

William Perkins' Restaurant Site
SE Corner Maple Avenue and Cross Street
Chestertown, Maryland ca. 1855

K-548

The "Rising Sun," one of Chestertown's best restaurants in the 1850's and 1860's was owned by William Perkins, a free African-American. The building no longer survives, but it was on Maple Avenue, the present site of the Chestertown Fire Company.

William Perkins purchased this site near the southeast corner of Fish and Cross Streets in 1855. This tract, part of original town lot No. 38, began 30 feet southeast of the southeast corner of the intersection of the above streets and ran 120 feet back to the fence of Colonel Joseph Wickes' brick residence, (which fronted on the present Horsey Lane), then 120 feet back to Fish Street. Perkins and his wife paid \$50 for this property, but on the same date (Oct. 1, 1855), Perkins took out a mortgage on this lot for \$370.00, from James A. Jones, another local free African-American businessman. 78/ Perkins subsequently bought adjoining land along Cross Street, part of Lot No. 39, and more of Lot No. 38, along Fish Street. Perkins' well-known restaurant as well as his residence were located on this property. Neither survive, however. Perkins' restaurant, The Rising Sun, was probably the largest free African-American-owned commercial enterprise in Kent County in 1860. It was advertised in the Kent County News as a "Summer Resort! The East Room is reserved for ladies and no gentleman is allowed except with ladies." The Oyster Salon was for men. Perkins advertised that he would "serve ladies and gentlemen with all the choice articles of confectionery. Cake, and ice cream, lemonades in the French style, mineral

waters from celebrated fountains, oysters pickled secendum antem, diamond-back terrapins, soft crabs, hard crabs, and deviled crabs." 79/ According to the Census of 1870, he had a net worth of \$10,000, making him one of the Eastern Shore's wealthiest African-Americans.

Perkins was a political as well as economic leader of the local African-American community. He represented Chestertown at the first political convention held by and for African-Americans in Maryland, in 1852 in Baltimore. At that convention he spoke out strongly in favor of African-American colonization in Africa, despite some strong opposition from others at the Convention. 80/

Perkins was also very active locally after emancipation in encouraging African-Americans to exercise their voting rights under the Fifteenth Amendment. He became the first African-American Maryland delegate to a National Republican Convention and the Eastern Shore's first African-American Federal grand juror. He was a member of Janes United Methodist Church in Chestertown, to which many of the area's African-American leaders belonged. As one of the organizers of a rally in Chestertown to celebrate the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, he and George Westcott, President of the major Chestertown bank, shortly thereafter generated enough additional support among the newly enfranchised African-American community to elect a straight Republican ticket for the local offices. 81/

As a prominent African-American business man and early political leader, the site of Perkins' restaurant and residence are significant to Kent County's historical evolution.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

K-548

SITE OF WILLIAM PERKINS RESTAURANT

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization

- 1) Eastern Shore

Chronological/Developmental Period

- 10) Agricultural-Industrial Transition 1815-1870

Historic Period Themes

- 2) Architecture
- 7) Social/Cultural

Resource Type

Category - Site, public acquisition - not applicable, accessible restricted, government
Historic Environment - Village
Historic Functions and Uses - Restaurant
Unknown Design Source

7. Description

Survey No. K-548

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

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

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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 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 type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) historic

Specific dates 1850-1860 **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.

William Perkins' restaurant was a major African-American local business in the mid-19th century. Perkins was also a political leader, particularly active in urging African-Americans to vote after the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchised them.

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the Fifteenth Amendment, he and George Westcott, President of the major Chestertown bank shortly thereafter generated enough additional support among the newly enfranchised African-

8. Significance continued

- American community to elect a straight Republican ticket for the local offices.

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U.S.G.S. 7.5 Min. Map
Kent County, Maryland
Chestertown

K-548

