



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 078-5131

1. General Property Information

Property name: Little Eldon

Property address: 70 Little Eldon Lane (formerly Hawlin Road / Route 618)

City or Town: Woodville, VA

Zip code: 22749

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Rappahannock County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building ☒

Site ☐

Structure ☐

Object ☐

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 226.42 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Town ☐ Village ☐ Hamlet ☐ Rural: ☒

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

Little Eldon is a ca. 1860s high-style, Italianate brick structure with Gothic features, situated on a 19th century plantation landscape with numerous agricultural outbuildings. The large farm property consists of rolling hills, mature trees and shrubs, pastures, agricultural outbuildings, and foundation plantings. Little Eldon is about ½ mi. south of the quaint crossroads town of Woodville, VA, and accessed by a farm lane from Hawlin Road. Entry to the property on a long, circular gravel drive features commanding views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Old Rag Mountain. Lane Enterprises LLC purchased Little Eldon in the 1960s, and the historic property is now a portion of the sprawling 7,100-acre Eldon Farms site, one of the largest undivided landholdings on the eastern seaboard. The large property is nestled in the Blue Ridge foothills adjacent to Shenandoah National Park.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): High-Style Italianate

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:
N/A

If the builder is known, please list here: N/A

Date of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1870s-80s

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

Little Eldon was established during the mid-19th century as the estate seat of the Turners, a prominent and politically influential family in Rappahannock County. The landscape has retained its historic agricultural setting and use since the early 19th century and is an intact example of a late 19th century gentleman's estate. Little Eldon sits on a solid brick foundation and is capped by a side-gabled standing-seam metal roof. The façade, facing north, is constructed of brick laid in a five-course Flemish-bond pattern, while the remainder of the building features six-course American-bond laid brick. A separate stone kitchen building sits immediately to the rear of the main house. The two structures were connected with a modern frame and glass hall by Ann Lane in the 1980s, during which time the rest of the house was restored. The modern connector is a good example of a contemporary alteration in keeping with but distinguished from historic materials and scale.

A number of outbuildings are located south and west of the main block, including early 20th century wellhouse and barn. A secondary frame dwelling that served as a tenant structure contemporary with the main house is located near the entrance of the driveway. To the rear of the main house, several working buildings were constructed during the 1980s, including a greenhouse and tackroom. A horse barn was built in this complex in 2008. The property is currently owned by the Akre family and operated as a privately held long-term lease for the film producer Scott Willis and the poet Mary-Sherman Willis.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- **Secondary Dwelling / Tenant House** (ca. 1860)
- **Garden Terracing** (estimated ca. 1850s-60s)
- **Well House** (ca. 1900)
- **Former Tenant House** (ca. 1930) – modified to appear as a log cabin.
- **Silo** (ca. 1930)
- ***Chimney Ruin** (ca. 1930s remnant of former residential structure)
- ***Greenhouse** (ca. 1980s)
- ***Tackroom** (ca. 1980s)
- ***Horse Barn** (2008)

Estimated Period of Significance: ca. 1850s-1930

**=denotes Non-Contributing Feature*

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Little Eldon was the historic agricultural estate of plantation owner and merchant Zephaniah (Zeph) Turner Sr. and Sally (Conner) Turner, situated at the headwaters of Blackwater Creek ½ mile from the crossroads village of Woodville, VA. The property was likely established ca. early 1800s and operated as an affluent plantation with over fifty people of African descent enslaved there. The Turners' son, Zeph Turner, Jr. (1812-1876), continued to reside at the property following his parents' deaths. Zeph Turner, Jr. was an influential Virginia politician and lawyer who represented Rappahannock County in the Virginia House of Delegates (1865-67 and 1869-71) and served as the Speaker of the House (1869-1871).

Zephaniah Turner Jr.'s political career was rooted in his influence as an attorney; he first qualified as an attorney at law in Rappahannock County in 1844. Subsequently, the county appointed him as the legal defense for Catherine 'Kitty' Payne, a legally emancipated Black woman who was kidnapped on her journey to freedom in Pennsylvania and forcibly taken back to Virginia to be re-enslaved alongside her three young children. Local Quaker abolitionists rushed to their aid but failed to prevent the kidnapping. In the aftermath, Quaker Cyrus Griest gave \$3,373.61 of his own money to Yardley Taylor of Rappahannock County to pay the legal fees for Zephaniah Turner, Jr. of Little Eldon. Turner agreed "that the petitioners were entitled to their freedom," and successfully defended the Payne family in court.

Meghan Linsley Bishop's thesis on the history of the Payne kidnapping analyzed the Turner family and their attitudes toward slavery, as well as their treatment of the people they themselves had enslaved at Little Eldon. Although Zeph Turner Jr.'s father, Zephaniah Turner, Sr., enslaved more people than any other landholder in Rappahannock County, he made provisions to keep enslaved families together, and for reasons unknown, his son refused to participate in the system of slavery altogether:

"Turner [Jr.], while no abolitionist, never owned slaves himself. His wealthy father, Zephaniah Turner, Sr., owned fifty-two slaves in 1840. Although [his] will did not provide for their manumission, he left instructions that, 'in selling my slaves I direct that in no case when husband and wife belong to me, they be parted, and when husband or wife belong to others a moderate sacrifice be made to avoid parting them.' Perhaps Turner, Jr. shared some of his father's measured kindness towards his slaves. At any rate, Zephaniah Turner, Jr... did not own slaves. Certainly, he could have afforded them had he wished it; his property, sold at his death, was referred to as one of the most valuable farms in the county of Rappahannock. Instead, Turner lived with his artist brother Henry at Eldon, the family estate, and employed paid labor."

No remaining built features dating to the Antebellum period remain on the property. It appears that the original pre-Civil War residence at Little Eldon was likely replaced by the brick Italianate structure built by Zeph Turner, Jr. ca. late 1860s-early 1870s. The building was possibly constructed by noted Rappahannock County architect G.W. Hawkins and is notable due to the elaborate detailing of the dwelling, including decorative brickwork, flush gable peak, a central cupola, scroll-sawn brackets on the eaves and porch posts, projecting three-sided bay windows, arched window openings, and fivecourse Flemish bonded brick on the façade. After the construction of the dwelling, Little Eldon served the local rural community as a private school for girls. Turner never married and remained in the home over the course of his life alongside his brother, Henry, a fine artist. To help manage the property, Zephaniah Turner, Jr. utilized hired labor of local African American men and women, who are visible in 19th century imagery of the property handling carriages. After Zephaniah Turner Jr.'s death in 1876, the property continued to be farmed into the 20th century, as evidenced by numerous 20th century agricultural outbuildings on the property, including a tenant house, wellhouse, barn, and silo.

The unique architectural detailing of the High Italianate dwelling at Little Eldon, alongside the farm's intact rural agricultural setting, reflect the changing tastes and influence of an affluent Rappahannock County family with political and cultural influence in the region and the state.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

Elisabeth B. and C. E. Johnson, Jr. *Rappahannock County, Virginia A History*. Orange, VA: Green Publishers, Inc. (1981).

E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., Architectural Survey Report of Rappahannock County, Virginia, May 2003. Accessed: https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/SpecialCollections/RA-016_Historic_AE_Rappahannock_County_2003_Traceries_Report.pdf

Frank Massie Map of Albemarle County, 1907.

Meghan Linsley Bishop. *Slave to Freewoman and Back Again: Kitty Payne and Antebellum Kidnapping*. Diss. Indiana University Department of History (2007): 73. Accessed: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.452.9288&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Rachel Nicholas. National Park Service / Gettysburg National Military Park. "The Thin Line Between Freedom and Slavery: The Story of Catherine "Kitty" Payne." Accessed: <https://www.nps.gov/gett/blogs/the-thin-line-between-freedom-and-slavery-the-story-of-catherine-kitty-payne.htm>

Virginia Department of Historic Resources Reconnaissance Level Survey, "Little Eldon Farm," DHR ID# 078-5131. 2003.

"Zephaniah Turner Jr." in *A History of the Virginia House of Delegates*. Accessed: <https://history.house.virginia.gov/members/6681>

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: ☒ Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: _____

organization: _____

street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

• • *Signature required for processing all applications.* • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

Name/title: Jennifer Lauer, Cultural Landscape Historian

Organization: Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects

Street & number: 310 E Market Street

City of town: Charlottesville State: VA Zip code: 22902

Email: jlauer@nbwla.com Telephone: (332) 330-4022 Date: October 18, 2024

ELDON FARMS

LITTLE ELDON PIF
'SKETCH MAP'

Nelson Byrd Woltz
Landscape Architects



Key

- 1. Former Tenant House
- 2. **Little Eldon Dwelling**
- 3. Greenhouse
- 4. Tackroom
- 5. Horse Barn
- 6. Well House
- 7. Garden Terraces
- 8. Silo
- 9. Chimney ruin
- 10. Secondary Tenant Dwelling
- 11. Entry Drive



























































