

K-593

Circa 1870-1900

Herbert Briscoe House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

Private

The Herbert Briscoe house is one example of the predominant vernacular late-nineteenth-century house form built in the early 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. (See also K-592, Blackston House.) This house is an example of those with a one-storey, shed-roofed end wing. 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, though in the Briscoe house they do. The main sections have one room on the first storey with a corner stair to the second storey, which has two bedrooms, the partition between them running from front to back. These houses seem to be almost entirely confined to Olivet Hill; 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 nearly standard community form is an interesting contrast to the most common form seen in Sharptown, the old black lower-county community near Rock Hall, where similarly small two-storey houses have a 2-bay-over-2-bay facade, with side entry and straight side stair. (See K-515, Harris-Smith House.)

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Herbert Briscoe House

## 2. Location

street & number East side Olivet Hill Loop Rd. (OP 410), .7 mile  
east of Galena  not for publicationcity, 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<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 Herbert Briscoe

street &amp; number P.O. Box 48 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 117

street &amp; number folio 316

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-593

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<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 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 Herbert Briscoe house is one of the numerous small, plain, inexpensive, vernacular Victorian two-storey frame houses built with one basic plan (though 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 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, though in the Briscoe house they do. The Briscoe house has a one-storey, shed-roofed wing on the north end of the two-storey, gable-roofed main section; the wing appears to have been built at the same time as the main section to house a kitchen, also in present use. The main section has one room on the first storey and a corner stair to the second storey, which has two bedrooms, the partition between them running from front to rear wall in the approximate center of the main section. The rear fenestration is identical to that of the front except that in the side bay where the corner stair is, there is now window. Originally covered with lapped, horizontal weatherboard, the house is now clad with tan asphalted sheet material with a simulated brick pattern.

(Continued)

# 8. Significance

Survey No. K-593

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

**Specific dates** circa 1870-1900      **Builder/Architect**

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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 Herbert Briscoe house is one 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 one-storey, shed-roofed end 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 usually is 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 side stair, while similarly having one room on the first storey and two on the second.

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Although considerably altered on both exterior and interior, the original simple, economical nature of the Briscoe house is readily apparent.

The main section of the Briscoe house measures about 16 feet wide by 14 feet deep; its axis is north-south. The two-bay-wide, shed-roofed north end wing, which appears to have been built at the same time as the main section, measures about 12 feet wide. Its front and rear walls are continuous with those of the main section.

The house rests on brick piers, though concrete-block infill recently has been added and painted a dark red. Under the center rear pier a large fieldstone can be seen. A single wide pier is under the joint between main section and wing, indicating that the wing probably was built at the same time as the main section.

The single chimney, within the wall at the center of the north end of the main section, was originally for a stove. It is built of brick that has been parged; there is a two-course cap.

The mid-twentieth-century asphalted panels were applied to the exterior over horizontal, lapped weatherboards, the standard cladding material for these houses. The double cornerboards were applied after re-siding.

The main-section roof is now covered with corrugated metal, applied over wood shingles. The roof overhang is about 12" on all sides. Originally probably open, it is now closed with a plywood soffit on the undersides of the rafters. The rafters are cut perpendicular to themselves; the ends are not vertical. There is a plain, narrow fascia. The wing roof, similarly finished, has little overhang on its lower, north termination (6"); there are flush verge boards. Rafters are exposed, though there is a narrow fascia.

The two main-section entries, in the central bay of both front and rear, are no longer in use, and their steps have been removed. The only entry is now through the wing, which has both front and rear doors. The main facade door has one large panel over three horizontal panels (possibly a replacement); an aluminum storm/screen door is in place. The rear four-panel door is nailed in place and appears not to fit this opening precisely. As with the windows, trim is wide and plain, with elaborated head trim, giving an overall handsome appearance to an otherwise very plain house.

Windows of the main section are double-hung with 2-over-2 lights. Trim is 4-3/8" wide and plain. However, the head trim is composite with a plain cap above an ovolo and cove molding. It is possible that this head trim is a later addition. Metal louvered shutters are now screwed to the wall, but the mortises on the window jambs show that there originally were functional shutters. There are no windows on the south end.

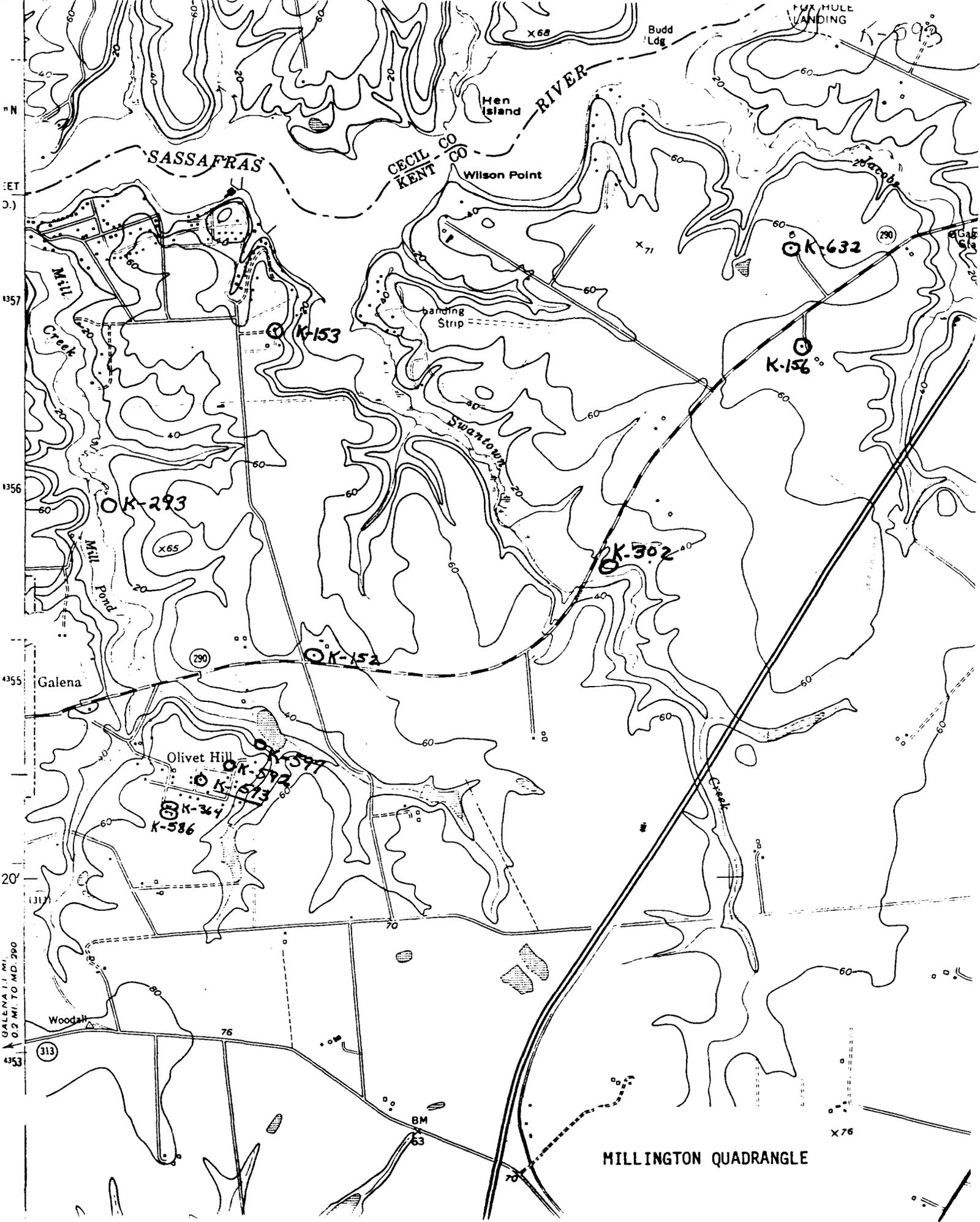
On the interior, the walls were originally plaster on lath, but they are now panelled with 4'x8' sheet material. Floors are of medium random boards, and the ceilings have been covered with ceiling tile. The 180° corner stair,  
(continued)

between the chimney and rear wall, is in the northeast corner of the main section, with access from both the main section room and the wing kitchen. It has all winders after the lower area that is adapted to entry from both rooms. The door to the stair from the main-section room is four-panel. The stair enclosure's walls below the level of the second-storey floor are covered with very narrow vertical tongue-and-groove beaded boards. There is no rail or balustrade on the second storey at the opening. Between the entry to the stair and the chimney is an angled four-panel closet door. The second-storey ceiling is at the tie beams; there are no ceiling joists at plate level, therefore.

The Briscoe lot is largely open, with a parking area and storage shed to the rear and a driveway to the south. A lawn surrounds the house. The portion of Olivet Hill's loop road that passes in front of the house is unpaved.

From the Briscoe house a portion of the Olivet Hill community can be seen. To the southeast is a house trailer with surrounding lawn. To the north is a two-storey frame house with a farm field and woods beyond it. To the southwest is a low, two-storey house of the same period. Directly across the road is a "2-over-3" house in ruins, with original materials revealed. It had a two-storey end wing added flush with the main section, with roof lines also continuous. Windows of this house had 6-over-6 lights.

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.



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K-593

Oliver Briscoe House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/7/85

View to northeast

10599-22



K-593

Oliver Briscoe House

Olivet Hill, near Galena

M. Q. Fallaw - 11/7/85

View to northwest