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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
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N-5135

Property Name: Okolona (R.T. Cochran House, 1868)

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

Okolona is located in the northwest corner of the intersection of routes 429 and approximately .2 miles north of the junction of the two roads. The house is set in a treed park situated in open agricultural lands in an area of the county that has remained in farming operations despite nearby development pressures. The nomination includes approximately 10 acres which contain the house and grounds, but excludes the present 20th century complement of agricultural buildings.

Owner: Michael Rourke

R.D.1, Box 36

Middletown, Delaware

Description:

Okolona is an imposing three-story Italianate farm mansion of frame construction resting on a rubble stone foundation. The house is built on a center-passage plan with an original rear service ell. The exterior is clad with plain milled weatherboard and finished with applied pilasters at the corners. The windows on the first and second story are four over four light sash held in architraves capped with molded lintels. The central second-story window is emphasized with two over two sidelights and full pedimented entablature carried on two brackets. The pattern of using small brackets to visually carry window cornices is repeated across the front of the building. At the third-story level, the rooms under the low hipped roof are illuminated by two light windows piercing the frieze between Italianate consoles and under sets of three brackets.

The symmetry of the front elevation is enhanced in ways other than the fashionable emphasis of the central bay. There is a slight compression of

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the three central bays with the openings on the first floor contained in an open tetra-style porch or veranda finished with open sawwork trim, squared columns, and cornice brackets. The main entry is, in turn, enframed by narrow four light sidelights, four light transom, and molded cornice similar to those found over the windows.

On the interior Okolona retains much of its 1866 finish. In the south parlor is a round arched mantel with a molded keystone visually finishing the apex of the arch. The flue behind the breastwork was always intended to serve a stove and not an open fireplace. In the passage is a stair furnished with balusters turned out on the duplicating lathes of architectural elements factories which served St. Georges Hundred customers through both catalogs and lumberyards. The interior woodwork in the north parlor is a replacement as the result of a chimney fire within the last fifty years.

Historical Background and Significance:

Okolona represents the culmination of R.T. Cochran's 19th-century building activities. In the 1830s Cochran began his architectural projects across the road to the south on Muddy Branch farm. Here he built a two-story, braced frame, five-bay, hall-parlor plan dwelling with a kitchen housed in a separate structure located near but not attached to the dwelling. Around the period of 1840 to 1850, he significantly enlarged his house with the addition of two-story one-room plan wing containing kitchen, pantry, and servants' quarters and a second larger wing at the opposite end of the house which came to be the best parlor with upper story best chambers. The whole building then received new porches and cornice work across the primary elevation making the sequence of additions less obvious. By 1866 the house that Muddy Branch had become was not enough, and Cochran commissioned the more elaborate Okolona on a second farm across the road. Although portions of Muddy Branch have been destroyed in the last five years, the two buildings still face each other across intervening fields.

Okolona is particularly important as a summation of much of the rebuilding

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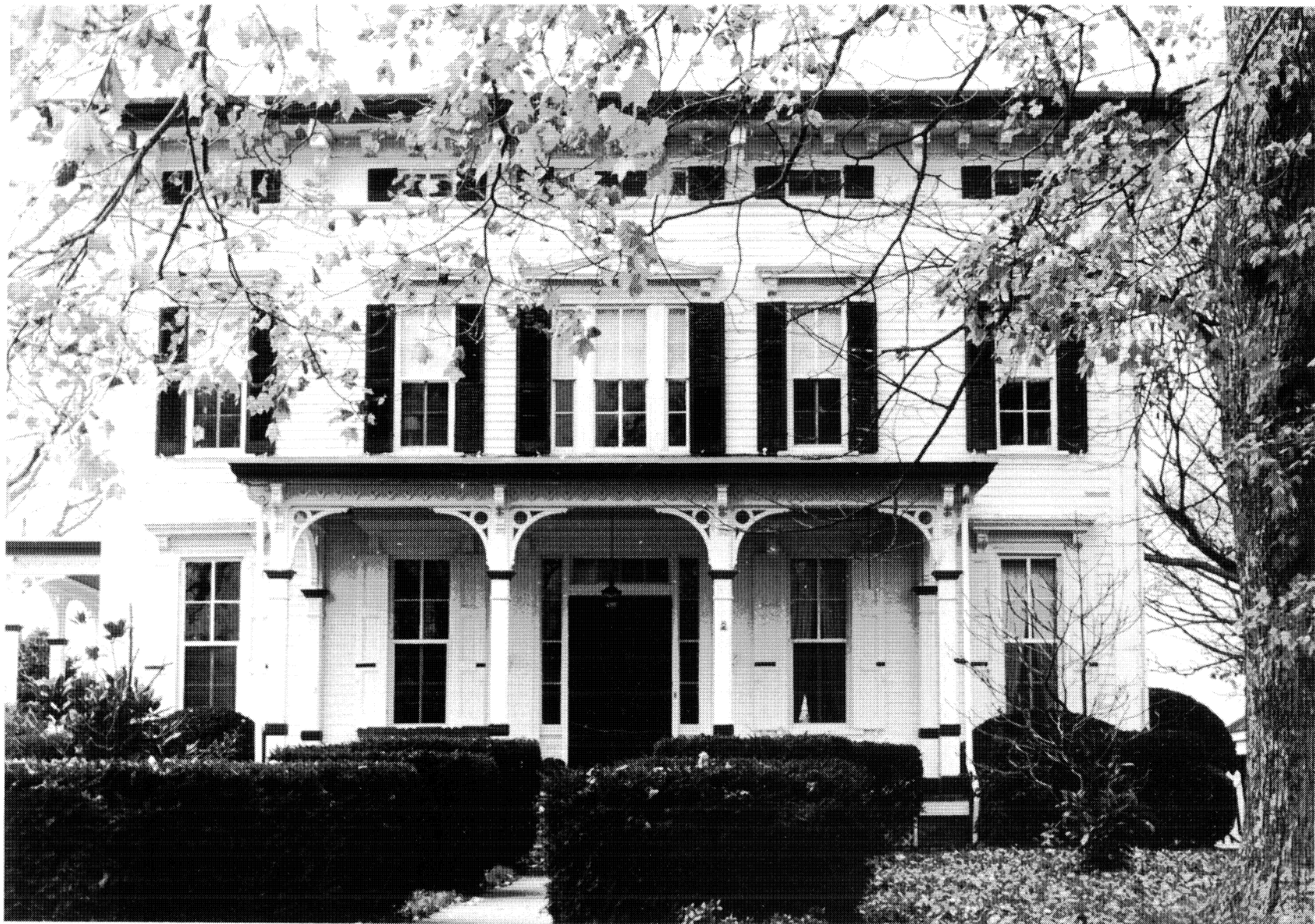
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activity that characterized St. Georges Hundred in the middle decades of the 19th century. In one compressed series of actions the process of developing housing on previously undeveloped sites, of improving that architecture substantially within a few years of initial construction and finally abandoning it in favor of something even more appropriate to self perceptions of economic and community position, is fully described.

Nomination by Jane Shimp and William Macintire



OKOLONA
N-5785