CAPSULE SUMMARY
CT-1345
Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn
Corner of Aspen Road and Alder Road
Port Republic Vicinity
Calvert County, Maryland
The Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn was built by James Chesley circa 1847 and was
owned by Octavius Bowen as soon as 1866. The barn is situated at the intersection of
Alder and Aspen Roads within what is now the Scientists' Cliffs Community. The barn
sits on a small rise near the entrance to the community. The barn features a cross-axial
plan oriented east to west. The original barn measures thirty-two by twenty-four feet
while three sheds adjoin the barn on its east, west and south elevations. Documentary
evidence as well as physical clues within the barn suggests that Chesley and Bowen may
have both experimented with flue-curing in this barn.
1. Name of Property  (indicate preferred name)

   historic Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn

   other

2. Location

   street and number  corner of Aspen Road and Alder Road  __  not for publication

   city, town  Port Republic  __  vicinity

   county  Calvert

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

   name  Scientists' Cliffs Community Organization

   street and number  2488 Apple Road  telephone

   city, town  Port Republic  state  MD  zip code  20676

4. Location of Legal Description

   courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Calvert County Courthouse liber folio

   city, town  Prince Frederick  tax map  28  tax parcel  62  tax ID number

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

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The Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn was built by James Chesley circa 1847 and was owned by Octavius Bowen as soon as 1866. The barn is situated at the intersection of Alder and Aspen Roads within the Scientists' Cliffs Community. The barn sits on a small rise near the entrance to the community. The barn features a cross-axial plan oriented east to west. The original barn measures thirty-two by twenty-four feet while three sheds adjoin the barn on its east, west and south elevations. Documentary evidence as well as physical clues within the barn suggests that Chesley and Bowen may have both experimented with flue-curing in this barn.

The barn is three bays wide with two fourteen foot bays and a central four-and-a-half foot door bay. There are eight rooms within the barn. The barn’s structure consists of heavy hand-hewn timbers joined with pegged mortise-and-tenon joints. Four single doors are centered on the north, south and west elevations atop a continuous sill. The sill is supported by fieldstone piers. Two posts, aligned transversely across the barn hold pegs which support a stripped sapling, which in turn supports the mid-point of tier poles stretched perpendicularly across the barn. There are two tiers of stripped sapling tier poles below the plate.

The barn is sheathed with vertical board siding on all elevations despite the presence of sheds on three sides. The siding is particularly close together on the east and west sides while wider gaps in the siding on the north and south elevations appear to be covered with riven battens in some places. Metal flashing along the east top plate also seals the eave on that side. Sealing around barn suggests it might have been used for flue-curing. In addition, there are no vents in the vertical siding. The roof is covered with corrugated sheet metal. Rafters are on four foot centers and rest on a flat false plate with windbraces. Each rafter is supported by three collars. Some of the upper collar beams show evidence of charring.

A Period II shed measuring fourteen by twenty-four feet extends off the barn’s east elevation. Heavy earthfast round posts provide the primary support for the shed. A similarly constructed Period III shed measuring fourteen-and-a-half by twenty-four feet extends off the barn’s west elevation. A Period IV shed measuring sixty-and-a-half by fourteen feet extends across the barn’s south elevation and features a similar style of construction. Tier poles in all three sheds extend from the shed plate to wooden blocks nailed to the Period I barn’s siding. The southern wall of the Period IV shed is open. This shed may have been used to house cattle.
The Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn remains one of the few barns in Calvert County that might have been converted for flue-curing. Physical evidence of charred timbers and sealed walls suggests the barn was made air-tight at one point, a key criteria for flue-curing. Instead of letting air pass through the barn’s doors and vents to cure the tobacco, farmers who used the flue-curing method built a fire in a furnace on the floor of the barn making the tobacco within the barn very hot and dry. As opposed to fire-curing (a process that entailed open fires on the barn’s floor), flues prevented fire and smoke from hitting the crop but still produced the desirable heat-cured yellow tobacco. James Chesley had family connections and lived very close to George Dorsey who partnered with Bently Bibb and George Needham to patent the Tobacco Curing Apparatus, one of the first flue-curing devices distributed in Maryland. Octavius Bowen acquired the Chesley farm in 1866 and likely continued the flue-curing as a “tobacco furnace” was listed in his 1882 estate. The much of the barn’s sealing was removed after Bowen’s ownership, however, and the barn was converted back to air-curing. The Chesley-Bowen Tobacco Barn represents an experimental era of tobacco curing and barn adaptation.

Information gathered from this barn can also be used to understand larger patterns of tobacco barn construction and curing processes across southern Maryland. Between 2007 and 2008, the Center for Historic Architecture and Design conducted intensive-level documentation across Calvert, Charles and St. Mary’s Counties on tobacco barns that represented both common and unique construction between 1750 and 1950. Like the Calvert County Tobacco Barn Survey conducted in 1990, the purpose of this study was to document and record tobacco barns as a highly threatened architectural and agricultural resource. The National Trust for Preservation cited the Southern Maryland Tobacco Barn as one of the eleven most threatened building types in the United States. Information from this study reveals specific patterns of change over time in use and construction of tobacco barns across the southern Maryland region.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property
Acreage of historical setting 470
Quadrangle name Prince Frederick

Verbal boundary description and justification

11. Form Prepared by

name/title Anna Blinn Cole, Graduate Research Assistant
organization Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware
date February 2009
street & number 307 Allison Hall
telephone 302-831-8097
city or town Newark
state DE

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 Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7800
CT-1345
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Port Republic Vicinity
Calvert County, Maryland

For additional documentation of this resource see the "Southern Maryland Tobacco Barn Project"; call number FRR Mary 21
CT-1345 Octavius Bowen Tobacco Barn
Port Republic, Calvert County
Photo by Center for Historic Architecture and Design Staff
Looking southeast
January, 2008