

K-646

1885

Maple Lawn
Near Sassafras
Private

The 1885 house at Maple Lawn is a rare example of a Kent County farmhouse built in the Queen Anne style, albeit a rather conservative interpretation of it. It was built for Anthony Hookey Johnson and his wife, Laura Wootters Johnson, probably was built from a builder's plan. From the exterior it contrasts markedly with the most common large farmhouse type built during the 1880s--2-1/2 storeys tall, five bays wide, basically in a Gothic Revival Style, and with a central gable. This house is similar in some ways to that Kent County "standard," but it is also significantly different, with its cross-gable plan and two-storey bay-windows projecting from a side, front-gable section. On the interior, however, Maple Lawn's plan is almost identical to that of the central gable, symmetrical houses--the plan is central hall with a parlor on each side. The separate framing of each section, however, distinguishes them and makes possible what little variation in room plan that there is. The house is rich with Victorian details of the sort ordered from millwork catalogues of the time; no expense seems to have been spared. The house is an unusually well-preserved document of Victorian building and tastes. The kitchen has been modernized, the pantry made into a television room, and some decorative changes made to the family parlor, and a second bathroom has been added (one may be original). Except for those alterations, the house is almost as it was built, with original finishes (many grained) and, most notably, what is probably the original wallpaper in the south, "company" parlor. Except for some water damage on the east wall, the paper on the other three walls and ceiling is remarkably well preserved, partly because the room seems to have remained darkened much of the time. It provides an interesting study in Victorian mixing and matching of patterns; somehow they all make a pleasing, unified whole. The house is also interesting for its early central heating system that used most chimneys as ducts for what must have been a gravity furnace in the cellar. Most Kent County farmhouses used stoves well into the twentieth century. There was also an early gas lighting system, with acetylene gas being made on the farm.

7. Description

Survey No. K-646

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Located on the west side of Route 290, the Massey-Sassafras Road, the house at Maple Lawn stands at the end of a broad allee of maple trees planted soon after the house was built in 1885, in a Queen Anne Style and probably from a builder's plan. The form is cross-gable. The section with its axis-north/south is three bays wide on its east-facing facade and contains only the formal parlor and the stair hall. It has a tall gable roof with a pair of dormers in the east roof slope. The larger, longer section, perpendicular to the formal section of the house, protrudes somewhat forward of the formal section's north end and in addition has a two-storey bay window in the front gable end that is part of the main, east-facing facade. It has a north facing gable that aligns with the gable roof of the formal section and also acts as a central, symmetrically located central gable for the secondary facade facing north, seen secondarily by those approaching the farmhouse. Most walls are covered with horizontal lapped weatherboard, and the roofs are slate. The interior plan is central hall.

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Both sections of the house at Maple lawn are 2-1/2 storeys tall. The formal, east-facing, south-gable section of the house is three bays wide and two bays deep. The main entry is in the northernmost bay of the east side, into the stair hall through a porch that bridges the house sections. There are no rear windows in the parlor in this section, but the south end does have windows in both bays on both storeys, symmetrically spaced and aligned from storey to storey. The hall does have a rear door that leads to the porch in the L formed by the juncture of the two house sections. Somewhat unusually, there is access through the rear of the hall to the family parlor.

The windows of the first-storey facade (two windows) appear to be the sort seen at Hickory Ridge Farm (K-639), almost a sister house to this one in some respects, and at only a few other Kent County houses. They are double-hung extend from almost floor to ceiling, with large 2-over-2 lights, with a horizontal panel in the lower part of the lower sash. It is not known whether these windows's lower sash rise into the wall below the level of the second-storey windows for true walk-out access to the porch. This is a feature at Hickory Ridge, which was built several years later than the house at Maple Lawn.

According to family tradition, the one-storey room at the rear of the 2-1/2 storey wing was originally supposed to be a porch, which would have meant that the present dining room would have been the kitchen, and the present family living room the dining room. Two parlors evidently were wanted, however, hence the one-storey kitchen at the rear. This perhaps explains the strange location of the pantry, between dining room and family parlor, one room away from the kitchen. A pass-through was constructed between dining room and pantry, however, probably making things slightly more convenient.

The early central heating system may be unique in Kent County, at least in the country and by the 1885 building date of the house, when it appears to have been installed. Only one of the three chimneys appears to have been built as working chimneys, the one at the rear of the two-storey wing, opening into the dining room. This may have served the kitchen as well, with a stovepipe possibly into it. While there are fireplace mantels in place under the chimneys, they are merely symbolic, for there are movable grates in their openings, for the heat from the cellar furnace to rise in. The one within the south parlor wall, adjacent to the hall, also has a grate on the side of the chimney that abuts the hall, so that the hall is heated. There is one "dummy" chimney that rises up in the pantry area to the third storey, where it simply stops above the grate that provides heat to that attic area.

The wallpaper of the south parlor is noteworthy for its mix of patterns and colors. There is a main paper for the main wall area and several wall and ceiling border papers, which jog around the chimney projection on the ceiling. There are also applique "patches" at the ceiling corners formed by the border papers and a central rectangular area over where there once was some sort of central lighting fixture, a dark patterned paper, perhaps to prevent darkening
(continued)

of the ceiling. There is a main ceiling paper as well.

Also notable are grained doors, a pair of them double leading from hall to family, north parlor. Like the double hall doors at Hickory Ridge, the architrave shape is segmentally arched, with the doors similarly shaped. The first-storey trim is unusually wide and complex (see profile); it is grained in the same manner as the doors. Almost all trim is in original condition, and all hardware is present. Even the original double screen doors, with their attractive, heavy, shaped corner brackets, at the main entry seem to be in place

According to the 1860 Martenet map of Kent County, there was a house on the property, which then belonged to _____ Wroth (the map is not legible). By 1877, the year of the Lake, Griffing and Stevenson atlas maps of Kent County, the property belonged to Richard Corbaley Johnson, the grandfather of the present owner's late husband, Clayton Johnson. There was an old house on it at that time, which may later have become a tenant house. It is now gone.

The farm was the wedding gift of Richard C. Johnson, who owned numerous farms, to his son Anthony Hookey Johnson sometime between 1877 and 1885, the date of building of the present house. Richard C. Johnson's home farm was at Hickory Ridge (K-639), to the south of Massey on the Sassafras-Massey Road, and he had grown up at Valhalla (K-165). Anthony H. Johnson was the older of two surviving sons of Richard C. Johnson, and they married a pair of sisters, Lila and Laura Wootters, Anthony marrying Laura. The girls are said to have come north with their mother from Richmond after their father was killed during the Civil War, to live with a Kennedyville relative who agreed to support them, provided the girls would be raised as Catholics. The sisters evidently were somewhat competitive; whatever one had, the other had to have also. This is reflected in the houses each was involved in building. Though they are not built in exactly the same style or plan, numerous details in the later of the two (the Victorian central-gable house at Hickory Ridge, K-639, to replace the earlier house that burned) are also seen in the slightly earlier house at Maple Lawn. Their husbands appeared able to indulge their wishes, for they were among the most successful, prosperous farmers of their upper-county area. The period in which the two Johnson families built the two houses was a boom time for house building in Kent County because of a number of successful years of crops, especially peaches and pears. Evidently as farmers prospered, they provided themselves with new, better houses. It was a time of conspicuous consumption, in Kent County as elsewhere during the "Gilded Age," and it was reflected in the houses built at that time. As members of the upper-county gentry and with a train station located in neaby Massey, it is likely that both sisters made excursions, for shopping and other reasons, to Philadelphia, where they would have been exposed to architectural styles, building elements, and decorative items not found in Kent County.

The house is a dated one, the numbers 1885 written high on a dormer rafter in the rear attic room of the wing.

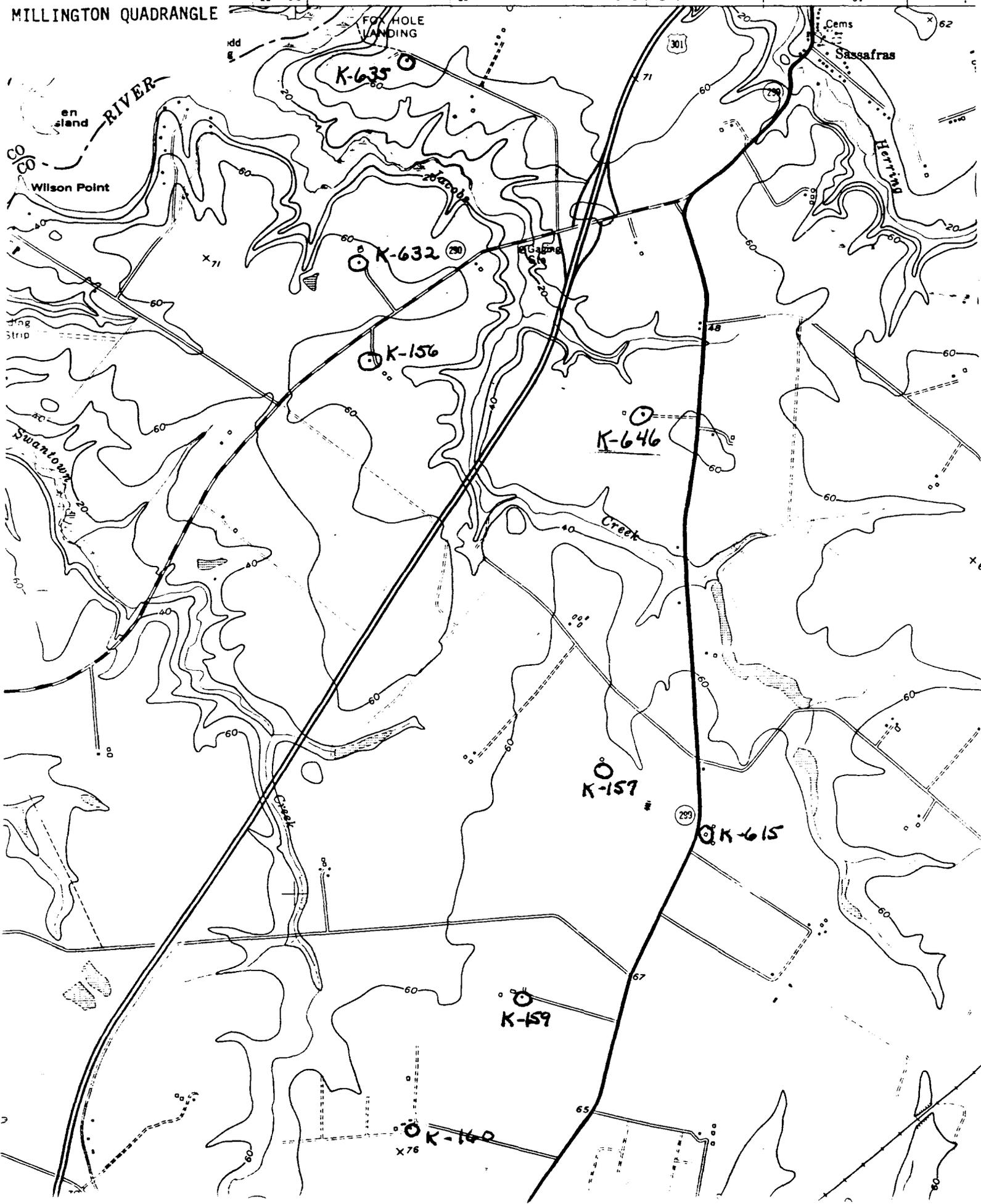
MILLINGTON QUADRANGLE

1428 50'

1429

5862 IV NE (CECILTON)

WARWICK 3.5 MI 1431



Wilson Point

K-635

K-632

K-156

K-646

K-157

K-615

K-159

K-140

dredging Strip

Swanton River

Creek

Cems

Sassafras

Herring

301

299

67

65

76

71

71

72

48

62

6

60

60

60

60

60

open island

RIVER

FOX HOLE LANDING



K-646

Maple Lawn

Rt. 299, near Sassafras

M. Q. Fallaw - 7/21/86

View to southwest

K 646 - 12



K-646

Maple Lawn

Rt. 299, near Sassafras

M. Q. Fallaw - 7/21/86

View to northeast

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