

Maryland Historical Trust
State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. BA 493
Magi No. 0304935404
DOE yes no

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Christian's Chance

and/or common Fisher House

2. Location

street & number 15909 Falls Road _____ not for publication

city, town Butler vicinity of Councilmanic District 3rd congressional district 2nd

state Maryland county Baltimore County

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

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

name A. Murray Fisher & Lucretia B. Fisher

street & number 1707 Ruxton Road telephone no.: 410-823-5730

city, town Ruxton state and zip code MD 21204-3510

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Courts Building GLB liber 2225

street & number 401 Bosley Avenue folio 319

city, town Towson state MD 21204

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title MHT Inventory

date December 8, 1971 federal state county local

depository for survey records MHT, 100 Community Place

city, town Crownsville state MD 21032

7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

The Fisher House is an almost primitive, two part, stone structure in a vernacular style, almost primitive. The two stone sections are of different height. Each section is one room deep, two stories, and only one bay wide. A newer section is of frame and clapboard, built in-line with the two older parts to form a three-part Maryland telescope house. The house is set in a clearing or meadow in a large, 57-acre forested area reached by a one-mile right-of-way that is little more than two tire tracks winding along the shoulders of hills overlooking Black Rock Run. The house lies in a curve of Black rock Run and is almost reached by the water in flood times. The house is apparently constructed from local stone, a brown material, yet not the sparkling Butler quartzite that was commercially quarried a short distance to the south. The walls are of remarkable thickness. This house always lacked fireplaces and there is a brick chimney with round orifices that once served stove-pipes. Houses heated by stoves are usually thought to date from the 1850 and up, but the owners always felt that this was an 18th century house. The house is not described as new in the 1852 advertisement to sell Baker's Bark Mill although the mill was described as new in that newspaper offering. Some rooms have been re-floored but the original flooring in some rooms contains planks approximately 16 inches wide. Roof rafters in both old sections are easily visible, bearing adze marks. There doesn't seem to be any machine-sawn timber visible in this house. The lintels in the west stone segment are small sections of wood but on the eastern stone segment one window is topped by a massive stone lintel about one foot in height. The corners of this house are heavily quoined with massive stones. It is fairly likely that this house existed in 1850 when the Sidney and Browne map showed the bark mill in place, it is more difficult--or impossible-- to find this house on the 1798 tax list, yet its isolation could have made it difficult for an assessor to discover at all. This area would have been part of the "Barrens" the treeless region that met the first settlers north of Butler in colonial times. The Barrens grew back into timber in the 19th century, so the geomorphology of the settlement period was probably the result of a great forest fire set by the Indians or lit by a lightning strike.

The present owners acquired this house as a summer place and restored it from a the condition in which a family with thirteen children left it. Mrs. Fisher notes that the meadow was strewn with junked automobiles when she took possession. She and Dr. Fisher picked up large quantities of smashed auto glass. The grounds also contain a frame garage and a stone power plant structure. Near the stream are ruined foundations of the extinct Baker bark mill. This is an isolated property with no neighbors in sight. The woods are occupied by deer and other animal species.

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m a r g i n

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates ca. 1846 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

check: Applicable Criteria: A B C D
and/or
Applicable Exception: A B C D E F G

Level of Significance: national state local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The State Department of Assessments data bank lists this property with an "old farm house" of estimated date 1853. The house could be older than that, but exact evidence is lacking. One known fact is the tract name of the land, "Christian's Chance," which is mentioned in several deeds. Another colonial tract comprising part of this property is "Edrion's Hills and Dales," named for the original owner, a person named Jacob Edrion, sometimes spelled "Adrion." Christian Adron [sic] was listed in the 1798 tax list of North Hundred with 327 acres of Christian's Chance, the landgrant no doubt named for himself as original patentee. Total value of his holdings was \$794. Adron had two tenants: Jacob Antherdon [probably another misspelling of the already misspelled Adron] and Joshua Cross. The structures on the property in 1798 were all log houses of one story, with the following measurements and assessed values:

30 by 20 feet	\$60
30 by 20 feet	45
24 by 20 feet (old)	35 (1798 Tax List, Entry # 2317).

After taking the title back as far as possible in the Towson courthouse records, we were able to look in various old tax lists for persons who owned the tract "Christian's Chance." This land probably fell within Old Election District 7 or, less likely, in Old Election District No. 5---it is on both sides of a dotted line between two now extinct landmarks that served as the old boundary in the layout of districts established in 1800 and last used in the 1833 tax list. Yet the microfilms of the old tax lists of 1823 and 1833 fail to show any of the possible owners---George Marsh, George Ensor, or Aquilla Naylor, who were referenced in early deeds. We do find an Edward Evans as owner of part of Christian's Chance in the 1823 tax list of Old District 7; his improvements were a pitiful \$40 on 135 acres.

Using the "tract index" in the Mitchell Courthouse in Baltimore City, we were able to perform a skeleton title search that demonstrated that this property passed from a person named Edrion [no first names given] to a person named Naylor in 1808; from Naylor to Benson in 1813; from Tagart to Marsh in 1843; and from Marsh [presumably George Marsh] to a person named Baker in 1846. By the time Baker took title in 1846, the property was reduced to 57-1/4 acres (Baltimore City Deeds AWB 364:160).

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Henry Baker was listed with a bark mill worth \$1000 in the 1850 Maryland census of manufactures. Baker's mill had 6 male and 2 female employees; the works was water-powered and produced 200 tons of bark/annum worth \$3200.

The 1850 map by J. C. Sidney and P. J. Browne showed *David* Baker's bark mill on Black Rock Run, downstream of Benson Mill. [The 1850 Sidney and Browne map also showed that George Tracey had a house and store on the road leading to the Bark Mill. We know from deed references that George Tracey purchased 17-1/4 acres of Christians Chance from George Marsh in 1843 or 1844 (Baltimore City Deeds TK 346:345). Yet the Tracey store, Tracey house, the mill road, and the bark mill, were all missing from the map by the time of the 1877 atlas. The Tracey store was definitely on the tract immediately north of the present Fisher House. That parcel is still 17-plus acres in 2001 and it can be traced back to the 1843 or 1844 sale by Marsh to Tracey.

David Baker, a resident of Baltimore City, advertised in the Baltimore County Advocate [of Cockeysville] on February 28, 1852 to sell a new sawmill a quarter mile from Falls Road, "presently used for manufacture of Querecitron bark." *Advocate*, Cockeysville,.

The text of the advertisement contains the first credible mention of the house:

MILL AND FARM
FOR SALE

This property is situated in Baltimore County, 20 miles from Baltimore, and about 1/4 of a mile from the Falls road. It consists of a new SAW MILL and Mill House at present used for the manufacture of Quercitron bark and is well adapted for a small factory or Paper Mill, being on a never failing stream of water.—There is also on this property another valuable Mill Site, where 20 feet of fall can be obtained. The land consists of SIXTY ACRES, being in good order, with wood sufficient for the use of the farm and good DWELLING, Stabling, &c. Terms accommodating. For further particulars, enquire of DAVID BAKER, corner of Caroline and McElderry streets, Baltimore. [Jan. 31.—6t]

The term "mill house" in this context means the mill itself rather than the residence of a miller. Baker was heavily invested in the bark business and had a plant in the city that also went on the market in a separate advertisement; his steam-powered bark and sumac mill at the NE corner of Caroline and McElderry Streets was advertised for sale in the *American* of April 13, 1855. The sales notice stated that Baker had assigned his interest in the city works to his partner Joel Mitzel.

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Baker was in financial trouble because in 1855, a court-appointed trustee, J. C. Blackburn, advertised the property for a public auction to be held on May 11. The case was entitled O. C. Klinefelter-vs-Baker &c. Two properties were offered, one on the Susquehanna Railroad 9 miles above Cockeysville, the other was a "saw mill and bark mill with all the machinery necessary for use), known as the Black Rock Mill; a good dwelling house and a barn." Other property was in the city (Baltimore *American*, April 13, 1855, page 3, column 7).

The trustees, John G. Blackburn and William A. Talbott, sold the place to Joel Mitzel, who kept it but one day and sold to Melchoir Fowble on August 7, 1855 (Baltimore County Deeds, JB 105:34). The tract names mentioned in the deed were again "Christian's Chance" and "Edrion's Hills and Dales." In spite of the change of ownership, the 1857 county map by Robert Taylor still showed David Baker's bark mill. The 1877 G. M. Hopkins *Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland*, showed two unidentified structures along this stream but on the opposite bank from the Fisher houses. Melchoir Fowble had neglected to have his deed recorded for 22 years, finally bringing it to Towson in 1878.

The Fowbles borrowed money on this tract in 1882, and the property went into default in 1915 or before. A court-appointed attorney, Edward N. Rich offered the place at public auction on December 12, 1915, and sold it to John Kemp for a mere \$550. (Baltimore County Deeds, WPC 456:318). John Kemp and wife sold to Emory R. Bull in May 1917. The Bulls kept the property two years and sold to John C. Whitaker who a month later conveyed to Arthur F. and Mary E. Blizzard (Baltimore County Deeds, WPC 509:303). The Blizzards held until 1952 when they sold to A. Murray Fisher and Lucretia B. Fisher (Baltimore County Deeds, GLB 2225:319).

Mrs. Fisher in 2001 reported the survival of a mill ruin on what is now designated as Map 27, Parcel P38, a 56-acre property now designated 15909 Falls Road. The site is found on the Hereford, Md., USGS Quad Sheet. The house bears MHT Site Number BA 493, added to the inventory on December 8, 1971, following a survey made for the Maryland Historical Trust by Alice Martin of Phoenix. Being in the valley of Black Rock Run, this area did not fit the theme of the Western Run-Belfast National Register Historic District established in 1979.

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SUMMARY: While we could look in the Transfer Books at Annapolis to see if the assessor discovered any newly taxable Baker property in the 1846 to 1850 period, those books often prove to be disappointing; in fact, the MSA archivists could not find the 1848 to 1850 volume the last time it was requested. The county historian looked at most of those books many times before in search of newly built mills and would at that time have recorded any pertinent data. But with the data already in hand, it is reasonable to estimate that the house of interest here originated between the 1846 purchase of land by Baker and the 1850 map that showed his mill in place. In addition, David Baker claimed that the mill was new in his advertisement in the 1852 county paper---possibly the house was built at that point as the residence of the miller.

The significance of this structure lies in its vernacular details of construction that have survived to the present with few alterations. It is also significant as a survival of a rural industrial complex from the early Republic and the adolescent period of the Industrial Revolution in this country.

