

K-609

Circa 1920

Leigh Ark  
Betterton  
Private

The Leigh Ark is located on the property of the Leigh family house at the end of Idlewhile Avenue just outside the town limits of Betterton. It is a large ark probably dating from the early 1920s and used by the Leigh family. It has a heavy scow bottom, turned up for a platform at each end. The hull sides are both swelled at the center and canted outwards. A cabin with very shallowly pitched gable roof covers most of the hull. At each end is a door. The walls of the cabin are now covered with an asphalted sheet material, with vertical boards beneath. Several windows are on one side (some probably added), and on the other side is an on-the-ground porch. The Leigh ark is one of largest and most sophisticatedly built of the very few Kent County arks that survive from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. Actually, in Betterton the preferred name is not ark (Chestertown) or shanty scow (Rock Hall) but houseboat. Part boat and part dwelling, they are a hybrid, utilitarian structure that was well adapted to the needs of the watermen of the time. In general, arks were not sophisticated structures that required building by a boatbuilder or even a skilled carpenter; most users could and did make their own. They were once part of winter and spring fishing for Kent County watermen, when they were towed to the fishing grounds, first by log canoes under sail and then by motorized boats, and pulled up on the shore to serve as dwellings for the season, though most watermen made periodic visits home using smaller boats. Betterton watermen fished during the winter and spring, especially for shad, and worked in resort-related occupations in the summer. Arks were made obsolete by improved, more powerful boat motors and larger boats during the 1930s. The Leigh ark is one of five known to still exist in Kent County, though one of these is in ruins and one has been converted to a house and is now lived in. One ark from the Rock Hall area that saw service as a meat house after retirement from the water is at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michael's. This ark is different from the others in the relatively complexity of its hull, both swelled at the center and canted outward. It is also unusually large, with sleeping space for four.

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic

and/or common Leigh Ark

## 2. Location

street & number North side at west end of Idlewhile Avenue  not for publicationcity, town Betterton  vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county Kent

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

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

name Howard Leigh ETAL, c/o J.S. Leigh

street &amp; number 276 Providence Road telephone no.:

city, town Annapolis state and zip code Maryland 21401

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Courthouse liber RAS 38

street &amp; number folio 147

city, town Chestertown state Maryland

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys NONE

title

state  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

# 7. Description

Survey No. K-609

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	N/A
<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 checked="" 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.

The Leigh Ark is located on the property of the Leigh family house at the end of Idlewhile Avenue just outside the town limits of Betterton. It is in a low area with access to the Sassafras River while the house is some distance away on the bluff to the west. The Leigh ark is a large ark probably dating from the early 1920s and used by the Leigh family. It has a heavy scow bottom, turned up for a platform at each end. The hull sides are both swelled at the center and canted outwards. A cabin with very shallowly pitched gable roof covers most of the hull. At each end is a door. The walls of the cabin are now covered with an asphalted sheet material. Several windows are on one side (some probably added), and on the other side is an on-the-ground porch. The ark is set up slightly off the ground but evidently has been used for children to play in and possibly as a summer cabin. It has been altered.

(Continued)

# 8. Significance

Survey No. K-609

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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" 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) fishing

**Specific dates** Circa 1920-1930 **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 Leigh ark is one of the largest and most sophisticatedly built of very few Kent County arks that survive from the period when they were part of watermen's work and way of life. Actually, in Betterton the preferred name is not ark (Chestertown) or shanty scow (Rock Hall) but houseboat. Part boat and part dwelling, they are a hybrid utilitarian structure that was well adapted to the needs of the watermen of the time. In general, arks were not sophisticated structures that required building by a boatbuilder or even a skilled carpenter; most users could and did make their own. They were once part of winter and spring fishing for Kent County Watermen, when they were towed to the fishing grounds, first by log canoes under sail and then by motorized boats, and pulled up on the shore to serve as dwellings for the season, though most watermen made periodic visits home using smaller boats. Betterton watermen fished during the winter and spring, especially for shad, and worked in resort-related occupations in the summer. Made obsolete by improved, more powerful boat motors and larger boats during the 1930s, the old arks were left to rot in marshes, dismantled for re-use of their materials, lived in as permanent dwellings and sometimes drastically altered, and used for backyard sheds and meathouses. The Leigh ark is one of five known to still exist in Kent County, though one of these is in ruins and one has been converted to a house and is lived in. One ark from the Rock Hall area that saw service as a meat house after retirement from the water is at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michael's. This ark is different from the others in the relative complexity of its hull, both swelled at the center and canted outward. It is also unusually large, with sleeping space for four instead of two.



The Leigh ark has been somewhat altered, with the addition of materials especially. The ark is sitting above the ground, on cans filled with concrete. The hull appears at first to be built of two boards on each side, but evidently there are three, with the top one doubled, on which the cabin rests. At one cabin end the width appears to be about 6'-4", measured at the platform surface, where however, additional materials have been added. The other end seems similarly sized.

In contrast to the ark at the Kent Museum at Turner's Creek, the Dickerson Ark (K-611), the Leigh ark has a platform at both ends and a door in the center of both ends. The south platform of the Leigh ark has had an extension built onto it since its use in the water. The original platform is about 25" deep, and the extension adds the same amount again. Overall, the approximate length of the scow bottom is about 24 feet long and that of the cabin, about 20 feet long. The roof at the eaves is about 50" above the level of the platform, and at the center about 55-56". The gable roof is pitched just enough to be able to shed water well. It is now covered with roll asphalt material. Its original covering is now known. Unlike the ark at the museum, however, this one has its original roof decking--narrow, double, beaded tongue-and-groove boards.

The rafters are cut from one piece of board that has been shaped from 1-3/4" stock that is 4-1/2" wide at roof edge, where they rest on a roof plate. A number of have additional pieces scabbed to them. The whole structure is now somewhat racked. The rafter lower edges are chamfered. The rafters are set about 32 to 34-1/2" on center.

The interior space cannot be easily measured because of the racking. Floor to ceiling height at the eaves appears to be about 6'-3" to 6'-5". From the interior it can be seen that the original exterior wall covering is vertical boards, fastened only at the cabin plate and at the joint with the hull. There are corner posts, about 3-5/8" square. These are diagonally braced at the bottom with short lengths of 2x4 material, in both directions.

There is now no sign of a stove location, no opening for a stovepipe. A stove may have been vented out a window or through a part of the wall or roof that has since been changed. Though there is a door at end each of the ar, the main access now is through a door cut into the side from the porch to the west. This ark has two pairs of simple bunkbeds, one on each side at one end, with an aisle in the middle giving access to them and the end door. The area under the lower bunkbeds may have been used for storage.

K-609

AMS 3

# BETTERTON

05:00"

02:30"





K-609

Leigh Ark

West end of Idlewhile Ave., Betterton

M. Q. Fallaw - 1/25/86

View to northwest

K609-6



K-609

Leigh Ark

West end of Idlewhile Ave., Betterton

M. Q. Fallaw - 1/25/86

View to southwest

K609-4