An Architectural History of Harford County, Maryland

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1-1. Rumsey House  
Bridge Drive  
c. 1720 (?); c. 1768; Private  
National Register; Historic American Buildings Survey

One of the most recognized yet least understood houses in Harford County, this structure is generally acknowledged to be "all that remains of Old Joppa." Something existed on the site of what was to become Joppa back in the seventeenth century; John Taylor's 1661 patent Taylor's Choice was in this general area and the post road came through here the same year, as early maps indicate. But it is all rather vague. Queen Anne didn't help matters. In 1706 the Maryland assembly approved new town sites but the queen refused to approve the legislation. In 1709, the colonial legislature authorized Col. James Maxwell I (died c. 1727) to build a courthouse on Taylor's Choice (the site specified in 1706); he began work but again the queen said no. Things were finally settled by 1725 (Queen Anne had died) when the town was platted and lots were sold with the understanding that Colonel Maxwell's house—what we call the Rumsey House—was not to be interfered with.

Therein lies the question—just how much of the Rumsey House was standing in the 1720s? In 1768 Benjamin Rumsey married the widow of James Maxwell II and thus gained the Maxwell property; when Rumsey died in 1808 this house was essentially in place. What happened when? Historian Albert C. Ritchie (father of the governor) concluded that Rumsey acquired Maxwell Sr.'s one-story house and then expanded it to its present size and gave it its distinctive gambrel roof. In the 1930s, however, a historian with the Historic American Buildings Survey argued that Rumsey merely "modernized . . . by new interior finish" Maxwell's two-story dwelling. No one will ever know for certain, but the smart money will go with Ritchie. If a house this size had existed in Maryland in the 1720s, it would have been so extraordinary as to have caused comment; since no known early description exists, one invokes Sherlock Holmes's dog that didn't bark. Moreover, construction details within and without closely resemble details seen at Sophia's Dairy, located nearby and firmly dated to 1768.

1-2. Sophia's Dairy  
Route 40 at Belcamp  
1768; Private  
National Register; Harford County Landmark; Historic American Buildings Survey

Generations of historians have continuously used such words as "elegant," "extraordinary," and "remarkable" when discussing Sophia's Dairy. And with good reason. The house is a truly remarkable survivor and it assuredly stands as primus inter pares among Harford's colonial-era dwellings. A brick in the west gable inscribed "AH 1768" offers succinct testimony that Aquila Hall (born 1727) built the house in 1768. Hall had married his first cousin Sophia White (born 1731) in 1750 and the house was built on land he brought to the wedding as her dowry. According to tradition, the Halls employed five redemptionists (two of whom were carpenters) to build the huge (64 feet by 54 feet) house. Simple to the point of severity on the exterior, the house's interior explodes in a glorious array of fashionably carved wood: Doric cornices, fluted pilasters, modillioned cornices, and crossetted window and door trim. Nothing else in Harford County can compare, although, perhaps, the original Mount Pleasant came close. But not even Mount Pleasant could equal Sophia's Dairy's famous double staircase: imperial in concept, flawless in execution, it remains...
without peer in the state and makes one wish one knew who those redemptionist carpenters were. (This highly important building is more fully discussed in chapter 3.)

1-3. Presbury House
(Quiet Lodge)
Austin and Parrish Roads
Mid-eighteenth century; Private
National Register

Its configurations (a 20-by-40-foot rectangle with a center through hall) and details (glazed Flemish bond brick and simple interior woodwork of native timber) link the Presbury House to dozens of similar structures throughout the Chesapeake region. From the James River to the Susquehanna Flats, during the mid-eighteenth century this is precisely what a prosperous planter/merchant would have built. But it is a rarity in Harford County in part because if there had been similar houses dotting the banks of the Gunpowder and Bush rivers, they were obliterated after the federal government took over Harford's bay frontage in 1917 for military use. (For a rare survivor, however, see the Davis farm, 6-4.) Deeds and other documents place the Presbury family in this area at an early date and suggest connections with this house. Moreover, a researcher for the Maryland Historical Society concluded that George Presbury, son of the immigrant James, built "the curious, little old 'mansion.' When George Presbury of William sold this land (361 acres) on August 28, 1799, to Stephen Raphel for £1,225, the deed describes the land as being "all that left to George by his grandfather George" and grandfather George's will does bequeath to "my Grandson George Presbury son of William" the "lands lying on or near Gunpowder River." Several bricks in the house are inscribed with Presbury names and dates (e.g., "George Presbury born Aug 16, 1719," and "Gouldsmith Presbury born Sep 10, 1749"), but the markings' reliability is unclear. (Someone could have scratched the names in in 1935.) What is clear is that many Presbrys were early converts to Methodism: they offered lodging here to itinerant ministers in the 1770s until the Gunpowder Neck Meetinghouse was built with Presbury help (see 1-14); Bishop Asbury's journal alone refers to fourteen separate visits to the Gunpowder Neck between 1772 and 1777. Incidentally, the name Quiet Lodge does not appear in Presbury deeds; its first fleeting use is in Stephen Raphel's 1811 will, but it then disappears, only to be revived c. 1900 as the name Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Francis Cadwalader gave their frame, 1½-story honeymoon cottage. (See also 1-16.) That cottage, much expanded, is now officer's housing and the Presbury house—also officer's housing—has willy-nilly acquired the moniker Quiet Lodge.

1-4. Morgan's Lott
900 Mountain Road
Eighteenth century; with additions;
Private

This three-part house deserves to be better known than it is. The name is from the ancient patent Morgan's Lott, part of which was assigned to William Morgan in 1687. No one thinks this house is that old, however, since most land in the upper reaches of the Gunpowder, Bush, and Winters Run valleys was taken up purely on speculation during the late seventeenth century. Instead, it seems safer to ascribe the central portion of the present dwelling (and probably the north wing as well) to the affluent Bond family, one of whom, Thomas, acquired the land in 1729. It fits with other surviving Bond houses such as Joshua's Meadows since the center section has a two-room, end-fireplace, corner-stair plan typical of the time. The last Bond sold the tract to Robert Conn in 1774 and Dennis Griffith's 1794 map of the county shows something here labeled "Conn's." Other sections are harder to date, but it all must have come together by the mid-nineteenth century, for when the place was sold at a trustees sale in 1871 the Baltimore Sun ran a notice for "a substantial Stone Dwelling House containing on the first floor Hall, Parlor, Dining Room, Sitting Room, Pantry and Kitchen. In front and around the House is a Piazza [porch] 60 feet in length"; those rooms are still here and that porch still rambles across the east façade.

1-5. St. Mary's Episcopal Church
St. Mary's Church Road
1849; Regular services
National Register; Harford County
Landmark

"St. Mary's is the finest rural church in the diocese of Maryland," according to Phoebe Stanton. And Professor Stanton ought to know: she reigned for years as chairman of the Johns Hopkins University's Department of Art History and her 1968 book, The Gothic
property and demolished the house—as well as a hay barn, storage shed, and stable—in 1973. Somehow the Upper Farm’s corncrib, representative of its type in form, survived. The structure, whose framing members appear to be all hand-hewn, mortised, tenoned, and pegged, is sheathed in vertical planks and topped by a standing seam tin gable roof. The functional, three-part plan allows for a central passage, wide enough to hold a wagon laden with corn, flanked by open slat storage racks.

2-14. Seaman-Smith House
718 Craig’s Corner Road
1860; Private
National Register

Thomas Smith (1712–1791) is remembered for his ferry line across the Susquehanna and his patriotism during the Revolution; this land entered his family in 1813 and in 1860 a grandson, Charles Corman Smith, built the present dwelling. Its walls are laid in a local tan fieldstone which, with the exceptionally sandy mortar, dramatically contrasts with the gray granite quoins. Although altered several times, the interior still possesses many original features including several six-panel doors with their hardware and simple surrounds.

2-15. Stephenson-Archer House
(Hygeia Hall)
Wilkinson Road
c. 1824; Private

Affluent twentieth-century countians maintain summer homes hundreds of miles away, in places like Nantucket and Maine. Five generations ago things were different: Dr. John Archer Jr. and his wife, Ann Stump Archer, for instance, lived most of the year at Rock Run, but when summer’s heat became too unbearable, they traveled all of a mile or two to seek refuge in this 1½-story, vertical plank structure, which they built shortly after purchasing the land from the Reverend William Stephenson in 1834. The summerhouse rests on a high stone cellar that is fully above ground on the south (entrance) front. The massive exterior end stone chimneys are stepped, diminishing in size up to their brick caps. Stephenson deserves some mention: this worldly man of the cloth owned one slave in 1798 and actively promoted one of the earliest agricultural socie-

treasure, he bought an acre of land near Lapidum and erected a plaster mill to produce fertilizer. Stephenson also presided over the Rock Run Academy from 1813 until 1821.

2-16. Swansbury
Mount Royal Avenue
Mid-eighteenth century; c. 1800; Private
National Register

This fascinating farm complex has been continuously owned by members of the Griffith-Smith-Jay family since the early eighteenth century. The house itself, one of the more intriguing structures in the county, began as a simple frame building but gained, in the federal era, a wealth of details and enlargements that are remarkable in concept and execution. Some of the details, such as the projecting second-story room, with its elaborate Palladian window, can be compared to such nationally known structures as the Carroll family’s Mount Clare in Baltimore. Other features resemble Mount Vernon, and since Martha Griffith Smith Jay’s first husband, Col. Alexander Lawson Smith, had been an intimate of General Washington’s during the Revolution, it is not inconceivable that the connection between the two houses is more than coincidental. A dozen outbuildings form one of the richest such concentrations in Maryland and include a very early pegged and hand-hewn log slaves’ quarters, a stone kitchen now somewhat in disrepair, as well as a meathouse, washhouse, chicken coop, and barn.

2-17. Spetsua Episcopal Church
(St. George’s Parish)
Perryman and Spetsua Church Roads
1831; Private
Harford County Landmark: Historic
American Buildings Survey

St. George’s, established by 1671, is among the most venerable religious institutions in America. The ancient parish’s first church is thought to have been at “Gravelly” near Michaelsville, now well within the Aberdeen Proving Ground and presumably obliterated. As settlement moved inland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the old building became increasingly inconvenient to its inland worshippers, and in 1718 the church hierarchy
chose this more central two-acre site in Perryman for a new place of worship. That building, the second St. George's, was built c. 1718 but deteriorated quickly. Thus another church was built on the Perryman site in 1758, but that structure, too, became obsolete. Then on May 12, 1811, the vestry asked the Baltimore architectural firm Niernsee and Neilson to design a new church "with two aisles and a gallery on one side . . . in the Norman style." That church, stuccoed brick with attenuated, round-arched windows, heavy buttresses, and octagonal belfry, has remained essentially unchanged ever since, with the exception of a few welcome modernisms, such as the glass in the three windows of the apse, designed by the distinguished artist Paul Barchowsky, a member of the congregation.

2-18. Speesutia Vestry House
Perryman Road
1766; Private National Register; Harford County Landmark; Historic American Buildings Survey

Colonial Maryland churches were more than places of worship; they were seats of government as well. Accordingly, vestry houses, built as places to conduct parish business, often functioned as courthouses, schoolhouses (clergyman could generally be trusted not to sow sedition ideas in young minds), and settings for other secular concerns. This particular vestry house dates to the era of the Reverend Andrew Leardum, rector of St. George's from 1749 until 1770. The importance of the building doubtless explains the remarkably complete specifications present in the vestry records. The Flemish bond brick structure was to be 20 feet long and 16 feet wide with foundations "sunk eighteen inches in the ground" and with a roof of white oak joists and rafters covered in cypress shingles, "the Shingles to be Round'd"; the ceiling was to be plastered; and there were to be "Two Sash Windows on Each Side with Twelve Lights in Each Window the Glafs to be Eight Inches by Ten Wide" and a "Corner Chimney well Support'd With a half inch & half Quarter Bar of Iron."

2-19. Woodlawn
3214 Harmony Church Road
Early nineteenth century; Private National Register

This intriguing—if ultimately maddening—house has managed to defy precise dating; in both plan and overall form it closely resembles the c. 1776 house Perry Point in Cecil County and the 1804 mansion at Rock Run. All three houses have associations with one very important man, John Stump of Stafford (1732-1816); his father built Perry Point, his business partner, John Carter, built Rock Run, and his mother's family, the Hubards, owned the land here. Yet Woodlawn remains a mystery. It does not appear in either the 1798 Federal Direct Tax list, or in the 1814 tax rolls, although that latter lists a "brick dwelling house and kitchen, 18' by 27'" which closely matches the present kitchen wing here. The property eventually passed to the notable Jewett family of Landowne who gave the building its present L plan. The main façade is four bays wide, laid in Flemish bond brick; the stroke is five bays laid in common bond with a further frame addition to the rear. Interior trim such as the chairrails, simply treated stair with its shadow rail, and pilastered mantel suggests an early date. In the twentieth century the Jewetts, actively involved in the Elkridge-Harford Hunt, built a large stable and kennel on the property in hopes that the club might make the farm its northern county base, as is discussed in chapter 8.

2-20. Gravity Flow
3226 Harmony Church Road
Late eighteenth century; Private National Register

One of several structures built on the once-vast landholdings of the Husband-Jewett family, this rubblestone house has been much altered over the years. Several local historians suggest that the building housed a tannery around 1800 and certainly the now-tranquil stretches of Harmony Church Road were once clanging and smoking with such industries. At one time the building was divided into two apartments, but a 1945 remodeling restored it to single-family use.

2-21. Lansdowne
(Kenton)
3300 Harmony Church Road
1770; c. 1876; c. 1886; Private National Register

Few houses anywhere can spin a tale as fascinating as the one centered on this sprawling, romantic pile. Lord Baltimore granted a 1,000-acre tract called Bachelor's Good Luck to one Enoch Spinks in 1703; shortly thereafter, the land passed into the Husband family.