



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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FREDERICK COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

Address:	2832 B Park Mills Road	Meeting Date:	March 5, 2025
Applicant/Owner:	Mark & Barbara Ryba	Report Date:	February 19, 2025
Case No.:	HPC25-0301DR	Staff:	Amanda Whitmore
Proposal:	Request for Review and Recommendation: Demolition Permit for Log Dwelling at 2832 B Park Mills Road		

BACKGROUND

In accordance with amended §1-23-8 of the Frederick County Code, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) will review an application for demolition if Historic Preservation staff have determined that the property is 50 years old or older and has historical, cultural, architectural, or archaeological significance per §1-23-6(B). A demolition permit application for a log dwelling at 2832 B Park Mills Road was received on February 4, 2025.



Location Map: 2832 B Park Mills Road



1873 Titus Atlas, Urbana Election District.

Little is known about the buildings and activities that enlivened this small African American community in the 19th century. An 1835 Frederick County Maryland Tax Assessment of free Black landowners shows several free Blacks living in the New Market district, which at the time included the Urbana area.² The 1860 U.S. Census for the Urbana Election District also supports the idea that free African Americans settled in the vicinity pre-emancipation, as several Black individuals are identified as heads of households. Following emancipation, African Americans were released from living on their enslaver's property and sought vacant land to build upon. Often, they bought land near existing African American communities or property owners. With little resources, small, one or two-room, gable-roofed log cabins were constructed.

Employment was on nearby farms or industries. A review of one-quarter of the 1870 U.S. Census Urbana Election District pages reveals a majority of Black or “mulatto” individuals worked as farm laborers with the next highest occupation as domestic servants. A few were listed as farmers of their property, a couple were fence makers or wood choppers, and one blacksmith, stone mason, and lime kiln worker were listed. A similar review of the 1880 U.S. Census reveals employment opportunities remained much the same with the majority working as farm laborers with the next highest occupation being a domestic servant. Table 1 illustrates the various occupations sampled in the two census years.

Table 1: Sampling of African American Occupations in Urbana Election District

Occupation	1870 US Census	1880 US Census
Farm laborer	68	83
Domestic servant	20	18
Fence Maker	3	6
Farmer	9	3

² Duvall, Jeffrey A. “1835 Frederick County Maryland Tax Assessment (Free Black Land Owners),” April 6, 2020. Accessed from: Maryland Historical Mapping, <https://mdhmapping.com/1835-frederick-county-tax-free-black-land-owners/>, February 19, 2025.

Bricklayer	0	1
Tan Yard Worker	0	1
Blacksmith	1	1
Shoemaker	0	1
Lime Kiln Worker	1	1
Stone Mason	1	0
Stone Quarry Worker	0	1
Wood Chopper	2	0
Cook	3	0
Huckster	1	0

Hope Hill United Methodist Church was originally established circa 1840 as a white church where Black people could attend. The church is depicted on the 1858 Isaac Bond Map. In 1869, the white members built a church near Urbana and sold the existing church to Black trustees. By 1873, the Titus Atlas shows Flint Hill Methodist Church a few miles southwest of the Hope Hill church. The 1873 Titus Atlas shows a “colored” school northwest of the Hope Hill church. By 1870, it appears this small rural African American village was growing. A 1908 topographic map labels the area as “Hopeland” and shows numerous buildings and additional roads. By 1942, the topographic maps depicted the areas as “Hopeland” and “Flint Hill.” A 2004 article in the Frederick News Post describing Black life in Hope Hill in the mid-20th century depicts a small rural area with unpaved roads, children playing outside, and people visiting and passing along news at Edgar Digg’s general store.³

In 1885, the widow of James L. Davis, Elizabeth, and his heirs sold approximately 3 ½ acres of land to Franklin Cromwell. Davis was a white farmer in Buckeystown who enslaved 11 individuals in 1850 and nine individuals in 1860. In 1870, he was listed with three Black laborers in his household: Tilghman Lee (Farm Laborer), Susan Lee (Domestic Servant), and Daniel Lee. Research did not find a connection between Franklin Cromwell and James Davis.

Franklin Cromwell is listed in the 1880 U.S. Census as a Black man married to Alice with a one-year-old named Lola Barnes. In 1885 he purchased the 3 ½ acre lot and nearly a month later, sold a portion of it to the Board of County Commissioners for a public school to adjoin the Flint Hill Methodist Church. Franklin and Alice likely built the log cabin to house their growing family. Their son James was born in 1884 and a year later another son Franklin was born, then Charles and Lee. A daughter was born in 1895 but died three years later due to croup. In 1906, they sold ½ an acre to Mary Overs.

Mary Overs was a widow when she received the ½ acre parcel. Mary is listed in the 1900 U.S. Census as a Black woman, widowed, with three children, living in a house, and working as a day laborer. By 1920, she is listed as owning a farm. Mary deeded the property to her daughter Grace in 1923 reserving a life estate for herself on the property. Mary died in 1933. Grace was living with her husband in Pennsylvania so may have rented the cabin until she and her husband sold it in 1945 to Irving and Catherine Holland. They purchased another ½ acre parcel that was originally part of Franklin and Alice Cromwell’s land holdings to make a one-acre parcel.

³ Slagle, Eric. “Home Safe Home: Blacks found refuge in small villages,” The Frederick News Post, February 22, 2004.

Irving and Catherine Holland were Black residents of Hope Hill and Flint Hill. Irving worked as a laborer. Following their passing in 1947 (Catherine) and 1953 (Irving), the property went to their son Robert and his wife Mildred who lived there through their deaths in 2010 and 2021, respectively. For a short time, the property was held by Donald and Iantha Weedon before the current property owner purchased it in 2024.

The structure is a one-and-one-half-story log cabin under a side-gable roof with a central brick chimney. The gable ends are covered in wood shingles with a single one-over-one double-hung window. A large screened-in porch covers the façade, or southern elevation, of the cabin. Two, one-over-one double-hung windows are located just below the roof on the façade. The porch is covered in vinyl siding. The eastern elevation has what appears to be a six-over-six double-hung window. Cellar access is also located on the elevation. The western elevation has a smaller opening that houses an air-conditioner window unit. Off the rear of the cabin is a one-story addition. Aerial photographs indicate the screened-in porch was added after 2000 and historic aerials do not indicate a porch originally on the cabin. The addition is harder to date on aerial photographs given the quality of aerial photographs available. However, it does not appear to be in the 1981 aerial photograph indicating it was built in the last 40 years.

A windshield survey of the Flint Hill and Hope Hill area reveals that log cabins that existed during post-emancipation are no longer extant or have been enclosed with additions and expansions so they are no longer recognizable. The Cromwell cabin appears to be the last remaining example of this building type for this historic African American community.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff has determined that the property is at least 50 years old and is not designated to the Frederick County Register of Historic Places. Therefore, per Section 1-23-8 of the updated Historic Preservation Ordinance, Historic Preservation staff must determine if the property has significance based on the criteria of Section 1-23-6(B).

The following criteria are used to assist in evaluating the significance of a property. A property needs to be determined to be significant in one or more of the following criteria:

- a) The property has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the county, state, or nation.

Yes, the property represents the building type that was built by African Americans in the 19th century. The cabin was built in a growing African American community known as Flint Hill and appears to be the last of this building type that has not been significantly altered.

- b) The property is the site of an historic event.

No significant event was found to have taken place on this property.

- c) The property is identified with a person or group of persons who influenced society.

No information was identified that shows the property is associated with a person or group of persons that influenced society.

- d) The property exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the county and its communities.

Yes, the property exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, and historic heritage of the rural African American experience in Frederick County.

- e) The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, design style, or method of construction of landscape architecture, engineering, public art, or architecture.

Yes, the property embodies characteristics of a typical rural late 19th century log cabin despite the porch and rear additions.

- f) The property represents the work of a master craftsman, architect, landscape architect, engineer, artist, or builder.

No, the property does not represent the work of a master architect, craftsman, landscape architect, engineer, artist, or builder.

- g) The property possesses significant artistic value.

No, the property does not possess artistic value.

- h) The property represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

No, the property does not represent a distinguishable entity that lacks individual distinction.

- i) The property represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or county, due to its singular physical characteristics, landscape, or historical event.

No, the property does not represent an established and familiar visual feature due to its singular physical characteristics, landscape, or historical event.

- j) The property is a rare example of a particular period, style, material, or construction technique.

No, the property is not a rare example of a period, style, material or construction technique.

Historic Preservation staff find the property meets three of the significance criteria; therefore, the Historic Preservation Commission must determine if the property is of unusual historic value to Frederick County, the State, or the nation. The updated Historic Preservation Ordinance defines unusual historic value as, *a property eligible for designation under this chapter with the added requirement that the property represents an outstanding or exceptional aspect of federal, state, or local history, culture, architecture, or archaeology that is not otherwise represented within the Frederick County Register of Historic Places, the loss of which would cause irreparable harm to the public interest as stated in § 1-23-2 of this chapter.*

If the Commission does not consider the property to be of unusual historic value, the demolition permit may proceed. However, if the Commission determines that the property does have unusual historic value, the Commission shall attempt to formulate an economically feasible plan with the owner for the preservation of the structure.

After careful review and analysis, Staff does find it to be an outstanding or exceptional aspect of local history that is not otherwise represented within the Frederick County Register of Historic Places. A dwelling built by and continuously occupied by African Americans in a rural African American village in Frederick County that has not undergone significant alteration is rare.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends recognizing the dwelling at 2832 B Park Mills Road, the Franklin and Alice Cromwell Property, as a property with unusual historic value in Frederick County. If the Commission agrees, Staff will schedule time on the April agenda to discuss with the property owner an economically feasible plan. If the Commission and the property owner are unable to agree on an economically feasible plan, the Commission or its designee shall have 90 days to negotiate with the owner and other parties in good faith to find a means of preserving the structure. If no means of preserving the structure is agreed upon, the demolition application shall be approved.