NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Owensville Historic District

other names West River Post Office; AA-70

## 2. Location

street & number Owensville Road (MD Route 255) and Owensville-Sudley Road ☐ not for publication

city or town Owensville ☐ vicinity

state Maryland code MD county Anne Arundel code 003 zip code 20778

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date 9-22-03

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:
- ☐ entered in the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ 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
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
- ☒ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

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

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 21 | 6 | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 21 | 6 | Total |

**Name of related multiple property listing**
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)
N/A

**number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**
2 (Christ Episcopal Church and Parish Hall)

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling(s)/secondary structure(s)
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
GOVERNMENT/Post Office
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural building
RELIGION/Religious Facility/Church school/Parsonage
FUNERARY/cemetery
EDUCATION/school/schoolhouse

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling(s)/secondary structure(s)
GOVERNMENT/post office
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/agricultural building(s)
FUNERARY/cemetery

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY/Gothic Revival
LATE VICTORIAN/Folk Victorian/Italianate
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY
REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

**Materials**
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Brick, stone and concrete
walls: Wood frame (weatherboard)
roof: Metal, Slate, Asphalt
other:

**Narrative Description**
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Colonial Revival style and located at the approach to the village from the west, replaced its 19th-century predecessor building that had an appearance more in keeping with the tradition of the community.

In addition to the "town lots" several houses occupy larger parcels and are set well back from the road. Generally, these houses, not visible to the passerby, occupy hilltop sites at the end of long lanes and offer spectacular views to open landscapes and wooded groves.

While the southern approach to the historic district retains greater open space and intact views, the other three approaches offer 20th-century additions to the community. Although architecturally undistinguished and considered non-contributing resources, the ranch houses from the 1960s and 70s are built on small lots alongside their historic counterparts, thus continuing the historic building pattern and linear arrangement of Owensville. More recently subdivided tracts, however, break this trend, as large tract mansions are set back from the road and, in some cases are clustered, in cul-de-sac-type groupings down new-cut lanes. On some of these subdivided lands, historic barns or other agricultural buildings survive as remnants of the agrarian tradition of the community. A brick contemporary commercial building (non-contributing) houses a medical facility and post office.

The Owensville Historic District includes the buildings and landscapes at and to all sides of the main crossroads, incorporating most all of that area that was historically considered to be part of the village of Owensville. The district begins on the west just before Owensville Road crosses Gott's Branch and extends east through the intersection to Woodstock (inclusive). On the south, the district extends to where the power line crosses the Owensville-Sudley Road and on the north to Tranquille Farm (inclusive). The following is a description of the resources within the historic district boundaries. (Minor outbuildings were not counted.)

Owensville Road from Gott's Branch to Woodstock:

**85 Owensville Road (Tamarack Hill, AA-282)**

Tamarack Hill was built ca. 1867 by local builder William Peake, Jr. and given to Sallie and Nathaniel Chew as a wedding present from Sallie's parents, William Peake, Sr. and Margaret Peake. Tamarack Hill is a 2-1/2-story wood shingled, frame dwelling covered with a hipped roof with cross gables on the center of all four elevations. A three-bay porch extends the width of the front elevation and provides access to the entry of this side-passage, double-pile plan house. The interior features a straight-flight stair with a robust Greek Revival-style turned newel and less ornate, tapered balusters; plain Greek Revival-style wood mantels; and original paneled doors and narrow wood floorboards throughout. Tamarack Hill survives in excellent condition and

**Christ Church Parish Hall AA-289**

Christ Church Parish Hall is a long and low-lying, one-story, five-bay frame structure, built in 1924 on the site of the 1851 West River Classical Institute. Set upon a low foundation, the parish hall features a side gable roof and a central projecting entry bay. The five-bay façade consists of a central entry flanked by single 6/6 windows with three-light transoms. The central entry has an engaged pediment surround. The parish hall is an important meeting place for the community and retains high integrity. Contributes to the historic district; individually listed in the National Register along with Christ Church in 1973.

**217 Owensville Road (Twin Cedars)**

This property, known as Twin Cedars, is historically associated with the locally prominent Hopkins family. The original Hopkins family residence, built 1833, stood on the site until the present house replaced it in 1940. The two-story, three-bay frame main block and its two-story side wing were clad with a brick veneer in 1971. Despite this architectural change, the dwelling is a landmark in the community and contributes to the historic district.

**220 Owensville Road (Christ Church and Cemetery AA-289)**

Built 1867-1869 on the site of an earlier church building, Christ Church is a basilican-plan frame church designed in what is cited to be the finest example of Gothic Revival architecture in Anne Arundel County. The design for Christ Church is based upon plans for rural parish churches by Richard Upjohn and published in *Rural Architecture* (1852). The church features board and batten siding, a steeply pitched gable roof and a bell tower. The cemetery, located to the north and east of the church building, contains numerous historic graves and acts as the historic setting for the church. Christ Church and cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1973) and is an outstanding contributor to the Owensville Historic District.

**230 Owensville Road (Christ Church Rectory)**

Christ Church Rectory, built ca. 1869, is a two-story frame "L" house. It is set upon a low brick foundation, has vinyl siding, and is covered with a cross gable roof, sheathed with asphalt shingles. A hipped roof porch fills in the intersection of the two wings. Several domestic outbuildings stand on the property including a frame barn with board and batten siding. The property is in excellent condition and, despite some replacement materials, retains high integrity. One contributing building.

**249 Owensville Road (Barn only)**

Located east of Christ Church, on the south side of Owensville Road and behind the contemporary house at 249 Owensville Road just down Owens Valley Estate Road is a large early 19th-century tobacco barn. This tobacco barn was most likely part of Henry Owens' farm, a 19th-century farmhouse (demolished) just west of this barn. The barn has a character-defining, steeply pitched roof sheathed with standing seam metal that extends over shed wings to both sides of the central gable. The barn walls have vertical board siding, while the gable ends are covered with weatherboard. The barn appears to be in good condition and survives as an important remnant of the agricultural heritage of the community. One contributing building.

**311 Owensville Road (Woodstock)**

Originally built ca. 1798, the main house at Woodstock burned in 1931 and was replaced with the large Colonial Revival-style house on the property today. The main house is a 2-1/2-story, five-bay frame structure covered with a gable roof and featuring a large, central gable dormer. A wide, hipped roof porch extends almost the full width of the façade. Woodstock contains several associated resources, including a ca. 1940 tenant house, a chicken house, corncrib, bank barn, spring house and a contemporary horse stable. Woodstock is the principal farm out of which Owensville developed in the 19th century and is associated with the locally prominent Murray family. Although the original "Woodstock" burned, the replacement house falls within the period of significance, and is considered contributing to the district. The property retains high integrity.

Old Owensville/Sudley Road from Electric Power line to Tranquille Farm:

**4778 Sudley Road**

This property includes a two-story frame I-house, built ca. 1930. It is in good condition and contributes to the historic district.

**4735 Sudley Road (Chew House AA-283)**

Chew House is a large 2-1/2-story, gable-roofed frame house with a pair of end chimneys and a rebuilt side wing. Originally built ca. 1809 as a one-room, two-story structure, the house was enlarged during the early to mid-19th century into the three-bay, side-passage plan house that it is today. The Chew House, likely the oldest surviving house in Owensville, is in excellent condition and contributes to the historic district.

**4706 Sudley Road**

This small, 1-1/2-story house located at the intersection of Owensville and Sudley Roads was built in 1940 behind the Methodist Church (demolished) that stood on the site until 1964. The house, facing Sudley Road, is reached via a long driveway leading to it from Owensville Road. The house is in good condition and contributes to the historic district.

**Tranquille**

Tranquille Farm is located north of the crossroads intersection and consists of a ca. 1878 farmhouse set well back from the road with a long expanse of lawn and mature shade trees in front. It is a two-story, three-bay frame structure with a projecting center gable addition. A single, one-story porch extends across the façade, while side wing additions abut either side of the house. The house was historically adorned with Gothic Revival detailing and trim work. Despite recent additions, the house retains integrity and contributes to the historic district.

## 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)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **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)

Property is:

- ☐ **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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Area of Significance**
(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE
ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE
RELIGION
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**Period of Significance**

1791-1952

**Significant Dates**

1791; 1814; 1832; 1849-52

**Significant Person**
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**
N/A

**Architect/Builder**
William Peake, Jr., builder
Other unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography**
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

**Previous documentation on files (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 #_____

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:
Anne Arundel County Office of Planning and Zoning

## Significance Summary:

The Owensville Historic District is significant under Criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places for the following reason:

> The rural setting of Owensville, with its cohesive concentration of 19th-century buildings located at the intersection of two important rural roads, is representative of the 19th-century crossroads communities that were once a common feature of the rural Anne Arundel landscape. Owensville is one of only three such surviving villages in the county (the other two are Davidsonville and Woodwardville) and provides a good representation of the rural village tradition.

The Owensville Historic District is significant under Criterion C of the National Register for the following reason:

> Owensville contains a rural clustering of 19th-century buildings reflecting a variety of stylistic influences including Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, Folk Victorian and vernacular building traditions of the early 19th century, that together represent a significant and distinguished entity. In addition, Owensville retains several tobacco barns, including two early 19th-century examples that embody the distinctive characteristics of the building type.

The period of significance for Owensville extends from 1791, when the principal tract of land out of which Owensville eventually developed was platted, to 1952, when the original corner store that had been the commercial and social center of the West River community was demolished.

## Historic Context:[1]

Owensville is a small rural crossroads community centrally located in southern Anne Arundel County, Maryland, between Galesville on the West River and the Prince Georges'/Anne Arundel county line on the Patuxent River. Named after early resident, Isaac Owens, and his descendents, Owensville arose as a commercial and social center of the larger, rural West River area. The town's first store opened ca. 1809 at the intersection of the Sudley and Galesville

[1] This historic context is based upon research principally compiled by Owensville resident Susan Wetherill. Susan Wetherill has extensive personal files on Owensville, including deeds, chancery records, census records, historic photographs, clippings, notes, sketches derived from plats and deed descriptions, and more, representing years of research and collecting.

Roads, and in 1814, the crossroads was selected as the site of the West River Post Office, providing mail service for the larger West River farming community, and propelling the future growth of the small village. By the mid-19th century, Owensville had developed into a self-sufficient village that was home to several outlying farms, numerous village residences clustered around the intersecting roads, two corner stores, a tailor, a wheelwright shop, a saddler shop, three churches, two schools (one private and one public), and the post office. The West River Post Office, still in Owensville, is considered the oldest surviving post office in the county.

Although Owensville has lost many of its original commercial and institutional buildings, it retains an important local landmark—Christ Episcopal Church—and many of its original farms and dwellings still serving as important reminders of the village's 19th and early 20th-century heyday. In addition, despite some recent subdivision and new construction that is generally set back and not visible from the main roads, the village retains its rural character and numerous associated agricultural buildings, including several tobacco barns. These agricultural buildings, along with the still cultivated landscapes, represent the primary and enduring industry of the West River farming community.

Background History

The community that would eventually emerge as Owensville in the early to mid-19th century was located at the intersection of two important early roads in the West River Hundred of rural Anne Arundel County. The Owensville-Galesville Road (present-day Route 255) led due east to the 17th-century port in Galesville on the West River and west to the Annapolis Road (present-day Route 2, or Solomon's Island Road), or across the Patuxent River to Upper Marlboro and Queen Anne, the political centers of neighboring Prince George's County. Sudley Road (today's Route 655) led to Sudley Post Office, Tracy's Landing, Fairhaven and further south toward Solomon's Island. Historically, the West River Hundred was remotely settled with large farms, cultivated primarily with tobacco, occupying the landscape.

The first settlers to the region were protestant Englishman from Virginia. These settlers had first established a hamlet known as Providence at the mouth of the Severn River, but then quickly dispersed and established plantations along the South and West Rivers, and further south. Many of those that settled in the West River area became Quakers during and following the missionary visit of English Quaker Elizabeth Harris in 1655-56. The first General Meeting of the Society of Friends in the Province was held in West River in 1672 and was attended by George Fox—the founder of the Society of Friends in England. The West River Meeting House stood at the northeast corner of Galesville and Muddy Creek Roads, near Galesville.[2] In 1682, William Penn stopped to visit his Quaker friend, William

[2] The West River Meeting House burned in 1815, but the Quaker Burial Ground, next to the meeting house site, survives.

Richardson at his house (demolished) at "Watkin's Hope," just beyond Owensville on the Owensville-Galesville Road. From there, Penn traveled to West River, where he attended a meeting of the Society of Friends. A highway marker on the Owensville-Galesville Road commemorates the site today. Despite the early predominance of Quakerism in the West River region, the West River Meeting had virtually ceased to function by the time of the Revolution

In 1684, Galesville (known then as West River Landing) was set up as a Port of Entry for the West River area, becoming a center of commerce and shipping. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Galesville remained the focal point for local maritime commerce; the surrounding West River area was largely agricultural, dependent upon tobacco and slavery.[3]

Owensville:

The area that would eventually grow into the important crossroads community of Owensville was originally part of several tracts of land in West River Hundred, which were owned by Joseph Richardson (1701-1782), grandson of Quaker William Richardson, friend of William Penn.[4] At Joseph's death in 1786, he devised his lands to his executor, Col. John Eccleston. In 1791, Eccleston re-surveyed the various tracts, consolidating them and platting the new tract, containing 685 7/8 acres, as "Anti Libanus" (also spelled "Antelebanus")[5]. "Anti Libanus" was presumably named for its proximity to and/or association with "Lebanon," an adjoining 540 ½-acre tract of land which included the 17th-century family seat of Quaker convert Philip Thomas, who came to the West River area from England in 1651.

In 1793, Eccleston sold the entire "Anti Libanus" tract to Dr. William Murray. Dr. William Murray (born 1753) studied medicine under his older brother, Dr. James Murray, a Revolutionary War physician who lived in Annapolis. According to surviving correspondence in the Murray family papers[6], Dr. William Murray began improving "Anti Libanus" with a residence, a log stable/cornhouse and other outbuildings. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax lists William Murray as owner of a one-story dwelling and four outbuildings on his West River land, which came to be known as "Woodstock." The dwelling—a 1-1/2-story, frame building covered with a gambrel roof— stood at Woodstock until 1931 when it burned and was replaced with the current 2-1/2-story Colonial Revival-style house on the site today.

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[3] According to the 1790 Census Records, Anne Arundel County was home to 14,756 free persons and 10,130 slaves. The county had the second highest number of slaves compared to all of the other counties in Maryland. Neighboring Prince George's County listed a total of 11,176 slaves, and Charles County listed 10,032 slaves. All other counties had far fewer slaves listed in the census records.

William Richardson, Jr.'s will, probated in 1743, devised his lands west of Beaver Dam (Gotts) Creek to his son Joseph, and his lands east of the creek to his son Daniel. The land that went to Daniel included the "dwelling plantation" at Watkin's Hope where William Penn had stopped; the land that went to Joseph had "improvements."

[5] Liber I.C. 9 Folio 190/193

[6] "Diary, letters with transcripts and photographs of the Murray family of West River," 1651-1935. MSA SC 2301.

The deed for the 1793 sale of "Anti Libanus" to William Murray was to be given upon final payment. However, due to the death of Col. Eccleston, and despite full payment, the deed was not filed as of 1809. In 1809, following a Chancery Court Case, filed by Dr. Murray that year, a deed finally recorded the sale of land.[7] Prior to that time, however, Dr. Murray had sold off several parcels, including an 86-acre tract to George Gardiner; a 21-acre tract to Edmund Kelly; and an unrecorded tract to Ezekial Gott—all three of which figure prominently in the history of Owensville. Having reconciled the deeds on his land, Dr. William Murray then mortgaged the remainder of his property to his stepson, James Brice. Dr. William Murray's children remained at "Woodstock" throughout the 19th century, becoming prominent members of the Owensville community. Another Murray relative, Dr. James Murray, came to Owensville in 1838 and built Smiths Purchase at the northwest corner of the crossroads.

George Gardiner, who purchased the 86-acre tract of "Anti Libanus," also purchased (or may have already owned) a 147-acre tract of the adjoining "Lebanon," thus becoming an important area landowner. On his newly acquired "Anti Libanus" tract o f land, on a site set back from Sudley Road, Gardiner built a modest "room-over-room" frame house that later evolved into the two-story, three-bay farmhouse which still stands on the site today. This house, known locally as the "Chew House" after longtime 20th-century owner Samuel Chew, was probably built ca. 1800[8] and may be the oldest surviving house in Owensville. Here, George Gardiner lived with his wife and five children, where, with the support of slave labor, he farmed his extensive lands.[9]

The 21-acre tract of land purchased by Edmund Kelly included land at the intersection of today's Owensville-Galesville Road and Old Owensville-Sudley Road. Based upon later documentation[10], Kelly appears to have opened a store at the southwest corner of the crossroads. The existence of "Woodstock," George Gardiner's farm and its operations, Kelly's store, and their location at or near this important intersection of roads, provided enough reason for the county to establish a post office on the site in 1814. The West River Post Office, named for the area that it serviced, was one of the first post offices established in this part of Anne Arundel County and is considered the oldest active post office in the county today.[11] The West River Post Office, which provided mail three times per week to all the plantations and settlements from the Patuxent River to the West River, further encouraged the growth of the emerging village of Owensville.[12]

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[7] Chancery Court Case 3369. Also, see deed dated September 14, 1809 between Wm. Murray and James Brice (NH 15/414).

[8] The 1798 Federal Direct Tax does not include the land or the house lot for George Gardiner in West River, indicating that his purchase of the tract, and thus construction of his house, post-dated 1798.

[9] The 1820 U.S. Census indicates that George Gardiner owned six slaves that year.

[10] An 1812 deed references "Kelly's store." See WSG 2/22.

The first post office in this section of the county was established in the town of Pig Point on July 1, 1807.

[12] The first postmaster was Virgil Maxey, at Tulip Hill, near Galesville. The second postmaster was Francis Bird, who lived closer to Owensville. The third postmaster was John Thomas, from Lebanon, south of Owensville. The fourth postmaster was Samuel Owens, from Owensville. All subsequent postmasters were from Owensville.

In 1818, Isaac Owens purchased the 21-acre lot, which had since passed through the hands of Edmund Kelly to a Francis Bird. Although Isaac Owens did not purchase this tract until 1818, it appears from earlier census records that he was already residing in the vicinity and that the Owens name was already well represented. Between 1818 and 1825, Isaac Owens built a house and blacksmith shop[13] on the site, which already included Kelly's store, establishing the foundation for the commercial growth of the crossroads. At Isaac Owens' death in 1825, his youngest son, Samuel Owens, inherited the property that included "my dwelling house."[14] Two of Isaac's three other children inherited land at or near the crossroads from their father, while the contents of the store were divided between all four sons. Samuel Owens continued to reside in his inherited dwelling, while perhaps operating the blacksmith shop with his brother Henry.[15] In 1827 Samuel Owens married, and in 1830, became postmaster—a position he held until 1836. In 1836, Samuel Owens sold his house lot to the newly formed West River Circuit (Methodist) for use as a parsonage.[16] In 1839, John Owens also sold his inherited land, including the "store lot" at the northeast corner and 2 1/8 acres at the northwest corner.[17] Henry Owens remained at the crossroads, eventually accumulating substantial acreage. The crossroads community, still known as West River Post Office at the time of Isaac's death in 1825, would soon bear the Owens' family name.

In 1832, George Gardiner died, and his large tract consisting of part of "Lebanon" and part of "Antelebanus" was divided into five lots, and inherited by his five children.[18] A dower lot that included George Gardiner's residence, to be held by his wife Margaret Gardiner until her death, was drawn in the center to capture parts of each of the five lots. The majority of these inherited tracts remained intact with Margaret Gardiner (the wife) and Margaret Gardiner (the daughter) living together at the family homestead.[19] In 1834, Margaret Gardiner (the daughter) had married William Peake. William Peake, Sr. (1810-1886) came to Owensville around 1831 to work as "Overseer" at George Gardiner's farm. In 1834, at their marriage, Peake became joint owner of Margaret's inherited land. William Peake continued to farm the land, and continued to live in George Gardiner's house, along with his wife, and his mother-in-law and community matriarch, Margaret Gardiner. There, the Peakes started to raise a family of 13 children. Between 1834 and 1860, William and Margaret Peake added 115 acres to their

[13] Isaac Owens also built a tobacco house and corncrib on the site. In addition, he built a second store at the northeast corner of the intersection. This store stood at the time of his death in 1825.

[14] Isaac Owens' will outlines the inheritance of his four sons, Thomas, John, Henry and Samuel. See Will Book EV and JG 1/261.

[15] Samuel and Henry each inherited ½ of the blacksmith shop.

[16] Samuel Owens purchased land about six miles south on which he built a similar, side-passage frame dwelling. He remained a part of the community, patronizing the local merchants, until his death in 1860.

Dr. James Murray, grandnephew of Dr. William Murray of Woodstock purchased the property, building the house known as "Smith's Purchase" (AA-287) on the lot.

[18] See Chancery Record 148, Richard Gardiner and others vs. Margaret Gardiner and Margaret Gardiner, the daughter, 1832.

[19] In 1832, William Gardiner sold half of his 1/5 portion (29 ½ acres) to Henry Owens. The rest of the land remained in Gardiner family hands.

holdings. His oldest son, William Peake, Jr. became a noted carpenter/builder and is considered responsible for the construction of at least three houses in Owensville and the original Catholic Church building, constructed in 1866.[20]

In addition to the Murrays, the Owenses and the Gardiner-Peake family, several other persons came onto the Owensville scene, including entrepreneur John Hopkins; merchant, John Chew; and resident James Cheston. Together, these men, followed by their children, would remain in Owensville, building houses, businesses, churches, schools and other services that by the mid-19th century had transformed the small cluster of buildings at the crossroads into the commercial, religious, educational and social center of a larger West River area.

John Hopkins (1806-1885), listed as a farmer in the census records, lived on the Owensville-Galesville Road and served as postmaster from 1836 to 1846. Hopkins operated a wheelwright shop and owned the corner store, run by merchant John Chew and known as *Chew and Hopkins*. *Chew and Hopkins* also came to house the West River Post Office.

John Chew, merchant who ran *Chew and Hopkins* until his death in the 1880s, was the patriarch of a large family, important in the Owensville community.[21] Nathaniel Summerfield Chew, John Chew's oldest son, purchased, in the 1870s, the store at the northeast corner of the crossroads (run previously by William Ireland, as shown on the 1860 Martenet Map) and there operated a dry goods and grocery store. John Chew's sister, Mary Chew, was a long-time schoolteacher at the one-room Owensville School, serving the community in this capacity from 1865 until 1910. According to the 1910 Census, Mary Chew lived, along with her sister, at the Crossroads house (AA-288). Sam Chew—Nathaniel's son—lived next door at the Tall House, until 1912, when he acquired the Chew House (AA-283). Several Chew family members also served as postmasters throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Chew Chapel cemetery, down Chew Chapel Road, just beyond the historic district boundaries, is the final resting place for many members of the Chew family.

James Cheston, who came to Owensville in 1864, was a later arrival, but by no means a stranger to the area. James Cheston's mother was Mary Thomas Cheston of nearby Lothian and his step uncle was Dr. James Murray, builder of Smiths Purchase (1838) in Owensville. Upon his arrival, James purchased the house at 153 Owensville Road (built prior to 1849), enlarging it and embellishing it with its distinctive Gothic Revival trim. James Cheston's youngest daugher, Helen, lived at this house until 1949.

[20] William Peake, Jr. is thought to have built his own house at 4725 Old Owensvilee-Sudley Road, still standing and known locally as vood Place for long-time 20th-century owner, Dr. Cawood; Tamarack Hill, located southwest of the crossroads at 85 Owensville oad, still standing and commanding its scenic hilltop site; and the house at 123 Owensville Road. Peake is also known to have worked in neighboring Prince George's County. There he built Ashland (79-63-11), near Upper Marlboro, and the now-demolished Grand Stand at the Marlborough Fair Grounds.

[21] John Chew lived on family land located north of Woodstock.

Once firmly established on the landscape, the village grew steadily throughout the 19th century becoming known as Owensville by at least 1841. In 1849, a Methodist Chapel, built by the Methodist Circuit, arose adjacent to the Methodist parsonage (Isaac Owens' old house) at the southwest corner of the crossroads. The Methodist Circuit, established in 1836, comprised five churches between Friendship to the south and the South River to the north. A second floor above the chapel, sponsored by the Sons of Temperance, was used as a meeting hall by the Sons, and rented out to various other groups, including the Odd Fellows, an Agricultural Club, Freemasons, and a Farmer's Grange. In 1886, the Methodists replaced this first chapel with a larger and more distinctive building designed in a vernacular Queen Anne style. In 1964, the church was taken down leaving a vacant corner lot on the site today.

In 1851, the West River Classical Institute, a school with Methodist connections, opened in Owensville, likely inspired by the presence of the new Methodist Church. The Institute included an impressive three-story frame structure defined by a central gable sheltering a double-story porch, and a distinctive belfry. The school, also known as Chaney's School, for principal and teacher Reverend R. G. Chaney, was located at the northern edge of the crossroads and provided education for both boys and girls from all over the West River area, including Owensville, and from as far away as New Orleans, Louisiana and Sacramento, California. In characteristically romantic fashion for the period, the first annual register, published in 1852, extolled the virtues of Owensville:

> This Institution is pleasantly situated in the village of Owensville, Anne Arundel County, Md., in the very heart of the beautiful and far famed West River country, amongst a people distinguished for their intelligence and morality; and it may be said with truth that Maryland can present no village more favorable to mental and moral improvement. In point of morality, Owensville stands unrivalled, almost every dwelling in the village is a house of prayer, and it is entirely exempt from those places of public resort so pernicious to the young, so destructive to youthful piety. Its citizens hear neither the noise of rioting, nor the language of profanity, but breathe a pure atmosphere and enjoy most excellent health.[22]

During the Civil War, the Institute was closed. In 1868, the building became "a Sunday School for the colored population...under the supervision of trustees chosen from the membership of Christs Church..."[23] In 1902, James and Charlotte Cheston purchased the former school building and donated it to Christ Church for use as a Parish house in memory of their daughter who died in 1896. William Bassford, Sexton, lived there with his family

[22] First Annual Register of the Officers and Pupils of the West River Classical Institute, 1851-1852 (Baltimore: John W. Woods, printer), 1852.
[23] SH 10/420, 1868.

beginning in at least 1910.[24] In 1924, the "old Hall" was torn down and the present parish hall was constructed, with community support and effort, on its site as a community hall.

In 1852, the Episcopalians arrived in Owensville when the Episcopal St. James' Parish built a "chapel of ease" in Owensville, next to the West River Classical Institute. By 1862, this chapel, known as St. James-the-Less was granted independent status and a new parish, named Christ Church, was formed. In 1867-69, the present Carpenter Gothic church building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was erected on land donated to the parish by Charles W. Owens, grandson of Isaac Owens and son of Henry Owens, and his wife, Mary F. Owens. The church was built in memory of brother and sister James and Annie McCaleb by their mother, Eleanor Burwell. The church, its adjacent rectory, and hillside cemetery are outstanding contributors to the Owensville Historic District.

In 1866, Our Lady of Sorrows, a Catholic denomination moved into Owensville, bringing a third church denomination to the community. The land upon which the church was erected was donated in part by Catholic–born William Peake. The first building erected on the site was a small, basilican-plan frame building that was enhanced in 1884 by a steeple with a bell tower and entry narthex. This church stood until 1951 when it was replaced by the present church structure.

The importance of Owensville in the mid-19th century over surrounding villages is well illustrated on the 1860 Martenet Map of Anne Arundel County. Owensville (designated simultaneously as Owensville and West River P.O. on map) is more densely developed than surrounding towns and villages in the region and, based upon an examination of church birth and death certificates and marriages, clearly served as the religious, and thus, social center of the larger rural area. A larger scale map of the crossroads on the Martenet Map shows the numerous residences clustered around the crossroads, including those of the Hopkins, Owens, Peakes and Chews. In addition, the crossroads included the West River Classical Institute; the Episcopal and Methodist churches; a public school (schoolhouse No. 52); a blacksmith shop; a tailor shop; two stores; a wheelwright shop and other commercial enterprises. Owensville also always had a resident doctor, beginning with Dr. William Murray in the 1790s to Dr. McClean Cawood in the 1930s.[25]

During the Civil War era, Owensville suffered both significant losses and enduring gains, but for all intents and purposes, appears to have survived the War relatively intact. The overall prosperity of the local residents of this farming community declined, based upon the U.S. Census Records for 1860 and

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GW 27/86, 90.

[25] The following is a list of resident doctors in Owensville: 1) Dr. William Murray, Woodstock, 1798-1842; 2) Dr. James Murray, Smiths Purchase, 1839-1843; 3) Dr. John Bird, Smiths Purchase, 1843-1848; 4) Dr. Estep Hall, Smiths Purchase, 1848-1876; 5) Dr. Morris Cheston, Smiths Purchase, 1881-1898; 6) Dr. Sewell Hepburn, Cawood Place, 1900-1907; 7) Dr. McCain Cawood, Cawood Place, 1907-ca. 1930; 8) Dr. Frank West, Crossroads, ca. 1930-1935.

1870, which show across-the-board decreases in the value of local real estate in 1870. The private West River Classical Institute, which closed during the War never re-opened as such, and several local residents who left for the War never returned. James McCaleb, son of Eleanor Hall McCaleb Burwell, wife of Dr. Elliott Burwell, died of Yellow Fever while serving in the Confederate Army. And, of the three Murray brothers of "Woodstock" who fought for the Confederacy at Gettysburg, only two returned: Captain William Murray was killed while leading an attack at Culp's Hill. After Pvt. Alexander Murray was wounded trying to save his brother, the third brother, Pvt. Clapham Murray took charge, valiantly leading the brigade.

The present Christ Church, constructed during the economically depressed post-Civil War era in memory of James and Annie McCaleb, however, must have inspired the spirits of the community and forged already strong bonds. The church survives today as the town's most significant individual landmark. In addition to the new Christ Church and its adjacent parsonage, several new houses were built or enlarged in Owensville in the ten-year period just after the war. It was most likely during this period that the frame house at 153 Owensville Road was enlarged and enhanced by its character-defining Gothic Revival detailing and that the house at Tamarack Hill at 85 Owensville Road, and the Peake House at 4725 Sudley Road were built by William Peake.

By 1878, as seen on the G.M. Hopkins Atlas, Owensville appears to have reached its physical peak. Throughout the rest of the 19th century and into the 20th century, Owensville thrived as a small, self-sufficient rural community. Many of its residents were the children and grandchildren of the founding members of the community.

20th Century Growth:

According to the memoirs of a long-time Owensville resident, Kate Chew Robinson, life in Owensville in the first decades of the 20th century was full of fun and adventure, even in hard times:

> Most exciting of all, a regiment of infantry was to camp for the weekend in Uncle Mac's field. They were coming some place in Pennsylvania, stopping at Camp Meade, and going to Ft. Foote in Virginia. The local ladies asked to serve refreshments in the afternoon...It was mid-July and very hot. The khaki tents, hundreds of them, were pitched in the field and down the slope toward the road to Galesville. Khaki men were swarming around them, in all stages of dress and undress. [26]

The village, according to Kate Chew's memoirs, consisted of "13 houses, three churches, and the public buildings of our childhood home, then so secure and happy." Based upon her memoirs, it appears that

[26] Kate Chew Robinson, "Thursday's Child (Has Far to Go), Memories of a Maryland Girlhood, 1908-1928," p. 43.

life for the Owensville resident had changed little from the mid-19th century until the early-to mid-20th century. Beginning in the 1920s, however, the Owensville landscape began to be altered. In 1924, the West River Classical Institute was demolished (the existing Christ Church parish hall was erected on its site). In 1927, the one-room schoolhouse that had served the community since at least 1860, was abandoned and a new school to serve a larger community was built across the road. Once abandoned, the one-room schoolhouse was quickly demolished, and replaced by the single-family dwelling on its site today.

The new school was constructed on the northwest side of the Owensville Road, across from the older school. This 1927 school was built to consolidate the one-room schoolhouses in the West River area, including those of Owensville, Bristol, Mt. Calvary, Mt. Zion, Bayard, Sudley and Churchton. The new school grew during the next 25 years to include seven classrooms and 200 students.[27]

In 1931, Owensville gained another new building--the two-story frame telephone exchange house, located on the Owensville Road, across from Our Lady of Sorrows Church. Since 1907, Owensville had been home to the West River Telephone Exchange, which provided telephone service for the entire West River country. It opened with 15 telephones in service, and until 1931, the switchboard had been located inside the operator's house. However, as the number of subscribers continued to increase and the necessary equipment grew, new quarters for the operator and the equipment were built in Owensville. In 1947, dial telephone technology was introduced and the exchange was moved to Annapolis, but the Telephone Exchange Residence remains.

In 1937, the Southern Anne Arundel County Community Association was formed for the "betterment of the community." Beginning in 1938, the Association purchased a ¾-acre lot at the corner of the Owensville and Sudley Roads from John Hopkins, III and established a T.B. clinic on the site, in the house known as the "Crossroads" (AA-288). The clinic operated with success for several years before being dismantled in 1941. Thereafter, the Association concerned itself with Boy and Girl Scout troops, highway improvement requests, lowering taxes and supporting tobacco legislation.

Despite the new amenities, the economic and social vitality of Owensville had begun to decline. By 1952, Owensville had a mere population of 37, its sole-surviving general store—there for 140 years—was being torn down, the West River exchange had moved to Annapolis, and the area embraced by the West River Post Office had been progressively reduced in scope. A 1952 article in the *Baltimore Sun*

[27] "Discovering Our School Community," Anne Arundel County School Board, 1952-53.

chronicles the demise of Owensville and quotes third-generation resident, Mr. Peake claiming, "the automobile was our undoing."[28]

Despite these losses, Owensville remains the site of the West River Post Office, and is home to two churches, numerous historic residences and associated agricultural and domestic outbuildings. The village retains a high degree of scenic and architectural integrity that evokes a palpable memory of a by-gone era.

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Owensville Historic District (AA-70) | Anne Arundel County, MD
Name of Property | County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** _____

**UTM References**
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | 3 | | | |
| 2 | | | | 4 | | | |

☐ See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

**Boundary Justification**
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kim Prothro Williams
Organization _____ date November 2002
street & number 9116 LeVelle Drive telephone 301-907-3435
city or town Chevy Chase state Maryland zip code 20815

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional Items**
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

**Paperwork Reduction Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

## UTM References:

Deale, MD quad

A: 18-363645-4302143
B: 18-362177-4301873
C: 18-362336-4301571
D: 18-361863-4300616
E: 18-361404-4300016
F: 18-361093-4301091
G: 18-361249-4301860

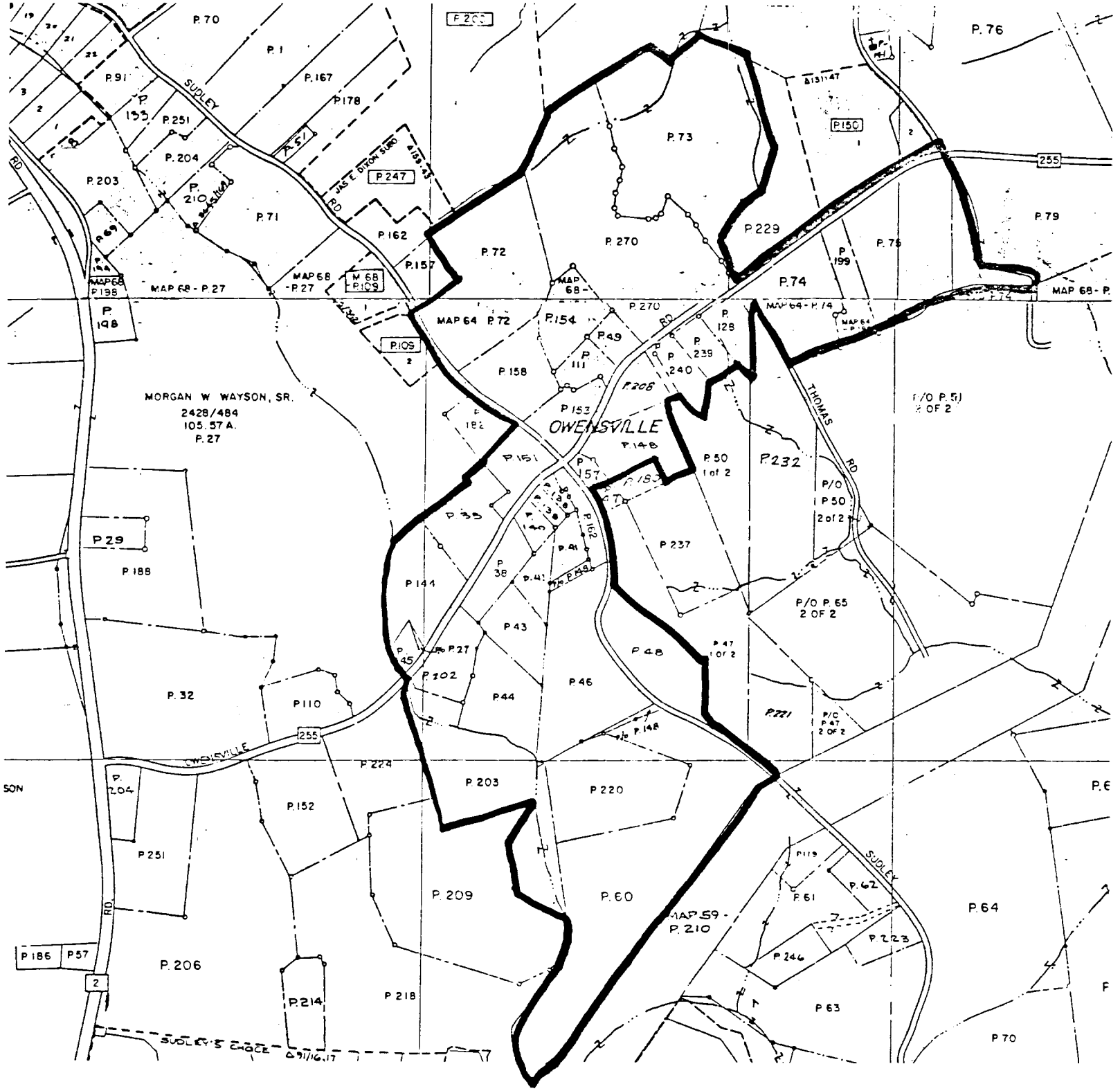
## Verbal Boundary Description:

The Owensville Historic District has its center at the intersection of Owensville Road (Route 255) and Owensville-Sudley Road. From the center, the district extends north, south, east and west to encompass that area which historically was considered part of the village of Owensville. From the intersection, the district extends west, capturing the properties on the north and south side of the road to include Tamarack Hill (Parcel 203, Tax Map 68). The district boundary runs along the rear lot lines of the properties fronting Route 255. To the north, the district includes the land to the east of the Owensville-Sudley Road, as well as the northwest corner property (Parcel 151, Tax Map 68), but otherwise finds its western edge along the Owensville-Sudley Road, including the road itself. The northern boundary is the northern edge of Tranquille Farm (Parcel 72, Map 64). To the east of the intersection, the district includes the properties to the north and south sides of the road, eliminating re-subdivided lots containing late 20$^{th}$-century residences. The district extends to the eastern edge of Woodstock (Parcel 75, Tax Map 67). To the south, the boundary runs down Sudley Road, excluding Parcel 47, to Parcel 48, then crosses Sudely Road to capture the southern property lines of those parcels south of Route 255, and back to the beginning at Tamarack Hill (Parcel 203, Map 68). Boundaries are indicated by the heavy line on the section of Anne Arundel County Tax Map 68 which accompanies this documentation.

## Boundary Justification:

The Owensville Historic District boundaries generally include the geographic area that has historically been considered the village of Owensville. The buildings and rural landscapes

within the boundaries survive as reminders of the once-vibrant crossroads village and its surrounding farming community. Excluded from the boundaries are several parcels of land that have been subdivided and developed with houses that are architecturally incompatible with the historic character of the village.




# OWENSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

## Boundary Map

AA-70
Owensville Historic District
Anne Arundel County, Maryland
NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARIES
May 2003
Boundary is indicated by the heavy black line

Source: Anne Arundel County Property Maps

NORTH

5661 I NW
(BOWIE)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

AA-70

OWENSVILLE
HISTORIC
DISTRICT
ANNE ARUNDEL
COUNTY, MD

A: 18-361645-
4302143

B: 18-362177-
4301873

C: 18-362336-
4301571

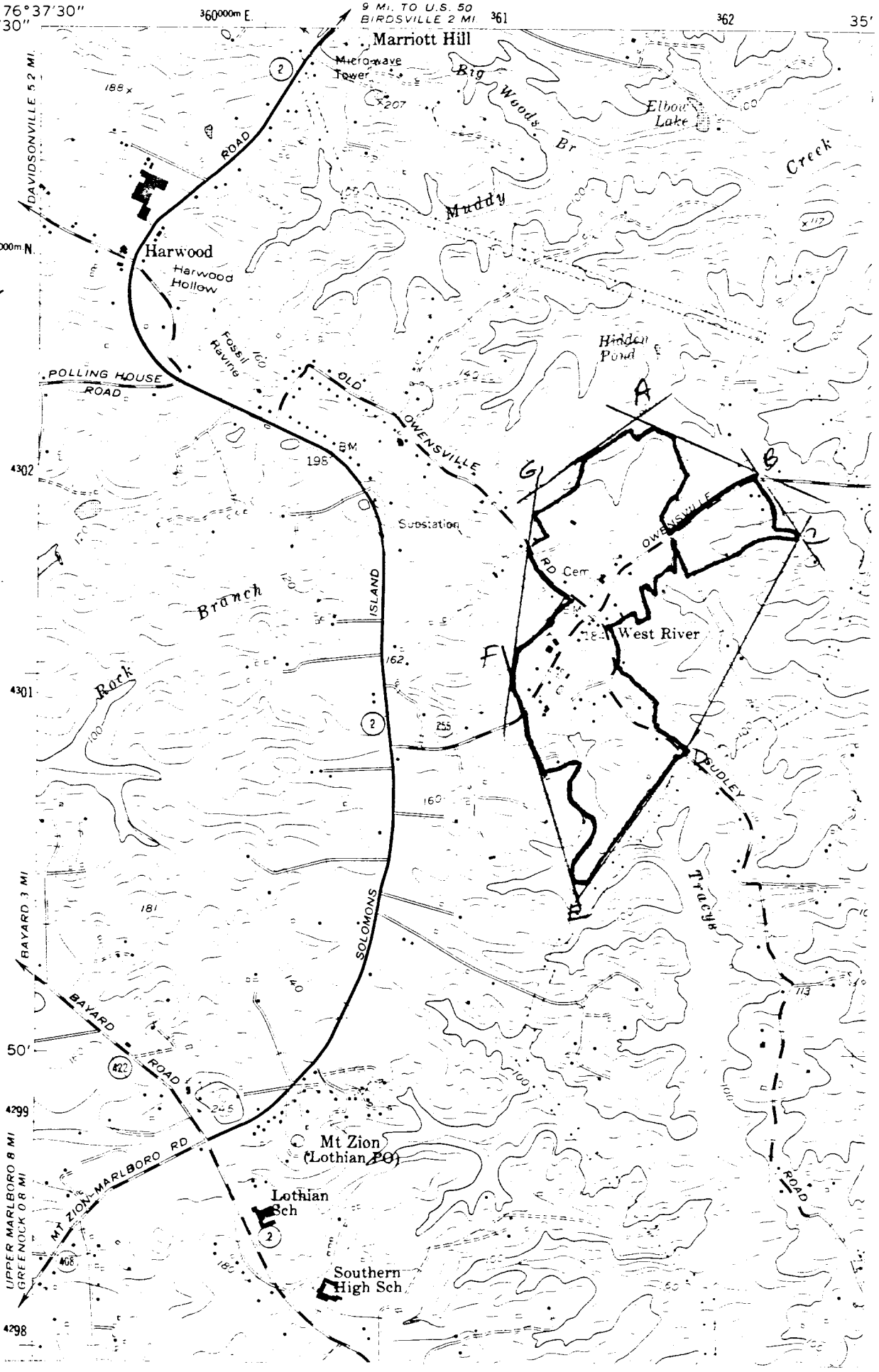
D: 18-361863-
4300616

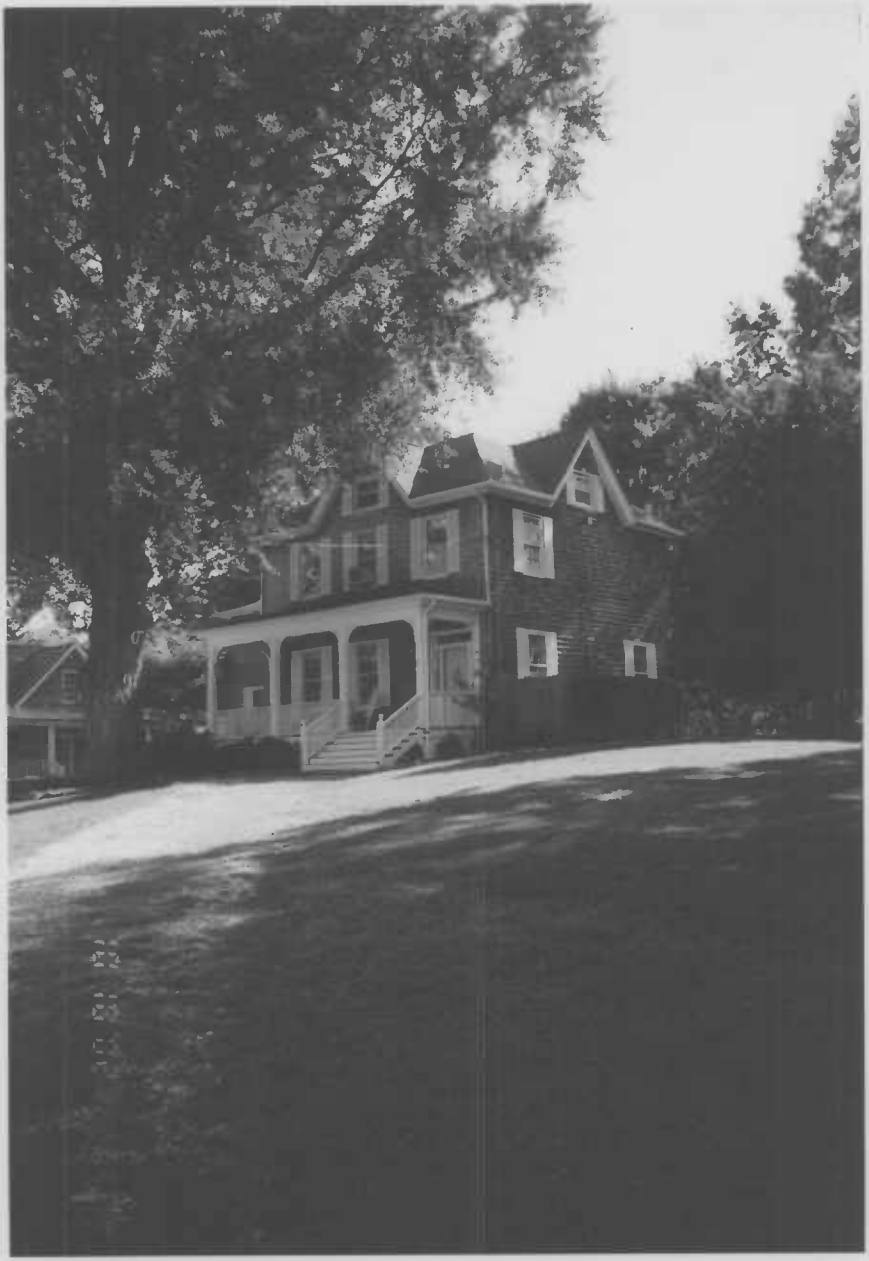
E: 18-361404-
4300016

F: 18-361093-
4301091

G: 18-361249-
4301860

Date Quad





AA-70
Tamarack Hill (AA-282); Owensville H.D.
AA Co, MD
Kim Williams
10/02
MD SHPO
View looking south
1/13

AA-70
Cheston House (AA-285), Owensville Historic District
AA Co., MD
Kim Williams
10/02
View looking south
2/13

AA-70
Cheston House (AA-285); Owensville Historic District
AA Co, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
View of barn and corn crib
3/13

AA-70

0057273.Package_A.18

Smiths Purchase (AA-287); Owensville Historic District

AA County, MD

Kim Williams

MD SHPO

View looking North

4/13

AA-70
Methodist Parsonage (AA-286)
Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
View looking SE
5/13

AA-70
Christ Church (AA-289)
Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
View of bell tower
6/13

0057273.Package_C.25

0057273-Package_C: 19

AA-70
Christ Church Rectory; Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
View looking north
7/13

0057273.Package_A.16

AA-70

Owensville Crossroads; Owensville H.D

AA County, MD

Kim Williams

MD SHPO

View from south side of intersection looking north

8/13

AA-70
Owensville Road, Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
10/02
View looking west along Owensville Road towards crossroads
9/13

0057273.Package_0.12

AA-70
Owensville-Sudley Road; Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
10/02
View looking south from crossroads down
10/13 Owensville-Sudley Road

AA-70
Tranquille Farm, Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
10/02
View looking east
12/13

AA-70
Woodstock Farm, Owensville Historic District
AA County, MD
Kim Williams
MD SHPO
10/02
View looking north
13/13