

Site Name: John T. Simmons Farmstead

CRS Number: N-4039

Location: 515 Christiana Road
Bear vicinity
White Clay Creek Hundred
New Castle County, Delaware

Date of Fieldwork: October 1999

Type of Documentation: Level II: Partial Intensive
Annotated field notes (5 sheets)
Measured drawings--CAD (4 sheets)
Black and white 4" x 5" photographs (13)
Architectural data narrative

Threat: The John T. Simmons Farmstead is currently suffering from neglect, deterioration, and vandalism. The property was recently rezoned and purchased by FirstUSA/Bank One, which plans to develop an office complex on the site. At present, FirstUSA/Bank One is planning the stabilization and rehabilitation of the dwelling, granary, dairy barn, windmill, and several small outbuildings. Although the plan calls for the maintenance of various elements of the farmstead's vistas and setting, it also includes the demolition of several small sheds and, if feasible, the transfer of the stone monument to another site.

Significance: The John T. Simmons Farmstead is locally significant in terms of mid-to-late nineteenth century agriculture and architecture. The dwelling provides an excellent example of the mid-nineteenth century rebuilding of rural Delaware when agricultural reforms coincided with construction of new dwellings and outbuildings, and also with expansion and improvement of existing buildings. The agricultural outbuildings in the complex, particularly the drive-through crib/granary and dairy barn, contribute to the significance of the property as architectural expressions of the evolution of agriculture in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Description: The John T. Simmons Farmstead is a 34.2-acre agricultural complex located on the east side of Route 7, at the northeast corner of its intersection with U. S. Route 40. Surrounded on all sides by cultivated and fallow fields and set back approximately 1,000 feet from Route 7, the complex is buffered from nearby modern commercial and residential development. An overgrown dirt farm lane leads directly to the farm complex, which includes a nineteenth-century farmhouse and several early twentieth century agricultural outbuildings--a granary, machine shed, dairy barn, two silos, a windmill, and numerous storage sheds.

The farmhouse, which faces west, consists of two pieces representing two separate periods of construction. A two-story two-bay log kitchen ell, measuring approximately 18 by 26 feet, constitutes the earliest period of construction. The second period of construction occurred at the north end of the kitchen ell and includes a two-and-a-half-story, five-bay, central-passage plan, braced-frame block measuring approximately 22 by 48 feet. The two sections are joined by a one-bay connecting passage. A one-story, frame, shed-roofed porch extends along the east elevation of both the main block and the kitchen ell. An interior chimney in the south gable end features the inscription "AJW 1860" in the mortar (visible from within the attic). Since none of the recorded owners of the farm had those initials, the inscription may have been the signature of a mason.

The gable-roofed, single-pile kitchen ell, or Period I section, is sheathed in clapboard with a composition-shingled roof and a low, rubble fieldstone foundation. The southwest corner of the foundation has been repaired with brick. The northwest elevation is divided into two symmetrical bays on each of the two floors. The first floor features an entrance (boarded up) to the north and a two-over-two-light double-hung sash window to the south. The second floor contains two windows equally spaced in the elevation. On the first floor a third bay to the north contains a window lighting the connecting passage.

The southeast gable elevation mirrors the gable end of the Period II block, with two small attic windows flanking the chimneystack. The northeast, or rear, elevation is divided into two bays (again a door and a window) with a one-story, enclosed, shed-roofed porch concealing the first floor. The second floor contains two bays with windows that are equally spaced within the elevation.

The removal of a portion of siding from the southern corner of the Period I section revealed details about its log construction. The rough-hewn logs measure approximately nine by nine inches and are joined by V-notching. The spaces between the logs are filled with stone chinking that has been parged with a cement-like material. Vertical wood nailers are equally spaced along the log walls.

The log section houses a kitchen on the first floor and two small bedrooms on the second floor. Centered along the south wall of the kitchen is a bricked-in fireplace topped by a tall (4½ feet) mantel with simple moldings. A pair of built-in cupboards is located at the southeast corner while an enclosed winder stair that rises to the attic level is located at the southwest corner of the room.

The Period II section of the house is a gable-roofed, single-pile, braced-frame dwelling configured on a center-passage plan. The walls of this section are sheathed in clapboard and the roof is clad in composition shingles. The building rests on a fieldstone foundation with a brick-floored cellar under the south end. Interior brick chimneys (the stacks of which appear to have been rebuilt) are present in each of the gable ends, flanked by small attic windows. The symmetrical, five-bay northwest elevation contains a central entrance flanked by three-light sidelights and topped by a transom. A ghost around the door suggests that the entrance once sat beneath a portico or porch. Windows are six-over-six-light double-hung sash, with those on the northwest elevation featuring paneled shutters on the first story and louvered shutters on the second. The narrow front eave is edged with a simple dentil molding.

The northeast elevation is relatively featureless, save for two small attic windows flanking the chimneystack. The southeast, or rear, elevation is divided asymmetrically into five bays. The first floor contains two single doors that are located at the southern end of the elevation. The second floor has five window openings that are unequally spaced in the elevation. A one-story, open, shed-roofed porch spans this elevation and is supported by a concrete slab floor and simple square posts. The southern end of the porch is enclosed and serves as a bulkhead, providing access to the cellar. The southwest elevation is almost completely concealed by the kitchen ell, revealing only two small attic windows flanking the chimneystack.

The first floor of the main block contains a central stair hall flanked by two rooms, one to the northeast and one to the southwest. Fireplaces in these rooms feature restrained, Greek Revival-style mantelpieces. A set of built-in cupboards with tall, paneled doors is located at the south corner of the southwest room. The stair hall retains the original stair with turned newel post, although the slender spindle balusters have been removed. The second floor contains four rooms, with fireplaces located in the two rear rooms. In the northeast corner a narrow stair leads to an unfinished attic, which is partitioned into two spaces.

Outbuildings: Most of the outbuildings in the complex are located north of the house, the exceptions being a row of three, shed-roof poultry houses with rough plank siding and the foundation of an icehouse located east of the dwelling.

Dairy Barn. The two-story dairy barn, measuring approximately 100 by 40 feet, includes an attached milk house and two silos. The most prominent feature of the barn is the corrugated metal, high-arched roof, also known as a rainbow roof. Fenestration includes bands of six-over-six-light double-hung sash and double-dutch stable doors made of vertical wood. The first floor exterior walls are clad in vertical wood siding while the interior walls feature a combination of fieldstone and concrete block, representing two distinct periods of construction. The second floor is an open loft area constructed of wood frame.

The first floor of the barn is divided into two separate spaces by a fieldstone wall that abuts the south wall of the building and ends several feet before meeting the north wall, creating a west room and an east room. The small break at the north end of the wall provides the only interior access from one room to the other. The west room, measuring 38 by 38 feet, is of masonry construction and features a poured concrete floor, manure gutter, and feed trough. Two rows of metal stanchions remain intact and are centered within the room, running north to south. The concrete block milk house projects from the west wall of the west room and is lit by two windows on the north and south walls. A single door on the west elevation of the milk house leads to the exterior. An opening centered on the north wall of the west room leads to a small concrete block storage or feed room flanked by the two concrete silos.

The east room, measuring 38 by 58 feet, contains evidence of the barn's second period of construction. Approximately twenty feet of the easternmost portion of this room is constructed

of concrete block, indicating an early twentieth-century addition. The east room also features a poured concrete floor, manure gutter, and feed trough. This room, however, retains its wood stanchions, which probably date to the late nineteenth century. Two calf pens with wood cages remain intact and are concentrated at the eastern end of the room.

This building was originally a late nineteenth-century bank barn, converted to a dairy barn during the early to mid-twentieth century. Material evidence of the barn's early function as a bank barn includes the use of fieldstone for the foundation, the bank located north of the building, and the wooden stanchions. The rainbow roof, concrete block milk house, and concrete block addition all likely date to the period of conversion.

Corncrib/Granary. The other principal agricultural outbuilding is located several hundred feet northeast of the dwelling. A two-story, six-bay, double drive-through corncrib/granary was constructed in the early twentieth-century with circular-sawn, nailed, dimension lumber. The central portion of the granary sits on a full fieldstone foundation while the corncribs on either end rest on masonry piers. The building is clad in vertical plank siding and features a winding stair to the upper level in the central section. An unusual feature of this granary is the cellar located below the main floor. Measuring approximately 13 by 32 feet with walls eighteen inches thick, the stone is similar in appearance, material, and texture to that underneath the main dwelling. The cellar retains window openings on three of its walls.

Other Outbuildings. An early twentieth-century machine shed constructed of wood posts with sheet metal walls and a gable roof (open on the east side) extends off the north wall of the granary. Perpendicular to the machine shed is another frame shed, partially open on the south side for machinery, with the east end fully enclosed. This shed also forms the south wall of a cattle yard, which is bound by an open, metal-clad shed on the west and by the dairy barn on the north. On the east edge of the cattle yard are two closed, gable-roof frame sheds and a tall steel windmill.

Monument. Approximately 400 feet southwest of the house, at one end of a small fenced pasture, is a stone monument enclosed in a barred cage with tall brick corner piers. The inscription of the monument dedicates the object to the four children of James and Margaret Partridge, who owned large tracts of land in this area in the late eighteenth century. It is not

known if the monument marks an actual gravesite or was intended simply as a commemorative object.

History: The John T. Simmons Farmstead is listed on the National Register of Historic Places⁷⁸, determined to be locally significant under Criterion C as an example of the property types identified for the Upper Peninsula Zone Historic Contexts, Economic and Cultural Trends 1830—1880 (Agriculture), and Landscape 1830—1880 (Architecture and Building). The following history of the property is largely based on that nomination.

The land on which the John T. Simmons Farmstead is located was owned in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by James Partridge, and later his son, John. By 1849, the property was in possession of John T. Simmons, remaining so until Simmons' death in February 1871. Simmons left a widow, Catherine A. and three minor children, Josephine B., Walter J., and Mary J. The New Castle County Orphans Court conveyed the property to Catherine Simmons, who retained it until 1879.

In 1879 Catherine sold the farm to John Janvier of New Castle, who left to his daughter, Margaret W. Janvier, in 1890. Margaret Janvier retained possession of the farm until 1919, when she sold it to Walter Rash. In 1928 the farm, sold at a sheriff's sale to pay debts, was conveyed to Richard and Florence McMullen, and remains in the hands of their descendants to the present day.

The Period I block of the dwelling may have been built by the Partridge family, and the Period II block and the bank barn were most likely constructed during the Simmons period of ownership. The farm was used for agricultural purposes, primarily as a small dairy operation, until very recently. Either Walter Rash or the McMullens renovated the bank barn into a dairy barn in the twentieth century.

⁷⁸ Martha H. Bowers, *National Register of Historic Places: John T. Simmons Farmstead* (East Orange, NJ: Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., 1987).

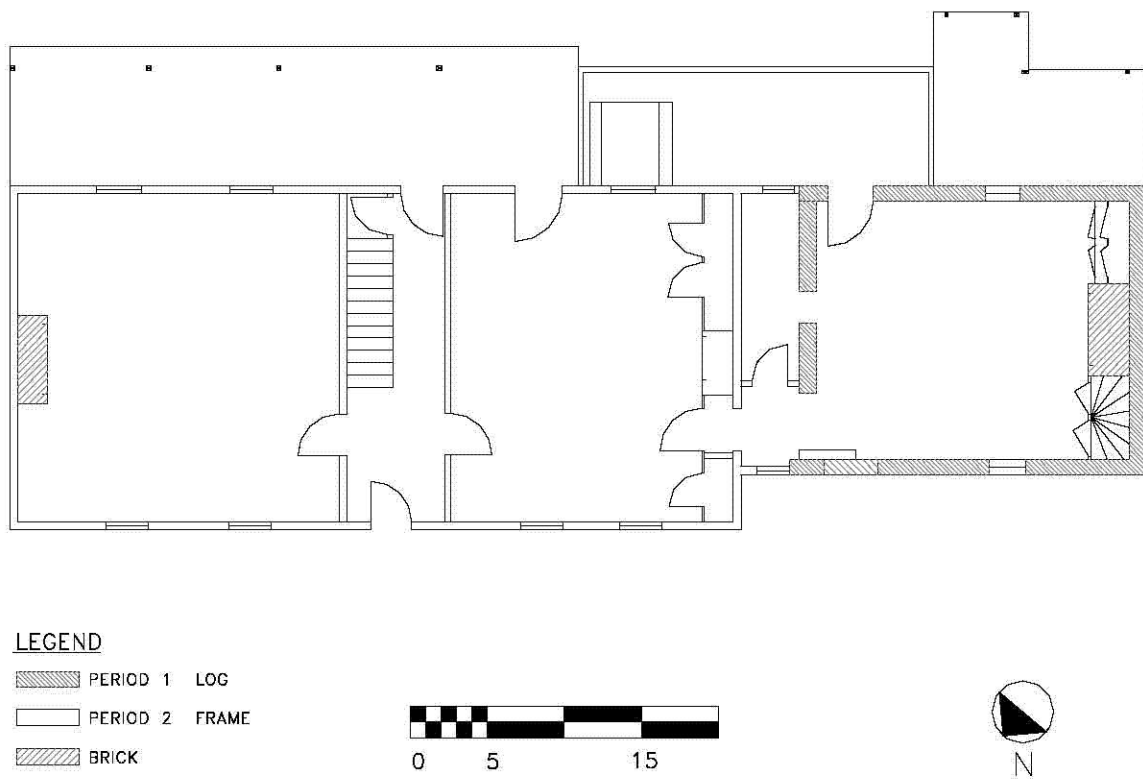


Figure 77: Simmons House, first floor plan.

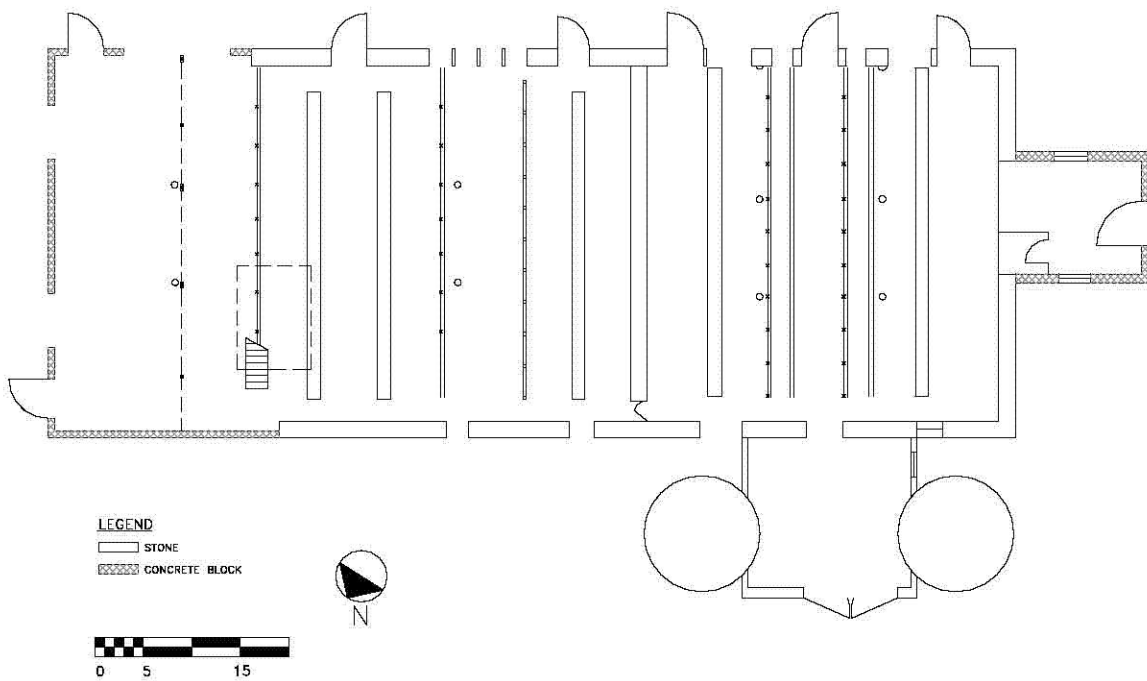


Figure 78: Simmons Farmstead, floor plan of dairy barn.

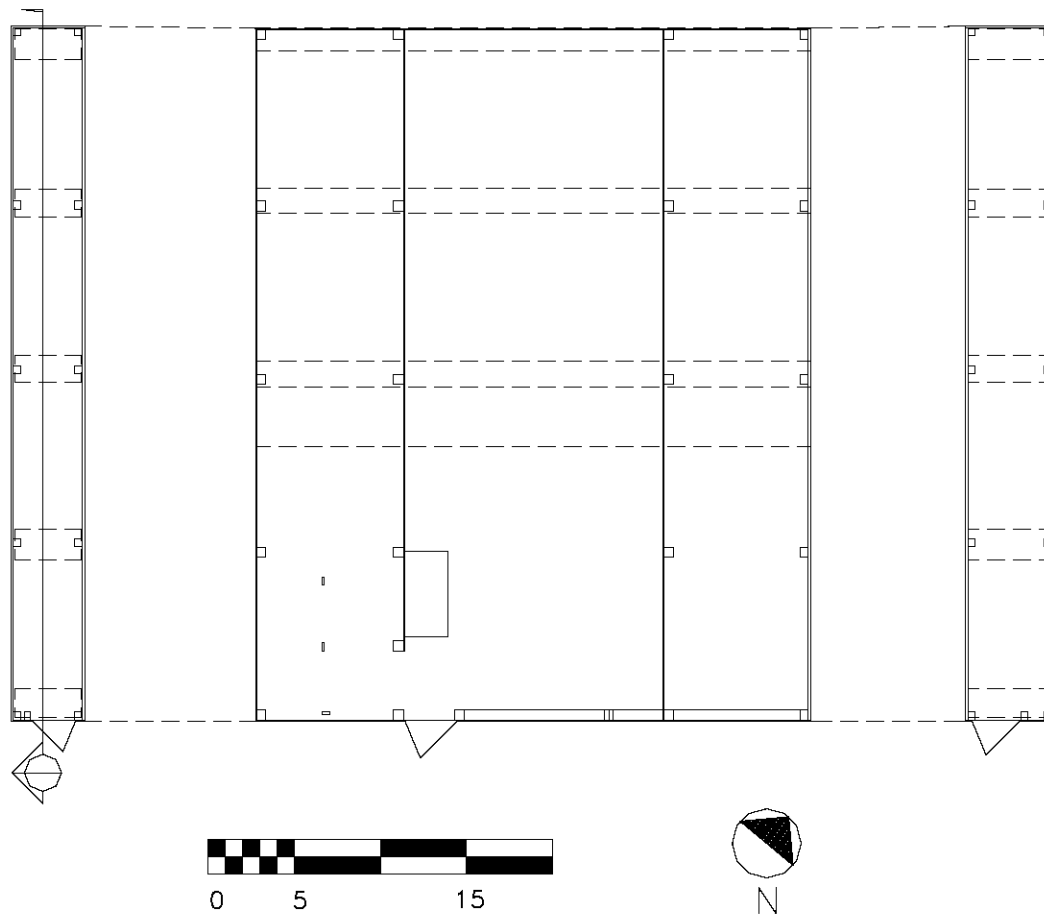


Figure 79: Simmons Farmstead, floor plan of corncrib/granary.

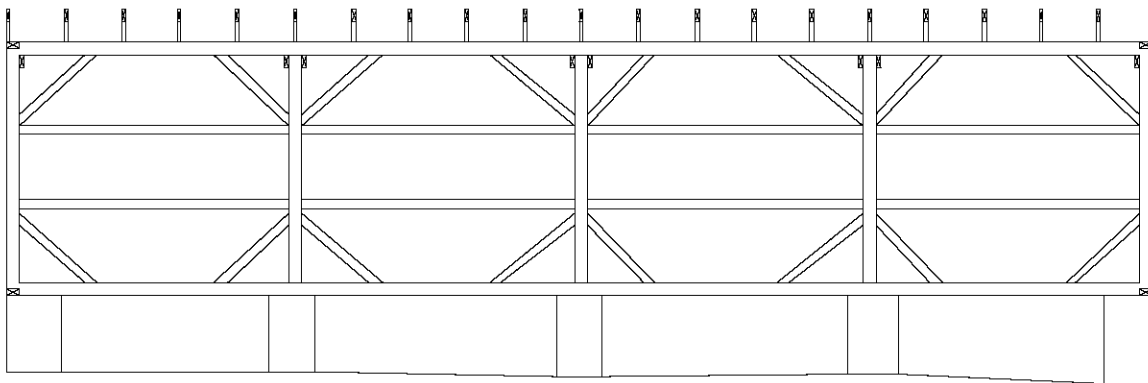


Figure 80: Simmons Farmstead, framing section of corncrib/granary.

MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS SURVEY

INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

John T. Simmons Farmstead
515 Christiana Road
Bear vicinity
White Clay Creek Hundred
New Castle County, Delaware

DE CRS No. N-4039

Photographer: David L. Ames

October 1999

Dwelling

- N-4039-1 Environmental view of the dwelling looking north
- N-4039-2 View of the northwest elevation of the Period II section looking east
- N-4039-3 Perspective of the southwest and southeast elevations of the Period I section looking northeast
- N-4039-4 Detail of log construction on the south corner of the Period I section showing foundation with brick repair, looking north
- N-4039-5 Detail of log construction on the southwest elevation of the Period I section, looking northwest
- N-4039-6 Environmental view of the northeast elevation looking west

Outbuildings

- N-4039-7 View of the farmyard looking northwest from the dwelling
- N-4039-8 View of the southeast elevation of the dairy barn looking northwest
- N-4039-9 View of the forebay of the dairy barn, showing the fieldstone walls and stable doors, looking west
- N-4039-10 View of the southeast elevation of the cornercrib/granary looking northwest

- N-4039-11 Perspective of the southwest and southeast elevations of the cornerib/granary looking north
- N-4039-12 Perspective of the northeast elevation of the cornerib/granary and the southeast elevation of the machine shed, looking southwest



Figure 81: Simmons Farm, environmental view of the dwelling looking north.



Figure 82: Simmons Farm House, view of the northwest elevation of the Period II section, looking east.



Figure 83: Simmons Farm House, perspective of the southwest and southeast elevations of the Period I section looking northeast.



Figure 84: Simmons Farm House, detail of log construction on the south corner of the Period I section showing foundation with brick repair, looking north.

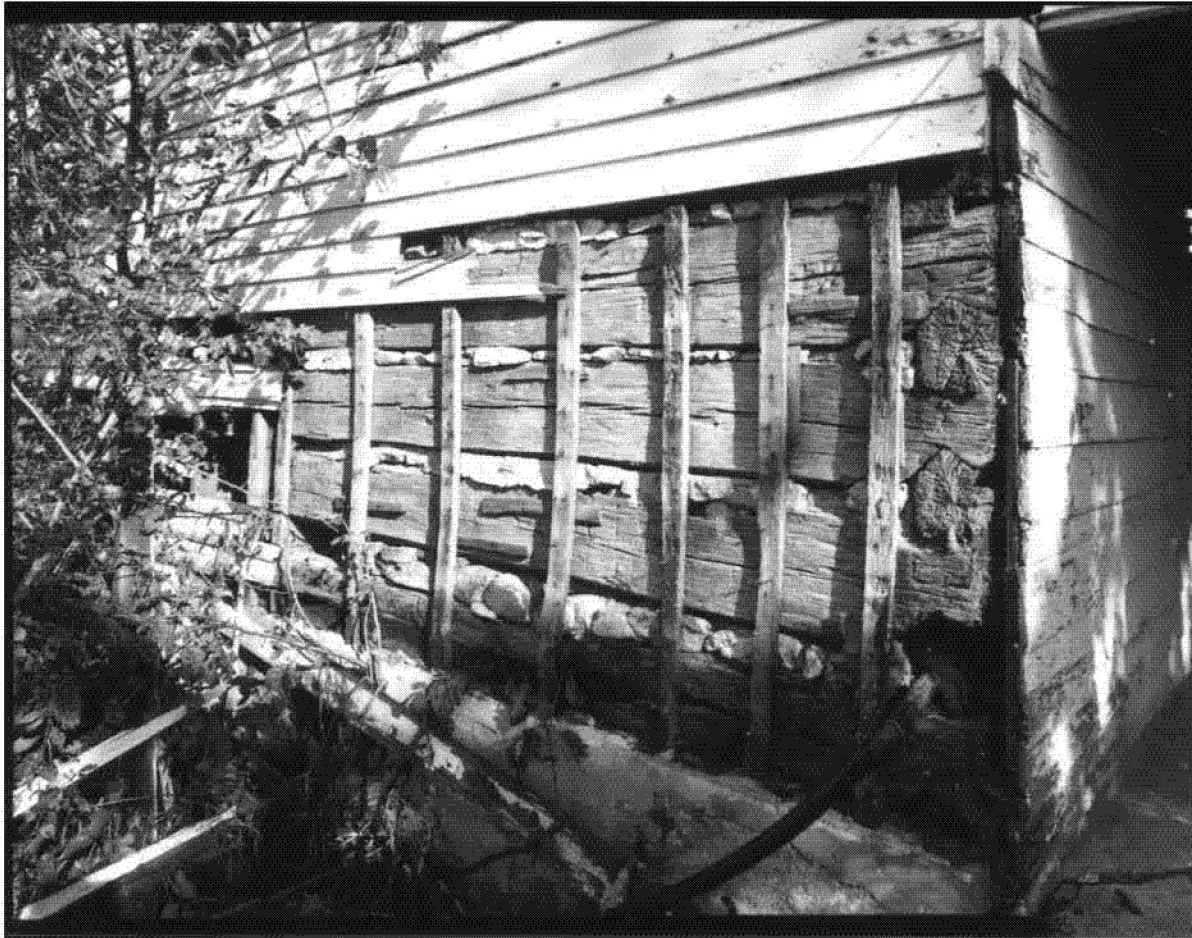


Figure 85: Simmons Farm, detail of log construction on the southwest elevation of the Period I section, looking northwest.



Figure 86: Simmons Farm House, environmental view of the northeast elevation looking west.



Figure 87: Simmons Farm, view of the farmyard looking northwest from the dwelling.



Figure 88: Simmons Farm, view of the southeast elevation of the dairy barn, looking northwest.



Figure 89: Simmons Farm, view of the forebay of the dairy barn, showing the fieldstone walls and stable doors, looking west.

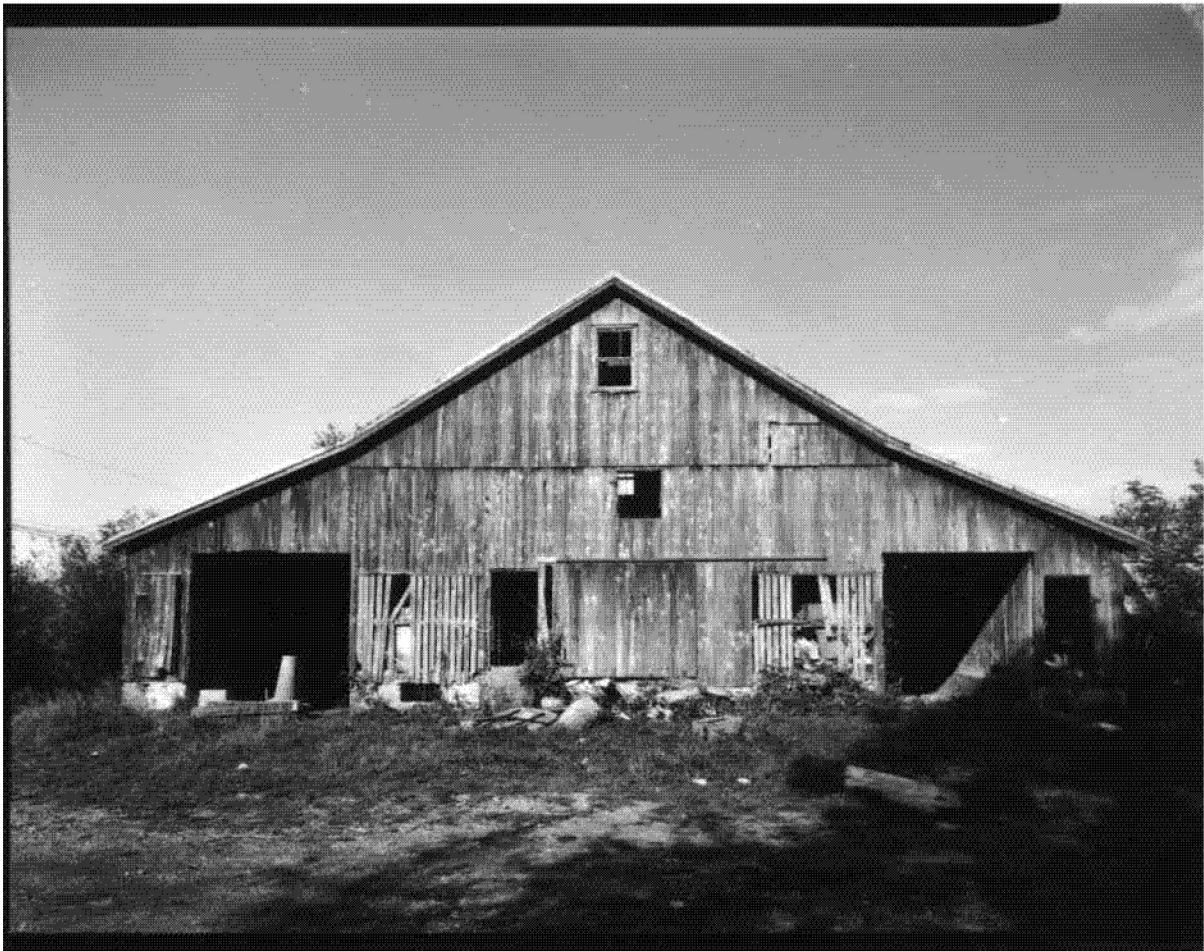


Figure 90: Simmons Farm, view of the southeast elevation of the cornerib/granary looking northwest.



Figure 91: Simmons Farm, perspective of the southeast and southwest elevations of the cornerib/granary, looking north.



Figure 92: Simmons Farm, perspective of the northeast elevation of the corncrib/granary and the southeast elevation of machine shed, looking southwest.