

K-592

Circa 1860-1900

Blackston House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

Private

The Blackston house is the least altered example of the predominant vernacular late-nineteenth-century house form built in the old black community of Olivet Hill. Though the two-storey, gable-roofed, frame main sections of these buildings were virtually identical--in size, basic plan, fenestration and original finish--their builders and later owners added to them in a variety of ways. This house is an example of those with a rear two-storey wing perpendicular to the main section; it appears to have been built at the same time as the main section. These typical Olivet Hill houses are most readily identified by the fenestration of the approach facade: three bays on the first storey with entry in the center bay, and two bays on the second storey. Though the facade openings are always symmetrically arranged with reference to the center point, first- and second-storey windows do not always align, which is the case with this house. The builders of these houses evidently had a high regard for symmetry while, undoubtedly of necessity, working with inexpensive materials. These houses seem almost entirely confined to Olivet Hill though a rare isolated example can be seen elsewhere in the upper county. The community itself pre-dates the Civil War, being one of the areas of the county where free blacks were landholders. Though the community has shrunk because of changes in agriculture and opportunities elsewhere, most of the present residents are descendants of the early Olivet Hill settlers. (See also K-593, K-597, K-364, and K-586 for additional information about the community.)

Maryland Historical Trust

State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Blackston House

2. Location

street & number North side, Olivet Hill Loop Rd. (OP 410), .8 mile east of Galena not for publication

city, town Galena vicinity of _____ congressional district _____

state Maryland county Kent

3. Classification

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

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

name Wayman A. Blackston

street & number R.D. 1, Box 77 telephone no.:

city, town Galena state and zip code Maryland 21635

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Courthouse liber EHP 114

street & number folio 94

city, town Chestertown state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys NONE

title

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. K-592

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

Appearing to have been built during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Blackston house is one of the numerous small, plain, inexpensive, vernacular Victorian two-storey frame houses built with one basic plan (through with variations originally and through later additions) in the black community of Olivet Hill east of Galena. They are most readily identified by the fenestration of the main section's approach facade: three bays on the first storey with entry in the center bay, and two bays on the second storey. Though the facade openings are always symmetrically arranged with reference to the center point, first-and second-storey windows do not always align, which is the case with the Blackston house. The Blackston house, unlike some of the others nearby, has a rear, perpendicular two-storey, two-bay-deep wing that appears to have been built at the same time as the main section. It houses a kitchen on the first storey and a bedroom on the second. This house was not seen on the interior, so the precise location and nature of the stair is not known. However, the main section, as with the other similar houses, has one room on the first story and two on the second. A porch fills the L on the east side or the rear wing. This house appears to be one of the least altered of its type.

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8. Significance

Survey No. K-592

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Black history
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates Circa 1860-1900 **Builder/Architect**

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 Blackston house is the least changed example of the predominant late-nineteenth-century house form built in the early black community of Olivet Hill. Though the two-storey main sections of these buildings were virtually identical in size, basic plan, fenestration, and original finish--their builders and later owners added to them in a variety of ways. This house is an example of those with a two-storey rear wing. These houses seem to be almost entirely confined to the Olivet Hill area; an isolated example occasionally can be seen elsewhere, but also in the upper county area. The near uniformity and style is in contrast to other black communities, where more variation is usually seen. This almost standard community form is an interesting contrast to the most common form seen in Sharptown, the old black lower-county community near Rock Hall. There similarly small, two-storey houses have a 2-bay-over-2-bay facade fenestration, with side entry and straight stair, while similarly having one room on the first storey and two on the second.

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The main section measures approximately 16 feet wide by 14 feet deep, the same as at the Briscoe House, K-593. The wing is about about 12 feet square, allowing for a 4-foot deep, shed-roofed porch to fill completely the L between main section and wing. The main-section axis is approximately east-west.

In this particular version of a "3-bay-over-2-bay" main section, the three openings of the first storey facade are spaced evenly in the horizontal space available. The same is true with the two windows of the second storey, resulting in the second storey windows' not being over those of the side bays of the first storey; instead they are centered on the rooms they light. There are no openings in the east gable end while on the west gable end there is a centered, single window on each storey. The wing's east side has a kitchen door set very close to the main section and a window in the other, north bay, spaced evenly between door and rear corner. Above, on the second storey, there is only one window; it is placed above the first-storey window. On the other, west side of the wing there is one centered window on each storey. There are no windows in the rear, north gable end. The builder/designer of this type of house clearly had a high regard for symmetry while, undoubtedly of necessity, working with inexpensive materials.

The exterior walls are covered with horizontal, lapped weatherboard of pine in poor condition and with paint mostly weathered off. The exposure is about 4-1/2 to 5 inches. The weatherboard is very thin (1/4"-3/8"), inexpensive but also subject to cupping. There are single 3-3/4" corner boards. The weatherboard is continuous on the west side from front corner of main section to rear corner of wing. That the original interior finish was plaster on lath can be seen through occasional openings in the weatherboard. The corner posts glimpsed appear to be about 4" x 4", and there are equally heavy diagonal corner braces.

The crawl-space foundation could not be well seen. The weatherboard extends to the ground in some places, and in others corrugated roofing has been placed between weatherboard and ground. A large field stone is seen at both front corners of the main section, however, where one end of the heavy sill is also visible, and there appear to be piers of stacked fieldstones elsewhere, resting on the ground.

There are two small, square chimneys of brick that have been at least partially parged. There have two-course bands one course below their tops. One is in the center of the east end of the main section, within the wall, and the other is at the center of the north, rear end of the wing, also within the wall. Both were built for use with stoves.

Windows of both sections are double-hung and have 3-over-1 lights, probably not original. The main section's west-end, second-storey window has 3-over-2 lights. Door and window trim is plain and 3-5/8" wide, some possibly not original. The wood sills are thin and double. Victorian movable-louver shutters are in place at some windows; mortises remain elsewhere.

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The main-section entry's steps are gone. The door there is possibly a replacement, with one light over two horizontal panels. The wing door is four-panel. It is not clear if there ever was a front porch.

The gable roofs are covered with asphalt shingles with a large, interlocking diamond pattern, applied over wood shingles. The roofs overhang the walls about 12 inches on both ends and sides. The rafters are exposed on the underside. The ends are simply shaped (beveled). The last, notched rafter of the gable ends appears to act as a vergeboard.

The house is on 3/4 acre lot at a turn of the unpaved Olivet Hill loop road. On the grounds are old tree and shrub plantings; the ground is cleared and not with a lawn. To the east, from the loop road, is a long lane to a recently-built house near the site of the old Galena silver mine. (See report for K-597.) Across the loop road to the south there is a woods, in which, on the corner lot, there appears to be the ruins of an old frame house. Behind the rear yard, to the north, there are woods. Down the road to the west two houses across the road can be seen, and beyond the tall, brambly hedge well to the south of the house is a tilled field now belonging to a white farmer that very likely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century belonged to a black owner. In general, the area is fairly heavily wooded, in contrast to what is said to have been its formerly more open nature. Earlier the community's residents tilled the small acreage they had or at least had large vegetable gardens.

Though the oldest standing dwellings at Olivet Hill appear to date from after the Civil War, the community in fact had its origins before the Civil War as a community of free blacks, who evidently owned enough land for at least subsistence farming. There are records of land transactions involving free blacks there from the 1830s through the 1850s. From the post-Civil War period well into the twentieth century the community's residents worked mainly on the nearby white-owned farms as laborers, cooks, and nursemaids; the women also took in laundry. With the changes in farming methods during the twentieth century and the lure of a better life and income elsewhere, many left Olivet Hill for other places. The high-population mark was probably reached about the turn of the century, when a new large (too large) Methodist church was built in the community to replace the one moved about 1863 from the white Galena Methodist church. Olivet Hill also had its own one-teacher school at least from the 1880s until about 1958. See reports for K-592, K-364, K-597 and K-586 for additional, fuller information about the community.

This particular property may have been associated with the Peaker family. Thomas and Robert D. Peaker were especially notable community leaders in Olivet Hill during the middle and late nineteenth century. One of that family's descendants lives in the recently-built house to the east of the Blackston property. In fact, most of the present-day residents of Olivet Hill are related to each other in some way, due to the many marriages that took place over the years within the community.



K-592

Blackston House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/7/85

View to southwest

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K-592

Blackston House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/7/85

View to northeast

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