1987

S-43
Joseph Croswell House
Oriole
private

c. 1900

The Joseph Croswell house, also called the Phoebus house, stands on the western edge of the watermans' village of Oriole north of St. Peter's Creek. Considered one of the most unusual of the Victorian houses in Somerset County, the two-story cruciform shaped dwelling is further marked by a pair of three-story towers, covered with pyramidal roofs with slightly kicked eaves. Turned post porches extend to each side of the house and shelter the principal entrances. Adding contrast to the horizontal weatherboarding, now covered with asbestos, are the gable ends sheathed with fishscale shingles.

The Croswell family has been long known in the vicinity for operating a store at the west end of Oriole during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Smith, William S., House
other names/site number: Croswell House, Phoebus House — S-43

2. Location

street & number: South side of Oriole Road — N/A ☐ not for publication
city, town: Oriole — N/A ☐ vicinity
state: Maryland code MD county: Somerset code 039 zip code 21853

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
☒ private	☒ building(s)	1	1 buildings
☐ public-local	☐ district		sites
☐ public-State	☐ site		structures
☐ public-Federal	☐ structure		objects
	☐ object	1	1 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

4. 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official: STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER — Date: 6/3/91

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling	DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)

QUEEN ANNE

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
walls WEATHERBOARD
SHINGLES
roof ASPHALT
other WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

The William S. Smith house, also known as the Joseph Croswell house or the Phoebus house, is located in the small village of Oriole, Somerset County, Maryland. The two-story cross-shaped frame Queen Anne house, built about 1890, dominated by a pair of three-story entrance towers, is supported on a brick pier foundation. The frame dwelling is clad with a mixture of plain weatherboards, fish-scale shingles, and later asbestos siding. The steeply pitched gable roofs are sheathed in asphalt shingles. Sheltering the two entrances are turned post porches accented with delicate spindles brackets and rows of spindles under the eaves. Two-over-two sash windows, originally flanked by louvered shutters, light the first and second floors. The first floor plan involves two center rooms flanked by separate staircases on each side with a single room on the opposite side of each stair. Most of the original Victorian woodwork remains intact. The only outbuilding is a modern garage.

[X] See continuation sheet 7.1

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The William S. Smith House, also known historically as the Joseph Croswell house or the Phoebus house, stands in the small village of Oriole, Somerset County, Maryland on the south side of Maryland Route 627. The house faces north with the principal gable roof oriented on an east/west axis.

Built around 1890, the two-story cruciform shaped Queen Anne frame dwelling is dominated by a pair of three-story towers that rise within the front corners of the cross plan. The house is supported by a brick pier foundation, and it is largely sheathed with a layer of asbestos shingles that cover the original weatherboards. The weatherboards are exposed within the porch areas, and the fish-scale shingles that distinguish the gable ends have not been covered over either. The steeply pitched asphalt shingle roof has extended eaves with exposed and decorated rafter feet. The pyramidal tower roofs are marked by kicked eaves, wooden finials, and weathervanes. Rising through the center of the house are two narrow brick chimneys, one of which retains a decorative corbelled cap.

The north (main) facade is a basically symmetrical five-bay elevation with a center gable-front bay of the cruciform plan house flanked by the two entrance towers. The projecting gable-front bay is pierced by single two-over-two sash windows on each floor. (Shutters survive although they are stored mostly in the attic and garage in preparation for repainting.) A smaller two-over-two sash window pierces the gable end to light the attic. Finishing the eave is a pierced bargeboard.

Flanking the projecting bay are the two towers, each containing an entrance on the first floor. The original partially glazed front doors remain in place. The east door is highlighted with colored glass upper entrances on both sides. The turned baluster handrails and the spindlework under the eaves remains intact as well. The second floor is lighted by two-over-two sash windows, while the third floor of each tower is marked by a small two-pane window.

The gable ends are largely alike with two-over-two sash windows piercing each floor. The eaves are extended and finished with pierced bargeboards.

See Continuation Sheet No. 2

The south side of the house is a relatively plain elevation with a central projecting bay. Two-over-two sash windows pierce the first and second floors as well as the gable end. Fishscale shingles remain exposed within the upper gable of the projecting bay. On the east side of the bay a single story shed roof extends to enclose a pantry and porch.

The interior of the house has changed little since the late nineteenth century and much of the original woodwork remains intact. The formal front entrance, located on the west side of the house, allows access to the main hall and principal stairway. A heavily turned newel post with a ball finial and a series of turned balusters anchor a molded handrail. The stringer is embellished with a scroll decoration. Opening off the hall are several four-panel doors framed by bulls-eye block surrounds.

The room farthest west, currently used as a bedroom, may have been a formal parlor, although its exact original use is uncertain. The room retains a period Victorian mantel; the dining room and living room are trimmed with the same bulls-eye block door and windows surrounds as well as ogee molded baseboards. A built-in cupboard flanks the dining room mantel.

The kitchen, located on the far east end of the house, is separated from the living room and dining room by a service stairway. The kitchen has been remodeled in the past fifteen years, but the built-in beaded board door cupboard remains in the northeast corner.

The second floor is divided in the same manner as the first floor, and the woodwork follows the same basic design. Metal floor vents remain in a few rooms. The open stairwell continues to an unfinished attic. The door at the head of the attic stair retains an oak grained back. Series of butted common rafters are stabilized by collar beams fastened with cut nails.

The only outbuilding is a mid-twentieth century garage which does not contribute to the significance of the house.

See Continuation Sheet No. 3

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
ARCHITECTURE	c.1890	c.1890

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Significant Person: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The William S. Smith House is significant for its architectural character. Built about 1890, the house is a modest example of a Queen Anne influenced building. The exterior displays a pair of square towers with pyramidal roofs, multiple roof lines, and the ubiquitous gable shingling. In Somerset County, however, the William S. Smith House is the most elaborate example of this style of architecture outside of Princess Anne, the county seat, and Crisfield, the largest town. Houses built in the Queen Anne can be found in these towns but in the rural regions, Queen Anne influences are limited generally to turn-of-the-century renovations of earlier houses.

☒ See continuation sheet 8.3

For HISTORIC CONTEXT and MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN data.

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Eastern Shore

Chronological/Developmental Period(s):

Industrial/Urban Dominance A.D. 1870-1930

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s):

Architecture/Landscape Architecture/Community Planning

Resource Type:

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Village

Historic Function(s) and Use(s):

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Known Design Source: None

See Continuation Sheet No. 5

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

William S. Smith is credited with financing the construction of this house around 1890 after he received part of the family land through his father's will. William T. Smith bequeathed to his son William S. and his two other sons portions of the family land that had been occupied by the Smiths since the early nineteenth century. Comprising parts of "Littleworth," or "Brother's Agreement" and "Nicholson's Adventure," the land was divided by the three sons in December 1889 (SCL 5/692). William S. Smith presumably erected this house shortly afterwards, although he experienced difficult financial shortfalls around 1898 which forced his property into Somerset Court. In the settlement proceedings the property was described as the land on the "south side of the road leading to Deal's Island on the East side of the homeplace of William T. Smith with improvements ... and where on the said William S. Smith built a dwelling house (OTB 10/58)." Very little is recorded about William S. Smith, although the family had been prominent in the area since the early nineteenth century. In June 1898 the Smith house was sold by the estate trustee, H. Filmore Lankford, to Severn W. Croswell and others for $800.00 (OTB 23/438). Joseph Croswell, a member of the group that purchased the Smith lands, is thought to have lived on the property with his wife Beulah Phoebus, although he did not acquire full title to the house until 1920 (WJS 80/580). Not much is known about Joseph Croswell other than the fact that the family operated a general store in the village during the early to mid twentieth century. The house remained in Croswell and related Phoebus family hands until 1968 (ITP 245/453). The current owner purchased the house in 1978 (311/680).

Houses built in the Queen Anne style in rural Somerset County are few. The best examples are the Smith house, the Long house (S-287) near Hopewell, the Berry house (S-294) near Tulls Corner, and the Whittington Farm (S-276) near Marion. All were built about 1900 and have the typical multiple roof lines and multiple siding materials. Only the Smith house has towers. The best examples with Queen Anne renovations are the Adams Farm (S-338) in the vicinity of Princess Anne, and Cedar Hill (S-195) near Westover.

See Continuation Sheet No. 6

Somerset County Land Records, Somerset County Courthouse, Princess Anne, Maryland.

Somerset County Will Books, Somerset County Courthouse, Princess Anne, Maryland.

Touart, Paul Baker. Somerset: An Architectural History. Published by the Maryland Historical Trust and the Somerset County Historical Trust, 1990.

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties: Somerset County. Maryland Historical Trust, Annapolis, Maryland.

☐ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .75 acre

USGS Quad: Monie, Maryland

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	428560	4225080
B			
C			
D			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

☒ See continuation sheet 10.5

Boundary Justification

☒ See continuation sheet 10.5

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian

organization Private Consultant date February 9, 1991

street & number P.O. Box 5 telephone (301)651-1094

city or town Westover state Maryland zip code 21871

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

All that lot or parcel of land situate, lying, and being in St. Peters Election District, Somerset County, Maryland, in the village of Oriole, on the south side of the Oriole County Road and east of, but not adjacent to, the intersection of Crab Island Road, being bounded on the east and south by the lands of N. Alberta Smith, Woodrow T. wilson, and Margaret A. Wilson, and being bounded on the west by a private road, and described in 1973 as "on the east side of the old county road leading from Oriole to Deal Island, bounded on the north by William Sharpless, on the east by the land of Hollis Riggin, and on the south by the land owned or formerly owned by Vel Somers, containing three-fourths of an acre more or less." (Description taken from the Somerset County Land Record, 311/680, dated December 12, 1978.)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property consists only of the village lot upon which it stands. The lot is surrounded by resources which do not contribute to the architectural character of this house.

2000435504

Form 10-445
(5/62)

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND PHOTOGRAPHS MAY BE ADDED ON SHEET OF SAME SIZE

1. STATE
COUNTY Somerset
TOWN Oriole VICINITY
STREET NO.

ORIGINAL OWNER ---
ORIGINAL USE Dwelling
PRESENT OWNER Mr. F. Phoebus
PRESENT USE Dwelling
WALL CONSTRUCTION Clapboard
NO. OF STORIES 2 w/ attic (2½)

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
INVENTORY

2. NAME Phoebus House S-43

DATE OR PERIOD c. 1870
STYLE Victorian Gothic
ARCHITECT
BUILDER

3. FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS USE

4. NOTABLE FEATURES, HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DESCRIPTION OPEN TO PUBLIC No

This is a very attractive and unusual Victorian Gothic structure. It is imaginative and is more like a child's castle or doll house than a real dwelling. It is built in a cruciform plan and is 7 bays long. The central front bay protrudes as an arm of cross and contains the door, a high, narrow, double Victorian one. All of the windows are likewise of the high narrow variety. The house is 2½ stories high and has a very steeply pitched A-roof.

The eye-catching feature occurs at the junction of the arms in the front of the house. Here, on each side of the central bay a 3 storey tower rises to above the roof level of the main house. The towers are capped by steeply pitched pyramidal roofs which flare slightly.

5. PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE Endangered Interior Exterior

The house is deteriorating and appears to be rotting away. It is unusual and should be saved.

6. LOCATION MAP (Plan Optional)

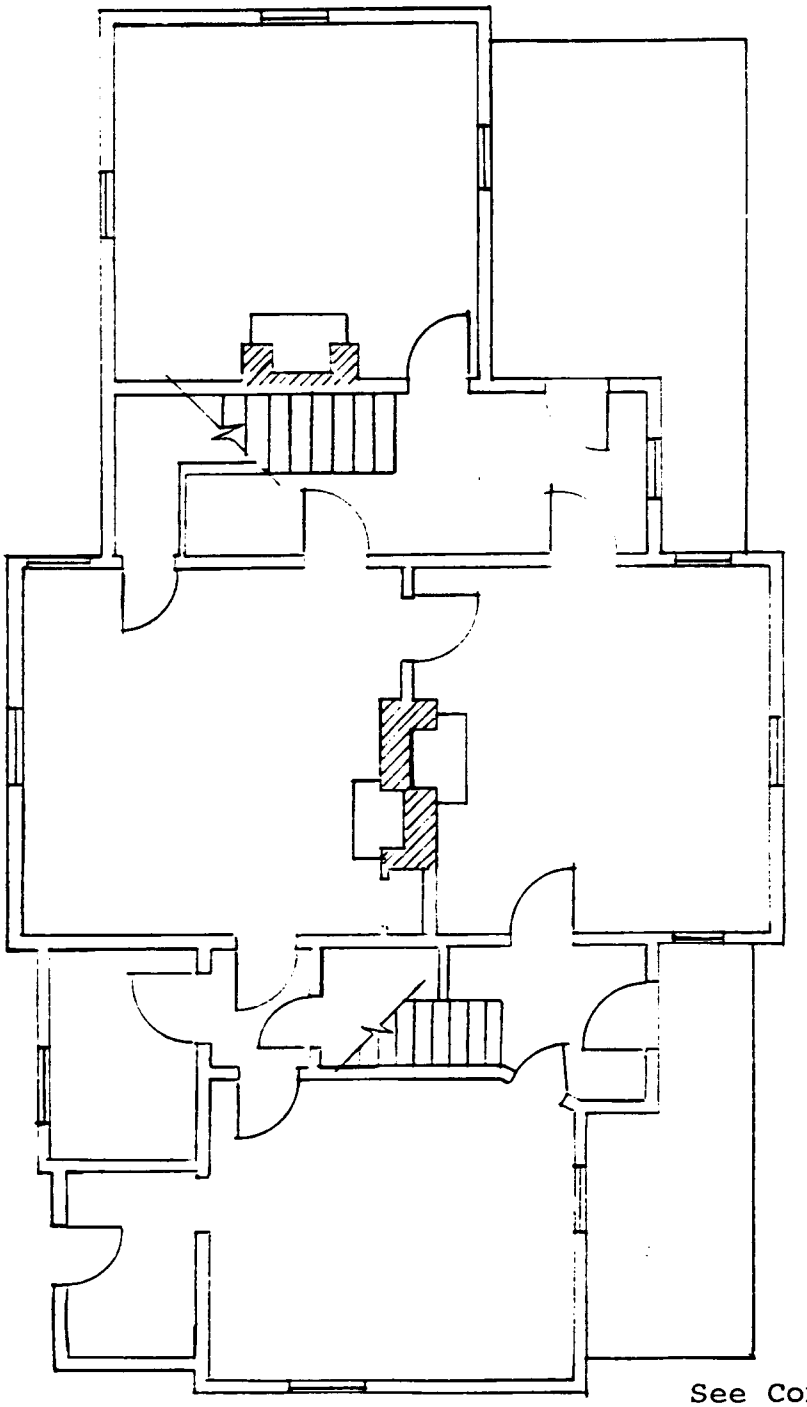
7. PHOTOGRAPH

8. PUBLISHED SOURCES (Author, Title, Pages)
INTERVIEWS, RECORDS, PHOTOS, ETC.

9. NAME, ADDRESS AND TITLE OF RECORDER
Paul A. Brinkman

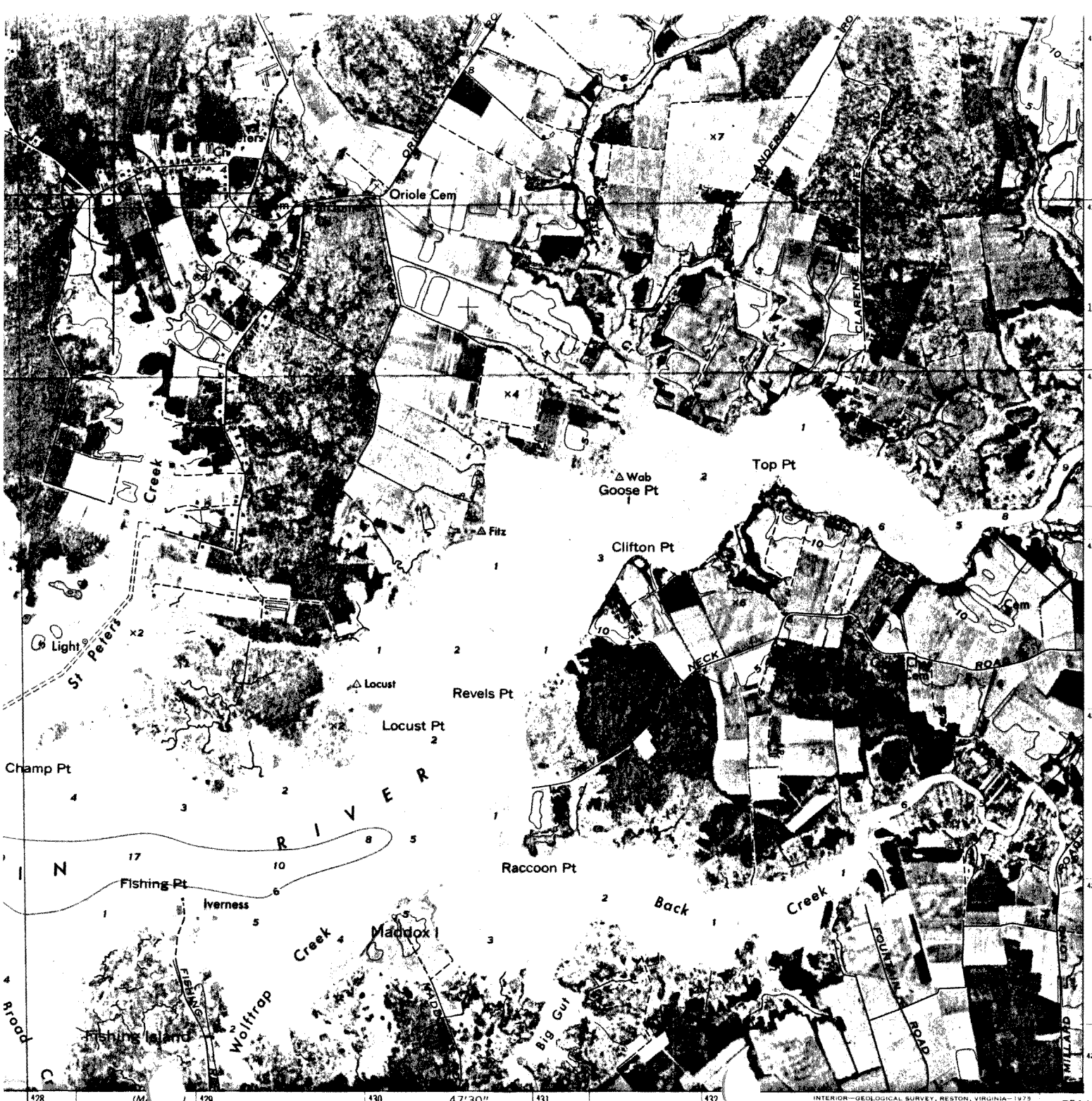
DATE OF RECORD 2/8/67

5-39



WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE
ORIOLE, SOMERSET COUNTY, MD

See Continuation Sheet No. 4



Smith, William S., House
S-43
10' Somerset Co. Maryland
18/428560/4225080

S-43

SCALE 1:24 000
0
1 MILE

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway
Light-duty road, hard or

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1975

Phoebus House S-43
(Joseph Croswell House)
Oriole, Somerset Co., Md.
Northeast Elevation
7/86, Paul Touart, Photographer
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

William S. Smith House

S-43
WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE
ORIOLE
NORTH ELEVATION
1/91
NEG/M H

1/11

S 43
WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE
ONDLE
WEST END PORCH
1/91
NEG / MD H T

2/11

S-43
William S. Smith House
Oriole
West Tower
MI
Neg / M H T

3/11

S-43

WALLACE & SMITH HOUSE

ORIOLE

NORTH GALE CNB

1/9

NEG/NT 4 T

4/11

S-47
WILLIAM S SMITH HOUSE
ORIOLE
SOUTH ELEVATION
1/91 I
NEG/M H T
5/11

S-43

WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE

ORIENT

FIRST FLOOR NEWEL POST

11/91

Neg / M H T

6/11

S-43

WILLIAM SMITH HOUSE

ORDER

FIRST FLOOR MANTEL - WEST ROOM

1/91

Neg. / M H T

7/11

DOME-A-LENE
INSULATING PRODUCTS

5-43
William S. Smith House
Oriole
Second Floor Mantel
1/71 Paul Touffe
Neg / M H T

9/11

S-43
WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE
ORIOLE

SECOND FLOOR BEDROOM DOOR
1/91 PAM TOURET
NEGATIVE/ M H T

10/11

S-43
WILLIAM S. SMITH HOUSE
ORIOLE, SOMERSET COUNTY MD
ATTIC DOOR
1/91, PAUL TOUART, PHOTOGRAPHER
NEGATIVE/MD HIST TRUST

11/11

S-43

Phoebus House

Somerset

Photograph courtesy of
DANIEL C. CHURCH