

Site Name: John Barber House

CRS Number: K-0000

Location: East side of Kenton Road, just south of its intersection with West Denneys Road
East Dover Hundred
Kent County, Delaware

Date of Fieldwork: October 1999

Type of Documentation: Level II: Partial Intensive
Annotated field notes (2 sheets)
Measured drawings-CAD (1 sheet)
Black and white 4" x 5" photographs (6)
Architectural data narrative

Threat: The John Barber House was demolished shortly after documentation in order to make way for a residential subdivision. The dwelling stood vacant for approximately six months prior to demolition and was suffering from neglect, deterioration, and vandalism.

Significance: The John Barber House is significant both as a log dwelling dating to the second quarter of the nineteenth century and for its association with the practice of tenant farming common in Kent County.

Description: The John Barber House is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Kenton Road and West Denneys Road. Open, cultivated fields dotted with mature trees are located to the south, west, and east, and dense woods are located to the north. The large parcel of land includes an early nineteenth-century dwelling with several additions and four late nineteenth/early twentieth-century outbuildings. Facing south, the dwelling is surrounded by primarily agricultural activities and situated on relatively level terrain. The dwelling is set back approximately 200 feet from the road at the end of a narrow, dirt lane.

The dwelling is composed of four distinct sections: the Period I two-and-a-half-story, two-bay log block (measuring 16 by 15 feet) constructed during the first quarter of the nineteenth

century; a two-and-a-half-story, three-bay frame addition off the west elevation (measuring 30 by 21 feet) that more than doubled the size of the original structure and dates to the late nineteenth century; a two-story rear frame addition (measuring 6 by 7 feet) dating to the early twentieth century; and a one-story rear frame addition (measuring 12 by 14 feet) also dating to the early twentieth century. A one-story shed-roofed porch spans the south (front) elevation of the Period I block.

The Period I section is a two-and-a-half-story, two-bay, gable-roofed dwelling with an interior brick chimney at the east end of the center ridge. In its earliest configuration it was a one-and-a-half-story, one-room-plan dwelling. The log walls are sheathed in clapboard and rest upon a brick foundation. The roof is clad in both asphalt and standing seam metal. Fenestration consists of single, two-over-two, double-hung-sash windows set in rectangular openings with simple lintels and sills. A fixed, multi-light window is located on the east elevation of this block.

The removal of siding from the exterior of the Period I section revealed the logs at the first floor of the south and east elevations; the logs are dressed and rough-hewn flat on their inner and outer faces but left round with remnants of bark on the upper and lower sides. The corners are joined by V-notches, with the spaces between the logs filled with scrap wood and soft mortar chinking.

The south elevation of the Period I section is symmetrically divided into two bays. The first floor features a door in the west bay and a single window in the east bay. These openings are set beneath a one-story, shed-roofed porch supported by turned posts and a concrete platform. Several screens remain, indicating it was once enclosed. The second floor of this elevation contains two single windows that align with the first floor openings. The east elevation is also divided into two bays. The first floor contains a single window in south bay and a fixed window in the north bay. The second floor contains a single window in the north bay, not aligned with the fixed window on the first floor. The rear, or north elevation, is almost completely concealed by additions. On this elevation, the only visible feature from the Period I section is a single window in the east bay. The west elevation has been completely concealed by the large, two-and-one-half-story addition.

The large, two-and-one-half-story, balloon-frame, side T-plan Period II addition projects from the west elevation of the Period I section, with the hall of the “T” adjacent to the Period I section’s west wall. The addition is clad in clapboard and rests on a brick foundation. The metal-sheathed roof contains an interior brick chimney that rises from the center ridge. Fenestration consists of single, two-over-two-light, double-hung-sash set in rectangular openings with molded wood lintels and simple wood sills.

The Period II south elevation is divided into three asymmetrical bays. The entrance is located directly west of the door to the Period I section, and leads into the hall of the addition. This entrance also sits beneath the entrance porch. The second floor of this elevation features two single windows with an attic window in the gable end. The west elevation features two single windows on the first floor and two single windows on the second floor. The north, or rear, elevation is divided into two bays. An offset entrance sits next to a single window. This entrance was not accessible from the exterior, as the steps leading to it had been removed. A single window is centered on the second floor of this elevation and is topped by a single attic window in the gable end.

The two-story Period III rear addition projects from the north elevation of the large, side-T plan addition. This addition features a shed roof and is clad in clapboard with asphalt sheathing on the roof. An exterior concrete block chimney rises from the center of the north elevation. The first floor of the north elevation contains two asymmetrically placed, fixed windows while the second floor contains a single, six-over-six, double-hung-sash window.

The one-story Period IV rear addition projects from the northeast corner of the main block and has a shed roof. This addition rests on a concrete block foundation and features two entrances and both paired and single, six-over-six double-hung-sash windows with wood panel surrounds. The south bay of the east elevation contains a single entrance set beneath a shed hood supported by wood struts. The west bay of this elevation contains a pair of windows. The north, or rear, elevation is divided into three bays: the east bay features a pair of windows, the center bay contains a single entrance, and the west bay contains a single window. The west elevation is relatively featureless, save for a single fixed window.

Interior: The door on the south elevation of the Period I section opens into the southeast room, a large, open space measuring 16 by 15 feet. Architectural features in this room include bull's eye molding around the doors and windows, wainscoting, and a built-in cabinet along the west wall. The removal of lath and plaster from the ceiling of this room revealed several ceiling joists. The joists had not been whitewashed or chamfered, indicating that they were never exposed. Situated directly across from the entrance door, the north wall of this room contains a single door leading to the northeast room, which is housed within the Period IV rear addition. This small room (measuring 12 by 14 feet) retains the original exterior clapboard siding for the log section on its south wall. A single door along the west wall provides access to the Period III rear addition. Decorative features of the northeast room are simple and limited to wood panel door and window surrounds.

The door on the south elevation of the two-and-one-half-story Period II addition leads to the hall and stair. The straight stairs are situated along the east wall and end in an attractive turned newel post. A small closet is housed within the stair box and accessed by a door on the north wall of the stair box. A wide entrance along the west wall of the hall leads to the southwest room. Sliding panel doors provide access to this room, which features a chimneystack along the north wall. Architectural details in this room include baseboards, molded window surrounds, and bull's eye molding around the wide entrance. A single door to the east of the chimneystack, at the north wall, leads to the northwest room.

The architectural details in the northwest room mirror those in the southwest room (baseboards, molded window surrounds, bull's eye molding). A modern, built-in cabinet is located at the northwest corner of the room. A single door at the south end of the east wall leads to a small hall located directly north of the stair box. This hall provides access to the southeast room of the Period I section as well as the Period III addition, which currently functions as a bathroom.

Due to the extremely poor condition of the second floor, field notes were limited to the exterior and first floor interior. A brief walk-through of the second floor revealed a total of four bedrooms and a narrow hallway. Two bedrooms are located in the Period I section, divided by a hallway. The second floor of the Period II addition contains two back-to-back bedrooms.

Architectural details on this floor include bull's eye molding around the door openings, simple wood window surrounds with several bull's eyes, and narrow wood floors.

History: The land on which the John Barber House stands began as a 45-acre parcel of marshland known as "Barber's Meadow." The Barber family owned the land as early as 1737, and they were responsible for constructing the log dwelling. Abraham Barber is the first identifiable owner of the land, which in 1737 was surveyed by the State of Delaware because it was alleged to be vacant and uncultivated. The resulting survey simply identifies the land as "marsh called Barber's Meadow" situated directly north of the St. Jones (or Dover) River.¹⁶

Though it is unclear which member of the Barber family held the property through the last half of the eighteenth century, it was likely John Barber, the elder, and his wife Dolly. It is not known when or how John, the elder, acquired the property, although he retained it until his death sometime around 1804. The property was then passed down to his wife, Dolly, and upon her death to their son, Jesse Barber. In February 1820, Jesse Barber sold the property to his brother, John Barber, and his wife, Ann.¹⁷ John and Ann Barber retained the property until his death *circa* 1838. During the administration of Barber's estate, the Kent County Orphans Court divided his real estate into two separate parcels, each containing 41 acres, and assigned both of them to Ann Barber, his widow.

Several pieces of documentary evidence suggest that the Period I section of the house was constructed during John and Ann Barber's ownership of the farm, between 1820 and 1840. A Kent County Orphans Court plat map depicts "John Barber's Land Sept. A.D. 1832" and shows a dwelling house on the east side of the "road to Dover," or Kenton Road, in roughly the location of the current house.¹⁸ A probate inventory taken for John Barber's estate contains furnishings that suggest a simple, one-room dwelling. Among these items are "1 bedstead and bedding, 1 pr blankets, 3 sheats, 1 walnut bureau, 1 mantel clock, 1 corner cupboard, 1 walnut dining table, 1 set of stools, 1 set of old chares, 1 candle stand, 1 looking glass, 1 rag carpet."

¹⁶ Delaware State Archives, Land Evidence Records, Warrant and Survey of Lands of Abraham Barber on North Side of Dover River, June 7, 1739.

¹⁷ Kent County Recorder of Deeds, Book S, Page 341.

¹⁸ Kent County Orphans Court, Plat Book Folio 79.

Barber's agricultural-related belongings suggest that he was an active and successful farmer. These include "1 horse, 1 coalt, 1 yoke of oxen, 1 young steare, 3 cows, 1 hifer, 2 yearlings, 5 head sheep, 3 lambs, 4 head hogs."¹⁹

Ann Barber died shortly after her husband, sometime in the early 1840s. Upon her death, the property was equally divided between John and Ann's heirs--Ann Bearman, Sarah Barber, Mary Barber, and James Barber. Between 1843 and 1844 the three sisters sold their shares of the real estate to their brother, James, who by December 1844 had acquired his parents original 82 acres.²⁰ Documentary evidence strongly suggests that James Barber did not follow his father into farming but became a clerk, possibly in Dover, and rented the farm to tenants. Census records dating to 1850 list James Barber as a clerk who resided with three other individuals, including Willard Pierce, a waterman.²¹ An 1860 tax assessment for James Barber lists "a farm in the tenure of Mrs. Smith with frame house, stables, crib . . . containing 100 acres land . . ." valued at \$1,750.²² The Period II frame addition was most likely constructed *circa* 1880.

James kept the farm for almost fifty years, selling it in July 1892 to Willard G. Pierce for \$3,000. At this time, the farm encompassed 87 acres and contained "all that farm and piece of woodland situated in East Dover Hundred . . . lying on or near the road leading from Dover to Kenton."²³ An 1896 tax assessment indicates that Pierce continued to maintain the property as a tenant farm, as he is assessed for 125 acres of land valued at \$2,250, including a "farm in tenure of D. Farrow."²⁴ Pierce held the farm until December 1898, when he sold it to Sallie Hobbs for \$3,750. The farm changed hands regularly after that date, rarely remaining with one owner for more than five to ten years.

¹⁹ Kent County Probate Records, John Barber, 1842—1843.

²⁰ Kent County Recorder of Deeds, Book T3, Page 23 and Book W3, Page 106.

²¹ United States Manuscript Population Census, Dover Hundred, 1850.

²² Kent County Tax Assessments, Dover Hundred, 1860, James Barber.

²³ Kent County Recorder of Deeds, Book K7, Page 361.

²⁴ Kent County Tax Assessments, East Dover Hundred, 1897, Willard G. Pierce.

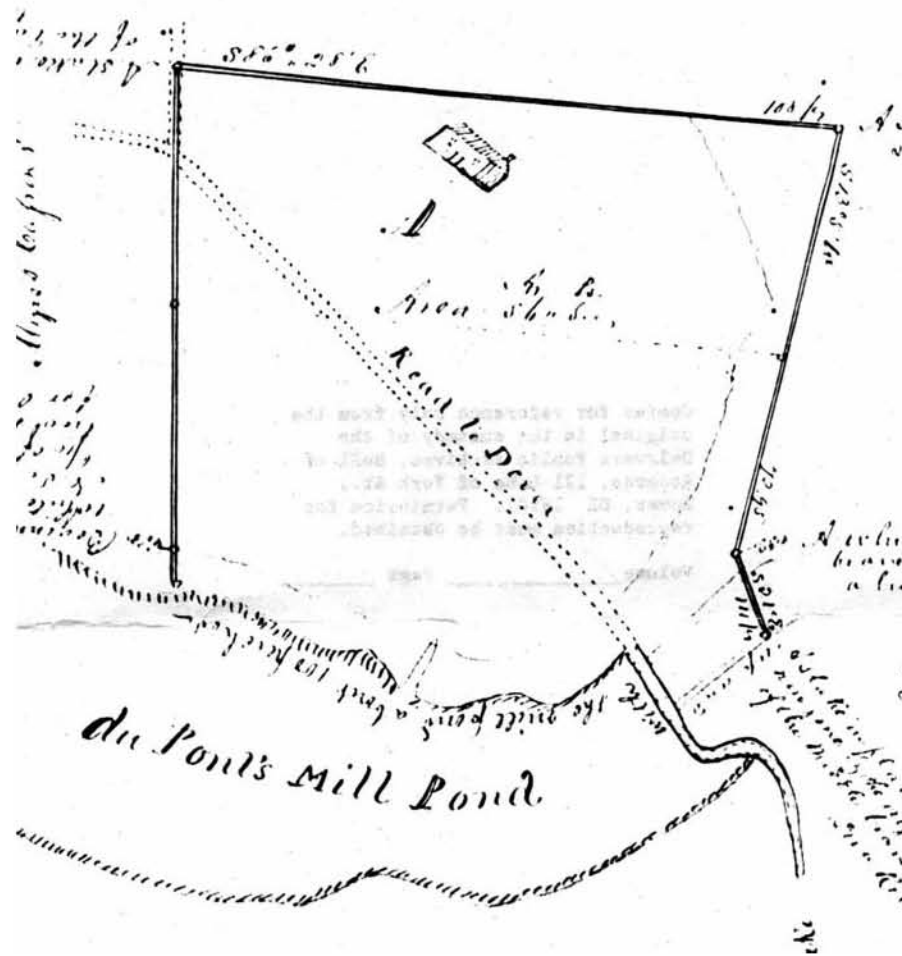


Figure 31: "John Barbers Land, Sept. 1832," Kent County Orphan's Court Plat Map.

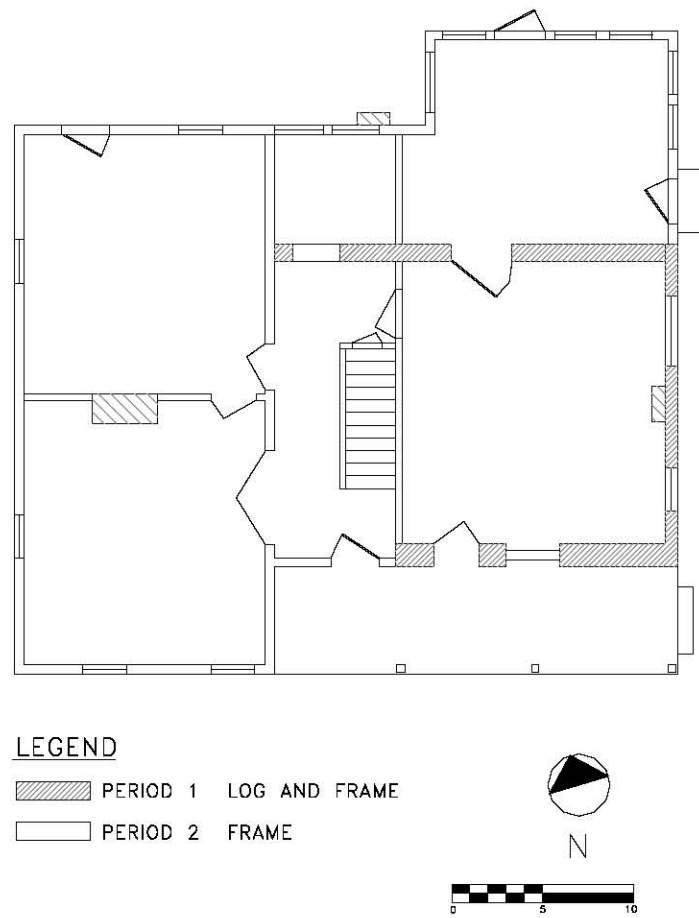


Figure 32: John Barber House, first floor plan.

MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS SURVEY

INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

John Barber House	DE CRS # K-0000
Southeast corner of Kenton and West Denneys Roads	
East Dover Hundred	
Kent County, Delaware	
Photographer: David L. Ames	October 1999
K-000-1	Perspective of the south and west elevations looking northeast
K-000-2	Perspective of the south and east elevations looking northwest
K-000-3	Perspective of the north elevation looking southwest
K-000-4	Detail of the north elevation showing concrete block exterior chimney and juncture of two rear additions
K-000-5	Detail of the log construction on the east elevation of Period I section
K-000-6	Detail of the log construction on the south elevation of Period I section



Figure 33: John Barber House, perspective of the south and west elevations looking northeast.



Figure 34: John Barber House, perspective of the south and east elevations looking northwest.



Figure 35: John Barber House, perspective of the north elevation looking southwest.



Figure 36: John Barber House, detail of the north elevation showing concrete block chimneystack and juncture of two rear additions.

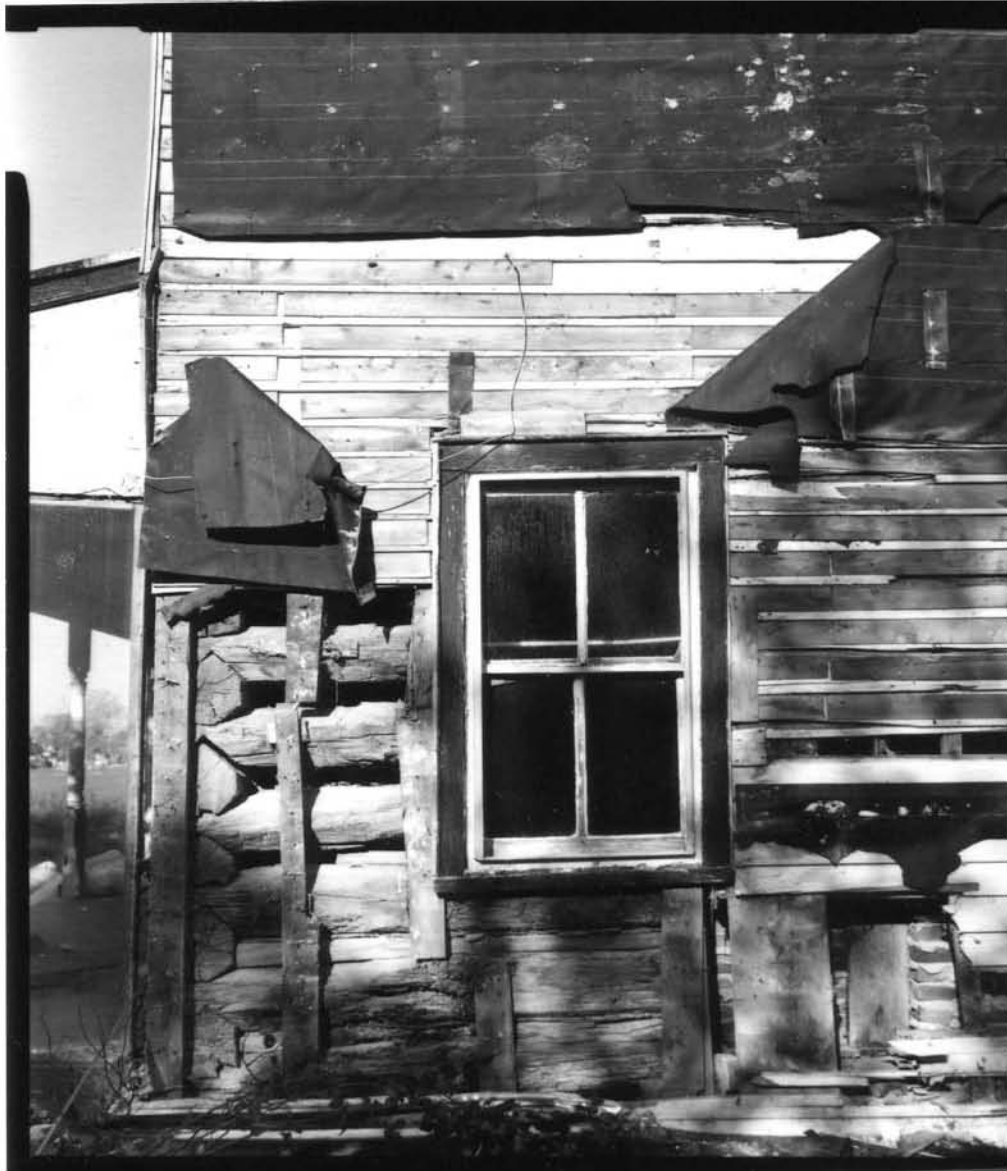


Figure 37: John Barber House, detail of the log construction on east elevation of Period I section.



Figure 38: John Barber House, detail of the log construction on south elevation of Period I section.