



The Drane House in 1968.



The Drane House in 1985.



**Nancy Strauss Umbel atop
the Drane House's Spring**

The First Permanent Settlement

Hunters and trappers were the first white men to discover what is now the Accident Valley, located on the plateau of the Alleghany Mountains in Maryland's western uplands.

The vale and surrounding hills in 1800 were abundant in virgin timber. Here was a wilderness of beautiful broad-leaved trees and hemlocks. Under the thick growth of hardwoods and ever- greens were the lush bushes of flowering rhododendrons and many species of ferns. The valley is drained by little streams flowing from its southern part into South Bear Creek, and from its northern part into the mainstream of Bear Creek.

The Indians hunted here, camped here, and passed through, but never chose the site to build a village. There was one barely passable "road" known as Seneca Trail, a few other Indian trails used for foot travel and pack horses, and a small house that probably was built by the Lamars some- time before 1798.

How did this spot get the name Accident? To this very day it remains a mystery. There are numerous stories advocating the name's origin, but the following is probably the most nearly correct story of the "accident". At least it checks with the land records.

In 1774 Lord Baltimore, Proprietor of the Maryland Colony, opened his lands "westward of Fort Cumberland" for settlement. Among the speculators who hastened to western Maryland with their surveyors to secure choice tracts of land were Brooke Beall and William Deakins, Jr., both of Prince George's County. William Deakins and his brother Francis had warrants for several tracts, and on April 14, 1774, they surveyed a fine tract of 682 acres between the branches of Bear Creek, including an old Indian camp ground on the trail to Braddock's Road. But when the survey was completed, Brooke Beall and his party appeared on the scene and Beall claimed that he had selected the same tract for his survey, calling attention to his axe marks on the trees to prove his claim. Deakins replied that it appeared that they had selected the same land "by accident". Since he and Beall were friends and land was abundant, he proposed that Beall take over the survey already made. To this Beall agreed, although his warrant called for 778 acres. John Hanson, Jr., Deputy County Surveyor, made out the survey to Beall, and they named the tract Accident.

The following August Brooke Beall assigned his warrant and survey of Accident to William Deakins, Jr., who secured his patent for the land from the state in 1786. Deakins sold Accident to Captain David Lynn of Cumberland. It was later included in a resurvey called Flowery Vale, 970 acres, sold by Captain Lynn to Colonel William Lamar, who appears to have begun to clear the land prior to 1798 when he was charged with Accident, and assessed there with nineteen cattle and other property. Colonel Lamar settled his sister, Priscilla, her husband James Drane, their children and slaves in Accident about the year 1800. The Dranes were the first permanent settlers at Accident, coming from Prince George's County. Their frontier home is just east of the town, the oldest standing residence in Garrett County.

James Drane was born in 1755 in Prince George's County, Maryland. In 1779 he was commissioned 2nd lieutenant in the militia of that county. His wife Priscilla was a daughter of Thomas Lamar, a descendant of the French Huguenot Marien Duval. In the U.S. census of 1790 they are listed in Prince George's County with one child and four slaves. On the assessment roll of Allegany County for 1798, James Drane was assessed with six slaves, two horses, and two cattle. He is not included in the census of 1800 in Allegany County, so it appears that he began to establish himself at Accident prior to 1798, but did not bring his family there until after the census of 1800 was taken.

Priscilla Drane's sister, Elizabeth, married Judge John Simkin (Simpkins). They established their home on the site of the Bear Camp of the early hunters and traders near Bear Camp Run where the old Morgantown Road joined the Braddock Road (Pig's Ear or State Line). Here Judge Simkins operated the noted Bear Camp Inn from 1787 until his death in 1827.

In 1810 Dr. James McHenry bought land in Locust Tree Bottom (McHenry). James and his wife Martha (Patty) became friends of the Drane family. He died in 1816 and his nephew John McHenry of Bear Creek Glades moved to Locust Tree Bottom two years later to care for his uncle's estate. After Richard Drane and his wife Susan J. West moved to Missouri in 1839, Martha continued to write to Susan. Part of her letter of June 30, 1842 follows:

"Elizabeth Ann (Drane) Browning is in dreadful health. Her friends are very uneasy about her. Tommy (Drane) came from there this morning. He says she is very poorly.

"Tommy requests me, as I am writing to inform his brother that a Mr. Snyder of Somerset has agreed to buy the old Accident Place at \$12.50 per acre: is waiting until we can put him in possession of the line in dispute. He is a man able to buy and will make a good payment. Many have been viewing the other lands and are pleased with them. Tommy says he thinks Richard's presence would be of good service here this summer." (In 1839 the heirs of Priscilla Drane deeded the Accident or Flowery Vale tract to Richard, who sold it to the Germans who began settling at Accident.)

The William W. Hoyer family of Cross Roads (Sang Run), the Singleton Townshend family of Hoyes, and the Captain Truman West family of Flatwoods became neighbors and friends of the Dranes.

Mr. Adam Richter, the grandson of Heinrich Richter who had purchased part of the Drane property, often repeated an interesting story about Singleton and James Drane. The two men enjoyed each other's company and entertained themselves with friendly argument. Upon their deaths they requested that they be buried, feet adjacent, in the same burial ground. On the Day of Resurrection they hoped to rise, facing each other, and begin their communications where they had left off.

Both men lie in the same burial ground, now a part of the Zion Lutheran Cemetery, but no one knows whether the exact wishes of burial were carried out.

The Drane plantation never became a large prosperous farm. Neither did the other settlements in Western Maryland of this time period, even though they were populated by families of education and wealth. The newcomers came from Southern Maryland and the Piedmont Plateau. The Lynns chose Bear Creek Glades and Cherry Tree Meadows; the Campbells also chose Cherry Tree Meadows; the Cunninghams settled where the Western Maryland 4-H and Recreational Area are now located; while the Ridgelys, Johnsons and Brooks all made settlements in what is now Eastern Garrett County. These early settlers expected more rapid development of Western Allegany County (Garrett) than actually took place. Slave labor in the mountains did not prove profitable. Financially, the ventures were not successful. Mountainous plateau terrain was difficult to farm. Severe winters, distance from markets, poorly constructed dirt roads, lack of schools and loneliness in the isolated settlements created discouragement and nostalgia for former homes.

With the passing of James Drane June 27, 1828, the idea of country gentleman farming perished in Flowery Vale (Accident) as peculiarly not suited to this area or climate.

Leaving the east room and returning to the little hall, one can ascend the well-worn stairway and step upon the landing at the head of the stairs. At this point one can observe that the levels of the floors of the second story make it quite evident where the later addition was joined to the older structure.

The door on the left leads to the room above the lower east room. A higher step on the right leads one into the room above the kitchen. On the other side of this room is another room above the living room. This west room was never finished inside. Here one can observe the small tree-trunk rafters, the hewn logs with the mud, lime, and grass chinking and the boarded gable end. Only one window is found in each second-story room.

The width of the boards on the floors and walls are "eye catchers". Some of them measure sixteen inches in width.

The author remembers only the present long porch on the north side of the house, but Mr. Adam Richter remembered a latticed stoop with wooden benches on each side. When the stoop deteriorated, it was removed and the basic porch was added.

Scores of memories have been brought back to life by families who have occupied the log structure known as the Drane House.

Heinrich Richter and wife Catharina lived in it from 1856-1897 with their children Edward, George, Margaret, John Leonard, and John. Apparently only minor improvements were made to the house during their occupancy.

When Frederick, son of John Leonard, became engaged to Emma Kahl, extensive work was done on the inside. Rooms were papered, wainscoting was placed on the ceiling of the parlor and linoleum covered the parlor and kitchen floors. The fireplace was closed in and new wall paper hid all evidence of its existence when one entered the parlor. Frederick and Emma lived in the house from 1901-1908.

Their son Walter was born in the house. As he grew older he continued to remember one very interesting fact about the place that has never been recorded.

"I remember best the outside oven. It was about twenty feet from the porch, a long structure, perhaps ten or twelve feet, four feet high with a rounded top covered with dirt.

The body of the oven was made of stones. At each end was an opening which, when in use was closed by a big, flat upright stone and propped with heavy rocks.

Before baking, hot fires were built inside until the stone structure glowed with heat. Then the fire was pulled when the baking products were ready to be baked.

It was my favorite place to play, and when other kids visited, we scooted off to the "tunnel"."

When George A. Lininger sold his store in Accident to J.L. Englehart in 1910, he and his family moved into the Drane House and lived there until the year 1911 when they departed for the west. The author had the good fortune of meeting one of the Lininger descendants from whom the above information was obtained, as well as a picture of the store when owned by the Liningers. Today, (1986) it is owned by Jane and Keith Pressley, but is no longer in operation as a general store,

“looking” with those books, always replacing them as carefully as we could so they were much like the original stack.”

Helen’s sister Jean also recalled some events that took place at the Drane house.

“I (Jean) recall that my sister Helen and I use to play for hours in the room upstairs above the kitchen near a small window, cutting pictures from catalogs. Sometimes we sat on the wide window sill using it as a seat while playing. There was something about the house that charmed me. It was warm and cozy even in the coldest weather.

“I remember seeing many wooden shoe lasts in one room. (Heinrich had been a cobbler.)

“The orchard adjacent to the yard provided a wonderful place for outdoor play. The trees were perfect for climbing and we certainly took advantage of the opportunity.

“Water had to be carried from the spring below the house, the same source which provided water for the Dranes who had lived there. The bank was not high but quite steep and we slipped many times, splashing ourselves wet before we refilled the bucket and made another attempt for a successful ascent to the gently sloping yard leading to the house. I often wondered why no one ever built steps down to the spring to help to lessen the danger of falling, but it never happened!”

In 1934 the Shoemaker family moved to their new home in the village and the house became occupied by Luther and Mildred Bowser and their two sons Donald and Hobart.

Mrs. Bowser remembered a winter of unusually heavy snows. Mr. Bowser who was employed by the State Roads Commission worked “round-the-clock”, so it was necessary for his wife to pack his bucket and trudge through the deep drifts to the state garage about one-half mile from the house. The two little boys stood by the south window of the living room and watched their mother as she carried the bucket of food to the garage. Often, Mr. Bowser would sleep at his post awaiting orders from his boss to proceed with snow removal at spots most desperately needed.

Upon her return home the boys would still be waiting at the window, happily waving to their mother as she waded through the deep drifted snow. In spite of the confinement during the winter, it was a happy one for the Bowser family.

During the summer of 1936, the Luther Bowser family moved from the Drane House to make it possible for Adam Richter’s daughter Margaret and her husband Raymond Georg to occupy the house. They were the parents of three sons Richard, Francis, and Edward. Raymond worked for Mr. Richter, doing much of the farming and other farm chores. It was during this time that insulsiding was placed over the outside boards and a pitcher pump was installed in the kitchen. Margaret did a lot of wall papering and other interior repairs to make the house an attractive home during the eight-year residence.

In 1944 the Georgs’ moved to a farm which they had purchased from William Fratz. That same year Smith and Margaret Ault Friend along with Claude, Jean (Shoemaker) and their daughter Sue Ellen moved into the Drane House, occupying it until 1948.

An enjoyable summer activity, sponsored by St. Paul’s Lutheran Ladies Aid, was held on the cool, shady lawn surrounding the house. The church group would gather, bringing bags of rags to be torn into strips and rolled in large balls. Later the balls would be taken to a rug weaver to be made into throw rugs. Many beautiful rugs were produced from the rags and sold at the



DRANE HOUSE UPDATE- The exterior rehabilitation of the James Drane House in Accident is now complete except for reconstruction of the home's massive fireplace and chimney. The earlier photo, above, was taken in October 1991, prior to complete disassembly of the structure. The later photo, below, was taken last month. Interior preservation work is also nearly complete, according to Steve Schlosnagle, chairman of the Drane House Committee and co-director of the Accident Cultural and Historic Society. The preservation of the Drane House, the first home built in the Accident community and one of the oldest surviving structures in Garrett County, has been made possible through the financial support of the Maryland Historic Trust, the Appalachian Regional Commission, Program Open Space, the Board of Commissioners of Garrett County, the Town of Accident, nearly 300 individual contributors, and approximately 50 local businesses. Those who wish to support the chimney fund may mail contributions to The James Drane House Preservation Fund, P. O. Box 190, Accident, MD 21520.





ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE DRANE HOUSE - Richard Lewis and Joel Dzodin, archaeologists affiliated with GAI Consultants of Monroeville, Pa., studied the chimney foundation of the James Drane House in Accident, October 27 and 28. Their investigation will aid in reconstruction of the historic home's massive fireplace and chimney, scheduled for next spring, pending funding. Reconstruction of the chimney will complete the six-year preservation effort.



IS THERE A FUTURE FOR OUR PAST IN GARRETT COUNTY? The preservation of the 18th century James Drane House in Accident demonstrates that there is. The Accident Cultural and Historical Society is sponsoring a fund-raising auction the evening of December 12 at the Flowery Vale Community Center in Accident to benefit the on-going preservation of this historic log home. The picture above left shows the home as it appeared last year before preservation work began. The picture at right shows the home today with stabilized log walls and a new roof and subfloor system.



Persons interested in contributing gift items to the auction are asked to contact Marjorie Fratz, clerk of the Town of Accident, at 746-8060. Donated items may be delivered to the Accident History House at 204 North Main Street in Accident, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Deadline for donation of items is December 11. The silent auction benefit will be held the evening of December 12 and will feature an evening of musical entertainment with complimentary refreshments. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m., and admission will be free.

Cabin weathers red tape

First permanent Garrett home finally restored

ACCIDENT, Md. (AP) — James Drane Jr. battled the threat of wild animals and tempestuous weather to build the first log cabin in Garrett County in the late 1790s.

Those restoring it today had to overcome about seven years of bureaucracy, red tape and financial problems to get it reconstructed.

It's hard to judge whose road was toughest to hoe.

"A few on the frontier built this home, but to reconstruct it under the guidelines that we were using involved a great deal of bureaucracy, which made it expensive," said Steve Schlosnagle, a member of the Accident Cultural and Historical Society.

"Just developing the specifications for rehabilitation took an enormous amount of time. It's been a very long project and that has led to frustration."

The more than \$100,000 project to save the Drane House began in 1987. It was financed primarily with \$80,000 in grants from the Maryland Historical Trust. Other money came from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the town of Accident, the Garrett County Commission, the state's Program Open Space and dozens of donations from individuals, businesses and civic groups.

On Oct. 25, 1991, after many years of research, report writing, archaeological digging and discussion, workers from the A.J. Wiley Construction Co. of Springs, Pa., began taking the dilapidated house apart piece-by-piece.

"Everybody thought it was oak, but it was chestnut. Every log in that house was chestnut," said Charles Strauss, who helped guide the restoration project along with his wife, Mary, who died in September.



AP Photo

Charles Strauss helped put the pieces together by remaining steadfast on what type of wood was needed in the Drane Home restoration. "Everybody thought it was oak, but it was chestnut. Every log in that house was chestnut," he said. The log-and-frame house in Accident, Md., was built in the late 1790s and was home to the first permanent settler in Garrett County, Md.

In the winter of 1991-1992, the Drane House was a 200-year-old jigsaw. Each piece, marked with a

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Mary Strauss
Accident historian

number for reassembly, lay on the ground, exposed to the biting winter wind of extreme western Maryland. Sticks and stones and broken pieces of mud, lime and grass daubing that had survived 200 years in the elements were stuffed in sacks.

When spring broke, it took

workers only a few months to get the structure back together and under roof. The chimney stones, however, still lay heaped in a pile. More money will be needed to rebuild the chimney.

But with or without the chimney, the restored house is to be spotlighted in a dedication ceremony Sept. 24.

Initially, the house will be used as gallery space for historical or contemporary photographs of Accident, Schlosnagle said. Over time, it likely will become a museum.

"The value to the town of Accident is that it's the first house. Not many communities have saved their first house," Schlosnagle said. "The value to the state is that it's a first generation frontier home."

James Drane, a native of Prince George's County, settled in Accident about 1800 with his wife and their eight children, according to Mrs. Strauss' book about

CABIN

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the history of Accident.

The town in north central Garrett County is believed to have gotten its name when two surveying teams from Frederick County "accidentally" surveyed the same tract of land in the 1770's. The land became known as the Accident tract.

"James Drane envisioned him-self a country gentleman, raising a large acreage of tobacco with the help of his negro slaves," Mrs. Strauss wrote in her book. "The Drane plantation never became a large prosperous farm. Neither did the other settlements in western Maryland of this period even though they were populated by families of education and wealth.

"Severe winters, distance from markets, poorly constructed dirt roads, lack of schools and loneliness in the isolated settlements created discouragement and nostalgia for (their) former homes."



THIS OLD HOUSE: JAMES DRANE'S HOMESTEAD

Although it's probably true that pre-historic Indians visited this valley at the foot of Hickory Ridge for thousands of years, the Drane House got its name from the first person of European descent to move permanently into this area of Western Maryland.

Mr. William Lamar bought this piece of land, including the Town of Accident, in about 1775. Mr. Lamar wanted to grow tobacco on his property, which he named "Flowery Vale." Mr. Lamar's property was very large, with an area of nearly one thousand acres. He probably built the oldest section of the old house, although he never lived here

himself. Instead, Mr. Lamar asked his sister's husband, James Drane, to come and run the tobacco farm for him.

James Drane moved his whole family to Flowery Vale in about 1800. His family was very large; he and Mrs. Drane had eight children. Mr. Drane also brought six slaves with him to help grow the tobacco.

Of course, with all those people, the house had to be made larger. More and bigger buildings also were needed to house the animals and tools used on the farm. However, in spite of all the improvements, Drane's tobacco farm was not a success.