JAMES A. DIFFENBAUGH HOUSE

The Diffenbaugh-Weant House is a large 2½ story L-shaped house fronting Willis Street at the northeast corner of its intersection with Center Street in Westminster. The house, built largely of brick (but with full length clapboard shingle 2 story sections to the rear) was built by John Diffenbaugh, probably in the late 1880's. At first glance, the house appears to be another of the L-shaped houses that were popular in the City in the late 19th century (such as the Orlando Reese House on East Main Street and the Francis Shriver on West Main Street). Closer examination reveals that the house possesses details that make it unique in the area.

The Diffenbaugh-Weant House is interesting in the matter in which it takes a popular late 19th century building form, and goes from there, by adding certain unusual features, to create a very individual statement. These features, such as the interestingly worked heavy bulbous brick chimneys, the rhythmic brick frieze, the shingled and glass rear sections, the fine use of stained glass, were doubtless though, at the time they were built, to be features of elegance as well as of individuality.

A barn-carriage house of exceptionally fine lines is found to the north towards the rear of the property. The barn continues several of the themes begun on the main house: stretcher bond walls pierced by segmental arched double hung sash windows enlivened by the same interesting brick frieze, slate roof, and cusped shingled dormer ends. The well landscaped grounds continue the theme of elegant Victorian individuality begun on the house, a theme which is echoed even in the lawn furniture. An especially noteworthy item is an intricately cast iron bench in the naturalistic form of intertwined, writhing grape vines, leaves, and fruit, is a masterpiece of its kind.

The builder, James A. Diffenbaugh, was something of a idiosyncratic character himself. Although he seems to have desired to have been more known as a public school teacher than anything else, it's clear that politics and appointed offices would account for most of his time, effort, and income. He was the Clerk of the Committee of Accounts in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 44th, 45th, and 46th Congress until he retired in 1881 when he was appointed Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court of Carroll County. He quit this post in 1884 when he was elected County School examiner.

SPEC# 539
MAGI # 07.5[illegible]04

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC
James A. Diffenbaugh House

AND/OR COMMON
Weant House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
171 Willis Street

CITY, TOWN
Westminster

___ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
7

STATE
Maryland

COUNTY
Carroll

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY
- ___DISTRICT
- X___BUILDING(S)
- ___STRUCTURE
- ___SITE
- ___OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
- ___PUBLIC
- X___PRIVATE
- ___BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION
- ___IN PROCESS
- ___BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
- X___OCCUPIED
- ___UNOCCUPIED
- ___WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE
- X___YES: RESTRICTED
- ___YES: UNRESTRICTED
- ___NO

PRESENT USE
- ___AGRICULTURE
- ___COMMERCIAL
- ___EDUCATIONAL
- ___ENTERTAINMENT
- ___GOVERNMENT
- ___INDUSTRIAL
- ___MILITARY
- ___MUSEUM
- ___PARK
- X___PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ___RELIGIOUS
- ___SCIENTIFIC
- ___TRANSPORTATION
- ___OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
The Hon. & Mrs. Edward O. Weant, Jr. Telephone #: 848-8959

STREET & NUMBER
171 Willis Street

CITY, TOWN
Westminster

___ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code
Maryland 21157

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Liber #: 270
Folio #: 494

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Carroll County Office Building

STREET & NUMBER
Center Street

CITY, TOWN
Westminster

STATE
Maryland

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None

DATE

___FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

CARR-539

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Diffenbaugh-Weant House is a large 2½ story L-shaped house fronting Willis Street at the northeast corner of its intersection with Center Street in Westminster. The house, built largely of brick (but with full length clapboard shingle 2 story sections to the rear) was built by John Diffenbaugh, probably in the late 1880's. At first glance, the house appears to be another of the L-shaped houses that were popular in the City in the late 19th century (such as the Orlando Reese House on East Main Street and the Francis Shriver on West Main Street). Closer examination reveals that the house possesses details that make it unique in the area.

The brick section consists of two nearly equal size 2½ story two-bay-by-three-bay gable roofed sections in an L-shape. Windows and doors on the two full stories of these brick sections are double-hung sash windows paned one-over-one with flanking dark wooden louvered shutters, which contrast with the cream of the window's and with woodwork trim. The western block has two such windows regularly spaced on the two stories fronting Center Street and two more closely spaced together in the two stories that front Willis Street. The other section has two on the two stories of the easternmost facade, and three on the second floor of the principal (southern) facade with two below to the west of the double entrance door on that facade. A one story simply railed hipped roof porch in the L-space shades the ground story windows. The east and west facade windows are separated around the chimney flues, which, in each instance, rise into massive and intricately designed corbel capped brick chimneys. An interesting brick frieze separates the top of the stretcher bond brick wall from the steeply pitched slate shingle gable roof. This brick frieze is topped by a small wooden modillion cornice painted the cream color of the windows' trim and the porch. Two twin shed roofed dormer windows pierce the roof to the west and south. Twin windows also appear in the gable ends of the sections; one on the south (principal) facade and two small twin windows in the eastern facade, these are separated by an area of involved brickwork similar to the delicate brickwork already discussed and associated with the chimney. This piece is well placed as it is on line with the eastern most chimney.

Besides the involved brick trim as discussed, the first feature that separates this house from other houses which it would appear to resemble, is a brick 2½ story gable roofed extension to the north, giving the house, in the brick part, a rather unusual floor plan. Certain motifs present in the main brick section (the segmental arched shuttered windows, the brick

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

CARR-539

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	X LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	X EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	X POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1888 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As noted in the descriptive answer to question 7, the Diffenbaugh-Weant House is interesting in the matter in which it takes a popular late 19th century building form, and goes from there, by adding certain unusual features, to create a very individual statement. These features, such as the interestingly worked heavy bulbous brick chimneys, the rhythmic brick frieze, the shingled and glass rear sections, the fine use of stained glass, were doubtless thought, at the time they were built, to be features of elegance as well as of individuality.

The builder, James A. Diffenbaugh, was something of a idiosyncratic character himself. Born at Fern Rock, near Westminster, in 1854, he received his undergraduate and Master's degrees from Western Maryland College in 1874 and 1877, and was admitted to the bar in 1878. Although he seems to have desired to have been more known as a public school teacher than anything else, it's clear that politics and appointed offices would account for most of his time, effort, and income. He was the Clerk of the Committee of Accounts in the U. S. House of Representatives during the 44th, 45th, and 46th Congress until he retired in 1881 when he was appointed Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court of Carroll County. He quit this post in 1884 when he was elected County School examiner. He was reelected to this post 5 times, in 1886, '88, '90, '92, and '94. In 1888 he was appointed one of 5 memebers of the State Board of Education and President of the State Teachers Association. An 1896 publication by the Baltimore American Publication, taking the nature of being a guide to the state and its leading citizens, comments on Diffenbaugh:

> Being a fine scholar, a fluent writer and speaker, a man of great executive ability, and of gentle and refined manners and cultivated taste, it need not be said that he filled the various offices to which he has been called with great credit to his alma mater, and with great advantage to his state. His elegant bachelor home, with its fine library, wealth of creature comforts and boundless hospitality at "The Maples" in Westminster, is well known to his host of friends in his own and other states.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

CARR-539

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Being a lot of approximately 18,000 sq. ft. on the northeast corner of the intersection of Willis and Center Streets in Westminster.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Christopher Weeks, Consultant

DATE
December, 1977

ORGANIZATION
Westminster Historical Sites Survey

STREET & NUMBER
c/o City Hall - Public Works Department

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN
Westminster

STATE
Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

cornice or frieze, the imbricated shingle dormers and the small square gable window(, have been carried over here, providing continuity. On each side of this extension are wood and glassy 2 story sections which are unusual in concept and fine in execution and detail, and which help with, the other features of the house, to give it its sense of individuality. The western-most section is largely glass, consisting of several double-hung sash windows on the two exposed sides of the second and ground stories, with a braod cusped shingle panel separating stories. The eastern section, is similar on the second story, but on the ground story presents variations on this variation. Here Roman arched windows (and one door) are evident, windows which have there circular arches enlivened by tinted leaded glass. This entire ground story section is sheathed in imbricated shingles such as appear on the glassy sections and on the gable end of the brick sections as well as on the dormer window of those brick sections. A barn-carriage house of exceptionally fine lines is found to the north towards the rear of the property. The barn continues several of the themes begun on the main house: stretcher bond walls pierced by segmental arched double hung sash windows enlivened by the same interesting brick frieze, slate roof, and cusped shingled dormer ends. The well landscaped grounds continue the theme of elegant Victorian individuality begun on the house, a theme which is echoed even in the lawn furniture. An especially noteworthy item is an intricately cast iron bench in the naturalistic form of intertwined, writhing grape vines, leaves, and fruit, is a masterpiece of its kind.

These "refined manners and cultivated taste", and perhaps the "great executive ability" resulted in being appointed in 1894 Special Deputy Collector of Customs at the Port of Baltimore in Westminster. Thus he left Carroll County in an official capacity. He bought the land the house is built on for $800 on July 1, 1887 from John K. Longwell and wife (Carroll County Deed Book 66, Page 258) at which time he was County school examiner. He must of prospered in this post, as the large house, the Maples", was built soon afterwards. After obtaining the plum post of Port Supervisor, he moved to Baltimore, selling the house to one David Cowan on February 23, 1898. The price he got for the place was $7500, remarkably high.

Various mortgage defaults a couple of years later resulted in Harvey O. Weant's taking possession on February 18, 1901 (96/481). He sold to Edward O. Weant, Sr., on January 21, 1903 for $5000 (97/39). The house has remained in the Weant family, now owned by Judge and Mrs. Edward O. Weant, Jr., ever since.

Additional information for CARR-539
171 Willis Street
A. Diffenbaugh-Weant House

From the Democratic Advocate, June 23, 1885:

"James A. Diffenbaugh broke ground on Thursday morning preparatory to the erection of a handsome brick Queen Ann cottage of fine size and proportions on the corner of Center and Willis Streets. Ten men were at work removing the earth from the foundation."

Joe Getty
7/12/85

54%

CAMR 539

171 Willis Street

Dittenbach. Weat House

J-17

CHR-539

116 %

CARR-539

#175 p. ~~102~~ 103

116%

~~CLXX~~

"Diffenbaugh-Weaut House"

(to match the Vaux Design No. 3)

958/0

1 1

CARR-539

#176 P.104

~~CLXXI~~

95%

(65)

UMR-539

CLXXII - Cast iron bench
at Diffenbach-Weant
House, 171 Willis Street.

CARR - 539

CAN 539

CMR-539