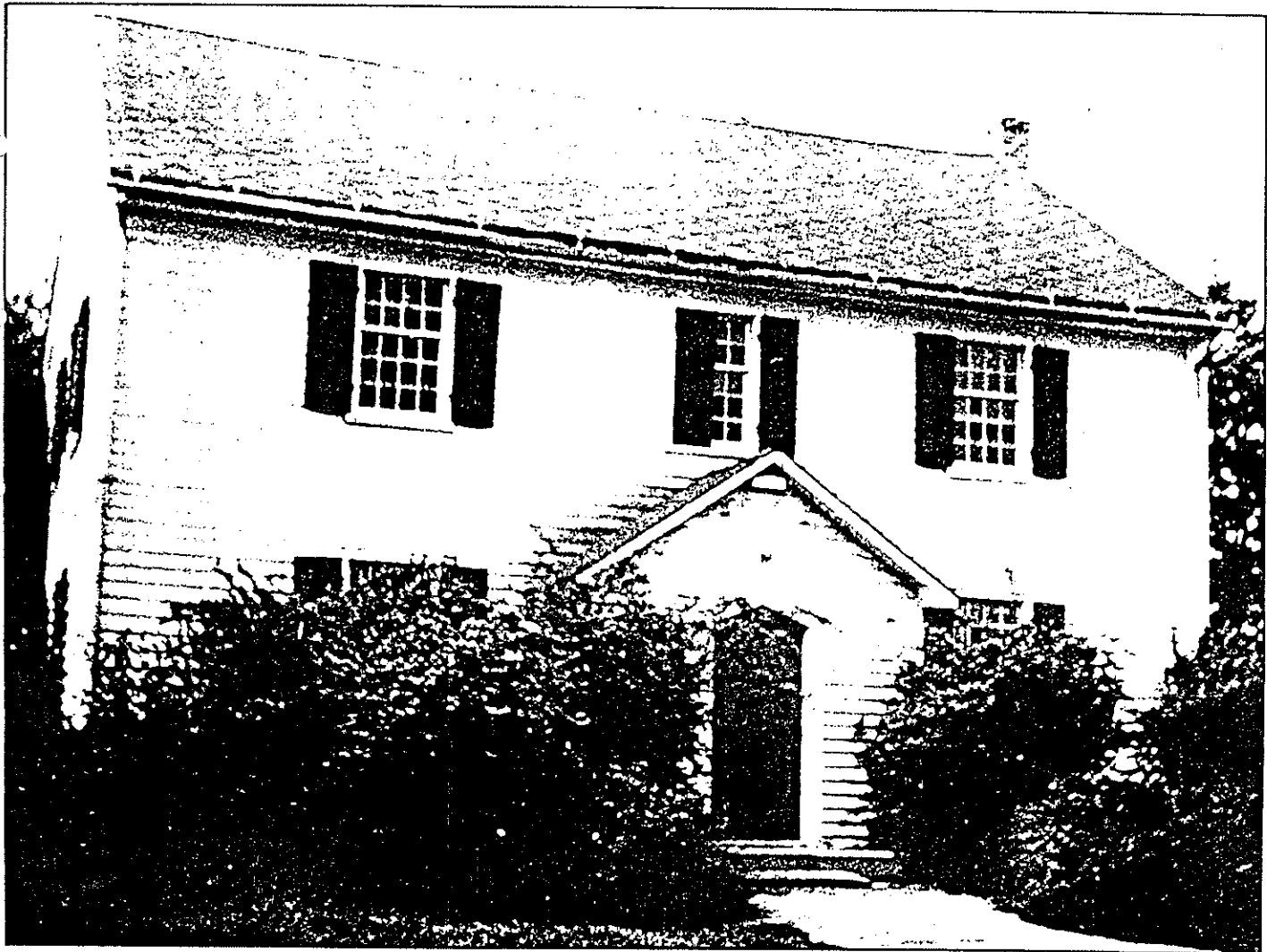


MAY, 1989

REPRINTED 2021



Photograph of the Baptist Chapel at High Point, built 1809
(demolished 1970's).

CHAPEL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESCRIPTION:

The Chapel Hill District is a small village district located on flat summit of a 200' ridge in central Middletown Township. The district comprises approximately seventeen buildings (plus additional outbuildings), clustered along King's Highway East between the junctions of Chapel Hill Road and Stillwell Road. Most of the buildings are set close to the road on irregular lots; the specific boundaries are delineated on the district property map. The vegetation in the district includes lawns, shrubs, and mature trees; the hills which descend from the district are a combination of woodland and pasture. The district itself is relatively free from intrusions. The lands around the district, have recently been subdivided and are being developed residentially.

Most of the buildings in the district are, one, one-and-a-half and two-story frame residences with rectangular and square with ell plans, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The buildings are stylistically simple; the earliest have the one and two room plans typical of early Middletown houses (sites #4 & #5). Two others, built in the early 19th century, have Dutch Colonial Revival alterations dating from the 1930's (sites #2 & #3). Mount's Tavern (site #4) exemplifies the two-thirds Georgian plan with earlier ell found on many residences in Middletown and Monmouth County. The district also includes examples of Victorian Vernacular styling (site #9 & #10).

In addition to the district's residential structures, Chapel Hill also includes two former taverns: Tracy Tavern (site #6) and Mount's Tavern (site # 4), both converted to residential use in the 19th century. There is a former store, now a residence (site #2), and the former Chapel Hill School (site #8), also a residence. Other businesses, such as the blacksmith and wheelwright shops, are no longer extant. The 1809 Baptist Chapel, after which the village was named, was demolished in the 1970's (see Statement of Significance on following page).

SIGNIFICANCE AND HISTORY

The Chapel Hill District is significant as one of Middletown's early villages of the 18th century, and an important survivor of the small rural hamlets that developed around inns and taverns along major thoroughfares. Originally known as High Point, it is located along King's Highway, a 17th century township road that linked Middletown Village with the Highlands and Sandy Hook. Architecturally, the district also is significant for structures dating from the early and mid-18th century to the late 19th century, most of which are in a good state of preservation (see descriptions of individual properties attached).

Chapel Hill began to be settled around 1700, when it was known as High Point. The settlers included Taylors and Conovers, families already well established in Middletown. From their vantage point on the ridge these enterprisers were well situated to profit by trade. Imports as well as exports were carried by sea. Then, as now, New York was a monied market, and Sandy Hook Harbor was a thriving port for coasting craft. Not blind to natural resources, the community viewed the water power at the base of the ridge. About one mile south of the village, along McClees Creek, the Luffburrows built a grist mill which burned in 1890 and was never rebuilt. Also in the vicinity, Andrew Winter built a fulling mill in which homespun woolen cloth was finished for suits and other articles of clothing.

Chapel Hill's vantage point above Sandy Hook Harbor took on strategic importance in the Revolutionary War. After the defeat of the British in the Battle of Monmouth, the retreating troops bivouacked all along the Chapel Hill ridge from June 29th to July 5th 1778, waiting for embarkation as soon as the necessary British ships should arrive in Sandy Hook Harbor below. Meantime patriot John Stillwell reported to General Washington on the movement of British ships along the Jersey Coast (John Stillwell's Diary).

Early in the 18th Century a "publick house" or hotel was opened in what is now known as Tracy House (#6) on King's Highway East (then known as Mountain Hill Road) and a few doors away Mount's Tavern (#4) offered competition, especially among patrons of the bar. Both were supplied by a local still run by Samuel Cooper, in addition to whatever imports were brought in through Sandy Hook Harbor, plainly visible below the ridge.

Samuel Cooper's brother, John was a talented preacher. By 1809 his congregation built a Baptist chapel between Tracy House and Taylor House (sites #5 & #6). In honor of the new church, the village of High Point was renamed Chapel Hill. The name stuck even when, after two decades of being a Baptist, John Cooper changed his affiliation to Wesleyan and persuaded his flock to build another (and larger) church in Riceville, now Navesink (Leonard, p. 145-146).

In 1842 the High Point Total Abstinence Society was formed and the chapel became a local center for the temperance movement. Fervent meetings were held in the Chapel and in a few years both taverns were forced to close their doors. During one of the temperance meetings, patrons of the tavern obtained the key to the chapel and locked the members in the building leaving them no alternative but an undignified egress through a window. The culprits were charged with "disturbing the peace" at the next weekly court session. Ironically, court sessions were held alternately in one of the public houses. The Chapel was destroyed in the 1970's but the graveyard still exists (Block 498 Lot 3).

The proposed Chapel Hill Historic District possesses "integrity of location, . . . setting, . . . and association "(Section 16 - 2.3) It is "of particular historic significance to the Township of Middletown by reflecting the broad cultural (architectural styles of the 18th & 19th Centuries, see descriptions of individual properties appended), political (setting for significant events of the Revolutionary War), economic (nurturing the early roots of our American incentive system in farming, commerce and industry and especially profiting from a geographical location which gave it an overview of coast shipping and an excellent harbor at a time when all commerce was by sea) and social (as site of a strong temperance movement) history of the nation, the State, (and) the community."

Tracy House and Cornelius Mount's Tavern, Hook's Farm, a Taylor and a Conover farm house, the store, and public school house are all occupied by current residents of Chapel Hill. They constitute "a significant concentration" of historic sites. This is a community rich with history of nearly three centuries. The Middletown Township Landmarks Commission strongly recommends to the Township Committee the protection of the Chapel Hill Historic District as indicated on the accompanying map and as provided for by Middletown Township Ordinance #2017 in order to "enhance and perpetuate the heritage of the Township of Middletown (as) one of the earliest settlements in New Jersey."

REFERENCES

- Franklin Ellis, History of Monmouth County (1885)
- Thomas H. Leonard, From Indian Trail to Electric Rail (1923)
- Ernest W. Mandeville, The Story of Middletown (1927; annotated and indexed by T. Jeliffe, 1972_.
- Thelma K. Jeliffe, Achter Coll to Zoning (1982)
- League of Women Voters, Seventeen Schools and Counting (1974)
- "Chapel Hill District," New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory.
- Gail Hunton and James C. McCabe, Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory (1980 - 1984)
- Middletown Township Landmarks Commission Files.
- Jesse Lightfoot, Map of Monmouth County (1851).
- F.W. Beers, Atlas of Monmouth County (1873).
- Chester Wolverton, Atlas of Monmouth County (1889).

CHAPEL HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT: PROPERTY INVENTORY

Below is an inventory of the seventeen structures identified within the district. Structures are classified as follows (as per ordinance):

- 1) Key: any buildings, structures, sites or objects which, due to their significance, would individually qualify for landmark status.
- 2) Contributing: any buildings, structures, sites or objects which are integral components of the historic district either because they date from a time period for which the district is significant or because they represent an architectural type, period, or method of construction for which the district is significant.
- 3) Non-contributing: any buildings, structures, sites or objects which are not integral components of the historic district either because they neither date from a time period for which the district is significant nor represent an architectural type, period or method for which the district is significant.

Township of Middletown, N.J.
Chapel Hill Historic District
List of Included Properties

SITE	CLASSIFICATION	ADDRESS	BLOCK & LOT
1	Key	680 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 19.01
2	Key	626 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 25
3	Key	630 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 25.01
4	Key	631 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 39.01
5	Key	645 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 41
6	Key	649 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 43
7	Contributing	634 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 24
8	Contributing	650 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 22
9	Contributing	617 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 38.01
10	Contributing	621 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 38.02
11	Non-Contributing	660 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 21.02
12	Contributing	345 Chapel Hill Rd.	Block 835, Lot 27
13	Non-Contributing	620 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 26
14	Non-Contributing	641 King's Hwy East	Block 672, Lot 40
15	Contributing	651 King's Hwy East	Block 671, Lot 44
16	Contributing	670 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 20
17	Non-Contributing	640 King's Hwy East	Block 835, Lot 23.01

Revised block and lot numbers as of 1996

gd
rd.



Original Block & Lot numbers. New block & lot numbers assigned in 1999

6 N 55. E 5.87
Stouck
Line

G. Vanmater

Chapel

Mrs West

Shops
Mount

Barn
Mount

House

7. N 89. 26 E 82.76

Barn

G. Vanmater

House

Old Road

House R.M. Harrington

House Wm Mount

Chapel

House Jas Stillwell

Hill

James Stillwell
woods

8. S 88.45 E 11.32

Mrs Ravat
House

A.C. Watrous

A.C. Watrous
Store

Geo. Alley
House

R.M. Harrington
woods

Line

Line

Richd Williams
House

Line 9 S 76.20 E 10.08

Thos Taylor House

House

S.M. Cooper

10. S 27.10 E 7.88

11. S 59.30 E 18.37

Wm. Prosser

Wm. O. Clark

CHAPL HILL RD

1869 Middletown Road Return
Monmouth County Archives, Manalapan

Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #1

Classification: Key

680 King's Highway East

Block 835, Lot 19.01

Reference: MTLC #99 (7/15/77) County Inventory #1331-41

DEMOLISHED 1-2011 by Richard Stavola

Large Italianate farmhouse, built c. 1850; 2-1/2 story center-hall plan main block with flanking wings, white aluminum siding over clapboard, Italianate details: overhanging eaves supported by paired brackets, segmental arch window cornices and transom light. Five bay fenestration on main block; three bay fenestration on side wings. West wing has same details but flat roof; east wing is a later Colonial Revival addition, as is the large flat-roofed front porch.

The surrounds of this farmhouse include barns and fields enclosed by spectacular 3 board fences painted an immaculate white in charming contrast to the green of occasional trees and well-manicured fields.

Hooker and Gertrude Talcott, having inherited this property from Hooker Talcott's father, sold it to Frank and Dorothy Stavola in November 1974.

Significance: (verbatim from the County Inventory) "this is a good representation of the Italianate Style as it was expressed in early Middletown. As in other parts of the county, the five-bay plan was the basic house form for the rural well-to-do; stylistic expression was achieved through the use of applied details. Historic mapping for this area is imprecise, so it is difficult to determine early ownership. G. Taylor owned the farm in 1889."



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site 2

Classification: Key

626 King's Highway East

Block 835, Lot 25

General Store

Reference: MTLC #105 County Inventory #1331-1-2

c. 1800 Residence that also served as a general store during the 19th century. Store started by Obadiah Winter. The main wing of the building with its distinguishing front porch supported on four large square wooden columns dates from the early 1800's. The main doorway with 6/6 windows either side is original but the Dutch Colonial curve in the porch roof was added by William K. Larsen in the 1930's. Painted wainscotting in the main wing may also be original.

The smaller west wing of the store had dormers added on the north side (facing King's Highway East) and the roof was raised at the back to give more living space. But much of the original construction survives, including exposed beams in the dining room ceiling, a wood and iron box lock on the front door and several interesting fireplaces.

Significance: This is one of the oldest remaining buildings in the Chapel Hill District, and a good example of the small cottage types erected in Middletown during the early 19th century. When the store was built in the early years of the 19th century, the first American locomotive was just emerging and there were very few miles of track for it to run on. Both goods and people moved by sea or by stage slowly, by our standards, and not very comfortably either. A local store brought occasional small luxuries to a home-spun market and its ample porch offered a good place to talk politics or housekeeping or just gossip with neighbors. So, Obadiah Winter's store served Chapel Hill for most of the last century but under many changes of management: Leonard, Langdon, Watrous, Conover & Bennett.



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #3

Classification: Key

630 King's Highway East

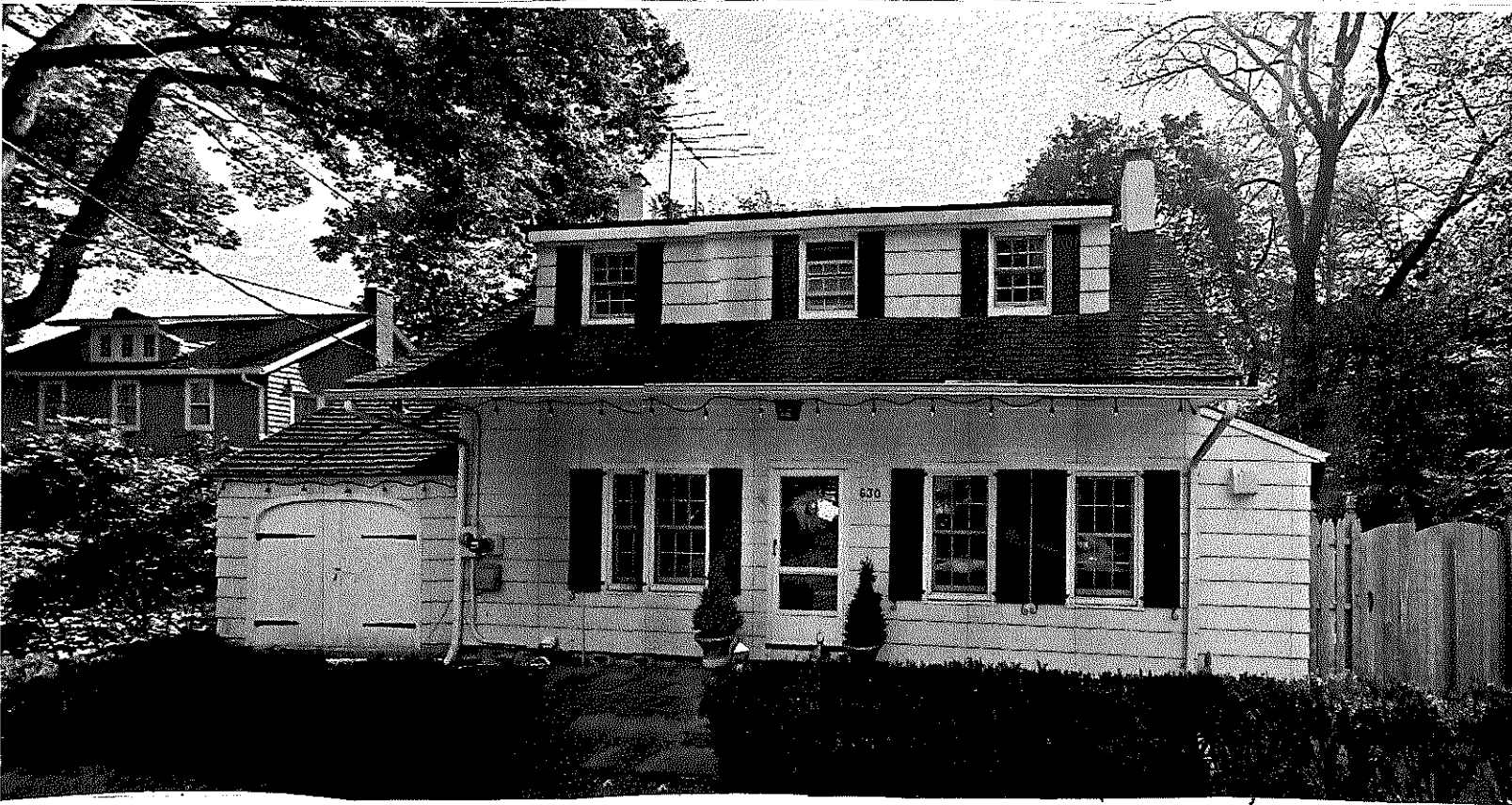
Block 835, Lot 25.01

High Point Cottage

Reference: MTLC #104 County Inventory 1331-1-4

1-1/2 story cottage built c. 1810 with later Colonial Revival alterations. Foundations are native ironstone. Despite remodeling by William Larsen in the early thirties, the house has original fireplace with ten step staircase winding around in back of it. It has six original solid wood shutters and two old paneled Dutch doors (leading to living room and dining room). Door hinges on bedrooms have been dated 1820 to 1830. (Source: unpublished work sheets for original application for Chapel Hill Historic District submitted to Department of Environmental Protection, Trenton – 9/11/73.)

Significance: This homestead, also known as Conover Cottage, was one of the first to be built at High Point. Small in scale with simple but well-crafted detailing, this is an excellent remaining example of the early dwellings of Chapel Hill.



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #4

Classification: Key

631 King's Highway East

Block 672, Lot 39.01

Mount's Tavern

Reference: MTLIC #92 County Inventory 1331-1-3

The side ell is the oldest, a Dutch-framed cottage with characteristic steep roof and large overhanging eaves; the ell is probably early 18th century (local tradition dates it 17 c. 1740), but there is no documentation to support an exact construction date. The 2-1/2 story main block, which has a fieldstone foundation and wood shingle cladding, has a 3-bay side-hall Georgian plan and dates from the early 19th century. The door is flanked by wide 8-pane sidelights; the pedimented portico replaces an older shed roof portico.

Significance: Known locally as "Mount's Tavern," this is an important local example of the combination of an early 18th century Dutch cottage with an early 19th century Georgian plan addition. The site is also significant as one of two early taverns at Chapel Hill, although its history as a tavern is inconclusive prior to 1816. Research by former owner Clinton P. King indicates that the Cooper family owned the property throughout most of the 18th century and until 1807. Cornelius Mount (1787-1857) first leased this property in 1816, then purchased it in 1826, and his tavern licenses appear through the years to 1846. After the death of Mount's widow in 1862, the tavern premises were sold to Garret and Harriet Hopping VanMater, when it ceased to be a hotel and became a private residence.



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #5

Classification: Key

645 King's Highway East

Block 671, lot 41

Taylor House (c. 1730)

Reference: MTLC #94 County Inventory 1331-1-5

Early section of the house is the rectangular main block and lean-to. Traditional Middletown 1-1/2 story cottage dating from about 1730. (West wing was added in the 20th Century). Eaves of roof are flush with end walls. 6/6 windows may have been added along with flush siding as a Greek Revival alteration in the early 19th century. Dormers are a later addition. Six paneled Dutch doors have original box locks (one wood; one iron.) Two original fireplaces, one with a recessed bake over. Ten-riser stair curves around behind the fireplace. Board and batten doors on the second floor.

Significance: This is a well-preserved early example of the 1-1/2 story 18th century cottage common to Middletown. It also illustrates the accrual of 19th century design elements such as larger windows and flush siding. Members of the numerous Taylor family, who were early settlers in Middletown, are believed to have been the original owners of the house.



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #6

Classification: Key

649 King's Highway East

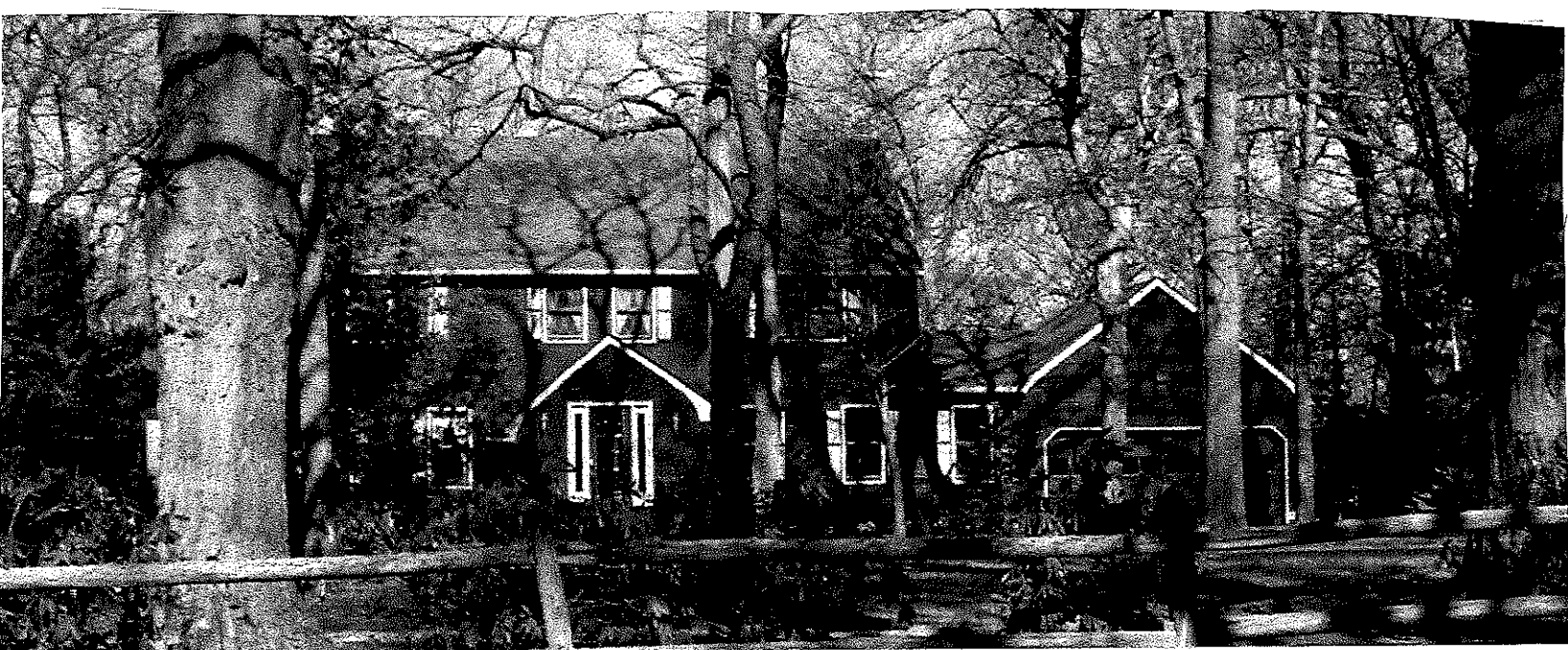
Block 672, Lot 43

Tracy Tavern

Reference: MTLIC #95 County Inventory 1331-1-1

Two story, four-bay main block with 1-1/2 story ell; earliest section of the house is 18th century, with 19th century additions and fenestration changes. Foundations are uncoursed fieldstone. Open stair well, two flights with landing between, plain balusters and handrail. Random-width floors and hand-forged nails. 6-panel Dutch door with old brass lock, bulkhead cellar access. Two fireplaces, original kitchen one with crane. Pegged rafters in attic, morticed structural members, board and batten doors above stairs. "Symmetrically molded trim with corner blocks framing windows and doors". (from the application for historic district 8/17/73)

Significance: The oldest part of this structure housed one of the earliest licensed taverns in the area and may have pre-dated Mount's Tavern by several decades. However, the exact years of the inn's 18 century origins and operation, and the early innkeepers/owners remain obscure. This was an "ordinary" with accommodation for overnight guests combined with a tavern where neighbors met to discuss war or trade or politics. The Township Court held its sessions here every other Sunday under a Justice of the Peace. But, by the middle of the 19th century, the Chapel Hill expression of the U.S. temperance movement had turned opinion against serving alcoholic beverages and the tavern was closed. This building became the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Tracy, only daughter of James Stillwell whose farm adjoined the property to the north.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #7
Classification: Contributing
634 King's Highway East
Block 835, lot 24
Reference: MTLC #103

Three bay 2-1/2 story house, dating from the second half of the 19th century. Central doorway, wood shingle siding, exterior chimney, shed roof dormer, 2/2 sash with louvered blinds, plastered door enframement with entablature. Of particular note is the great oak in the front yard, which appears to be well over 200 years old.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #8
Classification: Contributing
650 King's Highway East
Block 835, lot 22
Reference: MTLC #101

Wood-framed six classroom school (Chapel Hill's second school). The first school was built in 1817 on Garret's Hill, north of Chapel Hill, on land now part of Earle Weapon Station. The building was moved in 1848 to a lot on the west side of the now-vacated portion of Chapel Hill Road (north of King's Highway East), and remained in use for forty-seven years. In 1894, the new Township Board of Education purchased this lot for a new school, and the new six-classroom structure was dedicated in February 1895. This was the first school building constructed by the newly established Township Board of Education. The Board of Education sold the building in 1923, when it became a private residence. It was resold and remodeled in 1930, when the bathrooms, center hall and staircase were installed and the roof raised to create a second story and attic. The building was remodeled again in 1958. According to Mrs. Wyndham Gary, the building still contains original schoolhouse floors on the first level, and two old mantelpieces.

Significance: This is one of Middletown's surviving 19th century school buildings, and though altered, is the principal remaining community structure in the district since the demolition of the Baptist Church.



Chapel Hill Historic District

Site #9

Classification: Contributing

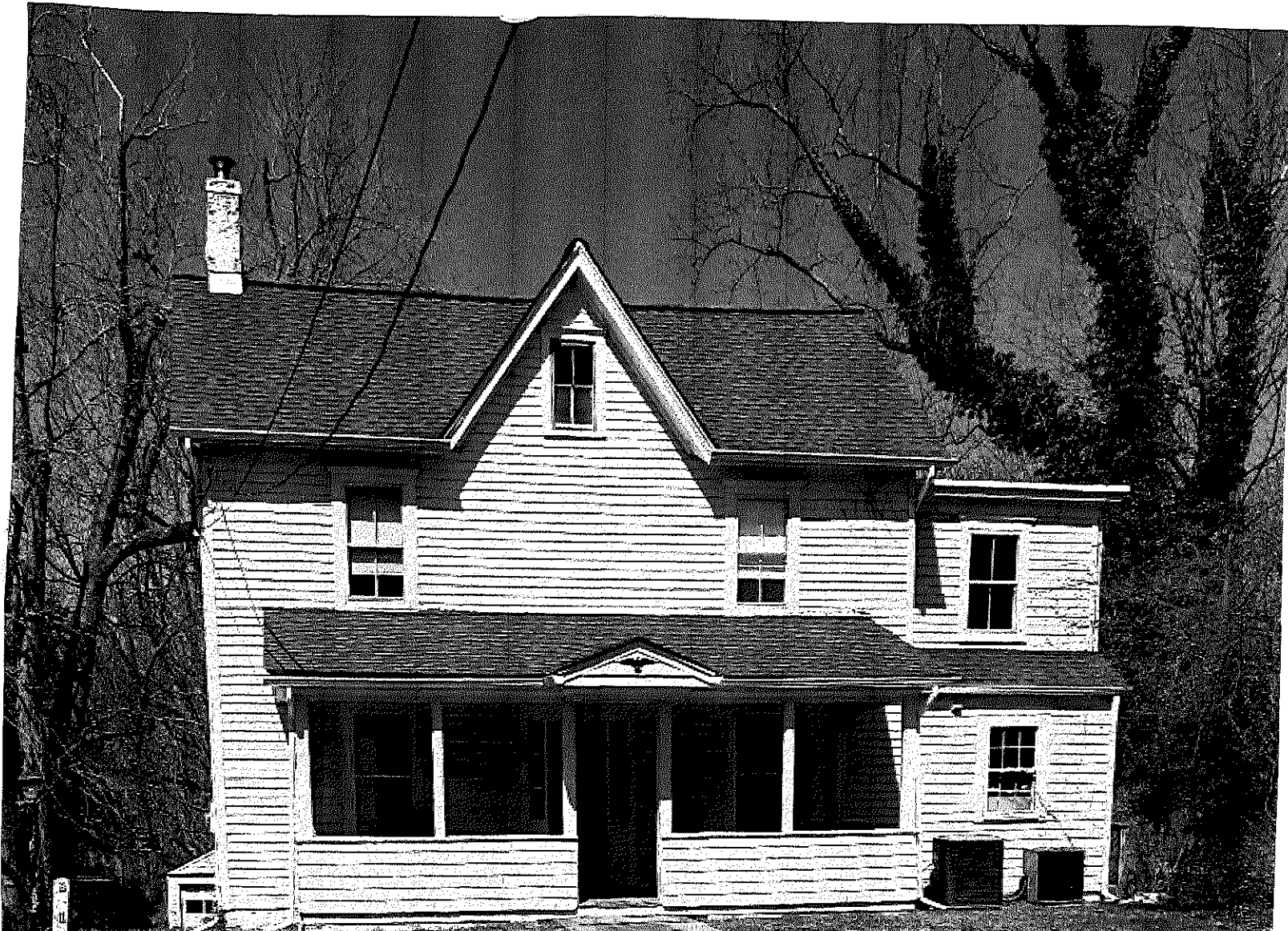
617 King's Highway East

Block 672, lot 38.01

Reference: MTLC #90 County Inventory #1331-1-1

Vernacular Victorian house built in 1878. Symmetrical 2 over 3 bay main block with flat-roofed, two-story wing which is a later addition. Steep cross gable roof reinforced by a small central pediment in shed roofed front porch. 2/2 sash windows and sidelighted central doorway. House appears in Wolverton Atlas (1889) as owned by D. Irwin.

This is a well-preserved example of a simple late 19th century residence in the Chapel Hill District and one of a few of its kind in a district dominated by earlier structures.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #10
Classification: Contributing
621 King's Highway East
Block 672, lot 38.02
Reference: MTLC #91

Vernacular Victorian residence built in the late 19th century. The 3 bay rectangular main block has a projecting central bay, cross gable roof and wide overhanging eaves. The flat roofed east wing is a later addition. House appears to have had Colonial Revival alterations (windows, doorway) in the early 20th century.

Significance: This is a well-maintained example of late 19th century residential construction within the Chapel Hill District.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #11
Classification: Non-Contributing
660 King's Highway East
Block 835, Lot 21.02
Reference: MTLC #549



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #12
Classification: Contributing
345 Chapel Hill Rd.
Block 835, Lot 27
Reference: MTLC #556

Mid-20th century Colonial Revival residence in the "Cape Cod" style; compatible with the historic structures in the Chapel Hill District in scale, form, materials and overall design.



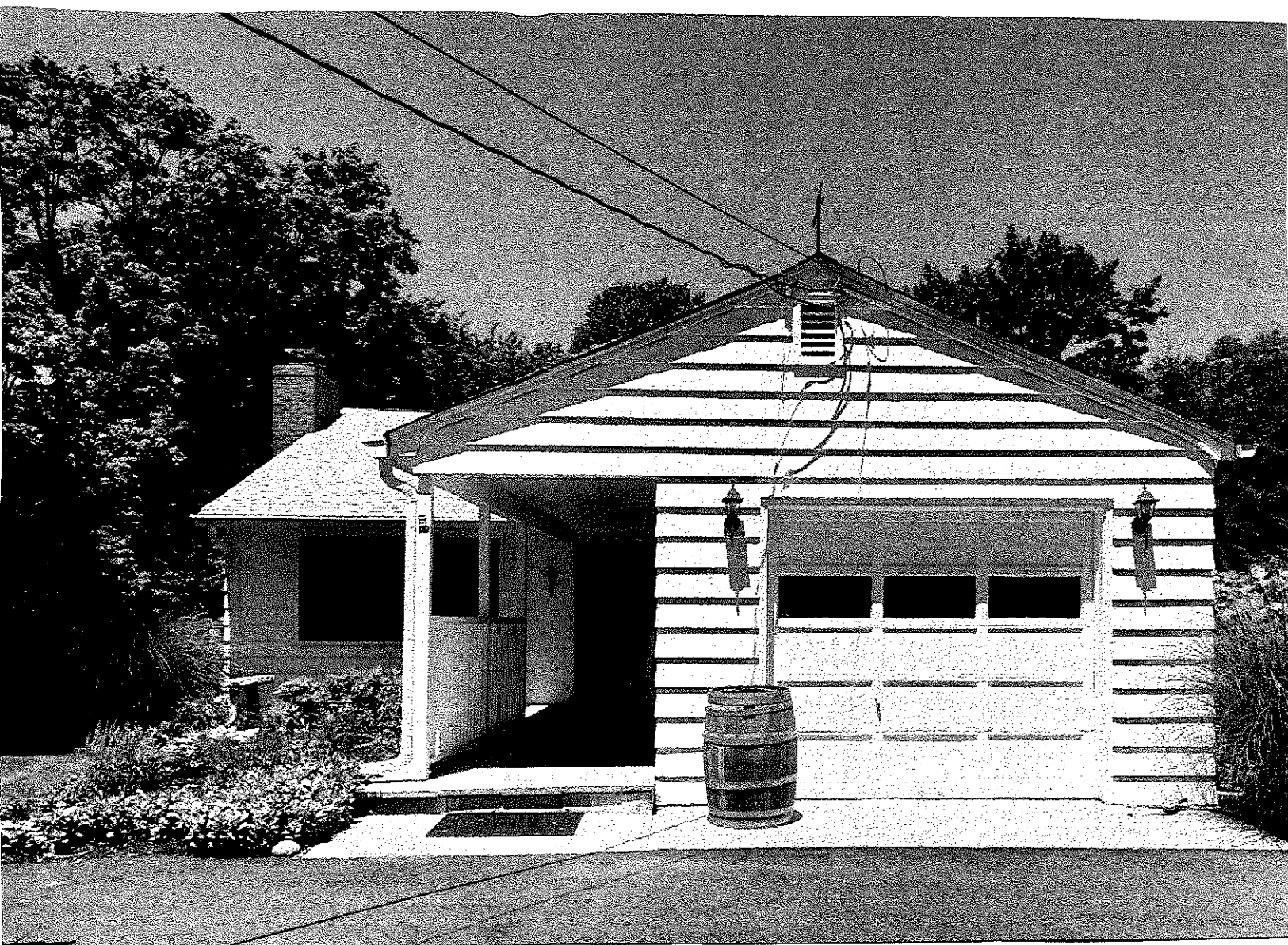
Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #13
Classification: Non-Contributing
620 King's Highway East
Block 835, Lot 26
Reference: MTLC #557

Recent two-story "Colonial."



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #14
Classification: Non-Contributing
641 King's Highway East
Block 672, Lot 40
Reference: MTLC #558

Mid-20th century wood-clad ranch house.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #15
Classification: Contributing
651 King's Highway East
Block 672, Lot 44
Reference: MTLC #559

Recent two-story wood-clad residence with traditional and colonial design references.



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #16
Classification: Contributing
670 King's Highway East
Block 835, Lot 20
Reference: MTLC #548



Chapel Hill Historic District
Site #17
Classification: Non-Contributing
640 King's Highway East
Block 835, Lot 23.01
Reference: MTLC #550

High Point Farm. Original ranch style house located on the property was destroyed in a fire in the late 1970s. Construction of a new, 1-1/2 ranch style house is planned for 2021. The new structure will be located 1,000 from the road.

