

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED AUG 9 1978
DATE ENTERED JAN 24 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

NAME

HISTORIC

LAGRANGE; Ricarton; Phillip's Discovery; Woolford's Regulation

AND/OR COMMON

(Meredith House;) Dorchester County Historical Society Headquarters

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

904 LaGrange Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Maryland

CODE

24

COUNTY

Dorchester

CODE

019

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER

Headquarters
Hist. Soc.

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Dorchester County Historical Society, c/o Dr. M. Fred Tidwell, President

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 361

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

VICINITY OF

STATE

Maryland

21613

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Dorchester County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

206 High Street

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Maryland

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION



CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Meredith House or LaGrange is located at 904 LaGrange Avenue, approximately 125 yards south of the bank of the Choptank River, Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland. Built circa 1760 the house is one of the few remaining Georgian houses in Cambridge. Three bays wide and two deep it measures 2½ stories in height. Additions, notably sunporches and a frame wing, were added during the late nineteenth century.

The walls of the main block are laid in Flemish bond. The house sits on a water table, the first course of which is accentuated by brick laid in all header bond. A thin belt course, two bricks thick, separates the first and second floors on the front (south) and rear (north) facades. A simple carved bracket cornice with returns crowns both these facades. The bracket cornice, extending past the plane of the side facade, also extends on the side of the building along the roof line. A thin belt course is also located on the east and west facades, stretching over each lintel from one cornice return to the other.

Upper and lower windows are aligned within the walls. Although there are now 6-over-6, double-hung sash windows in each window on the front and rear facades, the interrupted brickwork and thickness of surrounds and mullion and muntins suggest these are replacements of the twentieth century. Similar changes have occurred to the second storey and attic windows on both sides of the house. The pedimented lintels which appear on the first floor, front facade window and doors, and on all windows on the east and west facades, appear also to be twentieth century additions. These may have been used to cover holes punched into the brickwork when two large porches were added to the front and rear facades during the late nineteenth century.

Entrances to the main block are located in the second bay on both front and rear facades. Original doors and surrounds for both entrances have been removed. On the front, the four-panel door is flanked by sidelights and covered with a three-pane transom. Each sidelight consists of a 2-over-2 double hung sash window over a single paneled base. Paneled reveals encircle the doorway, which is set back from the plane of the sidelights. A modern store door has been placed over the transom and door. Two modern brick steps, flanked by cast-iron handrails, lead to the doorway. On the rear facade, the interrupted brickwork indicates that sidelights like those seen on the front were removed. The entrance door is now a multi-lighted twentieth century door, capped by a three-light transom. It too has a modern storm door, and is reached by two modern brick steps without handrail.

The gable roof is covered with dark asbestos shingles. Three massive brick chimneys with corbeled caps are placed at the northeast, northwest and southeast corners of the structure. All chimneys have common bond brickwork. Their overall crispness, brick texture and uniformity, tooling of joint and shape suggest they are alterations carried out during the late nineteenth century. Two pedimented dormers, aligned roughly over the first and third bays, are located on both the north and south facades. Each 6-over-6, double-hung sash window is flanked by simple Doric pilasters and capped by a cornice and returns. The sides of each dormer are sheathed in modern clapboard.

See Continuation Sheet 1.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES circa 1760 (altered) BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Woolford

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SIGNIFICANCE

La Grange, now known as the Meredith House, is important as one of only a few houses of the Georgian period remaining in Cambridge. In a 1976 survey of the town four other houses incorporating 18th century fabric were identified and remain today. The exterior of this house is, by far, the least altered. Significant remaining exterior Georgian characteristics include its Flemish bond brickwork with watertable; and five bay facade, the most outstanding feature of which is the extremely tall corner chimney stacks, a design feature found only rarely on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. More importantly though, this 18th century house is significant as an example of a house that has changed through time, with century architectural additions, in and of themselves pleasing and representative of the late Victorian period. An 18th century structure on the property is also in excellent condition and is a rare survival of an important ancillary building type from that period.

LaGrange has also served as the home of a number of prominent Cambridge families and its history is intertwined with the development of Cambridge and Dorchester County from the 18th through the 20th centuries. It is perhaps fitting that the house now, functions as the county's historical society, serving two purposes--its exterior exhibiting the Georgian architecture form now rare in Cambridge, while its 19th century interior serves as a splendid backdrop for the interpretation of remaining pieces of this city and county's important heritage.

HISTORY

The land on which La Grange was constructed dates back to the 17th century. In 1699 the provincial government of Maryland granted land along the Choptank River, three miles wide, extending from the present Cambridge city area to the Warwick River in Secretary, to the Choptank Indians to insure peace and goodwill. In 1686, John Kirke, whose plantation "Ricarton" served as a tobacco trading center until later establishment of the port of Cambridge by Lord Baltimore in 1684, bought an original tract of this land on Shoal Creek, on which Meredith House stands today, from one of the Indian chiefs Ababco for forty two matchcoats (a matchcoat is an outer garment made from a coarse, woolen cloth). Kirke became prominent in the area, in his sense as commissioner for Lord Baltimore, collecting rents for his employer. In 1684, the provisional government purchased one hundred acres and laid out lots on High Street, which later became the center of town. Kirke's political influence and weather grew as reflected in the construction of Cambridge's first house, "The Point", in 1709. When he died in 1733 the 435-acre tract of land bought from the Indians, passed to his daughter, Ann.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Primary Sources: 1) Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland; Dorchester County Probate Records, patents, and rent rolls. 2) Dorchester County Land Records. 3) Dorchester County Historical Society records. 4) Laskowski, F. Arthur, The Laskowski Papers, Vol.1.1. Dorchester County Historical Society, Cambridge, Maryland, 1955. 5) Jones, Elias. New Revised History of Dorchester County Maryland, Cambridge, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1966.

See Continuation #5.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 1/2 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Cambridge

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 407640 4269000

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Deed Ref: Liber 100-100-300, Dorchester Co.
 LaGrange is located on 1 1/2 acres in Cambridge bounded by LaGrange Street (NW) and Maryland Avenue Extended (NE), connected by a straight line running from the eastern terminus of Maryland Avenue Extended to the Corner of LaGrange Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Susan K. Langrall, Committee Chairman / Mark R. Edwards, Historic Sites Survey Coordinator

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Dorchester County Historical Society / Maryland Historical Trust August 13, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

P. O. Box 361/21 State Circle (301) 228-2074 / (301) 269-2438

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Cambridge / Annapolis Maryland 21613 / 21401

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

J. Little

12-18-79

TITLE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Charles O. Stahl

DATE 1-24-80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Emma Drenth

DATE 1/28/80

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

Regional Coordinator

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Meredith House (LaGrange)
Dorchester County

CONTINUATION SHEET Maryland ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

The basement of the house has been greatly altered. Access is gained by a winding stair (twentieth century) and by steps located in the northeast corner leading to a modern bulkhead on the surface. Joists appear to be replacements, based on evidence of circular saw cuts and machine-made nails.

In plan, the building exhibits an altered configuration which has changed more than once from what was most probably the original Georgian central hall, double pile configuration. The present plan consists of four rooms (see floor plan) from the front door, one enters a hall. Doors and windows are set off with late nineteenth century architrave moldings and bulls-eye corner blocks. Here, as in every other room in the main block, modern wood floors have replaced the older, random width pine flooring. In the southeast corner of the room, a stairway rises on two landings and the second floor. The open-string stair exhibits simple brackets, tapering balusters, rounded handrail and bulbous beautifully turned newel post on square base. A door in the southeast corner of the room leads to a bathroom in the twentieth century addition. A door under the staircase leads down a winding stair to the basement below. Two entrances on the north wall lead into the rear parlors. A door on the west leads into a smaller parlor room on the front.

This front parlor also contains moldings identical to those found in the hallway. A late nineteenth century mantel has been built into the southwest corner of the room. What was originally a window on the west wall has been filled in with shelves and now serves as a bookcase.

A smaller parlor, now used as a dining room is located directly behind the entrance hall. Its plaster walls are painted grey. A simple baseboard, painted white, continues around the room and into the second parlor. Windows have paneled reveals and finely detailed architrave trim with corner blocks. A Victorian marble fireplace and mantel shelf are located in the northeast corner of the room, embellished only by a floral bouquet decoration centrally placed below the shelf.

A paneled surround, also with identical moldings and corner blocks used in the above parlor, leads into a second and larger parlor, now used as a living room. Moldings are identical to those in the first parlor. A fireplace, similar in design to the other, but with a flat polygonal decoration below the shelf, is located in the northwest corner.

On the second floor, the floor plan consists of a long hall that runs lengthwise across the front of the building. The first room, located in the northeast corner, shows extensive alterations, such as twentieth century doors, built-in shelves, etc. The second room, located to the northwest, contains simpler late nineteenth century moldings and another Victorian mantel placed at a 45° angle in the far corner of the building. A small modern closet has been added in the southwest corner of this room and hall. A doorway on the west wall of the hall leads into an early twentieth century bathroom.

See Continuation Sheet 2.

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Meredith House (LaGrange)
Dorchester County

CONTINUATION SHEET Maryland ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

From the second floor, the stairway leads to a landing and up a winding stair to the attic. Here, rooms are all early twentieth century, used only for storage.

Circa 1897, a two-storey, gable-roofed, frame addition was built on the east side of the house. It houses a kitchen remodeled in the 1900's on the first floor and bedrooms above. It is clad with clapboard and has a central brick chimney.

On the northeast, the addition is three-bays wide and contains two levels of 6-over-6 double-hung sash windows which are modern replacements. On the southeast facade, the fenestration is similar, with the addition of a small four-pane casement window which lights a bathroom. On its east facade, a modern kitchen window is placed to the left of a modern door, reached by three-brick steps. A small window is centrally placed in the second storey.

Early in the twentieth century, a sunporch and other porches were added to the north, west and south facades of the main block. Between 1897 and 1958, the two major porches were removed. The frame sunporch was retained and now serves as part of the exhibition space in the museum. The porch is placed on a cinderblock foundation and topped by a shed roof. Its north and south facades are pierced by three, 2-over-2 double-hung sash windows. Its western facade has six windows identical to the above, interspersed by carved verticle panels. Doric 3/4 columns mark the northwest and southwest corners.

In 1958, a major renovation of the house took place, resulting in the creation of the caretaker's quarters in the frame wing, sandblasting of the brick main block, and refurbishing the interior rooms, including the addition of new wooden floors.

Three outbuildings are located close to the main house. Ten feet from the northeast corner of the main block is a late nineteenth century dairy, with projecting hip roof, now used as a storage area. An eighteenth century smokehouse, moved from another property in Cambridge, is located thirty feet from the northeast corner of the house. It is noted for its 2" thick oak boards placed horizontally and connected by dovetail joints and pegging and two verticle board doors. It is capped by a shingled hip roof with wooden weathervane. Approximately 75 feet from the southeast corner of the house, a converted twentieth century garage now serves as the farm museum. This building includes farming implements, and 1835 McCormick reaper and a blacksmiths shop.

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LaGrange (Meredith House)
Dorchester County

CONTINUATION SHEET Maryland ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

SIGNIFICANCE, continued

John Woolford purchased part of this tract, renamed "Phillips Discovery," from Ann and her husband, James Phillips, in 1745 for 340 pounds. Between 1760 and 1773, land and probate records indicate that John Woolford improved the 378 acre tract with the construction of a dwelling house of brick, later to be patented "Woolford's Regulation".

Woolford's importance to Cambridge's development is reflected in his holdings at the time of his death in 1773. His numerous land holdings and possessions were sufficient to leave each of his seven children sizeable tracts of land, cash and slaves. Although there is no known inventory of his estate, probably due to the Revolutionary War in progress, which disrupted record keeping, Woolford's will gives some insight into his wealth. It was his son William who inherited the home plantation, but the will stipulated his only daughter, Mary, could "occupy the little room in my dwelling house below the stairs and the little room above the stairs, also the use of that field at the head of the Creek...also the privilege of pasture for two or three horses and cows" until she married. Mary was also left a silver cream pot, mug and several spoons. All the children were left slaves and money in the form of Spanish dollars. In subsequent inventories of Woolford's children, land, slaves, money and livestock figured significantly, indicating his family maintained prosperity and prestige in the community. Elizabeth Muse bought the property in 1846 from the Woolford family and called it LaGrange, meaning "the home of the gentleman farmer" and possibly after the Marquis de Lafayette's home in France. Her husband, Dr. William H. Muse, from an eminent Maryland family, practiced medicine in Dorchester County most of his adult life. He was a descendant of the noted Ennals clan, who boasted such notable kinsmen as Sophia Kerr and a United States senator, the honorable John Leeds Kerr. Besides being land developers, the Muse family were leaders in agricultural methods and scientific farming techniques. Dr. Joseph Ennalls Muse (1776-1852) was one of the founders of the Dorchester County Agricultural Society (1824). The family performed numerous experiments with new crop growth. Although wheat and corn had replaced tobacco as a cash crop, its continual use had seriously damaged the quality of the soil. With their work in fertilizer use and crop change, the Muser family reversed the disastrous decline of Maryland farming prior to the Civil War.

A later owner was A. Hamilton Bayly, grandson of Josiah Bayly, attorney for the notorious slave kidnapper Patty Cannon, and the first Attorney General of Maryland. At this point in the nineteenth century, LaGrange was one of several prominent water front farms in Cambridge. Appleby, the home of Thomas Holliday Hicks, Civil War governor from Dorchester County, was probably the most majestic of these homes, while two other farms, Shoal Creek and Rose Hill, bordered LaGrange in the eastern sector of the city.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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LaGrange (Meredith House)
Dorchester County

CONTINUATION SHEET Maryland ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

SIGNIFICANCE, continued

Now comprised of some forty acres, LaGrange changed owners four more times before John Howard Hirst purchased it in 1897. Ten years earlier, Hearst and his family bouth the adjoining property of William Wilson Byrn's "Rose Hill." Hirst and his father were New Yorkers and regarded as pioneers in truck farming with their property Jamaica Point on Long Island. Here on the south shore of the Choptank River they found undeveloped land ideal for their method of farming. Byrn had broken the way with the introduction of Southdown sheep and Aldernay cattle, and improved harvests of corn. In 1897, with the planting of fruit orchards, the expansion of fields and the construction of packing houses, LaGrange was purchased by Hirst, adding 41 acres to the 115 he already farmed.

See photo slip for missing sentence. Same 1/21/80.

Active in community, business and governmental affairs, Smith served as Register of Wills in Dorchester County for forty-eight years. He resigned when Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him Collector of Customs for the Port of Baltimore. Sometime during his thirty years of residence at LaGrange, Smith added a sunporch to the northwest part of the house and removed two exterior porches.

In 1958 the Dorchester County Historical Society purchased LaGrange, which had shrunk in size to one acre of land. IT was renamed in 1960 Meredith House in memory of Thomas H. and Joseph B. Meredith when the latter's grandson, Thomas S. Nichols, aided the society in purchasing the house and an additional half acre of property. Several years later a major renovation was undertaken, resulting in the creation of the caretaker's quarters in the frame wing, sandblasting the brick section, removing earlier added white paint and refurbishing of the interior rooms.

Meredith House is used today by the society for meetings and is open to the public on a limited basis. The first floor rooms are furnished much as they would be in the middle nineteenth century, with local collections of antiques, china, clothing and pictures adding a touch of Dorchester history. Scrapbooks, files on local family histories and documents on Maryland and Dorchester history comprise the sunporch library, although much of this material has been moved to the local library for the convenience of the public. The first bedroom upstairs contains maritime artifacts, including ships' models, tools of a ship's carpenter and apparatus used by watermen. Pictures and some personal possessions of the seven Dorchester County men who served as Maryland governors are housed in a second bedroom, known as the "Governor's Room."

Outside, a smokehouse contains a small collection of household items. It was built in the eighteenth century and moved from another Cambridge city property. A farm museum, once a garage probably built by Smith, contains farming implements, including an 1835 McCormick reaper. Another small structure on the property was probably used as a dairy house in earlier times.

¹Will of John Woolford, 1773. 39/359, Dorchester County. Probate records in Annapolis Hall of Records.