

WI-489  
Pittsville  
Salisbury vicinity  
Public and private

19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

Originally known as Derrickson's Crossroads, or more simply, "The Crossroads," a small community emerged during the first quarter of the nineteenth century as a center of commerce in the western precincts of what was then Worcester County. Located at the intersection of several converging roads, Derrickson's Crossroads was situated where the main east/west route joining Salisbury and Berlin crossed several north/south roads connecting interior Worcester County plantations and farms with nearby Delaware towns.

The earliest reference for the name Derrickson's Crossroads dates to 1817 when Justice of the Peace Joshua Lewis established court at his residence in or near the crossroads. A few years later, in an 1821 deed from Henry Dennis to Billy Fooks for a part of a tract known as "A Gift to My First Son," the community is mentioned in the metes and bounds of the tract which joined the southeast corner of the Methodist preaching house lot called the "Derrickson's X roads meeting house." The year before Henry Dennis, Sr. and his wife Elizabeth transferred a small lot to William Parsons of John, Daniel Fooks, John Dennis, Sr., George Truitt of Job, and Thomas White, who were the appointed trustees of the Derrickson's Crossroads Methodist congregation, "...provided that they shall erect & build or cause to be built thereon a house for the use of the members of the Methodist Church as a preaching house & also to serve as a school house." Evidently the Derrickson family operated a store at this location during the 1820s, although little information on this business has been found. Lands held by Levin Derrickson were sold following his death, which included a tract called "Derrickson's Choice" lying near Derrickson's X roads...together with the land and

improvements called Derrickson's X roads lying and being in the Fourth Election District."

Following Levin Derrickson's death and the sale of his land holdings, a crossroads store was operated by partners, James Minos Fooks and his brother-in-law, Benjamin H. Byrd, who signed articles of agreement concerning a store on January 2, 1832. James Fooks became the first postmaster in 1855, and he probably operated the mail service from the store building.

By the time Simon Martenet published his maps of the Maryland counties in 1866, "The Crossroads" is clearly indicated in the center of the Crossroads Election District, No. 4. The Methodist Episcopal church is located at the crossroads along with a school. Two years later, the Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad was laid across the level fields between Salisbury and Berlin, thereby sponsoring a surge of growth and commerce unknown to the crossroads community. As a sign of a new beginning, Derrickson's Crossroads was renamed Pittsville in honor of Dr. Hillary R. Pitts, president of the Wicomico & Pocomoke.

Running through the center of the old crossroads village, the railroad and its attendant passenger and freight services sponsored a distinct boost in the economic vitality of the town as well as the hundreds of farms in the Pittsburg Election District. By the time the 1877 atlas was published nine years following the completion of the rail line, Pittsville boasted four general merchandise stores, two churches, a hotel, lumber mills, as well as its own cabinetmaker/undertaker, and physician.

Pittsville continued to thrive as the trading and shipping center for a large agricultural region in eastern Wicomico County, which had been created in 1867 from portions of Worcester and Somerset. During the period between the completion of the railroad and the

early twentieth century, lower Shore farmers embraced the cultivation of a variety of fruits for export. Around Pittsville, the strawberry was the predominant fruit crop, and by the early twentieth century it was one of the most lucrative agricultural products for the entire region.

Reporting on the state of Pittsville's strawberry crop in 1913, *The Wicomico News* stated that

*Prosperity reigns in this town and vicinity just at present. The growers of strawberries received the largest sums for fruit delivered at the station this season in the history of berry growing. Prices ranged high all season, and while the frost and freeze destroyed a part of the crop it is the general opinion that the net results were far in excess of what they would have been had the crop been full.*

*Many of our farmers who had as much as four acres of berries netted a thousand dollars on their crop. Many farmers netted a great more than that and it is not hard to find a half-dozen growers in a crowd talking, each of whom received as much as a thousand, twelve hundred and some fifteen hundred dollars for their crop... The farmers of Pittsville and Dennis, as well as Willard district, need not be afraid to set out berry patches, because it is acknowledged that the land in this section of the county grows the finest strawberries grown in the United States, and the yield is as high per acre as anywhere.*

*The shipping arrangements this season were the best we have ever had. Refrigerator cars were brought to Pittsville in the early morning and growers could bring in their berries all day until late afternoon and load them in iced cars, which insured perfect fruit when delivered to the cities the next morning. The farmers and growers of Pittsville appreciate the efforts of the local buyers who have created such a fine market for strawberries on the east side of the county by buying the fruit every day. In the old days the growers received very little for their fruit because it was shipped on consignment to the cities, and the commission merchants got the big slice of the profits. Now there is no fruit consigned. It is bought and paid for every day at the platform and is all sold by the growers at auction to the buyer who will give the best prices. The growers are learning to pack their fruit better and this is another reason they get the big prices.*

As indicated in the newspaper article, Pittsville growers got the best price for their strawberries when sales were handled locally, and buyers purchased the berries directly from

the farmers. The direct purchase of the berries started around 1903 and was organized with a regular auction schedule shortly thereafter. The strawberry boom, however, did not last forever. In the 1940s the "red steale" disease swept through the region and killed many of the varieties. Despite the devastation to the region's crop, Pittsville's strawberry auction block, known as the "Hi-Dollar Market," was a fixture in the community until the mid 1960s.

Like most small towns on the Eastern Shore, growth of business and population stagnated during the Depression, and the widespread ownership of automobiles with the attendant improvements in the road systems spelled ultimate doom for many of the traditional general stores. Within the past twenty years, however, the population of Pittsville has increased and new houses have been built within an expanded town limits.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. W I-489

### 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Pittsville

other Pittsville Survey District

### 2. Location

street and number \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication \_\_\_\_\_

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity \_\_\_\_\_

county \_\_\_\_\_

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

name Various owners

street and number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Pittsville state MD zip code 21850

### 4. Location of Legal Description

~~courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.~~ Wicomico County Clerk of Court tax map and parcel Map, P. \_\_\_\_\_

city, town Salisbury, Maryland liber \_\_\_\_\_ folio \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

Contributing Resource in National Register District  
**Contributing Resource in Local Historic District**  
 Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
 Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
 Recorded by HABS/HAER  
 Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count	
			Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	public	agriculture	<u>250</u>	buildings
building(s)	private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade		
structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	defense	<u>250</u>	structures
site		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic		
object		education	social	Total
		funerary	transportation	
		government	work in progress	
		health care	unknown	
		industry	vacant/not in use	
			other:	<b>Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory</b>

Name Pittsville Survey District  
Continuation Sheet

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## 7. Description

Inventory No. WI-489

### Condition

	excellent	deteriorated
x	good	ruins
	fair	altered

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

The town of Pittsville is located in the center of the Pittsburg Election District north of US Route 50 in Wicomico County, Maryland. Principal road access is provided by means of MD Route 353, which intersects Route 50 south of the town. The town is approximately seven (7) miles east of Salisbury. Running on an east/west course through the center of Pittsville is Main Street, which parallels the former right-of-way of the old Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad, later the Baltimore & Eastern Shore Railroad, and later yet the Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic Railroad. Main Street is located on the south side of the right-of-way while Railroad Avenue runs east/west on the north side of the former rail line. Intersecting Main Street in the center of Pittsville is MD Route 353, also known as Delaware Avenue. Several side streets oriented on a rough grid pattern intersect these principal roads. When the Ocean City Road was built between Salisbury and the seaside resort, its path passed a short distance south of Pittsville. New construction occurred along its route during the decades that followed.

The historic resources that define the town of Pittsville principally date to the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Approximately two-hundred and fifty (250) standing structures line the primary roads and side streets of the town. Principal among the historic properties is the Pittsville Store (WI-52), a well-preserved frame commercial structure dating around 1870. Originally located in the center of the town, it was relocated to Maple Street in 1980. Relocated to Maple Street as well is the Pittsville Ticket Office (WI-495), a turn of the twentieth-century board-and-batten frame station retaining its broad hip roof and bracket supports. While these structures have been moved from the center of the town, the original business district is defined by the old Pittsville Firehouse (WI-501) and a branch of Peninsula Bank, housed in an early twentieth-century rusticated concrete block structure originally built for the Trucker's and Savings Bank.

Two late nineteenth-century Gothic Revival churches are located in Pittsville. Ayres United Methodist Church, erected in 1888 for the Methodist Episcopal congregation, stands north of the crossroads along Route 353, while the former Grace M. P. Church stands along Main Street.

While oldest structure in Pittsville is yet to be determined, there are several one- or two-story, two- and three-bay frame structures that date to the mid nineteenth century. Resting on low brick foundations, the houses are sheathed with a variety of materials ranging from plain weatherboard siding to artificial coverings of asbestos shingles or vinyl siding.

The prosperity during the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of twentieth century sponsored a host of new houses and commercial buildings, many of which survive in the town. Mid size to large Victorian dwellings with cross gables of pediment fronts and wraparound porches are dotted throughout the town. After the construction of the Ocean City Road in 1913-14 a group of bungalow, Colonial Revival, and four-square dwellings were erected along its path.

Name Pittsville Survey District

**Continuation Sheet**Number 8 Page 1**8. Significance**

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
1600-1699	agriculture	economics	health/medicine	performing arts
1700-1799	archeology	education	industry	philosophy
<u>x</u> 1800-1899	<u>x</u> architecture	engineering	invention	politics/government
<u>x</u> 1900-1999	art	entertainment/ recreation	landscape architecture	religion
2000-	commerce	ethnic heritage	law	science
	communications	exploration/ settlement	literature	social history
	community planning		maritime history	transportation
	conservation		military	other:

**Significance dates****Architect****Specific dates****Builder**

Evaluation for:

National Register

   Maryland Register   not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance reports, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

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<sup>1</sup> Worcester County Land Record, AM/440, 17 November 1821.

Name Pittsville Survey District

**Continuation Sheet**Number 8 Page 2

as a school house..."<sup>2</sup> Evidently the Derrickson family operated a store at this location during the 1820s, although little information of this business has been found. Lands held by Levin Derrickson were sold following his death, which included a tract called "Derrickson's Choice," lying near Derrickson's X roads...together with the land and improvements called Derrickson's X roads lying and being in the Fourth Election District."<sup>3</sup>

Following Levin Derrickson's death and the sale of his land holdings, a crossroads store was operated by partners, James Minos Fooks and his brother-in-law, Benjamin H. Byrd, who signed articles of agreement concerning a store on January 2, 1832.<sup>4</sup> James Fooks became the first postmaster in 1855 and probably operated the mail service from the store.<sup>5</sup>

By the time Simon Martenet published his maps of the Maryland counties in 1866, "The Crossroads" is clearly indicated in the center of the Crossroads Election District, No. 4.<sup>6</sup> Two years later, the Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad was laid across the level fields between Salisbury and Berlin, thereby sponsoring a surge of growth and commerce unknown to the crossroads community. As a sign of a new beginning, Derrickson's Crossroads was renamed Pittsville in honor of Dr. Hillary R. Pitts, president of the Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad.

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Pittsville continued to thrive as the trading and shipping center for a large agricultural region in eastern Wicomico County, which had been created in 1867 from portions of Worcester and Somerset counties. During the period between the completion of the railroad and the early twentieth century, lower Shore farmers embraced the cultivation of a variety of fruits for export. Around Pittsville, the strawberry was the predominant fruit crop, and by the early twentieth century it was one of the most lucrative agricultural products for the entire region. The introduction of refrigerated railroad cars helped boost the shipment of fresh berries to city markets. Reporting on the state of Pittsville's strawberry crop in 1913, *The Wicomico News* stated that

*Prosperity reigns in this town and vicinity just at present. The growers of strawberries received the largest sums for*

<sup>2</sup> Worcester County Land Record, AK/306, 26 February 1820.

<sup>3</sup> Worcester County Land Record, AS/321, 10 February 1827.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Parsons, *Pittsville: An Eastern Shore Town's History*, privately printed, p. VII.

<sup>5</sup> Parsons, p. VIII.

<sup>6</sup> Simon J. Martenet, "Map of Worcester County," 1866, (Maryland State Archives)

<sup>7</sup> John L. Graham, ed. *The 1877 Atlases and Other Early Maps of the Eastern Shore of Maryland*, Wicomico County Bicentennial Committee, p. 15.

Name Pittsville Survey District

## Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 3

*fruit delivered at the station this season in the history of the berry growing. Prices ranged high all the season, and while the frost and freeze destroyed a part of the crop it is the general opinion that the net results were far in excess of what they would have been had the crop been full.*

*Many of our farmers who had as much as four acres of berries netted a thousand dollars on their crop. Many farmers netted a great more than that and it is not hard to find a half-dozen growers in one crowd talking, each of whom received as much as a thousand, twelve hundred and some fifteen hundred dollars for their crop....The farmers of Pittsville and Dennis, as well as Willard district, need not be afraid to set out berry patches, because it is acknowledged that the land in this section of the county grows the finest strawberries grown in the United States, and the yield is as high per acre as anywhere.*

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As indicated in the newspaper article, Pittsville growers got the best price for their strawberries when sales were handled locally, and buyers purchased the berries directly from the farmers. This direct sales of the berries to buyers started around 1903 and was organized with a regular auction shortly thereafter. The strawberry boom, however, did not last forever. In the 1940s the "red steele" disease swept through the area and killed many of the varieties. Despite the devastation to the region's crop, Pittsville's strawberry auction block known as the "Hi-Dollar Market" was a fixture in community until the mid 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

Like most towns on the Eastern Shore, growth of business and population stagnated during the Depression, and the widespread ownership of automobiles with the attendant improvements in the road systems spelled ultimate doom for many of the traditional general stores. Within the past twenty years, however, the population of Pittsville has increased and new houses have been built within an expanded town limits.

<sup>8</sup> *The Wicomico News*, 26 June 1913.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Parsons, "Pittsville: An Eastern Shore Town's History," privately printed, p. 10.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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WI-489

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of project area

Acreage surveyed 100 acres

Quadrangle name Pittsville, Maryland

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The district boundary included in this form has been drawn in a manner to embrace all contributing resources that coherently define historic nature of Pittsville.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

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name/title Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian

organization Private Consultant

street & number P. O. Box 5

date 4/12/00

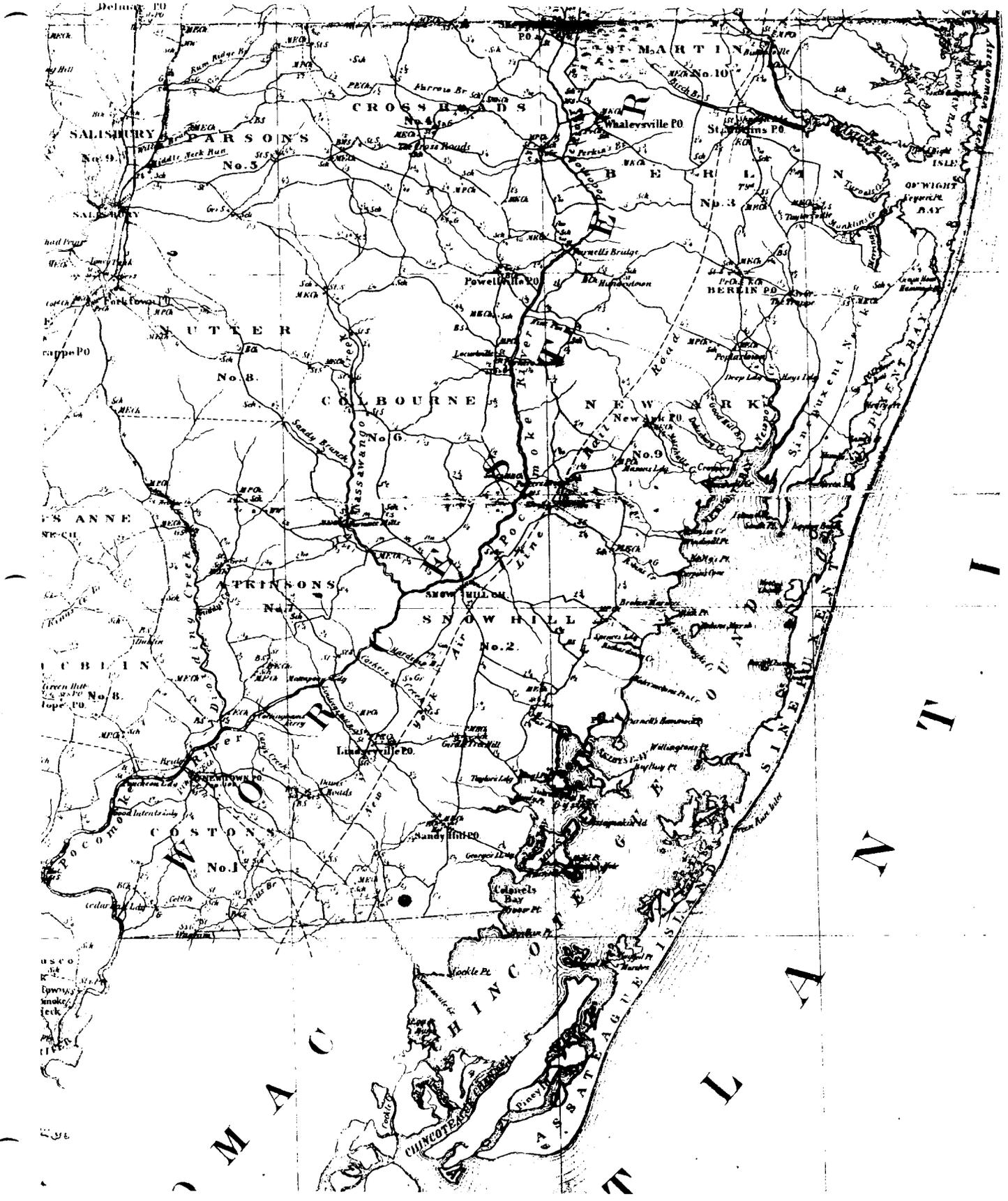
city or town Westover, Maryland 21871

phone 410-651-1094

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
DHCD/DHCP  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032  
410-514-7600



Simon J. Martenet, "Map of Worcester County," 1866 (Maryland State Archives, MSA SC 1427-286)



PITTSBURG

NO 4

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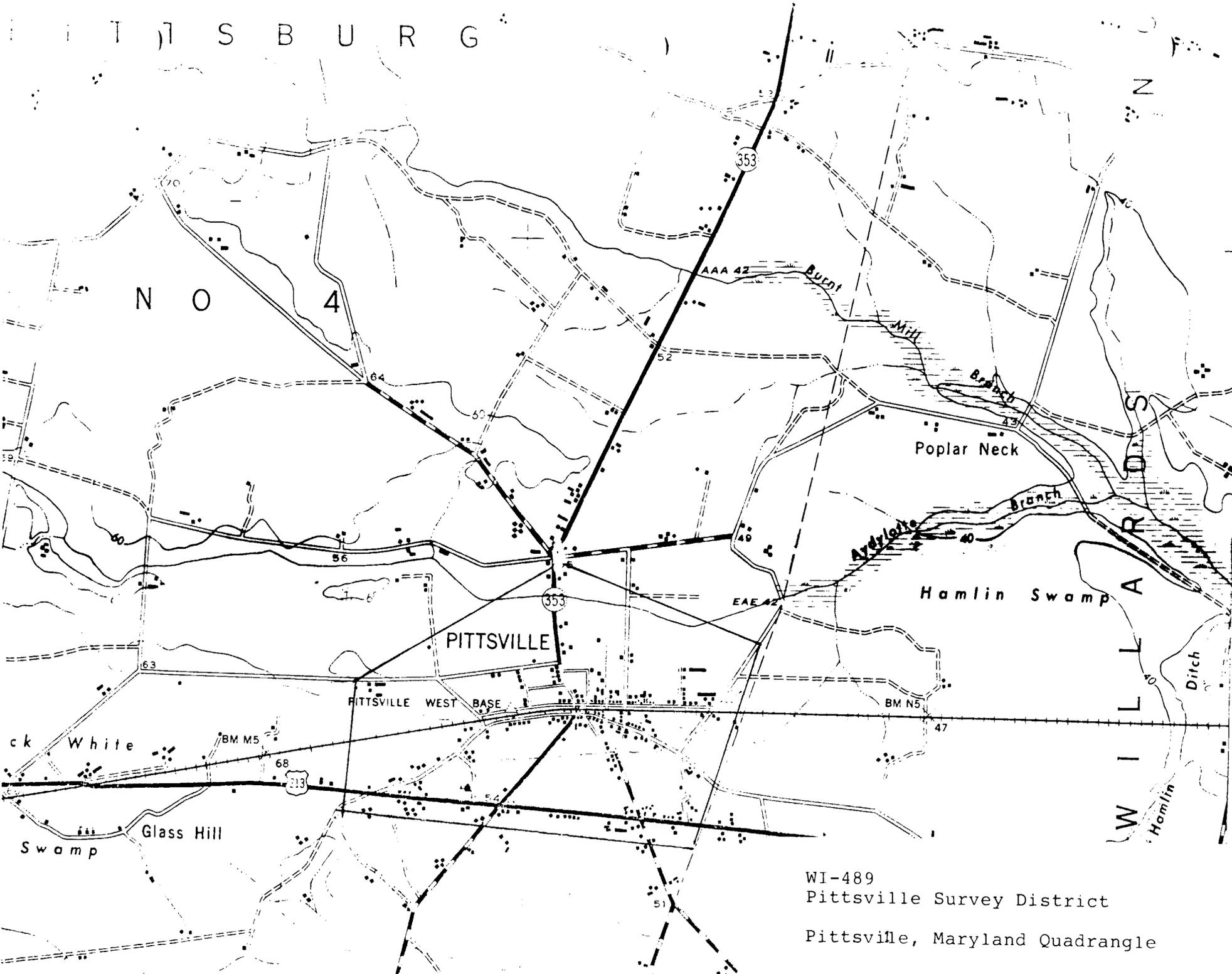
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PITTSVILLE

PITTSVILLE WEST BASE

Poplar Neck

Hamlin Swamp

ck White

Glass Hill

Swamp

WI-489  
 Pittsville Survey District  
 Pittsville, Maryland Quadrangle

WILLARDS 15 MI.  
 WHALEYSVILLE 4.3 MI.