

Easement

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 Sumner, Charles, Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic  
other names K-661

2. Location

street & number 206 S. Queen Street  not for publication  
city or town Chestertown  vicinity  
state MD code MD county Kent code 029 zip code 21620

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] 5-24-05  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Sumner, Charles, Post #25 (K-661)  
Name of Property

Kent County, Maryland  
County and State

### Classification

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

- 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	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	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**

1 (building contributes to National Register listed Chestertown NR Historic District)

### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/ Meeting Hall

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

### 7. Description

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

OTHER: Front-gabled Wood Frame

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK  
walls ASPHALT  
roof METAL  
other

### Narrative Description

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

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Sumner, Charles, Post #25

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### Description Summary:

Constructed as a meeting hall ca. 1908, the Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic is a two-story, front-gabled, wood frame building with a rectangular floor plan. Built on brick piers, this meeting hall has wood clapboard covered with asphalt siding and a low-pitched corrugated metal roof pierced by two small brick chimneys. Seventeen one-over-one windows (four up and four down per side and one in the front) adorn the building. Its upper and lower floors are open to facilitate its use as meeting and entertaining space. An eight foot deep, ten inch high stage runs across the rear of the second floor. Access to the upper floor was via two stairways flanking the main entrance. (The left stairway space was later partially removed to accommodate a restroom.) A narrow room at the rear of the first floor was used for food preparation. All wood details in the building, including windows, doors, casings, wainscoting and floors have their original finishes intact. The doors at the top of the stairs leading to the second floor have three-inch peepholes cut into the center stile, with a screw hole above that once likely held a piece of tin that would be pushed to the side in order to identify visitors. The first floor walls feature a highly distinctive 10 inch wide blue stripe painted along the ceiling, which, with white plaster walls and red painted wainscoting, represent the colors of the American flag.

Unlike the surrounding residences that are built very close to the street, the Charles Sumner Post is set back approximately twenty feet. The building faces southwest and is situated on a thirty foot wide by seventy-five foot deep lot, a typical size for the neighborhood. The building is located in the Scotts Point area, a historically black area within the Chestertown Historic District.

The meeting hall has been abandoned since 1985. Between 1985 and when the building was purchased by Preservation Incorporated in 2002, several panels of the corrugated metal roof blew off, leading to extensive interior and exterior damage beneath those areas. The building also became completely overgrown with vegetation and trees. Since the purchase of the property by Preservation Incorporated in September 2002, the overgrowth has been removed, the roof has been closed in and the building has been stabilized in preparation for restoration.

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**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 pattern of our history.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**Area of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black  
 MILITARY  
 SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1908-1950

**Significant Dates**

1908 (constructed)  
 1928 (last veteran died)

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

unknown

**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:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Maryland Historical Trust

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Sumner, Charles, Post #25

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### Summary Statement of Significance:

The Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the GAR, the principal fraternal association for Civil War veterans and the only integrated social organization in 19th-century America. Some 8,600 GAR posts were established in the country after 1866 to provide support and fellowship for Union veterans regardless of race. The GAR maintained a strict policy of accepting posts made up wholly or in part of African-American members; the Charles Sumner Post, established in 1882 by 21 veterans who had served in the U. S. Colored Troops, was one of 22 African-American GAR posts in Maryland. The Sumner Post served the local GAR from its construction around 1908 until the last member died in 1928, and continued to be operated by surviving family members until the building was sold in 1950. It remains substantially unaltered, and derives additional significance under Criterion C as an example of a type of social building characteristic of the period and region. The Charles Sumner Post is one of only two GAR halls known to survive in the nation.

Although the last of the original members died in 1928, female relatives and descendants of the veterans continued to carry on the work of the Post until 1950, holding meetings, participating in Memorial Day observances, and making the hall available to Chestertown's black community as a venue for social events. The period of significance, 1908-1950, begins with the construction of the present hall and concludes with the building's transfer out of the ownership of descendants of the founding veterans.

### Resource History and Historic Context:

The Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic meeting hall meets National Register Criterion A because the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) played a highly significant role in the post-Civil War era. The GAR advocated for Union veterans, lobbied Congress for pensions and played a highly significant role in American politics. With a membership of over 400,000 former sailors and soldiers in every state of the country, North and South, these veterans reminded the government and the public about the sacrifices made by, and the debt owed to, those who had fought to preserve the Union. The GAR had a major influence on the Republican Party and national, state and local politics for many decades after the Civil War.

In addition, the Charles Sumner Post #25 meets the NHL theme, Black Americans in United States History. The GAR was the only integrated social organization in the United States during the 19th century. Black and mixed-race posts existed in many areas of the country. The men who founded the Charles Sumner Post, most of them former slaves, used patriotic celebrations on May 30, then called Decoration Day (later Memorial Day) to remind the black *and* white community about their important contribution towards Union victory and their vital role in winning emancipation for their enslaved brothers and sisters.

Union soldiers who fought during the Civil War experienced many hardships together, and this led to a deep comradeship that they attempted to sustain in civilian life. The Grand Army of the Republic was organized to

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fill that need. Of the more than 8,600 GAR posts, the Charles Sumner Post #25 (the 25th GAR post organized in Maryland) is one of only two African-American built lodges still standing in the United States, the only other being a one-story structure in Beaufort, South Carolina, which sustained heavy fire damage in the 1980s and was completely rebuilt.

Union veterans formed the GAR as a social and fraternal organization on April 6, 1866. Dr. Benjamin Franklin Stephenson founded the organization at Decatur, Illinois, on the three principles of Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty. The GAR was founded to strengthen fellowship (Fraternity), provide care for soldiers and their dependents (Charity), and to celebrate and uphold the Constitution (Loyalty). In 1868, the Commander-in-Chief of the GAR, General John A. Logan, established Decoration Day. His General Order No. 11 stated "The 30<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form or ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit."

Maryland had 56 GAR posts, of which 22 were African American. The high percentage of "colored" posts in Maryland was due to the high proportion of African American slaves who served in the army and navy. During the Civil War, Maryland fielded seven regiments of United States Colored Troops (USCT). In Kent County, where the Sumner Post is located, more than 400 African Americans volunteered or were conscripted into the Union forces. Many black soldiers from Kent County fought and died in the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg, VA in July, 1860.

In 1882, 21 local black veterans (most of them from Kent County, but also including a drummer from the famous Massachusetts 54th who had moved to the area) formed the Charles Sumner Post #25. They named their post after Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a fierce advocate of emancipation and voting rights for African Americans. The naming of the post is particularly significant in light of the fact that Senator George Vickers from Kent County argued against Charles Sumner for passage of the 15th Amendment. Yearly inspection reports to the national organization reveal that at its peak, the Sumner Post had 28 members, who, despite their humble backgrounds, were able to pay dues and fit themselves out with GAR dress uniforms for use in parades and official functions.

The most visible activity for the Sumner Post was Decoration Day, celebrated each May 30. A parade would form in Chestertown, led by the veterans and followed by a train of musicians, decorated wagons, friends and schoolchildren. The parade traveled first to the white cemetery, where the graves of the Civil War dead were strewn with flowers, and then to the black cemetery, where their brothers' graves were similarly decorated. The former soldiers marched through the center of town to fire a musket salute over the Chester River, and then across the bridge to a local farm where a large picnic was held. As the sole GAR post in Chestertown, the Sumner Post organized the only yearly celebration of Union victory in the area, and despite a deep undercurrent of racism combined with strong pro-Southern sympathies in the local white populace, the veterans proudly continued their tradition for many decades.

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The GAR encouraged the formation of allied groups such as the Woman's Relief Corps, consisting primarily of the wives and daughters of veterans. The Charles Sumner Post had the distinction of creating the first Woman's Relief Corps (WRC) in Maryland, and as such was listed first in the Maryland register. In addition to providing support for the ill or bereaved, the WRC assisted in commemorating Memorial Day. Barb Gannon, a historian specializing in African Americans in the GAR, believes that the Woman's Relief Corps of the Sumner Post were responsible for the post's longevity.

The last member of Post #25 died in 1928, but the female relatives of the veterans (most of them were likely WRC members) continued to hold meetings and carry on the work of the Post. The "Army Hall," as it became known, was often rented out for meetings, weddings, graduations, and concerts. Many jazz notables performed at the hall, including Ella Fitzgerald and Chick Webb, who traveled by steamboat from Baltimore in 1937 to perform on the small second floor stage. In 1950, five remaining women sold the property to the Centennial Beneficial Association, a group that had been meeting there and who performed a similar function in the black community. The property changed hands several more times, until 1985, when a real estate developer bought up most of the properties in Scotts Point and evicted all of the tenants. The Chestertown Historic District Commission initiated Demolition by Neglect proceedings against the developer in order to force action on the property, which had fallen into severe disrepair. A local non-profit group, Preservation Incorporated, purchased the property in 2002 and is in the process of restoring the building.

As one of two surviving African American Civil War veterans' lodges in the United States, the Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic is significant in a national context.

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### Major Bibliographical References:

Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System. National Park Service. Available at <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/index.html>.

Gannon, Barbara. "Colored Comrades": African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic and the Construction of Interracial Veteranhood. Presented at the Southern Historical Society's National Meeting, Nov. 1999.

Goodheart, Adam. Homage to Black Union Heroes: A Md. town reclaims the nation's last standing veteran hall. *Preservation Magazine*, March/April 2003. Pp. 7-10.

The Grand Army of the Republic and Kindred Societies. Library of Congress. Available at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/gar/garhome.html>.

Guy, Chris. Building houses legacy of black veterans. *Baltimore Sun*, November 26, 2001.

Hill, Michael. Memorial Day from Civil War to 9-11. *Baltimore Sun*, May 26, 2002.

Mills, Eric. Chesapeake Bay in the Civil War. Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers 1996.

Kent County News, Chestertown Transcript and Chestertown Enterprise newspapers.

Maryland's African American Architectural Resources. Charles Sumner Lodge. Available at <http://www.udel.edu/CHAD/MD-Afro/ChsSumner.html>

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Available at <http://www.suvcw.org/>.

United States Colored Troops Institute. Hartwick College. Available at <http://info.hartwick.edu/usct/usct.htm>.

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### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .052 acres

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8 Zone	4 0 7 9 0 2 Easting	4 3 4 0 2 9 3 Northing	3																
2				4																

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 Cornelis (Kees) de Mooy  
Organization Preservation Incorporated date 8/15/04  
street & number 101 S. Water Street telephone 410-810-7156  
city or town Chestertown state MD zip code 21620

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- 3 A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- 3 A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

- 3 Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items) digital images of exterior and interior

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Preservation Incorporated  
street & number c/o 101 S. Water Street telephone 410-810-7156  
city or town Chestertown state MD zip code 21620

**Paperwork Reduction 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.

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### Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property, 0.052 acre, is recorded among the land records of Kent County, Maryland in Liber E.H.P. 210/297. A plat and property survey are appended to this nomination.

### Boundary Justification:

The nominated property encompasses the single town lot historically associated with the resource.