

5900 Damascus rd

PRELIM

8005

Israel Griffith House, 23/05

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

<b>Address:</b>	5900 Damascus Rd, Etchison	<b>Meeting Date:</b>	1/25/2006
<b>Resource:</b>	<i>Master Plan</i> Site #23/05 Conrad Royer House	<b>Report Date:</b>	1/18/2006
<b>Applicant:</b>	Randall Stabler (Tom Taltavull, Architect)	<b>Public Notice:</b>	1/11/2006
<b>Review:</b>	Preliminary Consultation	<b>Tax Credit:</b>	Partial
<b>Case Number:</b>	N/A	<b>Staff:</b>	Tania Tully

**PROPOSAL:** new garage, additions and alterations

**RECOMMENDATION:** Proceed to HAWP

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff is generally supportive of the proposal. However, there are a number of suggestions – as listed below – that should be incorporated into any final HAWP application.

- A) If the asphalt shingle siding is removed, the original siding should be restored and painted rather than re-covered with artificial siding.
- B) The rear addition should be inset from the end of the existing “L.”
- C) Refine the details of the rear porch enclosure so that it will have more porch characteristics.
- D) Eliminate the arched window from the front of the bedroom addition.
- E) Illustrate the impact of the bedroom wing on the historic house physically and visually.
- F) Removed the breezeway.
- G) Provided additional information regarding the outbuildings.

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

**SIGNIFICANCE:** *Master Plan* Site #23/05  
**STYLE:** Folk Victorian  
**DATE:** 1880

Built in 1880 to replace one constructed in 1869 and subsequently burned, this frame dwelling is a fine example of a traditional house outfitted in Victorian era dressing. For its time period, the house has up-to-date Gothic Revival features: center cross gable, cutwork porch brackets, and corbelled chimneys. Yet traditional Greek Revival characteristics persist in cornice gable returns, doorway transom and sidelights, and low horizontal massing that are more typical of the pre-Civil War era. Although not in the best of condition due to its recent vacancy, these architectural features remain. The only changes to the house have been the enclosure of the rear porch, installation of the asphalt siding, and replacement of a small gable window.

As seen in Circle 26 the house and associated outbuildings sit quite far from the road on the approximately 86 acres of land. Adjacent properties are also farmed by the applicant and others, including the **Samuel O. Dorsey House**, *Master Plan Site #23/06*. At the time of designation in 1988, the environmental setting of Conrad Royer House included a frame meat house, frame corncrib, and board and batten shed. A few large deciduous trees frame the house.

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

### “Wheat Farming And Mid-Atlantic Building Traditions”\*

The character of the landscape began to change dramatically as grain-producing farming began to replace tobacco plantations. By the late 1700s, Montgomery County population was changing. A wave of migrants from Pennsylvania traveled south in search of less densely settled, cheaper land and many settled in Montgomery County. In contrast to tobacco planters, who were dependent on slave labor and one staple crop, Mid-Atlantic farmers introduced Germanic-influenced farming practices. These new settlers established family-operated farms with diversified crops and livestock, and large multi-purpose barns.

The development of the Frederick area directly affected Montgomery County. When developer Daniel Dulany laid out the town of Frederick in 1745, he offered low-priced land to Germans, Swiss-Germans, and Scotch-Irish. The area became the fastest growing in Maryland, and by 1750 Frederick was the largest town in the state. Succeeding generations of millers, blacksmiths, farmers, and merchants from Frederick County moved to Montgomery County, joining migrants from Pennsylvania who had already settled there.

Migrants from the north brought new building types and settlement patterns that had a dramatic impact on Montgomery County’s landscape. Large barns designed to hold diverse livestock, hay, and grain overshadowed dwellings. Residents built houses and outbuildings into hillsides. Northerners platted villages that provided commercial services to support farmers.

In addition to barns, houses and other structures were often built into hillsides, reflecting Mid-Atlantic building traditions. Typical were side-gable 2½-story structures with an exposed basement that, in houses, often contained a kitchen. Another Germanic house type, known as the Pennsylvania Farmhouse, is well represented in Montgomery County. These dwellings have two adjacent front doors usually centered on the front facade and found primarily on houses without a central hallway. Doors allowed direct access to a public meeting room and a private family room.

Pennsylvania influence may also be seen in several of the county’s early communities. A linear town plan known as the Pennsylvania Town extends into villages in Maryland’s piedmont region. In contrast to crossroads communities, the Pennsylvania plan is concentrated on one main road. Densely concentrated buildings are constructed close to the road with alleys located in back. Unlike most town plans of this town, which were English-influenced gridiron plans established by public officials, the plans of these two communities were linear and the work of private landowners.

With the wave of people from the Mid-Atlantic region came a shift from tobacco farming to grain farming. In the mid-19th century, 78% of Poolesville area farms grew wheat as their principal crop, while 22% grew tobacco. Only three percent of farmers in the eastern part of the county grew tobacco. The increase in wheat production through the early 1800s coincides with construction of bank barns and gristmills. By 1783, there were about 25 mills in the county. By about 1810, there were some 50 mills, of which some 38 were merchant and gristmills. Wheat continued to be a principal crop into the 20th century. More wheat was grown in central Maryland than anywhere else in the United States, outside of Kansas and South Dakota.

Traditional Mid-Atlantic farming practices and agricultural reform dramatically improved soil conditions in the county. The practice of one-crop tobacco farming had depleted nutrients from the soil throughout Montgomery County by the 1790s. The worn-out soil forced many farmers to move westward in search of better farmland. Others began to improve the land through crop rotation, diversified crops, and mechanization. Leading the reform

were Thomas Moore (1762-1822) of Longwood and Isaac Briggs (1763-1825) of Sharon, who were brothers-in-law, engineers, and Sandy Spring Quakers. Acquaintances of Thomas Jefferson who shared his enthusiasm for inventiveness and reform, the duo created, in 1799, the Sandy Spring Farmers' Society. Two years later, Moore published a guidebook instructing farmers on improved agricultural practices. In 1803, Briggs and James Madison founded the American Board of Agriculture, forerunner of the Department of Agriculture. In the Board's first slate of officers Briggs was secretary and Madison president.

Farming reformers promoted crop rotation, fertilization, and improved machinery, such as threshing machines and moldboard plows. Most farmers were slow to adopt improved farming methods, due in large part to prohibitive costs. Transportation improvements in the early 1800s, including turnpikes and the canal, helped in the economic distribution of fertilizer, as did the appearance, in 1847, of chemical fertilizer to replace expensive Peruvian guano. Farmers founded the Montgomery County Agricultural Society in 1846 and organized a county fair to exhibit new livestock breeds and farm machinery. Later in the century, a greater segment of the population benefited from the railroad for making transportation of fertilizer cheaper and for opening up the Washington market.

Conrad Royer, a wheat farmer, purchased 183 acres in 1879 from the heirs of Israel Griffith. Royer built the house after the Israel Griffith House was destroyed by fire. According to family history, Royer owned the first wheat-threshing machine in Montgomery County. The farm remained in the family for nearly a century.

\* Excerpted from *Places from the Past: The Tradition of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County, Maryland*, published by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

## **PROPOSAL:**

See Circle 8 for a written description by the architect.

1. Restore the farmhouse (Photos Circles 24 & 25)
  - a. Replace metal roof in-kind
  - b. Replace metal half-round gutters in-kind
  - c. Preserve existing wood fascia, rake and soffits
  - d. Repair and repoint chimneys
  - e. Remove existing non-historic asphalt shingle siding, keeping original (possibly Chestnut) siding intact
  - f. Recover the original siding with vinyl siding
  - g. Rehabilitate the stone foundation after removing the parging
2. Construct new additions (Drawings 11-23)
  - a. Rear a 1-story family room addition and screened porch.
  - b. 1-story mudroom addition on the east side of the enclosed porch.
  - c. 1-½ story 2-car semidetached garage with guest suite
  - d. 1-story bedroom suite addition on the west side of the house.
3. Restore and re-enclose the rear-enclosed porch with glass to better convey the appearance of a porch. (Circle 17)
4. Relocate 1 or more outbuildings
5. New construction materials
  - a. Metal roofing
  - b. Fiber cement siding and trim
  - c. Parged concrete foundation
  - d. Half-round metal gutters
  - e. Vinyl clad wood windows and doors with simulated divide lites