

MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE SURVEY

Polk-Atkinson House
Appoquinimink Hundred
New Castle County, Delaware



Center for Historic Architecture and Design
Newark, Delaware 19716
2005

MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE SURVEY

Polk-Atkinson House
527 Stonehaven Drive
Townsend
Appoquinimink Hundred
New Castle County, Delaware



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MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPES SURVEY
Deed and Document Trace

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CHAD #2005.01.0017.01
DE CRS # N-5839
Tax parcel # 14-013.31-304

Sold to Odessa National Development Company 11/27/2001 (\$10)
Deed Instrument Number 20011129-0098876

Thomas A. Atkinson and wife Ida D. "sold" the farm to Atkinson Farm 12/30/1976(\$5)
Deed R 95 pg. 88

Harry M Deakyne sold to Thomas and Ida Atkinson 11/1/1934 (\$7300)
Deed E 39 pg. 503

Charles T. Deakyne sold to Harry M. Deakyne 3/13/1923 (\$12000)
Deed V 31 p. 12

Thomas Lattomus, Arie E. Lattomus, Levi L. Maloney and Nina S. sold to Charles T. Deakyne 1/4/1919 (\$16000)
Deed H 28 pg. 148

Alan Cunningham sold to Latomus and Maloney 12/12/1918 (\$13975)
Deed F 1 pg. 96

National Bank of Smyrna sold to Alan Cunningham 5/25/1915 (\$12500)
Deed M 25 pg. 593

Sheriff Emmit F. Stidham for the National Bank of Smyrna received (?) the property from Frank Ranney (deceased) for debts owed 7/29/1903 (\$4755+ \$30.48 in fees)
Deed N 19 P. 456

George W. Polk sold to Frank Ranney 1/17/1890 (\$25000) [for two farms]
Deed X 14 Pg. 44

Cyrus Polk and Charles T. Polk (Jr.) sold to George W. Polk 7/10/1889 (\$5)
Deed T 14 pg. 218

Charles T. Polk's estate was probated at his death in 1863 (Will dated 12/22/1860). He leaves his mansion house in Odessa with all of its furnishings to his wife, and lands to his four minor sons (Cyrus, Charles T., George and William). He provides that if further monies are needed to clear up any debts, his executors should sell his "farm in

Appoquinimink Hundred, known as the Webb land..." (This is not Atkinson, but the land across Fieldsboro Rd. from Atkinson). Both farms are in Charles T. Polk Jr.'s possession in the 1881 Hopkins map of Delaware.

In his 1852 will, William Polk leaves the Appoquinimink property to Charles T. Polk Sr. and claims to have purchased the land from _____ Lowber (the first name is left blank in the will). No property transfers from a Lowber to William Polk in the direct or indirect deed index. John Lowber, Daniel and William Lowber (brothers) end up selling property in 1816 and 1826 respectively to creditors to pay debts (none William Polk). William Polk purchased ten properties at auction in Appoquinimink Hundred between 1824-1846. The deeds all are listed between William Polk and the then current sheriff. While none of these lands were owned by a Lowber, Polk was purchasing debtor properties in the area during the first third of the century.

Mid-Atlantic Historic Buildings and Landscapes Survey

Historic Narrative and Architectural Description

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527 Stonehaven Drive
Townsend
Appoquinimink Hundred
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Historic Narrative

The Polk-Atkinson House is located on the south side of Fieldsboro Road, approximately 0.5 miles west of its intersection with Taylors Bridge Landing Road (State Route 9), in Appoquinimink Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. The house is all that remains of the farm complex that once supported a roughly 300-acre farming operation. The outbuildings were removed in the fall of 2005, prior to the documentation process. The house sits on a lot within the subdivision of Odessa National, which is currently under construction.

At this time, the origins of the house remain somewhat cloudy. Architectural evidence suggests that the dwelling was constructed *circa* 1830, but the title trace research confirmed ownership of the property only as far back as 1849. On the basis of the title trace, historic map evidence, and the physical evidence in the building itself, we offer the following theory as to the initial use of the house and property. William Polk acquired the 300-acre parcel between 1824 and 1846.¹ During this period Polk purchased a number of debtors' properties sold at auction and the prior owner of this particular property cannot be confirmed. In a later document, Polk described the farm as the one he purchased from someone named Lowber, but there is no deed to confirm this transaction. At least two Lowbers (John and Daniel) owned land in Appoquinimink Hundred during

¹ In his 1852 will, William Polk claimed to have purchased the land from a man named _____ Lowber. No deed between a Lowber and William Polk exists, but a John Lowber sold property in Appoquinimink Hundred to a group of creditors for past debts in 1824 (none were Polk). Daniel Lowber of Philadelphia is listed in the 1828 tax assessment as owning 400 acres in Appoquinimink Hundred. William Polk purchased more than 40 properties between 1824 and 1846, at least 10 of them at auction. While none of these properties were listed as owned by a Lowber, it is clear that in the first half of the nineteenth century, William Polk was buying debtors' properties at auction and Lowbers were selling property in Appoquinimink for debts. No paper trail on the property exists before William Polk's will in 1852.

this period, which was sold to settle debts. Polk certainly owned the property by 1849, when Rea and Price's Atlas shows his name connected with a building on the site. However, the building on the 1849 Atlas is located somewhat to the south and west of the current location.

By 1868, Beers Atlas of Delaware shows the house in its current location, still owned by the Polk family. Given the architectural evidence in the dwelling, it is most likely that Polk built the original dwelling at the southwestern location and sometime between 1849 and 1868, the family chose to relocate the house to the current position. William Polk died *circa* 1852-53, leaving the farm to his son, Charles T. Polk. It appears that the Polks chose land as a major form of investment throughout the nineteenth century, purchasing many farms in Appoquinimink and St. Georges Hundreds and then renting them to tenants. The Polks themselves lived in the town of Odessa and never personally engaged in the activity of farming on the property. In this respect they resembled other members of a landed elite in the region, who owned farm land only to rent for income and engaged in other town-centered commercial enterprises. William Polk operated as a grain merchant in Odessa from the 1820s through his death in 1852.

Charles T. Polk owned the farm until 1863, when he died leaving a wife, Sarah Eliza, and four sons under the age of 10 (Cyrus, George W., Charles T., and William). In 1861, Charles T. Polk's Appoquinimink estate included a 300-acre parcel with a farm dwelling and stable valued at \$6000. By 1868, the property apparently also included a small "house and garden" dwelling located near the road at the north end of the farm lane. Such dwellings were often constructed in the nineteenth century to house agricultural laborers and their families, providing a reliable source of seasonal labor for farm owners and managers. On the 1868 Beers Atlas, the main house and the house along the road were listed as belonging to Mrs. Polk, although it is clear she did not live in either house. On the Hopkins map of 1881, the current main Atkinson house and a house along the county road appear on the 300-acre farm. Both houses and the farm across the road were listed in the estate of Charles T. Polk (Jr.). After 1881, the house and garden disappears from the maps and it is likely that this building was moved across the field to form the extension of the service wing on the main house.

The four Polk boys appear to have held their father's real estate jointly until 1889. By that time, the youngest brother, William, had died and George (age 35) was married. Cyrus (age 36) and Charles (age 33) sold their rights to the farm in Appoquinimink to George in 1889 and less than six months later he and his wife sold it to Frank Ranney. During the period that the Polk brothers owned the farm, they were involved in a number of pecuniary and civic organizations, including the Lord and Polk Chemical Company and the New Castle County Bank (later converted to the New Castle County National Bank with at least two of the brothers acting as directors). George W., William, and Cyrus all participated in the incorporation and leadership of the Odessa Loan Association.

From 1890 until at least 1919 (and possibly as late as 1934), it appears likely that the farm remained in the hands of tenant farmers, owned by a series of different people. Frank Ranney (of New Castle) died in 1903 and his executors sold the property to the National Bank of Smyrna to settle a debt. Twelve years later the bank sold the farm to Alan Cunningham (of Delaware County, Pennsylvania). Cunningham held it for only three years before selling to Levi Maloney and Thomas Lattomus (of Townsend) in 1918. The two men sold the property only a month later to Charles S. Deakyne; the Deakyne family owned the farm until 1934, when Thomas and Ida Atkinson purchased it.

Architectural Description

Situated at the end of a roughly 0.5 mile lane, the Period I braced-frame dwelling includes a two-and-a-half story four-bay main block with a one-and-a-half-story two-bay kitchen wing on the west gable end. As discussed earlier, evidence suggests that the Period I house was originally located further south and west on the property and was moved to its current location sometime between 1849 and 1868. At the time of relocation, the owners chose to orient the house facing away from the road, towards the agricultural outbuildings and farmyard. An early nineteenth-century, one-and-a-half story two-bay Period II braced-frame addition extends off the west gable end of the kitchen wing. Evidence suggests that this addition represents a free-standing tenant dwelling originally located at the edge of the property along Fieldsboro Road, moved up to the west gable end of the house to increase the living space sometime after 1881.

Clapboard siding covers the south (front) elevation of the Period I main block under a tin roof. Brick interior-end chimneys rise through the peak of the roof at the east and west ends of the main block. This elevation displays asymmetrical fenestration that reflects the interior floor plan. Four unevenly-spaced bays on the first floor contain two doors in the center bays and two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows in the outer bays, with one window and one door opening into each of the two first-floor rooms. The eastern door features board and batten construction and original hardware, while the western one displays a four-panel door with glass in the upper two panels. On the second floor, three evenly-spaced windows light the three upper rooms. The sash for these windows are missing but surviving sash indicates that they were originally six-over-six-light, possibly replaced later by two-over-two-light sash.

The south elevation of the Period I and II kitchen wing extends from the west gable end of the main block. Both sections stand one-and-a-half-stories tall, with two bays in each wing on the first floor and a single dormer window on the upper floor. In the Period I wing, a board and batten door occupies the western bay, while a two-over-two-light sash window opens through the eastern bay. On the Period II wing, the order of the openings is reversed, with the door in the eastern bay. The window on this addition has been sealed to accommodate modern renovations to the porch. The dormers on the upper floors also mark the difference between the two construction periods. On the Period I wing, a simple gable-roofed dormer contains a three-over-six-light sash, while the Period II wing displays a simple shed-roofed dormer with a two-over-two-light sash.

A frame one-story shed-roofed porch covers the first floor of the entire elevation, built in two periods matching the Period I and II blocks and renovated in three separate sections. A thin board partition wall divides the porch on the Period I block into two sections, one roughly in front of the main block and the other in front of the kitchen wing. Original sash-sawn rafters survive in the shed roof of the Period I porch, marking the extent of the original open porch. Most likely a series of turned posts supported the shed roof. During the twentieth-century, the owners extended the depth of the porch by sistering the ends of the rafters, adding about two feet in length. Both sides were enclosed during the twentieth century, at different times and with different forms of fenestration. A double door with ten panes of glass on each side opens into the main

block porch. This porch shelters the only exterior entrance to the cellar, a bulkhead stair under a trap door located just below the westernmost window. Framing for the porch indicates that the plate below the rafters was replaced with a large circular-sawn 6 by 6 inch timber, supported at one time by four square posts. Later, modern 2 by 4 inch timbers were used to enclose the porch with windows and the double door. The portion of the porch covering the Period I kitchen wing also experienced renovation in the twentieth-century, with the construction of a series of fixed two-light windows and a wooden door with two-over-two-lights in the top portion. The section of porch covering the Period II wing was completely enclosed in the twentieth century to create a modern bathroom and is now covered with vinyl siding above a concrete-block foundation. Two modern one-over-one-light sash windows open through the south elevation of the enclosed porch. Although the Period I and II porch has experienced significant renovation and alteration, its form remains consistent with the historic nature of the dwelling—that is, a shed-roofed porch was present on this elevation from an early date.

The east elevation shows only the Period I main block and the north and south porches. Vinyl siding covers the main block, including the original two window openings at the attic level, now sealed. These windows flank the interior brick chimneystack centered on the gable end. The east elevations of the north and south porches are visible, revealing broken window openings in both.

A one-story shed-roofed enclosed porch covers much of the rear (north) elevation of the dwelling. Anecdotal and photographic evidence provided by the Atkinson family indicates that this porch was built in the 1970s to replace an earlier one-bay portico. Thus, this porch represents a significant change from the historical appearance and form of this elevation. Divided into two sections and covered by a corrugated tin roof, the porch stretches across the western half of the main block and three-quarters of the Period I and II kitchen wings. The north porch rests on a brick foundation; all materials used in the current porch are modern lumber or siding. Scars in the siding mark the location of the original portico that sheltered the door into the main block.

Like the south elevation, the north elevation contains both Period I and Period II sections. Fenestration on the first and second floors of the main block mirrors some, but

not all, of the openings on the south elevation. It is possible that the missing elements are simply covered by later siding or interior materials. The first floor of the main block contains three openings: a two-over-two-light window lighting the eastern room, and a two-over-two-light window and a door opening into the western room. On the second floor, only two six-over-six-light windows survive, one towards each end of the elevation. Two layers of horizontal wooden siding cover the main block.

On the kitchen wing, fenestration for both the Period I and II sections mirrors exactly the openings on the south elevation, with a door and window in each section on the first floor and a single dormer centered above. Horizontal wooden siding also covers these two sections.

The west elevation shows the Period II addition covered in vinyl siding with a concrete block stovepipe stack centered on the gable. A fixed, single-pane window is located on the first floor to the south of the stack. Two six-over-six-light sash windows, now boarded up, flank the stack on the second floor. Two boarded windows are located on the attic story of the Period I block, flanking the interior brick chimneystack.

Access to the cellar can be acquired only through the bulkhead entrance located on the south porch. The cellar extends under the Period I main block as one large room, with the bulkhead in the southwest corner. Brick tops the white-washed stone foundation walls. Brick relieving arches are centered on the east and west walls, supporting the stacks above. Windows are located in the north, east, and south walls; the frames are missing and boards cover the openings. Sash-sawn white-washed ceiling joists run from north to south. Evidence of shelving for food storage survives in the relieving arches and also in the form of frames constructed on both the north and south walls. On the west gable end, to the north of the relieving arch, a narrow ladder stair rises to the Period I kitchen.

From the south porch, one can enter the Period I block through one of three doors, corresponding to the three rooms in the floor plan. The Period I dwelling is organized on a hall-parlor plan with a service wing on the west gable end, essentially three rooms in a line running from east to west. The two-and-one-half-story block contains the hall-parlor section, with the hall to the west and the parlor to the east. Both rooms feature brick

fireplaces surrounded by wooden, Federal-style mantels with stovepipe holes visible above the fireplace near the ceiling. In the parlor, built-in cupboards with board and batten doors flank both sides of the fireplace. Notches in the shelves of the upper cabinets allowed display of plates and other china, while the lower cabinets provided storage space. Windows opened directly across from each other on the north and south walls. A single door on the south wall accessed the south porch, and an opening on the western partition wall leads to the hall, or central room. Originally this opening was likely just a door, but it was framed as a larger opening in the twentieth century. Other traces of this twentieth-century renovation include the faux-wood paneling on the interior walls, covering the original lath and plaster finish.

In the hall, a single window and door open through both the north and south walls. On the west wall, a door opens into the kitchen wing on the south side of the fireplace, while an enclosed winder stair occupies the space to the north. The stair box features a board and batten door with original hardware. A modern built-in closet fills the southwest corner of the room, between the window on the south wall and the door on the west wall. Walls and floors in this room have also been covered with modern finishes.

A doorway in the west wall of the hall leads to the Period I kitchen wing. This original opening contains a board and batten door with original hardware. The kitchen is organized as a service space, with a large brick fireplace centered on the east wall, a winder stair in the northeast corner; and a built-in beaded-board cabinet for storage in the southwest corner. The winder stair leads to both the second floor and the cellar; the cellar opening consists of a half-height board and batten door opening into a space under the winder. An unusual feature of this stair is that the white-washed space extends under the winder stair of the hall as well, with a narrow opening cut in the floor next to the chimney stack to access the ladder stair. A single window and door open into this room on both the north and south walls, mirroring each other. An additional board and batten door opens through the west wall into the Period II kitchen wing. This room also experienced the twentieth-century renovation, with faux-wood paneling on the walls and the installation of modern cabinets, countertop, and sink on the west wall.

The Period II kitchen wing also contains a single room, that shows evidence of multiple renovations. Like the Period I kitchen, a single door and window originally opened through the north and south walls; the window on the south wall was sealed in the twentieth century to support conversion of the south porch into a bathroom. Walls on the interior of this room display narrow tongue and groove beaded matchstick siding. On the west wall, cuts in the paneling and changes in paint color document a series of changes. The original stove-pipe chimney ran up the center of this wall, on the interior of the building; it was later removed and replaced by the exterior concrete block stack and a stovepipe hole in the wall connected the interior stove to the new chimney. To the south of the chimney scar, evidence survives for the placement of a built-in cabinet similar to the one in the Period I kitchen. This cabinet was removed in the twentieth century and a modern window occupies part of that space. To the north of the chimney stack stands the winder stair. Originally enclosed like those in the Period I block with a closet below the stair, only the portion of the stair rising to the second floor remains. The door in the south wall opens into a modern bathroom with two modern windows on the south wall. The door in the north wall opens into the twentieth-century porch.

The winder stair leads to the upper story of the Period II kitchen wing, and opens directly onto that floor. A simple frame railing surrounds the opening in the floor. This space is finished with a combination of tongue and groove matchstick siding to the height of the plate, and then lath and plaster over the rafters above that. Dormer windows in the north and south wall and two sash windows in the west gable wall light the attic room. Ghosts on the west gable wall and the floor mark the presence of the original chimney stack, while a stove-pipe hole in the floor marks the location of a later stove connection. On the east wall a board and batten door opens into the Period I kitchen wing. A closet constructed of matchstick siding fills the northeast corner of the room.

The garret room above the Period I kitchen wing also displays dormer windows on the north and south walls, while lath and plaster cover the walls. In the northeast corner, a winder stair leads down to the first floor. On the east wall, a narrow door above a high step opens into the Period I main block. This door is not original to the dwelling and was likely added in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, possibly at the time the service wing was expanded. Originally the garret above the kitchen likely served as

living space for laborers or domestic servants; the east gable wall kept their space separate from the sleeping chambers of the tenant family.

Originally, the only access to the upper floors of the Period I main block came via the winder stair in the hall (west room). The stair box opens at the second floor into a hallway that runs along most of the north wall. Two small chambers open off the south wall, with a third, larger chamber accessed through a door at the east end of the hallway. A modern partial bathroom fills a small space at the east end of the hall along the north wall. A beaded-board door opens into the easternmost chamber, or parlor chamber. This room contains a brick fireplace with a Federal-style mantle centered on the east wall and a closet in the northeast corner. The fireplace is now enclosed and a stovepipe hole is visible above the fireplace. Windows in the north and south walls light the space, although the sash for both windows are missing.

Narrow board partition walls covered with lath and plaster separate the rooms on the second floor, and all three have beaded-board doors opening from the hallway. The central and western chambers each contain a built-in closet likely dating to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. In the west chamber a chimneystack stands in the northwest corner, with a stovepipe hole in the floor. The closet and stack flank the door that leads to the space above the Period I kitchen wing.

The winder stair in the northwest corner of the second-floor hallway continues up to the attic, which spans the entire length of the Period I main block. Whitewashed timbers are visible in the stairbox. The stair opens into a large open space, with brick chimney stacks centered on the east and west gables. Likely used for storage, the attic is completely floored with wide boards. Sash-sawn rafters measuring roughly 4 inches by 2 ½ meet with a butt-joint at the peak.

Outbuildings. As part of the documentation process undertaken in the fall of 2005, CHAD staff contacted members of the Atkinson family about the possibility of photographs that might document the demolished outbuildings. A meeting with the four surviving Atkinson siblings (Herbert, Richard, and Thomas Atkinson, and Elizabeth Atkinson Segars) and two of their spouses in early December 2005 proved invaluable to reconstructing that environment. The siblings possessed a collection of aerial

photographs, family snapshots, and pen and ink drawings by one of the brothers (James) and spent several hours with CHAD staff discussing the images and some of their memories of farm life in the twentieth century. The following description is based upon that informal discussion and the images provided by the family.

The Atkinson family purchased the farm in 1934. Thomas Atkinson emigrated from England as a teenager and settled in southeastern Pennsylvania with his parents. There he met Ica, whose family had moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania. Following their marriage, the couple began searching for a farm property to purchase. They managed to acquire the Polk-Atkinson farm with a mortgage and moved into the house with their two young sons, Thomas' parents, and "Uncle John." The family later expanded to include two more sons and a daughter, and the household at various times included both maternal and paternal grandparents. In the 1930s and early 1940s, while the boys were still young, hired laborers assisted Thomas with the farm labor and lived in the first floor of the Period II kitchen wing.

The farm complex was organized in a roughly linear plan with the farmyard running perpendicular to the farm lane that ran south from Fieldsboro Road. In 1934, the major outbuildings included a large gable-roofed horse barn built *circa* 1930, a frame milking parlor, a nineteenth-century drive-through granary/corncrib, a pigpen, milk house, smokehouse, privy, and several sheds. The primary focus of Thomas Atkinson's agricultural efforts lay in dairy, producing fluid milk that was transported to urban markets such as Wilmington and Philadelphia. Everything else grown on the farm was used to feed and shelter the cows or to feed the family. Changes in the outbuildings reflect this continuing focus.

In the late 1930s a new frame milk house attached to the milking parlor replaced the earlier one located on the south side of the dwelling. By the early 1950s a large modern barn off the west gable end of the horse barn and a concrete-block milk house expanded the milking facilities, reflecting an expansion of the herd. A large fenced pound extended off the south and east sides of the two barns, with loafing sheds to shelter the cows extending south. Grain and corn continued to be stored in the granary/corncrib. The smokehouse was converted to a chicken house and the pigpen was torn down and

replaced with a shed built from materials salvaged from a barn on Green Street in Middletown.

At the time that the buildings were removed, the most significant outbuilding still standing was the granary/corncrib. Constructed in the nineteenth century, the building was in very poor condition, having been badly damaged by a hurricane some years ago. Photographs taken in the late twentieth century show the corncrib braced by large poles. Most of the outbuildings were constructed in the mid-twentieth century, between 1930 and 1970, and were largely related to functions required for dairying. They demonstrated a constant process of repair, rebuilding, and new construction to support agricultural activities typical of the region.

The photographs included in the enclosed CD-ROM represent a selection from those provided by the Atkinson family.