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date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 1

N-107

Property Name: S. Holton Farm

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The Holton Farm is located in cultivated farmland (including the entire 165 acre parcel of the mid 19th-century farmstead) on the east side of route 435 approximately 2 miles northwest of Middletown. The house and outbuildings are set back about one-hundred yards from the road within a yard of dense ornamental plantings. The nominated parcel includes five acres containing all the outbuildings, the house, grounds, and the lane leading in from route 435.

Owner: Mary Crossland

P.O.Box 74

Middletown, Delaware

Description:

"Weston" consists of an imposing main house made up of the original two-story brick farmhouse adjoining a later and larger brick three-story addition whose design displays influences of both Greek Revival and Italianite styles. Later still, a one-story wood structure was added to the north and east sides of the original house. Significant outbuildings on the farm include icehouse, smokehouse, barn, granary and tenant house. Together they represent an excellent and relatively unaltered example of a large and prosperous farm complex in St. George's Hundred in the mid-nineteenth century.

The house combines elements of Greek Revival and Italianite styles. The facade consists of four floor to ceiling windows on the first floor, five slightly smaller windows on the second floor and five small windows set in a bracketed frieze on the upper floor. All windows are placed symmetrically and have plain

**United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

N-107

Item number

Page 2

wood lintels. In common with other houses in Delaware of this period, there are no windows in the north wall. First and second story windows are sash, four over four; those above being two sash. Shutters are three panel and white on the first story, louvered and painted green on the second.

Main entrance is a double-leaf door, two paneled, with each top panel arched. The door is surrounded by a plain architrave, recessed light mullion transom and recessed three quarter sidelights above panels. Above the transom is a shelf supported by two brackets. The doors are approached through a porch, twenty-seven feet long and one story high, supported by four square columns representing no classical order.

Most prominent features on the exterior are the large pairs of cutwork brackets supporting the overhanging boxed cornice. The cornice is badly deteriorated in places. There are five pairs on the north and south walls, four on the east, and six on the west wall. The brackets rest on a string course of wood running completely around the building. Above the cornice is a low-hipped roof sheathed with tin and bearing the remnants of a widow's walk and observatory. There is a pair of chimneys (replaced in 1941) in each gable end.

The interior consists of a central hall with stairway. The ballustrade follows a continuous oval course to the third floor. On the north side is a ballroom running the full length of the building with the original marble faced fireplace with wood surround. The mantle is 5' 3" high bearing out the story related in the family history that the carpenter who built all the fireplace surrounds was exceptionally tall and gauged everything by his own height. To the south of the hall is a library of the same length but originally two rooms. The large ornate rosettes that supported the chandeliers are still in place in the library and ballroom.

On the second floor is a hallway, four bedrooms (one with fireplace) and bathroom. A strip of marble serves as a threshold for every room. The third floor consists of one room with exposed rafters.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet *N-107*

Item number

Page 3

The east wall of the large three-story wing adjoins the original farmhouse. Date of build is unknown, although on the basis of brick size, thickness of mortar, and different size windows, the structure antedates the larger wing. The two-story, common bond brick building is one room deep with three windows in the north and south walls of the second floor. Two windows remain in the south-facing first floor wall. All are symmetrical with six over six sash. Brackets and facades are similar as to the large wing but proportionally much smaller. Shutters are also similar except those on the first floor are two panel. Surmounting the structure is a medium gable roof with one chimney at the east gable.

The first floor interior was originally one large room used as a living room, dining room and kitchen with a large deep fireplace at the end of the room. The mantle has been altered but the fireplace is relatively intact with the metal arm for cooking still visible. On the second floor were simply two bedrooms. When the large addition was built the upper floor became servants quarters.

A white clapboard addition, built in 1941, extends to the north and east of the original house covering over the existing porch with pump, and creating a kitchen, pantry and glassed-in brick terrace. A powder room was also added to the old dining room. In addition, the original door and adjacent window on the south side of the old wing were removed and replaced with a larger door. Alterations in 1941 to the main wing included the removal of original side door and middle window from the south wall, the space being bricked up. This enabled the library to be created out of two rooms with a central fireplace in place of the original two, and window seats added to the remaining two windows on the south side. Bookcases were built into the window recesses and built in either side of the fireplace. The porch was also repaired, with the columns replaced and the cornice repaired and ornament on fascia removed.

Outbuildings consist of a granary with hand hewn beams, unaltered on the first floor and with an apartment on the second. There is a tenant house

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet N-107

Item number

Page 4

of white clapboard behind the main house, and possibly moved onto the site sometime in the twentieth century. Further buildings include an icehouse with circular stone cellar, now converted into a guesthouse and reroofed, and an unconverted smokehouse nearby. Completing the farm complex is a 30 by 55 foot gable end bank barn with cattle and horse stalls on the first floor with hay loft above.

"Weston" is a significant architectural example from the great rebuilding period in Delaware, circa 1830 to 1860. A growing market for grain and other farm produce, the consolidation of land holdings, and the improvement of the means of transportation, brought new agricultural prosperity to the state. This manifested itself in buildings larger and more ornate than anything that had been seen before. Weston combined features of Greek Revival and Italianite styles in an unmistakable display of its owner's new found status. The house, together with its related outbuildings, shows great architectural merit and is an excellent example of a prosperous farm in Delaware in the mid-nineteenth century.

Historical Background and Significance:

James Brady brought his family from Ireland in 1828, settling first in Pennsylvania. The family moved to Delaware in 1847 when three sons, Samuel, William and George bought the 496 acre farm from the Rev. Nicholas Patterson and his wife. The farm subsequently remained in the Brady family until 1933.

By the time the Bradys arrived, Delaware was enjoying an agricultural boom. The cash value of the farm was \$18,000 in 1850, according to census data, well above the mean farm value in St. George's Hundred. Wheat, corn, oats, potatoes and orchard produce were the most important crops. The farm shared in the rapid growth of the peach industry as New Castle County became the peach center due to its well adapted soil, climate and rainfall. The Delaware Railway, running

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

N-107

Item number

Page

through the Brady property when extended to Middletown in 1855, stimulated the distribution of farm produce to the growing urban centers of Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland. The nearby Chesapeake and Delaware Canal also facilitated transportation.

By 1860 the value of the farm had jumped to \$35,000. By this time a large and imposing addition had been added to the original farmhouse, and the property named "Weston" after the family home in Ireland.

The original farmhouse was a two-story brick structure, one room deep, with a combination living room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor and with two bedrooms above. The new brick three-story addition joined it on the west side. Indicative of the family's changing status, the new structure was considerably larger and more elaborate and was a blend of Greek Revival and Italianite styles, both popular during this period.

Neo-classical features include the symmetrical facade with small upper windows incorporated into the enlarged frieze of the entablature. The door, surrounded by rectangular transom and sidelights is approached through a single-story porch supported by four columns. Italianite features include the tall, thin first floor windows that reach from floor to ceiling. Large brackets support an overhanging cornice, and above, a low-pitch hip roof that was formerly surmounted by a widow's walk and observatory.

Several buildings of similar design were built in nearby Odessa at approximately the same time. At least one has been attributed to the work of Samuel Sloan, the noted Philadelphia architect.

The interior of Weston was also designed to display the Bradys' new-found wealth. A ballroom on the first floor runs the full length of the house. The third floor is one large room and was used for large dinner parties, wedding receptions, etc. After the large addition was built the upper floor of the original building was used for servants' quarters. A long park-like front yard bordered by trees and terraces added to the prosperous appearance.

Grain growing remained an important source of income and has remained so to the present. The last generation of Bradys to work the farm also had a lumber and sawmill business and housed the mules in the barn. The present owners, who acquired the pro-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 0-107 Item number Page

perty in 1952, at one time kept dairy cattle in the barn.

In 1941, the then owner, Dr. Carl H. Davis, made several alterations to the old wing and main house and built a wood addition to the east and north of the original building, thereby creating a separate kitchen, pantry and glassed-in terrace. At a later date alterations were made to the icehouse to convert it to a guesthouse and to the upper floor of the granary to turn it into an apartment. These changes do not substantially violate the integrity of the farm complex.

Nomination by Anne Witty



N-607
S. HOLZOO FARM