

## SUMMARY

### JOHN FINNEY WELLS HOUSE HA-1555

In 1907, this estate belonging to John Finney Wells was advertised in a bankruptcy suit as comprising "a large farm house containing 15 rooms, frame barn, cow stables, horse stable with shed attached, large barrack, corn house and wagon house attached, meat house, hen house, wood house, canning house and warehouse all in good condition... 4 tenant houses, an orchard bearing fruit, and 16 acres of corn." John Finney Wells had purchase Luther Stewart's farm as well as the one belonging to his father, James Wells, in 1885 and 1890, respectively.

Unfortunately no longer "a very desirable and valuable property,"<sup>as advertised</sup> the house is now a forlorn ruin on the edge of the Kennedy Highway. Deterioration has rendered the interior inaccessible, although the exterior suggests construction in several stages, the eastern third apparently later than the western two-thirds. The configuration of the house, the gable roof, pedimented dormers, rectangular brick chimneys, ell shape and five-bay long front facade is unusual for the area. Generally, houses here had a center front gable, and dormers were rarely seen on 19th century houses until 1860 or later. Also, houses were often added on to at the back, retaining an orderly facade, or at the front, creating a larger and more pretentious structure to precede the old one. Additions tacked on in a linear fashion broadening the facade were unusual (although the George Jones House [HA-1053] represents a smaller version). In this case, they served to magnify the impression of the building's size and to create quite an imposing structure, splendidly sited across the brow of a hill.

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
John Finney Wells House

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER East side of Stepney Rd. North of I-95, Aberdeen, MD 21001.

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

COUNTY

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**ACCESSIBLE**

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:
- MILITARY

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Burdell Preston

Telephone #:

STREET & NUMBER 3467 Churchville Road

CITY, TOWN Aberdeen, MD 21001

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Harford County Courthouse

Liber #:

Folio #:

STREET & NUMBER 40 S. Main Street

CITY, TOWN Bel Air, MD 21014

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

57-1555

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This two-story, gable-roofed clapboard house built in several parts is located on the east side of Stepney Road north of the Kennedy Highway (I-95).

This house is el-shaped; the five-bay by two-bay main section is on an east-west axis and faces south, with the two bay long ell attached to the east end of the north side. Most windows seem to have had 6/6 sash and, on the front at least, louvered shutters; gable windows have 3/6 sash. A one-story, shed-roofed porch with carved posts and brackets spans the south facade; the cornice is boxed with gable returns. There are three brick chimneys: in the main section, one in the west end and one between the second and third bays from the east; and, in the ell, one in the north end. The door in the west has four panels and a rosette knob; the door on the east has four raised panels and a four-light transom.

The house appears to have been constructed in several stages, although the chronology and configuration of those stages are difficult to determine. Two-story seams in the clapboarding divide the south and north facades into three parts: a one-bay wide section on the west with one window in each story and one dormer on both sides; a two bay wide center section with entrances in the first story west bay of both the north and south facades, windows in the east bay and second story, and one dormer on each side; and, finally, a two-bay wide section on the east with an entrance in the first story east bay flanked on the west by a window, and two windows in the second story. The ell covers the corresponding portion of the north side. The latter section has no dormers but has two gable windows in the east end.

The ell has a shed-roofed addition on the east side and entrances in the south bay of both sides.

The interior contains four rooms in the first story with a winding staircase in the northwest corner of the east room and a stairhall on the west side of the center section. There are fireplaces flanked by cupboards on both sides of the wall between the center and east section, and the east room has a beaded board wainscot.

East of the house is a board-and-batten outbuilding.

NA-1555

# 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 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/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES \_\_\_\_\_ BUILDER/ARCHITECT \_\_\_\_\_

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In 1907, this estate belonging to John Finney Wells was advertised in a bankruptcy suit as comprising "a large farm house containing 15 rooms, frame barn, cow stables, horse stable with shed attached, large barrack (22 X 60 feet), corn house and wagon house attached, meat house, hen house, wood house, canning house, and warehouse all in good condition... 4 tenant houses, an orchard bearing fruit, and 16 acres of corn." Furthermore, it was located conveniently to churches, schools and stores and within easy reach of two railroads, the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and the B & O," and was "a very desirable and valuable property."

It is difficult to determine who actually built the house. John Finney Wells purchased Luther Stewart's farm from James Stewart in 1885.<sup>1</sup> Wells paid Stewart \$1935 and took out a mortgage for \$1865 for 33 acres of "Whitakers Ridge," "Pritchards Security," and "The Agreement." Wells also purchased his father's farm--129 acres of "The Agreement" in 1890 for \$7400.<sup>2</sup> There are no metes and bounds descriptions of either of the respective farms. The 1858 Jennings and Herrick Map shows a J. Wells on the west side of Stepney Road, south of Bush Chapel. On the east side of the road were buildings attributed to W. Hollis, L. Stewart, and Wilson. By 1878 Jas. Wells had moved to the east side of Stepney Road. (One local resident said that this was his farm.), as well as Wm. Hollis, Wheelwright's Shop, Harvey Osborn, and Luther Stewart.

Unfortunately no longer "a very desirable and valuable property," the house is now a forlorn ruin on the edge of the Kennedy Highway. Deterioration has rendered the interior inaccessible, although the exterior suggests construction in several stages, the eastern third apparently later than the western two-thirds. The configuration of the house, the gable roof, pedimented dormers, rectangular brick chimneys, ell shape and five-bay long front facade is unusual for the area. Generally, houses here had a center front gable, and dormers were rarely seen on 19th century houses until 1860 or later. Also, houses were often added on to at the back, retaining an orderly facade, or at the front, creating a larger and more pretentious structure to precede the old one. Additions tacked on in a linear fashion broadening the facade were unusual (although the George Jones house [HA-1053] represents a smaller version). In this case, they served to magnify the impression of the building's size and to create quite an imposing structure, splendidly sited across the brow of a hill.

- 1. Liber ALJ 55, Folio 81
- 2. Liber ALJ 67, Folio 85

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Land, will and Equity records of Harford County  
1858 Jennings & Herrick Map  
1878 Martenet's Map

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Natal Shivers, Historic Site Surveyor

ORGANIZATION

Harford County Historic District Commission

DATE

8/79

STREET & NUMBER

45 South Main Street

TELEPHONE

838-6000 X207

CITY OR TOWN

Bel Air, MD

STATE

21014

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory 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  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

TITLE SEARCH

HA-1555  
JOHN FINNEY WELLS HOUSE

304/101	March 22, 1947	Grantor: J. Smith & Beatrice P. Michael Grantee: Benjamin Burdell Preston & wife Beulah W. Acreage: 130 Acres
DGW 191/425	March 4, 1925	Grantor: Frank & Johanna Maxa Grantee: J. Smith Michael Acreage: 130 Acres
JAR 160/415	October 21, 1918	Grantor: James H. and Mary E. Fahey of Havre de Grace Grantee: Frank Maxa Acreage: 130 Acres
JAR 155/400	June 26, 1917	Grantor: John Finney & Mollie R. Wells Grantee: James H. Fahey Acreage: 168 Acres, 2 Parcels: WSF 122/61; WSF 109/382
WSF 122/61	July 31, 1907	Grantor: Edwin H. Webster & James J. Archer, Trustees, Otho S. Lee, Trustee Grantee: Mollie R. Wells Acreage: 162 Acres-farm Sum: \$4500
Equity Records WSF 95/8	1907	Henry Tarring et al vs. Edwin H. Webster & James J. Archer, Trustees (John Finney Wells bankrupt; James J. Archer & Edwin H. Webster assigned property) Acreage: Farm of 2 tracts: ALJ 55/81 (#1) ALJ 67/85 (#2)
1. ALJ 55/81	November 25, 1885	Grantor: James B. & Sallie E. Stewart Grantee: John F. Wells Acreage: 33 Acres "Whitakers Ridge", "Pritchards Security", "Agreement" Sum: \$1935 + \$1865 Mort.
ALJ 53/198	January 22, 1885	Grantor: Albertine Stewart Grantee: James B. Stewart Acreage: 19 Acres "Whitakers Ridge" & "Pritchards Security" Sum: \$1900
Will Records WSR 10/39	1884	Devisor: Luther M. Stewart To: Son, James B. Stewart: "Agreement"= 13 Acres, 2 Roods, 9 Parcels To: Daughter, Albertine Stewart-all other lands=

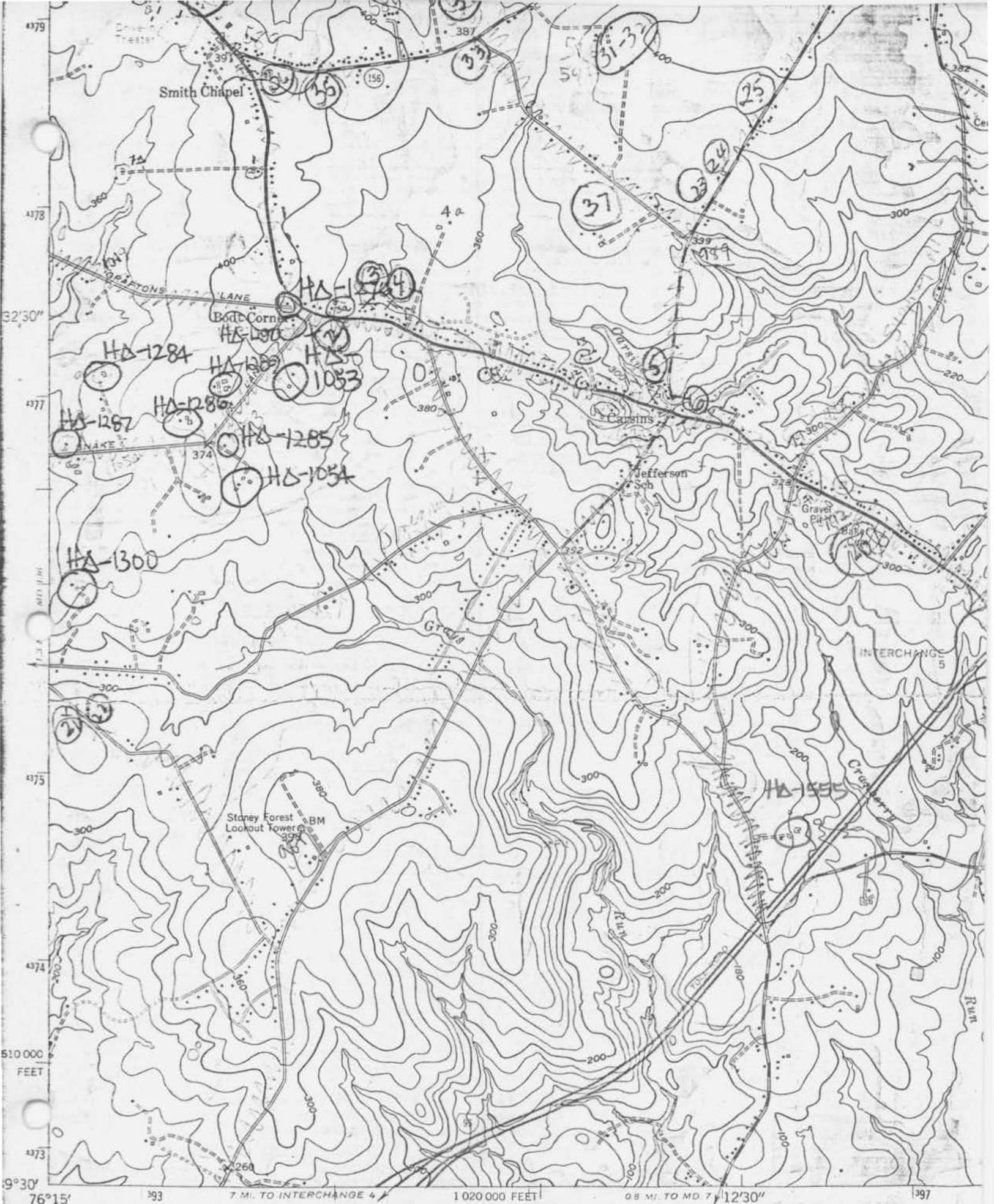
## JOHN FINNEY WELLS HOUSE

ALJ	25/40	October 7, 1870	Grantor: Stevenson Archer, Trustee Bennett & Harriet M. Osborn Grantee: Luther M. Stewart Acreage: 13 Acres, 2 Roods, 9 Parcels, "Agreement" Sum: \$1500
Equity Records			
ALJ	9/265	February 14, 1870	Luther M. Stewart, wife and others vs. Bennett Osborn et al Settlement of estate of James H. Osborn
WG	11/162	August 30, 1859	Grantor: William H. & Jane C. Wilson Grantee: Luther M. Stewart Acreage: 6-3/4 Acres, 12 Parcels, "Whitaker's Ridge" Sum: \$150
WG	11/65	July 20, 1859	Grantor: Henry W. Archer, Trustee Grantee: William H. Wilson Acreage: 116 Acres, "Whitaker's Ridge" on road from Perrymansville (Equity case, John W. Wilson & others vs. William Henry Wilson & others)
ALJ	1/129	March 1, 1852	Grantor: John R. Kirk Grantee: Luther M. Stewart Acreage: 10 Acres, "Pritchard's Security" Sum: \$100
ALJ	23/325	January 15, 1870	Grantor: John Sharswood & wife Mary Ann of Prince Georges County Grantee: Luther M. Stewart Acreage: 6 1/4 Acres "being in the occupancy and possession of the said Luther M. Stewart" Sum: \$75
2. ALJ	67/85	January 11, 1890	Grantor: Semelia A. Wells, Widow et al Grantee: John F. Wells Acreage: 129 Acres, "Agreement" of which James Wells died, seized and possessed 2 deeds HDG 34/326 Sum: \$1,000 + \$6400 WG 12/242
WG	12/242	April 17, 1861	Grantor: Robert and Angeline Wilson Grantee: James Wells Acreage: 26 Acres "The Agreement" Sum: \$373 plus \$500 mortgage

## Title Search (cont'd.)

## JOHN FINNEY WELLS HOUSE

ALJ	2/237	January 24, 1853	Grantor: Robert F. & Mary A. McGraw Grantee: Robert Wilson Acreage: 26-3/4 Acres Sum: \$1200
HD	7/261	February 22, 1824	Grantor: Henry Michael Grantee: John McGay Acreage: 26-3/4 Acres "The Agreement" Sum: \$250
HDG	34/326	October 13, 1848	Grantor: George C. and Jane Davis, Joseph & Ruth Everitt of Baltimore County Grantee: James Wells Acreage: 107 Acres of "The Agreement" Sum: \$500



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
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ABERDEEN USGS QUADRANGLE



John Finney Wells House HA-1555  
Aberdeen, MD 21001  
Natalie Shivers 5/79  
Southeast