

6. Function or Use

HA-1074

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single DwellingAGRICULTURE/Agricultural FieldDOMESTIC/Secondary StructureAGRICULTURE/Animal Facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single DwellingAGRICULTURE/Agricultural FieldDOMESTIC/Secondary StructureAGRICULTURE/Animal Facility**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stonewalls Weatherboardroof Slateother Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

Mount Adams is a 114-acre working farm in south-central Harford County, Maryland, approximately 5 miles southeast of the county seat, Bel Air. The farm is centered around a large, multi-sectioned, 2½-story frame house built in 1817 on a hillock by War of 1812 hero, Captain John Adams Webster, for himself and his large family and has remained largely untouched since his death in 1877. Placed around the main house is a largely undisturbed collection of free-standing outbuildings representing the sort one associates with grain-farming activities in this part of Maryland; four date to Webster's era and are considered contributing; these include a stone bank barn, a stone and stucco dairy, a stone and stucco privy as well as a family cemetery; also on the property (but post-dating Webster) are a corn crib, carriage shed, and a tenant house (all frame). The farm's gently rolling acres are bisected by a small tributary of Bynum Run (which, in turn, flows into the tidal Bush River); they are also more or less equally divided between field and woodland.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Mount Adams is a working farm in south-central Harford County, Maryland located roughly 5 miles southeast of the county seat, Bel Air. The property contains 5 contributing structures and 3 noncontributing. Also on the property is a family cemetery.

MAIN HOUSE

The main house at Mount Adams is a multi-sectioned frame dwelling begun in 1817 by War of 1812 hero, Captain John Adams Webster. It has been continuously owned by his descendants. Three of Webster's grown children spent their lives at Mount Adams and the house is a fascinating example of how the resulting demands for semi-independent living spaces were met. The entire house has remained virtually untouched since Webster died in 1877.

The oldest section is a 2½-story, 4-bay, gable-roofed frame house with a smaller-scale 2½-story ell to the rear; this latter unit contains the narrow winder stair and kitchen. The house faces south and the main gable roof runs east-west. There are 2 rooms per floor in the main section with an interior chimney at the east end and an exterior chimney at the west end. Each ground floor room has a window and a door on the main facade; together they read WDDW; upstairs they read DWDW. Doors are raised 6-panel on both sides; windows are 6/6 double hung sash. Interior walls are plaster; interior woodwork (mantelpieces, beaded chair rails, beaded basesboards, 6-panel doors) appears to be entirely original and in place. It is generally of a restrained Federal style appropriate to this conservative part of the state. Exceptions are the mantels, which are surprisingly elaborate: each has pairs of delicate colonnettes supporting an entablature whose attenuated members have vague Adamesque overtones; the center panels sport delicately gouged diamond shapes; all in all they are extremely high-style touches for the house's time and place. The stair has simple (and later, seemingly mid-19th century) newel post and beaded baseboard (seemingly original). The kitchen has a massive exposed stone fireplace in the north wall.

The parlor (the eastern ground floor room) has two 6/6 windows on the east wall. They are regularly placed and flank the chimney. The dining room--reached from the parlor by original double doors--has a door to the north of its fireplace. That door leads to the house's main addition built by Webster c.1850 to accommodate his large and growing family. (There were 13 children and Webster's obituary in the Baltimore Sun noted that at his death 2 adult sons and a grown, maiden daughter lived at Mount Adams. Their needs for independence doubtless determined much of the house's configuration.) Probably dating from c.1850 (based on stylistic similarities between it and other dated houses in the area) the addition is a 2½-story, cross-gable

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independent unit, slightly taller than the older section. It contains a study on the ground floor off of the old house's dining room; like the other ground floor rooms, the study still retains its original trim; the mantel, especially, is a fine example of "county" Greek Revival with a bold mantel shelf and thick, unfluted columns. A prominent, 2-tier, flat-roofed restrained Greek Revival wooden porch dates from about the time of this addition (i.e., c.1850) and spans the entire main facade of both sections. In addition to the usual functions of providing shade (the main facade faces south) and extra living space in warm weather, it does much to unify the otherwise rambling house in that it minimizes the irregular roofline and hides the unusual bay rhythm of (from west to east) WDWDDW on the ground floor and WDDWDW above.

There are two further, smaller additions to the rear (north); both have shed roofs; one is two-stories and is off the western or cross-gable section; the other, one-story, is off the old kitchen.

Evidence that Webster built the entire sprawling and seemingly disjointed house comes from the very organized Estate Inventory made on his death in 1877.¹ Moving deliberately and systematically the appraisers began with the servants' rooms in the attic; they then went down to the second floor and noted the contents of the three front bedrooms, still the three principal bedrooms today (two are in the oldest section; one is over the study in the cross-gable addition). The addition also contained two "back" bedrooms as well as, on the ground floor and behind the study, a separate second parlor and chamber, which certainly suggests that the three grown children (one son was a doctor, another ran the farm; the unmarried daughter presumably served as mistress of the entire house) had carved out their own independent living spaces for themselves. Webster kept for his own use the two ground floor rooms in the old section, i.e., the dining room and front parlor (which the appraisers called sitting room), as well as the present kitchen and study (called by that name in 1877).

BARN: mid-19th century. The rubble stone bank barn is located about 100 yards northwest of the main house. Built, as it was, into a knoll, it reads as one story on the east facade and two stories on the west. It is two large bays wide.

¹Estate Inventory of John Adams Webster; Harford County Orphan's Court.

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MILKHOUSE (DAIRY): mid-19th century. The stuccoed, rubblestone structure is located 15 yards east of the kitchen. Square in plan, the one-story dairy is topped by a slate hip roof which overhangs the walls on all sides, most prominently on the front (west).

PRIVY: mid-19th century. The stuccoed rubblestone structure is located 15 yards north of the kitchen. The small building, in poor condition, has a wooden, single-pitch roof.

CEMETERY

NONCONTRIBUTING:

TENANT HOUSE: Late 19th century. Two-story, three-bay gable roofed frame dwelling with a small one-story kitchen to the rear. It is covered with unpainted cedar shakes, now weathered almost black in color. Like the two structures below, it contributes to the smooth running of the farming that still goes on at Mount Adams, but, because it probably post-dates Webster, it must be called noncontributing to the farm's historic context.

CORNCRIB: mid-20th century frame, gable-roofed structure with vented sides.

WAGON SHED: Early 20th century. One-story, shed-roofed frame structure, two large bays wide.

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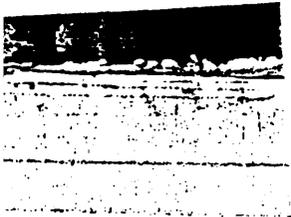
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resource sketch and photograph map

1988



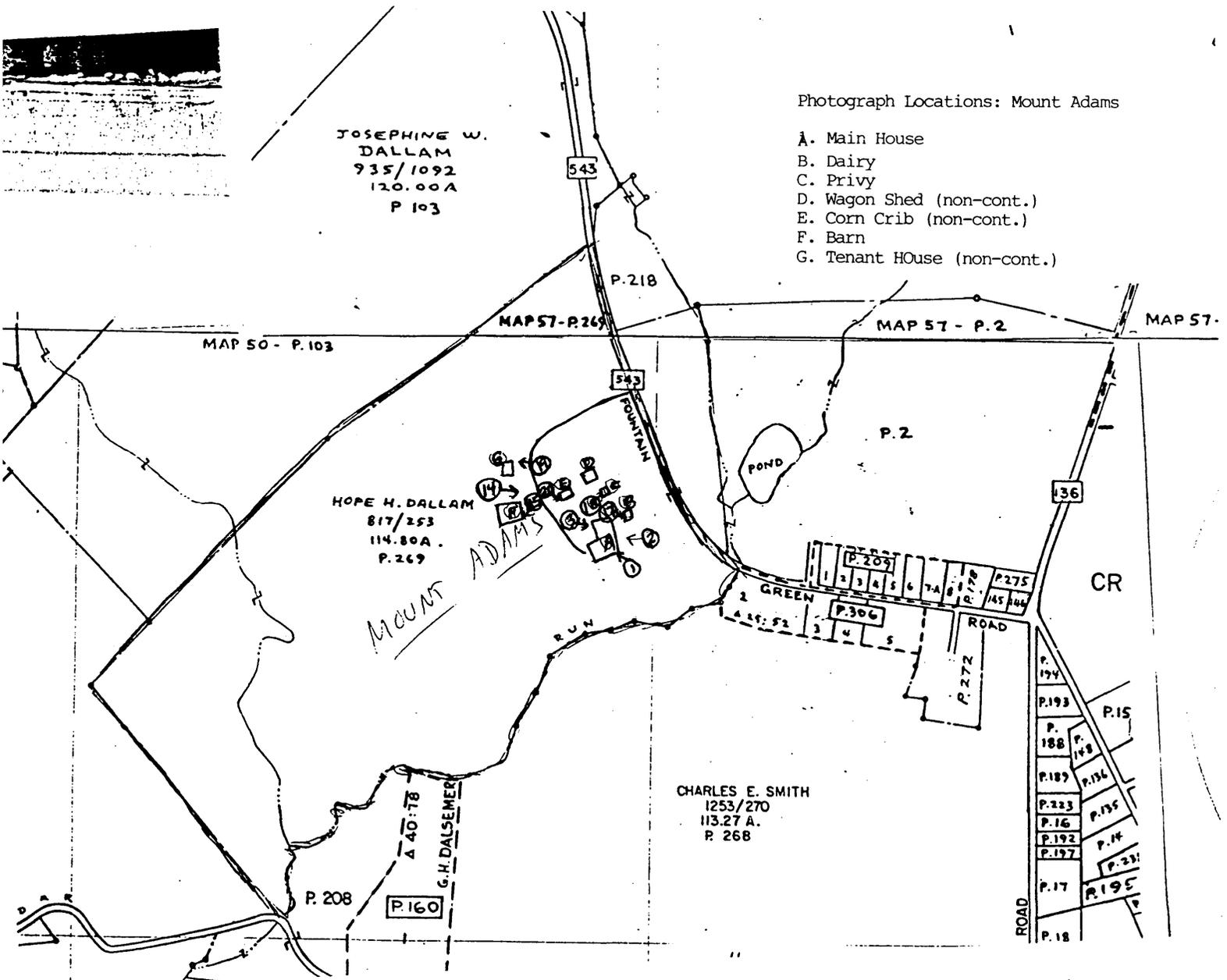
JOSEPHINE W.
DALLAM
935/1092
120.00A
P 103

HOPE H. DALLAM
817/253
114.80A.
P. 269

CHARLES E. SMITH
1253/270
113.27 A.
P. 268

Photograph Locations: Mount Adams

- A. Main House
- B. Dairy
- C. Privy
- D. Wagon Shed (non-cont.)
- E. Corn Crib (non-cont.)
- F. Barn
- G. Tenant House (non-cont.)



See Continuation Sheet 7/5

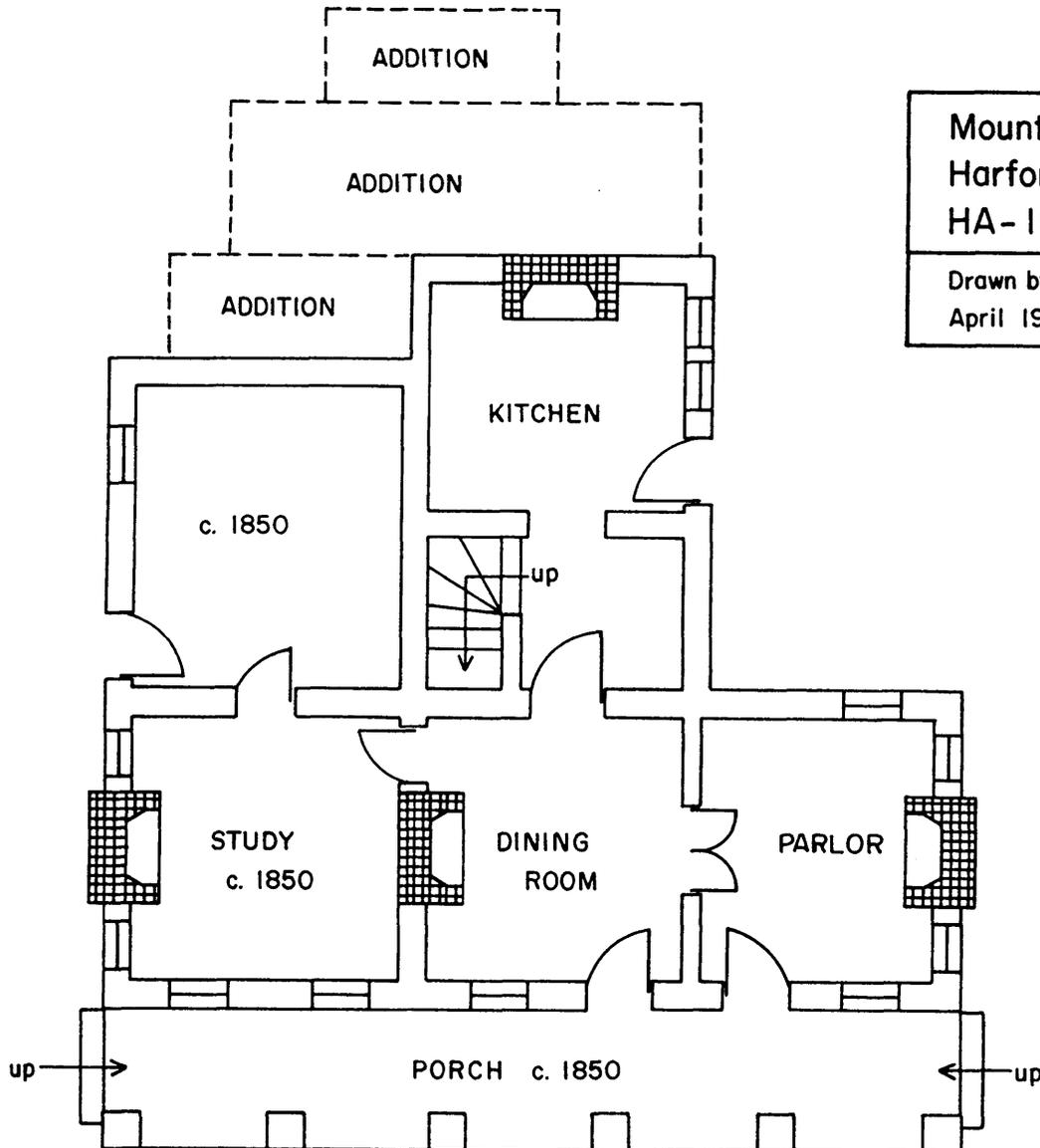
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first floor plan, 1988



Mount Adams
Harford County, Maryland
HA-1074

Drawn by: C.L. Smith
April 1988 Not to Scale

8. Statement of Significance

HA-1074

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Military

Period of Significance
c.1817-1877

Significant Dates
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
Webster, Capt. John Adams

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The significance of Mount Adams derives primarily from its builder and resident for 50 years, Capt. John Adams Webster. His family had owned these acres, originally part of the patent Broom's Bloom since the early 18th century, and he was born on the farm in 1789.² He began his naval career in 1803 and rose to prominence in the War of 1812; the Baltimore Sun, in its sesquicentennial issue on the siege of Fort McHenry, called Webster the "Neglected Hero of Ft. McHenry" and explained this by noting "without whose alertness and prompt action at a critical stage of the battle, Fort McHenry and Baltimore itself might well have fallen to the British."³ He received a commemorative sword from the City of Baltimore in 1816 for his "gallant defense". (Both are now on display at the Maryland Historical Society.) Webster continued his seafaring life after the war: in 1816 President Madison appointed him a sailing master in the U.S. Navy, and in 1819 President Monroe issued him a commission as captain in the revenue service where he was in charge of several cutters.⁴ During the Mexican War he was detailed to control the operations of the revenue vessels employed in the Gulf of Mexico and he and his fleet of 8 cutters saw action in the Rio Grande and Vera Cruz campaigns. The house's historic context began with Webster's building the place in 1817, and ends with his death, at the house, in 1877, at which time he was "the senior captain in the service."⁵ Mount Adams, which has remained virtually unchanged since Webster's death and has been continuously owned by his descendants, is also notable for its architecture. Conservative Harford County--"where few houses were built in any recognizable style"⁶--is notable for its general lack of high-style architecture. Webster's travels exposed him to more cultural influences than his fellow-countains generally experienced and the details at Mount Adams--mantels particularly--cover two stylistic eras, from the delicate Federal/Adamesque trim in the 1817 section to the heavier Greek Revival c.1850 additions.

See continuation sheet for HISTORIC CONTEXT and MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

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 # HABS MD-13-Cres.v., 1-1, 1-2
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet No. 9/1

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Preparer _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 114.8 acres
USGS Quad - Bel Air, MD

UTM References

A

1	8
3	9
0	1
4	0

4	3
7	4
1	4
0	0

C

1	8
3	8
9	6
4	0

4	3
4	3
2	2
0	0

B

1	8
3	9
0	3
5	0

4	3
7	3
7	6
0	0

D

1	8
3	8
9	3
5	0

4	3
7	3
6	0
0	0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet No. 10/1

Boundary Justification

These were the boundaries during Webster's occupancy and have remained the boundaries ever since.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christopher Weeks, Preservation Planner
organization Harford County Dept. of Planning & Zoning date December, 1987
street & number 220 S. Main Street telephone (301)879-2000, ext. 207
city or town Bel Air state Maryland zip code 21014

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HISTORIC CONTEXT

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Piedmont

Chronological/Developmental Period(s): Agricultural Industrial Transition
A.D. 1815-1870
Industrial Urban Dominance
A.D. 1870-1930

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s):
Architecture/Landscape Architecture/Community Planning - Military

Resource Type

Category: Buildings
Historic Environment: Rural
Historic Function(s) and Use(s): DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling
AGRICULTURE/Agricultural Field
DOMESTIC/Secondary Structure
AGRICULTURE/Animal Facility

Known Design Source: Unknown

²Portrait and Biographical Record of Harford and Cecil Counties, (New York and Chicago: Chapman Publishing Co., 1897), p. 167.

³Harold Manakee, "Neglected Hero of Fort McHenry", in Baltimore Sunday Sun Magazine, August 30, 1964.

⁴C. Milton Wright, Our Harford Heritage, (Bel Air: 1967), pp. 425-426.

⁵Webster obituary in the Baltimore Sun (?).

⁶National Register Nomination for Liriodendron.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT:

The historic significance of Mount Adams is completely tied to that of the house's builder, Captain John Adams Webster. Webster played a major role in saving Baltimore from the British in the War of 1812; famous and honored in his lifetime, he is now largely forgotten, and, indeed, the Baltimore Sunday Sun once ran an article on him entitled the "Neglected Hero of Fort McHenry".

The Webster family was already well established in Harford County, Maryland, by the time John Adams Webster was born here in 1789. Four Webster brothers came to America from England in the late 17th century; Michael (whose descendants included Daniel) settled in New England, John in Virginia (where he was known as "John of Roanoke"), and Isaac and another John in Maryland.⁷ The Maryland John (1667-1753) grew wealthy as a planter in what is now Harford County, and patented and built Webster's Forest (National Register). One son, Samuel (1710-1786) found work in the area as a tobacco inspector at the port of Joppa, the county seat, but the most prominent Webster of the next generation was undoubtedly Samuel's brother, Isaac (b.1730). Isaac bought and patented several large tracts of land comprising over 1900 acres in all, mostly in the Webster's Forest area. In 1765 he acquired the Bush River Iron Works nearby. Webster served on the War Committee (1775) for the Spesutia Upper Hundred in Harford County, having earlier (1774) been a part of the "committee of correspondence" which resulted in the Bush Resolution of 1774. His youngest son, Samuel, married Margaret Adams (a near relation of John Adams) and inherited Brooms' Bloom, one of Isaac's many farms. Their son, John Adams Webster, was born at Broom's Bloom on September 19, 1789.

Young Webster spent virtually his entire life as a seafaring man serving the interests of the United States. He entered the navy in 1803 (age 14); when war broke out in 1812 Commodore Joshua Barney appointed him a lieutenant on the privateer Rosseau⁹ (also spelled Rossie¹⁰). Webster spent most of the war in his native area, serving under Barney and sailing the streams and

⁷Walter W. Preston, History of Harford County, (Baltimore: Sun Book Office, 1901), p. 33.

⁸Wright, Heritage, p. 65.

⁹Wright, Heritage, p. 65.

¹⁰Preston, Harford, p. 310.

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rivers that feed the Chesapeake. "In 1813, when Barney was given a flotilla of gunboats to resist British deprecations on the Chesapeake Bay, he obtained for Webster a warrant as sailing master¹¹", and placed him in command of the flotilla of vessels guarding Baltimore.

In August of 1814, as the British moved on Washington, Webster led his sailors to Bladensburg, where they served as artillerymen in the battle there on August 24. (Webster began the battle on horseback, but the animal was shot out from under him. The state of Maryland later paid him \$300 for the lost steed.) In 1964, to mark the susquecentennial of the battle at Fort McHenry, the Baltimore Sunday Sun devoted its magazine to events of that day (and night). Harold Manakee wrote a piece for the magazine on Webster entitled "Neglected Hero of Fort McHenry". In it Manakee noted that the Battle of Bladensburg "was a farce in which Barney's men were among the few who behaved like soldiers. In the panic which followed, Webster distinguished himself by saving several cannon and hauling them to Montgomery Court House, now Rockville. They were the only guns salvaged from the disaster¹²".

Barney was captured at Bladensburg, but Webster was able to get his troops back to Baltimore to wait for the British attack. General Samuel Smith, overall commander of the American forces, assigned him to the command of a six-gun battery on the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River, just west of Fort McHenry. This battery and Fort Covington (farther west) were set up to prevent the British from landing behind the fort. Manakee continues:

When at daybreak on September 13 the British opened their bombardment of Fort McHenry, the six-gun battery was completely out of range. Webster and his men could do little except remain alert. About 11 p.m., despite a pouring rain and unseasonable cold, Webster made his rounds and ordered his guns double shotted with 18 pound balls and grapeshot. Then he wrapped himself in a blanket and stretched on the breastwork to rest.

About midnight, however, he was all attention. Above the steady beat of the rain he could hear the sound of muffled oars, splashing in the river. He roused his men and soon, not more than 200 yards off shore, they could see tiny gleaming lights. The British were trying to land in the rear of Fort McHenry.

¹¹Manakee, "Neglected".

¹²Manakee, "Neglected".

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Webster acted with cool deliberation. Successively he mounted each of his six guns and, shielding their vents from the rain with his body, examined their primings. Carefully he aimed each gun himself. Then, "Fire", he commanded.

Sounds of shot crashing through wood and cries of wounded men came from the river....Fort Covington's guns opened, and within minutes every American cannon within range was in action...(H)ouses in Baltimore 4 miles distant trembled on their foundations. Finally, the British withdrew.

Webster, meanwhile, had been more than busy. At the height of the exchange of fire he discovered one of his seamen, a deserter from the British navy, laying a train of gunpowder to the battery magazine. "Without thought", the sailing master later reported, "I laid him out for dead with a hand spike". In this encounter Webster may have been injured: some time during the bombardment, anyway, he suffered a broken shoulder.¹³

In 1816 Webster married Rachel Biays and then began the house called Mount Adams, an obvious bow to his mother's venerable New England ancestry. Mount Adams's farmland--then and now 114 acres--was carved out of the Webster family's ancient Broom's Bloom tract. Webster also continued his maritime career along the same distinguished--if less dramatic--lines described above. Also in 1816, a committee made up of such Baltimore luminaries as John Eager Howard, Robert Gilmore, Jr., Isaac McKim, and Fielding Lucas sent Webster a proclamation reading, in part,

May 11, 1816. To John A. Webster, late of the Chesapeake Flotilla. Sir, the citizens of Baltimore, with the most lively sentiments of gratitude to you and the brave men under your command during the attack of the British on this city...present you some testimony of it for your gallant and successful defense of the six-gun battery.

The committee...have sincere pleasure in now presenting you with a sword bearing an inscription commemorative of the event for which it is presented, and beg your acceptance of it in the name of the citizens of Baltimore.

¹³Manakee, "Neglected".

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In common with our fellow-citizens, we have great pleasure in the remembrance of your gallant conduct and hope it will have a happy influence on others similarly situated to follow so excellent an example.

The committee tender you assurances of their highest personal regard, and of their best wishes for your health and happiness.¹⁴

The sword is inscribed, "Presented by a number of citizens of Baltimore to Lieut. John Adams Webster, of the United States Chesapeake flotilla, for his gallant defense of the six-gun battery during the attack on that city by a large british force on the 13th and 14th of September 1814".

Much later, the state government decided to honor Webster and in 1835 the General Assembly ordered a second sword. The files of the Historical Society of Harford County contain an undated clipping from an unspecified Philadelphia newspaper. The clipping notes "some time ago, Mr. Fletcher of this city [Philadelphia] received an order from the Legislature of Maryland for the making of a sword, which is to be presented to Capt. Webster of the U.S. Revenue Service. It is a beautiful affair, and the inscription upon its blade is explicit enough to express the object for which it is intended". The inscription reads, "Presented by the State of Maryland to Capt. John A. Webster for his gallant defense of the battery committed to his charge during the memorable attack against the city of Baltimore, September 14, 1814--filio forti et fideli, John Adams Webster, Maryland dedit".¹⁵

The clipping goes on to describe the sword as being "in the form of a cross, being the shape of those worn by the Crusaders in the time of Richard the Second. The hilt and scabbard mountings are of solid gold, highly ornamented with emblems and devices. The sword cost \$400, and is said to be one of the richest and most tasteful ever produced in this country. Mr. Fletcher has long been known as an artisan of superior genius and mechanical skill and the State of Maryland could not have trusted their commission to better hands."¹⁶ This obviously marvelous sword is the outward and visible sign of the very high regard Webster was given by his contemporaries and makes Manakee's description of him as "the neglected hero" all the more

¹⁴Clipping (A) in the files of the Historical Society of Harford County.

¹⁵Clipping (B) in the files of the Historical Society of Harford County.

¹⁶Clipping (B).

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telling. Both swords are now on display at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, and "along with the six cannon mounted on cement blocks in Riverside Park, they are the city's only memorabilia of a forgotten hero".¹⁷

Webster continued to serve his country, achieving much distinction. He spent a quiet year at Mount Adams, recovering from a fever and a second broken shoulder, but in 1817 President Madison appointed him a sailing master in the U.S. Navy, and in 1819 President Monroe made him a captain in the Revenue Service; here he controlled several cutters.¹⁸

Another random clipping notes "Captain Webster was for a long time commander of the U.S. Cutter Taney, of this station, where he gained for himself a number of warm friends by his gentlemanly and officer-like deportment. He is now commander of the cutter Ewing on the New York station". Yet another, entitled "A Marylander on the Spot", reports "Capt. John Adams Webster, of the U.S.S. Revenue Service, arrived at New Orleans on the 7th instant. He was to take charge of the vessels in the Revenue Service, which are to concentrate on the coast of Mexico and Texas. Capt. Webster is well known in this city as a gallant Marylander, a native of Harford County, and one of the brave defenders of Baltimore in 1814."¹⁹

That last clipping may well date from the 1840's, for on May 19, 1946, Webster was detailed to control the operations of revenue vessels in the Gulf during the Mexican War. He and his fleet of 8 cutters saw action at the battles of Rio Grande and Vera Cruz--he was well into his fifties!

He retired back to Mount Adams in 1865, where he died 12 years later. The Baltimore Sun obituary of Webster, entitled "Honor to a Maryland Soldier"; noted:

In Baltimore City the flags of the city hall, custom house, United States revenue cutters Ewing, Guthrie, and Search were half-masted. Colonel George P. Kane wrote to Gen. Wm. F. Barry, commanding Fort McHenry, notifying him of the death of Capt. Webster, which elicited the following reply:

¹⁷Manatee, "Neglected".

¹⁸Wright, Heritage, p. 425.

¹⁹Random clippings in the Historical Society of Harford County

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Headquarters, Fort McHenry, July 6,
1877.--Col. Geo. P. Kane, Baltimore--Dear Sir:
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of
your note of to-day. The military service of the
late Capt. Webster in aid of Fort McHenry and in
the defense of Baltimore in 1814 was certainly
of the highest importance and should be appreci-
ated by every patriotic American. I will cause
the flag of this fort to be half-masted and
minute guns to be fired at noon to-morrow, the
hour which you state has been appointed for
Capt. Webster's interment...." The flag of the
fort was consequently placed at half-mast and the
minute guns were fired as ordered.²⁰

Significant as Captain Webster's naval career was, his house, Mount Adams, is also important architecturally. Conservative Harford County has few examples of avant-garde high-style architecture--"few buildings of any discernible style" according to one National Register nomination. What few stylish structures exist are usually a bit retarditaire, built long after the particular style had flourished in more architecturally up-to-date regions. Thus it is significant to note that Webster gave Mount Adams elegant touches of Federal/Adamesque designs in the main rooms' 1817 mantels (and other woodwork), and, later, a good Greek Revival mantel and two-tier porch, both of which date from c.1850, when Hellenistic-inspired architecture was still comparatively new in America.

Moreover, the house's rambling configuration is an interesting response to the family's rather special social and spatial needs. As Webster's Sun obituary noted, at his death two sons, Dr. J. Biays Webster and William S. Webster, and a daughter, Susie A. Webster, were living at Mount Adams. Biays Webster had been born in 1828, "Susie" (Susan Ann) in 1830, and William in 1838. Biays was an M.D., William, after 1856, "commenced to assist his father on the farm" and Susan presumably would have desired some independence of movement as well, and the house's abundant doors to the outside and their seemingly perplexing placement is explained (see Description). This theory is supported by the Estate Inventory made on Webster's death, which listed a set of bedrooms (for the "children") clustered about a parlor, all separate and distinct from the senior Adams quarters. Interestingly this arrangement

²⁰Adams obituary.

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has been carried on into the 20th century and the house still functions as three separate apartments.

After Captain Webster's death (his wife predeceased him in 1869) William Webster "carried on the home farm until 1886, when he went to Colorado and there engaged in ranching for a few years". He married in 1889 and in "October 1892 he returned to Harford County and has since [1897] remained on the old homestead".²¹ Biays Webster continued to practice medicine until he died at Mount Adams in 1890; Susan--who presumably kept house for her brothers--died in 1895. One of their sisters, Josephine (b.1823) had married Dr. William Dallam and in 1913 the executors of Susan Webster transferred title to Mount Adams to E. Pleasants Dallam, Laura A. Dallam, Margaret A. Dallam, and Mr. and Mrs. William Dallam II. It is still owned by the Dallam family.

²¹Portrait and Biographical, p. 168.

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C. Milton Wright, Our Harford Heritage, (Bel Air, 1967).

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boundary map, 1988

