

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Jesse and Myrtle Downey House

## 2. Location

street & number Southeast side Rt. 20, .3 mile northeast of Rt. 288  not for publication  
(Sharptown Rd.) east of Rock Hall

city, town Rock Hall  vicinity of congressional district first

state Maryland county Kent

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Jesse B. Downey

street & number telephone no.: 778-5520

city, town Rock Hall state and zip code Maryland 21661

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Court House liber RAS 20

street & number folio 443,444

city, town Chestertown state Maryland 21620

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys NONE

title

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

# 7. Description

Survey No. K-522

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Built with a narrow central hall (later modified) and a secondary transverse hall near the rear with access to the enclosed stair, this large 1928 1-1/2 story frame stuccoed bungalow has three rooms on each side on the first story. The gable roof, with one large gable-roofed dormer in each slope (the rear one eccentric), changes pitch to cover the partial-width rear porch and the full-width **front** porch, where the roof is supported only by large tapered wooden pillars upon the corner piers of the porch's stuccoed half-wall, or solid balustrade. Most windows are double-hung with 3/1 lights and grouped. A chimney stepped on one side only, gable-roofed rectangular dining room bay, and exposed roof framing members, including ersatz purlins, add visual interest.

# 8. Significance

Survey No. K-522

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1928 **Builder/Architect**

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
 and/or  
 Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  
 Level of Significance:  national  state  local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Jesse and Myrtle Downey House is a well-conceived and well executed example of a large 1920's American bungalow built from a purchased plan that was a popularization deriving largely from Gustav Stickley's "Craftsman Houses" of the first decade of the century. It is the finest house of its type in the Rock Hall area. A low, horizontal, sheltering effect was achieved by the low-sweeping roof which changes pitch to cover the porches; the front porch's solid balustrade, or half-wall, and single span of its low roof beam; overhanging eaves; and grouped windows. Bold, plain trim; earthtone exterior colors; exposed roof rafters and purlins; large gable-roofed dormers and bay; unpainted (but varnished) interior trim; room-wide fireplace wall with natural-finish cabinets and drawers flanking the fireplace and small windows high in the wall on each side; and asymmetrically stepped chimney are all elements inspired by Stickley and others (including Frank Lloyd Wright) in their quest for simplicity, "honest," practicality, and for the apparent hand of man as craftsman. Fairly common in the Rock Hall area, but in general rare in Kent County, 1920's bungalows built from purchased plans broke to some extent the persistent local tradition of quite plain (though with some Victorian details) 2-story, 3 to 5 bay, rectangular, gable-roofed houses with wings and porches under their own separate roofs.



## 7.1 DESCRIPTION (continued)

BUILDING FORM AND MATERIAL

1. Size: 1-1/2 stories, 3 bays wide, 3-4 bays deep. Measurements are ca. 34 feet wide by 38 feet deep. There are no wings.
2. Plan type: Originally central hall with, essentially, three rooms each side; secondary, transverse rear hall at end of central hall, near rear of house, for access from kitchen to enclosed stair, bath, and the three bedrooms east of the central hall. (See plan sketch) 1st story rectangular bay extension (ca. 2 feet) on west gable end, central bay (dining room).
3. Roof type: gable, with change of slope (shallower) over front and rear porches.
4. Chimney: in west gable end, south bay, outside wall. For living room fireplace, with small high windows each side. Light salmon-colored brick. Decorative elements: corbelled cap (out and in) , two large steps one side (north) only. Ivy growing on chimney.
5. Material/Walls: Frame. Surfaced with original cement stucco with pressed-in beige, gray and brown stones. Overall effect is beige-tan color. Still in good condition except for solid balustrade of side entry to front porch.
6. Material/Roofs: asphalt shingles over wood shingles
7. Material/Foundation: Foundation of poured concrete which is not visible on exterior since stuccoing extends to ground. Cellar with 1-light awning windows.
8. Age: Built in 1928 for less than \$4,000 by present owner/occupants. Main carpenter received 50 cents per hour, helper 25 cents. Main carpenter was Charles S. Parsons, Mrs. Downey's uncle. He was the same carpenter who built K-531, Miss Kingsland's Boarding House in Gratitude. He apparently worked with care--trimwork done well, and joints are still tight. Owner says house built from plan book, possibly acquired at lumberyard.
9. Style: 1920's American bungalow, a popularization of Craftsman Style, not indigenous to Kent County. See later discussion of this style.

BUILDING ELEMENTS AND DETAILS

## 1. Doors

Main entry: in central bay of approach (north) side, from front porch. Plain 4-1/2" trim. Door: two tall vertical lights with same double-faced recessed panel style as interior wooden doors; interior frame/band is in recessed area and raised.

Secondary entries: 1) South side (rear), west bay, through small screened porch to kitchen; door-4 lights over 2 horizontal panels.

2) South side next to porch, at ground level-5panel door to cellar.

## 7.2 DESCRIPTION (continued)

## 2. Windows

Most double-hung (except the two flanking the chimney, which are 3 light and apparently fixed) with 3/1 lights, but in several sizes. Most windows are in groups of 2 (e.g. all 4 pair on east end), 3 (approach side, in each side bay of first story and in front dormer), or 4 (west end, central bay, where there is a rectangular bay projection; bay protrudes ca. 2 feet and has gable roof with same roof detail as elsewhere; no bay on east end). The center window in both groups of 3 on the 1st story, approach side, is larger than the flanking windows. Trim is 4-1/2" wide and plain except for the intermediate trim of window groups, which is 6" wide. Overall effect is flat and bold. No shutters. Trim painted dark brown, sash white.

## 3. Dormers:

1) in western half of rear slope (i.e., not centered in roof), a large dormer with double 3/1 windows, with same bold trim as elsewhere, also same roof details. Face and cheeks are stucco as elsewhere.

2) approach side roof slope, 1 large dormer in center, with group of three 3/1 windows; other details same as #1.

## 4. Roof details

Overhang sides and ends ca. 20 inches, with open cornice; rafters visible and cut vertically, with fascia, painted dark brown as is door and window trim. Interstices (as above plate and below roof decking) closed with slanted ca. 6" board (painted white) with bevel above (painted brown). Underside of roof between rafters (decking) is tongue and-groove narrow beaded board, two beaded strips per piece. At both gable ends and on dormer gables there are brown-painted, bold 4" x 6" purlins, or lookouts, spaced ca. 6-1/2 to 7 feet on gable ends, 3 feet on dormers; end edges are chamfered. While they are structural in the sense that they carry a load in the overhang area, they are false in the sense that the entire roof itself is not double-framed. It can be seen in the unfinished second story storage area that the "purlins" do not extend across the house proper under the rafters, as would appear to be the case from viewing the exterior. Purlin total and functional in rear porch roof (serves as outer beam).

## 5. Porches:

1) front porch-almost full width of approach side, 3 bays wide by 10 feet deep; stuccoed deep, solid balustrade with large built-up stuccoed posts, both covered with concrete caps, form an enclosing half-wall 32 inches high. The ca. 43 inches between balustrade and facade roof support system originally were open, but screening and screened doors were installed in 1980. Large tapered (pyramidal) built-up posts with recessed panels each of four sides rest upon the two corner balustrade corner bases. They carry the entire roof front; no intermediate supports. Besides the large beam (not visible) said to span the ca. 33 feet, according to the owner there is also some sort of tension cable system with turnbuckles. Front and end openings are slightly arched. Two entries to porch: in central bay of approach side and at west end. Both have large solid stuccoed balustrade and concrete cap/rail, less massive for the side porch entry than at the main, front entry, however; concrete steps. Ceiling: narrow beaded board (2 per piece). Floor: narrow uniform wood strips. Overall, a sheltered, enclosing effect.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.3 DESCRIPTION (continued)

2) rear porch-south side, west bay, into kitchen. Now screened, earlier open. Sides' openings arched. No half-wall, or solid balustrade, on rear porch but wooden stock-lumberyard-colonial-revival balustrade on west side only, with large square balusters and molded rail. Built-up corner posts. Narrow strip floor. Mid-20th century brick steps, replacement for wooden steps. Porch measures ca. 7 ft. 9 in. deep by 10 ft. 2 inches wide.

6. Color: beige-tan house walls with dark brown trim, white window sash and screen doors. This color scheme has been maintained since the house was built in 1928.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

1. Plan type: originally narrow central hall from front door to union with transverse secondary hall near rear of house. Secondary hall for access from kitchen (west rear) to enclosed stair, bath, and the 3 bedrooms on east side of house (the last via the central hall which secondary hall joined). Owners later removed wall between living room and hall, adding the space to the living room was closed (plastered); the remainder of the central hall is intact to the rear, with access now via the dining room-to-hall door previously in place and via the secondary hall from the kitchen. A closet was built across the hall behind the closed opening from the front of the house. The double French doors originally in the wide opening between living room and dining room were removed and placed in the single wall between living room and front bedroom, which was converted to use as a music room. See plan sketch. Second story not originally finished but in 1946 was made into spacious apartment for mother; has large living room with wide arch to dining room, bedroom, kitchen (but with no plumbing). Southwest section left unfinished for storage.

2. Major stair: to rear of secondary hall, adjacent to kitchen, enclosed behind door, open at second story, with simple 2" x 4" rail. Purely utilitarian.

3. Mantel: (see photo) Fireplace facade of brown face bricks with raked joints in running bond except for frieze row consisting of groups of three bricks laid alternately horizontally and vertically. Brickwork design is typical of Rock Hall area of period. Shoulder-height, deep shelf with plain, deep apron is varnished pine and is continuous over cabinets with double glass doors with drawer below each side of fireplace; the array occupies the entire west living room wall. A high 3-light window is on each side above the cabinets; trim is as elsewhere but with compound sill and deep apron, the latter continuous across overmantel area, which does not protrude and is simply the exterior plastered wall.

## 4. Major trim

Windows/Doors: plain 4-1/2" pilasters; at head there is bead at lower edge and crown of ogee with cove below. Varnished pine.

Baseboards: 6" overall, including ogee shoe and quarter-round cap. Painted.

Cornices: none; originally wall paper borders.

Chair rails: none

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.4 DESCRIPTION (continued)

5. Major doors: Double French doors (15 lights each) originally between living room and dining room, now in east wall of living room, to music room (former front bedroom). 1st story doors: large single recessed panel with raised border. 2nd story doors: 5 horizontal panels.
6. Floors: narrow uniform-width tongue and groove pine
7. Walls/ceiling finishes: plastered and painted on first story, originally wallpapered; 2nd story-wallboard.

OUTBUILDINGS/SITE DESCRIPTION

1. Outbuildings: 1) small metal storage shed; 2) small wooden shed with shed roof Both in rear yard.

## 2. Site description:

House site is elevated 3-4 feet above the public road (Rt. 20, the main road from Chestertown to Rock Hall) with concrete block retaining wall, beyond which are ditch and road. Circular drive to west of house around large landscaped lawn, which in fact is the adjacent lot to the west, purchased by the owners. Many shrub and flower plantings and small lawns on the property; especially heavily planted to rear. A large tree (dying?) is immediately to the west of the drive portion adjacent to the west side of the house. Two large ornamental trees occupy most of immediate rear yard. Small vegetable garden and small grape arbor in rear.

3. Views to/from site: To the south (rear): woods. No view to the west beyond owners' side lot because of dense property-line plantings. To east: ca. 20-25 feet away. Closely beyond is small frame mid-20th century house. From rear yard there is unobstructed view of those neighboring yards; the adjacent one has a large gravel parking area and large workshop or shed. To the north: Directly across the road is the lane to Beck's Content (K-521), whose deep front lawns with the house beyond can be seen. Across the road to the west of Beck's Content are woods, with a house visible down road to west. To northeast across road: altered late 19th-early 20th century 2-story house. Can see in distance up road to east on same side as Downey house, near curve of Route 20, an early 20th century (1920s?) gas station (now vacant) and Wesley Chapel and its cemetery.

USE OF BUILDING

Current and historic: private residence

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

The Downey House is a well-conceived and well-executed example of the "American bungalow style," which flourished from about 1910 to 1930 throughout the country but mainly in the 1920's in Kent County. Spread not as much by architects as by builders' plans published mainly in plan books and monthly journals, nationally the bungalow became the first style to be built in quantity by contractor-builders,

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.5 DESCRIPTION (continued)

especially for speculative sale. While rows of identical bungalows were built in more populous areas (Chicago is a notable example), Kent County bungalows seem to have been built as contracted for. However, in the Rock Hall area (which was in a growth period at the time) they are fairly numerous though with considerable variation in size and design while still sharing certain elements. Sharp Street in Rock Hall has a row of bungalows, and there are scattered examples nearby, including the T. Weldon Joiner house on the north side of the Gratitude Road (Rt. 20), which is similar in overall appearance to the Downey House, though smaller. The bungalow was sometimes called an inexpensive house, but in the case of all but the smallest this was generally not true. Although low-cost materials were emphasized, the bungalow was not inexpensive; it depended on costly foundations, wall and roof areas because of the spread-out first story. Indeed, somewhat to their surprise, the Downey family found that the first story of their house was all they really needed (except when later his mother came to live with them and they made an apartment for her on the second story). The house as built simply was more spacious than they had anticipated. In contrast, the Boulter House (K-519), a compact two-story house built in the same year, was less than half the cost, though the owner did contribute some labor and there was no cellar.

Though the term "bungalow" is derived from the Hindustani word "Bangla," meaning a low house for travelers with surrounding porches, the bungalows built by the British in India bear little resemblance to what in the United States are low-slung, informal, picturesque cottages. The American bungalow resulted from many influences-- Japanese architecture, the low adobe dwellings of the Spanish Colonial Style of the Southwest, the open informal planning of the Eastern Shingle Style, the Swiss chalet, but especially from the Craftsman Style, which was an offshoot of the English Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps at least in part reacting against what came to be considered Victorian architecture's excesses and in opposition to the impersonal machine aesthetic of the English and German functionalists, adherents of the Craftsman Style favored simplicity, "honesty," usefulness, and fine craftsmanship. The look was to be sturdy, with bold elements. In the U.S. Gustav Stickley was most closely identified with the Craftsman movement. Houses were designed in his Craftsman Workshops and their plans published in a periodical called The Craftsman. The popularized bungalow then evolved and spread (particularly from California) and was modified. Unlike most western bungalows, most eastern ones have enough roof pitch to have a partial second story.

Many of the principles promoted by Stickley and elements of at least some of the designs seen in the Dover Press reprint of Craftsman Houses (see for reference) are seen in the Downey bungalow. Natural materials were used, especially unpainted wood and stone; texture was also important (the Downey House is stuccoed, unusual in Kent County). Stickley favored "liberal use of wood finished in such a way that all its friendliness is revealed." (p.9). (Most interior wood

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.6 DESCRIPTION (continued)

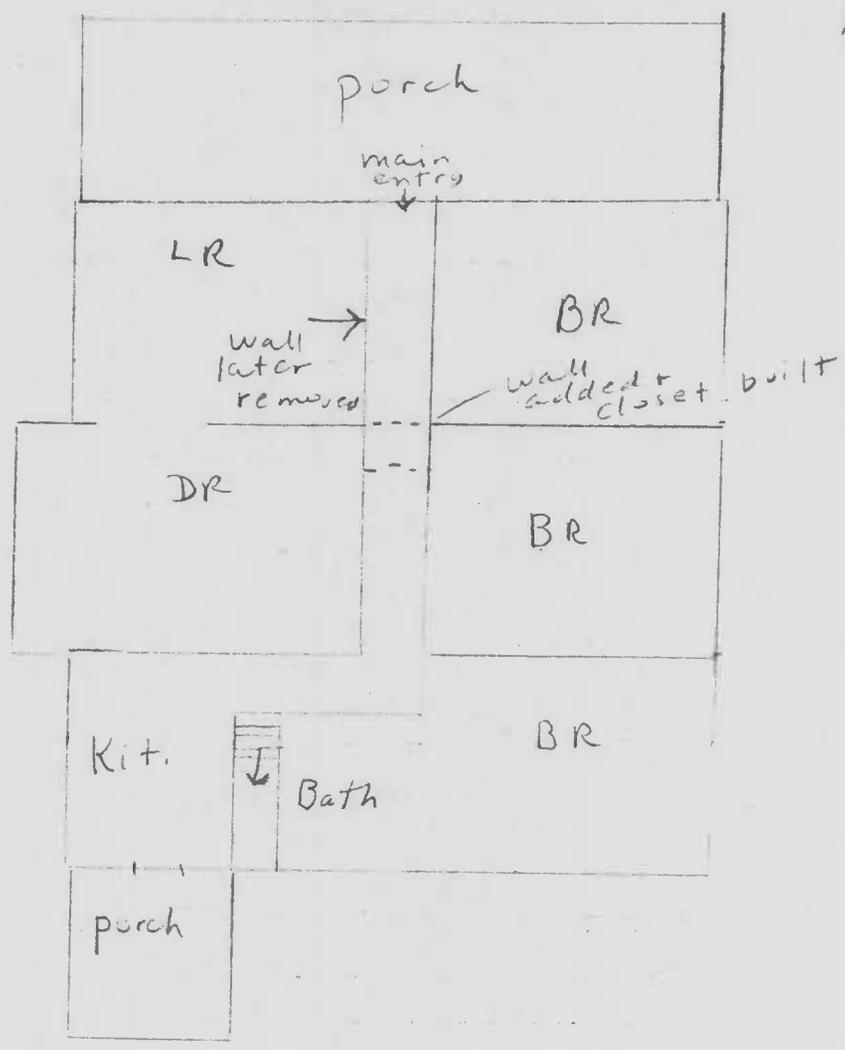
in the Downey house is varnished, including the wood of the fireplace wall's cabinets.) Earth colors were preferred. (Since built, the Downey House has had its original stucco, a beige color with small grey and brown stones; most of the exterior trim has always been dark brown. Perhaps this is what was recommended in the plan and was followed. Indeed, the plan in general seems to have been followed faithfully, with few Kent County variations.) Economical use was to be made of space (true of the Downey plan). Though Stickley disliked complete partitions between rooms, preferring wide openings, this was only partially realized in the Downey's popularized bungalow, in which originally there was only one wide opening between rooms (between living room and dining room), and that with French doors; basically the plan is compartmentalized. Stickley often used fireplaces with built-in bookcases and/or cabinets on one or both sides since he felt "built-in furnishings ...are a part of the house itself and so serve to link it closer to the needs of daily life." He particularly favored bookcases, which had inherent "beauty and interest" but were also practical. (The Downey fireplace wall with its cabinets and drawers is one of the notable features of the house.) One of Stickley's houses (pp. 66-67) was quite similar to the Downey house on the exterior. Stickley labeled this house "A Roomy, Homelike Farmhouse for Lovers of Plain and Wholesome Country Life." It had a roof which sloped down over a house-wide porch, was 1-1/2 stories, and had a prominent front gable-roofed dormer. Indeed, many of Stickley's houses showed "broad sheltering" roofs. Stickley's farmhouses and cottages were to look comfortable and inviting as well as sheltering, and prominent horizontal lines and widely overhanging roofs promoted this. The Downey front porch (almost house-wide) with its solid balustrade and low roof,, leaving a small (vertically) uninterrupted opening originally fulfilled Stickley's criteria. In order to achieve the uninterrupted side-to-side span the carpenters, apparently following the plan as it specified, used not only a beam from corner pillar to corner pillar, but also a system undoubtedly a novelty in Kent County of cable wire and turn-buckles, incompletely described to the surveyor and not visible. Besides providing light for the second story, a large facade dormer was used to add visual interest.

Other elements seen in both Stickley houses and the Downey House are exposed rafters, decorative use of timbers (the exposed "purlins" at gable ends), broad roof expanses, porches recessed under the main roof (though with pitch changed), grouped windows (which he thought best harmonized with the wide, low look of the house as a whole); and a small kitchen "so that extra steps may be avoided, and fitted with every kind of convenience and comfort." Strong corner porch piers with large tapered built-up posts above, though not seen in Stickley's houses, are elements seen in the Downey House, several other Rock Hall area bungalows, and apparently in the popularized bungalows of the plan books; they seem to be an almost inescapable characteristic. Other popularized bungalow elements carried out well in the Downey house are the rectangular dining room bay with gable roof and the asymmetrical, stepped chimney (the latter seen occasionally in Stickley houses, though often on the interior rather than on the exterior as in the Downey House.

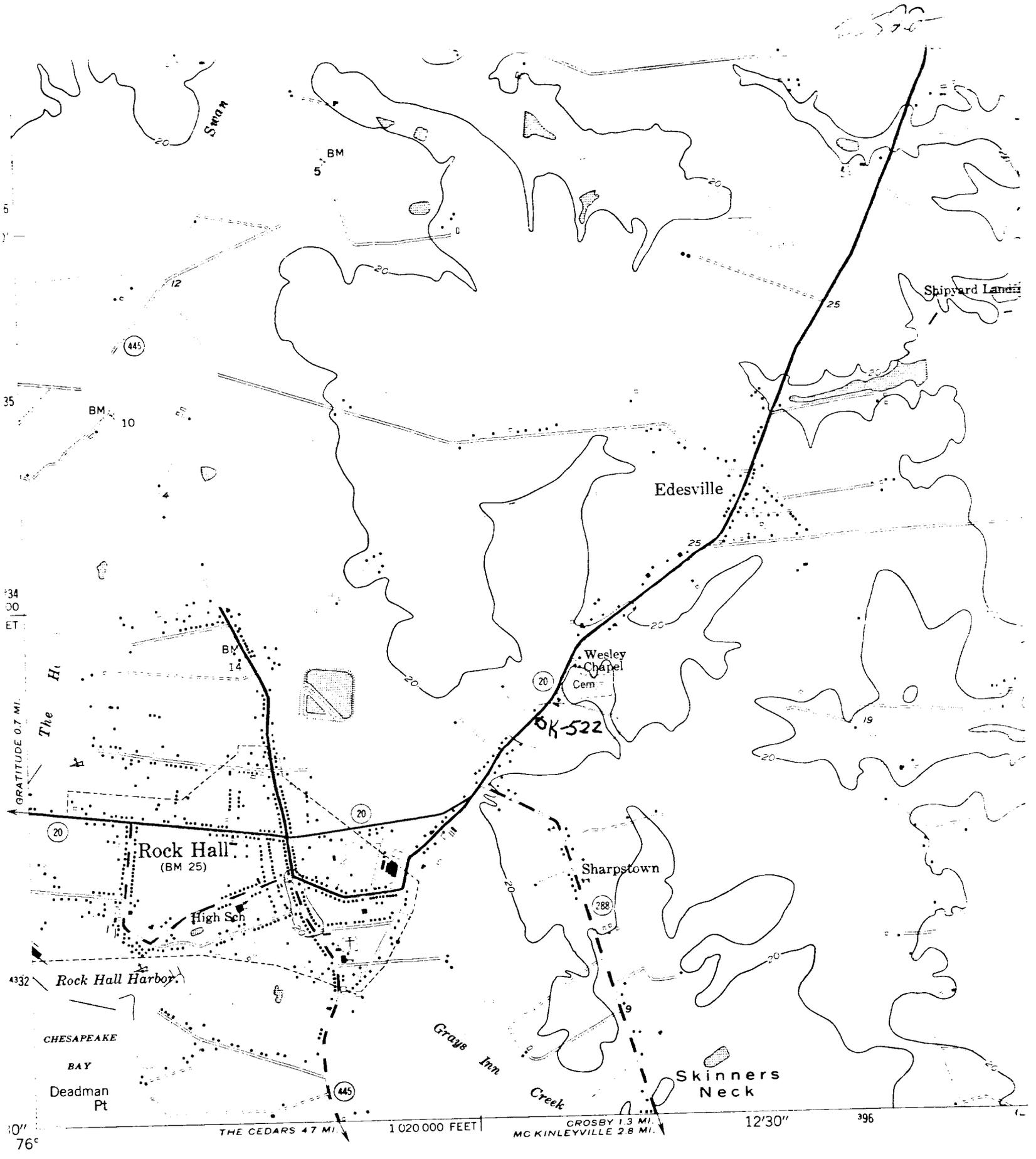
Part of the success of the Downey House comes from what appears to be faithful adherence to the published plan, but it is also due to the care and craftsmanship of the house's carpenters. Fifty-five years after it was built, it is in fine condition structurally and with trim joints carefully cut and still tight.

2.5B  
Jesse +  
Myrtle  
Coney  
House  
K-522

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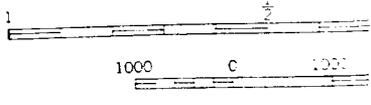
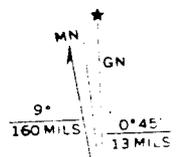


no scale



ROCK HALL QUADRANGLE

Hydrography from USC&GS charts 548 and 549, dated 1944



NATIONAL