CT-93

Bleak Hill

Architectural Survey File

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site (mht.maryland.gov) for details about how to make an appointment.

All material is property of the Maryland Historical Trust.

Last Updated: 02-03-2017
Bleak Hill is an early nineteenth-century dwelling that occupies a 3.84-acre lot on the west side of Briscoe Turn Road in Owings, Calvert County, Maryland. The two-story, frame dwelling is an interesting amalgamation of Georgian and Gothic Revival styles. The west, north, and south elevations reflect a Georgian-style form, while the east elevation contains the steeply pitched cross gables that characterize the Gothic Revival style. The dwelling retains its original clapboard exterior wall siding, and many of the windows, all of which the current owners, Joshua and Jessica Lewis, are in the process of restoring.

Bleak Hill was constructed ca. 1842 on a hill overlooking active agricultural fields. The dwelling was part of a large farm that included over 200 acres owned for over 100 years by the Briscoe family. Although the property has undergone various alterations, the Gothic Revival detailing evident on the east elevation reflects one of the best examples of the architectural style in Calvert County. The vergeboard, projecting bays, and steeply pitched gables clearly reflect the picturesque qualities espoused by architects of the mid-nineteenth century and found throughout English and American pattern books of that period.
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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

   historic Bleak Hill

   other

2. **Location**

   street and number 6521 Briscoe Turn Road

   city, town Owings

   county Calvert County

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

   name Joshua Lewis & Jessica Malone-Lewis

   street and number 6521 Briscoe Turn Road

   city, town Owings

   state MD

   zip code 20736

4. **Location of Legal Description**

   courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court

   liber 2492 folio 266

   city, town Prince Frederick

   tax map10

   tax parcel 121

   tax ID number 095033

5. **Primary Location of Additional Data**

   X **Contributing Resource in National Register District**

   X **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

   X **Other:** Calvert County Planning Department

6. **Classification**

   **Category**
   ___ district
   ___ building(s)
   ___ structure
   ___ site
   ___ object

   **Ownership**
   ___ public
   X ___ private
   ___ both

   **Current Function**
   ___ agriculture
   ___ commerce/trade
   ___ defense
   X ___ domestic
   ___ education
   ___ funerary
   ___ government
   ___ health care
   ___ industry

   ___ landscape
   ___ recreation/culture
   ___ religion
   ___ social
   ___ transportation
   ___ work in progress
   ___ unknown
   ___ vacant/not in use
   ___ other:

   **Resource Count**

   Contributing 1
   Noncontributing 1

   buildings
   sites
   structures
   objects

   Total

   Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory

   1 (Bleak Hill: CT-93)
Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Bleak Hill is an early nineteenth-century dwelling that occupies a 3.84-acre lot on the west side of Briscoe Turn Road in Owings, Calvert County, Maryland. The two-story, frame dwelling is an interesting amalgamation of Georgian and Gothic Revival styles. The west, north, and south elevations reflect a Georgian-style form, while the east elevation contains the steeply pitched cross gables that characterize the Gothic Revival style. The dwelling retains its original clapboard exterior wall siding, which the current owners, Joshua and Jessica Lewis, are in the process of restoring.

Bleak Hill measures two-stories in height atop a brick foundation. The dwelling faces east towards Briscoe Turn Road. The exterior walls are clad in clapboard siding, and asphalt shingles, meant to imitate slate, cover the various gabled roofs. The west elevation of the main block and the south elevations both feature tooth-like dentils at the cornice. The northernmost cross-gable and north gable of the main block feature a decorative wood vergeboard. Brick interior chimneys are located at each end of the main block as well as at the north end of a three-bay, Georgian-style northern block. Windows consist primarily of wood six-over-six light, double-hung, except where noted. One-over-one aluminum double-hung storm windows shelter the typical windows.

The east elevation (façade) reflects the Gothic Revival detailing, including the steeply pitched cross gables and decorative trim on the entry bay (Photograph 1). The Gothic Revival block measures three bays across, with a cross gable delineating each bay. The entire northernmost cross-gabled bay projects outward from the face of the elevation. A three-bay Georgian-style block extends from the north elevation so that the entire width of the façade measures six-bays wide. The main entry into the dwelling occupies the center bay of the Gothic Revival section. Three brick steps lead to a brick landing sheltered by a gabled entry hood. The hood is accentuated with a decorative wood vergeboard. The entry, which consists of a single-leaf, wood door sheltered by a one-light wood storm door, is accentuated by three-light over wood panel sidelights and surmounted by a seven-light transom. A projecting three-sided bay, inset with a four-over-four light, double-hung, wood-sash windows in each side, is located to both the north and south of the entry. Three typical second-story windows are aligned directly above the first-story openings; the center window is flanked by a set of inoperable wood shutters. The three-bay northern block contains three evenly spaced typical windows, each flanked by a set of inoperable wood louvered shutters, in both the first and second stories (Photograph 2).

The north elevation of the dwelling lacks openings (Photograph 3).

The west elevation features the three-bay Georgian-style main block, with the three-bay block at the north elevation (Photographs 4 - 5). The main block contains a central entry accessed via three brick steps that lead to a circular brick landing. The entry consists of a single-leaf wood paneled door accentuated by three-light over one-panel sidelights and a seven-light transom. A large beam over the entry provides evidence of a former entry porch. A set of paired four-over-six light, double-hung, wood-sash windows that measure the same height as the entry are located to both the north and south sides in the first story. Three typical second-story windows are

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1 For the purposes of this physical description, Briscoe Turn Road is used to denote north-south; therefore, the dwelling faces east.
aligned directly above the first-story openings. A one-story shed-roof enclosure occupies the first story of the north block. Three evenly spaced typical windows are situated in the second story. All window openings in this elevation feature inoperable, louvered, wood shutters.

The south elevation of the dwelling contains two evenly spaced four-over-six light, double-hung, wood-sash, elongated windows as visible in the west elevation (Photograph 6). Two typical windows are aligned directly above in the second story. All window openings in this elevation feature inoperable, louvered, wood shutters.

Overall, the dwelling, which retains its function as a single-family dwelling, is in good condition and currently undergoing restoration.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

A long tree-lined gravel driveway leads west from Briscoe Turn Road to access the Bleak Hill. A grass lawn surrounds the dwelling, and an in-ground pool is located to the west. A small prefabricated modern shed is situated to the northwest of the dwelling. Mature evergreen and deciduous trees dot the property. A picket fence encircles the yard to the east of the dwelling. Late-twentieth century residential properties located on wooded lots comprise the surrounding area.

INTEGRITY

Bleak Hill retains its integrity of location, on the west side of Briscoe Turn Road. Integrity of setting has been compromised through the conversion of the former agricultural fields that surrounded the property into wooded residential lots, as evident from the 1938 and 1957 historic aerial imagery. Although the dwelling has undergone alterations, it retains overall integrity of materials, workmanship, and design through the retention of the wall and roof cladding, windows and overall footprint. Thus, Bleak Hill retains its integrity of association and feeling as a nineteenth-century dwelling that reflects Georgian and Gothic Revival detailing.
8. Significance

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Specific dates ca. 1842

Construction dates ca. 1842

Architect/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 projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Bleak Hill was constructed ca. 1842 on a hill overlooking active agricultural fields. The dwelling was part of a large farm that included over 200 acres owned for over 100 years by the Briscoe family. Although the property has undergone various alterations, the Gothic Revival detailing evident on the east elevation reflects one of the best examples of the architectural style in Calvert County. The vergeboard, projecting bays, and steeply pitched gables clearly reflect the picturesque qualities espoused by architects of the mid-nineteenth century and found throughout English and American pattern books of that period.

HISTORY OF BLEAK HILL

The earliest recorded deed reference to Bleak Hill is 1897, when a deed for an adjacent piece of land notes that Ann M. Briscoe, late wife of James T. Briscoe, acquired a 200-acre parcel of land known as “Bleak Hill,” from Anne and Octavius Harris on January 6, 1864; however, tax records indicate that the dwelling was constructed in 1842. 2

Local traditions passed down through the various property owners indicate that some of the building materials used in constructing the dwelling was brought from England. Tradition states that the dwelling bears a remarkable resemblance to a house described in Charles Dickens’ novel Bleak House; hence, the property’s name. 3

Ann Maria Briscoe was the daughter of Maryland State Senator John Parran and Anna Maria Graham. It may be possible that John Parran constructed the two-story Georgian and Gothic Revival dwelling; however, research did not confirm that the dwelling was built by Parran. Ann Maria Briscoe married farmer and future politician James Thompson Briscoe; however, they first lived at a place called “Cherry Hill.” 4 Upon Ann Briscoe’s death

3 Beckrich 2006.
4 Calvert County Historical Society, “Recollections of Mabel Briscoe,” unpublished notes on file at Calvert County Historical Society, Prince Frederick, Maryland.
between 1864 and 1870, James Thompson Briscoe relocated to Bleak Hill, where he raised his four sons, John P., James T., Jr., Phillip, and William. The 1870 Federal Population Census notes the 41-year-old James T. Briscoe of Calvert County, as a lawyer and head of household that included his four sons, a farm hand, and a domestic servant.\(^5\)

James Thompson Briscoe was born on March 21, 1828 in St. Mary’s County, Maryland. He studied law in Baltimore and later relocated to Calvert County, where he began practicing. In 1850, he was appointed Deputy State’s Attorney by Attorney General Robert J. Brent, and in 1851, was elected State’s Attorney of Calvert County. During the Civil War, Briscoe, an extensive slaveholder, served in the Maryland House of Delegates and later in the Maryland State Senate. In 1864, Briscoe was elected to the Maryland Constitutional Convention, and later served as Secretary of State under Governor William Hamilton (1880-1884). From 1884 through 1888, James Briscoe was chief clerk in the U.S. Postal Service under Second Assistant Postmaster General A. Leo Knott. Afterwards, he resumed practicing law in Calvert County, where he also owned a large amount of real estate. James T. Briscoe continued to live at Bleak Hill until his death in April 1903. While visiting Baltimore, he died in his hotel room after asphyxiating on gas fumes.\(^6\)

Upon James T. Briscoe’s untimely death, Bleak Hill passed to his son, James T. Briscoe, Jr., a newspaper publisher in Hagerstown, Washington County.\(^7\) During this time, James T. Briscoe assumingly rented Bleak Hill, as the 1910 and 1920 Federal Population Census notes his home as Hagerstown.\(^8\) On May 9, 1925, Julia Hamilton Briscoe, widow of James, conveyed the 200-acre Bleak Hill property to Phillip Briscoe. Upon Phillip’s death in 1927, the property passed to his widow, Rebecca. Rebecca Briscoe died on December 20, 1943, and her son, H. Clare Briscoe inherited her estate, which included Bleak Hill.\(^9\) Clare Briscoe subsequently conveyed the property, on November 25, 1944, to James Hanson Briscoe. The conveyance included two separate parcels: the first “Bleak Hill” including 200 acres and the second consisting of a 134 acre contiguous parcel.\(^10\)

James and his wife, Mabel, lived at Bleak Hill for over the next 20 years, until April 23, 1969, when it was subdivided into a five-acre lot and sold out of Briscoe family hands to Martin and Ann Callahan for $23,000.\(^11\) The Callahans never lived in the dwelling, but instead resided in a trailer on the property while undertaking both

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\(^7\) Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 4: 167.


\(^9\) Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 12: 262.

\(^10\) Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 3: 345.

\(^11\) Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 109: 436.
interior and exterior renovations. The Callahans retained ownership for just two years, after which Ann Callahan sold the property on May 18, 1971, to Bennett F. Frankel. On March 9, 1988, Bennett Frankel conveyed the property to Alan and Teri White for $260,000, who, four years later, sold the property to Andrew and Elaine Julian. On December 29, 2000, John and Nancy Bateman acquired the property from the Julians. On June 1, 2005, the current owners, Joshua Lewis and his wife, Jessica Malone-Lewis, acquired the now 3.84-acre property, and are in the process of painstakingly rehabilitating the original clapboard siding as well as restoring the original windows back to their wood sashes.

GOTHIC REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE

Although Bleak Hill illustrates details of the Georgian style at the north, west, and south elevations, including the central paneled door with simple multi-light surrounds, side-gable roof, double-hung sash windows, and tooth-like dentils at the cornice, the dwelling is most notable for its exemplification of the Gothic Revival style, evident at the east elevation. These features include the steeply pitched cross gables, continuation of wall surface into the gables, projecting bays, and the decorative vergeboards. Alexander Jackson Davis designed the first fully developed domestic example of the Gothic Revival style in 1832 for Glen Ellen in Baltimore, Maryland. Davis was the first American architect to champion the style, filling his 1837 book *Rural Residences* with Gothic Revival styles. Andrew Jackson Downing built upon Davis’ styles, expanding the style through his pattern books published in 1842 (*Cottage Residences*) and 1850 (*The Architecture of Country Houses*). The style was largely employed between 1840 and 1870; however, it never became as popular as its contemporary Greek Revival and Italianate influences.

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12 Calvert County Historical Society, “Donations for the Calvert County Historical Society by Ann Jaffin.” On file at Calvert County Historical Society, Prince Frederick, Maryland.
13 Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 129: 485.
14 Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court Land Records Liber 432: 421; Liber 638: 872.
9. Major Bibliographical References

Calvert County Clerk of Circuit Court, Land Records, Prince Frederick, Maryland.

Calvert County Historical Society, Prince Frederick, Maryland.


10. Geographical Data

| Acreage of surveyed property | 3.84 acres |
| Acreage of historical setting | 200 acres |
| Quadrangle name | Lower Marlboro, MD |

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary for Bleak Hill includes all of Calvert County Tax Parcel 121 shown on Tax Map 10. The boundary includes the 1842 Georgian and Gothic Revival dwelling that has occupied the property since the time of its construction.

11. Form Prepared by

| name/title | Emma K. Diehl/Sr. Architectural Historian |
| organization | A.D. Marble & Company |
| street & number | 10989 Red Run Boulevard, Suite 211 |
| city or town | Owings Mills |
| date | June 2012 |
| telephone | 410.902.1421 |
| state | MD |

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
410-514-7600
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name  Bleak Hill
Continuation Sheet

Number  9  Page 1

Photograph 1: Bleak Hill, east elevation, view looking northwest. March 2012.
Name: Bleak Hill  
Continuation Sheet

Photograph 2: Bleak Hill, east and north elevations, view looking west. March 2012.
Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name  Bleak Hill
Continuation Sheet

Number  9  Page 4

Photograph 5: Bleak Hill, west elevation, view looking southeast. March 2012.
Site Plan and Photograph Locations
Bleak Hill
CT-93
6521 Briscoe Turn Rd
Owings, Calvert County, Maryland
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<td>West and south elevations, view looking east.</td>
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CT-93
BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIÉHL
03. 2012
MD SHPO
EAST ELEVATION, VIEW LOOKING NORTHWEST.
PHOTO # 1 of 6
CT-93
BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIÈHL
03. 2012
MD SHPO
EAST; NORTH ELEVATIONS, VIEW LOOKING WEST.
PHOTO # 2 OF 6
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BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIEHL
03. 2012
MD SHPO
NORTH ELEVATION, VIEW LOOKING SOUTHWEST
PHOTO # 3 OF 6
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BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIÈHL
03. 2012
MD SHPO
NORTHWEST CORNER, VIEW LOOKING SOUTH.
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BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIEHL
03. 2012
MD SHPO
WEST ELEVATION, VIEW LOOKING SOUTHEAST.
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BLEAK HILL
CALVERT COUNTY, MD
E. DIEHL
03.2012
MD SHPO
WEST & SOUTH ELEVATIONS, VIEW LOOKING EAST.
PHOTO # 6 OF 6