United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: _The Robert Mitchell House_____
Other names/site number: _Hyde-Mitchell House; Mitchell-Owen-Hyde House; 1749 Old Wilmington Road; Delaware CRS # N14754___
Name of related multiple property listing**:**
_N/A_____
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: _1749 Old Wilmington Road_____
City or town: _Hockessin_____ State: _Delaware_____ County: _New Castle_____
Not For Publication: [ ] Vicinity: [x]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national **___statewide** **_X__local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

_X__A **___B** **_X__C** **___D**

_____

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

_____

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [x]

Public – Local [ ]

Public – State [ ]

Public – Federal [ ]

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) [x]

District [ ]

[ ]

Site

Structure ☐

Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
_LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/ Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: _Stucco, wood

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Robert Mitchell House, built initially c. 1865-1870, is a two-and-a-half-story, three-bay, frame dwelling located at 1749 Old Wilmington Road, Hockessin vicinity, Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. The dwelling is situated on the north side of Old Wilmington Road and approximately 500 feet from the Delaware state line, with Kennett Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania, to the northwest. Constructed originally as a vernacular farmhouse in a traditional hall-parlor plan, the dwelling features several later additions dating to the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth, and mid- to late-twentieth century. The material fabric of the dwelling is most representative of an extensive Early American-style renovation undertaken by Robert Mitchell, a carpenter, and his wife Patricia between 1958-1973 (the period of significance for the dwelling). The property retains high levels of integrity for setting, location, materials, workmanship, design, association, and feeling to the Mitchell's occupancy at the site.

Narrative Description

Periodization of the Dwelling

The two-and-a-half-story, three-bay, frame dwelling, known as the Robert Mitchell House, features five periods of construction (a sketch map has been included at the end of the nomination delineating the five periods of construction). The Period I portion of the house was constructed by John Hyde and his family c. 1865-1870.[1] This single-pile, two-and-a-half-story, three-bay, modified hall-parlor plan house with an enclosed center stair, was likely constructed as a large, front addition to a smaller, circa 1800 log dwelling on the property, which was soon replaced by the Period II rear ell. The construction of the existing house has been previously misattributed to the 1820s, because of the earlier log dwelling that existed on the property, which was referred to in historical records. The log dwelling was likely built for Sarah Sharpless and was extant by 1803.[2] In the 1803 and 1816 tax assessments for Mill Creek Hundred (the earliest available), Sharpless was assessed for the six-acre tract of land and a log dwelling thereon.[3] The 1849 Rea & Price Map for New Castle County, the first historical map drafted of the area that depicts dwellings and property owners, indicates a house at or near to the present-day location of the Mitchell House. In the 1852 tax assessment for Mill Creek Hundred (the next available tax record), the property owner at that time, David Owen (or Owens), was assessed for the log dwelling plus a frame barn.[4] The larger, present house was almost certainly built by the following owners—the Hydes—a family of Irish immigrants who moved from Pennsylvania and acquired the property in 1864. It was not until John Hyde's death in 1872, about eight years after he purchased the property from Owen, that the first recorded reference to this house exists. In his probate inventory, a hall-parlor plan dwelling, with bedrooms above, is described in a room-by-room assessment.[5] The physical evidence found in the house, mainly in the basement, also supports an 1860s date of construction. Here, the wood framing of the house is visible and is constructed in a distinct, transitional style—utilizing a mixture of framing techniques common in the area during the transition from large-dimension timber frames to smaller-dimension "stick" construction. Interestingly, the framing is not quite balloon style, but instead the first-floor studs are nailed to the basement joists, instead of a first-floor sill. Buildings utilizing such transitional framing mostly appeared on the Delaware landscape after the Civil War.[6] Additionally, the framing members in the Period I portion of the dwelling are circular sawn, again indicating a mid-nineteenth century date of construction rather than early-nineteenth century. Additionally, based on the material fabric found in the now-attached garage/shop, this historic outbuilding almost certainly predates the construction of the house. Up-and-down sawn timbers and rafters, and half-round log joists at the lower level, provide material evidence that this building was constructed prior to the house.

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[1] Andrew Hayden to John Hyde, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, X-7-76, April 25, 1864.
[2] Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, Tax Assessment, Sarah Sharpless, 1803.
[3] Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, Tax Assessment, Sarah Sharpless, 1803; Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, Tax Assessment, Sarah Sharpless, 1816.
[4] Samuel M, Rea and Jacob Price, George Read Riddle, Robert Pearsall Smith, *Map of New Castle County, Delaware: from original surveys*, (Philadelphia: Smith & Wistar, 1849), accessed at: https://www.loc.gov/item/2013593084/.
[5] Delaware Recorder of Wills, Probate file for John Hyde, 1872-1873.
[6] Gabrielle Lanier and Bernard L. Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*, (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1997), 94.

The rear, two-story Period II addition is located on the northeast façade, and contains the present-day dining room and a bedroom on the second floor. This shed-roofed rear ell was likely constructed soon after the main dwelling was built. Other architectural evidence that this ell represents a second building campaign is a subtle seam in the stucco, visible on the exterior, and the fact that only the Period I portion of the dwelling has a cellar. The Period II addition sits on an unexcavated stone foundation. Material fabric found on the inside of the house suggests that this Period II addition replaced the original one-room log dwelling, reusing a portion of its stone foundation wall (dimensions indicate that the log house would have been about 13 or 14 feet by 17 feet). This first-floor space would have likely served as the kitchen in the late nineteenth-century. Additionally, the second story bedroom is only accessed from the stairs in the Period I house—indicating this must have been an addition—as there is no material evidence of a second stairway or ladder accessing the space from the first floor of the Period II section. Lastly, the exposed joists in the Period II bedroom are materially consistent with milled lumber from the 1860s and 1870s in this region.

The dwelling remained in the Hyde family following John's death in 1872. His widow, Honora (sometimes referred to as Hannah), and his adult son Daniel took possession of the property until 1904.[7] The second rear addition, which today houses the modern kitchen, was likely built after the property changed hands after Daniel Hyde's death in 1905. This Period III addition is single-pile and only one-story in height and located in the same plane as the dining room, behind the Period I parlor. This room was definitely extant by 1924, when a public sale advertisement described the "Daniel Hyde" dwelling as a "9-room house."[8] This was the last major pre-Mitchell addition to the house.

The Period IV (1958-1973) and Period V (c. 1980-2015) renovations and additions to the house comprise the most significant building campaigns at the dwelling.[9] Both were undertaken by Robert and Patricia Mitchell who purchased the property in 1958 and resided there until Robert Mitchell passed away in 2015. The couple purchased the house before their marriage and quickly began an extensive renovation campaign—adding or altering most of the visible architectural fabric on both the interior and exterior of the dwelling. Some of the first big projects undertaken by the Mitchells in the late 1950s and early 1960s included work in the living room, the outbuilding, as well as some exterior modifications. The Mitchells opened the center stair wall onto the living room (c. 1958/1959) and renovated and rebricked the stove fireplace in the room (c. 1961). The overhead false joists were added to the living room c. 1966. Robert Mitchell expanded the first and second floor of the outbuilding c. 1960—an important addition to the building since the upstairs would serve as the workshop for Mitchell's carpentry work for decades to come. On the exterior, the zig-zag pattern fascia board with the drop pendants was also added by Mitchell c. 1960 (the pattern for this still hangs in the workshop today). The Mitchells constructed the rear porch c. 1966, including the creation of the exterior door to the porch, which

[7] Delaware Recorder of Wills, Probate file for John Hyde, 1872-1873; Delaware Recorder of Wills, Probate file for Daniel J. Hyde, 1904-1905.
[8] "Public Sale of Valuable Real estate and personal property," *The Evening Journal*, Wilmington, Delaware, February 23, 1924.
[9] Robert Mitchell preceded Patricia in death. No known major alterations to the dwelling occurred after his passing.

is accessed from dining room (through the old log cabin foundation) by way of a new brick stairway. Mitchell renovated a number of other exterior features of the dwelling during the 1960s and early 1970s. He added the paneled wood shutters (with hand-hammered shutter dogs), the pent roof across the front façade, and he removed a previous wooden front porch and replaced it with a brick-topped, poured concrete porch. As part of the Period IV renovations, Mitchell also added the built-ins on the interior of the house. He added a desk with cabinets and shelving in the parlor; a desk, cabinets, and dresser in the bedroom over the parlor; and cabinets in the Period II bedroom over the dining room. In 1973, the Mitchells constructed a large addition to the southeast of the Period I dwelling and Period III kitchen addition. This Early American styled "breakfast room" addition is one-story in height, nine-and-a-half feet in width, twenty-and-a-half feet in length, and features a shed-roof profile. On the southwest elevation of this addition, a new front door was added, which became the primary entry door for the dwelling. On the inside, the "breakfast room addition" contained three new rooms—including a small entry hall, a half-bathroom, and the breakfast room. Also in 1973, the kitchen was renovated and the exterior wall was removed, opening the kitchen to the new breakfast room below. Lastly, this addition connected the dwelling to the free-standing outbuilding, creating one single building. Now, a Dutch-door, opens directly into the garage (and provides immediate access to the stairway to the upstairs workshop/loft). In the early 1980s, during the Period V renovations, the Mitchells added the rear, attic-level bedroom over the second-floor, Period II bedroom. During the same renovation campaign, the Mitchells also added the shed roof dormers on the front elevation, as well as the upstairs bathroom.

Setting

The Mitchell House is set back from Old Wilmington Road approximately 30 feet and oriented to the southwest, on a parcel of land measuring just under one acre. The house is sited on a rising hill overlooking Old Wilmington Road, an historic east-west road that provided access from Wilmington west into Pennsylvania. At the time of its initial construction, this section of Mill Creek Hundred consisted almost entirely of farmsteads and agricultural land, but today, many twentieth-century subdivisions are mixed with remaining farmland and open space—including a housing development (started in 1998) up the hill from the Mitchell House to its north and east. The dwelling is partially embanked and sits well above the roadway, with a dry-laid fieldstone retaining wall and hedgerow running along the southwest perimeter of the property. A gravel driveway leads to the dwelling from the southeast and is bordered by a dry-laid fieldstone retaining wall, shrubbery, and mature trees on its northeast side. The side and rear yards surrounding the dwelling, which slope uphill to the north and northeast, are predominantly open and grassy, with scattered mature trees throughout the property and a more discernible tree line along its perimeter. An embanked outbuilding, once a separate edifice but now attached to and incorporated with the dwelling, is located to the east. Historically, evidence suggests that the outbuilding loft served as a workshop, even before Mitchell's expansion and use.[10]

Exterior

[10] The 1873 probate inventory for then owner John Hyde describes contents in the "shop loft." Owner Robert Mitchell, who purchased the property with his wife Patricia in 1958, also used the space as a workshop and expanded its footprint, with garage space on the lower level.

Constructed in several phases, the Period I main block, built c. 1865-1870, is a two-and-half-story, three-bay, single-pile, frame dwelling with a symmetrical façade, constructed in a late example hall-parlor plan with a closed central stair. The exterior walls are stuccoed and were originally clad in wood clapboards, portions of which remain visible from the basement. The main block sits on a uncoursed fieldstone foundation, which is also stuccoed, and is sheltered by a side-gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. The roof exhibits overhanging boxed eaves and features decorative drop pendants and gingerbread detailing along the bargeboards and fascia boards. Two shed roof dormers project from the southwest (front) slope of the roof, with a third on the northeast (rear) slope, which are part of the Period IV additions. These are clad in wide wood boards set on a diagonal. Two interior brick chimneys are located at the gable ends of the main block.

The three-bay façade of the Period I main block features a recessed central entry containing a modern storm door covering a one-light over two-panel wooden door, with an inset divider housing stained glass, and plain wood trim. The windows are wood, six-over-six, under wooden storm windows, with plain wood trim. There are four regularly spaced windows at the second story, consistent in material with those at the first story. Operable, three-panel wooden shutters flank the windows and feature hammered metal shutter dogs. A full span pent roof extends from the façade between the first and second stories and exhibits decorative wooden scrollwork brackets at either end. The pent roof, covered with wooden shingles, partially shelters a one-story, poured concrete porch with a brick-lined perimeter, which also extends across the full façade.

The northwest elevation of the Period I main block features regular and symmetrical fenestration between the first and second stories, with windows and shutters (present at the first story) consistent with those at the façade. Two symmetrical attic-level bays contain two-over-two, wood windows, with plain wood trim. The southeast elevation of the Period I main block features one window at the first story, with two symmetrical bays at both the second story and attic levels. These bays contain four-over-four wood windows, with two-over-two wood windows at the attic level. The same type of three-panel wooden shutters and shutter dogs as those found at the façade flank each of the bays on this elevation, with shorter two-panel shutters at the attic level. The windows on the first and second stories of the southeast elevation are each capped with a wooden canopy. A former one-bay section of the original southeast elevation was obscured and altered by a Period IV addition. The northeast (rear) elevation of the Period I main block is mostly obscured from view by a Period III addition and Period IV additions and alterations. One six-over-six wood window located at the second story of the northeast elevation is partially visible from the vantage of the rear yard. It has plain wood trim and is flanked by louvered wooden shutters, which are possibly original to the Period I main block.

Built c. late-nineteenth century, the Period II addition to the dwelling extends from the northeast (rear) elevation of the Period I main block and consists of a two-story, frame addition with a shed roof covered in raised-seam metal. The walls and rubble fieldstone foundation are also stuccoed. This portion of the dwelling is partially embanked into the hillside and contains the present dining room with a bedroom above. The northwest elevation of the Period II addition features a window and door at the first story, with one window at the second story. The windows are consistent with those found at the façade and on the northwest elevation of the Period I main block. The door is wood, one-light over two-panel, under a modern storm door, with plain wood trim. Decorative

bargeboard trim established on the Period I main block continues along this elevation of the Period II addition. The partially embanked northeast (rear) elevation of the Period II addition is obscured by a Period IV screened-in porch but features a fixed, 14-light, wood window near ground level. A passage containing a 12-light over one-panel wood door, adjacent to the 14-light window, is cut through a section of a rubble fieldstone foundation of the earlier log dwelling. Thought not readily visible from the exterior at ground level, the southeast elevation also features one six-over-six wood window at the second story. It has plain wood trim and is flanked by louvered wooden shutters like those present on the northeast (rear) elevation of the Period I main block.

A one-story, frame, Period III addition, built c. late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century, extends from the northeast (rear) elevation of the Period I main block and the southeast elevation of the Period II addition. This portion of the dwelling contains the current kitchen. It has a flat roof and is obscured from view from the exterior at ground level by the Period IV screened-in porch.

During the Mitchell era of ownership, beginning in the early 1960s through the early 1970s, several additions and alterations were made to the dwelling that comprise the Period IV building phase. A one-story, shed roof, frame addition projects from the southeast elevation of the Period I main block and Period III kitchen addition, which serves to connect the dwelling with the workshop. This addition, which is recessed from the façade of the Period I main block, effectively created a new main entry located on its southwest elevation, containing a vertical board wood door under a four-light transom, with plain wood trim. A four-light wood casement window is located adjacent to the door, with another on the southeast elevation, as well as a tripartite bay window. The walls are clad in vertical wood board siding. An exterior brick chimney extends from the southeast elevation of the Period IV addition and the southwest (front) elevation of the workshop. A one-story, shed roof porch, built during the Period IV building phase, extends from the northeast elevation of the Period II and III additions and meets the northwest elevation of the workshop. The roof is covered in corrugated metal. The porch is screened-in and supported by plain wood framing anchored on a low, brick foundation wall. The shed roof dormers found on the southwest and northeast slopes of the Period I main block of the dwelling were also added during the Period IV building phase. Each contains double six-light wood casement windows, with plain wood trim. During the Period IV building phase, a deteriorated porch present at the façade of the Period I main block was also demolished and replaced by the present poured concrete foundation and pent roof spanning the façade.

The main block of the workshop, which is likely contemporaneous to and possibly even predates the dwelling, is embanked into the hillside on a full-height rubble fieldstone foundation. The above-grade section is one-story, frame, and sheltered by a side-gable roof clad in wood shingles. The exterior is stuccoed in the same manner as the Period I main block and Period II addition of the dwelling and also features the same style of decorative bargeboard trim on its southeast gable end. Its southwest (front) façade contains a single garage bay containing a modern roll-top door. Two wood windows, one fixed four-light and one six-over-six, are located on the southwest elevation above grade. Another six-over-six wood window is located on the southeast elevation of the main block. Each window features the same plain wood trim, though with crowns which rise modestly to a central point.

During the Period IV building phase, a one-story, frame addition expanded the workshop to the northeast, approximately doubling its size. The entirely below-grade northeast foundation wall was also modified, with a portion of it removed and replaced with concrete blocks, expanding the footprint of the below-grade space to accommodate a vehicle. The one-story, frame addition, which rests on a poured concrete foundation, has a cross-gable roof covered in wood shingles, and its walls are clad in wood board-and-batten. Its southeast elevation features double six-light wood casement windows, which match the windows found in the Period IV dormers on the southwest and northeast slopes of the main block of the dwelling. The windows in the Period IV addition to the outbuilding all feature plain wood trim with crowns which rise modestly to a central point, like those found on the main block. Adjacent to the window bay are half-width, five-light, wood double doors, with plain wood trim. The northeast elevation features a horizontal span of five large one-light wood windows with plain wood trim, with three smaller fixed wood windows overhead—a six-light at center, flanked by four-lights. One six-over-nine wood window is located on the northwest elevation.

A cross-gable addition was later constructed, c. 1985, above the Period II second-story bedroom, which extends from the northeast elevation of the Period I main block, creating a large attic-level master bedroom. The roof is covered in asphalt shingles, and the exterior is clad in vertical wood board siding. A shed roof dormer projects from both the northwest and southeast slopes of the roof, each containing double six-light wood casement windows, with plain wood trim. A walkout frame deck is accessed on the northeast elevation via half-width, five-light, wood double doors—which appear to be the same type found on the southeast elevation of the Period IV addition to the workshop—and is bounded by a plain wood post-and-rail balustrade with chamfered posts. Two four-light wood casement windows with plain wood trim flank the double doors. Four wood steps lead down onto the corrugated metal roof of the Period IV northeast porch addition.

Interior

The Period I main block of the dwelling was built originally in a modified hall-parlor plan, with a closed central stair accessing the second story. An architectural ghost in the ceiling inside the original main entry indicates that the stair hall was previously closed to the hall and parlor. Upon entering, there would have been a vestibule, with the stairs to the second story at center and a door to either side accessing the hall and parlor. The cellar is accessed from under the central stair and exists solely under the Period I main block of the dwelling. It exhibits some exposed framing, with exposed circular-sawn joists and exterior framing members. There are also some visible sections of the original exterior wood clapboard. Underneath the main cellar is smaller root cellar, accessed from the northern portion of the main cellar.

In the Period I main block of the dwelling, the hall and parlor both exhibit what initially appear to be exposed second-story floor joists, roughly chamfered and whitewashed. However, these are faux joists, dropped below the plaster ceiling. These faux joists in each front room are even tied into a faux summer beam straddling either side of the central stair, with the first three faux joists extending from the parlor across the formerly closed central stair and into the hall, and layered on top of the architectural ghost of the formerly extended partition wall that once reached across to the original main entry. The chimney in the hall has also been altered to appear more substantial in form. While the dwelling would have originally had stove heating, evidenced by the lack of

relieving arches in the basement and the late build date, the brick platform on which the current stove rests and the exposed chimney and surround is a later alteration. The parlor features built-in wood furniture on the southeast wall, consisting of open bookshelves, storage cabinets, and a desk.

On the second story of the Period I main block, directly above the hall and parlor, were likely originally two bedrooms, with a winder stair in the western second-story room to access the attic. The architectural ghost of a partition wall is visible in the ceiling of the western room, indicating that there was, at one time, a closed hallway to access the attic stairs, separate from the bedroom. The Period I main block of the second story now contains two rooms and a bathroom. The southeast bedroom features built-in furniture similar to that found in the parlor, with a desk, dresser, and storage cabinets. Both bedrooms also feature vertical board wood doors with wrought iron latches.

The Period I main block of the attic may have also once been partitioned into two rooms but now contains a bedroom to the southeast and a storage area and bathroom to the northwest. The master bedroom, a Period V addition built in the early 1980s, extends from the northeast elevation of the Period I main block and is situated over the Period II addition. These spaces all also feature the same type of vertical board wood doors and iron latches found in the other Period I main block and Period II second-story rooms.

The late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century Period II addition to the dwelling added two rooms, consisting of what is now a dining room to the northeast (rear) on the first story, with an additional bedroom above on the second story. The northeast (rear) wall of the dining room is partially embanked with a section of rubble fieldstone foundation wall, or the vestige of a retaining wall, extending above grade and projecting into the room as a wide ledge. The walls of the dining room feature chair rail with vertical wood board below, with the same material enclosing the fieldstone wall. A passage is cut through a section of this foundation wall to access the Period IV northeast (rear) screened-in porch, which contains a 12-light over one-panel wood door. A brick threshold set in running bond opens onto a brick landing, with four brick steps leading to the northwest. An additional section of a fieldstone wall, built by Mitchell with stone likely reused from the reworking of the northeast foundation wall of the workshop, runs northeast and then turns northwest forming a retaining wall around the steps. A wrought iron hairpin fence serves as a railing. The floor of the screened-in porch is laid in brick and set in a herringbone pattern. The framing of the roof is exposed and is constructed of salvaged rafters and purlins. A bar clad in vertical wood board with a moulded ledge projects from the northeast elevation of the porch, east of the door and steps to the dining room.

The Period II bedroom above the dining room features “exposed” faux joists, similar to those found in the first-story hall and parlor, though these are made of whitewashed standard mill-sawn, two-by-four lumber. The bedroom also features built-in storage cabinets constructed in the same fashion as the built-ins found in the southeast second-story bedroom and first-story parlor. The doors are the same type of vertical wood board with iron latches found in the Period I main block of the second story.

The early-twentieth century Period III addition expanded the dwelling further, with the creation of the kitchen space. The rubble fieldstone foundation (or former retaining) wall extends from the Period II dining room approximately two feet into the kitchen on the northwest elevation but is hidden by the counter. It may have been during this time, with the presumed addition of plumbing, that a bathroom was added in the second-story Period I main block.

The mid-to-late-twentieth century Period IV additions and alterations further increased the footprint of the dwelling, with the construction on the southeast elevation of the Period I main block of a new main entry and small foyer, plus a combined bathroom and laundry room. A former window bay on the southeast elevation of the Period I main block was reconfigured as a doorway, providing access between the addition and the parlor. The foyer features beaded, salvaged joists.

The Period IV building phase also partially opened up the southeast wall of the Period III kitchen and added a sunken eat-in dining area. The kitchen was renovated during this building phase and features cabinet faces constructed of vertical wood board, akin to that found in the dining room and with handles similar to the latches found on the interior doors throughout the dwelling. The same vertical wood board covers a portion of the remaining southeast kitchen wall and now northwest eat-in dining area wall. A horizontal two-light sliding wood window looks out on the northeast elevation of the kitchen onto the Period IV screened-in porch. The sunken eat-in dining space features a vaulted ceiling with beaded, salsa aged joists, with a triple five-light clerestory wood window set high on the northwest elevation. The floor is faced with brick in a running bond pattern. The southeast elevation of the sunken dining space contains a tripartite bay window. In the east corner is an angled fireplace faced in brick, though of concrete block construction, with two inset wood cabinets.

The Period IV expansion to the kitchen space additionally served to connect the dwelling to the workshop, which was also enlarged for additional garage and work space. It is accessed through a six-light over vertical wood board Dutch door, located on the northeast elevation of the eat-in dining space. From inside the lower-level garage space, the concrete block construction of the corner fireplace, located in the adjacent eat-in dining area, is visible. The fieldstone foundation walls of the embanked workshop are exposed on the northwest and southeast elevations, with a portion of the northeast (rear) wall reconstructed of concrete block, increasing the footprint of the garage space. A mix of half-rounded and squared hewn joists are exposed overhead. Wooden stairs stand in line with the Dutch door and lead to the original main block and Period IV expanded workshop space above. The interior walls of the workshop are unfinished with its framing entirely exposed. Many woodworking tools, and patterns from the Period IV building phase remain in the space and include those used by Mitchell in his business.

Integrity

The Robert Mitchell House possesses high levels of integrity for location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and thus strongly conveys its period of significance, which ranges from 1958 to 1973. The period of significance represents the extensive Early American style renovations and additions added to the house by homeowner and carpenter-contractor Robert Mitchell, which remain largely unaltered and intact.

Location: The Robert Mitchell House retains its original location, as constructed in 1865.

Setting: The Robert Mitchell House retains a high level of integrity of setting. The landscape surrounding the building has not changed significantly since the Mitchells purchased the property in 1958. The house is perched on a hillside in a fairly rural setting, with an old mushroom farm across the road, and only a few other houses visible in the immediate surrounding area. Many trees on the parcel, and on neighboring properties, provide a generally private and insulated feel.

Design: The Robert Mitchell House possesses a high level of design from the period of significance, which spans 1958 to 1973. Starting in 1958, Robert Mitchell worked for about 15 years to design and renovate the house in an Early American style, both on the exterior and interior. The overall design and layout of the house and its additions, as well as the architectural features that give character to almost every room, survive almost entirely unaltered. Only one major renovation campaign occurred after the period of significance, during the 1980s, when Mitchell built a third-story bedroom addition on the rear of the house, and added shed dormers on the front roof. However, these additions do not significantly detract from the overall design of the house, since they incorporate similar design features as the rest of the house and are not visually predominant, especially from the front of the house.

Materials: The large majority of the materials at the Robert Mitchell House reflect the period of significance, and many of the materials are typical of Mitchell's designs. While the stone foundation and framing of the original house and carriage house pre-date the Mitchell family era, as do some windows and some flooring, almost all of the visible finishes on both the exterior and interior of the house are the result of Mitchell renovations.

Workmanship: The Robert Mitchell House features a high level of workmanship, the result of the careful craftsmanship and attention to detail that Mitchell was known for. This applies to the creative "chamfered" joists overhead in the front rooms of the house, to the Classical wood mouldings and trim applied throughout the house, to the carefully laid brick floors and fireplaces, to the hand-crafted reproduction hardware obtained from a specialty company in Pennsylvania and his own son, David Mitchell.

Feeling: The Robert Mitchell House retains a high level of feeling from the period of significance. Not only has the outside setting changed little since the period of significance, but the interior finishes are almost entirely intact from the Mitchell era, besides some changed paint colors and other minor alterations.

Association: The Mitchell family no longer owns the property, but the Mitchells owned it for nearly 60 years, and the house was only sold to a new family in 2017. While the Robert Mitchell House now has new owners, they have made no significant alterations to the house—and have even left Mitchell's workbench and wood patterns in place in his former workshop area above the garage.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Architecture

Period of Significance
1958-1973

Significant Dates
c. 1865-1870 (construction of main block)
c. 1958-1973 (Mitchell alterations)

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Robert E. Mitchell (mid-to-late-twentieth century alterations)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Robert Mitchell House is significant at the local level under Criteria A and C for its extensive renovations between 1958 and 1973 in a customized "Early American" style, participating in a broader movement of Early American renovations and decoration popular in the United States during the decades after World War II. The property is also significant as the experimental prototype and home workshop of carpenter Robert Mitchell, who executed similar Early American-style designs on dozens of historic properties in northern Delaware and southeast Pennsylvania between 1960 and 1985. The Robert Mitchell House, and many of the other historic houses Mitchell renovated, featured his signature Early American designs that did not necessarily seek restoration-caliber authenticity, but instead created a general Early American aesthetic by incorporating reclaimed building materials, and new "historic" architectural features—such as traditional fireplaces, exposed overhead joists and rafters, rustic brick floors, historic mouldings and trim, raised paneling on walls and doors, and reproduction hardware. For Mitchell and many of his clients, the collecting of antiques—and the staging of those antiques in an Early American setting—was clearly a motivating factor driving the Early American themed house renovations.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criteria A and C

Robert Mitchell's House & His "Early American" Design Approach

Robert Mitchell's aesthetic choices for his family's house during the 1960s and early-1970s featured an interesting and inventive blend of authentic historic elements, fanciful renovations inspired by historical looks, decorations that were a mixture of antiques and reproductions, and at the same time, a dash of modern architectural and decorative form. Some of the architectural treatments, such as exposed beaded joists and reproduction hardware, even created a historic aesthetic that predated the age of his family's house. This same general design approach was applied by Mitchell, in collaboration with his clients, at many other upscale historic properties in northern Delaware where he was hired to do historic-style renovations. Mitchell's design approach—not really "restoration" in the technical sense, but instead renovation inspired by historical looks and often using historical materials—reflected some common tendencies of the post-World War II Early American design movement in northern Delaware and throughout the United States. With little scholarship existing at this time for the Early American aesthetic movements that evolved in the United States after World War II, the Robert Mitchell House provides an opportunity to explore the context for his renovations both nationally and locally.

The "Early American" Movement in Post-World War II United States

Though most scholarship about the Colonial Revival movement has focused on the historical period between 1876 and 1940, the revival of early American themes in architecture and the decorative arts did not cease with World War II—and, in fact, it experienced a widespread

resurgence and popularization during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. While many people associate post-World War II America with Modernist and "Contemporary" design movements, which consciously broke *away* from such earlier American traditions, the aesthetic fascination with early American history—and its designs and icons—never truly faded. In fact, it seems to have surged to new heights during the 1960s and 70s as a more popular, and more widespread, movement among middle-class and even working-class Americans—who arguably embraced traditional designs more than modernist ones.

The decades after World War II created a perfect atmosphere for embracing the comfort of tradition, and for celebrating the idea of American exceptionalism. The 1950s, besides ushering in an era of rapid suburbanization and its cultural upheavals, witnessed high political tensions during the Cold War—and its attendant celebration of American capitalism, democracy, and history. The 1960s experienced unprecedented social turmoil and disorienting social movements, including the counterculture, women's liberation, Black and Chicano civil rights, the first major gay rights protests, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. During the following decade, in the 1970s, a political and economic malaise took hold in the United States, as problematic developments like defeat in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, and economic stagflation soured the nation's mood—while ongoing "culture wars" heightened concern about American morals and social stability.

During these decades of rapid change and social turmoil, Americans frequently turned to their past for a sense of national pride and stability. This awareness of and orientation to the past was most famously expressed—and enhanced—by the historic preservation movement (culminating in the Historic Preservation Act of 1966) and the American Bicentennial celebrations of the mid-1970s. In academia, historians began a shift to the "new social history," focusing on the past lives of everyday Americans, and universities across the country founded or expanded new departments and programs in American Studies, Folklore, Historic Preservation, Archaeology, Historic Geography, and Early American Material Culture. These scholars often led the charge in studying early American architecture, including vernacular architecture, as well as "material culture," including early American furniture, wallpapers, lighting fixtures, clothing, metalwork, and the products of countless other industries and handcrafts. The academic work in these fields, as well as studies led by museum professionals and other public historians, significantly advanced the understanding of early American architecture and decorative arts. This information was frequently disseminated to the general public as they streamed through historical museums, both old and new, and purchased books and magazines, like *The Magazine Antiques* and *Early American Life*.

However, the celebration of American traditions during the 1960s and 70s went far beyond the passing of historic preservation legislation, national celebrations, and academic developments, expressing itself most powerfully and extensively through consumer-driven activities—including tourism, pop culture, and especially real estate and home goods. Americans traveled to historical destination sites like Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, Greenfield Village in Michigan, and Old

Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and they visited local historical sites in droves.[11] On television, historically-themed programs like Bonanza, Gunsmoke, and Little House on the Prairie transported Americans to earlier (and presumably simpler) times in the nation's history.[12] Many Americans also learned traditional handcrafts like quilting and woodworking, and some even learned specialized historical trades like blacksmithing and tinsmithing.[13] However, the Early American movement manifested itself most extensively in people's houses, and commercialism in the domestic housing sector thus drove the post-World War II "Early American" design movement — through the construction of new houses, the renovation of old houses, furniture sales, and in the marketing of a large array of new products that embodied historical themes.

"Early American" is a flexible and imprecise label, used here to capture the broadest contours of a multivalent movement that was strongest during (but not limited to) the 1950s, 60s, and 70s—much as "Colonial Revival" is often used in an expansive way to describe a similarly broad and complex movement during the first half of the twentieth century. It should also be noted that there are clear parallels and continuities in the Early American movement from the first Colonial Revival movement(s), which never truly ended (as many scholars have noted in passing).[14] However, even with their similarities and carryovers, the architecture and material culture of the post-World War II 'Early American' movement was distinct enough, and occurred within contexts that were different enough, to warrant its own distinct labels and analysis.

Even so, terminology for this post-World War II era of early American architecture and decoration is not well-defined and can be especially complicated because names and labels were fluid and ill-defined even during the era—ranging from "Early American," to "Colonial," to "Traditional." Especially outside academia, in the world of marketing, terminology seemed to vary between market segments (and even within them), with different words or labels being more or less common in the areas of real estate, new furniture sales, antiques, and countless specialty activities or products. Yet "Early American" was the most common label applied during this era, being a default term that seemed to capture a broad design concept, and perhaps even a cultural orientation. It is particularly telling that the publication most focused on capturing the spirit of this general movement was, in fact, titled *Early American Life*, but it is also telling that its first issue in 1970

[11] In "The End of History Museums: What's Plan B?" by architectural historian Cary Carson, he discusses the rise and fall of history-oriented tourism in the years after the U.S. Bicentennial. He states that approximately half the house museums in the country opened in the 1960s, an era in which the Early American movement was flourishing. Carson, who worked for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, noted that museum visitor-ship was at an all-time high in the 1970s, but has slowly declined every decade since into the 2000s.

[12] Lisa Hix, "It Came From the '70s: The Story of Your Grandma's Weird Couch," *Collectors Weekly*, August 27, 2018, accessed at https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/it-came-from-the-70s-the-story-of-your-grandmas-weird-couch/.

[13] "Simple Furniture You Can Build," *Early American Life, 1970 Yearbook*, 1970, 16.

[14] For example, Colonial Revival scholar William Rhoades observes: "When I began to study the Colonial Revival in 1969, I, like many readers of Hitchcock, assumed that the Colonial Revival was dead and that Modernism had triumphed. Certainly, there were gas stations and supermarkets being built with tacked on Colonial cupolas, and suburban housing was often Colonial Revival, but none of these were designed by prominent architects or counted as serious architecture. Yet, as we all know, Americans' enthusiasm for Colonial forms did not end by 1952 or 1969, and it shows no signs of ending in the twenty-first century." See William B. Rhoads, "The Long and Unsuccessful Effort to Kill Off the Colonial Revival," in *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, eds. Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring and Kenny Marotta, (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2006), 13.

included an article that wrestled with the question, "What is Early American?" The editor found it difficult to precisely define. The magazine would cover a broad range of topics, he noted, including historic sites, restoration, new house construction in traditional styles, heritage tourism, handcrafts, and other historical themes, and the editor had considered "about 12 possible names" for the magazine, including *Tradition* or *American Traditional*. However, ultimately, the editor decided "Early American" most clearly captured the umbrella of topics that were of interest to himself and his intended subscribers.[15] Still, in the broader market, the terms "Colonial" and "Traditional" were nearly employed with a similar frequency. In the world of real estate, for example, the label "colonial" seems to have begun with at least some understanding that a house carrying the name featured some traditional aesthetics, but it slowly evolved to mean almost any house that was two stories high and rectangular in form—while the term "traditional" continued to imply Early American decorative elements like shutters and classical door surrounds. With consumer goods, especially furniture and decor, "Colonial" may have been used with as much frequency as "Early American" in Sears catalogs and department store advertisements. In the world of antiques and serious reproduction furniture, however, generic labels like Early American or Colonial simply would not suffice when classification by specific styles or eras (Queen Anne, Chippendale, etc.) was so critical.[16] Yet in the related world of consumer-grade traditional furniture, the terms Early American, Colonial, and Traditional were all common and fairly fluid.

The Great Depression and World War II had slowed the building activity and buying that fueled the early Colonial Revival movement, and the rise of Modernism had interrupted the traditional styles so popular in the first half of the twentieth century, especially among upper classes. Yet as historian Mary Theobald has observed, "by the 1950s, the Colonial Revival taste was climbing again."[17] While the post-war Early American movement featured many of the same characteristics as the earlier Colonial Revival era, it was distinct in some of its key aspects— especially by the 1960s and 70s.[18] Advances in technology during the war effort led to a dizzying array of new materials and products, and post-war suburbanization created a boom in new house construction and an explosion in consumer culture, as families furnished their new homes or redecorated old ones. A strong economy and widely available credit made borrowing and buying easy for even working-class families. The Early American movement was fueled by all of these changes.

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[15] See also Henry and Ottalie Williams, *How to Furnish Old American Houses,* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), in which they describe this decorating approach as "furnished in Early American style," on the dust jacket and elsewhere.

[16] Some furniture experts considered "Early American" furniture to be of the more rustic or country type, rather than the refined pieces of identifiable style. For example, in contrasting "house" styles with furniture styles, Henry and Ottalie Williams note, "When we speak of furniture periods we use a different system. The earliest furniture made in this country by the Massachusetts colonists is called Pilgrim furniture, or, more properly, Early Colonial. The name Early American is reserved for furniture also known as American Provincial or kitchen furniture, made in country districts after the Revolution. . . . The rest of the furniture made here takes its name from the English furniture from which it was copied, such as Jacobean, Carolean, William-and-Mary, Queen Anne." Williams, 12

[17] Mary Miley Theobald, "The Colonial Revival: The Past That Never Dies," *CW Journal,* Summer 2002, accessed at https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/Foundation/journal/Summer02/revival.cfm.

[18] "The Colonial Revival style endured, but it took on different forms over the years in post-World War II America, which is what I tend to write about and focus on at Retro Renovation," Pam Kueber says. "In the '50s, the style looks more like it looked in the '30s and '40s because we were still recovering from the Depression and World War II, so there were carryovers. By the '60s and '70s, you started to see more marketers reimagining and playing with the concept of what Early American meant." Hix, quoting Pan Kueber.

Several themes and tendencies, often related and overlapping, were common during the Early American movement after World War II. These include a fascinating interplay between Early American motifs and modern design and technologies; the consistent and related themes of "warmth," "comfort," and "security;" a highly fluid idea of "authenticity;" and in general, a more widely marketed and at times more casual expression of Early American aesthetics that was affordable to consumers of almost all socioeconomic backgrounds. Most pertinent to Robert Mitchell's designs, including the renovations at his own house, were the mixing of some modern design elements and sensibilities into otherwise "historic" designs, and relatedly, a loose concept of "authenticity" in executing such designs.

Architectural Expressions & Decorating Approaches in the Early American Movement

In the realm of domestic architecture, the Post-War Early American Movement manifested itself in several distinct but overlapping ways: 1) as newly-constructed suburban houses in "Colonial," "Traditional," or "Early American" styles; 2) as "restorations" and/or renovations (often fanciful) to existing houses; and 3) as decorating and furnishing schemes utilizing antiques or early American style fixtures, wall and floor coverings, and reproductions in historic houses and even new houses (including in newer styles like Ranches or Split-Levels). Though all of these architectural expressions were very common in northern Delaware in the decades after World War II, Robert Mitchell's work—both in his own house and in the renovations for his clients—is most relevant to the last two categories, historic house renovations and Early American decorations (primarily with antiques). This section provides the national and regional context for these architectural and decorating treatments, with the following section examining Robert Mitchell's design approach in relation to these broader trends.

Restoration, Renovation, and Reinvention in Existing Old Houses

The decades after World War II witnessed a resurgence and expansion of what is frequently called house "restoration" culture, though much of this activity would not be considered true restoration by the definitions and standards set forth today by the National Park Service and most historic preservation professionals.[19] While there were countless historic homeowners who did attempt to accurately return their houses to their authentic appearances at a defined point in their histories, at least as many engaged in a broad spectrum of less strict or more fanciful renovations—sometimes imaginative and even inventive interpretations of "Colonial" architecture. These less historically accurate treatments, sometimes executed by the homeowners themselves (without the involvement of a restoration architect or even serious study of historic architecture) were typically aimed at creating a historic "feel" or "mood," and sometimes did not even pretend to seek authenticity. The range of historical treatments and approaches to historical renovation during these decades was complex, and it can be difficult to sort or categorize them. Every restoration or renovation was one-of-a-kind, and many makeovers in the Early American style involved a mixture of original architectural features, historic replacement materials, and newer replica materials. Additionally, the furnishings and decor within these houses existed on a similarly complex spectrum of

[19] The National Park Service currently defines Restoration as "the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period." See https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/treatment-restoration.htm.

authenticity and whimsy, from high-end antiques, to well-executed reproductions, to upholstered furniture or lamps featuring colonial imagery (with little attempt to actually recreate true historical design).[20] In the case of Robert Mitchell, at his house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road (and with his other commissions), he often blended historic salvage materials and quality reproduction materials (like bricks, mouldings, and hardware) to create historically-inspired designs, but sometimes with frankly modern forms and elements. To contextualize the type of historical renovations commonly executed by Robert Mitchell, including at his own house, the following section highlights a few of the common Early American renovation trends of the 1960s and 70s.

Restoration

True architectural "restoration," in the technical sense, was (and still is) quite rare—especially when considering the total restoration of entire buildings. As the American Bicentennial approached, architect George Stephen pointed out in 1972 that "total restoration is only possible when the building is to be a museum piece," since "few of us would care to rely on eighteenth-century plumbing, open fireplaces, and candles for our utilities."[21] Modern building codes would also pose a challenge for the most enthusiastic proponents of early American living. As such, Stephen concluded, the restoration of historic houses "is almost always a compromise," ranging from "almost total restoration where only the essential services are modernized" to more minimal treatments that restore "only a part of the building."[22]

The approach of restoring individual rooms, however, was quite common. Historic homeowners would frequently attempt their most accurate restorations in rooms requiring the least amount of modernization, like front parlors or "halls," dining rooms, and bedrooms. Electrical wiring and heat service were typically the only modernization required, and these were often achieved fairly invisibly. Many of these rooms were located in the front of historic houses, where they were the most visible and (historically) often the most formal—and thus contained the most paneling, fireplace mantles, crown mouldings, and other historic architectural elements for restoration. Modern kitchens and bathrooms were frequently created in back rooms and in rear additions (both old and new), where they were less intrusive to the historic effect.

Restoration often involved stripping away later layers of architectural fabric, revealing older or original finishes and restoring them as close as possible to their original appearance (though the patina of age was typically welcome). Where original materials had been lost or were in deteriorated condition, restoration often required replacement with "in kind" materials that roughly matched what the originals would have looked like, thus replicating the dimensions, wood types, and finishes of original elements. Sometimes this was achieved with actual antique architectural salvage recovered from other historic buildings of a similar vintage, including beams, joists, flooring, doors, hardware, bricks, and decorative trim. Replastering walls and ceilings was a frequent requirement where plaster had deteriorated or been removed, and it was common for later layers of flooring to be removed, revealing original wood floors (or even wide-plank subfloors) that returned a strong historic ambiance to the room. Collectively, these efforts led to the most

[20] Stephen, 12.
[21] Stephen 8-9.
[22] Stephen 8-9.

serious restorations of historic houses, especially when based on the careful study of the building's architectural evidence and regional vernacular trends. Many historic homeowners successfully returned large portions of their homes to a fairly authentic, even museum-caliber, appearance that recalled its colonial or pre-Civil War architecture.

Renovation

For every historic house (or historic room) that was restored with this level of desired accuracy, there were countless others remodeled with approaches that were significantly less strict and less academic. For many renovators of historic houses during the post-war Early American movement, as during the earlier Colonial Revival period (as established above), strict authenticity of design was not always the primary goal. Instead, many homeowners sought to create a convincing Early American "setting" that captured the general "mood," "feeling," or "atmosphere" of the past. Most historic-themed renovations fell into this broader spectrum of historic house remodeling approaches.

Heavy-handed, interpretive, and even fanciful "restorations" were not unique to the post-World War II Early American movement. While early-twentieth century Colonial Revival restorations were often led by architects (basing their work on carefully documented architectural details in other colonial buildings), they frequently took liberties with their designs and "restored' buildings to appearances they might never have looked like (an approach that might be compared to the well-known theories of 19th-century French architect Eugene Viollet-le-Duc). For aesthetic effect, house interiors were sometimes made more formal or stately than they were originally, or conversely, made more primitive or rustic feeling to create a romanticized "Colonial" look. In discussing distinguished Colonial Revival architect R. Brognard Okie's work in the Mid-Atlantic region, Gabrielle Lanier and Bernie Herman point out that, "Many of these 'restorations' tended to be rather interpretive, and in some cases disruptive, of the original building fabric."[23] In New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and in the South alike, "Materials from other houses were often removed and appropriated for use in a different setting, and architectural details that were evocative of the colonial era but not necessarily historically accurate were sometimes utilized."[24]

Whether an architect was involved or not, or whether intentional or not, historic homeowners during the Early American movement engaged in a wide range of historic renovations that mixed accuracy with pragmatism, sacrificed authenticity for comfort, combined historic elements with modern ones, and sometimes, aimed to simply create an evocative historic aesthetic whether the look was based on historical reality or not. Often, elements for more comfortable (and safe) modern living were introduced in otherwise historic rooms. Even in serious restorations, lighting fixtures and wall switches were often frankly modern. Corner spaces of large rooms, especially towards the rear of houses, were sometimes boxed out to create bathrooms or even partitioned to create small kitchens. Electric baseboard heating units were commonly installed at the base of walls to provide heat where other solutions were not feasible or would disturb too much historic fabric. Water or steam pipes for upstairs plumbing often ran up first-floor corners or in the middle of walls, and were frequently "boxed in," with historic trim to partially disguise their function.

[23] Lanier and Herman, 169.
[24] Lanier and Herman, 169.

Some people went even further in loosening the accuracy of their early American interiors. For example, many owners of early- or mid-19th century houses, which typically would have featured plastered ceilings for a brighter and more "finished" look, removed those ceilings to expose the "beams" (floor joists) above, in order to achieve a more evocative and historic look. Original subfloors were sometimes exposed, even if they were never originally visible, because their wide dimensions and rusticated appearance looked very "historic." Crown mouldings and chair rails were sometimes added to create a formal Early American appearance, even when there was no forensic evidence that such finishes had existed in the house. Where original chimneys and fireplaces had been removed, historic house owners recreated early fireplaces, sometimes with wider fireboxes, more rustic lintels, and historic hardware (like cooking cranes) and implements that may have never existed in that location. Lighting fixtures such as historic chandeliers and wall sconces might similarly add to a historic ambiance, while not necessarily replacing an element that would have actually existed in such a house.

Reinvention: Pre-Dating / "Early Americanization"

It was not uncommon for old houses to be renovated to an appearance that actually pre-dated their true original build date. This creation of anachronistic architecture was sometimes intentional and sometimes not. In 1972, architect and restoration specialist George Stephen labeled the practice "pre-dating," which he summarized as "making a building look as though it belongs to a period older than its actual age.[25] He pointed out that if the details and proportions were appropriate, this practice could be "a harmless white lie," but too often the result was less successful and led to a mismatched "catalogue of parts available at the local lumber yard."[26] Yet it is clear that this approach to historic renovation, and related decoration schemes, was common and widely accepted in some quarters of the Early American movement. Recent fieldwork in northern Delaware has revealed several nineteenth-century domestic dwellings with "pre-dated" interiors. For example, the Thomas Lynam House (built c. 1804-1816) near Wilmington was constructed in the Federal style, originally featuring two back-to-back parlors with Federal-style mantles, door and window casings, a curved plaster wall, and delicate spindlework on the stairway. The dwelling was expanded between 1850 and 1860 and also featured some late Greek Revival details in its additions. However, a circa 1971 Early American restoration "pre-dated" the house through the use of applied, quasi-architectural treatments—such as faux hewn beams, vertical plank barn siding on walls, and composite brick veneers on chimney stacks—which attempted to lend a more rustic, "colonial" look to the once refined dwelling.[27] Another Delaware property, the Governor Benjamin Biggs Farm in Middletown, was described by an architectural historian in 1980 as an 1840 structure that had been "earlied up" by its last owner. The house "was very Victorian" when purchased, so the owner, apparently a descendent of the original builder, had "altered the structure externally to give it an 18th c. appearance."[28] Some of Robert Mitchell's renovations at 1749 Old

[25] Stephen, 9.
[26] Stephen, 9.
[27] For more information on the Thomas Lynam house (demolished 2020), see Catherine Morrissey, "The Thomas Lynam House," (Newark, Delaware: Center for Historic Architecture and Design, 2020).
[28] Delaware Cultural Resource Survey form for the Governor Benjamin T. Briggs Farm, CRS# N-6190, completed by Gretchen Fitting, May 1980.

Wilmington Road would create a similar effect in establishing architectural looks that at least slightly pre-dated the house.

Reinvention: New Additions—Blending Old and New in the Early American Style

Another type of Early American renovation was the construction of new additions featuring "historic" designs. Sometimes these renovations incorporated historic salvaged materials or reproduction materials in order to create a "historic" or "Colonial" feel, even for spaces that were quite obviously new or designed with modern architectural influence. This approach was, in fact, viewed by many as the ideal method for adapting old houses to modern needs. Architect George Stephen was a major proponent of this strategy and noted that "it is often possible to actually improve the original design by addition."[29] While some homeowners and builders preferred a clean break between old sections of a house and new additions, many sought to more seamlessly blend old and new portions of their homes by carrying forth at least some historic aesthetic in newly built spaces. As highlighted below, Robert Mitchell utilized this approach for many of his designs, including that for his own breakfast room addition. This design strategy was seen by many as a stylish compromise between the sometimes stark or cold effect of Modern architecture and the dark and cramped spaces sometimes common in historic houses, blending the "warmth" and patina of traditional rooms with the spaciousness, light, and comforts provided by newer design. In 1972, George Stephen warned against "thinking that *everything* old is esthetically good and *everything* new is esthetically bad—or that the two don't mix." Even while generally advocating for authenticity wherever possible, Stephen urged renovators of old houses to at least consider "the possibility of adding new modern elements carefully and sympathetically designed." He urged that, "when sensitively handled, such combinations of old and new architectural styles can be very attractive and exciting."[30]

Quasi-Architectural Materials to Create a "Setting"

Many house makeovers in the Early American style involved treatments with quasi-architectural materials—ranging from expensive, reclaimed historic house parts affixed to existing structural elements, to reproduction Colonial-era architectural features, to inexpensive synthetic building materials that imitated historic architectural parts. Such quasi-architectural features went beyond simply decorating, sometimes establishing a convincing illusion of a structural historic background. These architectural elements were often added as an additional, superfluous surface treatment, over original finishes or architectural elements. Such false architectural treatments were often an extension of an overall scheme for Early American decoration, working together with antiques, furnishings, and other decor to create a more effective historic aesthetic. In 1949, the Williamses pointed out that a room's "walls, trim, ceiling, and floor constitute the background for your furniture," and thus might determine whether or not the overall effect of the historic decor was successful or not.[31] An *Early American Life* article from 1970, entitled "Set a Stage," similarly discussed creating the proper Early American room through the use of "background treatments."[32] By replacing the wall coverings, floors, windows, and ceilings in any home, old or new, one could

[29] Stephen, 107.
[30] Stephen, 106-107.
[31] Williams, 10.
[32] "Set a Stage," *Early American Life*, 1970, 50.

"go a long way towards establishing the essential mood of the Early American room."[33] While historic homeowners who were the most serious about their restorations and renovations often pursued the salvage of antique house parts or high-quality reproduction materials, the market offered a wide array of products that helped owners of almost any house create veneers of early American rooms, sometimes even in tract-built suburban houses. Through the use of applied, quasi-architectural design treatments, everyday Americans could affordably create domestic settings featuring Early American characteristics.

Building Materials Used in Early American Renovations

Salvaged Materials

The salvage of historic building materials was most commonly a strategy in existing historic houses. The use of reclaimed or antique building parts could be limited to a single feature, like a historic fireplace mantle, to extensive installations with wholesale salvaged rooms, including paneling, doors, joists, hardware, mouldings, trim, and even fireplaces. One of the most famous examples of the latter approach—to create a total "historic background"—can be found at the Winterthur Museum in northern Delaware, which would prove to have a strong influence on the Mitchells and their house in Hockessin. At Winterthur, H. F. du Pont famously amassed during his lifetime (1880-1969) one of the largest and best collections of early American antiques in the country. As his extensive collection grew, du Pont repeatedly added large additions to his mansion to display the antiques, often in "period rooms" with antiques of similar styles or eras. To display his antiques in the most authentic environments possible, du Pont purchased and acquired several early historic houses in the eastern United States, so that he could salvage their architectural parts and rebuild the structures inside the museum as backdrops for the antiques. Especially early on, du Pont often altered the original architecture to fit the dimensions of his museum room—though over time, through the influence of architect Thomas Waterman, he seems to have become more serious about retaining the authenticity of the architecture. Still, it is clear that du Pont was most interested in the architectural features that could "provide suitable settings for his collection of material culture."[34]

While the extensive approach of reclaiming entire rooms was comparatively rare and used mostly by museum institutions and the occasional die hard restorationist, a very common approach to creating quasi-architectural settings in historic houses, and others, was the use of salvaged or reclaimed historic wood. Utilizing reclaimed lumber offered several advantages to Early American home restoration projects, many of which were laid out in "Building and Saving With Used Lumber," an article published in *Early American Life* the month before the U.S. Bicentennial. The author noted that, unlike new wood, "old lumber is well seasoned, dry, and usually easy to work."[35] Old lumber also featured a patina to it that could not be replicated through other methods, since

[33] "Set a Stage," 50.
[34] Emily Elizabeth Martin, "The Mansion House by the Bridge: An Account of the Henry Francis Du Pont Cottage at Winterthur," Masters Thesis (University of Delaware, May 2009), 14-15. Martin notes that du Pont's version of "saving a house [was] by dismantling it." According to Mrs. Reginald Rose, "Harry (H.F.) didn't have, in the beginning certainly, or perhaps at any time, the tremendous interest in preservation." Du Pont's interest in saving historic structures only applied to what he could salvage from them.
[35] C. Julian Fish, "Building and Saving With Used Lumber," *Early American Life*, June 1976, 52.

there was "no way in which artificial 'distressing' can duplicate the random marks of true age."[36] The author also observed that, at that time, old wood was typically less expensive than new lumber, suggesting that the savings was about "50% on average."[37] Lastly, besides the patina and charm afforded by reusing old pieces of board, or other lumber, "a bonanza of fine woodwork" could also be salvaged from old houses including trim pieces, moldings, cornices, and cabinets.[38] Many salvage specialists emerged during the mid-twentieth century, offering a broad range of historic house parts, often advertising them in classified advertisements in antiques, architecture, and history magazines.

While it is unknown if Robert Mitchell ever scouted for his own reclaimed lumber, he had a network of contractors from which he acquired historic materials. Intricate fireplace mantles, fancy mouldings, and other specialty items like columns and hardware could be more scarce and expensive, but a plentiful and more affordable building material was reclaimed plank wood—often valued more for its patina and rustic appearance than for its ability to match an authentic style or specific era of a house. In fact, a substantial amount of reclaimed antique wood seems to have come from barns, which was frequently offered for sale. For example, a typical classified ad published in 1972 offered "ANTIQUE BARN SIDING" of random widths, along with "HAND HEWN BEAMS" available in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The proprietor noted that the siding was "excellent for paneling."[39] Yet, for the more ambitious homeowner, they could even save money by cutting out the "middle man." In a 1976 article titled "Hunt and Haul," the author suggested a more time intensive way to acquire historic wood—stating for "the fortunate scavengers who are willing to devote a few hours on a week-end scouting" they could be rewarded by finding materials to salvage by spotting buildings "that are being removed or about to be torn down."[40] The author suggested that the easiest and most practical structures to target for salvage were one-story buildings, like "small barns, storage sheds, chicken houses, and even unused outhouses."[41]

Reproduction Materials

The salvage of historic materials for Early American renovations was likely limited mostly to historic property owners, but many more Americans could achieve Colonial-inspired rooms by utilizing reproduction materials. During this period, reproductions of almost every historic house part imaginable—from shutters, to mantles, to flooring—were advertised to Early American enthusiasts in order to achieve a "charming old look" in their homes. A 1970 article in *Early American Life* promised readers they would "be happy to discover how many wonderful reproductions are available at moderate prices," since they could "buy anything and everything you need and want for an Early American home."[42] It is important to note that many of these reproduction materials were not consumer items but were instead created by hundreds of individual carpenters and homeowners in customized installations. Yet many reproduction building parts were also advertised for sale. Like salvaged historic materials, wood elements were the most

[36] Fish, 52.
[37] Fish, 52.
[38] Fish, 52.
[39] Classified ad, *Early American Life,* August 1972, 56.
[40] "Hunt and Haul," *Early American Life,* June 1976, 52.
[41] "Hunt and Haul," 52.
[42] *Early American Life, 1970 Yearbook*, 1970, 74.

discussed and advertised type of reproduction home good—and often, the products were intentionally distressed by manufacturers or consumers to create a more authentic appearance. In a 1975 article by Margaret Graham Way, on "How to Build Board Floors," which offered "a method of aging new, wide pine boards so that nobody can tell they are new," the author stated that using wide pine board floors in your Early American home was a "must" and gave any space "a certificate of authenticity."[43] In several advertisements in the same periodical, a company named Guyon Structures, Inc. offered their reproduction "Pennsylvania Barn Siding."[44] This company, which first started producing barn siding in 1956, aimed their ads at "discriminating decorators, colonial remodelers, rustic home builders, designers and architects and others who want the real thing."[45] One of the company's ads explained the process of distressing their reproduction historic wood:

> We take selected pine boards...in random lengths and widths having a rough sawn face from the saw mill and have them kiln dried down...a ship lap is milled onto both edges. With a special tool, we gouge out the soft grain and areas around the knots, bite out "worm holes," and generally distress the face of the wood. The boards are then stained Light Grey, or Faded Red.[46]

While clearly a reproduction material, Guyon Structures, Inc. wanted their potential customers to know how seriously they took their products. In the same ad, it mentions that for the final installation of their reproduction barn wood, you should also purchase their reproduction "Olde Fashioned Wrought Nails" that "give an unusually authentic look of age."[47] Such reproduction barn siding and nails were used for the interior of the Thomas Lyman House near Wilmington, Delaware, which featured an identical treatment as an extra wall covering in its dining room, kitchen, and upstairs bathroom. Clearly, the authentic application of such quasi-architectural elements was not always viewed as important. A 1972 piece in *Early American Life*, for example, discussed using reproduction H or HL hinges to attach antique shutters on the inside of your house to lend a charming and "authentic" historic look. The author was quick to point out that "the purist would say that outside shutters should never be used inside, but if you have a first-floor powder room that yearns for early American beauty, you may find, as we did, that old shutters will provide the perfect touch."[48]

Imitative Materials

Perhaps the most interesting category of quasi-architectural materials during the post-World War II Early American movement was a wide variety of imitative products—often inexpensive—that were only meant to imply historic architecture or create the initial impression of an Early American atmosphere. Owners of historic houses—and even some newer ones—purchased many new

[43] *Early American Life,* August 1975, 38.
[44] Guyon Structures, Inc. advertisement, *Early American Life,* April 1973, 8; Guyon Structures Inc. advertisement, *Early American Life,* December 1973, 93; Guyon Structures, Inc. advertisement, *Early American Life,* October 1974, 81.
[45] Guyon Structures, Inc. advertisement, *Early American Life,* October 1974, 81.
[46] Guyon Structures, Inc. advertisement, *Early American Life,* April 1973, 8.
[47] Guyon Structures, Inc. advertisement, April 1973, 8.
[48] "Using Antique Shutters," *Early American Life,* August 1972, 46-47.

consumer materials manufactured to *appear* historic, though these architectural products varied widely in their success at achieving an "authentic" look. Some of these materials made little attempt to appear authentic, and instead only roughly mimicked historic aesthetics in new materials like plastics, particle board, and composites. For example, a 1976 article from *Early American Life* suggested cork and plastic tile as an appropriate floor treatment in historic themed rooms.[49] Wood paneling, like pine, "wormy" chestnut, and "pecky" cypress were also added to interiors to help set the overall "mood" of Early American rooms.[50] Plywood and laminate veneer paneling, often with knotty wood looks, was all the rage in the 1960s and 70s, even in many newer homes, especially in dens and recreation areas. During this same period, fake historic beams were produced in wood fiber, plastic, and foam materials.[51] These beams would sometimes be simply glued to the ceiling. One 1970 article in *Early American Life*, titled "Plastic Beams," observed that since "barns and houses are disappearing rapidly from the countryside as builders of traditional homes seek the timbers for their projects," then "maybe the answer is a plastic replica."[52] For many homeowners, replica or faux historic materials were an inexpensive and easy way to create an imitative Early American backdrop for their antiques or Early American decorations. Robert Mitchell does not seem to have ever used imitative materials in his own house, or at any of his other commissions as a carpenter, but his higher quality historic renovations were similarly intended to create a historic backdrop or setting for Early American decoration—in his case, with antiques.

Decorating in the Early American Style: Antiques & Reproductions

During the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, many Americans simply preferred to create Early American living spaces as a decorating approach, whether their houses were old or not. Though not usually "architectural" (permanently affixed), finishing interior spaces with antiques, reproduction furniture, and other historically inspired decorations was a central feature in the Early American domestic style. In fact, many Americans who did not actually own a historic house, or even a newly-built "Traditional" or "Colonial" house, still decorated their homes with a wide range of Early Americana—including wallpaper, lighting fixtures, furniture, wall hangings, draperies, and other historical knick-knacks. There is little in the way of scholarship about this decorating trend, but it has been frequently noticed and occasionally written about by design professionals and other bloggers, and its pervasiveness is readily apparent with even a cursory examination of Sears catalogues, furniture advertisements, and home magazines of the era.

While Early American-style decorating may have achieved its most successful and authentic expressions inside the natural settings of truly historic houses, especially using antiques, it was a widespread fashion trend that was adopted—though in differing ways—by people living in new subdivision "Colonials" or even houses that were not built in traditional styles. The trend was so popular that even families in new, modern styles of houses—including Ranches and Split-levels—sometimes renovated their interiors in the "early American" mode through decorations and even faux architectural elements. As early as 1949, Henry and Ottalie Williams' 1949 book, *How to*

[49] *Early American Life*, December 1976, 35; Williams, 9; 106.
[50] "Set a Stage," 50.
[51] "Costs," *Early American Life, 1970 Yearbook*, 1970, 34; "Set a Stage," 50; "Plastic Beams," *Early American Life*, Yearbook 1970, 159.
[52] "Set a Stage," 50.

Furnish Old American Houses, proclaimed that their serious decorating advice using antiques and reproductions applied "as much to the Colonial-type home built this year as to those structures which date back to the 18th and 19th centuries."[53] The Early American "effect," they suggested, "can be achieved with an old house or a new one," using "furniture that is antique or merely a good copy of one of the traditional styles."[54] Even Ranch-style houses were entirely madeover in the Early American style. The author of a 1973 article in the magazine *Early American Life* described in detail the transformation of her house (which she called "our early American"), which had "began as a typical ranch style home in a typical suburban development."[55] In justifying this "metamorphosis," she reasoned that "Americans revel in their heritage and it follows naturally that Early American architecture, decoration, and furnishings are overwhelmingly popular in domestic housing," but unfortunately, " the supply of authentic early American houses falls short of the number of people who would enjoy living in one." Fortunately, she noted, "the right mixture of ingenuity and energy can transform just about any house into a Colonial showplace."[56] The placement of furniture within historic interiors was a frequently discussed topic—and for antiques, the appropriate type of furniture for various house types and ages was seen as important to many tastemakers.

1749 Old Wilmington Road: Prototype & Laboratory for Early American Renovation

Robert and Patricia Mitchell's house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road is significant for its Early American-style architectural renovations and additions from the 1960s and 70s—and for serving as both an experimental prototype and as the home workshop for Robert Mitchell's similar historic renovations for many other clients in the region. Examples of Mitchell's Early American-style alterations are present throughout the dwelling, including exposed joists (sometimes reclaimed, sometimes recreated to look historic), large rustic bricks (in flooring and for fireplaces), mouldings and other millwork, Early American inspired built-in furniture, restoration hardware, vertical plank wood (for exterior siding and interior paneling), historic-styled shutters, and historic "lantern" lights. In Mitchell's house, and in many of his other commissions, these character-defining historical features were often applied in anachronistic ways that still allowed for a stylish, even modern aesthetic and feeling—including the use of large-scale rooms, vaulted ceilings, and modern types of windows (and thus a lot of light). To best understand Mitchell's Early American renovations at his own house, it is important to understand Robert Mitchell as a carpenter and designer.

Robert Mitchell as "Early American" Carpenter & Designer

Robert Mitchell's work as a carpenter, designer, and general contractor in Early American styles frequently included a well-to-do clientele, who were often historic homeowners sharing his interest in antiques and American history, and high-quality craftsmanship on projects that often required many months to execute. Mitchell's reputation as an excellent craftsman for work on historic structures was not necessarily because of a scholarly "authenticity" in his work (in the sense of attempting to accurately recreate architectural interiors). Instead, Mitchell's reputation for good historic carpentry and his success in a higher-end market was due to his excellent craftsmanship

[53] Williams, dust jacket.
[54] Williams, 2.
[55] *Early American Life*, October 1973, 68-69.
[56] *Early American Life*, October 1973, 68-69.

and his ability to create stylish designs by using reclaimed historic materials and new materials that looked historically appropriate—even in rooms that achieved a bright and overall modern feel.

Clientele

During his 40-year career as a "carpenter-contractor," spanning 1949 to 1989, Mitchell's client list featured many well-to-do historic homeowners in northern Delaware, including (then) U.S. Senator Joseph Biden, nationally-known antiques dealer David Stockwell, architect Robert Raley (involved in restorations of many distinguished historic properties, including the White House), and several other prominent historic houses in the region, including the Van Dyck House, a c. 1820 landmark in historic New Castle.[57] His specializations were additions and extensive remodels of historic properties, though he was known to occasionally build full houses, or take on small projects like built-ins, trim work, or alterations for houses both new and old. His usual brand of work was probably most affordable to a clientele with the means to pay for superior materials and, often, longer than usual project timelines.[58] Mitchell's significant work in this market segment was likely due to both his expertise and the quality of his craftsmanship, which put him in high demand with a specific clientele. Friend and former client Carol McKelvey recalls that people "in the know" all "knew that he did the best work," and that for historic homeowners who wanted quality work done, there "was no one at that period of time who was better to work with."[59] Similarly, electrician Bill Furry, a frequent subcontractor for Robert Mitchell, remembered that Mitchell "was in high demand" because he "was the only one doing this type of work," and so "if you had an old house or wanted a historic-style addition, there weren't many people you could call" if you wanted good quality.[60] Mitchell's business was almost entirely word-of-mouth, and, according to Furry, it seemed like there was "an inner-circle among that socioeconomic group and his name would be passed along."[61] Mitchell tended to be hired for projects that would take many months, often because of the historical design and materials, and he was often rehired by the same clients for later jobs, sometimes after many years had passed.[62] This level of demand may be why Mitchell himself once recalled that in "all the 40 years of being in business I never had the luxury of a 40 hour week."[63]

Quality craftsmanship

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[57] See property list; Bill Furry (electrician), phone interview with Michael J. Emmons, Jr., January 27, 2021.
[58] Electrician Bill Furry, who started working with Mitchell around 1975, remembers, "Working with people with money lent itself to his kind of work. You couldn't afford to do the work he did in a tract subdivision house. He primarily seemed to be in a well-to-do area, with people with a little money to spend, or people who could afford a nice-sized addition—and look appropriate. And that's why he worked in those kinds of places." Furry interview with Emmons.
[59] Carol and Jim McKelvey (clients of Robert Mitchell), phone interview with Michael J. Emmons, Jr., January 27, 2021.
[60] Furry interview with Emmons.
[61] Dr. Kathryn Pumphrey (daughter of Robert Mitchell), phone interview with Catherine Morrissey, Michael J. Emmons, Jr., and Kimberley Showell, March 9, 2020; Furry interview with Emmons.
[62] Mitchell's daughter, Dr. Kathryn Pumphrey, remembers that for many projects, "It was all custom work, and the people who contacted him for certain work, they were willing to wait a long time to get these things done." She adds that, "He was at these jobs for a long time, putting a lot of time into each of them." Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[63] Robert Mitchell, "Patricia and I," private collection, undated, 10.

The demand for Mitchell's work was not only because of his specialization in historic properties, but also because of his reputation for unparalleled quality of craftsmanship. Electrician Bill Furry recalls, "I never ran across anyone else who did what [Mitchell] did—good carpenters, sure—but he was a craftsman, very true to his trade."[64] Interviews with several of Mitchell's clients, subcontractors, and family members reveal a portrait of a craftsperson who was widely admired for his attention to detail and "getting it right," even to the point of occasional disagreements with clients and other tradespeople who wanted to cut corners or compromise.[65]

Historical Inspirations

One of the distinguishing factors of Robert Mitchell's career as a carpenter-contractor was his love of history and antiques, and the significant effect this had on his work. This was clearly a major factor in his specialization in historic-styled renovations—including the Early American renovations at his own house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road. It is unclear if Robert and Patricia Mitchell were passionate about history before purchasing their old house in 1958, or if it was living in an old house that helped foster their interest in history—but the house seemed to have played a significant role. Mitchell remembered that "Pat and I fell in love with the past" after buying their historic Hockessin house, and implied that this passion was most intensely expressed within their home, where friends who visited could appreciate not just their historic house, but also "all the furniture, china, [and] glassware [that] we live with every day in this home we love."[66] Of the house, Mitchell noted later in his life that, "Pat and I have often said we wish some of the folks that have lived in this house could return for a visit," and after listing some of those longtime owners from the nineteenth-century, he wondered, "How would these families feel when we told them we just started our 53rd year in this house?"[67]

Local history might have been one source of inspiration for their deep interest in the past and its physical remnants. Robert Mitchell's daughter, Dr. Kathryn Pumphrey, recalls that the Mitchells and their neighbors in Hockessin felt connected to American history through several events that

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[64] Furry interview with Emmons.

[65] Mitchell's daughter, Dr. Kathryn Pumphrey, recalls that he was "very particular about his work" and it "had to be done a certain way – and he would impress his opinions upon the people he worked with." She notes that "if they wanted to do something one way, he would try to convince them, 'Well that's really isn't the way it should be done.'" Mitchell's serious approach to design and detail is remembered by several people, all of whom recall stories of Mitchell telling property owners they needed to finish things in a particular way, even if it was against their original plans, because he believed it to be the most correct. Former client Don Deaven recalls that Mitchell was "very strict, and all business . . . everything had to be perfect with him," but while he could be "hard," he was also "on top of everything" and his work was "excellent." Electrician Bill Furry remembers with a laugh that, "It was gonna be Bob's way or no way.. . . and that was with the owners!" They might suggest things be done one way and Mitchell would say, "Nope, that's just not gonna look right," and he would stick to his principles Yet, universally, people note that Mitchell was not combative or disagreeable—he was just serious about his craft, and people respected him for that and enjoyed him as a person. Furry notes that, "You could have a disagreement with him, but he was never mean . . . He was a master of his trade and proud of it. Not in a boastful way, it was just who he was. He was really a gentleman." The McKelveys remember that Mitchell was very precise and exacting, and sometimes would calculate every board foot so precisely that he would leave with only a small bag of cast-off scrap material at the end of the day. He worked with "intensity" and he "knew just how he wanted it done." He was "an extraordinary human being."

[66] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 13-14.

[67] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 12.

had happened there. Besides the existence of the old Quaker meetinghouse and several historic properties just down the road, soldiers during the Revolutionary War had once swarmed the area before the Battle of the Brandywine. She recalls local lore that the British encampment stretched all along Old Wilmington Road, and that thousands of British soldiers had "pillaged that whole area, taking livestock and anything they could find" in Hockessin. She remembers during the 1960s that people would find things digging in their gardens, like cannonballs, buckles from colonial shoes, and so on. Yet the Mitchell family's interest in history went well beyond local legends, and Kathryn remembers they would often travel to historical destinations like Colonial Williamsburg.[68] Robert Mitchell connected these travels to historical places to the idea of stewardship, both in historic preservation and antique collecting. He pointed out around 2008 that he and Patricia "love old homes, furniture and all the hand-done pieces of the past that skillful people have lovingly created," which related to "most of the traveling we have done." He noted that they always traveled to "the old cities, towns, and villages," and in Europe, the "walled cities, castles, forts, cathedrals, and churches." These places, like the house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road and the many antiques the Mitchells collected, had "survived because there are so many people who love all this as we do."[69]

Robert Mitchell himself points to a single day in 1960 that highly influenced the Mitchells' renovations and decor at 1749 Old Wilmington Road, and by extension, probably shaped his life's work as a historic carpenter-contractor. He recalls a transformative visit to Henry F. du Pont's Winterthur Museum, just a few miles away from their home, about a year after purchasing their own historic house. During that fateful visit to the newly opened south wing of Winterthur, the Mitchells experienced an all-day tour featuring a chronological progression of period rooms, starting with the early William & Mary and Queen Anne rooms in the morning, then Chippendale and Federal style rooms in the afternoon. Their lunch was served in the evocative Kershner Parlor, "complete with pewter plates and 3-prong forks," and the immersive experience inspired the Mitchells. He remembers it was "a rather dark day," and "all the period lighting was so perfect," as the "candalite bulbs in all the sconces & chandeliers made us feel like we were living during the 1700's." The Mitchells "loved this feeling of stepping back in time."[70] This experience was so transformative that Robert Mitchell declared, "That one day at the Henry Francis Dupont Winterthur Museum set us on the path we have followed for 52 years."[71]

Through historic renovations, antiques collecting, and making reproduction furniture, Robert Mitchell discovered that he and Patricia could create a historic "mood" or "setting" at 1749 Old Wilmington Road that transported residents and visitors alike back in time, much like at the Winterthur Museum. Mitchell's daughter, Kathryn, remembers this type of ambiance being established in the Mitchell's own home, including "low lighting," which slowly became a showcase for antiques and historic architecture—creating an evocative historical feeling throughout much of the house.[72] Just as H. F. du Pont was most interested in architectural features that could "provide suitable settings for his collection of material culture" at Winterthur, Mitchell's

[68] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[69] Mitchell, "Pat & I," 13.
[70] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 12-13.
[71] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 12-13.
[72] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

design approach in his own house—as well as many of his clients—emphasized a stylized Early American architecture as a backdrop, against which antiques or reproduction furniture could be displayed.[73]

Role of Antiques & Reproduction Furniture

Antiques were central to the Mitchells' remodeling and decoration at 1749 Old Wilmington Road. Later in life, Mitchell himself hinted at the importance of antiques when he remembered that, for their first ten years at their house, "we did not have heat in the 2nd & 3rd floor bedrooms," and observed, "when you see the number of antiques we bought before '69, you can easily see where our priority was."[74] The Mitchells acquired at least 22 large antique pieces during their first decade in the Hockessin house, and 11 of those pieces were collected during their first two years of marriage. These included a large deacon bench, arrowback chairs, a tavern/trestle table, a hutch, a dry sink, and other tables and chairs (Figure 5). Antiquing was a part of family life during the 1960s, and the Mitchells' daughter Kathryn remembers spending "many Saturdays driving all through Pennsylvania, going to antiques stores . . . I can't tell you how many shops," and Robert Mitchell recalled his visits to certain antique shops were "a regular, monthly routine."[75] Documents written by Robert Mitchell in later years reveal that antiques connected him, and his home, with American history. For example, in a letter detailing their extensive antique collection, he wrote of their c. 1760 Chippendale desk, noting that it was created "probably ten to fifteen years before Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence," and "that gives me goose bumps."[76] Similarly, he noted that a pair of Windsor side chairs in their collection were of the "quality and vintage to be setting in Independence Hall during the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution."[77] Mitchell often linked his house and antiques to the imagined lives of their previous owners. In ruminating on a 300-year-old box desk in his collection, Mitchell wrote, "I wish it could talk to me"—a sentiment similar to others he expressed from time to time.[78]

Robert Mitchell created an additional dialogue with the past, and antiques, through his own craftsmanship—both as a historic house carpenter and as a reproduction furniture maker. By early 2008, at age 80, Mitchell proudly noted that "I have made 63 [reproduction] pieces and hope to design and make several more that I have been thinking about."[79] He recalled making "my first antique reproduction (marked no. 1) on October 15, 1966," a trestle table that became the Mitchell's dining room table. He remembered this moment, at age 39, as his "first real attempt at being a cabinetmaker," marking a clear elevation of skill in his trade.[80] Mitchell prided himself on crafting his reproduction furniture based on actual historic models and executing them with materials and finishes that helped them pass for true antiques. Mitchell's reproductions were based

[73] Emily Elizabeth Martin, "The Mansion House by the Bridge: An Account of the Henry Francis Du Pont Cottage at Winterthur," Masters Thesis (University of Delaware, May 2009), 14-15.
[74] Robert Mitchell, personal letter, written May-December, 2008, private collection, 10.
[75] Dr. Pumphrey phone interview; Mitchell, personal correspondence, letters, and loose papers.
[76] Mitchell, personal correspondence, letters, and loose papers.
[77] Mitchell, ell, personal correspondence, letters, and loose papers.
[78] Mitchell, personal correspondence, letters, and loose papers; Also, writing on a similarly old primitive bench, he wrote, "I wish it could talk!".
[79] Robert Mitchell, "Designed and Made by: Robert E. Mitchell 1749 Old Wilmington Road, Hockessin, Delaware," May 2008, private collection, 2.
[80] Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 2.

on a wide variety of sources, including antiques in his own collection. Winterthur Museum played a role in this activity, too, as friends recall Mitchell would sometimes go to the museum to study antiques for his reproductions.[81] Another source of design inspiration included antiques from the collection of David Stockwell, a client of Mitchell's historic carpentry business and a nationally known antiques dealer whose store was located in Wilmington near Winterthur.[82] He also consulted a wide variety of publications, including *The Magazine Antiques*, Wallace Nutting's *Furniture Treasury*, Helen Comstock's *American Furniture*, and antique auction catalogs.[83] Mitchell also sought to make his reproductions highly authentic through the reuse of historic materials. His notes about his reproduction pieces are filled with information about wood type, age, and source, such as his lowboys created with walnut from Pennsylvania, "about 140 years old."[84] Through the combination of historic materials, antique design sources, and Mitchell's own skill as an exacting craftsperson, his reproduction pieces received much praise for their skill and authenticity. Richard Driscoll, an antique appraiser, told Mitchell that his hanging cupboards "could pass as originals...to the average collector (Figure 6)."[85] During the early 1980s, Mitchell received many letters of praise after being selected to create several fine reproduction furniture pieces for the historic Emmanuel Episcopal Church on The Green of Historic New Castle, including a handcrafted altar and credence table.[86] In 1981, Stockwell told Mitchell that one of his reproduction cupboards was "beautiful," then removed an antique in his showroom and replaced it with Mitchell's reproduction. This was clearly a point of pride that Mitchell recalled decades later, "this was an important day in my life. I was very proud of my cupboard and of Mr. Stockwell's enthusiasm."[87]

Mitchell's Design Approach

Robert Mitchell's design approach for his reproduction furniture, and especially in his historic house renovations, combined historical design and details, as well as antique materials, without always seeking to exactly reproduce historical designs. For example, for some of his reproduction furniture, he would "scale down" the size, as when he created slant-front desks to be about 80% or 4/5ths the size of the originals.[88] He also would sometimes swap historical details to achieve a look he preferred, as with the lowboys he recreated based on details from a pair of different ones

[81] McKelvey interview with Emmons.
[82] Robert Mitchell, "Furniture Made by Me," undated, private collection; photos of antiques sold by Stockwell and copied by Mitchell are included in a set of papers now in his granddaughter's possession.
[83] Mitchell references the Nutting and Comstock books, as well as Israel Sack auction catalogs, in his records. His daughter, Kathryn, recalls, "We always had a copy [of *Antiques* magazine] floating around the house and I know that my father referred to them. We probably had a subscription. He also attended lectures and tours at Winterthur throughout the years. Additionally, I recall looking at books by Wallace Nutting with him when I was younger and Nutting's name has stuck with me all these years. We specifically perused the books on furniture, especially the ones on chests and Windsor chairs." Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[84] Robert Mitchell loose papers, undated, private collection.
[85] Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 6.
[86] Letter from Mary Jarvis to Robert Mitchell, undated, private collection; Letter from Calvin Marshall to Robert Mitchell, undated, private collection.
[87] Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 7-8.
[88] "Furniture Made By Me," Robert Mitchell loose papers, various sketches and notes, undated, private collection.

available from prominent antiques dealer Israel Sack (Figure 6).[89] He would also purposely distress reproductions in order to "give an older look," by using, for example, "smokey" glass in reproduction mirrors.[90] This willingness to alter original designs or detail was common in Mitchell's historic house renovations, as well, as in the case of a colonial house in Landenburg, Pennsylvania, where Mitchell urged the owners to move an original second-story window just seven inches, so it would better align with the first-floor entry door directly below.[91] The same clients hired Mitchell to design roof dormers for their second home, in Chestertown, Maryland, which "wasn't that old or special," but Mitchell designed the dormers to make the house "look older than it really was," in probably a higher style and older in appearance than the house.[92]

In general, Mitchell's designs were thus highly inspired by historical precedent, but sometimes included his own interpretations—and in the case with architectural additions and renovations, a touch of modern comforts and aesthetic. In work at his own house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road, and in many other commissions, Mitchell frequently utilized reused historic materials to enhance the authenticity and aesthetic effect of his work (including his reproduction antique furniture). Though he had probably reused old materials from the very beginning of his carpentry business, the first reference to him using historic lumber dates to a job in 1964 or 65, a time he recalled proudly saving three yellow pine floor joists from a c. 1755 log house he had moved and reconstructed for the Raley family in Greenville, Delaware. He later used those salvaged joists to create his first reproduction trestle table, in 1966.[93] Family members and acquaintances alike recall that Mitchell developed a whole network of contractors from whom he could acquire reclaimed lumber and other materials. Dr. Pumphrey remembers occasions when her father would hear that an old building was being taken down and would go to inspect the wood to see if there was "anything useful" for his projects. She also remembers him acquiring historic bricks that needed

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[89] His notes and drawings for the lowboy project noted he "preferred" a narrower shell design over a central fan motif; preferred a flattened arch apron with turned finials; and made a note to "change [the] profile of moulded top and notch [the] corners." See file called "From Israel Sack Catalog 1993 & 1980; My Design Taken From Both Lowboys," Robert Mitchell loose papers.

[90] Mitchell listed a pair of mirrors made in Chippendale style: "Both mirrors had "smokey glass" to give an older look." Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 3.

[91] Carol and Jim McKelvey remember this project as one of several they hired Mitchell for. She recalls the window was 7" off-center from the door below it, and Bob said "You've GOT to move it. You're doing it." He then made the window himself, doing all the millwork, using only oil paint" because it was more accurate. McKelvey interview with Emmons.

[92] McKelvey interview with Emmons.

[93] Mitchell notes in "Designed and Made" that, "I made my first antique reproduction (marked no. 1) on October 15, 1966. It was a trestle table. When completed it would be our dining room table. . . This being my first real attempt at being a cabinetmaker, I should tell you a little about the wood I have saved for this table. Saved is the word. 1966: About a year [before] I completed rebuilding two log houses for Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Raley. One was small and very early, believed to have been built by Swedish settlers around 1680. I dismantled and rebuilt this house on the Raley's property. At the same time I was starting on the interior of the other log house moved to the Raley location. This was a big one, 30' wide 36' long, two story with a finished attic (3rd floor) and country kitchen in the basement overlooking a lovely garden area. I worked on these two houses, plus a carriage house and greenhouse for two years, 1964 and 1965. . . . The large house was originally built in Chambersburg, PA in 1755. During the rebuilding of this log house I had come to remove a portion of three floor joists to provide an areaway for a second stairway to the attic. The top of this [reproduction trestle] table is long-leaf yellow pine cut in 1755. The floor joists I saved. They were 3" thick so I resawed the thickness making six pieces 1 ½" x 8" over 7' long. The trestle material is very old but not 1755." Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 1-2.

to be cleaned before they were reused in renovation projects.[94] One of his most consistent sources for historic materials was probably Sylvan Brandt in Lititz, Pennsylvania, who had begun dismantling historic buildings and selling their parts around 1960.[95] Carol and Jim McKelvey remember that the "guy in Lititz" was "very well-known in the area" for historic salvage, and "that's where Mitchell got a lot of his old stuff."[96] Mitchell's own records also show that he purchased antique lumber from Brandt on multiple occasions, at least well into the 1970s. Yet a receipt from May of 1977 also shows that he purchased a few hundred board feet of reclaimed lumber from the Wilmington Wrecking Company in Delaware, and it is likely that he purchased historic materials from a broad range of sources during the 1960s and 70s when he was renovating many historic houses, including his own at 1749 Old Wilmington Road. Though records do not apparently survive from his carpentry commissions, later letters from Mitchell to purchasers of his reproduction furniture often proudly noted the provenance of the materials used. For example, in February 1981, he wrote to one family that, "Your reproduction is made of old white pine that was taken from a warehouse in downtown Wilmington, Delaware . . . built in 1890; some of the secondary wood is poplar purchased in Jennersville, PA."[97] Some reproduction blanket chests from 1978 were made of "old pine" that was "barn siding from tobacco barn in Brickerville, Penn."[98] Don Deaven, who hired Mitchell to construct a historic-styled addition behind his Federal-era home in Hockessin, recalled that Mitchell obtained stone for the fireplace from an old barn foundation in Pennsylvania, a large lintel beam from the same barn (or perhaps another one), and the wood flooring from a 19th-century courthouse in Dover, Delaware.[99] Mitchell seemed to always be collecting historic building materials for future projects, and friends recalled that when Robert Mitchell passed away in 2015, there was "an enormous amount of lumber" still remaining at his house.[100]

Where actual historic materials were not possible or practical, Robert Mitchell would reproduce the appearance of historic architectural elements. Several people recall that Mitchell would use historic tools in an attempt to recreate the workmanship and appearance of historic finishes. Electrician Bill Furry remembers that Mitchell had "a fairly extensive collection of woodworking tools, that were definitely old themselves," and he worked with these older tools "because he felt like that gave the true character to the wood, like it used to be." He would sometimes even use an older style hand saw instead of an electrical reciprocating saw, and "he would cut things with a hand auger or chisel instead of a modern router or whatever."[101] He would also occasionally use a lathe to turn rounded wooden elements.[102] Reproduction historic hardware also played a major role in Mitchell's designs. These included historic styled doorknobs, lockboxes, thumb latches, cabinet hardware, and more. His primary source for these historic recreations was Ball & Ball Hardware Reproductions in Exton, Pennsylvania—about a forty-minute drive from Mitchell's home. In later

[94] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[95] Mitchell, "Designed and Made," 5; website of Sylvan Brandt, LLC; Dean Brandt (Owner of Sylvan Brandt LLC) phone interview with Michael J. Emmons, Jr., February 12, 2021.
[96] McKelvey interview with Emmons.
[97] Correspondence from Robert Mitchell to Becky & Bill (no last name given), February 6, 1981, private collection.
[98] Mitchell, "Furniture Made by Me."
[99] Don Deaven (client of Robert Mitchell), phone interview with Michael J. Emmons, Jr., January 31, 2021.
[100] McKelvey interview with Emmons.
[101] Furry interview with Emmons.
[102] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

years, Mitchell's son, David, worked for Ball & Ball and started his own reproduction hardware business, and Mitchell occasionally used some of David's products, as well.[103] As with his reproduction furniture, Mitchell would use techniques to "age" elements in his designs, so that they looked more authentic or historic. Multiple people recall such techniques with new windows, including the use of old tools, oil paints, and "weather stressing" to create a historic or "aged" look. Furry remembers that by the time he was done, you might think that new window came over on the Mayflower or something."[104]

Robert Mitchell's business stationary for his carpenter-contractor work contained the tagline, "Specializing in the Restoration of 18th and Early 19th Century Homes," but the second tagline better captured his true specialty: "Additions, and Alteration Work in Keeping With This Period" (Figure 3).[105] While complete records do not exist, academic "restorations" of historic houses never seemed to have been Mitchell's primary work, but instead, his designs and finishes tended to be more creative—and inspired by his love of history, antiques, and old houses. Working often on historic houses, Mitchell excelled in constructing highly customized new additions and extensive renovations to create backdrops of Early American architecture suitable for modern living.[106] Mitchell's design approach thus created the illusion of old design, "in keeping with" the 18th and 19th centuries, by combining quality craftsmanship, authentic historic materials, and carefully executed reproduction materials—all while leaving room for modern comforts and sensibilities. His own house in many ways exemplified this design approach.

1749 Old Wilmington Road: Mitchell's Early American Design Features at Home

The majority of the visible material fabric of the Mitchell House is reflective of its Early American style alterations, executed by Robert Mitchell mostly during the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s.[107] While new research and careful examination of the house has revealed that the original dwelling was built c. 1865-1870, Robert Mitchell's belief that the house had been constructed during the 1820s (probably around 1828) led to a creative, historical renovation that "pre-dated" the house's actual original architecture.[108] Mitchell thus used the house as a canvas to craft his vision of an Early American aesthetic through anachronistic architectural modifications that created an evocative stage set for his antiques and reproduction furniture. The Mitchell House also

[103] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[104] McKelvey interview with Emmons; Furry interview with Emmons.
[105] Robert Mitchell loose papers, business stationary, undated, private collection.
[106] Electrical Bill Furry, who "probably worked on 30 or even 40 jobs" with Mitchell, recalls that Mitchell "did additions way more than he did new constructions" or pure restorations. Furry interview with Emmons.
[107] Mitchell recalls, in "Pat and I," that they were already working on the Hockessin house in spring of 1958, four months before they were married. His daughter, Dr. Kathryn Pumphrey, also remembers, "There was a lot going on in our house, even as we moved in, he was working on it. And that was 1959. . . He was always working on certain things, the whole time we lived there." Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[108] The best evidence of Robert Mitchell's beliefs about the build date of the house was his business stationary (undated), which claims a c. 1828 date for the "Mitchell-Hyde-Owens House." In one recollection ("Pat and I"), he stated that the house was "believed to be about 120 years old" when they bought it in 1958, placing the build date around 1838 (it is unclear if this was just a miscalculation, and he meant 130 years, and thus 1828). Mitchell's daughter, in a recent phone interview, recalled that he "believed it to be between 1823 and 1826" in a phone interview. Towards the end of his life, in the letter titled "Pat and I," he revealed that he believed the house might have been built even earlier, in 1820, noting, "Recently, by way of the internet, this house was built in 1820. We have documented papers from 1845 when David Owens purchased this property, that this house was here."

blends some modern architectural trends contemporary to the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the Early American movement's sometimes fascinating interplay between traditional and modernist themes and forms. The Mitchells' house at 1749 Old Wilmington Road, besides being a strong and intact example of Early American style renovations, also served as a prototype or experimental workshop for Robert Mitchell's many other commissions that were executed in the Early American style, helping him develop what would become his signature design approach.[109] This design approach is highlighted here with the Early American design features at his own property at 1749 Old Wilmington Road, while the following section demonstrates these signature Mitchell design elements at other prominent historic properties in the region.

Exterior 'Early American' Treatments

The exterior of the Mitchell house features several architectural treatments and decorative elements, added after the Mitchells purchased the house in 1958, to achieve an Early American feel to the property. All of Mitchell's additions to the dwelling, including the breakfast room, the workshop extension, and the later attic-level master bedroom, feature vertical plank wood siding for a more traditional look. Almost all of the wood windows are double-hung with six-over-six lights, windows typically found on early nineteenth century Federal or Greek Revival era dwellings. The house also features multi-light casement windows in the dormers and smaller bays, a look that typically suggests an even older Early American or "Colonial" aesthetic. Most windows also feature operable raised-paneled shutters, made by Mitchell, with reproduction hammered metal shutter dogs, manufactured to look rustic and hand-forged. Windows in the new additions also feature mouldings or trim that were typical for pre-Civil War era houses in this region. Mitchell added lantern-style exterior light fixtures to several walls, including two flanking the front door, one on the side of the house's main block (to illuminate the new entrance into the breakfast room addition), two more planking the floating "shoppe' window on the breakfast room addition, one on the other side of the house to light the side door from the dining room, and, later, another pair to illuminate the third-floor rear balcony (off the new master bedroom addition). During the 1960s, Mitchell also added a "pent" roof on the facade between the first and second stories, a feature that was common on eighteenth-century brick houses in the Mid-Atlantic. Decorative elements also add to the Early American theme. The front exterior door leading into the breakfast room addition, which served as the primary entrance to the house after its construction, features a heavy brass knocker designed in an eagle motif that is an interpretation of the Great Seal of the United States, with the eagle clutching arrows and an olive branch, holding a banner its beak (these banners often contain the motto "*E. Pluribus Unum*," though not in this case), with a shield in front of its body. Above the garage and workshop addition, at the roof ridge, a large weathervane features a horse and carriage design, evoking the romance of a bygone era.

While the majority of Mitchell's renovations were decidedly in the Colonial or Early American vein, several exterior elements reflect later styles and trends that might actually be the most appropriate for the build date of the house. For example, Mitchell designed a Gothic Revival

[109] When discussing the "historic" joists Mitchell installed in the front rooms of the house, Mitchell's daughter Kathryn remembers that it was to "make it look more historic, based on things he had seen, maybe in Williamsburg or wherever we had gone," but also that it was an opportunity for Mitchell to "kind of use our house as a testing ground, to experiment a little bit" to see what worked well for historic renovations. Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

bargeboard trim with drop pendants (the pattern for which is still hanging in the workshop) and applied it to the gables along the Period I main block, the Period II addition, as well as the workshop.[110] This trim unmistakably strays from Mitchell's attempt to mimic the period in which he thought the house to date. Under the "pent" roof above the porch, he also added scrolled, Victorian styled wooden brackets that are of a similar style to the scrollwork found on many Victorian-era porches in the Delaware River valley (on houses of a similar age to his own, 1860s-1880s). Window hoods above three windows on the southeast elevation also seem to generally mimic the design approaches of several mid-nineteenth century Victorian styles. The vertical board exterior on the rear garage/workshop addition and the rear screen porch features is in the "board and batten" style, typical during the Gothic Revival era. Mitchell's design goals were not likely shifting; instead, he was incorporating later designs alongside the colonial ones, subtly suggesting a more layered, naturally evolved-over-time look, as opposed to that of a single campaign of rehistoricizing the dwelling. In effect, and perhaps counterintuitively, the design choices lend visual credibility to the dwelling being older than it actually is.

Exposed "Historic" Joists

Perhaps representing Mitchell's most signature touch are the quasi-architectural "exposed joists" found attached to the ceilings in the Period I hall and parlor, as well as in the second story rear bedroom in the Period II addition to the dwelling. In the hall and parlor, these false beams are whitewashed and roughly chamfered, intentionally creating a rustic appearance that would likely pre-date even an 1828 house in the Mid-Atlantic. Upon close inspection, there are visible plug holes hiding the screws used to attach the beams to the real architectural joists hidden above the ceiling (Figure 7). The dimensional lumber used in the creation of the faux joists is another giveaway of their true age, and suggests that, in this instance, Mitchell was less concerned about strict authenticity and was probably conducting some early experimentation with the creation of such a traditional-looking alteration, executed in the mid-to-late 1960s.[111] The exposed joists used in the lower-level of the workshop/garage expansion and the rafters for the rear porch addition appear to be the same dimensional lumber—but unadulterated with "chamfers." Mitchell later recreated this "exposed joist" or "exposed rafter" look in other commissions with a more "authentic" application. The evolution of his design approach for these joists is evident even within the Mitchell House itself, where the Period IV Mitchell-era eat-in dining addition, constructed in the early 1970s, features beaded joists that appear to be authentic architectural salvage, versus modern dimensional lumber altered to look older.

"Colonial" Brick

The incorporation of brick for "Colonial" flair is another touchstone of Mitchell's alteration and renovation work, and is found throughout the Mitchell House in various applications. Some of the brick is likely salvaged material.[112] Since the original dwelling was built during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and featured stove heating (and thus lacked fireplaces), Mitchell created a more

[110] Mitchell's daughter Kathryn recalled that he created the pattern for the bargeboard. "He did that – I remember him making that. I think he just created it" with his own design. She also stated that the bargeboard was created and hung on the exterior "very early" on, after the family started residing in the house in 1959. Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[111] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[112] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

visually distinctive (and perhaps more "historic" looking) heating stove area in the living room (hall) by using rustic, pitted bricks with surface undulations to create a large platform and wall surround for an antique Franklin stove. The historic look was enhanced by laying the bricks with their largest surface facing forward (sometimes called the "shiner" or "bed" side), lending a larger and perhaps more rudimentary appearance to the brickwork. Later, for the sunken dining addition to the kitchen, Mitchell created a brick floor (which he labeled a "pavement brick floor" laid "on concrete") laid in running bond, while the rear patio features a similar brick floor laid in a herringbone pattern—both examples suggesting a more rustic, "historic" aesthetic, in new additions constructed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. These "pavement brick floors" helped create an effective early American appearance or "feel" to the rooms, even if it was actually rare for eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century houses to feature interior brick flooring. For the new corner fireplace in the kitchen dining addition, which was only faced with brick (its construction with concrete cinder blocks is visible from within the garage), it is unclear if Mitchell used the same brick type or instead used reclaimed historic brick. These facing bricks are slightly different in appearance and might exhibit stains of older whitewash or mortar—though this "distressing" or intentional patina may have been a Mitchell effect. Lastly, Mitchell also used brick for the walls of the reconstructed porch in front of the Period I main block, though in a design that did not resemble historic porches from the 18th or 19th centuries.

Early American Woodwork: Millwork, Built-Ins, and Doors

During his extensive renovations, Robert Mitchell incorporated reproduction woodwork throughout the interior of his house. Such woodwork includes the widespread application of millwork (like mouldings and trim), vertical board wainscotting, built-in cabinetry with raised panels, and colonial-style doors. One of the first projects undertaken by Mitchell at the house, around 1959, was the opening of the boxed stairway—where he removed part of the partition wall between the living room and the stairway, then added the straight banister with beaded square balustrades, as well as a square newel post.[113] The interior of the dwelling features Classical moulded trim on the door surrounds, the windows, and the fireplace in the breakfast room addition—most of which seem to have been created by Mitchell. He also added a number of built-in cabinets, shelves, and other furniture with Early American mouldings and trim, including raised-panel doors, beaded plank doors, crown mouldings, though the use of built-in furniture was not actually widespread until the Arts & Crafts movement in the late-nineteenth century.[114] Rooms in the Mitchell House featuring built-ins include a desk with cabinets and shelving in the parlor; a desk, cabinets, and dresser in the bedroom over the parlor; cabinets in the Period II bedroom over the dining room; and built-in cabinets in the chimney stack in the breakfast room. He also added heavy Classical mouldings to trim out other architectural features, like above the encased stone wall projecting into the dining room and at the "bar" style table top affixed to the house in the rear screen porch/patio area. Mitchell also utilized vertical plank wainscotting in many rooms, including the dining room, the kitchen, and the exterior wall of the kitchen (below the "bar." The wainscotting is typically of random width with a beaded-edge, giving both rooms a more historic

[113] Daughter Kathryn recalls that "he opened up that staircase early on…maybe was even done when we moved in [1959], or shortly after we moved in." Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[114] Gordon Brock, "The Use of Built-Ins: A brief history of built-ins, which became popular during the Arts & Crafts movement as a quest for simplicity, health, and design unity," *Old House Online*, Updated October 26, 2018, accessed at https://www.oldhouseonline.com/interiors-and-decor/the-role-of-built-ins.

feeling. The application of most of the wainscotting likely dates to the early 1970s, when the kitchen was renovated and the breakfast room was added.[115] The kitchen renovation also featured Early American inspired, custom-made, vertical board cabinets, similar in feeling to the wainscotting, but uniform in width. Lastly, nearly every interior door in the Mitchell house is creed with vertical wood plank or beadboard, outfitted with reproduction thumb latch hardware.

Restoration Hardware

Restoration hardware was a significant part of the finish in Mitchell's Early American renovations (as well as his reproduction furniture). Such hardware in the Mitchell house included lock boxes, thumb latches, slide bolts, door handles, doorknobs, and shutter dogs. Much of this reproduction hardware was purchased from Ball & Ball Hardware Reproductions, located in Exton, Pennsylvania. Other pieces, including the interior rim lock box on the front door, were created by the Mitchells' son, David, who apprenticed at Ball & Ball at one time and later went on to found his own reproduction hardware company. Mitchell sometimes used David's hardware for other renovations. At least one lock box at the Mitchell might be a true antique. The rim lock on the new primary entrance (situated on the facade of the breakfast room addition) appears to be an actual antique lockbox and not restoration hardware, created by "Carpenter & Co Patentees" in England, and probably dates to the 1830s or 40s.[116] There is, however, a similar lockbox on a door at the Biden-Deaven House that Mitchell also renovated around the same time, so it is unclear if they are both antiques or both reproductions.

Antiques & Reproduction Furniture

The Early American style renovations at the Mitchell's house (and those of several of his clients) was at least partially motivated by the desire to create a sympathetic backdrop or setting for the display of antiques and reproduction furniture. By late 1973, when Robert Mitchell designed his new breakfast room, he and Patricia had collected at least 30 antique furniture pieces. Mitchell's 1973 architectural drawing for the breakfast room addition showed that he planned the placement of specific antiques as carefully as he did the actual architectural features. Besides plotting out the location of the new "historic" corner fireplace and the "pavement brick floor" over concrete, he sketched in the location of historic "peg rails" on three walls, a built-in corner cupboard, and several antiques, including a dry sink, a Windsor chair, a desk and chair, and a gate-leg table with chairs (Figure 4). Antiques, in fact, filled nearly every room of the Mitchell house, and it is clear that the Mitchells often shopped for antiques while considering their placement in specific areas of the house. The brick surround Mitchell constructed in the living room shortly after moving into the house was likely built to accommodate their antique Franklin stove purchased in 1958.[117] In 2008, when recalling the acquisitions of their various antiques over the years, Mitchell sometimes mentioned that they would consider how antiques that would "fit" or belong in certain rooms. For example, when discovering an antique hutch in Pennsylvania, he remembers "I could picture this hutch (cupboard) in our dining room," and for another piece, a country ladderback chair, he was

[115] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[116] See Jim Evans, "A Gazetteer of Lock and Key Makers," 2002, at: http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/Museum/locks/gazetteer/gazc.htm, and "Ye Olde Rim Lock," (December 10, 2013) at Fine Artist Made blog: https://www.fineartistmade.com/blog/blog-detail.php?Ye-Ole-Rim-Lock-76 .
[117] Robert Mitchell, "Furniture," undated, private collection.

satisfied that "this rocker fits so well in this little bedroom on the third floor."[118] To the Mitchells, the historic house and antiques were almost a single entity, and Mitchell recalled his satisfaction that their "loving family and lifelong friends" could "appreciate all the furniture, china, glassware, we live with every day in this home we love," including "all the [reproduction] furniture I have made."[119] The Mitchells used and displayed several of Robert's reproduction antique furniture pieces throughout the house, including the original trestle table he created in 1966, which still served as the dining room table in 2008. Pat's historic handiwork was also displayed in the house, since after 1980, she took classes and became quite skilled in crewel embroidery, and she had 17 pieces displayed throughout the house.[120]

Letting in the Modern: Mitchell's Contemporary Architectural Design Features

Despite Robert Mitchell's desire to create an "Early American" brand of architecture that would serve as a strong backdrop for his and Pat's beloved antiques, he was not preoccupied with creating exact recreations of historic rooms, and in fact introduced several modern architectural features to his renovations. For example, his breakfast room ceiling, which featured historic reclaimed joists with beaded edges, were angled and vaulted to create a soaring, sloping ceiling and roofline. Channeling the popular "shed" style of architecture prevalent during the 1970s, this sloping roofline was punctuated by a band of modern clerestory windows to illuminate the room from above. The flooring, laid with rustic-looking brick to lend a historic appearance, was actually not a typical feature in historic houses and perhaps most resembled modern tile flooring. The flooring in the entry hall, powder room, and kitchen was linoleum, of a modern color and design and not of any particular historical look. Lastly, though his oriel or projecting bay window in the room had windows with many lights, lending it a historic "shoppe" window appearance, this large window feature—and the light it allowed into the space—was quite modern. In general, Mitchell was perfectly willing to compromise architectural authenticity for modern materials and forms when it suited him (and his clients). For example, soon after purchasing his house, when he rebuilt the front porch, which was "wooden" and "deteriorated," he chose to use a brick foundation and created a raised platform with poured concrete, rather than attempt an "authentic" early-nineteenth century porch.

Robert Mitchell's Workshop & Workbench: A Laboratory for Early American Carpentry

Though not an Early American feature, per se, the workshop of Robert Mitchell survives partially intact, and serves to commemorate the Early American carpentry and reproduction furniture work performed by Mitchell for his own house and those of his clients. The workshop was one of the first projects after Robert and Patricia Mitchell purchased 1749 Old Wilmington Road in 1959. Robert quickly got to work to expand the garage, nearly doubling its original size, creating more room to park a vehicle downstairs, and upstairs, expanding the embanked garage loft to the rear to form a large workshop room with large screen windows.[121] This expansion created significantly

[118] Mitchell, Personal correspondence, letters, and loose papers.
[119] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 13-14.
[120] Mitchell, "Pat and I," 14.
[121] The stone foundation of the workshop was also reworked along the northeast elevation, digging further into the embankment to create garage space. The wall, hidden below ground and at the rear of the garage space, was rebuilt with concrete block, with the stone likely reused in the creation of the retaining wall for the patio at the rear of the dwelling—the incorporation of salvaged materials being a hallmark of Mitchell's work.

more space for Mitchell's carpentry work, and the bank of windows along the northeast elevation helped illuminate the workshop with natural light. The expanded garage loft/workshop provided ample storage for lumber, both on overhead collar ties and on the floor, and a corner workspace at the top of the garage stairs. Here, Mitchell situated his workbench with a vice near the sunlight of the rear windows. The wall to the left of the workbench still features many of Mitchell's carefully arranged patterns and samples of mouldings, trim, reproduction furniture parts, and other architectural elements—including the gingerbread verge board for his own house. It was here, in this workshop, that Mitchell created so many of the architectural elements for his own Early American renovations, but also for so many clients similarly renovating their homes in Early American designs. A handful of properties on which Mitchell was commissioned to work, which were studied in person or via photographs, directly reflect or even expand on the prototypical "Early American" features found in the Mitchell House.

Mitchell's Other Commissions: Spreading His Early American Style

The significance of Robert Mitchell's work at his own property becomes more apparent as one studies his other commissions, where clear patterns emerge—and the similarities in design demonstrate that Mitchell both participated in and helped to spread a particular brand of Early American renovations, based out of his own workshop and experimental lab at 1749 Old Wilmington Road. Mitchell was hired to perform extensive "Early American" additions and renovations on at least two dozen historic properties—many resulting in highly similar features to his own house—including exposed joists, brick floors, traditional fireplaces, traditional woodwork, and restoration hardware. Mitchell began his work as a carpenter in 1949, at age 22, and worked for 40 years, retiring from contracting work in 1989. Most of his work on historic properties, executed with Early American design principles, occurred between 1960 and 1989, after he purchased his own house and experimented with historic-themed renovations.[122] As covered above, it seems Mitchell's passion for antiques, combined with his reputation for fine craftsmanship in Early American styles, led to a strong word-of-mouth network of referrals. This likely suited Mitchell quite well, since people recall that he particularly enjoyed working with clients who shared his interests and passions—especially for antiques and historic preservation.[123]

Robert Raley House (Greenville, Delaware)

An early and particularly influential project for Mitchell was his collaboration with preservation architect Robert Raley, who was a prominent restoration architect who was retained for dozens of high-profile properties, including at Winterthur Museum and at the White House in Washington D.C. In 1965, Raley first contacted Mitchell to help move, rebuild, and renovate a pair of early Pennsylvania log houses, one reputedly dating to 1680 and another circa 1755. These log buildings

[122] In 2010, Mitchell recalled, "At age 22, I started my little wood working shop in a double garage across the street from this house we were all living in. But by the time Kathy was born I was also doing construction work as well as my shop work. I was working at least six days a week, but I did try to spend as much time with Kathy as possible. Answering all my phone calls inquiring about prospective work, visiting people's homes and places of business, making sketches, drawings and giving estimates was very demanding. All the 40 years of being in business I never had the luxury of a 40 hour week." "Pat and I," 10. In another document, Mitchell notes that, "I didn't retire until 1989." Designed and Made, 7.

[123] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell; Carol Kipp, "Formula for a House with Character," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, DE), October 9, 2011.

were dismantled and moved to 800 Center Mill Road, near Greenville, Delaware, to use as Raley's personal residence.[124] The structures were rebuilt on an embanked fieldstone foundation, with a full story walkout at the rear of the residence. The kitchen, built at this lower level, clearly evidences Mitchell's touch—most obviously with its whitewashed, exposed joists overhead and a unique raised and arched brick oven, suggestive of a bread oven. Throughout the dwelling is other evidence of Mitchell's handiwork, with paneled wood doors, vertical board wall treatments, and Federal-inspired mouldings and built-ins that appear to be the same profile as those found in the Mitchell House. An outdoor brick patio is laid in a herringbone pattern, the same as in the rear patio at the Mitchell House, and a pent roof shelters the full-height lower level exposed at the rear of the dwelling, also like in the front porch at the Mitchell House. He was apparently hired by Raley for multiple projects over the years, including work on a carriage house and even a greenhouse.[125]

David Stockwell House (aka, "Log Folly," Greenville, Delaware)

David Stockwell, a nationally-known antiques dealer throughout the mid-twentieth century, commissioned Mitchell for work on "Log Folly," his residence located at 33 Old Guyencourt Road, near Greenville, Delaware, starting in the late-1960s. Mitchell had first met Stockwell and his wife when they hired him to renovate another Wilmington house almost 20 years earlier, in 1951. Mitchell started work on Log Folly in 1969, including building a "huge addition" for the house, and continued working with him on various interior projects over a period of about ten years.[126] The dwelling, another log and stone house moved from Pennsylvania and expanded, features a number of hallmark Mitchell design elements in his Early American style—several rooms with rusticated brick floors and exterior brick patios in a herringbone pattern; paneled wood doors with reproduction Early American hardware and paneled wall treatments; as well as Federal style mouldings and built-ins, including a formal living room with a wall of built-in cabinetry incorporating a fireplace; and a porch addition with vaulted ceilings featuring exposed joists that appear to be reused architectural salvage, juxtaposed with skylights for a historic-meets-modern, "naturally layered" look—with similarities to Mitchell's work in his own house and at several other commissions. Mitchell also performed renovation work at the Barley Mill House that served as Stockwell's antiques business headquarters.[127]

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[124] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell; Kipp.

[125] Mitchell recalls "rebuilding two log houses for Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Raley. One was small and very early, believed to have been built by Swedish settlers around 1680. I dismantled and rebuilt this house on the Raley's property. At the same time I was starting on the interior of the other log house moved to the Raley location. This was a big one, 30' wide 36' long, two story with a finished attic (3rd floor) and country kitchen in the basement overlooking a lovely garden area. I worked on these two houses, plus a carriage house and greenhouse for two years, 1964 and 1965 . . . The large house was originally built in Chambersburg, PA in 1755. During the rebuilding of this log house I had come to remove a portion of three floor joists." See "Designed and Made," p. 1-2.

[126] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

[127] Mitchell remembers, "Shortly after starting my little carpenter contracting business in 1949, probably about '51, I started doing some work for Mr. and Mrs. David Stockwell. They lived on Nottingham Road in Wawaset Park at the time. The work was minor alterations and repairs. Little did I know at the time, that years later I would be building a huge addition on "Log Folly." A years work, and work at the Barley Mill House [that was] Mr. Stockwell's antique business headquarters. Mr. and Mrs. Stockwell at times treated me more like a very close friend than a carpenter contractor all those years. I have many happy stories I would like to take time to tell." See "Designed & Made," 7.

Joseph R. Biden House (North Star, Delaware)
In the early 1970s, future U.S. President and then-junior U.S. Senator for the State of Delaware, Joe Biden, commissioned Mitchell to complete renovations at his home at 228 North Star Road near Hockessin, Delaware (Figure 8). Mitchell completed a two-story rear addition for the Bidens, with a den downstairs and a master bedroom upstairs. The den features typical Mitchell approaches to Early American design, including heavy crown mouldings around its entire perimeter, with all walls featuring elaborate built-ins, as well as floor-to-ceiling paneling and chair rails. The fireplace wall features crossetted mouldings around the fireplace and raised paneling covering the entire wall, with two projecting built-in cabinets with raised paneling. The fireplace hearth also is laid in rustic brick like those used in Mitchell's house. The rear wall features a full-width built-in feature with bookshelves flanking a window and raised-panel cabinets below. Off the formal dining room and kitchen, on the east side of their house, the Bidens also hired Mitchell to create an enclosed sunroom addition, which features a herringbone brick floor (again, using the same rustic brick as in Mitchell's own house and in other commissions), as well as an angled roofline overhead (though plastered), similar to other Mitchell projects. The doorway Mitchell installed between the porch and formal dining room features coffered paneling and a raised panel door, with a reproduction historic lockbox.

The Bidens later sold their house to the Deaven family, and they, too, hired Mitchell for additional work on the home in the early 1980s. Most significantly, the Deavens had Mitchell build a large, Colonial-inspired dining room addition off the back of the kitchen. This room employed not only Early American styling, but also Mitchell's tendency to incorporate reclaimed/salvaged historic materials. It features a walk-in stone cooking hearth and arched brick bread oven, with a large, wood lintel (the stone and wood salvaged from a barn in Pennsylvania), a creation said to have been inspired by one observed at the Revolutionary War headquarters of Marquis de Lafayette at the Brandywine Battlefield in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.[128] Massive, exposed, hand-hewn joists run overhead, which were salvaged from a different barn in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, while the historic wood floors were salvaged from the nineteenth-century City Hall in Dover, Delaware, when it was dismantled.[129] The room also features a "shoppe" front type bay window with a deep sill, like that found on the breakfast room addition at the Mitchell House. Furthermore, the exterior of this addition is clad in vertical board, and the exterior of the entire dwelling features paneled shutters like those found at the Mitchell House, finished with the same reproduction "hammered" shutter dogs. The Deavens also hired Mitchell to do other, smaller historical-style work, including the installation of crown mouldings in the living room and formal dining room.[130]

Kensey Johns Van Dyke House (New Castle, Delaware)
In Old New Castle, the National Register-listed Kensey Johns Van Dyke House (contributing building to the New Castle Historic District NR # 84000312), located at 300 Delaware Street, is another Mitchell project, commissioned by former owner and antiques collector Calvin

[128] Deaven interview with Emmons.
[129] Deaven interview with Emmons.
[130] Deaven interview with Emmons.

Marshall.[131] While the Van Dyke House is actually an historic, Federal period residence retaining what appears to be many of its original features throughout, Mitchell's touch is evident, nevertheless. In the basement, a bar room was created and historicized with a stretcher bond rustic brick floor, salvaged joists overhead bearing robbed pockets, and a brick bar with a moulded ledge that looks similar to the one built within the rear porch of the Mitchell House. A rear porch addition to the Van Dyke House is also apparently the work of Mitchell, featuring a herringbone brick floor and exposed joists, bearing striking resemblance to the rear porch at the Mitchell House.

Townhouses on Ivy Road (Wilmington, Delaware)

Two other Mitchell commissions are located in the far west end of Wilmington, on Ivy Road, in brick townhouses originally built in the 1890s for mill worker housing. In the 1970s, the neighborhood was "rediscovered" and overhauled. The first project house is located at 43 Ivy Road and was the residence of John H. Mullin, Jr., then owner of the prominent Mullin's Clothing Store on Market Street in Wilmington.[132] Still inscribed on a wall of a coat closet in the home is Mitchell's own handwriting to commemorate the renovation, completed in January 1976 as the U.S. Bicentennial approached, which reads, "John, I think we succeeded; now everyone can see what we thought a 'townhouse' should really look like" (Figure 9). Mitchell's touch is evident throughout the home, which, characteristic to Mitchell's Early American designs, features a sunken living room addition with a herringbone pattern brick floor; a vaulted ceiling with whitewashed, exposed joists; a "shoppe" style projecting bay window with deep sill; and a corner fireplace with a Federal style mantel and surround. The kitchen and bathroom cabinetry feature custom-made vertical board cabinet door fronts, just like those found in the Mitchell House. Throughout the dwelling are paneled and vertical board wood doors with reproduction hardware, Federal type mouldings and vertical board wall treatments, and numerous built-ins faces like the kitchen cabinets, as well as a handful of casement windows like those found in the Mitchell House. The windows feature operable, louvered and paneled shutters and shutter dogs. An anachronistic pent roof shelters the main entry, and several front-gable and shed roof dormer additions are clad in wide wood board set on a diagonal, just the same as those at the Mitchell House. The front slope of the roof features the more traditional, Federal looking front-gable dormers, while the rear slope contains a more modern shed dormer—arguably another example of Mitchell blending historic and modern design.

A similar vision is realized at the townhouse located at 71 Ivy Road, one of Mitchell's final projects before retirement, completed about 1987 for owner Robert Tulley.[133] It features a sunken living room with whitewashed, exposed joists and two projecting bay windows, with a squared, somewhat more modern look. Two reproduction "Early American" chandeliers hang from the vaulted ceiling and seem to nearly exactly match one featured in the vaulted and sunken living room of 43 Ivy Road. The doorway leading out from this addition includes a distinctive Federal style fanlight. Leading up into the main block of the dwelling, a railing is clad in vertical board and continues as a wall treatment into the adjoining room, while at the upper level, a modern, geometric balustrade runs across a wide overlook from the dining room into the sunken living

[131] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.
[132] Scott Hubbard, "Mill worker's renovated home to be on tour," *The Morning News*, Wilmington, Delaware, March 1, 1977.
[133] Dr. Pumphrey interview with Morrissey, Emmons, and Showell.

room. Once again, an architecturally layered effect has been creatively crafted. The entirety of the dwelling exhibits various Mitchell hallmarks—more instances of exposed joists, paneled and vertical board doors with reproduction hardware, as well as built-in cabinetry faced with vertical board, and Federal style mouldings, including a paneled dining room wall incorporating a fireplace. This townhouse also features a pent roof at the main entry, paneled and louvered shutters with shutter dogs at the exterior, and several dormers, with more "traditional" Federal looking front-gable dormers on the front slope, while a more modern shed dormer projects from the rear slope.

Below is a list of confirmed Robert Mitchell commissions:

- William Kitchell, c. 1964, Chadds Ford, PA
- Robert Raley, 1965, Greenville, DE
- Donahue Family, 1967, Kennett Square, PA
- Edith Draper, c. 1967, Snuff Mill Road (DE or PA, exact location unconfirmed)
- Henry Scott, c. 1968 and c. 1972, 2402 Delaware Avenue, Wilmington, DE
- David Stockwell, 1969, Greenville, DE
- Rodney Scott, c. late '60s/ early '70s, Chadds Ford, PA
- Gordon Farquhar, c. 1970, Kennett Square, PA
- Joseph R. Biden, 1973-1974, North Star, DE
- Calvin Marshall, c. 1973-1975, New Castle, DE
- John Mullin, c. 1974-1975, Wilmington, DE
- Audrey and Mike Donahue, c. 1976, Chandler Mill/Marshall Bridge Road, Kennett Square, PA
- Rodney Layton, c. 1980, Mendenhall, PA
- Don Deaven, early 1980s, North Star, DE
- Jim and Carol McKelvey, 1985, Landenberg, PA
- Charles Shoemaker, c. 1985-1989, Kennett Square, PA
- Martin Tulley, 1987, Wilmington, DE
- Several other properties mentioned in partial records or in interviews with Mitchell associates

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
__X_ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N14754

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property __0.97_____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 39.799076 Longitude: -75.704905

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or
UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the property are the same as those of New Castle County tax parcel 08-003.00-006.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries for Robert Mitchell House coincide with the current tax parcel for the dwelling today. This was the same piece of property the Mitchells purchased in 1958, when they undertook their massive Early American style restoration of the dwelling.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael J. Emmons, Jr. (primary author), Kimberley Showell (contributing author), and Catherine Morrissey (contributing author)
organization: Center for Historic Architecture and Design
street & number: 331A Alison Hall, University of Delaware
city or town: Newark state: Delaware zip code: 19716
e-mail mjej@udel.edu
telephone: (302) 831-8097
date: September 17 2021

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Delaware Cultural Resource Survey Information

Time Period: 1940-1960 +/ Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization

Geographic Zone: Piedmont

Historic Period Themes(s): Architecture, Engineering and Decorative Arts; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes, Transportation and Communication

Correlation with State Historic Preservation Plan 2018-2022

Goal 1: Strengthen/Expand Delaware's Core Federal/State Historic Preservation Program

Strategy 7: Address gaps and biases in the state's inventory of historic properties

Actions 7a: Prioritize cultural resource survey and National Register nominations to address under-represent communities or property types [MID-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE]

The Robert Mitchell House (Parcel # 0800300006) in red, New Castle County Tax Parcel Map.

The Robert Mitchell House
Name of Property

New Castle County, DE
County and State

USGS Quad Map, 7.5 Minute, Kennett Square, 2011, (Coordinates Lat: 39.799091 Long: -75.704908)

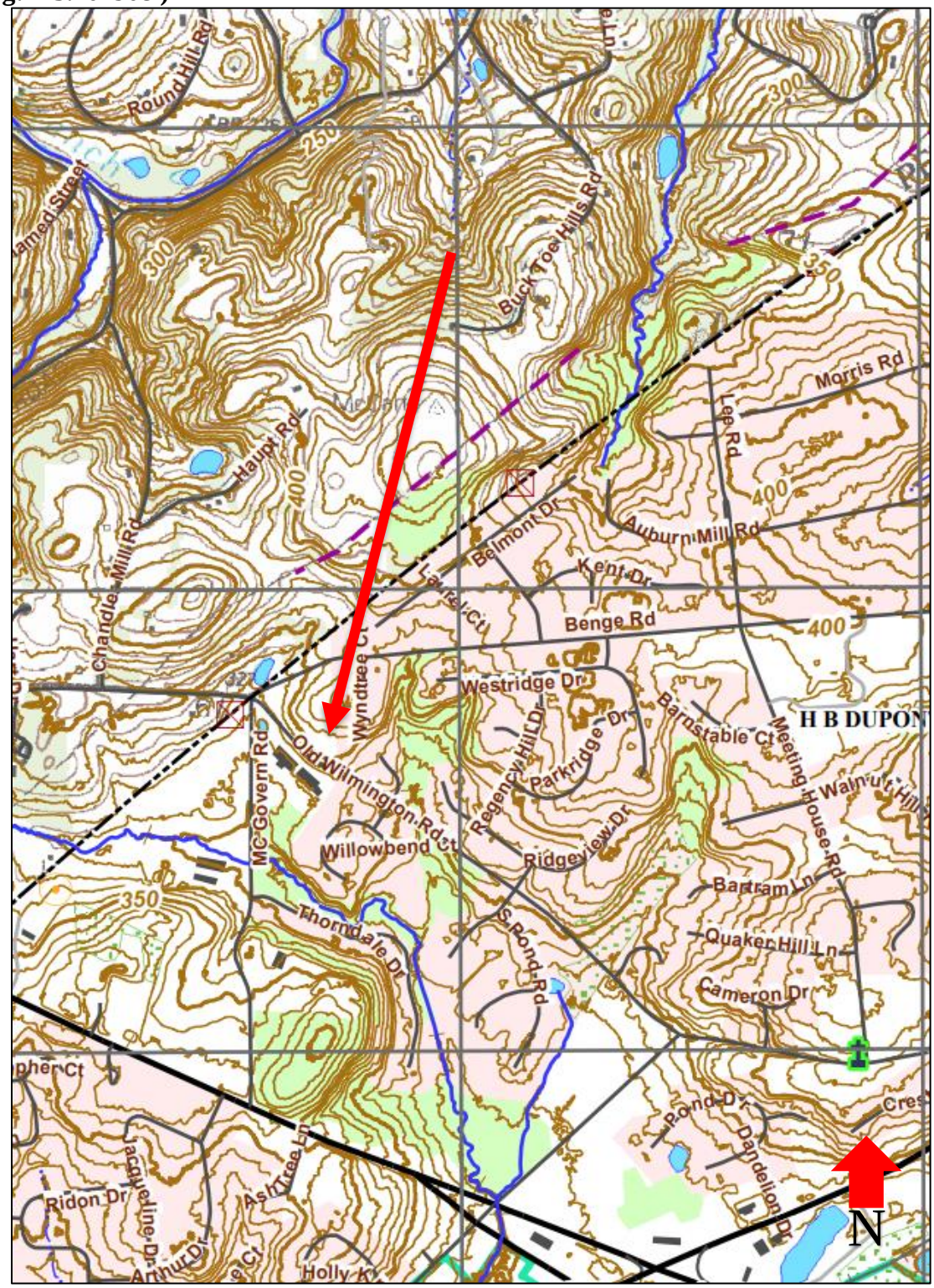
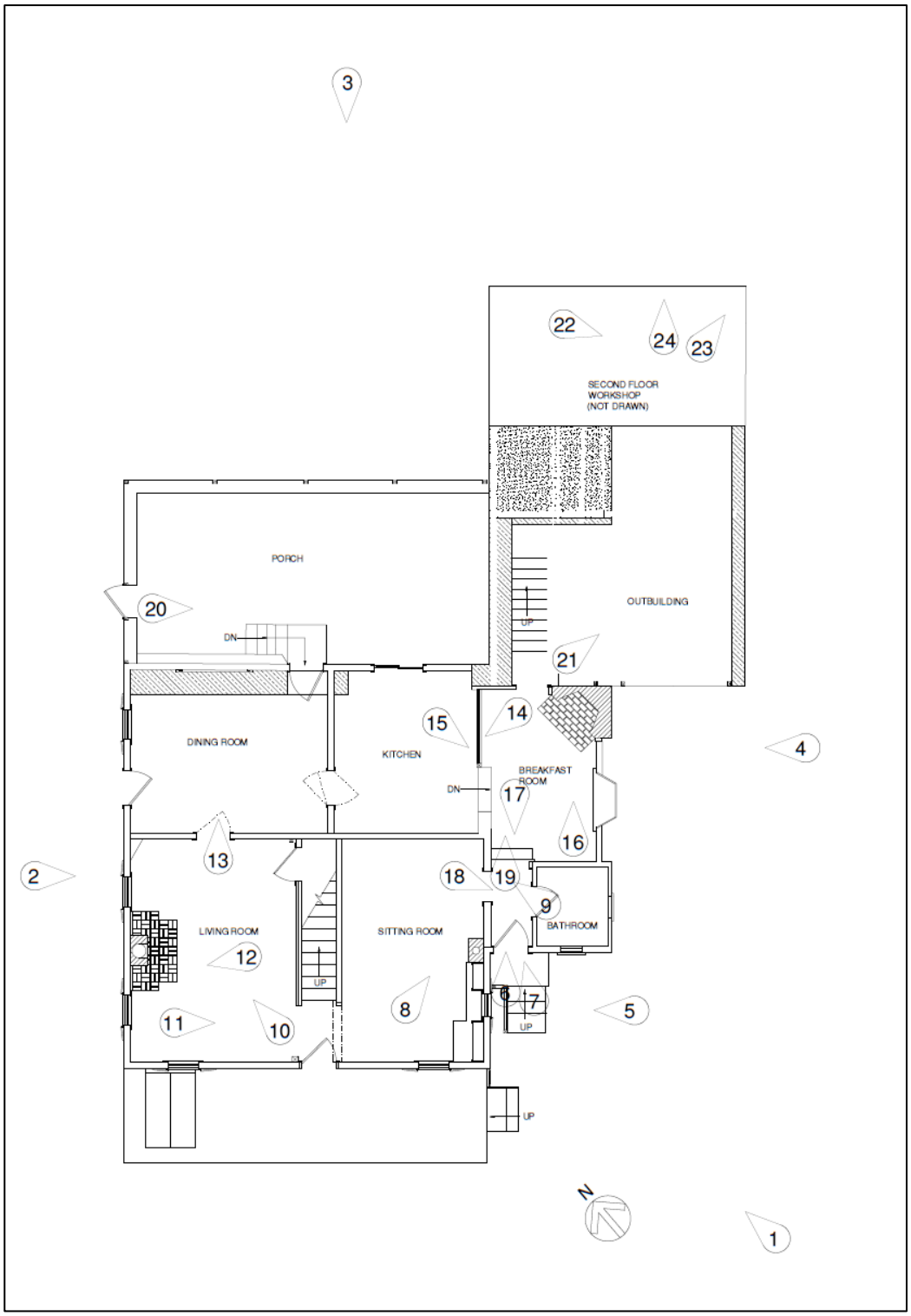
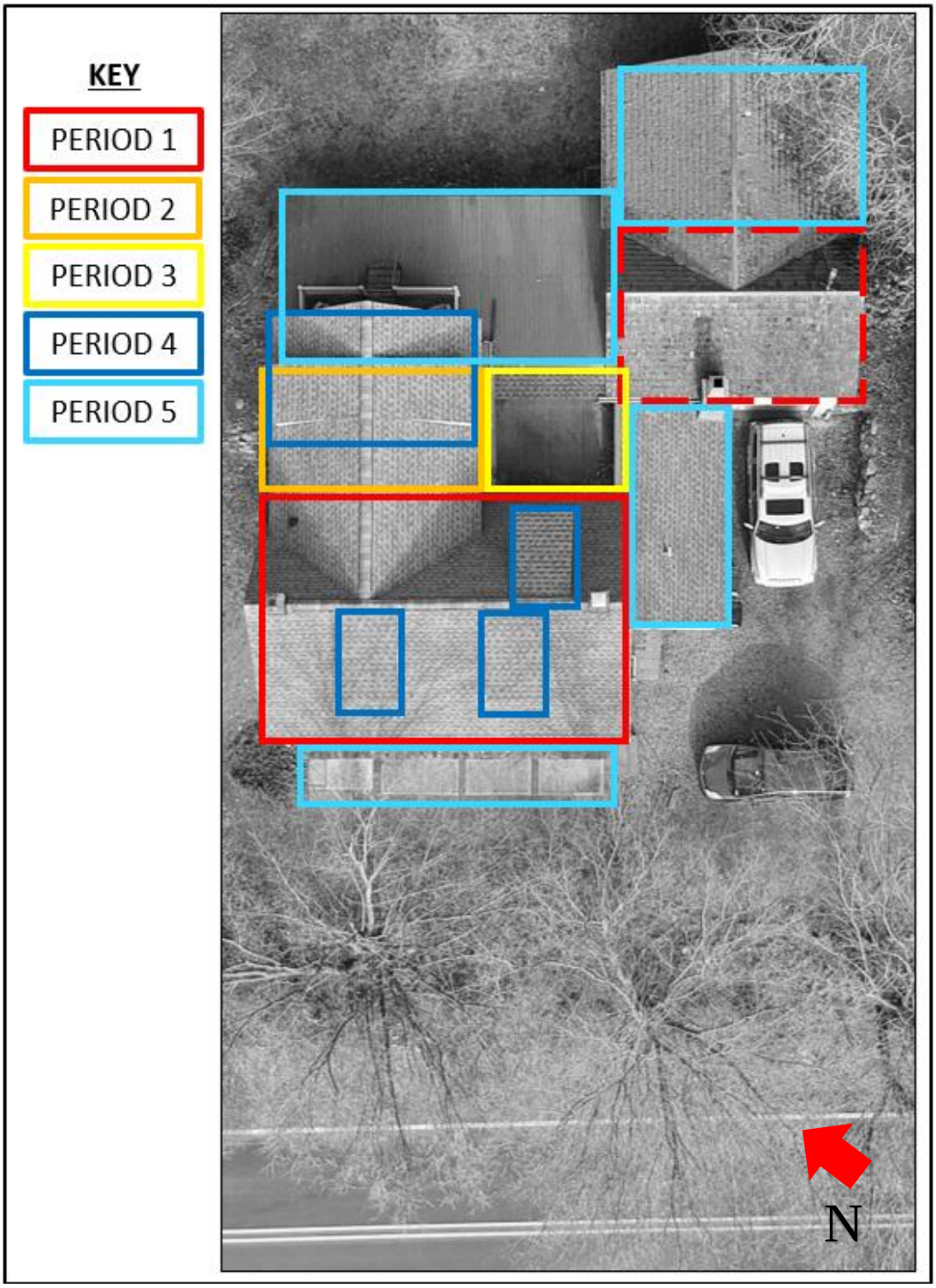


Photo key for the Robert Mitchell House. Drawn by Kevin Barni, Center for Historic Architecture and Design, 2021.



Periodization drawing showing the five periods of construction at the Robert Mitchell House.



Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: The Robert Mitchell House

City or Vicinity: Hockessin

County: New Castle State: Delaware

Photographer: Michael J. Emmons, Jr.

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_001)

Perspective view of the showing southwest and southeast elevations of the Robert Mitchell House, showing the Period I and Period IV sections of the dwelling, as well as the attached outbuilding, looking north.

2 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_002)

View of the northwest elevation, showing the Period I, Period II, Period IV, and Period V sections of the dwelling, looking southeast.

3 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_003)

View of the northeast (rear) elevation, showing the Period IV and V additions to the dwelling and outbuilding, looking southwest.

4 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_004)

View of the southeast elevation, showing the outbuilding and its Period IV addition, looking northwest.

5 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_005)

Detail view of the zig-zag fascia board, designed by Robert Mitchell (c. 1960), and an Early American style weathervane.

6 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_006)

Detail view of a brass eagle doorknocker on the exterior of the Period IV front entry door.

7 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_007)

Detail view of an antique rim lock on the interior of the Period IV front entry door.

8 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_008)

Perspective view of the southeast and northeast walls of the Period I sitting room, showing the built-ins cabinets (c. 1966), and the false joists (c. 1966) added by Mitchell, facing east.

9 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_009)

Detail view of the northwest wall in the Period I sitting room, showing the Period IV false joists (c. 1966).

10 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_010)

Perspective view of the northwest and northeast walls of the Period I living room, showing the banister, false joists, and reworked chimney (c. 1961) done by Mitchell, facing north.

11 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_011)

View of the southeast wall of the Period I living room, showing the banister (c. 1959), false joists (c. 1966), and false summer beam (c. 1966) added by Mitchell, facing southeast.

12 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_012)

Detail view of the false joists and a chamfered chimney trimmer in the Period I living room.

13 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_013)

View of the northeast wall in the Period II dining room, showing the stone foundation wall now encased in Period IV wood paneling, facing northeast. Note that the width of the stone wall is visible to the right of the doorway.

14 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_014)

Perspective view of the northwest and southwest Period III kitchen walls, showing Period IV Early American style cabinetry, including random width cabinet doors, and hammered metal hinges and handles, facing west.

15 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_015)

Perspective view of the Period IV breakfast room (c. 1973), from the kitchen, showing reclaimed beaded wood joists, stretcher bond brick flooring, the bay window, and the corner chimney stack, facing southeast.

16 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_016)

View of the Period IV breakfast room (c. 1973), showing reclaimed beaded wood joists, stretcher bond brick flooring, the bay window, and the corner chimney stack, facing northeast.

17 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_017)

Detail view of the clearstory windows in the Period IV breakfast room, showing the rest of the Period IV addition to the southwest, and the Period III kitchen to the northwest, facing west.

18 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_018)

Detail view of the reclaimed beaded wood joists (installed c. 1973) in the Period IV breakfast room, showing nail holes and checking.

19 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_019)

Detail view of the brick stretcher bond floor (c. 1973) in the Period IV breakfast room.

20 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_020)

View of the Period IV rear porch (c. 1966), showing exterior door into the Period II dining room, herringbone brick flooring, and a bar, facing southeast.

21 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_021)

Interior view of the first floor of the embanked outbuilding, showing the half-round log joists, and the stone foundation, facing east.

22 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_022)

Perspective view of the Period IV outbuilding extension (c. 1960), showing the northeast and southeast walls, looking east. This was an important addition to the building since the upstairs was constructed to serve as the workshop for Mitchell's carpentry work for decades to come.

23 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_023)

Detail view of Robert Mitchell's workbench in the Period IV addition to the second floor of the outbuilding. Mitchell likely used this space while performing his carpentry work.

24 of 24 (DE_New Castle County_Robert Mitchell House_024)

Detail view of Robert Mitchell's carpentry patterns still hanging in the workshop. Note the wide variety of patterns that survive.