

HISTORIC CONTEXT GUIDANCE FOR EVALUATION SURVEY

(adapted for Delaware from National Register Bulletin 16B¹)

What is a Historic Context?

Historic context is a term used in the National Park Service's National Register program. So remember that in this usage, the ultimate goal of developing a context is to lead to the listing of historic properties in the National Register of Historic Places. The development of a historic context is intended to make the decisions about eligibility for listing consistent and defensible. Delaware developed a framework of general historic contexts for the state. Relate the specific contexts developed for survey briefly to this framework. (See Appendix 1, Defined Historic Contexts in Delaware.)

- A historic context is a body of information about related properties. It is organized by theme, place, and time.
- The theme can be part of one or more broad areas of significance. It can also rest on more specific events and patterns of physical or historical development with one or more areas of significance.
- The place reflects the location and extent of properties known or likely to be related to the historic context. For instance, the area covered could be a town developed as a center of commerce, a river valley with a common pattern of cultural development, or an area across several states settled by one particular ethnic group.
- The time period covered by a historic context is the period when the events significant to the historic context occurred.
- Specific property groups may cover any geographical scale--local, regional, state or national--and need not be the same level as that of the related historic contexts.
- While a property group or a historic context has a specific geographical level, an individual property may be evaluated at another, often smaller, level. If so, the nomination must consider the property's relationship to its historic context.
- A property type may relate to one or more historic contexts. The significance of a property type rests on knowledge of these contexts.

¹ National Park Service. National Register Bulletin 16B, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16b/>.

- A property type and its related properties may have significance in history, architecture, engineering, archaeology, or culture, or a combination of these, and may meet one or more of the National Register criteria.
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DEVELOPING HISTORIC CONTEXTS

In developing contexts for a geographically based survey area, consider the broader trends that explain settlement and use of the area during different times. It is important to discuss these themes adequately, including defining the limits of each context in time and space. However, it is not necessary to do extensive research on the full geographic area and/or time that the context may cover. Focus the discussion on the survey area and its immediate surroundings and on the period of the surveyed properties.

In a context based on a single theme, define the geographic extent from the research design for the survey. However, note any broader areas to which the theme may apply. For instance, the survey may look at a theme on a local level, but note related developments on county, state, or national levels.

The general steps to develop contexts based on survey are:

- To begin, gather information about the prehistory and history of the community and any known historic resources. Use a study of primary and secondary sources, predictive studies, field survey, and other techniques.
- Carefully analyze the information to identify the broad patterns and stages in the area's prehistory or history. Relate these to the National Register criteria and areas of significance. Consider:
 1. Patterns of area settlement and development, important events, and significant persons.
 2. Values of art, craftsmanship, construction technology, or the style and work of a master shown by the architecture of a property.
 3. Research questions related to the area's prehistory and history; social and physical sciences and humanities, and local cultural interests.
- Determine which historic developments you can study on a local level, and which you need to study in a larger geographical context, such as the state, region, or the nation as a whole. Consider the ways in which the patterns of local development relate to the framework of historic contexts outlined in statewide planning. (See appendix, Ames, 1983.)
- Define a particular period of time, geographical area, and theme for each major stage or pattern of development. This makes a set of historic contexts that organizes information about the history and prehistory of the locality and its related historic properties.

- Survey identifies various kinds of properties found in the local community or geographical area according to each historic context. Group these into property types based on their common physical or associative² characteristics.
 - Using survey data and other information, describe the associative and physical characteristics that define each property type and discuss its significance to the historic context. Assess the qualities and condition of existing related properties. Determine the characteristics or qualities and the degree of historic integrity required for the evaluation of related properties as eligible for the National Register as a member of the property type.
 - Apply the evaluation requirements to each surveyed property possessing similar physical or associative characteristics. Compare the characteristics, qualities, and degree of integrity required for a determination as eligible to that of each property to determine if it qualifies for registration as a member of the property type.
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Approaches to Developing a Context

Historic contexts are the foundation for decisions about the identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment of historic properties. To qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a property must be significant. It must first represent a significant historic context in the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture of an area. Second, it must have the characteristics that make it a good representative of properties associated with that context.

Historic contexts are those patterns or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning within prehistory or history is made clear. Historians, architectural historians, folklorists, archeologists, and anthropologists use different words to describe these ideas, such as trend, pattern, theme, or cultural affiliation, but **the concept is the same**. The concept of historic context is not a new one. It has been fundamental to the study of history since the 18th century and, arguably, earlier than that. Its core premise is that resources, properties, or happenings in history do not occur in a vacuum but rather are part of larger trends or patterns.

The historic context is a written narrative that describes the unifying framework. Develop the historic context in enough depth to support the relevance, relationships, and importance of the properties you are considering. For National Register purposes, the statement of historic contexts requires a consistent framework: theme, geographical area, and chronological period. This provides for a standard means of describing and explaining the significance of a wide variety of

² Associative characteristics are those things that you cannot see when you look at a building or site, but that are associated with that property historically. These are usually significant events or people. For example, you have to study historical documents about a building to tell if tenants ever occupied it. Even the John Dickinson plantation spent most of its history as a tenant farm. See Siders, et al., *Agricultural Tenancy in Central Delaware, 1770-1900+/-: A Historic Context*.

properties. Delaware has an outline of general historic contexts within which you can fit a more specific context (Ames 1983; Custer 1986).

Depending on the nature of the historic properties and the informed judgment of the surveyor, the historic context may represent any one of a range of historical frames of reference. There are many ways in which to look at historic properties and thus many ways of documenting contexts. The approach should be determined by the purpose or need for evaluating and managing historic properties.

If there is a need to know more about particular kinds of resources, a **thematic approach** may be called for. The historic context may emphasize economic, social, and political forces, such as certain industries, arts and literature, or military subjects. A historic context may be associated with the life of a person or groups of persons that influenced the destiny and character of a region. Architectural styles, building and structural types, and building materials and methods of construction may also serve as the organizing device for the historic context. Take care not to define the context too narrowly or you may limit its usefulness in preservation decision making. For example, a historic context covering three-story apartment houses will be far less useful than one defined by the general apartment house building type. Or, a historic context may be based on a research topic or archaeological site type that will expand existing knowledge of an area's development, past cultural affiliation, and human activities and interaction.

If you need to know more about properties in a particular area, such as when a Certified Local Government³ wishes to survey and inventory the resources within its jurisdiction, then a **geographically-based approach** would be appropriate. A geographically-based historic context may be at the scale of a community, town, city, county, state, region, nation, or physiographic area and may treat all or some of the themes and periods in a given area. A management unit, such as a park, public forest, or transportation system, also may be a geographically-based historic context. For such historic contexts, prehistory and history prior to the establishment of the management unit should take into account patterns and trends beyond the modern boundaries. For geographically-based historic contexts, the following may be addressed:

- the developmental phases in the area's history;
- the economic, social, and political forces that affected the area's physical form, and
- factors that gave the community or area its own distinct character separate from that of like or other settlements.

If there is a need to know more about the properties of a particular period in history, a **chronologically based approach** is called for. Such historic contexts may focus on a prehistoric period, such as a historic context devoted to prehistoric hunters and gatherers ca. 10,000-200 B.P. They also may focus on historical periods, such as the post-Civil War era, the Great Depression, or early settlement.

³ A Certified Local Government has met specific requirements established by the National Park Service and the State of Delaware, so that it can participate directly in decisions on survey, registration, and treatment of historic properties within its jurisdiction. See <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/clg/index.htm> for more information.

The discussion of historic context should introduce a definition of the property type, its locational patterns, and general characteristics. If more than one historic context is documented, they should be presented in sequential order. Normally, the historic context(s) discussion stands as a discrete narrative section, followed by the property type(s) discussion. Depending on the nature of the historic properties, however, it may be advantageous to present each historic context followed by its corresponding property type before proceeding to the next historic context. Either approach is acceptable, provided that the information is clearly labeled.

GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTING A HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation⁴ offers the following steps for documenting a historic context:

- Identify the concept (or theme), chronological period, and geographical area for the historic context.
- Assemble information about the historic context:
 1. Collect information about the prehistory or history of the geographical area encompassed by the historic context, including information about properties that have already been identified. Identify groups of properties that may have important roles in defining historic contexts and values.
 2. Assess information to identify any bias in historic perspective, methodological approach, or area of coverage.
- Synthesize information. Prepare a written narrative of the historic context, providing a detailed synthesis of the data collected and analyzed. Important patterns, events, persons, architectural types and styles, or cultural values should be identified. Consider:
 1. Trends in area settlement and development;
 2. Aesthetic and artistic values embodied in architecture, construction, technology, or craftsmanship, and
 3. Research values.
- Define property types.
 1. Identify property types that have relevance and importance in illustrating the historic context. Determine how the National Register criteria would apply to examples of each on the basis of the important patterns, events, persons, and cultural values discussed in the written narrative of historic context. Also, outline and justify the specific physical and associative characteristics and quality of historic integrity that an individual property must possess to be eligible for listing as a member of the property type.
 2. Characterize the locational patterns of property types, that is, generalize about where particular types of property are likely to be found.

⁴ See http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_0.htm

3. Characterize the current condition of known properties relating to each property type.

Background Information for Historic Contexts

Background information for historic contexts may include facts about:

- Prehistoric cultural occupations.
- Exploration and settlement.
- The social and cultural environment.
- The natural character of the area, including waterways, natural features, natural resources, climate, terrain, soil conditions, and its relationship to manmade development.
- Development of transportation routes, commerce, industry, immigration, settlement patterns, the development or establishment of communities or towns and government.
- Historic patterns and stages of community or regional growth.
- Contemporary manmade character of the area, including population density, patterns of land use, nature of physical development, and general condition of cultural resources.

Historic Contexts Related to Historic or Prehistoric Trends and Patterns

For historic contexts related to historic or prehistoric trends and patterns of development such as commerce, industry, settlement, education, transportation, communication, etc., discuss:

- The historical development characterizing the theme or themes on which the historic contexts are based, including major stages of growth, pivotal events, significant ethnic or personal associations, and political or legislative decisions.
- Principal dates, events, activities, persons, associations, and developmental forces related to the contexts.
- The relationship of cultural and environmental influences such as transportation, immigration, politics, commerce, industry, technology, communications, access to natural resources, climatic and soil conditions, and topography to the course of events related to the historic contexts.

Historic Contexts Related to an Individual or Group of Individuals

For historic contexts related to the life of an individual or a group of individuals, discuss:

- The major achievements of the individual or individuals.
- How the achievements or career influenced life in the locality, region, state, or nation.
- The role of the individual or group in spreading a distinctive culture, religion, or philosophy throughout a geographical area.
- The entirety of the individual's or group's career and its reflection in the historic properties.

Historic Contexts Related to Art, Architecture, Engineering, and Landscape Architecture

For historic contexts related to art, architecture, engineering, and landscape architecture, discuss:

- Principal types, styles, time periods, and methods of construction on which the theme or themes underlying the historic contexts are based.
- Principal architects, landscape architects, artists, builders, craftsmen, or designers identified with the historic contexts; if related to the work of one or a small group of artisans, the evolution and distinguishing features of their work.
- The impact of architectural characteristics, such as scale, proportions, materials, workmanship, stylistic details, spatial arrangements, construction techniques, and aesthetic quality on the overall architectural character of a particular geographical area or period of time.
- The relationship of cultural influences such as immigration, settlement, commerce, transportation, communications, developments in technology, and industrial developments to the development of style, type, and method of construction.
- The relationship of environmental influences such as climate, natural features, soil conditions, and presence of natural resources to the development of style, type, or method of construction.

Historic Contexts Related to Prehistoric and Historic Archaeology

For historic contexts related to prehistoric and historical archaeology, discuss:

- Types of archaeological properties, including periods of time, related research topics, cultural affiliations, general physical characteristics, and probable kinds of important research data represented by the historic contexts.
- Results of archaeological, ethnographic, or historic research already conducted or otherwise pertinent to an understanding of the historic contexts and related property types.

- Important categories of information known or believed to exist relative to the historic contexts.
- Cultural and environmental influences that determined the location, distribution, and quality of sites or resources historically, and that have affected the potential of existing sites and resources to yield important information.
- Research value and other uses of information and information categories likely to be yielded by a study of related property types.

ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPE(S)

Property type ties the historic context to specific historic properties, so that surveyors can assess National Register eligibility. A property type is a grouping of individual properties characterized by common physical and/or associative attributes. **Physical attributes** include style, structural type, size, scale, proportions, design, architectural details, method of construction, orientation, spatial arrangement or plan, materials, workmanship, artistry, and environmental relationships. Care should be taken not to define property types too narrowly--according to a localized architectural feature, size, scale, feature, proportions, etc. **Associative attributes** include the property's relationship to important persons, activities, and events, based on information such as dates, functions, cultural affiliations, and relationship to important research topics.

For each property type, provide the name, description, statement of significance, and eligibility requirements for making a determination of eligible for the National Register. The property type description and statement of significance need not be lengthy if the information is already discussed in the general historic context statement, but it should be summarized.

Discuss the specific characteristics qualifying or disqualifying specific properties for listing. These characteristics may include physical or associative attributes or relate to integrity considerations. For purposes of discussion and analysis, it may be useful to divide some property types into subtypes. For example, in the Metal Mining and Tourist Era Resources of Boulder County, Colorado Multiple Property Listing, the property type vernacular domestic dwelling is divided into the subtypes: pioneer log, vernacular wood frame, and vernacular Victorian.

Property type analysis is a tool for evaluating related properties. The conclusion of this analysis is the eligibility requirements. The analysis also is useful for assessing variations within a particular property type. If subtypes are identified, eligibility requirements may be divided between the general qualifications for members of the type and more specific features of the subtypes. The analysis of subtypes will be more detailed, and therefore, more useful for the evaluation of identified properties. Property type analysis is not necessary for unique or rare resources because the information can appear within the general historic context statement.

A property type may include a variety of buildings and structures with diverse physical characteristics or may be based on distinguishable structural types or functions. A context on railroad-era construction in Wilmington could include commercial, industrial, civic, and residential buildings of the period as well as structures directly associated with the railroad. The property type, *microband base-camp*, is limited to a specific archaeological site type. *Round barn* is based on architectural form, whereas *dairy farms and facilities* is based on function and association with a specific agricultural activity.

Guidelines for Selecting Property Types

In selecting property types, consider the following:

- Form, function, associations, events, or physical characteristics should be considered in selecting and determining the name of a property type.

- The selection should be based on a knowledge of the relevant historic contexts, and then on whether or not the type is a manageable and efficient tool for evaluating eligibility for National Register listing.
- Property types may be defined to include resources that are associated with the general growth or prosperity influenced by the theme and that are not directly resultant from the predominant theme of the context.
- A property type may consist of one or more related structural types. The property type, *post office*, would only include post office buildings, whereas *railroad-era buildings and structures* could include commercial buildings, public buildings, residences, bridges, storage sheds, and industrial buildings on the railroad, as well as the Wilmington rail viaduct, railroad stations, and roundhouses.
- The fullest extent of the significant historic values of a group of related resources should be considered. For example, discussion of a *round barn* as a property type may concentrate on the resource's inherent architectural values while *dairy farms and facilities* recognizes a broader spectrum of significant and interrelated architectural and historical values.
- A property type may include buildings, sites, structures, objects, historic districts, or any combination of these resources.
- Historic districts may be a separate property type or may be included within a property type that combines it with other resources such as buildings and sites.
- A property type may relate to one or more of the National Register criteria.
- Base property types related to Criterion A on properties relating to an event or chain of events important in illustrating the historic context.
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- Base property types related to Criterion B on known properties associated with the productive life of a person important in the historic context.
- Base property types related to Criterion C on one or a group of the following:
 1. Properties having common architectural style, period, or method of construction.
 2. The works of a master or related groups of masters.
 3. Properties having common high artistic values.
 4. Significant architectural features distinguishing one or more groups of buildings or structures.

- Base property types related to Criterion D on one or a group of resources that are likely to yield important information about a common set of research questions important to the historic context.

Property Type Description

In concise narrative form, describe the physical characteristics and associative qualities that define each property type. Descriptions should discuss a combination of physical and associative characteristics. Physical or associative characteristics may be emphasized depending on the significance of the property type. Property types significant under Criteria A and B, for historical associations, will likely emphasize associative characteristics, whereas those under Criterion C will likely emphasize physical characteristics. Criterion D may emphasize associations with events, trends, or individuals; representatives of a group; or physical characteristics.

Consider:

- **Physical characteristics** such as style, period, site or structural type, size, scale, proportions, design, architectural details, method of construction, siting, orientation, spatial arrangement or plan, materials, workmanship, artistry, and environmental relationships.
- **Associative characteristics** such as the property's relationship to important activities, persons, or events, including information such as dates, functions, role, cultural affiliations, relationship to important research topics, and the presence of natural features or resources that helped determine location.
- **Geographical information** such as the property's relationship to natural resources, climate, topographical features, and soil conditions that may have been relied upon for industry, transportation, defense, or subsistence, or that helped determine the siting, location, form, design, function, and materials of associated cultural resources.
- The likely **nature of boundaries** for related properties and any special factors to be considered in selecting boundaries, such as the likelihood of the resource to exist in groups or in combination with other significant property types forming historic districts.
- **Variations** occurring within the property type due to changing cultural, chronological, or geographical influences
- **Locational patterns** of the property type, that is generalizations about the known or likely location, occurrence, and distribution of examples representing the property type.
- **Condition or expected condition** of property types including:
 1. Any inherent characteristics that are likely to contribute to or detract from its physical condition.

2. Any aspects of the social and natural environment that may affect its preservation or visibility.

- Specific **period of time and locations** in which related properties probably or definitely existed.

Property Type Significance

State the significance of the property type as it relates to each historic context. The narrative should be a concise and factual summary of information directly relating the property type to:

- Important aspects of its various historic contexts.
- The various areas of significance and criteria for which properties may be listed in the National Register.
- Significance in national, state, or local history.

Consider the following when discussing the significance of property types under Criteria A and B:

- Important dates, events, activities, persons, associations, and developmental forces, trends, and patterns relating the property type to its relevant historic context(s).
- Any direct relationship of the property type to major stages of growth, pivotal events or activities, or personal associations characterizing the historic context.

For properties significant under Criterion C, summarize the following:

- Principal types, styles, and methods of construction illustrated by the property type and how these relate to the overall historic context(s).
- Principal architects, artists, builders, craftsmen, designers, or landscape architects identified with the introduction and development of the property type.
- Architectural characteristics, such as scale, proportions, materials, workmanship, stylistic details, spatial arrangement, construction techniques, and aesthetic quality, that give examples of the property type their significance.
- Spatial relationships of resources to each other and the environment, including set backs, street plans, parks, squares, open spaces, structural density, plantings, natural features, and landscape architecture, if these are significant unifying features of the property type.

For property types significant under Criterion D, discuss the following:

- Related research topics, cultural affiliations, general physical characteristics, and probable kinds of important research data that link the property type to its historic context(s).
- Archaeological, ethnographic, or historic research already conducted or otherwise pertinent to an understanding of the property type.
- Important categories of information and related research topics about which properties related to the property type are likely to yield information.

For property types that require meeting National Register Criteria Considerations to be eligible, including properties less than 50 years old, religious properties, reconstructed and moved properties, commemorative properties, cemeteries and graves, or birthplaces, explain how these properties as a group meet the special requirements for listing called for in the criteria considerations.⁵

Property Type Eligibility Requirements

State the eligibility requirements based on the analysis of the data collected on the property type and known related properties in relationship to the National Register criteria, criteria considerations, and areas of significance. The requirements should provide specific information that can be used for comparing actual historic properties and for making judgments about their relative significance. Eligibility requirements involve not just integrity, but also measuring how well a specific property illustrates the property type and represents the historic context.

Include the following in a discussion of eligibility requirements: the physical characteristics, associative qualities, or information potential that an example of the property type must possess to qualify for the National Register. This should specify the aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association) and an explanation of how each aspect is defined for the specific property type. Base integrity requirements on an analysis of the property type and its significant features and a knowledge of representative properties and their relative integrity.

⁵ See National Register Bulletin 15: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/> for advice on Criteria Considerations.

APPENDIX I: Defined Historic Contexts in Delaware

A defined historic context has three parts: a geographic area, a time period, and a cultural theme. Delaware has a framework of contexts, defined on a very general level. This framework provides a reference for relating specific contexts and historic properties to each other. The following maps provide the general geographic areas for prehistoric and historic time periods.

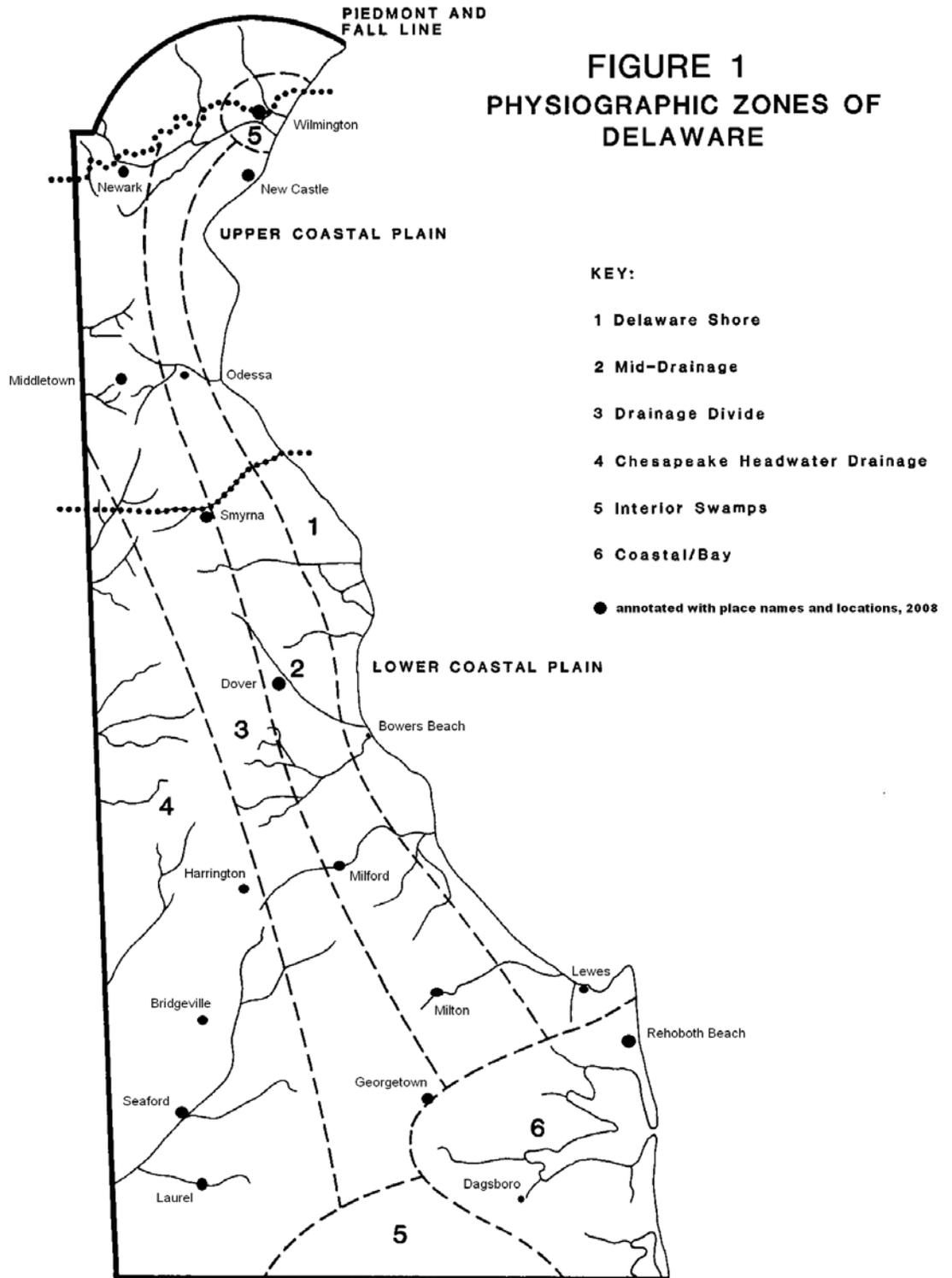
Time Period Name
Pre-European Contact ⁶
Paleo-Indian
Archaic
Woodland I
Woodland II
Contact Period, 1600-1750 AD +/- ⁷
Exploration and Frontier Settlement, 1630-1730 +/-
Intensified and Durable Occupation, 1730-1770 +/-
Early Industrialization, 1770-1830 +/-
Industrialization and Early Urbanization, 1830-1880 +/-
Urbanization and Early Suburbanization, 1880-1940 +/-
Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization, 1940-1960 +/-

Historic Period Theme
Agriculture
Forestry
Trapping/Hunting
Mining/Quarrying
Fishing/Oystering
Manufacturing
Retailing/Wholesaling
Finance
Professional Services
Transportation and Communication
Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes
Architecture, Engineering and Decorative Arts
Government
Religion
Education
Community Organizations
Occupational Organizations
Major Families, Individuals and Events
Recreation and Culture

⁶ for prehistoric sites without diagnostic artifacts

⁷ +/- indicates that date ranges are approximate and may be different depending on geographic region

Physiographic Zones: from Custer, Jay F., 1986, *A Management Plan for Delaware's Prehistoric Cultural Resources*. Monograph, No. 2. University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research, Newark, DE.



Geographic Zones: from Ames, David L., et al., 1989, *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*. University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture & Engineering, Newark, DE).

