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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
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N-115

Property Name: A. M. Vail (1868); Laurel Farm

Location and Verban Boundry Description:

The A. M. Vail House is located on the north side route 299 approximately two miles west of the intersection of routes 299 and 13 in the village of Odessa. The nomination includes seven acres containing the house, granary, barn and cart-shed. The nominated parcel is situated in land which has remained agricultural in use.

Owner: Louis and Christa Pederson
R.D. 2
Middletown, Delaware
19709

Description:

The A. M. Vail House is a two-and-one-half story, five-bay, frame house constructed in vernacular Victorian style. A three by two bay wing on the rear of the house, forms an "L". The exterior walls are white painted wood siding. The cross gabled roof is covered with tin and houses two brick end wall chimneys in the main block, and a third in the rear wing. Two dormers with gable roofs flank the front (south) cross gable. There is one dormer on the north face of the main block. On the rear wing there are three dormers, two facing west, and one facing east. There is a full basement under all sections of the house. The windows are all two over two sash with white painted trim molding surrounds and storm windows. The attic is lit by three, two over two sash gable end windows. There is no evidence of shutters.

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The center front passage on this central hall plan house is a single leaf, four panel door, the top two panels being one pane of glass. The sidelights flanking the door repeat this sectional pattern. The wood moldings that surround the windows are repeated above the door.

There are three porches on this structure, the most elaborate being the three bay, wood porch on the front (south) of the house. Brick columns support the floor of the porch, while four by four wood posts support the flat roof. Decorative lattice work covers the crawl space beneath the porch. The porch has been ceiled, but the overhanging eaves expose the rafter ends.

The porches on the west and east of the house have low pitched shed roofs, and are supported by wood posts. The west porch is built on brick piers while the foundation of the east porch is stone and brick.

Surrounding the house are a number of outbuildings, the largest of which is a framed planked barn with a hipped roof addition. There is also a drive through granary, vertically planked with a shed addition. An equipment shed, vertically planked and utilizing mortise and tenon joints, completes the courtyard arranged around the back of the residence. Centered among these buildings is a windmill.

Historical Background and Significance

Alexander Vail's Laurel Farm was small at 41 acres in 1850, based on that census of that year. Production was centered on corn and butter. Livestock was also an important asset. By the time of the 1860 census, Vail had more than tripled his land holdings, doubled his production of corn and butter and also grew oats, potatoes, sweet potatoes and wheat. Before 1870, orchard crops were added, reflecting the post-bellum emphasis on fruit production. By 1880, Vail retired to his original 41 acres.

This parcel is particularly significant, not only because of the imposing vernacular Victorian style dwelling, but also due to the survival of several outbuildings in a courtyard arrangement behind the house. Thus, the architec-

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tural resources provide evidence for reconstructing the daily farm working life in this area as well as analyzing our understanding of the social and domestic arena.

Nomination by Bert Jicha and Trish Bensinger