

Amaziah Burcham Farm
(J & J Burcham Farm)
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
South Second Avenue
Millville
Cumberland County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-995

HABS
NJ
6-MILLV)
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

AMAZIAH BURCHAM FARM
(J & J Burcham Farm)

HABS No. NJ-995

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Location: South Second Avenue
Millville, NJ 08332

Owner/Occupant: Janice Burcham and Jeanette Burcham.

Present Use: Working farm and residence.

Significance: The thirty-five acre Burcham farm is the last remaining example of the once numerous working farms created out of reclaimed marshland along the Maurice River. Moreover, the fragile existence of its dikes, sluice gates, and drainage ditches signifies the historical use of landscape and environment to enhance economic stability. It has also been designated a New Jersey "Century Farm," as it has been owned and operated by the same family for more than 100 years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1869, 1907. Upon purchasing the land in 1869, Amaziah Burcham either built a new structure or moved into a pre-existing one. In 1907, Burcham built the present house, attaching it to some or all of the nineteenth-century structure.
2. Architect: None.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Reference is to the Land Records of Cumberland County, New Jersey, located in Bridgeton, which fall under the supervision of the Cumberland County Circuit Court. The chain was searched to 1816.

Block 217, Lot 48. The description is based on landmarks and does not correspond to permanent features: "Beginning at a White Oak standing by the edge of the upland on the lower side of an island and is corner to formerly Job S. Watson's meadow, and runs thence along his line North forty degrees East one chain and fifty links to the turn of a ditch; thence along said ditch North thirteen and a half degrees West five chains and twenty-five links to where a bridge was formerly over said ditch; thence North twenty degrees West twelve chains and eight links to gum tree outside the bank; thence North forty-seven degrees West six chains more or less to low water mark on Maurice River, thence down the River the several courses thereof to a corner of said Watson land, thence along now or formerly said Watson's meadow to the place of beginning. Containing thirty-five acres more or less."

- 1816 Deed December 18, 1816, recorded in Book GG 32, p. 409-11.
Daniel Elmer and Martha, his wife, of Bridgeton in Cumberland
County
To
John Brannon of Millville Township.
- 1832 Deed November 16, 1832, recorded in Book AG 56, p. 449-51.
Daniel Elmer and Martha, his wife, of Bridgeton
To
Cornelius Garrison of Downe Township.
- 1838 Deed August 3, 1838, recorded in Book AQ, p. 282-4.
Cornelius Garrison and wife Rachel, Chesapeake City, Cecil County
To
Joseph Butcher of Cumberland County.
- 1839 Deed January 30, 1839, recorded in Book AR, p. 117-9.
Joseph Butcher and Rebecca, his wife, of Cumberland County
To
Jacob Sutton of the same place.
- 1840 Deed April 27, 1840, recorded in Book AS, p. 593-4.
Joseph Butcher and Rebecca, his wife, of Cumberland County
To
Jacob Sutton of the same place.
- 1850 Deed January 19, 1850, recorded in Book BG, p. 574-5.
John P. Sutton and Ann, his wife, of Cumberland County
To
Aaron G. Robinson and Rachel, his wife, of the same place.
- 1852 Deed February 3, 1852, recorded in Book BK 83, p. 368-9.
Aaron G. Robinson and Rachel, his wife, of Millville Township
To
George Wilson of Cumberland County.
- 1855 Deed April 10, 1855, recorded in Book BO 87, p. 324-25.
George Wilson and Mary Ann, his wife, of Millville
To
Hannah Loper of Millville Township.
- 1855 Deed December 6, 1855, recorded in Book BP 88, p. 204-5.
Hannah Loper of Millville
To
John Frease of the same place.

- 1862 Deed October 7, 1862, recorded in Book CA p. 302.
John Frease and Mary Ann, his wife, of Maurice River Township
To
Moses T. Swan, of Vermont.
- 1862 Deed October 7, 1862, recorded in Book CF p. 84-85.
Moses T. Swan, of Millville Township
To
Peter Snider, of the same place.
- 1865 Deed March 14, 1865, recorded in Book CH 123.
Peter Snyder and Mary, his wife, of Millville Township
To
John McClure of the same place.
- 1869 Deed January 27, 1869, recorded in Liber CW folio 675-679.
John G. McClure and Louisa, his wife, of Salem County
To
Amaziah E. Burcham of the city of Millville.
- 1915 Deed March 17, 1915, recorded in Liber 342, folio 438-441.
Amaziah E. Burcham and Mary, his wife, of the city of Millville
To
Frank A. Burcham and Maud, his wife, of the same place.
- 1951 Will April 19, 1951.
Maud Burcham, deceased.
To
Janice and Jeanette Burcham.

4. Original plans and construction: No plans exist for the nineteenth-century structure, which consisted of fourteen rooms. These included four bedrooms, two parlors, two storage or bicycle rooms, cellar kitchen, spring cellar, two north cellar rooms, conservatory and store.
In 1907, Amaziah Burcham built the present-day main block--a banked four-story, side-facing, four-bay wide, two-bay deep structure. Bricks used in the construction were fired on the premises. The plan is irregular: From the exterior it appears to have a central passage and stairwell, but there is no front entrance. Actually the house is entered on the west side and has a side stairwell, also facing west. The side orientation of the door and stairwell occurs because the 1907 house was butted against the original nineteenth-century structure.
5. Alterations and additions: In the 1960s, much of the nineteenth-century frame structure was demolished due to structural damage from storms, high winds, and old age. Only what is today's north bedroom, living room below, north

basement room, and the store remain. The latter two spaces appear to be a one-and-one-half story, single-pile rear addition, while the store may have been a side addition to the primary structure. In 1991, the west wall of the store and the mud room were updated with aluminum siding. The original interior of the living room and north bedroom has been replaced with paneling, modern windows and molding. In the 1940s, a bathroom was installed north of the stairs on the second floor. The kitchen was updated in 1976 with the installation of modern appliances.

B. Historical Context:

The house and its occupants:

In 1869, Amaziah Burcham, a Civil War veteran from East Lyme, Connecticut, bought a triangular-shaped thirty-five-acre tract of reclaimed marshland along the Maurice River. On the southeastern corner of the land, Burcham either built a frame house or moved into an already-existing structure. This location, the highest point on the property, ensured that if breaches occurred in the dike the house would remain dry.

The land, which lies just north of Menatico Creek, contained deposits of Cape May clay, a gritty, loamy, and sandy clay that was ideal for making bricks and drain tiles. As a result, Burcham established his South Jersey Brick and Drain Tile Works on the property. Besides using the bricks for building the 1907 house, Burcham also took advantage of his factory by laying the drain tiles in his fields to help direct the flow of runoff to the holding pond and drainage ditch in the center of his land and then out the sluice gate.

Until its demise during World War II, the brick and tile works was the main source of family income; farming was a secondary venture that supplied Burcham's family, employees, and animals with food. Periodically, Burcham relieved one man of his duties at the brickyard to work in the garden and care for the animals. Burcham also operated a store out of his home to supplement his income.

Burcham sold his bricks largely to customers who lived in the Millville area. He and his men loaded them onto horse-drawn barges on the Maurice River. At the time, all marshland from the Burcham farm north to Millville was reclaimed. In 1913 when Burcham's son, Frank, took over the business, he transported the bricks to Millville via truck. Frank Burcham continued to run the brick factory along with five employees, until World War II when the government declared the business non-essential to the war effort. The younger Burcham and his employees went to work in defense plants, and the factory closed.

The younger Burcham continued to raise crops to provide for his family. In 1948 Frank Burcham died, followed three years later by his wife. Thus, in 1951, their twin daughters, Janice and Jeanette Burcham, inherited the farm. Jeanette, a school teacher and transportation lawyer, returned to the farm and with her uncle, George Haesler, continued to maintain the dike and work the land. Janice, a U.S. Navy nurse, also helped on the farm whenever her leave permitted; in 1975 she retired from the Navy and returned to the farm permanently.

Farming along the Maurice River:

The Burcham Farm, located on the Maurice River in New Jersey, represents an era in American agricultural history when farmers altered tidal salt marshes by digging drainage ditches, building dikes, and installing sluice gates to create land. Through this construction,

farmers could drain the marshes and create sowable fields capable of growing upland crops. Because of the expense of such a venture, farmers in the area worked together to share costs.

In 1866, New Jersey state geologist George Cook reported that out of approximately 274,000 acres of tidal marshes in New Jersey, only 20,000 acres had been drained; the majority were located in Cumberland and Salem counties. Prior to improvement, these were worth \$20 per acre at the most, but after improvement they were valued at as much as \$300 per acre. Nineteen years later, in a U.S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin, D. M. Nesbit wrote that the farmers who lived along the Maurice River in Cumberland County had created the most fertile farm land of its kind in the United States.

The superiority of diked land over poor upland is nowhere better illustrated than along the Maurice River, New Jersey. There the banked meadows, some of which have been in cultivation, without manure, for generations, are wonderfully fertile, and the upland immediately adjoining is only able to produce scrub oak and stunted pine.

It is within this context that Amaziah Burcham worked with his neighbors to maintain the dikes and preserve the reclaimed marshlands. Since breaches in the dikes affected all the farmers along the Maurice River, everyone helped make repairs and was alert to the actions of neighbors. When one farmer had a muddigger, or crane with a clam scoop on it, come up the river to deposit more mud on the banks, he notified the other farmers in the area. Any repairs to the river banks could be done at one time and the farmers shared the cost of the equipment.

Prior to the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Burchams used mud from the river as well as broken brickbats, when the brick factory operated, to maintain the dike. The Burchams, as well as other farmers in the area, hired a muddigger, usually a man who owned a barge equipped with a crane that had a clam scoop on it, to retrieve the mud and repair the dikes. All the farmers along the river were notified when the muddigger would arrive, so he could complete repairs to everyone's banks at the same time. The farmers shared the cost as well as helped one another make repairs during emergencies. The dikes connected these people not only by land but also by the need to survive.

In 1972, while repairing breaches made by Hurricane Agnes, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection notified the Burcham sisters that they were no longer able to use the mud from the river to repair their banks as it was considered state property. As a result, the twins had to look for other material to maintain the dike. Today they use concrete without reinforcement rods, and crushed oyster and clam shells. With the change in materials, the sisters built the first road, the present-day loop, on top of the dike to allow repairs to be made from the land. Previously, the dike had been repaired from the river side and no road was required.

By the 1950s, when Janice and Jeanette took over the property, all the farmers along the Maurice River--except the neighboring farmer--had allowed their dikes to fall into disrepair. The farm to the east of the Burchams existed until the middle of the 1950s when its owner allowed the dike to fail, fearing that the Burchams would do the same: he would have been unable to afford to maintain his dike independently. As a result, the sisters had to raise their access road 3' and extend their dike eastward to act as a barrier between their dry land and the renewed marshland. With the resubmergence of that site, the Burchams became the only extant dike farm on the Maurice River.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Burcham house is a four-story, vernacular brick Gothic Revival structure with a high-pitched cross-gable roof. The house has four bays across the front at the basement level, five on the first floor, three on the second floor, and one at the attic level. The house faces south overlooking the Maurice River, surrounded by a handful of service structures.
2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the 1907 main block is good. The interior has not been significantly altered except to reinforce the southeast corner wall, which had at one time been an interior wall, but with the demise of the conservatory has become an exterior wall. The wall was reinforced and plastered on the interior.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The 1907 main block is ca. 30' x 11'. The width of the rear brick ell is 20'; total rear width is 16'.
2. Foundations: Brick covered with concrete. However, a portion of the east foundation is concrete block due to the stabilization of that section of the house when the nineteenth-century rooms were eliminated.
3. Walls: Brick in seven-course common bond. The only exception is the bottom portion of the east wall which has no set pattern because it had originally been an interior wall made from a mixture of "brick bats" and odd bricks. Again, the wall was exposed when the nineteenth-century rooms adjacent to it were destroyed. Evidence of these rooms can be seen in this wall, particularly the roof line of and blocked door to the conservatory.
4. Structural system: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: The one-story porch wraps around the front (south) and west side of the house supported by turned supports and a balustrade. On the west side the porch is flush with the ground resting on concrete block foundation. As the porch extends east it is raised up on the ground by concrete-block piers.
6. Chimneys: The house has three exterior chimneys, one on the east gable and two on each side of the north gable. The cornice line extends beyond the chimneys.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The house has six exterior doorways. One is on

the east side, which exits from the north living room. Three doors are located on the west side of the house. The first is in the northwest corner and exits the storeroom. The second accesses the mud room while the third leads from the mud room to the porch. The last two doors are located on the south side of the house, basement level, to provide access to the laundry room and an adjacent room respectively. All the exterior doors have been replaced with modern storm doors and are set in simple surrounds.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows on the east, south and west walls are two-over-two-light, double-hung sash set in simple surrounds. The windows not included in the porch area have straight moldings above the windows and protruding sills. All original storm glazing is locked or hooked into place every fall, and removed every spring. The windows on the west wall of the store have been replaced by modern awning windows. The windows on the north wall are flush with the wall and have brick sills.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof of the 1907 main block is a high-pitched cross gable. The nineteenth-century portion is also gabled, but runs south to north instead of west to east. The roof is covered with cedar shingles, which date from about 1965.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The main gable and cross gable have molded box cornices with partial returns, while the rear ell has a box cornice at the east and west roof line and none on the north.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. Basement: The house has a full basement with three rooms banked into the hillside. It has a finished four-bay facade consisting of two five-paneled glazed doors and two of molded panels and two double-hung sash. The floor is brick throughout. The two rooms in the southeast and southwest corners are accessed by outside doors; there is an interior door between them. The two rooms run the length and width of the kitchen, parlor and pantry. An interior stairway to these rooms has been blocked by heating pipes, but the stairwell and door still exist.

On the east wall of the southeast basement room are the blocked doors of three rooms that no longer exist. These included, from north to south, the cellar kitchen, spring cellar, and conservatory. At the north end of this room is the entrance to the

north basement room, which runs only the length of the living room and does not extend under the storeroom. The east wall in the north basement room is brick, the rest are concrete block. A raised brick platform runs the perimeter of the room. Both the east wall and west wall have one small window. The window on the west wall is not visible from the exterior because it is covered by the storeroom.

- b. First floor: The first floor consists of six rooms: a mud room, storeroom, and kitchen on the west side of the house, a parlor on the east, a living room on the north, and a pantry between the living room and parlor. The dimensions of the parlor do not equal that of the kitchen because the pantry and stairwell occupy the remaining space. The two rooms share a doorway with sliding doors, while the doors to the pantry and stairwell are in the kitchen. In the north wall of the pantry is a door that opened into the adjacent living room, but has since been covered on the living room side. Next to that door is the impassable stairwell to the basement and across from it in the east wall of the pantry is five steps to a stairwell that formerly led to the conservatory.

At the north end of the kitchen is the entrance to the nineteenth-century living room. No evidence of stove-pipe hole or fireplace is evident, but the chimneys feed into it. All evidence was covered over when the room was modernized. Adjacent to the living room, in the northwest area of the house, is the storeroom. It can only be entered, however, from the mud room or from an outside door. Within the storeroom is the door that passed between it and the living room. Located on the west wall of the living room, this door has been covered.

- c. Second floor: The second floor has four rooms accessed by the stairs that lead to a central hall. North of the stairwell is the smallest room on the second floor. Much of its height is decreased due to the gable roof line. This room is also lower than the rest of the floor since its section is not part of the 1907 main block.

Down the hall, which runs east to west and then curves south, is the bathroom, southwest bedroom, and south bedroom; each of the bedrooms have closets.

The plan of the second floor is similar to that of the first; however, the southwest bedroom over the kitchen is not as big as the kitchen. Originally the space was shared with a smaller room, which has since been converted to a bathroom.

The stairwell to the third floor is immediately to the south of the second-floor stairwell.

- d. Third floor: The floor plan of the third floor features a central hall that runs north to south with two bedrooms each on the east and west

sides. The ceilings of the hall and bedrooms are sloped because of the roof pitch. The hall's north window looks over the gable roof of the nineteenth-century wing. The west bedroom has a closet in its northeast corner. The stairwell protrudes into the east bedroom on its north side. Directly behind and to the side of the stairwell is a closet that contains the entrance to the attic through a trap door.

2. Stairways: The stairway to the second floor is located in the kitchen between the pantry and the living room. It has a closed well up to the second floor where there is a banister with turned balusters and a decorative newel post. The stairs end at the second-floor hallway. Turning 90 degrees to the right is the stairwell to the third floor, which is a closed stairwell with no banister.
3. Flooring: All flooring is white pine covered with carpeting. Floors in the kitchen and bathrooms are covered with linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are painted except for the lower half of the bathroom wall, which is covered with wainscoting. The walls of the third-floor rooms are covered with wallpaper.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All the interior doors are original. The four-panel doors on the first and second floors are framed with molded trim with corner blocks. The door from the mud room to the kitchen was at one time the main entrance until the mud room was closed in; the door opening is the same as above.

One exception to the above is the door to the north bedroom was once a window and shows that the interior wall facing the stairwell had been an exterior wall. Window shutters act as the door from the top of the stairwell into the room. Several feet down from the door, above the stairwell, is an identical window with shutters. It's opening into the bedroom was covered when the room was remodeled.

The doors on the third floor have six panels.
 - b. Windows: Most of the windows on the first and second floors are original and have symmetrically molded framing with corner blocks like the doors. Two exceptions, however, are the windows in the living room that have been replaced with plainly trimmed, one-over-one-light, double-hung sash. Those in the store are modern casement windows.
6. Hardware: All of the original hinges are still on the doors. The hinges on the second floor are adorned with a scroll-like pattern.

7. Mechanical systems:

- a. Heating: Stovepipe holes are found in the parlor; stoves were used there and in the living room and kitchen. A hot-air heating system was installed in 1962.
- b. Plumbing: Installed in 1935.
- c. Electric: Electricity for lighting was added in 1950. Frank Burcham bought a windcharger from Sears, Roebuck and Company in the early twentieth century and placed it on the barn roof. The windcharger was moved to the windmill's present location when fire destroyed the barn in 1940. The windcharger charged twenty-four batteries located in the cellar. The voltage produced was too weak to operate major appliances, but enough to operate a radio and lights.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The thirty-five acre tract of land that includes the Burcham house and outbuildings is surrounded by a mile long, 10' high dike. According to the title search, this land has been reclaimed since at least 1816. The land, located on the Maurice River, is consistently lower than high tide and higher than low tide. The dike keeps the land from being inundated at every high tide while drains with sluice gates allow rain and ground water to exit at every low tide. If problems occur with the dike, drains, or sluice gates, the land will be under water within twenty-four hours. The house and outbuildings, however, are located on the highest area of the property sparing them from flooding.
2. Outbuildings: On the west side of the house (NJ-995-A) is a windmill and two-story bank barn constructed of modern block. The original brick barn burned in 1940. Frank Burcham, Amaziah's son, replaced it with another brick barn that was destroyed by Hurricane Hazel in 1954. A modern pigpen and chicken coop (NJ-995-B) are located north of the house along with a small pigeon shed (NJ-995-C) made of broken brickbats fired on the premises.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Burcham, Janice; and Burcham, Jeanette. Millville, New Jersey. Interview. 26 September 1991.

B. Bibliography:

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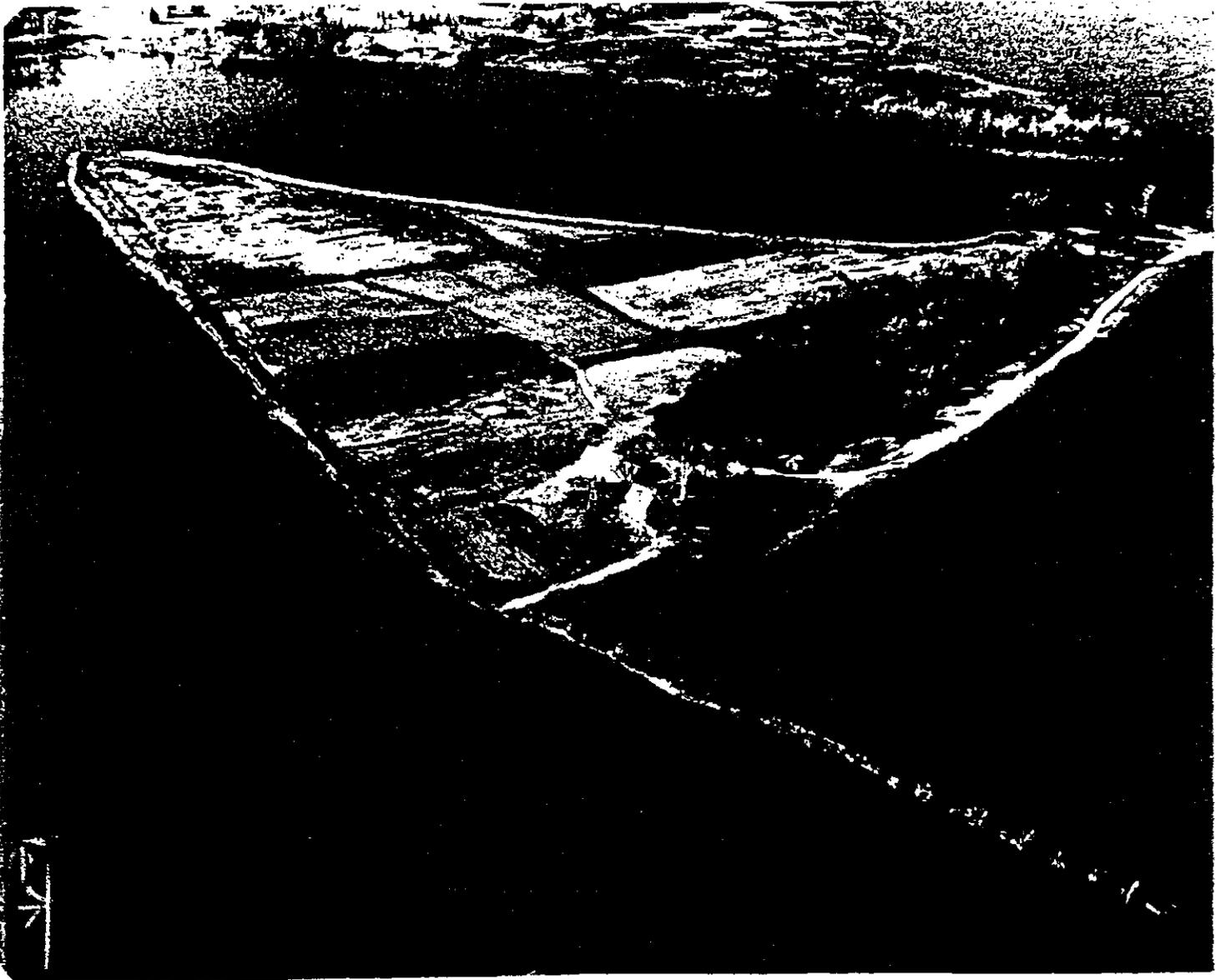
Vanaman, Joyce. "A Country Life: Twin Sisters Have Traveled The World, But Home Is Where Their Farm Is." Sunday Press, 15 November 1987: 1(K).

C. Photographs:

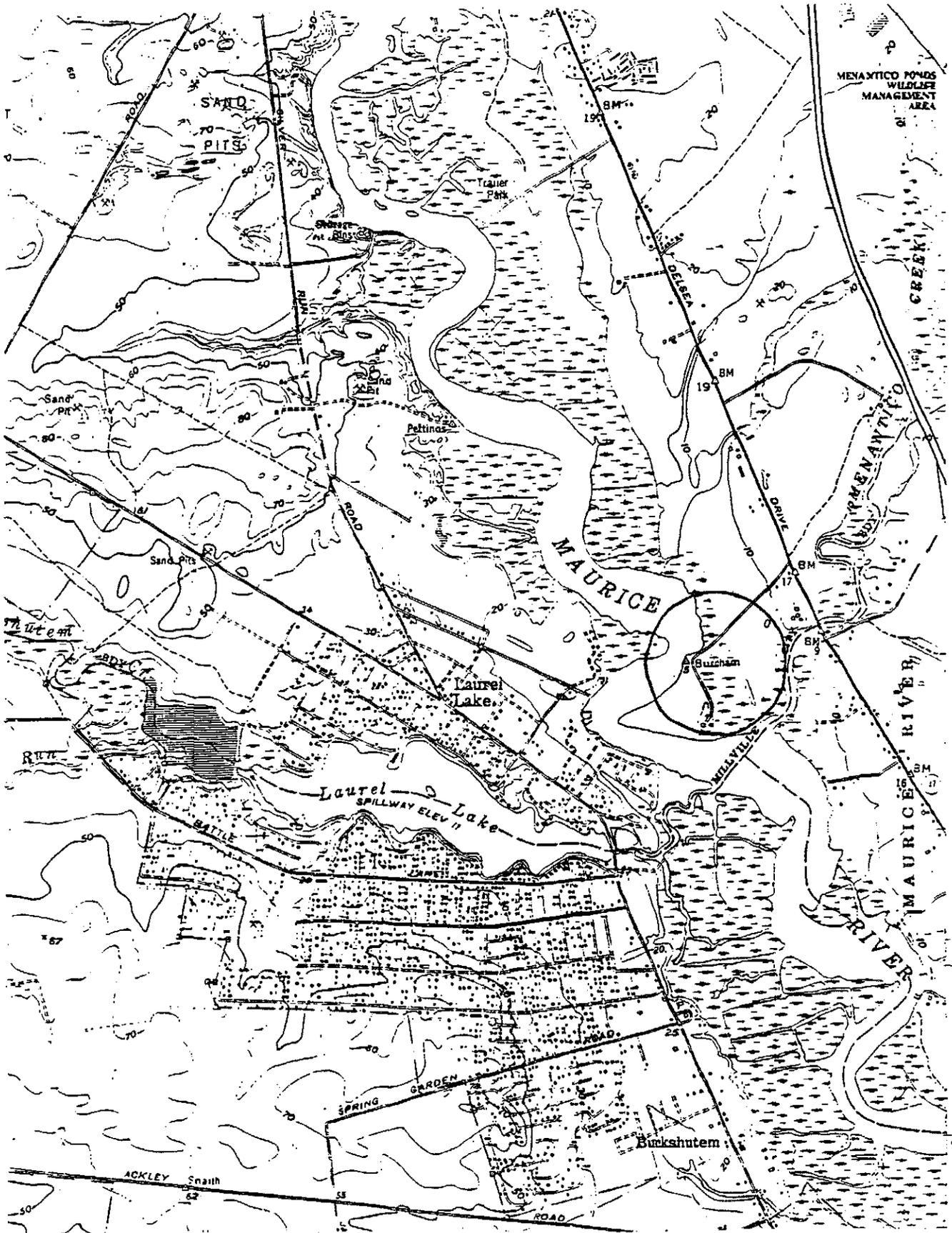
Dale Wettstein Collection, Aerial photograph, ca 1950.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS Historian Sara Amy Leach. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was HABS Historian, Kimberly R. Sebold. The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.



Aerial photograph, ca. 1950. Dale Wettstein Collection.
(House in center ground)



Detail from U.S. Geological Survey topographic map, Dividing Creek, N.J. Quadrangle, revised 1986, scale 1:24,000. Burcham location circled.