NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

**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 Johnson-Wolfe Farm (MIHP # M: 12-8-1)

other names Comus Inn (preferred)

## 2. Location

street & number 23900 Old Hundred Road ☐ not for publication

city or town Comus ☐ vicinity

state MD code MD county Montgomery code 031 zip code 20842

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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/Title — Date 9-22-05

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 certifying official/Title — 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 the Keeper — Date of Action

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- X private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ District
- ☐ Site
- ☐ Structure
- ☐ Object

**Number of Resources within Property** (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | | Buildings |
| | | Sites |
| | | Structures |
| | | Objects |
| 4 | 0 | Total |

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

N/A

**number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)
Domestic/single dwelling
Agriculture/Subsistence/agricultural outbuilding

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)
Commerce/Trade/restaurant

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

**Materials**
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A (Not visible) Stone (presumed)
walls Log
Wood
roof Wood
other Asphalt
Asbestos

**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)

X **A** Property is associated with events that have made a Significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.

☐ **B** Property 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)

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious Purposes.

☐ **B** Removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or 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.

### Area of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

### Period of Significance
1862-1936

### Significant Dates
N/A

### Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation
N/A

### Architect/Builder
N/A

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

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

### Previous documentation on files (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:

X State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository:
_____

## Description Summary:

The Johnson-Wolfe Farm, commonly known as the Comus Inn, encompasses a four-building complex that occupies a 5.26-acre site located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Comus Road and Old Hundred Road (MD Rte 109), in Montgomery County, Maryland. The vernacular dwelling and assemblage of three agricultural outbuildings visually defines the crossroads community of Comus, historically known as Johnsonville. The rural crossroads village of Comus is characterized by low scale, low-density development dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The main house of the Johnson-Wolfe Farm is oriented east and south towards Old Hundred Road (MD Rte 109) and is slightly recessed from the road front. A landscaped parking area adjoins the two-lane secondary road in front of the dwelling. The house lot immediately adjacent to the rear of the inn incorporates a landscaped slate patio that is defined by a low retaining wall, and a small pond. The rear elevation and landscape amenities afford sweeping views towards Sugarloaf Mountain. This viewshed is unobstructed and incorporates open fields, whose preservation is assured through agricultural easements. Outbuildings included in the complex include a two-story, log-and- frame barn (ca. 1862, with addition ca. 1885), a log smokehouse (ca. 1862), and a frame chicken house (ca. 1936).

The dwelling and associated outbuildings embody a pattern of design and modification common in rural domestic complexes in northwestern Montgomery County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The dwelling was documented as "typical of the architecture found in rural Montgomery County" in the 1986 Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Site Inventory Form for the village of Comus (Crawford *Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form* 1986: Description Summary).

The Johnson-Wolfe House and related outbuildings retain their overall integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association from the period ca. 1862 to ca. 1936. The complex occupies its original corner location in the rural crossroads community of Comus.

The dwelling is the result of four periods of major construction, which are clearly read in the existing exterior design, structure, interior plan, and ornamentation. These additions survive intact and are characterized by differences in design, materials, and workmanship. Three periods of construction, ca. 1862, ca. 1885, and ca. 1900, are historic and exhibit a pattern common to rural Montgomery County dwellings of the period. This pattern includes the initial construction of a modest two-bay log dwelling, expansion of the initial dwelling to a five bay house, and extension of the principal block to a double pile form though a rear addition.

The overall integrity of each phase of construction of the Johnson-Wolfe House has been retained through the discrete design and placement of the additions. The original log structural core (ca. 1862) was incorporated into the five-bay, single-pile building with a north kitchen wing that forms the principal block of the current house (ca. 1885). The ca. 1885 design is expressed in the current façade through its orientation, two-story scale, nearly symmetrical design, two-over-two wood windows enframed in simple surrounds, gable-front peak with round arch window, and central entry. A two-story, wood frame rear addition was added to the building ca. 1900 resulting in a double pile form. This addition is clearly delineated through changes in roof height and structure. The ca. 1900 addition included an open rear elevation porch, affording views to Sugarloaf Mountain. The addition adjoins the secondary elevation of the earlier house.

The final modification of the building is non-historic and was associated with its conversion to the Comus Inn. The existing rear elevation porch, added as part of the ca. 1900 addition, was enclosed, and the exposed basement created by the sloping site was enhanced; at the same time, an addition was made to the north kitchen. A false wall was constructed along the façade to create a service alley. The 1970s addition is consistent in scale, materials, and proportion with the historic dwelling and is clearly differentiated from the earlier building. The three outbuildings associated with the dwelling, barn (ca.1862, ca. 1936), smokehouse (ca. 1862), and poultry house (ca.1936); survive intact.

The complex retains an unusually high degree of integrity of setting, feeling, and association within the village of Comus. The intact assemblage of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings in Comus and the surrounding open space, which is preserved through easements and in perpetual conservation areas, contribute to the identity of the Johnson-Wolfe House as representative of a class of rural Montgomery County dwelling that evolved during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## General Description:

Construction Sequence of Main House

The main house of the Johnson-Wolfe Farm comprises a two-story, five-bay, double pile principal block and rear addition. Examination of the building reveals a complex construction sequence incorporating four periods of major addition and expansion. The original log house constructed ca. 1862 by Robert Johnson was a two-story, two-bay, single pile building. This log dwelling occupies the north end of the principal block. The log core currently is exposed on the interior of the building. The log construction employs squared, hand-hewn logs keyed with steeple corner notches. The wide width between the log courses and their good state of preservation suggests that the log walls of the original dwelling were not exposed to the weather. The pattern of nail holes on the interior face of the logs suggests that the interior walls likely were sheathed in lath and plaster.

The size, scale, and construction technology employed in the first period building additionally is documented in the existing roof structure. The common rafter gable roofing system is comprised of peeled log rafters secured with lap joints and tree nails at the ridgeline. The exterior faces of the rafters supporting the roof cladding were worked with an adze to a smooth plane. The log rafters are keyed to the roof plate with bird's eye joints.

The second major period of construction was undertaken ca.1885 by Joel Hamilton Wolfe and the prominent local builder William T. Hilton. The addition resulted in the current configuration of the main elevation of the principal block. The two-story core was expanded three bays to the south at that time. The interior plan of the principal block was modified to include a central hall with straight stair flanked by north and south chambers.

The substantial frame addition and core structure were unified through a single gable roof that retained the height and pitch of the earlier building. The main elevation further was enhanced through the addition of a central gable accented by a two-light-over-two-light, round arch window. A one-and-one-half story, two-bay, frame wing also was added to the north end of the dwelling and most likely served as a kitchen. The existing roofing system documents this addition through the extension of the common rafter framing system. The original and ca.1885 roof structures differ in construction technique and materials. The rafters contained in the later common rafter system are standardized and bear the imprint of circular saw milling. These rafters are lapped and nailed at the ridgeline.

The principal block was enlarged further ca. 1900 through the addition of a two-story rear extension that integrates a two-story, polygonal wall bay on the south elevation of the dwelling. This addition

increased the dwelling to a double pile plan. Corner boards visually delineate the exterior corners of the west elevation walls of the ca.1900 addition.

The ridgeline of the gable roof of the ca.1900 addition is oriented perpendicular to the ridge of the principal block. The roof of the rear addition is higher in scale that the ca. 1885 structure and includes a full attic level. The roof structure accommodates the increased height of the rear addition through a roof hip that intersects with the framing of the gable front peak and intersects with the ridgeline of the rear gable.

The building assumed its current configuration ca. 1973, when the dwelling was converted to a restaurant. Work during this commercial conversion included the enclosure of an existing porch to create a dining room; multi-light metal casement windows were used. The west elevation (rear) on the basement level was expanded to the porch plane to accommodate a banquet room with gable entry. A one-story extension was added to the north kitchen wing.

Exterior Description

The Johnson Wolfe House is a two-story, five-bay, frame building. The exterior walls of the dwelling are currently clad in asbestos shingle siding, which was applied over historic wood siding. The historic wood siding survives intact and in good condition beneath the asbestos cladding. The roof is sheathed with wood shingles. The wood shingles were applied over an existing asphalt roof. The east elevation features a center gable that contains a two-over-two-light, round arched window. The original box cornice of the principal block features gable returns; raking boards further delineate the gable ends of the side elevations (north and south). The south gable of the main block features two original wood-frame, round arched windows containing two-over-two-lights. The windows in the front (east) elevation are two-over-two-light, wood-frame double-hung sash windows that date to ca. 1885. Three windows on the first floor of the east elevation are identical, while a slightly smaller fourth window marks the location of the door into the original log core.

A one-and-a-half story extension also was added to the north gable end ca. 1885 and most likely served as a kitchen. This addition is sheathed with asbestos shingles. The windows are wood-frame, two-over-two-light units. This portion of the building is screened along the east elevation by a false wall constructed to create a service alley for the ca. 1973 restaurant.

The main entry to the building currently occupies the central bay of the ca. 1885 principal block. This bay houses a contemporary wood panel door with twelve upper panel lights. A brick exterior end chimney rises along the exterior north wall of the center block of the house.

Historic photographs indicate that an open porch with shallow shed roof originally spanned the five-bay facade. The current enclosed porch is a non-original element. Photographic documentation is sufficiently detailed to enable restoration of this element.

A two-story wood-frame rear addition was appended to the west elevation ca. 1900. This addition features a two-story polygonal bay with a polygonal roof at its southwest corner. This addition rests on a concrete block foundation. This addition is clad with asbestos shingles installed over the original with the exception of the west gable, which retains earlier horizontal wood siding. A wood-frame, two-over-two-light window is located in the attic level of the west gable. The windows in the second floor are contemporary single-light wood casements.

The single-family dwelling was converted to a restaurant in 1973. Construction undertaken during this conversion included a one-story kitchen addition onto the north side of the ca. 1885 extension to the building. The rear (west) elevation was expanded through the enclosure of the porch, and the expansion of the basement elevation to the vertical plane of the porch elevation. The shed roof of the porch is sheathed in standing-seam metal. The basement level window units are fixed. The first story window units are steel casements. Two one-story, gable roof, projecting vestibules provide access from the basement to the rear slate terrace.

Freestanding walk-in coolers currently are located north of the building. These coolers were installed to support restaurant operations; they are partially screened with a lattice fence and vegetation.

The dwelling retains its overall design integrity. The additive design of the building is clearly reflected through fourth distinct phases of construction. The principal block (east) and north wing document the ca. 1862 and ca. 1885 building episodes. The south and west addition clearly reads as an ca. 1900 expansion, and the west porches and north kitchen additions read as ca. 1973 improvements. Each of these additions is compatible in overall scale, proportion, and materials.

The ca. 1862 period building retains its scale, massing, proportion, and wall and roof structure. The pattern of bay openings, including windows and doors, also has been retained as depicted in a ca. 1890 photograph of the dwelling (Cuttler 1999). From the ca. 1885 addition, the building retains its wood-frame construction and weatherboard siding (underneath the asbestos shingle siding). The design of the symmetrical five-bay front, which was unified under a front gable peak with its arched window, also dates from this period. The pattern of window and door openings is also original, as are the two-over-two-light windows as depicted in ca. 1890 photograph, including the windows in the ca. 1862 portion of the building (Cuttler 1999). The simple box cornice along the eave is also original.

Outbuildings

The property contains a smokehouse, a barn, and a large chicken coop. The smokehouse is contemporary with the original log dwelling and exhibits similar construction techniques. The smokehouse is a one-story, rectangular log building located north of the house. The ca. 1862 log smokehouse has steeple-notched chinked logs. The gable roof is sheathed with wood shingles. A fixed six-light window is located in one side.

The barn was constructed in two stages. The original log core was built ca. 1862 during the establishment of the farmstead. This small, two-story barn is located west of the main house. The foundation of the barn is rubble stone and may be the remnants of an older building (Cuttler, personal communication 9/17/2002). The first floor of the building was constructed ca. 1862 of hand-hewn steeple-notched logs, which are exposed on the north elevation. The upper portion of the barn and the shed addition along the south elevation appear to be frame and were added by Joel Hamilton Wolfe ca. 1885 (Cuttler, personal communication 9/17/2002). These portions of the barn are clad with vertical board and batten siding, which also dates from this period. The entire building is unified under a gable roof that is sheathed with standing seam metal. Paired and single hinged doors are evident on the east and north elevation. The east elevation of the barn was modified to accommodate double lead doors for automobile storage, ca. 1936. The upper story has been modified with many bird holes to accommodate pigeons. A photograph located in the Comus Inn depicted the building without the bird holes.

The ca. 1936 chicken coop is a long, low one-story building constructed in three sections to conform to a gradual slope. The wood-frame building is clad with horizontal wood siding. The foundation is supported by wood and cinderblock piers. The gable roof is sheathed in standing seam metal and features four wood-frame ventilators. Small rectangular window openings are located under the eave line along the north elevation; larger window openings are located along the south elevation. Door openings are located in the end gables and along the south elevation. The building served as an antique store during the 1970s.

Integrity

The dwelling included in the Johnson-Wolfe Farm is the result of three periods of major construction associated with residential occupation and one period of major construction associated with its conversion to the Comus Inn. Major work was undertaken ca. 1862, ca. 1885, ca. 1900, and ca. 1970. Each period of construction is distinguished clearly in the current building through variations in materials, construction, and design. The dwelling retains its overall historical integrity from the period ca.1862 to ca. 1900 despite the additive quality of the design. Each phase of construction is compatible in scale, proportion, materials, and ornamentation.

The sequence and placement of each of the additions contributes to the building's continued ability to convey its local significance and to be read clearly as a residential design. The original log structural core (ca. 1862) was incorporated into the five-bay redesign of the dwelling (ca. 1885). The resulting single-pile dwelling forms the principal block of the building. The ca. 1885 design is expressed in the current façade through its orientation, two-story scale, symmetrical design, two-over-two wood windows enframed by simple surrounds, gable-front peak with round arch window, and central entry. A two-story, wood frame ell was added to the building ca.1900. This rear addition incorporates a two-story polygonal bay at the southwest corner. The addition adjoins a secondary elevation of the earlier house and did not affect its overall design.

The additions to the building completed during its conversion to the Comus Inn were focused on the rear elevation of the building. The sloping site made possible the extension of the basement to the vertical plane of the ca. 1900 porch. The rear-elevation porch was enclosed; the exterior wall of the ca.1900 addition was retained with windows intact. While the ca. 1970s additions were substantial, they made possible the segregation of kitchen and banquet rooms outside the historic core, thus retaining the overall spatial divisions of the plan and interior finishes. These most recent additions, while adopting a residential scale and compatible materials, read clearly as later additions to the historic dwelling. In addition to the original plan, the core retains its original first and second story staircases, wide plank flooring, the majority of original plasterwork, baseboards, window surrounds, chair rails, and mantels.

Modifications within the historic core that are incompatible to its architectural character are reversible and include asbestos shingles applied to early wood siding, the addition of an enclosed shed porch to the façade, and the location of commercial mechanical systems. Historic photographs of the dwelling dating from the late nineteenth century along with structural evidence enable the accurate rehabilitation of these later modifications. The Comus Inn operated from 1973 through 2001. The building is currently vacant.

An extensive rehabilitation applying the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation* is proposed by the current owners. Federal, state, and local tax incentives for historic rehabilitation will enable the appropriate treatment of the historic fabric of the local Comus landmark, including the restoration of elements that have been inappropriately modified over the years.

## Summary Statement of Significance:

The Johnson-Wolfe Farm, commonly known as the Comus Inn, occupies an important corner in the crossroads community of Comus, formerly known as Johnsonville, located in western Montgomery County. This four-building complex possesses the qualities of local significance and integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C and A. The house and associated outbuildings embody the distinctive characteristics of type, period, and method of construction associated with a rural domestic complex dating from ca. 1862 though ca. 1936. The main house illustrates, through its additions and modifications, the pattern of evolution in domestic design common in rural western Montgomery County. The main house contains a log core built ca. 1852 by Robert Johnson of Johnsonville that was expanded to incorporate contemporary domestic designs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the addition of a Gothic Revival style front gable and the Queen Anne style ell with polygonal bay. The agricultural outbuildings also exhibit the distinctive characteristics of their types, periods, and methods of construction as representative of farm buildings of their eras.

The Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn) also represents a locally significant broad pattern of developmental history in the evolution of crossroads communities in Montgomery County under Criterion A. The Johnson-Wolfe Farm illustrates this pattern through its history as the domestic component of a modest, small-scale family farm through its evolution into a domestic rural lot that formed the nucleus of the rural crossroads community of Comus. The property was the first domestic complex constructed on a corner of the intersection of two rural roads and formed the nucleus for the development of the late nineteenth-century community. The typical pattern of settlement as illustrated by the history of the Johnson-Wolfe property is the evolution from initial agricultural settlement, through a period of early growth in which larger farms were subdivided to accommodate family members, then rural community expansion, which ultimately evolved into a small vibrant rural community complete with school, town hall, and post office. Comus remains an intact rural crossroads community surrounded by a rural setting that has been preserved through land easements and conservation areas.

## Resource History and Historic Context:

The Johnson-Wolfe House, commonly known as the Comus Inn, is located in the crossroads community of Comus, formerly Johnsonville. The house and outbuildings occupy a 5.26-acre lot that contains parts of the original land patents "Happy Choice" and "Self Defense." The tracts "Happy Choice" and "Self Defense" were parts of Johnson family landholdings assembled during the early nineteenth century. In 1835, the landholdings of Benjamin (deceased) and Mary Johnson were divided between their sons Joseph and Benjamin (Montgomery County Land Records (MCLR) BS 7:118). The latter, at his death in 1902 was described as "one of the wealthiest and best known citizens of the county" (*Frederick News Post* 6 September 1902). The brothers lived near one another. Joseph farmed 34 acres, while Benjamin farmed 205 acres (Montgomery County Tax Assessment books 1858-1863, 1864-1868).

In 1862, Robert Johnson, son of Joseph, purchased ten acres of "Happy Choice" from his uncle Benjamin Johnson (MCLR JGH 9:200). In the 1860 census, Robert was listed as living with his father. He was 23 years old and worked as a farm laborer (Hurley 1998). By 1870, Robert, age 32, lived at the property with his wife Narcissa, age 29, and two children: Florida, age 6, and George W., age 2 (Hurley 1999). The ten acres that Robert acquired from his uncle in 1862 formed the nucleus of his family farm. The two-story log core of the Comus Inn, the log smokehouse, and the log core of the barn were constructed ca. 1862 under the Johnson ownership. Robert Johnson's house appeared on the 1865 Martenet and Bond map of Montgomery County. Benjamin Johnson and Joseph Johnson owned adjacent farms in "Johnsonville."

In 1865, Robert Johnson augmented his original landholdings through purchase of 60 acres of the tract known as "Mount Vernon" from Robert Sellman, a neighboring property owner located east of MD Route 100 (MCLR ERB 2:426). The 60 acres transferred with no improvements (Montgomery County Tax Assessments 1864-1868). In 1866, Robert Johnson was assessed for 70 acres of land valued at $10 per acre and improvements valued at $250 (Montgomery County Tax Assessments 1869-1876).

The size of Robert Johnson's initial landholdings was modest in terms of farm size in Montgomery County. In 1860, 25 per cent of the farms in Montgomery County contained between 50 and 99 acres, while 50 per cent of the farms contained between 100 and 499 acres. By 1870, 57 per cent of farms in Montgomery County contained between 100 and 499 acres, while the number of farms containing between 50 and 99 acres remained approximately at 25 per cent. The overall numbers of farms increased only slightly between 1860 and 1870, from 1,299 farms in 1860 to 1,308 farms in 1870 (Historical Census http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu). By 1880, Robert Johnson, at the age of 43, was recorded as farming 143 acres in the vicinity of Comus (U.S. Census Bureau 1880 Agricultural Census-Montgomery County).

In 1878, Robert and Narcissa Johnson sold the ten acres of "Happy Choice" including the original ten-acre house lot and 20 acres of "Mount Vernon" to Joel Hamilton Wolfe (MCLR Deed EBP 18/54). Joel Hamilton Wolfe owned the Comus Inn property between March 1878 and October 1900. The Wolfe family originally

had emigrated from Germany, and, ultimately, settled in Hyattstown (Cuttler personal communication 9/17/2002). Wolfe's father George was listed as a carpenter in the 1850 census (Hurley1998). Joel Hamilton Wolfe was a blacksmith and farrier by trade (Hurley 1999). He operated a smithy on the southeast corner of the intersection in Comus near the location of the original school (Cuttler 1999). Wolfe lived in the log house that forms the core of the current building and made substantial improvements to the building. The 1879 tax assessment valued the extant improvements on the Wolfe property at $315. In contrast, the improvements on the property in 1885 were valued at $715 (Crawford, 1986; Cuttler 1999).

Two additions were made to the building under Wolfe's ownership. One addition extended the front façade of the principal block southward to form a nearly symmetrical five-bay residence ornamented with simple Gothic details. The second addition was the one-and-a-half story section added to the north end of the building that served as a kitchen. Both additions were attributed to William T. Hilton (b. 1829-d. 1909), a noted local carpenter and casket maker located in Barnesville. Buildings constructed by Hilton included Sugarloaf Mountain Chapel (1861), Mt. Ephraim (1868), Christ Episcopal Church (1878), Leonard Hays House (ca. 1890), St. Mary's Catholic Church (1900), Thomas O. White House (1903), and additions to Mary Morningstar House and the Barnesville Post Office (Getty and Gutheim 1990). The additions to the Johnson-Wolfe house are shown in historic photographs published by Cuttler in the local history, *The History of Comus* (1999). Wolfe also added the shed addition to the barn on the property (Cuttler personal communication 9/17/2002).

Joel Hamilton Wolfe was an active promoter of the region and served informally as a one-man chamber of commerce. He advertised the healthfulness of the area in regional newspapers, including *The Sentinel*, and rented rooms in his house during the late nineteenth century to visitors attracted to the "mountain air" and natural beauty of the Sugarloaf Mountain area. He was a charter member of the Barnesville Baptist Church. As a blacksmith, he repaired the iron railings of the Monocacy Aqueduct (Cuttler personal communication 9/17/2002).

In 1897, Joel Hamilton Wolfe was assessed for 27 acres of Happy Choice and Mount Vernon valued at $18 an acre, with improvements valued at $604, livestock valued at $110, household furniture valued at $120, and other property valued at $35 (Montgomery County Tax Assessments 1896-1908). Wolfe operated the blacksmith shop until 1902, when he retired to Forest Glen (Cuttler 1999).

Under the Wolfe ownership, the property contained approximately 30 acres. In 1880, farms in Montgomery County containing between 20 and 49 acres numbered 181 or approximately 10 per cent of the total of 1,791 farms. Joel Hamilton Wolfe's primary occupation was as a blacksmith and farrier. His occupation recorded in the 1880 census was blacksmith, not farmer, and the production of Wolfe's acreage was not recorded in the 1880 Montgomery County agricultural census. The farm probably was used to augment domestic consumption, such as chickens, a few cows and horses, hay, and a garden. Therefore, the associated outbuildings to the complex were small in size and fewer in number than larger income-producing farms in Montgomery County. The large income-producing farms were typically identified by the presence of large bank barns.

scale family farm. The area began to be called Johnsonville for its cluster of log dwellings constructed by the Johnson family. Under the Wolfe ownership, the house lot evolved into a domestic rural complex since the owner drew his livelihood from blacksmithing to support the regional economy. The Johnson-Wolfe Farm formed the nucleus for the development of a rural community of Comus during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The community came to include a school and town hall, blacksmith shop, a small general store, and residences. A communal spring just north of the crossroads provided water to the community; title to that spring still is shared between neighboring properties at the crossroads, including the Johnson – Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn).

Although the character of many of the old crossroads communities in Montgomery County has been lost to suburbanization and development, agricultural zoning in this part of the county, coupled with an active agricultural preservation program that has encompassed surrounding farms, has heretofore precluded significant suburban encroachment on Comus. In addition, the legacy of Gordon Strong at Stronghold, or Sugarloaf Mountain, has served to fortify the rural character of the area. The Johnson-Wolfe Farm is unusual in its intact physical context from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that contributes to the identify of the complex and its ability to embody the characteristics of a local rural domestic building type that evolved over time.

## Major Bibliographical References:

Crawford, Catherine
1986 Comus MIHP form on file at Maryland Historical Trust and Montgomery County Maryland Capital Parks and Planning Commission.

Cuttler, Dona L.
1999 The History of Comus. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

2002 Personal communication, 9/17/2002.

Getty, Joseph, M., and Frederick Gutheim
1990 Sugarloaf Mountain Historic District. On file at Maryland Historical Trust, Crownsville, MD.

Hertel, Ms. Mary
Family files, genealogical information. Resident of Rockville, MD.

Historical Census Data
Many years of historical census data are on file at www: http//fisher.lib.virginia.edu.

Hopkins, G.M.
1879 Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington, including the County of Montgomery, Maryland. G.M. Hopkins, Philadelphia, PA

Hurley, William
1998 Montgomery County, MD, 1850 Census. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

1998 Montgomery County, MD, 1860 Census. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

1999 Montgomery County, MD, 1870 Census. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

2000 Montgomery County, MD, 1880 Census. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

2001 Montgomery County, MD, 1900 Census. Heritage Books, Inc., Bowie, MD.

Johnson, Benjamin
1902 Death Notice published in Frederick News Post, 6 September. On file at Montgomery County Historical Society.

Langstaff, Ms. Cynthia
Family files, genealogical information. Resident of Comus, MD.

Martenet and Bond
1865 Martenet and Bond's Map of Montgomery County, Maryland. Simon J. Martenet, C.E., Baltimore, Maryland.

Maryland Civil War Trails Commission
2002 Placque prepared for Antietam Campaign for location on the Comus Inn Property.

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties forms for Planning Areas 10, 12, and 13.

Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission
Vertical files on Comus.

Montgomery County Records
Land records on file at the Montgomery County Courthouse, Rockville.
Tax Assessment Records on file at the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis.

Montgomery County Historical Society
Vertical files and genealogical records, Rockville.

Priest, John Michael
1992 Before Antietam: The Battle for South Mountain. White Mane Publishing Co., Inc., Shippensburg, PA.

Scharf, J. Thomas
1882 History of Western Maryland. Louis H. Everts, Philadelphia, PA. Reprint edition.

Soderberg, Susan
2002 Preservation Outreach Planner, Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, personal communication 9/17/2002.

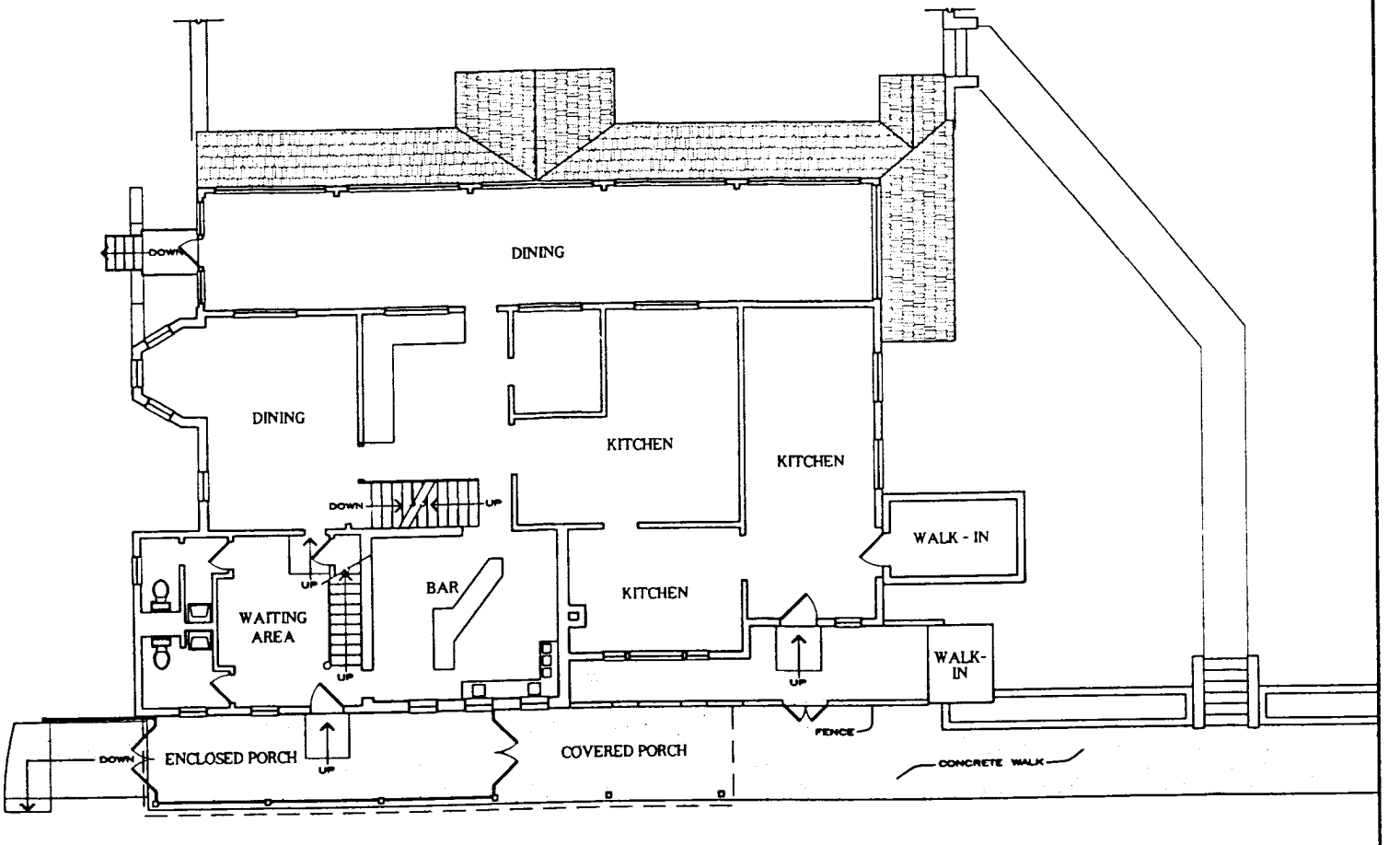
U.S. Census Bureau
1880 Agricultural Census for Montgomery County. On file at the Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, MD.

## Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is the same as the current property boundary found on tax map DW parcel 346 in Montgomery County, Maryland.

## Boundary Justification:

This property has contained this acreage since 1900. The nominated property, 5.26 acres, represents the remnant of the acreage historically associated with the resource.

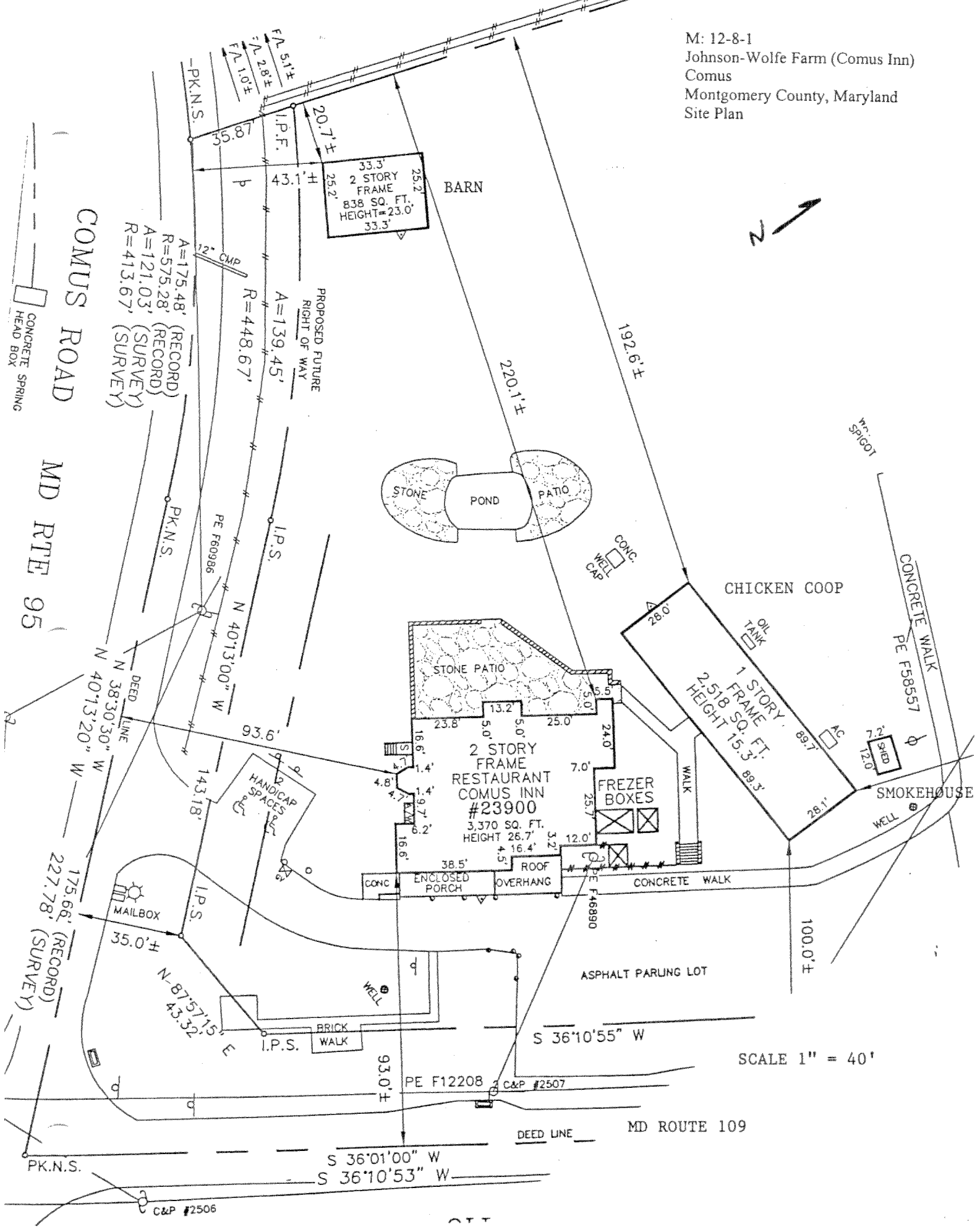



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Comus
Montgomery County, Maryland
M-13-8-1
Floor Plan

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Comus
Montgomery County, Maryland
Site Plan



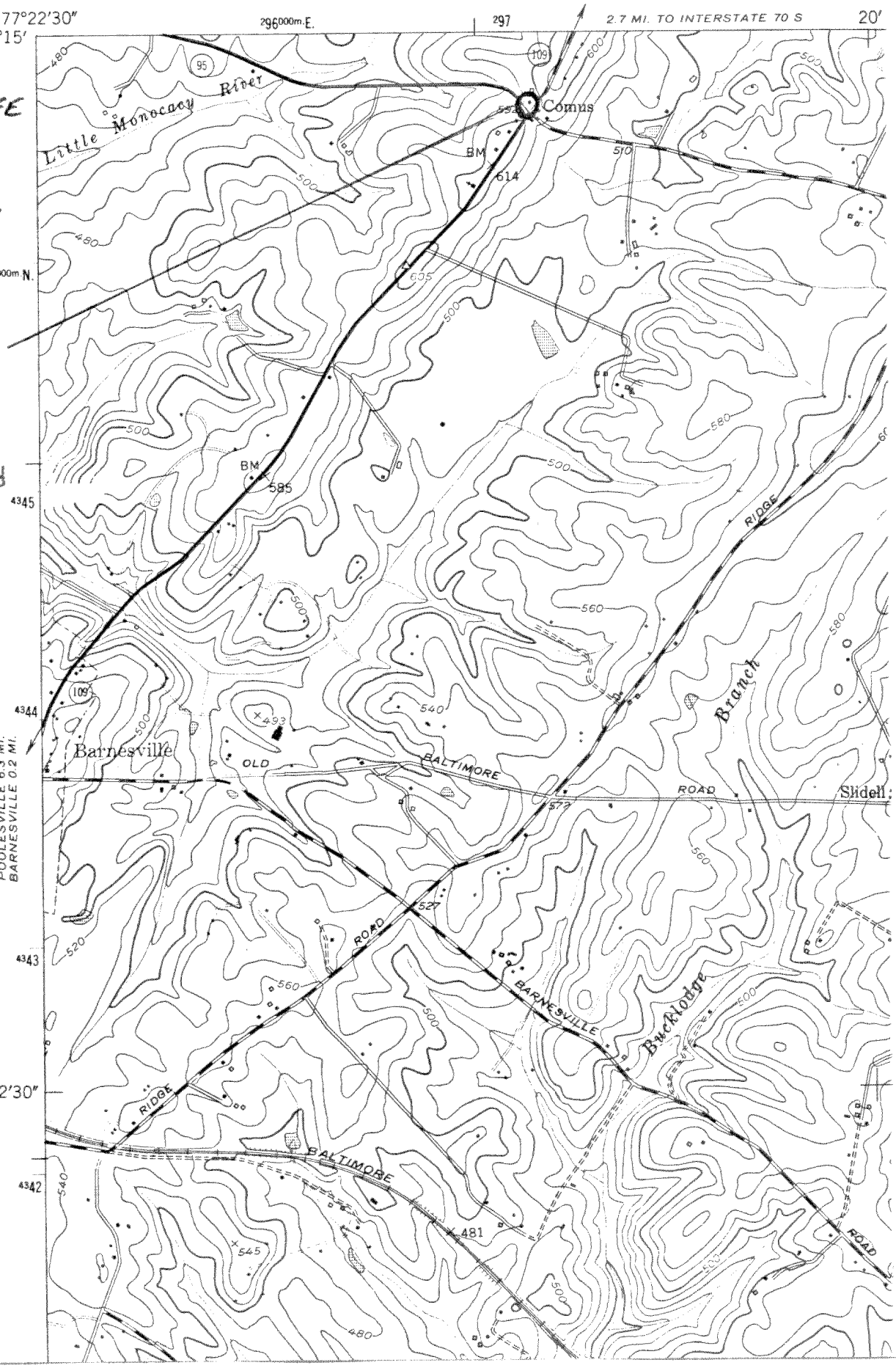
5562 IV SW
(BUCKEYSTOWN)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

M-12-B-1
JOHNSON/WOLFE FARM
(COMUS INN)
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

18-297168-4346634

Germantown Quad



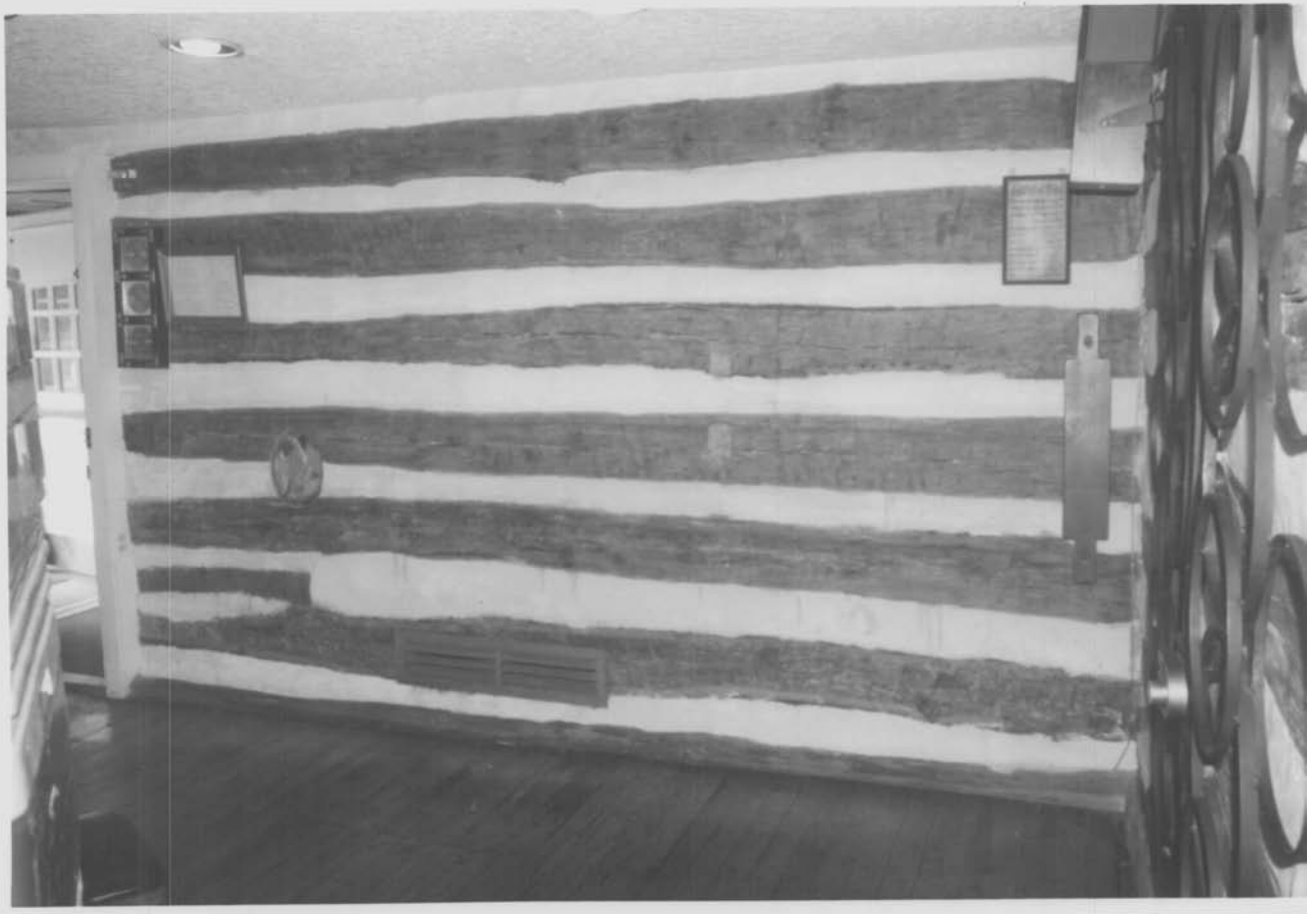
M-12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co. Md
B. Clewell
9/2002
Md SHPO
Sugarloaf Mtn. from Comus Inn
1 of 15

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery County, MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Main house, east facade
2 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson- Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery County, MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Main house, SE corner
3 of 14

M:12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery County, MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Main house, SW corner
4 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery County, MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Main house, west facade
5 of 14



M:12-8-1

Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)

Montgomery Co. Md

B. Cleven

9/2002

Md SHPO

1ST fl, south wall showing logs

6 of 15

M: 12-8-1
Johnson. Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
1st floor stair, view looking NW
7 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
2nd floor, SE corner
8 of 14

M: 12 - 8 - 1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
smokehouse, east and south elevations
9 of 14

H: 12 - 8 - 1
Johnson - Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
smokehouse, west and north elevations
10 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Barn, North and east elevations
11 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson - Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co, MD
K Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Barn, south and west elevations
12 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Chicken Coop, NE corner
13 of 14

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co., MD
K. Grandine
August 2002
MD SHPO
Chicken coop, SW corner
14 of 14

# MT. EPHRAIM CROSSROADS

★ ★ ★

## *Sharpshooters Hold the Line*

ANTIETAM CAMPAIGN 1862

*You are looking at Sugarloaf Mountain, where the running cavalry fight that began in the late afternoon on September 9, 1862, in Barnesville came to a halt. By the next morning, the 7th and 9th Virginia Cavalry had been brought to bay here at the southern base of the mountain by the 8th Illinois and 3rd Indiana Cavalry. Both sides had been reinforced, and each had brought up artillery. Dismounted sharpshooters of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry looked down on the Federals from among the trees and rocks on the slopes of* the mountain. The fighting continued throughout the day with much cannon fire. By evening neither side had budged, and one Union cavalryman had been killed and one wounded.

Early on the morning of September 11, the Confederates slipped away after brief exchanges of gunfire, also abandoning a signal station atop the mountain. As the Army of Northern Virginia was marching northwest out of Frederick, the action at Sugarloaf Mountain proved to be a successful rearguard action.

Sugarloaf Mountain

The Comus Inn was the Benjamin Johnson family farm at the time of the Civil War, and the crossroads was known as Mt. Ephraim. The family's log cabin was added to in the 1800s. The name Comus (former god of poetry and son of Bacchus) was not used until a post office was established here in 1850. In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to acquire Sugarloaf Mountain as his presidential retreat, but the owner, Gordon Strong, refused to sell, so the president went north to Shangri-La, now Camp David.

Stuart's cavalry on their way to the Potomac River

M: 12-8-1
Johnson-Wolfe Farm (Comus Inn)
Montgomery Co. Md
B. Clevenger
9/2002
Md SHPO
Civil War Marker
15 of 15

M: 12-8-1 c. 1862, 1901
Comus Inn
(Robert Johnson House)
23900 Old Hundred Road
Dickerson
Private

The Comus Inn is a three-part frame house facing east onto Old Hundred Road in the community of Comus in northern Montgomery County. The 2 1/2-story main block of the house is five bays wide, but the northernmost bay is set apart, suggesting that this bay is a later addition. Windows are 2/2 sash with louvered shutters. The center bay, slightly left of the true center of the building, is surmounted by a cross gable bearing a four-light round-arched window. The first floor of this bay contains the principal entrance. The south gable end of the building is two bays wide, with a single 2/2 sash shuttered window in the west bay on both levels, and two round-arched 4-light windows in the attic gable. The shallow roof is covered with wood shingles, and the cornice returns deeply at this end. The north gable end has a single exterior chimney, which is covered on the first two floors by a two-story addition, four narrow bays wide. This addition is recessed from the main block, and contains a multi-paned bay window on the first floor and four short 4/4 sash windows on the second floor. The first floor of the east facade of both the main block and this addition is covered by a shed-roofed porch, also with wood shingles, supported by square posts. To the north of this addition is a one-story frame wing. To the rear of these additions is a glass enclosed porch or "Florida room." A 2 1/2-story hip-roofed wing extends to the rear of the main block, and features a 2-story semi-octagonal tower with 2/2 sash windows on the second floor and 6/6 on the first. This hip-on-gable wing,

two bays deep, is slightly higher than the main block. West of the house is a log meat house. This small, square gable-front structure of hewn, chinked logs is one bay wide.

The town of Comus appears on the Hopkins Atlas of 1879 as Johnsonville, undoubtedly named for the Johnson family, who occupied the tract which included the present Comus Inn. In 1862 Benjamin Johnson, who appears on both the Martenet & Bond Map of 1865 and Hopkins 1879 Atlas, purchased ten acres of "Happy Choice" from Joseph and Ormer Johnson's larger tract. Robert Johnson later acquired a part of this parcel and built the Comus Inn at the crossroads. The town was later called "Nicholson's Crossroads" and "Nicholsonville" after a family who had a store and residence in the town during the late 19th century, and possibly were also the postmasters. The town was later renamed "Comus," purportedly after Senator Lewis McComas who represented the Sixth Congressional District at the time a post office was first established. The Comus Inn, with its two story, gable roof center gable facade and facade porch, though larger and perhaps more decorative than most, is typical of the architecture found in rural Montgomery County.

The main block of the building was probably built by Robert Johnson between 1862 when the property was purchased and 1865 when it appears on the Martenet & Bond Map. Joel H. Wolfe purchased the house on a ten acre lot from the Johnson family in March of 1878. the property was then described as that adjoining the lands of Benjamin Johnson and William Sellman (EBP 18/54). The tax assessment records show an improvement value for Joel Wolfe's

property of $315 in 1879 which rose to $715 in 1885. In October of 1900, Joel Wolfe sold the property to Levin B. Johnson. It was described as being the "same land on which the said Joel H. Wolfe now resides" (Deed TD 16/224). Between 1901 and 1902 the improvement value of the property jumped considerably from $600 to $1000, suggesting that Levin Johnson made one of the additions to the house at this time. In addition to this parcel, Mr. Johnson also owned a 261 acre tract which he farmed. In August of 1929 Levin Johnson died leaving "my home farm of 261 acres and also the 'Wolfe tract' on which I now reside...." To his eight children (Will PEW 14/283). His personal estate included farm improvements and 125 pounds of corn and 300 bushels of wheat (Inventory PEW 15/232). The report of the sale of the real estate following his death merely described the improvements as "a dwelling house and other outbuildings (Inventory HGC 10/415). The property was sold in 1936 to Jessie M. Fitzwater of Washington, D.C. (Deed 628/476). It was sold to John and Jeanette Spates in 1945 and remained in the Spates family until June of 1973 when it was conveyed to Comus Inn, Inc. (Deeds, 987/265 & 4405/550). It was since bought by Carolyn D. and Leroy T. Morgan, and in September of 2002 by "Old Hundred Road LLC". This company plans to open the restaurant under new ownership in 2003, and requested that the Montgomery County Planning Board recommend a country inn zoning for the property. The 5.26-acre property retained its residential zoning despite its use as a restaurant for at least 30 years. The new designation would allow expansion at the site by the new owners,

although the application stated that no lodging was anticipated, and the owners intend to renovate the property, rather than construct new buildings.

Click here for a plain text ADA compliant screen.

**Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation**
**MONTGOMERY COUNTY**
**Real Property Data Search**

Go Back
View Map
New Search

**Account Identifier:** **District** - 11 **Account Number** - 00920188

## Owner Information

**Owner Name:** OLD HUNDRED ROAD LLC

**Mailing Address:** 18831 COMUS RD
DICKERSON MD 20842

**Use:** COMMERCIAL
**Principal Residence:** NO

**Deed Reference:** 1) /21760/ 675
2)

## Location & Structure Information

**Premises Address**
23900 OLD HUNDRED RD
DICKERSON 20842

**Zoning**
RUR

**Legal Description**
HAPPY CHOICE CERT/TR
ANS

| Map | Grid | Parcel | Sub District | Subdivision | Section | Block | Lot | Group | Plat No: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DW22 | | P347 | | 1 | | | | 81 | Plat Ref: |

**Special Tax Areas**
**Town**
**Ad Valorem**
**Tax Class** 42

| Primary Structure Built | Enclosed Area | Property Land Area | County Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0000 | 7,395 SF | 229,125.00 SF | 581 |

| Stories | Basement | Type | Exterior |
|---|---|---|---|

## Value Information

| | Base Value | Value As Of 01/01/2002 | Phase-in Assessments As Of 07/01/2002 | As Of 07/01/2003 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Land:** | 286,400 | 343,600 | | |
| **Improvements:** | 481,400 | 476,500 | | |
| **Total:** | 767,800 | 820,100 | 785,233 | 802,666 |
| **Preferential Land:** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

## Transfer Information

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Seller:** | MORGAN, CAROLYN D ET AL | **Date:** | 09/10/2002 | **Price:** | $520,000 |
| **Type:** | IMPROVED ARMS-LENGTH | **Deed1:** | /21760/ 675 | **Deed2:** | |
| **Seller:** | MORGAN, LEROY T & C D M ET AL | **Date:** | 09/10/2002 | **Price:** | $0 |
| **Type:** | NOT ARMS-LENGTH | **Deed1:** | /21760/ 671 | **Deed2:** | |
| **Seller:** | LEROY T & C D M MORGAN ET AL | **Date:** | 12/30/1994 | **Price:** | $0 |
| **Type:** | NOT ARMS-LENGTH | **Deed1:** | /13178/ 370 | **Deed2:** | |

## Exemption Information

| Partial Exempt Assessments | Class | 07/01/2002 | 07/01/2003 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **County** | 000 | 0 | 0 |
| **State** | 000 | 0 | 0 |
| **Municipal** | 000 | 0 | 0 |

**Tax Exempt:** NO
**Exempt Class:**

**Special Tax Recapture:**

* NONE *

**Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation**
**MONTGOMERY COUNTY**
**Real Property Data Search**

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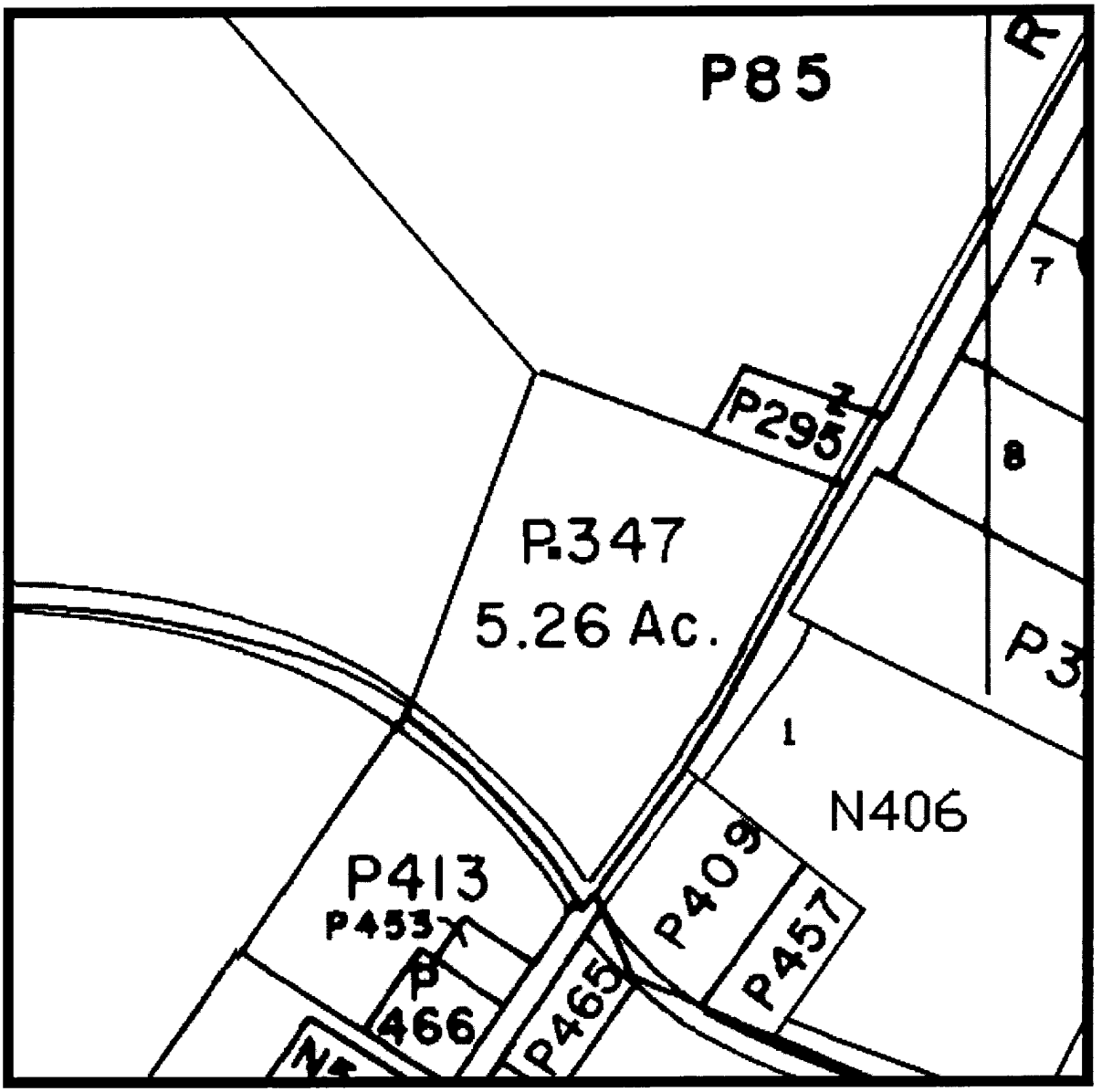
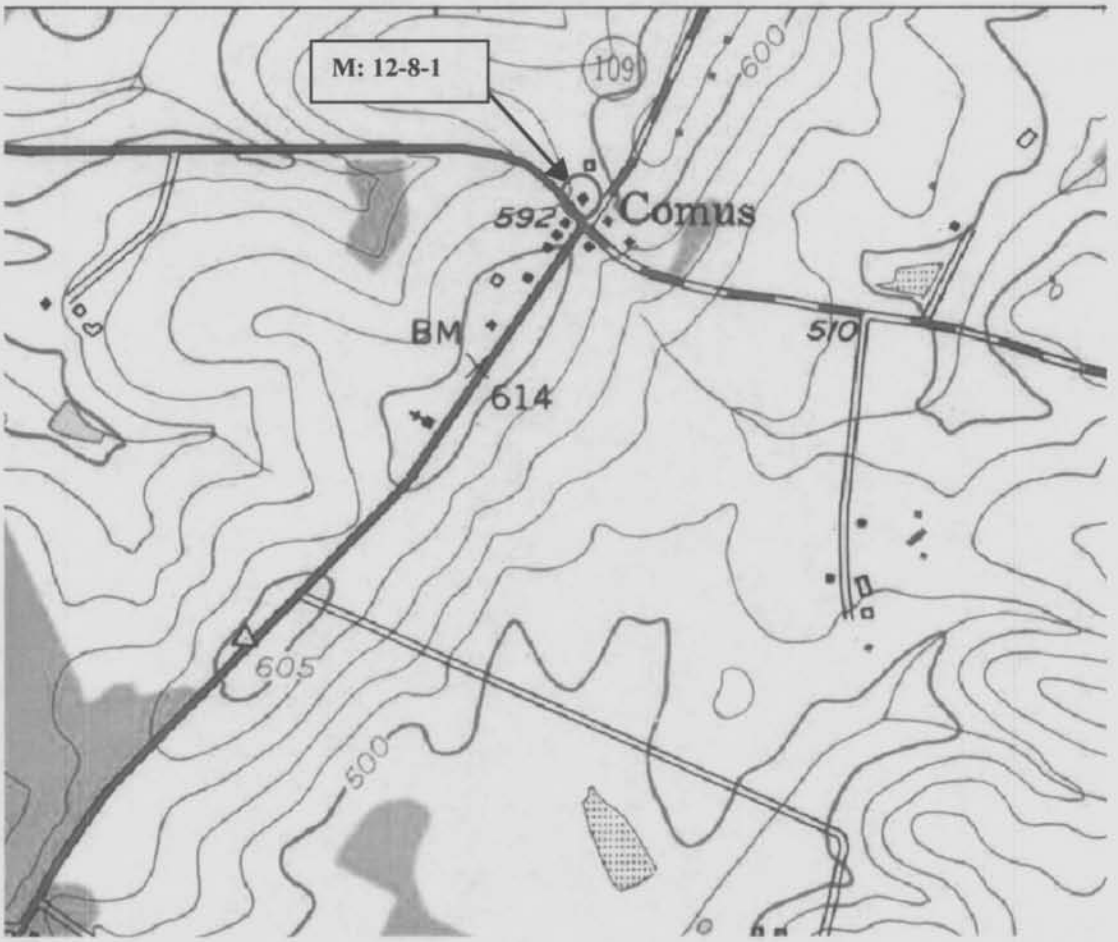
**District** - 11**Account Number** - 00920188




Property maps provided courtesy of the Maryland Department of Planning ©2001.
For more information on electronic mapping applications, visit the Maryland Department of Planning web site at www.mdp.state.md.us

M: 12-8-1
Comus Inn (Robert Johnson House)
23900 Old Hundred Road
Germantown Quadrangle



NAME COMUS INN – ROBERT JOHNSON HOUSE

LOCATION Rt 95 & Rt 109 COMUS, Md

FACADE SW

PHOTO TAKEN 4/23/74 MOWYER

M: #12-8-1

#12-8-Comus Historic District
Comus Inn
23900 Old Hundred Rd.
5/86

M:12-8-1