

THE GAMBACORTA OR TOWN MARSH IN NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE: AN INVESTIGATION INTO ITS TRANSFORMATION OVER TIME

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1 ABSTRACT

This project explores the shifting relationship of humans to marshland over time in Delaware. It links the development of the city of New Castle, Delaware to the Gambacorta/ Town Marsh, which includes the urban, industrial site of the historic Tasker Iron Works and neighborhood of Dobbinsville. Proximity and access to marshland have profoundly influenced settlement and land use patterns in New Castle, and human development and attitudes towards nature have in turn affected the marsh. While current attitudes recognize that, as a functional ecological system, tidal marshland provides a myriad of ecosystem services, such as habitat provision, storm surge protection, and carbon sequestration, humans have not always looked so favorably upon the marsh. By its very nature, marshland acts as a barrier, and does not lend itself to ease of development; humans are required to put in significant effort to manage this landscape and marshland has dictated land use patterns. Through interdependent relationships, based on input and extraction, and diking, banking or filling, agricultural and industrial practices in Delaware have harnessed and transformed this abundant natural resource.

Historical research using methods from the scholarship of vernacular architecture guides this investigation. As a historical repository for industrial waste, the marsh represents environmental injustice and segregates neighborhoods of the town. While methods of management and notions of stewardship have reformed over time, the current trend of marsh restoration and environmental sensitivity, especially in the face of resiliency concerns, supports this study and its applicability to future approaches to conservation and development. This study is applicable to future approaches to conservation and development as it defines the cultural significance and sense of place inherent to the marsh landscape, which is disappearing as a result of development and gray approaches to resilience engineering.

1.1 Keywords

Marsh; Coastal Resilience; Vernacular; Environmental Justice; Townscape