WO-16 Circa 1820
Newport Farm
Hayes Landing Road
Berlin vicinity

Its Flemish bond brick walls, Federal-style woodwork, and Georgian proportions have led many people to believe the two-story four-room plan house on Newport Farm was erected during the late 18th century. However, architectural analysis, coupled with the chain of title, places the construction of this impressive three-bay, double-pile dwelling during the first quarter of the 19th century. The corbeled brick cornices on the exterior and the late stylistic nature of the neoclassical mantels are strong indications that this house was erected for Dr. George W. Purnell (1776-1844) after his purchase of Rackliffe family lands in December, 1813. Five years before Purnell bought the property, officials of the Orphans' Court of Worcester County visited the plantation lands of John, Rider, Kitturah, and Charlotte Rackliffe, minor children of deceased parents John and Sarah Rackliffe. The principal family plantation, located on Sinepuxent Neck (see WO-11), was joined in the evaluation with the family holdings on Newport Neck. Entered as a matter of court record in the fall of 1808 was the official description of these properties, written by Thomas N. Williams and William McGrigor. In this record, they detailed the plantation improvements they found on each property, including the land where this house stands:

> *And there is on the Lands leased to Nathaniel Brittingham in Newport Neck, which is an undivided right of said John, Rider, Kitturah, and Charlotte Rackliffe Two thousand one hundred and twenty pounds of fence eight or nine rails to a pannel and about three hundred old decaying peach trees, and the following buildings viz. one framed grain house, loged shed at one end in bad repair 20 x 20, One new framed dwelling house shingled all over 28 x 18, One framed dwelling house much out of repair 25 x 25, One round log kitchen 15 x 15, One old log smoke house of little value 12 1/2 by 10, 1 new log ditto ditto in good order 12 x 12, 1 old hen house of no value 10 by 10, Two sawed log corn cribs in bad repair each 19 1/2 by 7 a passage between said cribs with plank floor in bad order 19 1/2 by 15*

It was the opinion of the court officials that the Newport Neck plantation, with nine slaves, should be valued annually at $330 (for setting the rent due from the leaseholder).

Clearly, in 1808 the plantation complex did not include the brick house. Moreover, the architectural features and research comfortably credit Dr. George W. Purnell with its construction a decade or so later. Built with the main house was a single-story brick colonnade that joined a single-story kitchen wing directly to the dwelling. During his tenure, Dr. Purnell created an impressive plantation complex surrounding Newport Bay.

The house, prominently sited in the center of rich agricultural lands, was adjacent to Newport Creek, where several landings served as shipment points for local tobacco, corn, wheat, timber, and other produce during the 18th and 19th centuries. Like other

large planters of his day, Purnell marketed surplus quantities of cured pork, bacon, and lard, as indicated in the inventory prepared after his death. Also listed were 528 bushels of shells, which were probably slated for burning in the stone lime kiln on the land near the plantation landing. The first item in Purnell's will, probated in June 1844, directed that his son, Elisha Littleton Purnell would receive:

> *all the lands I own in Newport neck where I now live and adjoining thereunto being the lands that belonged to Zadok Purnell Jr at his death and the lands I bought from the heirs of John Rackliffe, of William Gaults heirs, of Isaac Bridle and Ebenezer Brattens heirs about Eight hundred acres*

Elisha L. Purnell outlived his father by only five years. After his death the Newport Neck lands were divided between his two sons, Isaac B. and George C. Purnell. Both sons are listed in the 1860 U.S. census as farmers with real estate valued at $25,000 each. Isaac B. Purnell and his wife, Mary A., took posession of the brick house and resided there until the late 1860s. In the meantime, Isaac began selling portions of his inherited land to Zadok P. Henry, Sr., (1798-1870), including property in Berlin as well as peripheral parcels around his grandfather's house. Finally, in November 1869, Isaac and his wife sold the brick dwelling with its acreage to Zadok P. Henry for $20,000.

A document between John W. Henry and Zadok P. Henry, Sr. records Zadok's purchase of John's interests in the schooner *Newport*, the lighter *George Edward*, the lime kiln at Newport landing, and the granary at Deep Landing across the creek. The 1870 U.S. Census for Worcester County lists Zadok P. Henry as a farmer and values his real estate at $60,000 and his personal property at $50,000. He is grouped in the census with his wife, Sally Mary, 57; daughter Laura, 30; and son George, 18. Zadok died in December of that year, and the eighth item in his will stated:

> *I give and devise to my wife, Sally Mary for her life in lieu of her dower in my lands all that tract of land bought by me during the year eighteen hundred and sixty nine, from Isaac B. Purnell and Mary his wife including all the land owned by said Isaac in Newport neck. . . after the death of my wife I give and devize in fee simple to my son George Edward Henry all the aforesaid land bought by me from Isaac B. Purnell except said part hereinafter devized to my daughter Henrietta. . . .*

To his daughter Laura he left his piano and his lands southwest of Berlin. Sally Mary Henry died two years later, in 1872, and as Zadok had directed, the Newport Creek farm passed to George E. Henry. Presumably 20 years old then, George E. Henry appears five years later at the site of this house on the East Berlin district map of the 1877 Lake, Griffing, and Stevenson atlas. The Purnell family held title to the farm until the early 20th century. By the 1930s the old brick house was being used for hay storage. Henry W. Heine bought part of the Newport farmland and restored the Purnell house in 1938.

Touart, Paul Baker
1994 Along the Seaboard Side: The Architectural History of Worcester County,

WO-16

Maryland. Worcester County, pp. 263-264.

WO-16
NEWPORT FARM
BERLIN, WORCESTER COUNTY, MD.
SOUTH ELEVATION
11/99, MICHAEL HARRISON DAY, PHOTOGRAPHER
NEC / MD HISTORICAL TRUST

Newport Farm WO-16

11/69 Michael Bourne

WO-16
NEWPORT FARM
BERLIN VICINITY, WORCESTER COUNTY, MD.
11/90, MICHAEL HARRISON DAY, PHOTOGRAPHER
STAIR
NEG. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

WO-16
NEWPORT FARM
BERLIN VICINITY, WORCESTER COUNTY, MD.
DINING ROOM MANTEL

PHOTOGRAPHER, MICHAEL HARRISON DAY
NEG. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

WO-16
NEWPORT FARM
BERLIN VICINITY, WORCESTER COUNTY, MD.
PARLOR MANTEL
11/18/80
PHOTOGRAPHER, MICHAEL HARRISON DAY
NEG. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST