

K-610

1929?

Mench Ark
Chestertown
Private

The Mench ark, now used for storage, is raised on blocks and closely placed between other buildings at the Mench family's marina on the south end of Water Street, in the location of the old railroad wharf of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It is constructed of wood, a cabin on a scow-bottom boat. Both ends originally had the turned-up scow bottom, but for easier access on land, since water no longer had to be kept out, the scow projection at one end was cut off and one now enters at floor level. There are three windows on each side. The exterior walls above hull level are covered with vertical boards. The roof is rounded and covered now with asphalt roll roofing. The interior is divided into two rooms, one large and one small. The interior walls and ceilings are finished. This large ark is one of very few of the hybrid house-boat structures to survive in Kent County from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. They were towed to various fishing locations and then pulled up onto the shore for the duration of the stay at that particular location. When boat motors grew bigger and more able to power larger, faster boats, watermen returned home daily or lived aboard large boats with ample cabin space. At the south end of Water Street in Chestertown, near the warehouses, railroad wharf, and basket factory, a small number of them serving as dwellings--for bachelors, aged watermen, men whose wives had died. The Mench ark is a large, sophisticated ark that may have been built in 1929, a late date for ark building in the county. Although it apparently was used by a waterman for a few years, it has spent most of its years blocked up and lived in near where it now rests. It is an unusually large "two-roomer" and finished on the interior, evidently for warmth but unusual in these very simple, basic structures.

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Mench Ark

2. Location

street & number 215 S. Front Street not for publicationcity, town Chestertown vicinity of congressional district Fourthstate Maryland county Kent

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Storage

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

name Mr. & Mrs. Franklin Mench

street & number 215 S. Front Street telephone no.: 778-2959

city, town Chestertown state and zip code Maryland

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Court House liber WHG 55

street & number Cross Street folio 274

city, town Chestertown state Maryland

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-610

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

The Mench ark is raised on blocks and closely places between other buildings at the Mench family's marina on the south end of Water Street, in the location of the old railroad wharf of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It is constructed of wood, a cabin on a scow-bottom boat. Both ends originally had the scow bottom turned up, but for easier accesson land, since water no longer had to be kept out, the scow projection at one end was cut off and one now enters at floor level. There are three windows on each side. The exterior walls above hull level are covered with vertical boards. The roof is rounded and covered now with asphalt roll roofing. The interior is divided into two rooms, one large and one small. The interior walls and ceilings are finished.

(Continued)

8. Significance

Survey No. K-610

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Fishing
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates	Builder/Architect
check: Applicable Criteria: <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D and/or	
Applicable Exception: <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> G	
Level of Significance: <input type="checkbox"/> national <input type="checkbox"/> state <input type="checkbox"/> local	

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

This large ark is one of very few of the hybrid house-boat structures to survive in Kent County from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. They were towed to various fishing locations and then pulled up onto the shore for the duration of the stay at that particular location. When boat motors grew bigger and more able to power larger, faster boats, watermen returned home daily or lived aboard large boats with ample cabin space. This one probably served longer as a land dwelling than it saw years of use on the water since it evidently was built close to the end of the period of watermen's use of arks. At the south end of Water Street in Chestertown, near the warehouses and railroad wharf, there was a small number of them serving as dwellings--for bachelors, aged watermen, men whose wives had died. The Mench ark is a large, sophisticated ark that may have been built in 1929, a late date for ark building in the county. Although it apparently was used by a waterman for a few years, it has spend most of its years blocked up and lived in the vicinity of the end of south Water Street in Chestertown. It is an unusually large "two-roomer" and finished on the interior, evidently for warmth but unusual in these very simple, basic structures.

(Continued)

The Mench ark is now in a row of small buildings that are associated with a marina operation at the Mench residence on the water side of the south end of Water Street. The ark is placed so close to the adjacent structures that access to the sides is difficult. Like the other arks still in Kent County, it is essentially a cabin placed on a heavy scow bottom, using common house-building materials and methods.

The Mench ark (or shanty, or shanty scow) is what is known as a "two roomer." It is one of the largest arks surviving, comparable in length only to the Leigh Ark in Betterton (K-609). The cabin is about 8'-3-1/2" wide and 19'-9-1/2" long. The scow bottom with its platform has been cut off one end and the end weatherboarded and a full-height entry door placed there. Formerly, with the scow end in place, access would have been only through a short door from the top of the platform at the scow end. One end still retains the platform, to which equipment may have been lashed for the journey.

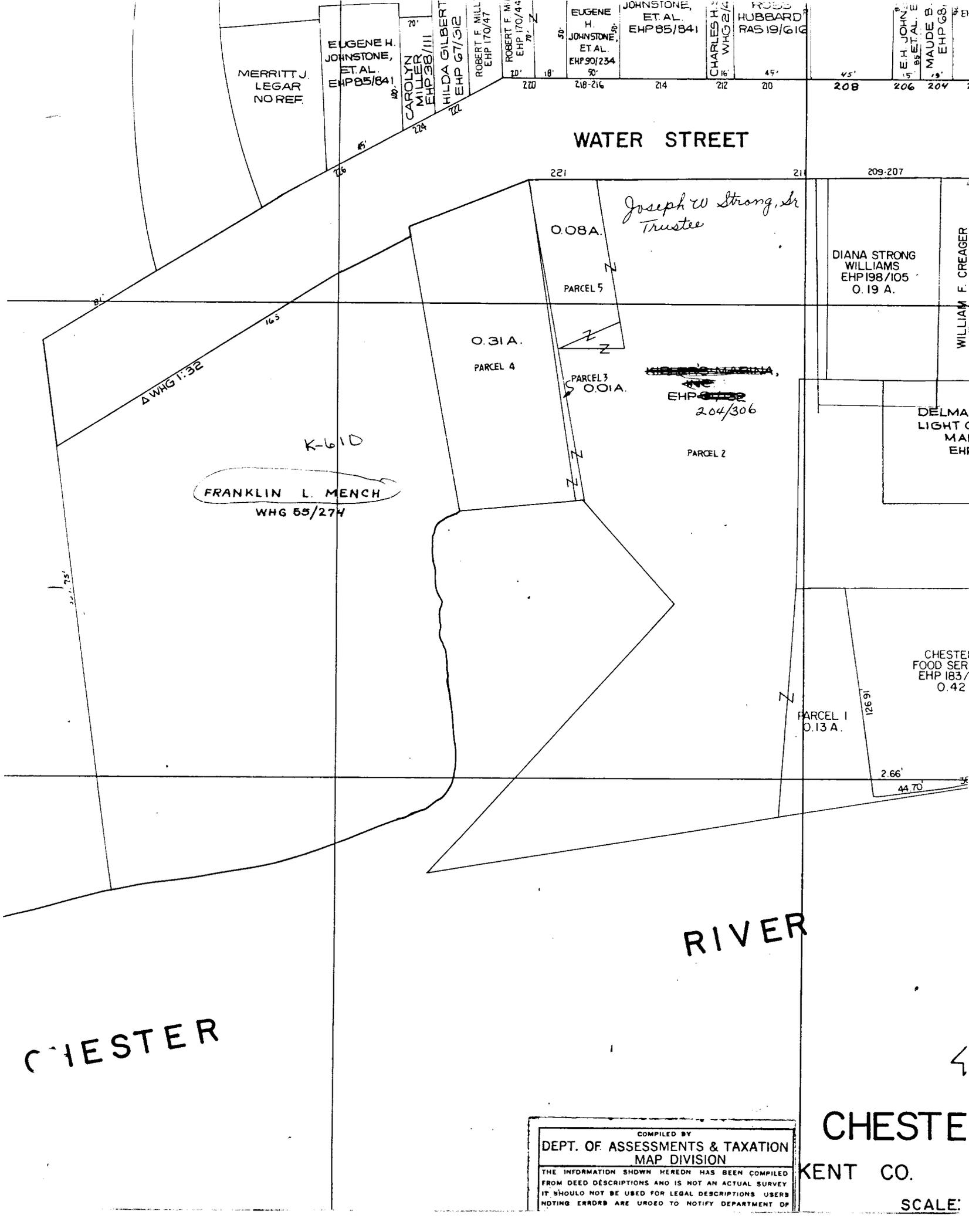
The ark cabin is constructed using corner posts and horizontal framing, to which vertical boards have been applied for weatherboard. Unlike the ark at Kent Museum (K-611) and the Leigh Ark, the roof is not a gable-roof. Its rafters are cut from single, wide boards with the upper edge shaped segmentally. The roof rafters are about 5" high at the eaves and 11-12" high in the center. The roof thus is rounded. As with most Kent County boatbuilding, the most common thickness of lumber used was 5/4" board. The rafters are sawn from this material. Despite the survival of the two gable-roofed arks, and one in ruins on Chesapeake Avenue in Rock Hall, the gable-roofed form was the less common. In Rock Hall especially, most were said to have been built with the rounded roof. Rafters with straight rafter bottoms also made it easy to apply interior finish, which this ark has. This is said to have been done for warmth in cold weather. Both the ceiling and the walls are covered with double, beaded, narrow tongue-and-groove boards.

Each side has three windows that appear from the exterior to be evenly spaced. Two on each side light the large room and one on each side the smaller, rear room that is divided from the main room by a beaded-board wall. The windows sash opening is about 27" wide x 23-1/2" high. The single sash slides up into vacant wall space above and is propped open with a stick. The windows each have six lights. There is no door in the end with the platform remaining, and there appears to never have been one there.

During the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century the area around the south end of Water Street (Front Street) in Chestertown was not as tidy as it is today. It was the location of small houses, unlike the other end of the street where the large, historic houses are, and the site of numerous economic activities. The railroad crossed Queen Street and passed beyond the end of Water Street to terminate on the railroad wharf. The basket factory with associated makeshift housing was located farther to the southeast. The area between Cannon Street and the railroad line was one of wharves, a granary, and warehouses besides other water-related buildings and boats. It is in this area that several arks came to be blocked up to serve as dwellings, either during the non-fishing season or permanently. At one time there were said to be three or four in the vicinity of the railroad wharf. One was used by the grandfather of writer Gilbert Byron for a dwelling after his wife died, around the turn of the twentieth century. Others very likely were used by other watermen after they no longer followed the water, or by bachelors.

These arks seem to have been Chester River arks, not among those taken up and down the Bay to various fishing grounds. During the fishing season, they were said to be towed, first under sail and later by motorized boats, to the various fishing grounds up and down the river, to as far as Crumpton upriver. At one time there were several headquartered at Buckingham Wharf up the river from Chestertown. Although no one is sure when Kent County watermen began building and using arks for fishing and oystering, they were in use at the turn of the century. By the 1930s they were no longer used on the water since more powerful boat motors made it possible for watermen either to return home daily or to power large boats with cabins to live in while working.

Although the Mench house and marina are now located in the approximate location of the old railroad wharf, the ark that is now moved to the side of their property and used for storage has been in its present general location for at least 50 years. The Mench family bought it from Henry Batchelor, the brother of Elmer Batchelor after the latter's death. Elmer Batchelor was a waterman but lived in a nearby house; he rented the for a dwelling. According to Charles Capel, the ark was built by Will Malin, a house carpenter, and Capel for Jack Johnson, a waterman, about 1929. He states that it was built at the old storehouse that is now the Old Wharf Restaurant and kept out of the water when not in use there. At one time there were three arks in this location. If it indeed is that late, it would have been during the last years of water use of arks. According to Capel, it was last used on the water in the 1930s. Jack Johnson was supposed to have towed it for several months in the year, with his two brothers, going among other places to Becky Brown's Creek six or seven miles below Chestertown in September and returning when it got too cold. The rest of the time it stayed near Kibler's Wharf.



MERRITT J.
LEGAR
NO REF.

EUGENE H.
JOHNSTONE,
ET AL.
EHP 85/841

CAROLYN
MILLER
EHP 38/111
HILDA GILBERT
EHP 67/512

ROBERT F. MILL
EHP 170/47

ROBERT F. MILL
EHP 170/44

EUGENE
H. JOHNSTONE,
ET AL.
EHP 90/234

JOHNSTONE,
ET AL.
EHP 85/841

CHARLES H.
WHG 21/2

ROSS
HUBBARD
RAS 19/616

E.H. JOHN
BET AL. E
MAUDE B.
EHP 68/

WATER STREET

*Joseph W Strong, Sr
Trustee*

0.08 A.
PARCEL 5

DIANA STRONG
WILLIAMS
EHP 198/105
0.19 A.

0.31 A.
PARCEL 4

PARCEL 3
0.01 A.

~~WILLIAM F. CREAGER~~
EHP ~~132~~
204/306

PARCEL 2

DELMA
LIGHT C
MA
EHP

FRANKLIN L. MENCH
WHG 55/274

K-610

CHESTER
FOOD SER
EHP 183/7
0.42

PARCEL 1
0.13 A.

RIVER

CHESTER

CHESTE

KENT CO.

COMPILED BY
DEPT. OF ASSESSMENTS & TAXATION
MAP DIVISION
THE INFORMATION SHOWN HEREON HAS BEEN COMPILED
FROM DEED DESCRIPTIONS AND IS NOT AN ACTUAL SURVEY
IT SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS. USERS
NOTING ERRORS ARE URGED TO NOTIFY DEPARTMENT OF

SCALE:



K-610

Mench Ark

S. Water St., Chestertown

M. Q. Fallaw - 8/6/86

View to southwest

K610-1



K-610

Menck Ark

S. Water St., Chestertown

M. Q. Fallaw - 1/25/86

View to northeast

K610-16



K-610

Mench Ark

S. Water St., Chestertown

M. Q. Fallaw - 1/25/86

View to southwest

K610-14