



THE DRANE HOUSE: PIONEER HOMESTEAD OF "FLOWERY VALE"

The Drane House is named for the first permanent settler in the Accident area. It was the main residence at a property originally called "Flowery Vale." This land, which eventually would become the town of Accident, was patented as early as 1775. By 1798, Col. William Lamar had acquired the 970 acre tract. Lamar, who planned to develop the land as a tobacco plantation, did not live on the property, although he probably built the first house on the tract around 1798. This tiny structure consisted of a two-room, one-story, hall and parlor plan log house, the western half of the building that stands today. Lamar then enlisted his brother-in-law, James Drane, to manage the enterprise. Members of the Drane family were the first documented inhabitants of the house.

James Drane had been a successful tobacco planter and a militia officer in Prince George's County, Maryland. When he moved to Flowery Vale in about 1801, he brought his wife, his eight children, and six slaves. To accommodate the sizeable family, an addition to the house was built. Drane tried to live as a gentleman farmer, establishing a plantation similar to the ones he had known along the Potomac. However, the plantation system was impractical in Western Maryland; the experiment in tobacco farming ended with James Drane's death in 1828. Drane's widow occupied the farm until her death

in 1836; the property passed from the family's control in 1844.

Heinrich Richter next owned the homestead. Richter and his family came to Accident in 1856, during a period of German immigration into the region. A cobbler by trade, Richter made shoes and harnesses for his neighbors, and he also cultivated the farm. Richter and his wife Catherine lived the rest of their lives in Accident, and raised their five children in the Drane Homestead.

One of Richter's sons, John Leonard, established a tannery near the family farm. He also purchased the family homestead from his father after his mother's death in 1894; however, the elder Richter continued to occupy the house until his death. The house was vacant after 1897, and John reportedly used the structure as a slaughter house until his son Frederick became engaged to Emma Kahl.

Emma and Frederick Richter moved into the century-old house in 1901; before doing so, they refurbished the interior of the building extensively. The couple and their first child lived in the house until 1908.

For much of the twentieth century, the house was occupied alternately by tenants and by members of the Richter family. The house has stood vacant since 1952, although heirs of the Richter family controlled the property until 1981.

ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHEOLOGY AT THE DRANE HOUSE

Buildings can be "read", just like books; structural modifications made in a building leave tell-tale traces. The process of reading such architectural marks is sometimes known as "above-ground archeology." Architectural historians have documented the structural changes that occurred at the Drane House during its nearly 200-year history. Their report recorded five major phases of architectural change in the building.

The original Drane House was a sturdy 18' x 26' single-story oak log structure. A loft topped the one full story, and an exterior gable-end stone chimney stood on the west face of the building.

A log addition was attached to the east end of the original house between 1798 and 1803. This enlargement extended the length of the house by 17 feet. A stone chimney reportedly was located in the center of the outside east wall. The windows were enlarged, and a door was cut through the east wall of the original cabin to allow passage between the two sections of the house.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the elevation of the house was raised to one and one-half stories. An enclosed staircase was built in the southwest corner of the original cabin, to allow access to the two rooms on the second floor.

Serious termite damage led to the modifications made in May 1890. At that time, the lower portions of the walls of the original cabin were repaired. New windows and a front porch were added, and the stone chimney on the east end of the house was removed. During the twentieth century, the interior of the house was refurbished and modernized extensively.

The new phase of renovation will occur when the Town of Accident begins to restore this historic structure--and thus to preserve nearly 200 years of Accident's history.

The present archeological project was begun late in 1989 to document further some of the changes that the architectural historians had noted in their investigations of the house. The first stage of archeology consisted of excavations around the house. Seven excavation units were dug at specific locations along the exterior foundations of the building. These units were designed to answer six questions: (1) had the original "front" of the house been located on the south, rather than the north, side of the building?;

(2) did any earlier entrances exist in addition to those currently visible on the structure?; (3) was there ever a chimney on the east end of the building?; (4) how old was the chimney that used to stand on the western end of the building?; (5) were different building techniques used to construct the original cabin and the later nineteenth century addition; and (6) how and when had the porch on the north side of the house been built?

Tentative answers to some questions were obtained. Archeological evidence suggested that the north entrance to the house had always been the main entryway; that there had been no other entrances; and, that no chimney had stood at the eastern end of the house. No conclusive answers were obtained for the other questions.

A second phase of testing took place during the summer of 1990; the purpose of these tests was to locate possible outbuildings, such as smokehouses, barns, sheds, or even privies, that once had stood on the property. Several archeological techniques were utilized to generate data about the yard area. Eighty-eight small shovel test units were dug in a grid pattern across the property. The soil from these test units was analyzed to reveal the presence of such chemical compounds as phosphates, which indicate areas of organic deposits. The artifacts from each test unit also were identified, and their densities plotted on an overall map of the property. The presence or absence of subsurface features such as wall lines and walkways also was noted.

The application of these analytical techniques led to the location of three areas of intensive historic activity on the property. The largest area is located near the spring, some 20 meters southwest of the house; quantities of charcoal were found at this location. Approximately thirty feet east of the house, a large concentration of trash, and a possible stone walkway, were discovered. And at the northernmost edge of the property, a third concentration of nineteenth century ceramics, nails, and bone was located.

The excavations currently in progress are designed to obtain further information concerning the nature and date of the activities that took place on these outlying areas of the Drane property.