United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic Name Aigburth Vale

other names/site number BA-100

2. Location

street & number 212 Aigburth Road not for publication n/a
city or town Towson vicinity n/a
state Maryland code MD county Baltimore code 005 zip code 21204

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide ___ locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official — Date 7-13-99

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

____ entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
____ determined eligible for the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
____ determined not eligible for the National Register
____ removed from the National Register

____ other (explain): _____

_____ _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

___ private
_X_ public-local
___ public-State
___ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

_X_ building(s)
___ district
___ site
___ structure
___ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	3	buildings
__	__	sites
__	__	structures
__	__	objects
2	3	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Domestic	Sub:	Single Dwelling
	Domestic		Hotel
	Health Care		Hospital

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Vacant/Not In Use	Sub:	

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Second Empire

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
roof Wood, Composition, Metal
walls Wood
other

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

_____	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
__X__	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
__X__	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
_____	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

____ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
____ B removed from its original location.
____ C a birthplace or a grave.
____ D a cemetery.
____ E a reconstructed building, object,or structure.
____ F a commemorative property.
____ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
Theater
Architecture

Period of Significance 1868-1886

Significant Dates 1868

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
John E. Owens

Cultural Affiliation n/a

Architect/Builder Niernsee & Neilson, architects

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)
___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data
__ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
_X_ Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository: Baltimore County Office of Planning and Zoning

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.9 Acres
USGS Quadrangle Towson, MD

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	362350	4361240	B			
C				D			

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol E. Hooper, Senior Associate

organization Robinson & Associates, Inc. date June 1998

street & number 1909 Q Street NW, Suite 300 Telephone 202 234-2333

city or town Washington state DC zip code 20009

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:
Continuation Sheets
Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)
name Baltimore County Bureau of Land Acquisition
street & number 111 West Chesapeake Ave., Rm.319 Telephone _____
city or town Towson state MD zip code 21204

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Description Summary

Aigburth Vale is a large, three-story, wood, Second Empire mansion set on an open, 4.9-acre lot. One of Baltimore County's preeminent examples of Second Empire architecture, the building's complex massing includes a large central pavilion, three porches, and a number of wings all with mansard roofs. Rich decorative elements appear throughout on the exterior, including on dormers, porch supports, and at the cornice line. In the interior, the building features a number of large public rooms with decorative stone fireplaces and simple wood trim. The land currently associated with the house is a part of what was originally a large, over 200-acre estate.[1] The house today is located within a largely suburban neighborhood.

General Description

Aigburth Vale is located in Towson, Maryland, on the south side of Aigburth Road adjacent to Towson High School and its numerous playing fields (to its west and south). A small stream (Herring Run) is located to the east, and Aigburth Road runs to the north of the property. Aside from the school, the neighborhood is largely residential. An access drive from Aigburth Road leading from the west side of the property first forms a circular drive in front of the west elevation of the house, and then continues eastward, providing access to the four outbuildings (one contributing, three noncontributing) to the north of the main building. A paved parking area is located at the end of this drive, below and to the east of the main house.[2] The site contains a number of large trees clustered close to the house and currently the west and south elevations are largely obscured by mature evergreen trees. A line of trees is located on the east side of the property along the stream and assorted deciduous and evergreen trees and bushes are scattered throughout the property, many as foundation plantings. No remnants of original extensive decorative gardens (which included parterres), or "sentinel elms," remain.[3]

Set on a slight rise, with large mansard roofs and a large central three-and-a-half-story tower with a widow's walk, Aigburth Vale is a striking example of Second Empire styling. The massing and footprint of the building are both complex and asymmetrical as was often true for the style. Building materials include original horizontal wood siding; standing-seam metal, wood shingle, and composition roofing; and stone foundations which are particularly visible at the

[1] Owens initially purchased 197 acres, and he later purchased additional adjacent acreage. When the estate was advertised for sale the first time in 1886 it included roughly 217.5 acres. An advertisement for the property just prior to when it was actually sold in 1889 listed 213 acres.

[2] Based on early maps of the area, the access road appears to be largely consistent with its early route. The parking area, however, likely was added in the 1960s.

[3] Mary S. Owens, *Memories of the Professional and Social Life of John E. Owens,* Baltimore: J. Murphy and Company, 1892, p. 66.

basement level on the north and east elevations. With a few minor exceptions, most windows in the house are original four-over-four, double-hung sash with decorative wood sills. Most windows have either one or two shutters. The numerous round-headed dormers have windows of two types: The four dormers located on the tower have casement windows with single vertical rows of three panes on either side of the opening (the top panes are rounded). Other dormers have four-over-four, double-hung windows, the uppermost panes of which are rounded. All of the two-and-one-half-story areas of the building feature a bracketed cornice with consoles located above each window. The cornice line of the main tower/pavilion, however, is not bracketed. The straight-sided mansard roof of the central tower features single dormers on each of the four sides, a balustrade along the top, and scalloped decorative molding below the railing. Chimneys, which are located on top of the central tower, at the end of the north wing, on the east wing and above the current west entrance, are brick and consist of two or three joined flues.

The building's current front (west) elevation is irregularly shaped and largely obscured by trees. Roughly L-shaped, it consists of a west-facing main section and a five-bay, two-and-one-half story wing that projects to the north. The wing section is relatively simple; however, the southern four bays are recessed from the plane of the rest of the wing. The central portion of the elevation consists of three elements: a two-story, one-bay flat-roofed section to the north which contains the entrance porch, a two-and-one-half-story, one-bay, projecting section (with a mansard roof), and a one-bay, flat-roofed, one-story section, formerly the side elevation of the building's front porch. The current front entrance is reached via a set of wooden steps to the northernmost (two-story) section of the central section. The one-story porch here is one bay wide and two bays deep. One of latter two bays has been closed in around the porch's decorative piers. A section of the balustrade is preserved in the open portion of the porch. The middle part of the central section consists of a single projecting bay that features, at the first-floor level, a tall window grouping consisting of three round-headed, four-over-six, double-hung windows, the panes of which are arranged vertically. To the south, the bay that was formerly part of the front porch is flat-roofed and has paired, six-over-six windows. The second-story level of this elevation includes a projecting bay above the long side of the current front porch. At the third-floor level, mansard roofs with dormers are located on the wing (four dormers), and above the central projecting section. Behind the two-story section that houses the entrance porch, the main block of the tower section is evident.

The first story of the south elevation (the building's historic front) is also heavily obscured by trees. This elevation is far more symmetrical than the other elevations. It consists generally of the central tower/pavilion with two-bay, two-and-a-half story sections on either side. The former front porch, which has been filled in, runs in front of both the central pavilion and much of the east and west sections. To the west, there is a slightly recessed two-and-a-half story section. To the east, the elevation steps back in two stages. The single-bay, two-story section closest to the central pavilion is flat-roofed. Visible behind this section is the mansard roof of the third section. The third section, a three-bay-long wing is stepped back at the second-floor level. The original section of this wing is two-and-a half stories high (with a mansard roof) and two bays wide. A one-story, two-bay-long, one-bay-wide addition (undated) was later added to the end of the building.[4] Later a porch which was located on the original portion of the elevation was filled in and

[4]See discussion of alterations at the end of this section.

the addition was widened to two bays. This later addition (also undated) utilized paired six-over-six double-hung windows. At the second-story level of this elevation, the central tower is visible. Identical at the second- and third-floor level, it is two bays wide and has paired windows with a single shutter on either side. A prominent nonoriginal feature of this elevation is a large modern metal fire escape which provides emergency egress from the roof level of the east wing. This elevation also includes a modern, one-story, four-bay, shed-roof addition that is joined to the main body of the front elevation via a long narrow wood hyphen. This addition runs along roughly two-thirds of the length of the building.

The east elevation also is largely L-shaped. It features, from south to north, the two-bay-wide east end of the former porch, the two-bay-wide east end of the east wing (only one-bay-wide at the original, second-story level) and the four-bay-long north wing. At the first-floor level of the north wing, the middle two of the four bays, which originally held a porch, have been filled-in around the porch supports. A door is located in one of the bays that originally housed the porch. At the second-story level, the north wing overhangs the first story. At this level, the southernmost bay of this wing is a three-sided projecting bay window that extends even farther from the plane of the first story. The mansard roof on this section of the building has three dormers.

The north elevation of the building also features a projecting wing. Moving from east to west, this elevation consists of the three-bay-long side elevation of the east wing (two bays in the one-story addition and one in the two-and-a-half-story original portion), the two-bay-wide, two-and-a-half-story north elevation of the north wing, and the three-bay section of the main portion of the house which includes the north elevation of the entrance porch. The central pavilion is visible behind this latter section. The third story of the north wing features a chimney.

On the interior, it is at the first-floor level that the grand scale and use of the house during the mid-19th century can best be seen. The current (west) entrance opens onto the main hall which provided access from the original (south) front entrance. Off of the hall towards the original entrance are the openings to two large rooms each with a fireplace. Both appear to have been major public spaces. From contemporary descriptions, the room to the east was originally the library or "sanctum" of John Owens, the original owner of the house. (A smaller room attached to it was his "smoking room.")[5] The west room, which likely was the main parlor or dining room, retains the most elaborate decorative elements. The focus of the room is a stone fireplace that has been given a black and mottled brown decorative treatment. It has an overmantel mirror. The fact that simpler, although related, designs are used in the eight other fireplace mantels in the house would indicate that the fireplace is original. The room also features an elaborate central plaster "rose" or ceiling medallion and chandelier. Straight ahead from the current entrance are the main stairs. The open-string stair features wood banisters and decorative brackets. The sides of the stairs are of wood and have

[5]Owens, *Memories of the Professional. . .*, pp. 66-70. She quotes a description of the property that she states was contained in a letter which appear in a Washington paper in August 1877. Subsequently this description appeared in a number of different periodicals.

recessed panels. The stairs are located in a hall that ends in what originally was another formal public space. It too features a stone fireplace. Today the room has been shortened to produce other rooms in the east wing. The north side of the room is a narrow passageway that provides access to a hall servicing the east wing and the hall leading to the north wing of the house. This hall also includes a service stair. The north wing consists of three large rooms and the enclosed porch. In general, moldings on the first floor, particularly in the major public spaces, are more ornate than those used in the upper floors.

The second floor consists of eleven rooms of varying sizes and four bathrooms. Three of the larger rooms have fireplaces The third floor consists of nine rooms, three of which have fireplaces, and five baths. The fourth floor, the dormer level of the tower, is reached via an enclosed staircase from the third-floor. The fourth floor is square in plan, with L-shaped storage areas located on the outside of, and between, the dormers. The cross-shaped area between the dormers is largely open. An enclosed wood spiral staircase leads to the roof.

In general, throughout the interior of the house, window, door, and ceiling moldings, baseboards, and doors are simple but consistent with the period of construction.

Alterations/Integrity

Documentary material regarding the building's original form and appearance is minimal. A photograph of the building in 1868 appears in a book on Owens written by his wife. In addition, there is one known historical description of Aigburth Vale, dating from 1877:

> *You reach it by a lovely road, displaying a mixture of all pictorial ingredients which give such enviable distinction to Maryland scenery. The greatest variety of trees, crowded together with picturesque abandon varies the perspective. At last we reach a broad gate which is pointed out as Mr. Owens' grounds. On the left as we enter is a stretch of clear meadow, to the right a waving cornfield. Nothing more can be seen till we saunter along the avenue of smiling maples, for perhaps four hundred yards, when the road suddenly drops and bends, and we stand in full view of a stately manor house nestling in the valley below. Descending by a winding path, the visitor passes through ground cultivated with charming skill, and laid off into plats of diamond and semicircle, fringed with loveliest parterres. Dainty bits of country gardening, watched and defended by sentinel elms, make up the immediate surroundings of Aigburth Vale. Around this charming scene, at a respectful distance, is a circle of green hills. The house is very large, generously constructed with all modern improvements, and is far handsomer than any other in the region around. A piazza runs the entire length of the southern or principal front, and the wings are tastily finished off with gables. The comedian's sanctum, on the right as you enter the wide hall, is a large apartment, and opens into a cozy smoking room . . . The walls are entirely coffered with paintings and engravings of celebrated actors and authors.*[6]

[6]Ibid.

As mentioned previously, the formal elements of Aigburth Vale's original landscaping do not survive, although much of the immediate setting -- the layout of the roads and the house's position atop a slight rise -- is the same as during Owens' tenure. As to the house, alterations appear to fall into two categories: 1) early additions and/or alterations to the building, and 2) changes made by the Baltimore County Board of Education between approximately 1963 and the 1980s. Although additional interior alterations to accommodate institutional uses in the building are possible, they remain largely undeterminable. Visually evident alterations such as the construction chronologies of the east wing and any possible alterations to the north wing are difficult to date.

Stone foundations which have been whitewashed and scored are found along the entire west wall of the north addition and, in the interior, along what would be the end of the building before the addition of the east wing. This would suggest that whatever alterations were made to the north wing were made early or were made exclusively to the upper story. A footprint of the building in 1877, as well as the north wing's irregular composition, casts some doubt as to whether the current configuration of this area is original.

In the east wing, joints in the construction of the foundations clearly indicate that the one-story section is an addition. The date of the first portion of the east wing cannot be determined at this point, although evidence found in the crawl space below the provides some information. Remnants of a porcelain knob and tube wiring system exists in three locations in a line perpendicular to the bottom of the floor joists. This particular wiring system was used between 1890 and 1920, and this brackets a probable date. (However, it is possible that the addition is of an earlier date and was retrofitted with modern wiring.) Additionally, the stonework of the foundation in this portion of the wing has a more angular shape than that of the original mansion. A report of a detailed physical investigation by Michael Bourne of the Maryland Historical Trust states:

> *[t]here is nothing about the evidence in this section of the house that can pinpoint a date of construction...My inclination is that the quality of the joists is not as good as Mr. Owens' previous work and thus I would tend to say that it was constructed after 1889.*[7]

It most likely was added after Owens' death, and could conjecturally fit with the reference to a large addition constructed in the mid 1890's, when the building was used as a boarding house.[8]

The most significant recent change to the building is the modern (1960s and 1970s) shed-roof, one-story building attached to the original front of the building during the Board of Education occupancy of the site. Because this

[7]"Examination of the One Story East Wing to Determine the Age Thereof." Report by Michael Bourne, Easement Administrator, Maryland Historical Trust, February 23, 1999.

[8]See "Resource History and Historic Significance."

addition is attached to the building via a long, narrow (16' x 9') hyphen it reads largely as a separate building. Other alterations that date to the Board of Education's use of the building, and that therefore likely occurred after 1963, include alterations to three porches.[9] The original front porch has been filled in to produce interior space, as has the porch in the middle of the north wing. In both cases, significant materials and/or detailing from the original porch structure, such as siding, roofing, or molding, remain. The west porch (the current front entrance) has been partially infilled. Here, the bays towards the steps and all of the porch supports remain intact. These elements fully convey the original appearance of the porch. Another alteration that occurred during this period was the widening (to the south) of the east wing.

In summary, although there have been changes to the building over time, they do not seriously affect the overall integrity of the property. Some changes appear to be early alterations consistent with the original portions of the building. Other recent changes, although more intrusive, still comprise a small portion of the large complex building. Despite these alterations, the building retains much of its original configuration and materials, and appears today much as it did in an 1868 photograph. The house today remains an outstanding example of Second Empire design in Baltimore County.

Outbuildings

Secondary structures on the property include a mansard-roofed cottage which appears contemporaneous with the main house, and three non-contributing buildings including a garage, former nurses' quarters, and office, all constructed outside the period of significance.

A small (roughly 33' x 31') one-and-a-half-story wood frame cottage, also in the Second Empire style and the only contributing outbuilding, is located northwest of the main house. The building has wood shingles, horizontal wood siding, and stone foundations (on all but the most recent section). It shares a number of decorative features with the main house, and, based on style and materials, the original portions of the building likely are roughly contemporaneous with the main house. The house is slightly L-shaped in massing, and had three separate additions. The original portion of the building -- the building's front facade -- faces south toward the main house. This rectangular piece is three bays wide and features four-over-four, double-hung windows on either side of a simple doorway. The entranceway is covered with a half-round hood that is supported by simple brackets. The roof story of this section has round-headed dormers with decorative scrolls at the base. Windows in the dormers are casement type and consist of six panes arranged in two vertical rows that meet in the center. An undated addition to the rear almost doubled the size of the building. This section too is one-and-a-half stories with a mansard roof covered with wood shingles. Here, however, windows are six-over-six double-hung, and the simple dormers are flatter and are segmentally arched. Two small one-

[9] A 1959 photograph of the front elevation of the building, shows that the front porch and east porch had not yet been filled in and that the east wing had not yet been widened.

story wood additions have also been made to the east end of the front of the building. Both are set back from the face of the building. One is a narrow (approximately 6' wide) rectangular block that comes slightly below the cornice line of the building. Attached to this addition is a small square addition that contains a separate entrance to the building.

Moving to the east, the next outbuilding is a simple, roughly 30' x 40', two-story frame garage also with horizontal wood siding. This utilitarian structure has concrete aggregate foundations. A series of five wood garage doors run the length of the building, and a single shed-roof dormer is centered in the front. Windows in the building are six-over-six double-hung. The rear facade features a shed-roofed addition which covers most of this elevation. An additional addition is located on the east side. Given the materials and style of the building, it was most likely constructed in the first half of the 20th century.

The third building is a two-and-a-half story, 24' x 34', Colonial Revival frame structure which features horizontal wood siding, six-over-six double-hung windows with shutters, and gable-roofed dormers. The building's front elevation is three bays wide. At the first-floor level there is a closed pedimented entry way. Side elevations are two bays wide. The rear elevation, also three bays wide, has a single shed-roofed dormer with two, four-pane fixed windows. According to tax records, this building dates to 1925 and was used as a nurses' residence.[10]

The outbuilding located the farthest to the east is the most recently constructed. It has been connected to the nurse's quarters. Like the other buildings in this grouping, this building faces southward. A long, rectangular building (58' x 20'), it is one-and-a-half stories high and is of brick construction. Its most prominent feature is a large horizontal metal window unit that consists of 36 panes arranged in vertical groupings. The front elevation also features three gable-roofed dormers with nine-pane fixed windows. The entrance is on the far south side of the building. On the interior this building consists of a single large open room. Although no documentary information has been found establishing a date for the building, building materials suggest that it was constructed in the 1940s. It was extant when the Board of Education took over the property. This building and the nurses' residence were used as the office of the Board of Education's Engineering and Construction department.

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[10]Quoted in, John McGrain, Baltimore County Landmarks Preservation Commission Inventory Form for Aigburth Vale, 1982.

Significance Summary

Aigburth Vale is significant under Criterion B for its association with the prominent stage actor John E. Owens, and derives additional significance under Criterion C as an outstanding example of the Second Empire style, attributed to Niernsee & Neilson, one of Baltimore's preeminent architectural firms in the late 19th century. The house was built in 1868 as the country home of one of America's best-known and wealthiest actors of the 19th century; and served as the main residence of John E. Owens and his wife, Mary S. Owens, until Owens' death in 1886.[11]. For its time and place, the house was considered particularly handsome and finer than other houses, largely, perhaps, because of its size and elegance as well as its use of modern conveniences. It is today one of Baltimore County's preeminent examples of Second Empire architecture, especially considering the building's scale and materials.[12] The house was one of a number of large mansions that were distributed along York Road during this era. Later, the area, became the site of early suburban development, and the Aigburth Vale subdivision was the first suburban development in the Towson area. The property was divided up for development around the time of Owens' death, and the house, at the center of the development, served briefly as an inn or summer residence. In 1919, the house was turned into a private hospital, and finally in 1963, it became the main office of the Baltimore County Board of Education.

The property derives its significance from Owens' association with the site, which lasted from 1868 until 1886, and from Niernsee and Neilson's original design for the house, which was completed in 1868. No subsequent occupants, uses, or design alterations of the property meet the National Register Criteria to merit extending the period of significance beyond Owens' occupation of Aigburth Vale.

Resource History and Historic Context

John E. Owens (1823-1886) was the most famous and wealthiest American comedic actor of his time. He also was a successful theater manager and owned two well-known theaters. Owens purchased what was to become the Aigburth Vale property in 1853 from Edward Taylor. At that time, there was at least a farmhouse and likely other outbuildings on the site.[13] Owens changed the name of the property from Rock Spring to Aigburth Vale as a tribute to a relative's

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[11]Material in this section relies heavily upon the writing and research of John McGrain of the Baltimore County Office of Planning. McGrain was the author of a 1982 Baltimore County Landmarks Preservation Commission Inventory Form on Aigburth Vale.

[12]John McGrain, Baltimore County Office of Planning and Zoning.

[13]A photograph of the "old farmhouse" appears in Mary Owens' book. Although there has been speculation as to whether part of the building was incorporated into Aigburth Vale there is no physical or documentary evidence to suggest that this actually occurred.

homestead in England. He constructed the main house in 1868.[14]

During the mid-19th century, theater played a far greater role in American life than today. Before the advent of cinema, it was one of the major forms of entertainment in America, and the country supported a large number of theatrical companies both resident in larger cities and traveling throughout the country. Born in Liverpool in 1823, he came to Philadelphia when he was five. At 18, he had his first speaking part as Poultice in *Ocean Child*. Through 1844, Owens worked with William E. Burton at the National Theater in Philadelphia and in Baltimore. In 1848, he formed his own company and between 1848 and 1852 became a co-owner and later sole owner of the Baltimore Museum. Thereafter, his fame increased as he appeared throughout the country and in Europe in hundreds of different roles. His best-known role was as Solon Shingle in *The Peoples' Lawyer*. The role became so associated with Owens that he later revised the script to add to his part and performed it as *Solon Shingle*. Owens performed the play for eight weeks in London and for 280 consecutive nights in New York. He rented the Variety Theater in New Orleans in 1859. It was in this theater that Owens sponsored a show that included 40 girls in military uniforms singing "Dixie." It has been suggested that this engagement brought the old minstrel tune "Dixie" to prominence and thereafter inspired its adoption as the Confederate States anthem.[15] In 1875, Owens purchased the Academy of Music in Charleston, South Carolina. From the mid-1850s onward, Owens performed both with his own company and with that of others. In general, Owens had his choice of roles and his fortunes and fame increased over time. During his lifetime he is known to have played over 340 different roles.[16]

Perhaps one of Owens' most important theatrical legacies involves his production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the first such production south of the Mason-Dixon line. The play, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel of the same name, is credited with fueling abolitionist thought in the North. Owens risked possible alienation of his Baltimore audience members, who at the time were displaying strong southern tendencies. Owens' lawyer and close friend urged him to forego the production, considering it a hazardous undertaking, saying, "You will ruin yourself with the 'South' and get into all sorts of trouble; the people will tear the theatre down or do you personal injury."[17]

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[14]John McGrain, Baltimore County Landmarks Preservation Commission Inventory Form for Aigburth Vale, 1982.

[15]Owens was drafted by the Union army. However, he obtained a substitute and never served.

[16]Aigburth Vale was Owens' main residence during most of his professional career. There are no other known sites that have such a strong association with him. No other properties associated with Owens have been listed on the National Register or appear to be strong candidates for such listing.

[17]Thomas A. Bogar, "The Theatrical Career of John E. Owens (1823-1886)," unpublished dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1982, p. 67.

Owens decided to continue with his plans, primarily because he felt the play would be well-attended, and several of Owens' Charles Street theatre's shows just prior to the production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been financial disasters. The play opened at Owens' theatre on April 16, 1855, with Owens in the role of Uncle Tom, and was well received, recovering previous financial losses. By April 25, over 8,000 citizens had seen the production, with audiences demonstrating no sectional feeling regarding the play. The play continued to run for approximately four more weeks.[18]

Owens' financial resources -- he was often referred to as the country's wealthiest actor[19]-- permitted him the expensive construction of Aigburth Vale, the costly maintenance of the farm and buildings, and its many improvements. However, Owens had limited financial resources in the mid-1880s after investing in unsuccessful mines in Arizona and, at the same time, funding extensive repairs to his Charleston theater which had been damaged in an earthquake. At that time he mortgaged Aigburth Vale. Owens fell ill in May 1885, but recovered enough to work on the restoration of the theater. However, he became ill again. The house was put up for sale in December 1886, shortly before he died on December 7, 1886. He was buried at Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore.

For the 30 years that Owens owned Aigburth Vale it served as his retreat from public life, and it was his "home . . . in every sense of the word, so long as he lived."[20] He stayed there whenever he was not on the stage -- most often in the summer months and during breaks in his schedule. He also entertained extensively at the house and most of the luminaries of the stage of the time enjoyed his hospitality there. By his own description, he was a gentleman farmer, and he was known for his humorous stories about his lack of knowledge of farming techniques and his "expensive" farming hobby. According to his wife, he was:

> *ultra-progressive--always kept abreast of the times, and availed himself of every facility to expedite business. All labor-saving inventions received investigation from him; and those possessing merit were added to his already numerous agricultural implements. Reapers, binders, &c., of the most approved patents, abounded at Aigburth Vale.*[21]

In addition to his willingness to experiment with different agricultural technologies, he also experimented with various

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[18]Owens, *Memories of the Professional and Social Life ...*, p. 74.

[19]For one of the many contemporary references to him as the "the richest actor in America," see *Baltimore County Union*, November 24, 1877.

[20]Owens, *Memories of the Professional and Social Life ...*, p. 33.

[21]Ibid., p. 138.

types of produce -- at least with respect to tomatoes where he sought "the choices and rarest varieties."[22] He grew a variety of crops on the site in addition to extensive decorative plantings. He also raised race horses on the farm. Owens' progressiveness was also reflected in his house, which had modern conveniences, such as gas and water.

Aigburth Vale was one of a series of prominent 19th-century country houses that were built along York Road from Waverly to Towson. These estates had large acreages that eventually were separated from the houses and became subdivided into the current suburban development.[23] Immediately before Owens' death the property was advertised for sale. At or about that time the site had been laid out into building lots, with roughly 66 acres assigned to the mansion. Three years after Owens' death in 1886, the property was finally sold at public auction for $28,000 to Solomon King.[24] One year later it was sold by King, who apparently was a personal friend of the Owens, to John Hubner. In February 1891, Hubner transferred ownership to the Maryland Real Estate Company of Baltimore City which was described as a "syndicate of Baltimore City and County capitalists, consisting of John Hubner, Col. William A. Hanway, Joseph M. Cone, Levi Z. Condon and Frederick Rice." A number of these men were involved in development in the Baltimore area either singly or together.[25] "The syndicate, who own the property are enterprising men, and its is believed their efforts will give quite a boon to this section, which will be greatly increased by the introduction of rapid transit on the York Railway."[26] In 1891, the building was being "fitted up and repaired" and was rented out to Joshua Horner, while his house was being rebuilt. In 1893, the Maryland Real Estate and Improvement Company, specifically, William A. Hanaway, John Hubner, and Even E. Hunting, continued to make improvements to the land. They put in two roads through Aigburth Vale and an adjacent property to the north (apparently Aigburth Road and Burke Avenue). Four cottages were built on the property and a large addition to the mansion was made for its use as a summer boarding

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[22]Ibid., p 68.

[23] Aigburth Vale was, in fact, Towson's first planned suburban development. Neal A. Brooks and Eric G. Rockel, *A History of Baltimore County*. Towson: Friends of the Towson Library. 1979.

[24]A total of 208 acres were transferred with the house. The rest of the acreage went to other buyers.

[25]John Hubner was a member of the Maryland General Assembly from 1886 to 1892 (he was Speaker of the House in 1890). He became a member of the State Senate in 1892 and served as the President of the Senate from 1900 to 1902. He was directly or indirectly involved in the construction of over 3,000 homes in Baltimore City and its suburbs. Hubner emigrated from Lonnerstadt, Bavaria, and worked at Relay before moving to the Catonsville area in 1870. Neal Brooks, *A History of Baltimore County*, p. 295 and pp. 304-306.

[26]*Baltimore County Democrat*, July 7, 1890.

house.[27] The boarding house, which operated as least during the mid-1890s, was run by a Miss M. Robinson.[28]

In the late 1910s, with the real estate speculation not particularly successful, the property went through a number of owners. In August 1917, the property was sold by the Maryland Real Estate Company back to John Hubner as an individual. Two years later, in September 1919, the property was sold to Raymond Foxwell who immediately transferred the property to H. Courtney Jennifer. Jennifer sold the property in December 1919 to George F. Sargent and Cora McCabe Sargent. This purchase was of a much smaller, 4.9-acre parcel, while much of the surrounding land became part of Towson Nurseries, Inc. It is during this era that use of the house is the least documented. Sargent operated what has variously been described as a hospital, a private mental hospital, a nursing home, and a hospital for adults.[29] In 1950, the Baltimore County Board of Education accepted a deed to the property subject to life estates for the Sargents, and for the next 13 years paid the Sargents rent in the amount of $600 per month. When Mrs. Sargent died in 1963, the 4.9-acre site was transferred to the Board of Education. At that time, the house parcel and the nursery parcel (which had been sold in two pieces in 1943 and 1946) were reunited into one parcel owned by the Board of Education. The house became the main office of the Board of Education. It was used as an office building until it was vacated by the school system in the late 1990s.

Architectural Significance

Aigburth Vale has been recognized as one of Baltimore County's preeminent examples of Second Empire architecture. It is one of very few surviving Second Empire estates in the county.[30] According to John McGrain, Baltimore County

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[27]This large addition could be the first portion of the east wing. Physical evidence found in the crawl space supports a mid-1890 construction date.

[28]According to one source, "McConn's Summer Boarding House" occupied the building during at least part of this period. (Handwritten note signed by Elizabeth Jacobsen Prudden, a neighbor of the property inserted into a copy of Mrs. Owens' book located at the Towson Public Library.)

[29]The lack of information about what was a relatively recent use of the property may in part reflect privacy concerns for the hospital's residents. Although there is very little information available about how the house was used during this time, one contemporary (1933) article on the history of the house, stated that it had come "into the possession of one who appreciated it and has restored, in a large measure, the house and immediate grounds to their original beauty." *The [Towson] Jeffersonian*, December 15, 1933.

[30]Three other Second Empire buildings in Baltimore County are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Historian, the house has a number of features that distinguish it from other local Second Empire residential buildings. He believes that other extant Second Empire buildings in the county are smaller in scale than Aigburth and do not, in general, show its use of high quality materials.[31]

Owens chose the prominent Baltimore architectural firm of Niernsee and Neilson to design his house. Niernsee and Neilson was one of the region's best known and most prolific architectural firms, designing numerous buildings in Baltimore City, as well as two country estates, the Villa Anneslie and Stoneleigh, located near Aigburth Vale. The firm's work was diverse, but it included numerous large estates, institutions, churches, and, attributable to their railroad connections, train stations. Although the work of Niernsee and Neilson is still well represented in the Baltimore area, many of their buildings have been demolished.

James Crawford Neilson (1816-1900) was born in Baltimore but moved to Europe in 1822. He returned to Baltimore in 1833, and by 1835 was working as a surveyor for the Baltimore and Port Deposit Railroad. It was while working for the railroad that he meet John Randolph Niernsee. The two joined forces as a firm in 1848. Between 1856 and 1865, while Niernsee was in South Carolina working on the state capital, Neilson ran his own office. The two men then practiced together again for another ten years, and that firm was disbanded in 1874. Thereafter Neilson continued to work on his own.

John Rudolph Niernsee (1814-1884) was born in Austria, and trained in engineering at the Polytechnic Institute of Vienna and thereafter at Prague. He came to the United States in 1838 and was initially employed as a surveyor. He worked for a brief while in Washington, DC, and, when this work ended, he was hired in August 1839 by Benjamin H. Latrobe, Jr., as a draftsman for the B&O Railroad. While with the B&O, Niernsee designed prefabricated iron roofs for a variety of types of buildings. He described their construction in a series of articles for an Austrian engineering publication. He met Neilson while working at the B&O. Prior to the Civil War, Niernsee was named architect for the capitol building of South Carolina and moved to Columbia. During the war he worked for the Confederacy as an engineer. Niernsee returned to Baltimore after the war and after the dissolution of Niernsee & Neilson he continued designing in Baltimore. In 1883 he moved back to Columbia with his son, also an architect, and continued to work on the capitol building. He died there in 1884.

Niernsee and Neilson worked in a variety of styles and building types. The firm was responsible for a number of railway stations in and around Baltimore, as well as churches, public institutions, urban mansions, and country estates. Residential examples appear to be the rarest extant type of the firm's work. In addition to successfully designing buildings for a variety of uses, Niernsee and Neilson also were adept at designing in a variety of architectural styles. The Italianate was perhaps the firm's most frequently-used style, and was employed in their railroad stations and many of their large estates. To accurately assess the significance of Aigburth Vale as a Niernsee and Neilson design, it must

[31] John McGrain, Baltimore County Office of Planning and Zoning.

be evaluated as a residential example of the firm's work, and also as a Second Empire building.

Niernsee and Neilson's residential work can be divided into two categories: urban mansions and country estates. The firm's first residential commission appears to be the Thomas-Jencks-Gladding House (now known as the Hackerman House), which is essentially Greek Revival in form, although it displays some features of the Italianate style such as tall windows, brackets, and a heavily modillioned cornice, which was coming into vogue at the time of the house's construction in 1849. Alexandroffsky, an urban Italianate mansion constructed in 1853, and demolished in 1928, like most of their residential commissions, was constructed for a prominent and wealthy citizen. Asbury House, located on Mount Vernon Place, was constructed shortly after Alexandroffsky, and displays strong English Renaissance influences.

With the exception of Aigburth Vale, the firm's country estates were all constructed in the Italianate style. Clifton, an Italianate mansion designed to incorporate and exiting farmhouse, was completed in 1852. Much of the firm's country estate work was focused on areas north of the city. In addition to Aigburth Vale, properties located in the Towson vicinity include the Italianate mansions Stoneleigh, constructed c. 1851 and demolished in 1953, and Villa Anneslie, constructed in 1855.

Because the firm designed primarily in the Italianate style, there were comparatively few examples of Second Empire buildings in their collection of work. Only three examples of Niernsee and Neilson's Second Empire work are known, and only two survive. Aigburth Vale appears to be the firm's first foray into the Second Empire style, and its the execution of the style is particularly appropriate for a large country estate. The other two examples are more appropriate for their urban settings, featuring imposing facades executed in masonry. In 1873, the extant YMCA building, at the corner of Charles and Saratoga Streets, was completed. Heavily ornamented with stone columns and arches adorning the windows, the building features elaborate dormers on the mansard roof. This stone building, which is wedge-shaped to fit the lot, appears dramatically different than the Academy of Music, located on Howard Street in Baltimore, and designed in 1874 and demolished in 1926. Photographs of the building show a polychromatic facade with mansard roofs, cresting, and atypical Palladian windows on the top story.[32]

Therefore, Aigburth Vale is architecturally significant for several reasons. As an example of the work of the most prominent Baltimore architectural firm of the time, Niernsee and Neilson, Aigburth Vale is one of the firm's few

[32]For biographical information on Niernsee & Neilson, see John Dorsey and James D. Dilts, *A Guide to Baltimore Architecture*. Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1997, pp.410-11.

surviving country estates, and the only extant Second Empire residential building designed by the firm. As such, Aigburth Vale is a unique architectural entity.

Summary

Aigburth Vale is a historically significant property because of its association with John Owens, who has been termed the most wealthy and famous actor of his time. The building also derives architectural significance as an excellent Second Empire example of the work of the prominent Baltimore firm Niernsee and Neilson.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Piedmont

Chronological/Developmental Period (s): Agricultural-Industrial Transition and Industrial/Urban Dominance

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme (s): Architecture/ Landscape Architecture/Community Planning
Social/Educational/Cultural

Resource Type

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Rural (later) Suburban

Historic Function(s) and Use(s): Domestic/Single Dwelling

Known Design Source: Architects/Niernsee & Neilson

9 Major Bibliographical References

Baltimore County Democrat. July 7, 1890.

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Dorsey, John and James D. Dilts. *A Guide to Baltimore Architecture*. Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1997,

Hopkins, G.M. *Atlas of Baltimore County*. 1877.

The [Towson] Jeffersonian. December 15, 1933.

McGrain, John. Baltimore County Landmarks Preservation Commission Inventory Form for Aigburth Vale. 1982.

McGrain, John. Clipping File on Aigburth Vale.

Owens, Mary S. *Memories of the Professional and Social Life of John E. Owens*. Baltimore: J. Murphy and Company, 1892.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the site consists of the entire parcel of land known as Lot 1, Aigburth Vale, 9th Election District (Tax Map 70, Parcel P429), Baltimore County, Maryland.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property, approximately 4.9 acres, includes the remnant of the property historically associated with the resource, and encompasses the mansion and outbuildings within their historic setting.

54-100

ARBUTUS VALE

BALTIMORE CO.,

MARYLAND

18-362350

4360240

(BALTIMORE WEST) 5662 I SW

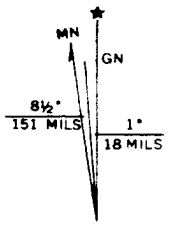
Mapped by the Army Map Service
Edited and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and Maryland Bureau of Control Surveys and Maps

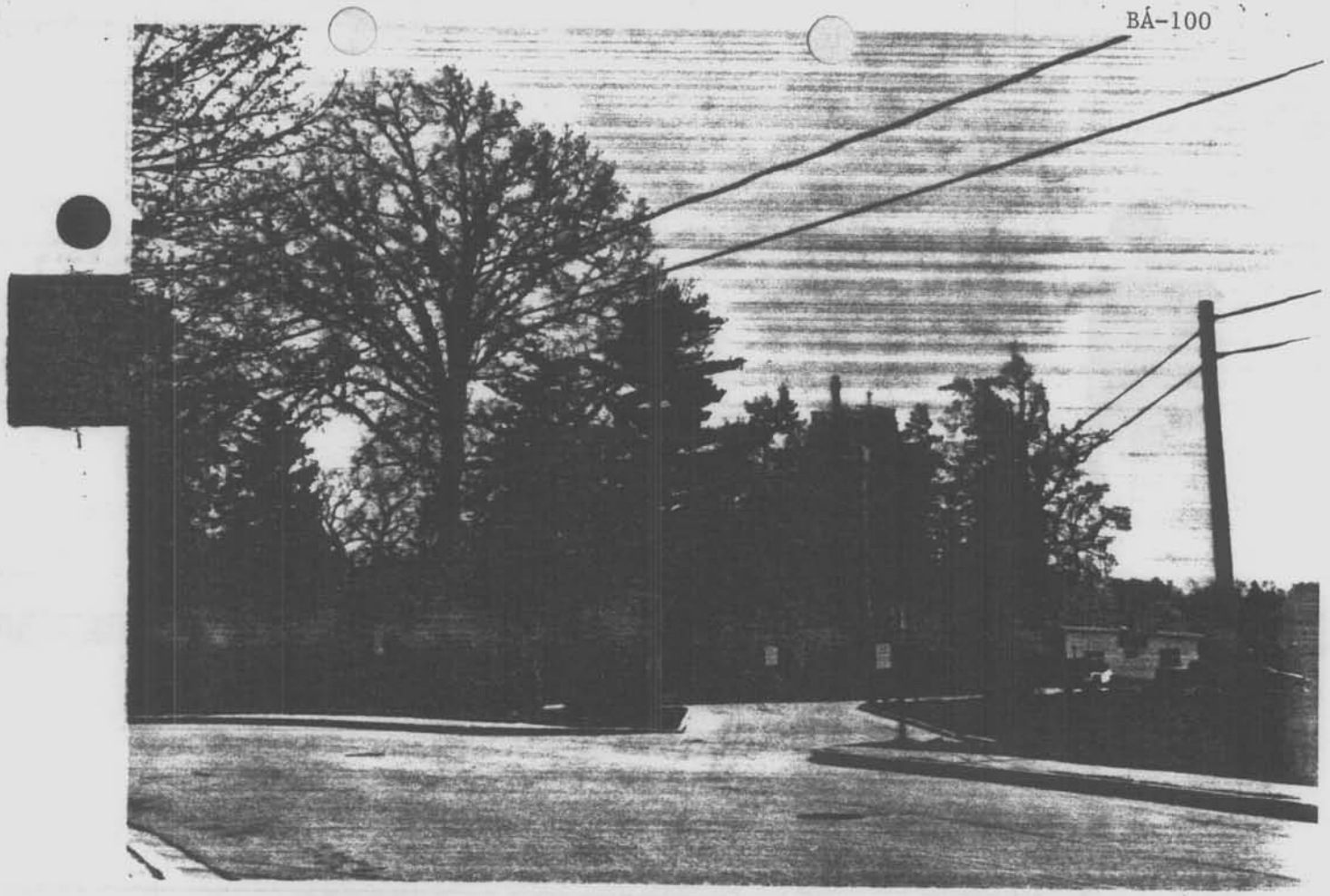
Culture and drainage in part compiled from aerial photographs taken 1943. Topography by planetable surveys 1944
Culture revised by the Geological Survey 1957

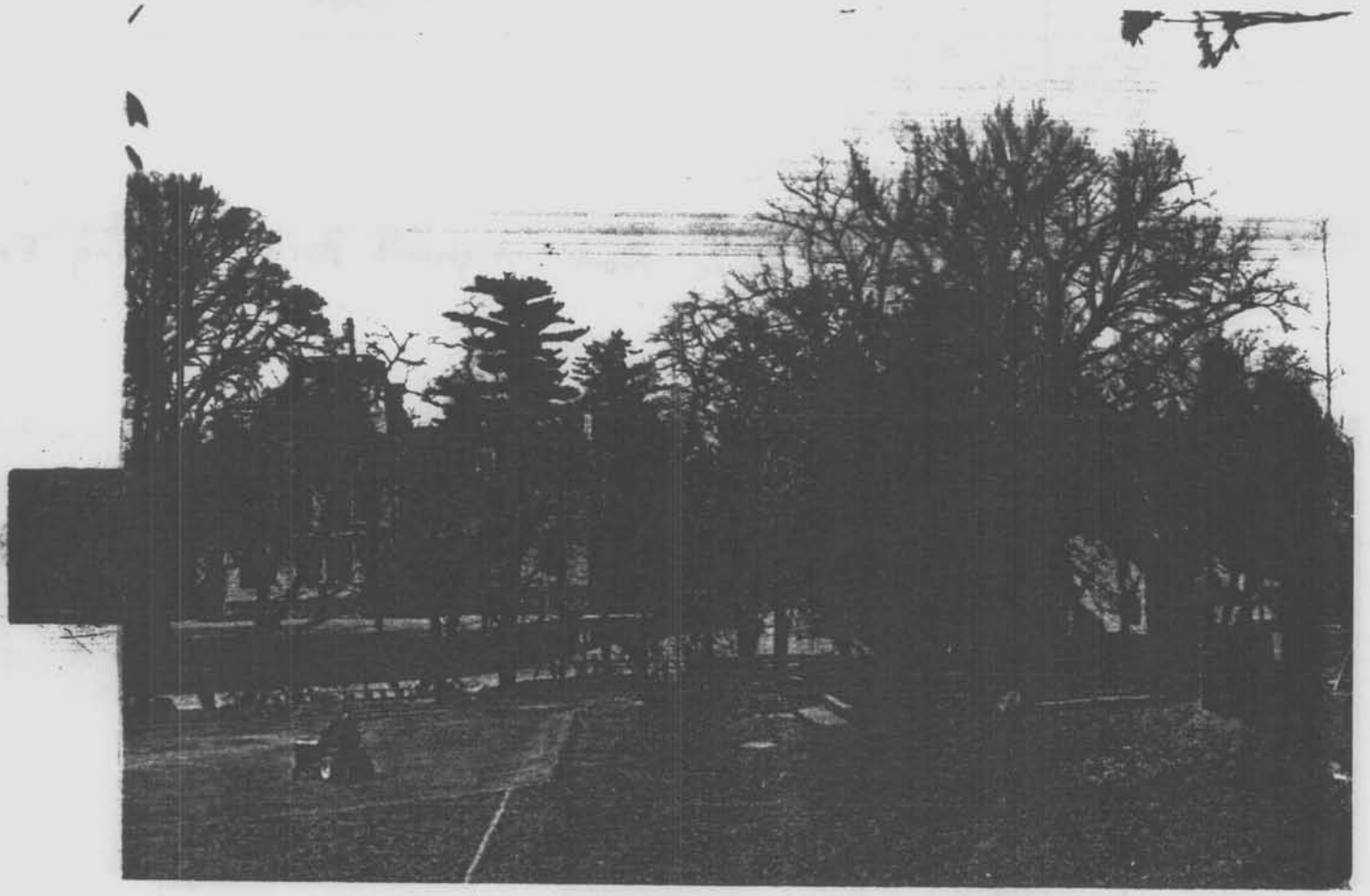
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Maryland coordinate system
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



UTM GRID AND 1974 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



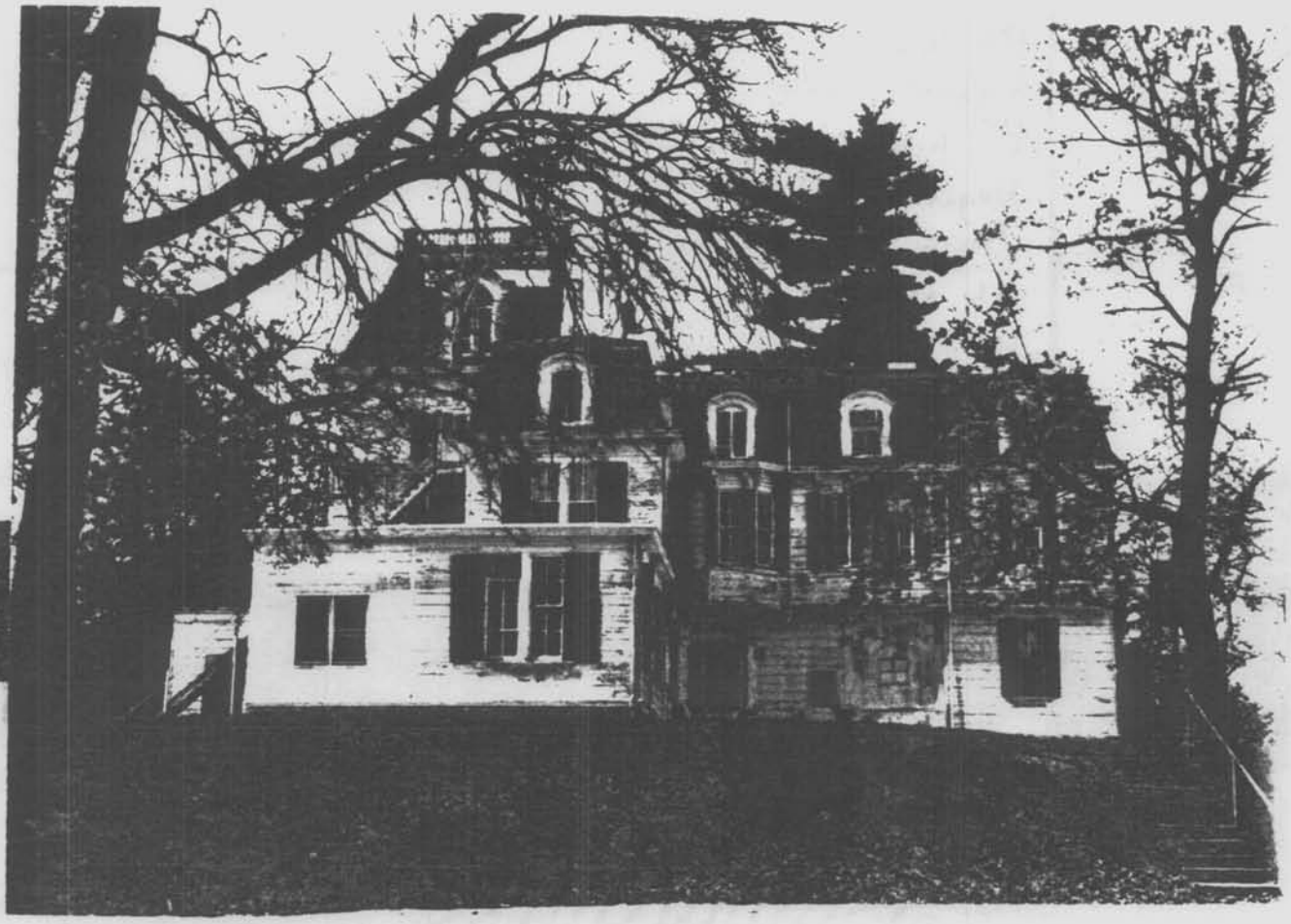


BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
View of Main House from Aigburth Avenue Looking West
#1 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
View of Main House from Aigburth Avenue Looking East
#2 of 19

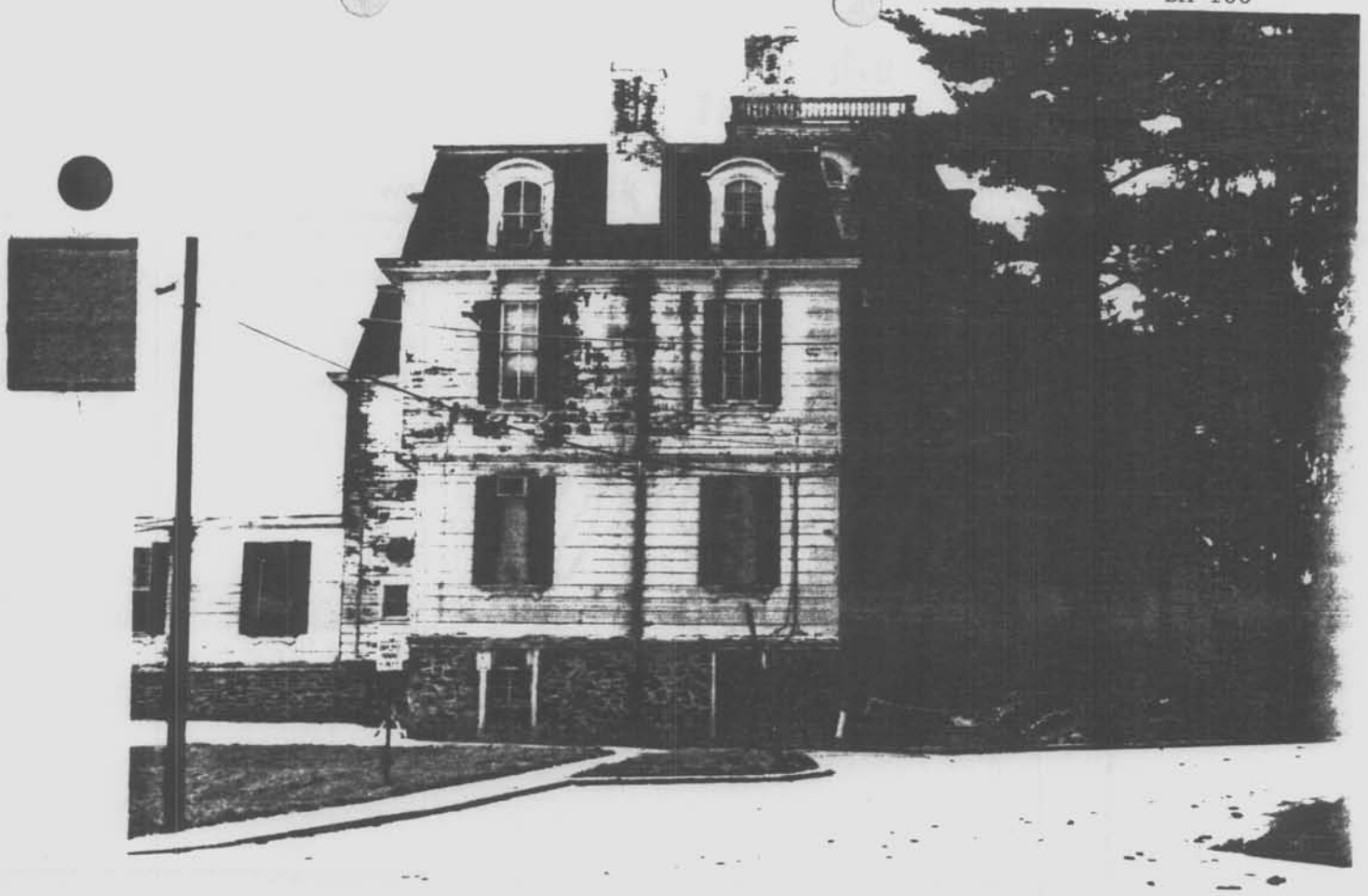
BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of Current Front (West) Elevation
#3 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of South (Former Front) Elevation
#4 of 19



BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of South and East Elevations
#5 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of East Elevation
#6 of 19



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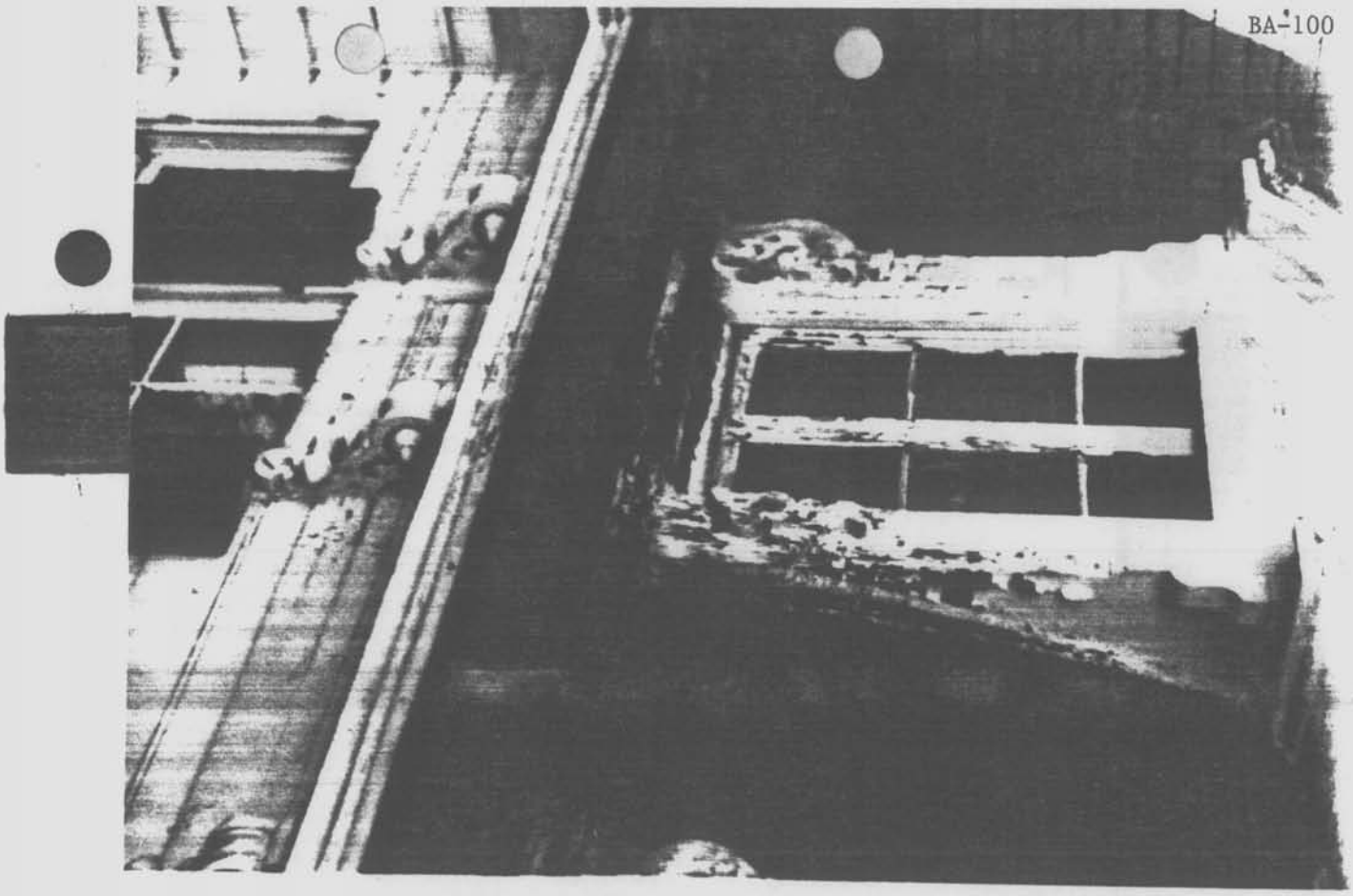
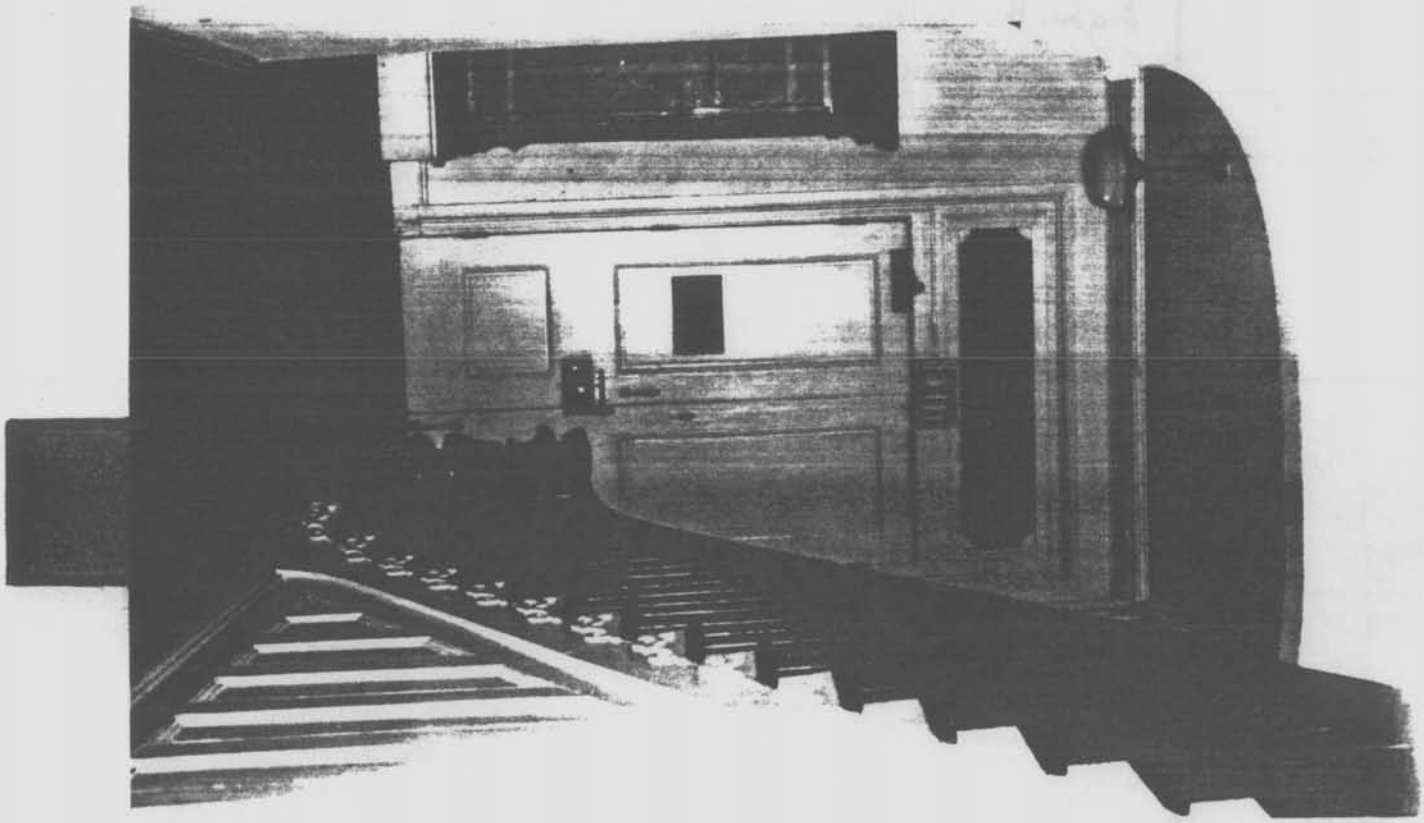
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of North Elevation
#8 of 19

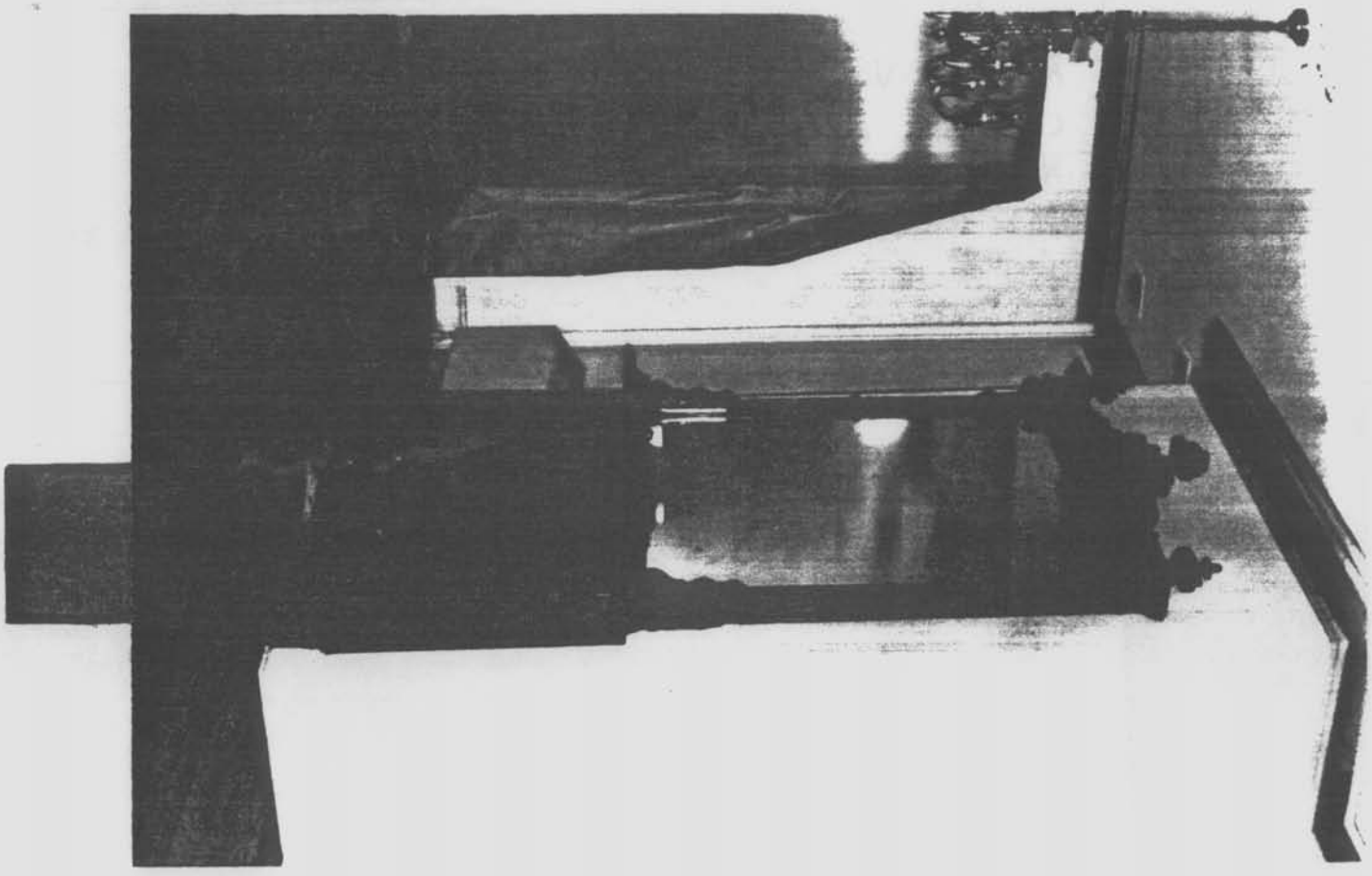
BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of Current Front (West) Elevation
#9 of 19





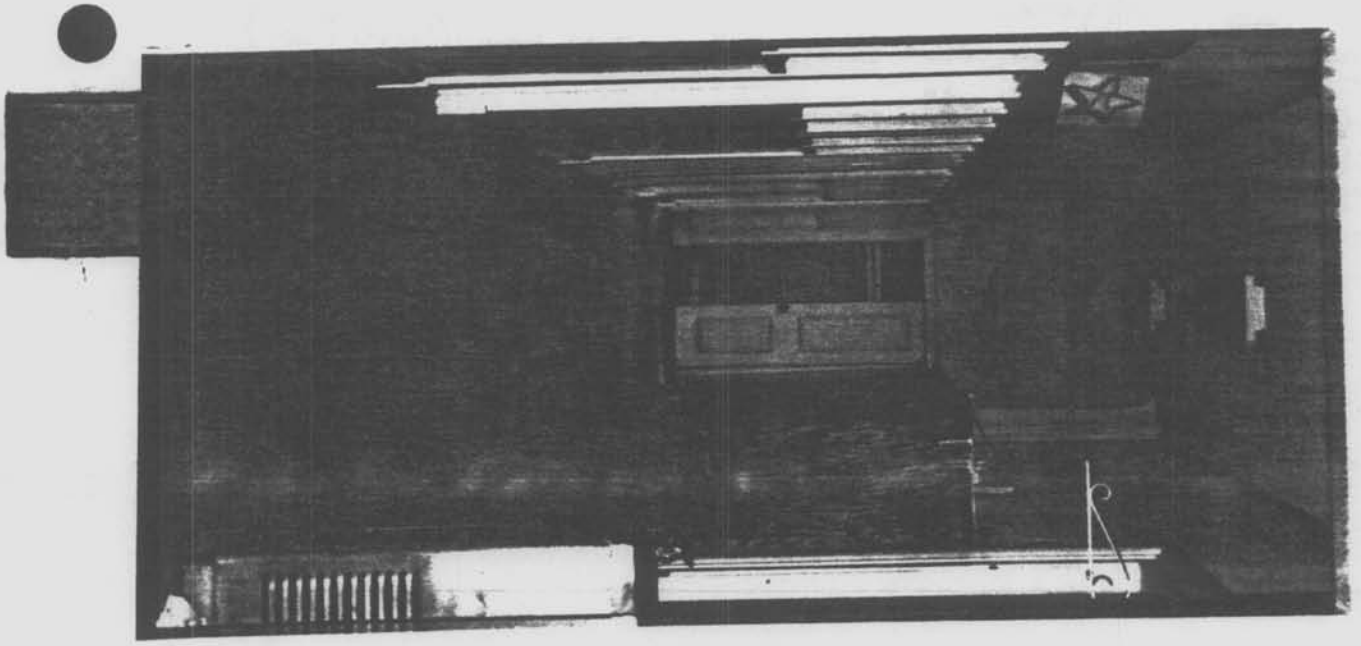
BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, Detail of Dormer
#10 of 19

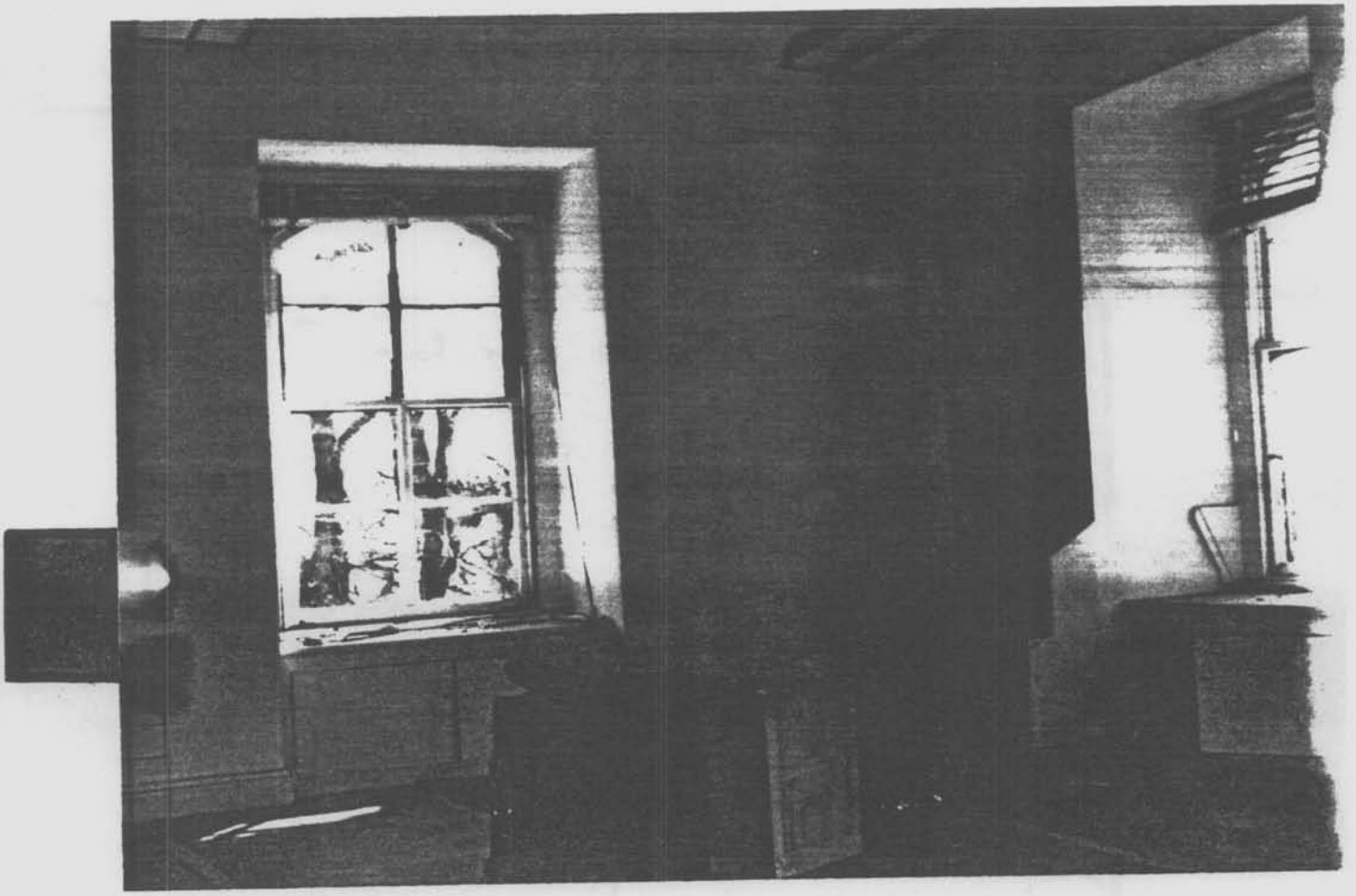
BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of Current Entrance Hall and Entrance
#11 of 19



BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main Hall, View of Hall (First Floor)
#12 of 19

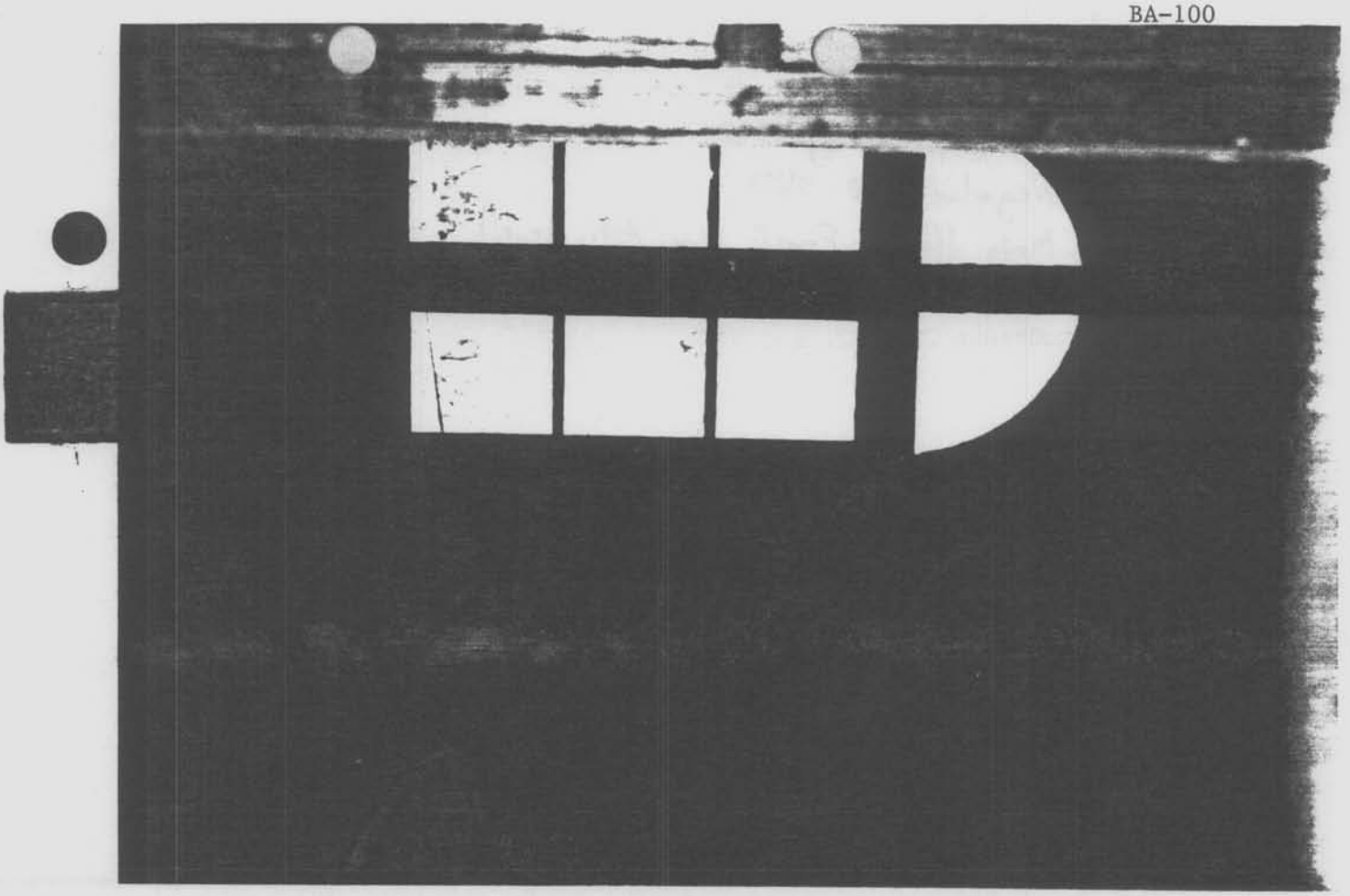
BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of Public Room on West Side (First Floor)
#13 of 19





BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: at MD SHPO
Interior, Main House, Hall on East Wing (First Floor)
#14 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, View of Second Floor Room
#15 of 19



BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Main House, Fourth Floor [Attic Level]
#16 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Cottage, South (Front) Elevation
#17 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Garage, South (Front) Elevations
#18 of 19

BA-100
Aigburth Vale
C. Hooper, May 1998
Negative: MD SHPO
Nurses Quarters and Office, South (Front) Elevations
#19 of 19