WO-17 Circa 1805
Zadok Purnell House
Hayes Landing Road
Berlin vicinity

Standing on the large estate known as Newport Farms, this two-story, four-room plan frame house predates the main brick house on the property by a few decades. The well-built, four-room plan dwelling survives with original 12 over 12 and 12 over 8 window sash in addition to fine examples of Federal woodwork. In particular, the richly decorated parlor mantel features molded plaster swags and classical forms rarely found in rural dwellings on the lower Eastern Shore. The original parlor ceiling was embellished with molded plaster decoration as well, but it has been replaced. An unusual feature in the adjacent dining room is the paneled wall incorporating a row of early 19th century closets presumably intended for the storage of fine china.

The chain of title for the land on which this house stands reveals the farm is composed of several tracts known as "Diocie," "Burtons Chance," "Pasture Lott," "Addition to Diocie," "Partnership," and "Confirmation." The often convoluted nature of land ownership during the 17th and 18th centuries is well represented by the summary history of this property as stated in the Worcester County land records:

> *Whereas a certain Henry Bishop obtained a Patent for a Tract of Land called Dicoce [1683] situate in said County . . . and said Bishop by his Deed of bargain and sale conveyed the said Land to a certain William Burton and said Burton devised the same to his son Benjamin and Benjamin Burton devised said Tract of land called Burtons Chance patented in the name of said Benjamin on the fourth day of November [1735], unto his said son John who died intestate [1745], and said Land called Dicoce and Burtons Chance decended to said Johns two daughters viz. Elizabeth and Mary, and Elizabeth married a certain Nathaniel Miller, and Mary married a certian Robert McCrea and in [1764] said land was divided by an agreement between said parties, and said Mary survived her husband McCrea and married a certain Edward Vandome, and said Mary and her husband Edwd Vandome in [1782] conveyed all their right to said Lands unto a certain Isaac Mitchell, who conveyed the same to said Edward Vandome, and said Vandome made a resurvey [1790] on said Lands and added some vacant Land and called the Land, addition to Dicoce.*

In April 1790 Edward Vandome sold part of the resurveyed lands to Littleton Robins, Sr., at the same time executing a conveyance bond for the land with Zadok Purnell, Sr., who in turn conveyed the bond to Zadok Purnell, Jr., Mary Franklin, the only surviving heir of Edward Vandome, and her husband, Selby Franklin, transferred their interest in the lands known as "Dioce" to Zadok Purnell in 1803. Two years later William McCrea, the son of Mary Vandome by her first marriage to Robert McCrea, sold his land rights to Purnell as well.

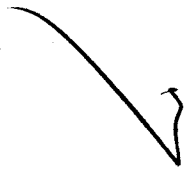
It seems likely that Zadok Purnell, Jr., of "Wallops Neck" as he is distinguished in the land records, financed the construction of this frame dwelling, with its fine interior woodwork and plaster decoration, between 1800 and 1805. Purnell died intestate

several years later, and in July 1808 a commission reported its opinion on the value of the land in the interest of the heirs--a brother Thomas; a sister Mary, who married Doctor George W. Purnell; and the four children of his brother John. The land was subsequently sold for $9,288 to Doctor George W. Purnell, who assembled an extensive estate on Newport Neck during the second quarter of the 19th century. Dr. Purnell and his wife, Mary, probably occupied the frame house until they financed construction of a new brick dwelling on the old Rackliffe lands, which he had purchased in 1813 (see WO-17). It is not certain who occupied the Federal plantation house following the construction of the new brick house. After Dr. Purnell's death in 1844, his large landholdings fell to his son, Elisha L. Purnell (1804-49). After Elisha's death five years later, the extensive Newport Neck plantations were divided between his two sons, George C. and Isaac B. Purnell.

George C. Purnell (1831-68) received the northern plantation on the "Dioce" tract, while his brother Isaac inherited the brick house on the "Newport Pannel" land. Both men are listed in the 1860 U.S. Census for Worcester County with equal real estate evaluations of $25,000 each. George is grouped with his wife, Elizabeth, and five-year old daughter Angeline. Although George C. Purnell died in March 1868, the Trap Creek plantation remained in family hands through the balance of the 19th century.

Touart, Paul Baker
1994 Along the Seaboard Side: The Architectural History of Worcester County, Maryland. Worcester County, pp. 259-260.

George Purnell House, WO-17
(Zadok Purnell House)



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