

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Sion Hill
other names/site number HA-525

2. Location

street & number 2026 Level Road N/A not for publication
city, town Havre de Grace vicinity
state Maryland code MD county Harford code 025 zip code 21078

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>6</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 6

4. 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. 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

6. Function or Use

HA-525

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structures

AGRICULTURAL/agricultural field

LANDSCAPE

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structures

AGRICULTURAL/agricultural field

LANDSCAPE

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(enter categories from instructions)

Georgian

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

roof SLATE

other WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

Sion Hill, Harford County, Maryland, is a three-part brick mansion with a superb location at the crest of a long hill whose open fields and an occasional patch of woods gently slope down to yield panoramic views of the city of Havre de Grace about a mile and a half away, and, just beyond, of that point at which the Susquehanna River broadens out to form the Chesapeake Bay. These expansive vistas are an integral and essential feature of the house, as will be discussed in the Significance Section. The house has a 2 1/2-story, five-bay, gable roof center section flanked by two matching two-story, single-pitched roofed wings: the western wing was built as a private boys' academy and the eastern wing was--and is--for service. The house was begun c.1787 by the Rev. John Ireland; in 1795 Ireland sold the unfinished structure to merchant Gideon Denison; he died in 1799 (with the house still unfinished) and Sion Hill was inherited by his daughter Minerva; she and her husband, Commodore John Rodgers, would finish the house and since their marriage (1806) Sion Hill has been identified with the Rodgers family. Minerva and John Rodgers gave the main facades a richness of period details such as keystone splayed stone window lintels, and sophisticated architectural treatments unique in Harford County and worthy of urbane centers such as Georgetown, where the Rodgers also had a home. The grounds contain a vestigial garden (some ancient boxwood, a formal sweep of lawn, several specimen trees) which seems to be contemporaneous with the house. A late 18th-century two-story brick tenant house is located roughly 200 yards north of the main dwelling. Also on the property--and all constructed by members of the Rodgers family--are two c.1930 stone outbuildings (a garage and a pump house) and a c.1900 frame barn.

8. Statement of Significance

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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

NHL Criteria 1

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Military

Period of Significance

1806-1933

Significant Dates

N/A

NHL Themes: See Continuation Sheet
No. 8

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Sion Hill is significant as the seat of the sea-faring Rodgers family, described by the Dictionary of American Biography as the most notable of American naval families. Their generations'-long careers cover the world and affect virtually every aspect of American naval history from the presidency of Thomas Jefferson to the New Deal. The family's transcendentally important affiliation with the navy begins with the exceptional career of Commodore John Rodgers (1772-1839) and his triumphs over the Barbary pirates (1802-06) whose fleet he vanquished and with whom he negotiated treaties which mark some of America's earliest diplomatic successes. During the War of 1812 Rodgers was responsible for many of the (few) victories the American navy had over superior British foes. He was for years the navy's ranking officer. Rodgers (working with President Thomas Jefferson) was instrumental in constructing the country's first gunboats and in establishing the nation's first dry docks; he also began the navy's support system of hospitals, established what became the Naval Observatory in Washington, and constructed the navy's first steam-powered battleship. Rodgers was the first to see the need for a Naval Academy: he planned its initial curriculum and continuously lobbied for its establishment at Annapolis. (He died before it could be officially opened in 1845, but nephew Christopher Rodgers served as the Academy's president in the 1870s.) After his death, four generations of his direct descendants maintained the family's exceptionally significant presence in the navy: Commodore John Rodgers II (1812-1882) was honored by Lincoln during the Civil War (an elaborate set of Lincoln's presentation silver is still at Sion Hill), was president of both the United States Naval Institute and the first Naval Advisory Board and superintendent of the Naval Observatory, which his father, the first Commodore, had founded; Admiral John Rodgers (1848-1933) brought wireless telegraphy to the

See continuation sheet No. 8
For Historic Context

9. Major Bibliographical References

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- Dictionary of American Biography, Vols. VII and VIII, (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons; Dumas Malone, editor).
- C. Milton Wright, Our Harford Heritage, (Bel Air, MD: Privately printed, 1967).
- Building by the Book, II, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1986, Mario di Valmarana, editor).
- Land and Probate Records, Harford County Courthouse, Bel Air; Interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Meigs Green, Sion Hill, Havre de Grace, MD.
- Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, Harford County, Maryland Historical Trust, Crownsville, MD.
- Charles Oscar Paullin, Commodore John Rodgers, (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1910).
- Dumas Malone, Jefferson The President, (Boston: The Little, Brown and Company, 1970).

See continuation sheet

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 # MD 13-Hav.v-2-1, 2-2, 2-3, 2-4
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 315 acres more or less
USGS Quad: Aberdeen, MD; Havre de Grace, MD

UTM References

A

1	8
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4	0	3	9	0	0
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4	3	7	9	9	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	8
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4	0	2	5	5	0
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4	3	7	9	5	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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

D

1	8
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4	0	2	9	5	0
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4	3	8	0	4	9	0
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Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries are delineated on Continuation Sheet No. 20

See continuation sheet No. 20

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet No. 19

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christopher Weeks, Preservation Planner

organization Harford County Government date November 1991

street & number 220 South Main Street telephone (301) 879-2000

city or town Bel Air state Maryland zip code 21014

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Section number 7 Page 1GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The 315-acre Sion Hill estate crowns a gentle hill about a mile and a half north of Havre de Grace in eastern Harford County, Maryland. For seven generations Commodore John Rodgers and his descendants, who have in continuous succession owned Sion Hill, have kept that sweep of ground in open fields and pasture land to yield expansive vistas down to the city and to the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay beyond. These views are and always have been important to the house and symbolize the family's vitally important contribution to the nation as founders and developers of the American navy.

MAIN HOUSE, c.1787 to c.1810, 1 contributing building

Although primarily associated with Commodore John Rodgers and his direct descendants, the three-part brick mansion was actually begun c.1785 by John Ireland, who ran a private boys' academy in the western wing, and used the center block as his main living area; services are in the eastern wing. Ireland sold Sion Hill to merchant Gideon Denison in 1795; "unfinished" according to the 1798 Federal Direct Tax, the house was inherited in 1799 (at Denison's death) by his daughter Minerva. She married Commodore Rodgers in 1806 and the Rodgerses would complete Sion Hill. The Flemish bond brick center block measures five bays across and 2 1/2 stories tall. The main (south and Bay-facing) facade is axial around the entrance door and pedimented porch, a three-part second story window (with an exceptionally elaborate arrangement of pilasters and dentiled and incised entablature), and a lunette (with a delicate keystone) attic window which is centrally placed within a modillioned and pedimented attic gable. This not only serves to mark the center of the house and heighten the symmetry, it also accurately suggests the center hall plan within. Side windows, two per floor, are nine-over-nine beneath flared stone lintels with bold keystones. Massive interior end chimneys heighten the overall effect of verticality and impressive grandeur. (The rear or land facade displays the same general theme in a less formal manner, i.e., the center second-story window lacks the three-part enrichment and the attic lunette is slightly simpler.) Both main facades have two-brick high beltcourses. The flanking wings are two stories tall; they are as deep as the main section and are one bay wide beneath sloping, single-pitched roofs. The wings' roofs' slopes are not as sharp as the main section's but nevertheless visually work well to lead the eye centrally upwards, heightening

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the monumental effect. By tradition, the chimneys are said to have been built especially tall to welcome John Rodgers home when he sailed into the Upper Chesapeake.¹

On the interior, the main section has a broad center hall plan; the two largest and most formal rooms (the equal-sized Summer and Winter Dining Rooms) are to the east while two small twin parlors rooms and a stairway are to the west; the mathematics of this scheme are interesting (a three-part composition with one third kept a single unit, one third divided in half, one third divided in thirds) but in a broad context it is a slightly retardataire arrangement when compared with some other high-style late 18th-century five-part houses in Maryland which use the "Annapolis Plan."² The stair is in an open alcove reached from the hall through a segmental and pilastered archway. The stair, entirely original like almost every other feature of the house, rises in four open flights to the attic and has simple, federal balusters, rail, and newel post. The main feature in the hall is the pilastered segmental arch which is identical to the one leading to the stair alcove. Walls are plastered throughout; the plaster is original as is the bountiful amount of high quality and high style woodwork such as chair rails, mantels and over mantels, cornices, panelled doors, hardware, etc. Trim in the Winter Dining Room is particularly notable, as befits the space used for formal entertaining; the elaborate fireplace is not known to have a specific book source for inspiration; the opening is bordered by original blue and white Delft tiles; the entire fireplace is flanked by cabinets, all original.

The west wing retains its original spatial configuration (a schoolroom on the ground floor with dormitory cells above) although the schoolroom was remodeled into an informal living room in the 1940s. The east wing is the service wing; originally the larger north room was the pantry and the small south room was the kitchen; the present owners have reversed this arrangement; in addition, the original kitchen led to the Summer Dining Room by means of a small hall; that hall was made into a downstairs powder room. Otherwise, and except for necessary modernizations such as plumbing and electricity, the house is all but entirely unchanged from its c.1810 appearance. Indeed one biographer of John Rodgers notes that Sion Hill "has never been remodeled, and [in its purity] may still be seen...[as] being one of the most interesting relics...in Maryland."³ This "purity" is doubtless because Sion Hill has been owned by the Rodgers family since that time and because the family have maintained it as a virtual shrine to Commodore John Rodgers

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(See Historic Context). The house is filled with furniture and objects owned by Rodgers, so many, in fact, that the Gallery Curator for the Maryland Historical Society recently called the house's contents "astonishing."⁴

TENANT HOUSE, c.1790, 1 contributing building

Cited in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax, this two-story, gable roofed, common bond brick building is located about 200 yards north of the main house. It measures three bays by one with a small frame addition on the southern end; there are two rooms per floor. Presumably built at the same time as the main house, the tenant house (servants' quarters) has a brick beltcourse and flat arches over the windows--surprising touches of enrichment on a utilitarian structure. The six-over-six pegged windows, doors, and plain box cornice all appear to be original.

GROUNDS, 1 contributing site

Not surprisingly, Sion Hill was originally set off by elaborate gardens, traces of which remain. Original (or very early) plantings include a formal boxwood garden southwest of the house (several ancient bushes remain but the overall design is largely lost), a park-like swath of open grass to the northeast of the house (possibly used for evening walks), and several specimen trees such as beech, holly, magnolia grandiflora, and osage orange. The gardens remain an integral part of the overall design of the estate, although the system of driveways has been changed: as depicted on C.F. Haudecouer's 1799 map of Havre de Grace, Sion Hill's original driveway circled the house so one arrived at the main (Bay front) facade and a service drive branched off it to lead to the rear facade and kitchen wing; this invited "sightseers" and the present owners took out the drive to the main facade and relaid a driveway to the north facade, which is how one approaches today; the service drive is still in place. The views from the house southward to the Bay are virtually unchanged from the time of Commodore Rodgers and also contribute to the significance of the resource as will be discussed in Section 8. The once formal area around the main house (which has now taken on a rather romantic quality) is separated from the tenant house by a cedar hedge of great age, a rail fence, and a pasture.

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BARN, c.1900, 1 contributing building

A variety of farm buildings once stood in the pasture/farmyard between house and tenant house, but they deteriorated and most have been removed. Remaining is a c.1900 one story plus attic frame barn; it is unused.

GARAGE AND PUMP HOUSE, c.1930, 2 contributing buildings

Nearer the house is a stone garage and a stone pump house; both are c.1930 one-story structures of utilitarian use and design. Robert Rodgers, AIA, a son of John Augustus and Elizabeth Chambers Rodgers, was their architect.

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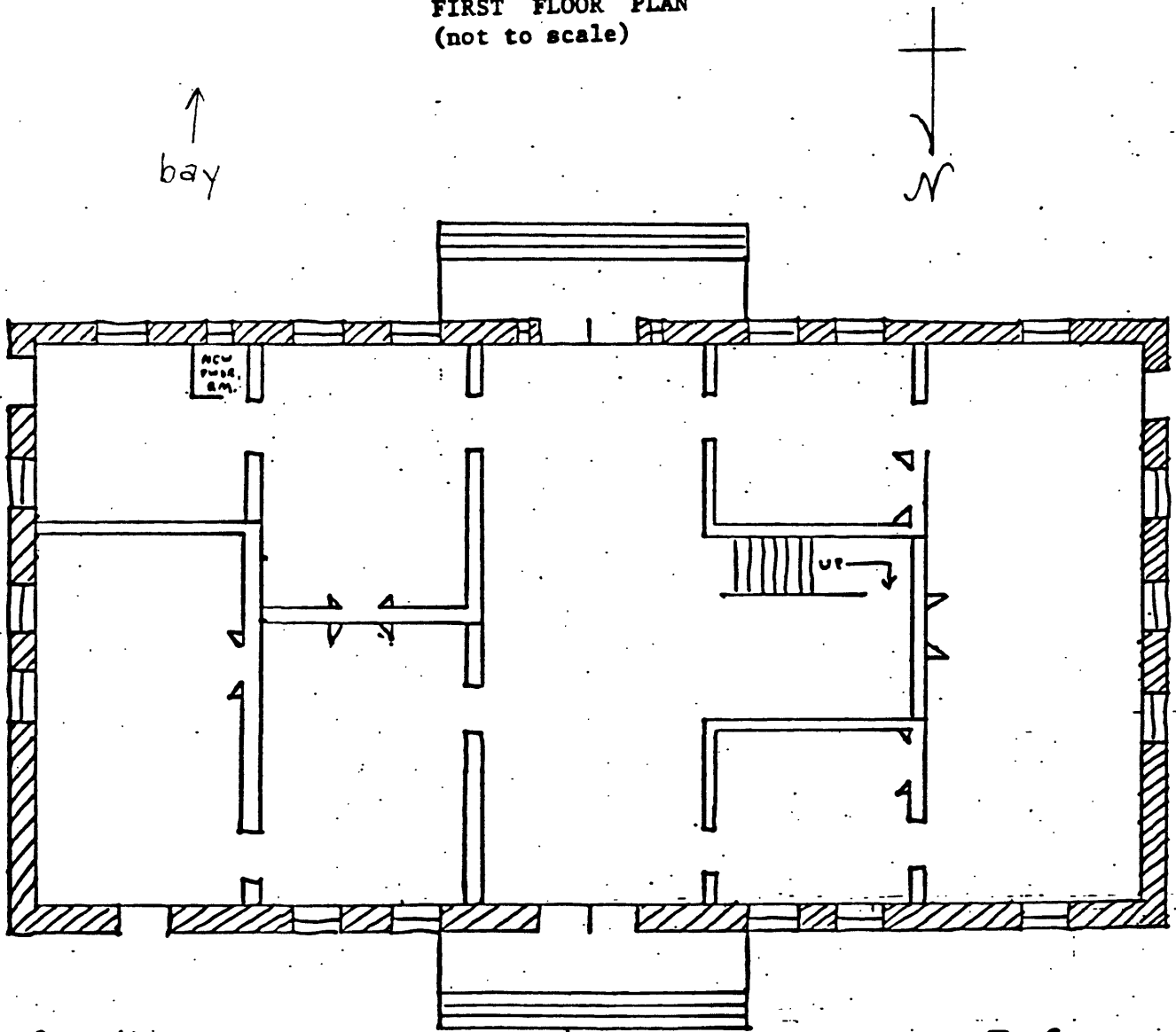
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN
(not to scale)



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NOT TO SCALE
C. WEEKS

EXCEPT FOR NEW POWDER ROOM
ALL EXTERIOR WALLS SHOWN ORIGINAL

See Continuation Sheet No. 6

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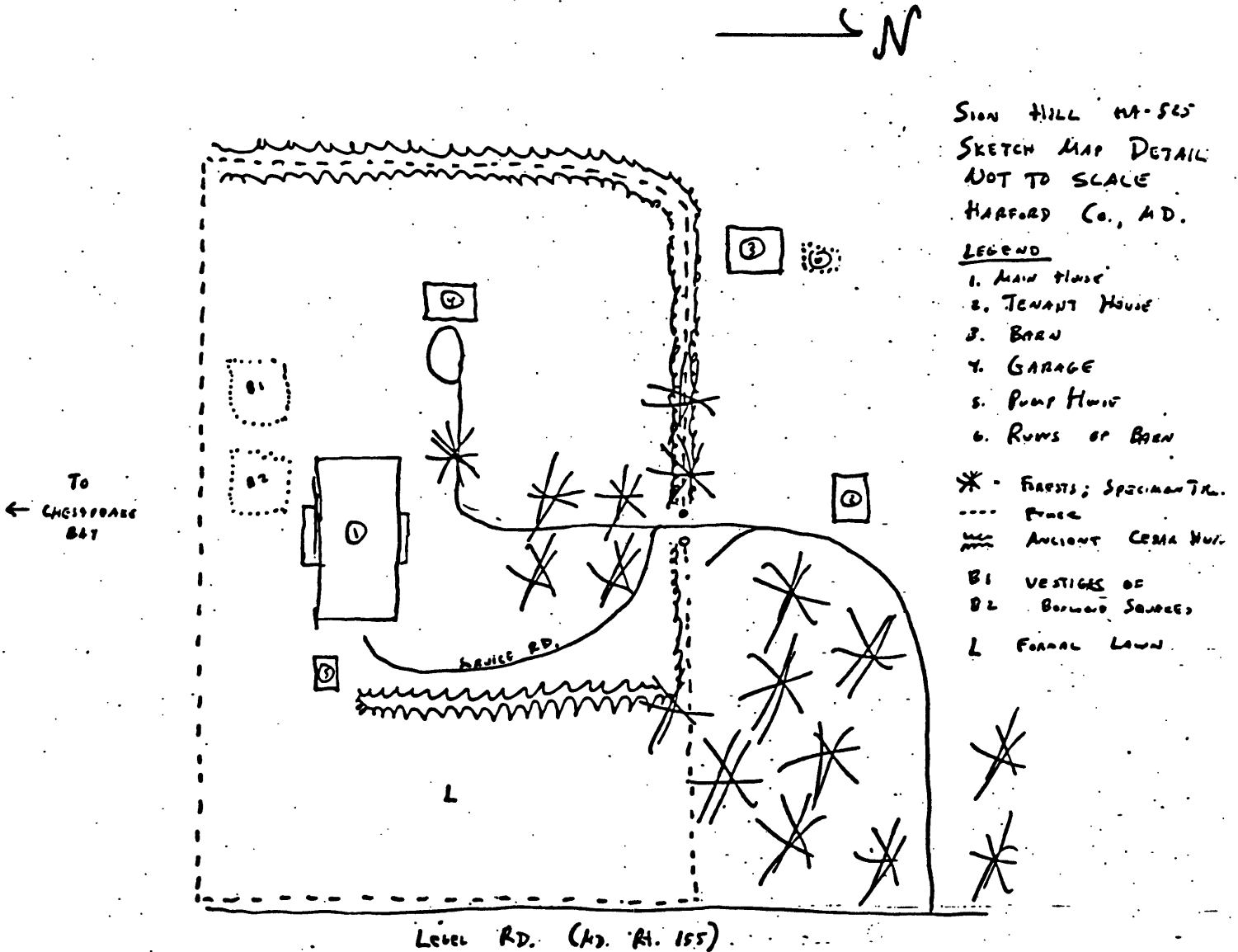
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RESOURCE SKETCH MAP



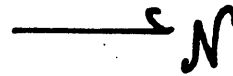
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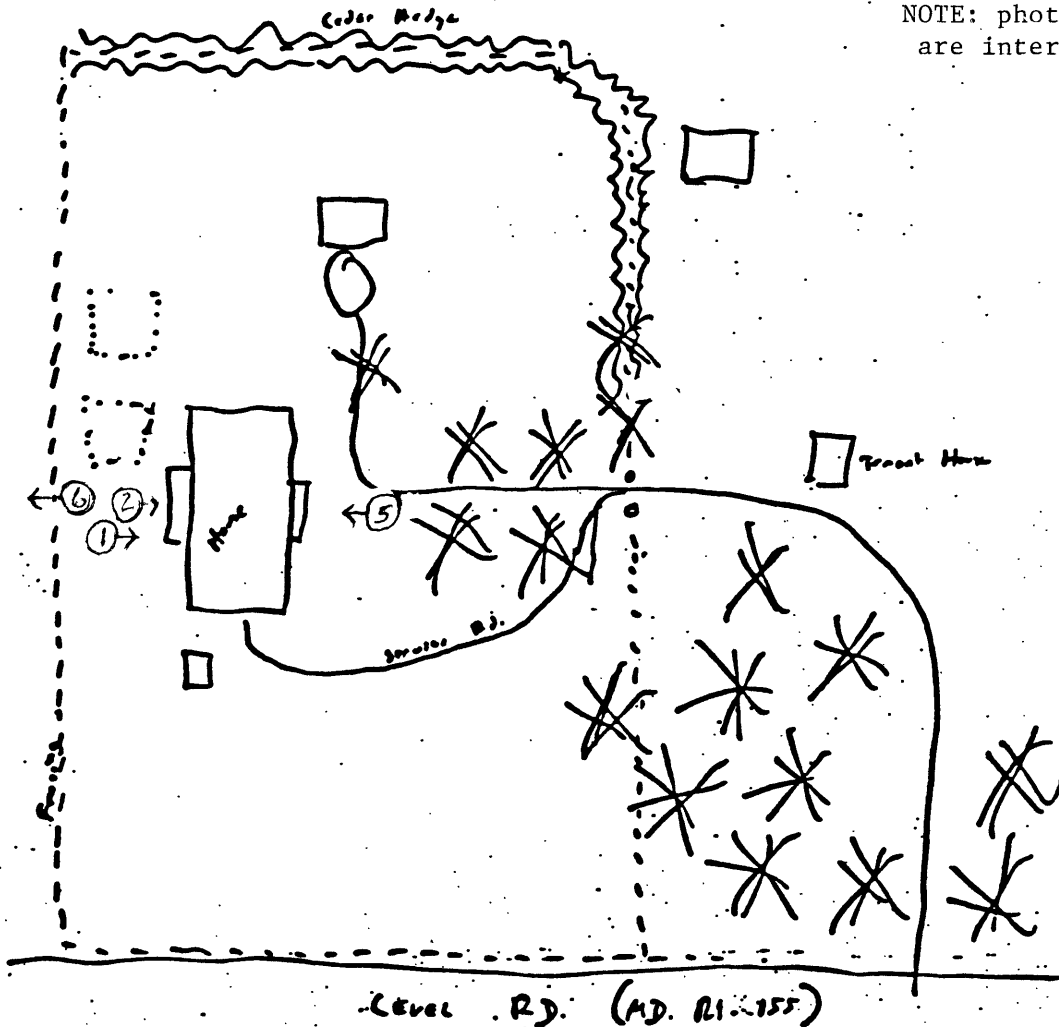
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PHOTOGRAPH MAP



NOTE: photos 3 & 4
are interior views

← T.
8A7



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navy; Commander John Rodgers (1881-1926) was a pioneer in Naval aviation and was first commandant of the air base at Pearl Harbor. Family marriages underscore these unequaled naval associations: the eldest son of Commodore Rodgers, Robert Smith Rodgers (1809-1891), married Sarah Perry, daughter of Matthew Perry who himself had served under Commodore Rodgers in the Barbary wars; R.S. Rodgers's sister Ann Maria married a sister of Matthew and Oliver Hazard Perry. Sion Hill, still owned by direct descendants of Commodore Rodgers although the male line ended in 1933, was home to each of these Rodgers and their families. The finest high-style house known to have been constructed in rural Harford County, Maryland in the 18th century, Sion Hill is virtually unchanged, inside and out, from when it was completed for Commodore Rodgers and his wife. Sion Hill has always been intimately associated with the Rodgers family: it received its final form by Commodore Rodgers and it saw the births and deaths of nearly all his descendants (one Rodgers was born in Washington in 1881). The Dictionary of American Biography notes that "the Rodgers' home was at Havre de Grace." Sion Hill is replete with original Rodgers furnishings, and has been maintained by the family almost as a shrine to the first Commodore.

NHL THEMES:

- V. Political Military Affairs, 1783-1860
 - D. Jefferson Period 1800-1811
 - E. War of 1812, 1812-1815

- VI. The Civil War
 - D. Naval Action

- VII. Political and Military Affairs, 1865-1939
 - D. America Becomes a World Power, 1865-1914
 - 1. Military Affairs
 - F. Military Affairs Not Related to World War I or World War II, 1914-1941

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Section number 8 Page 9HISTORIC CONTEXT:

In 1806 Commodore John Rodgers married Minerva Denison in the north parlor at Sion Hill; Denison brought the unfinished house with her to the marriage as dowry and from that moment Sion Hill has been intimately associated with the Rodgerses. Based at Sion Hill, successive generations of Rodgerses achieved national significance by creating and shaping the United States Navy, becoming, in the words of the Dictionary of American Biography "the most noted of American naval families."

Although the house's period of national significance begins with the first Commodore John Rodgers, its history can be traced back to the Rev. John Ireland, who bought an unimproved tract here in 1787⁵ and began the house, which he used as Sion Hill Seminary, a private school for boys. In 1795 Ireland sold the property to Gideon Denison (1753-1799)⁶, a wealthy Connecticut merchant whom the Dictionary of American Biography describes as "a descendant of Capt. George Denison, called 'the Miles Standish of Connecticut.'"⁷ The 1798 Federal Direct Tax cites Denison as owner of Sion Hill,⁸ described as a "Brick dwelling, two stories, 10 ft. piazza on one side and each end 15 ft. wide, 40 x 42." It is also described as being in an "unfinished state."

Some sources have suggested that Denison "was attracted to Havre de Grace, thinking it might be the site for the new national capital" and that he added the elegant and stylish federal period touches.⁹ But the District of Columbia had been selected as the site in 1790. Instead, it might be better to assume that Denison thought that Havre de Grace was destined to grow into a large city¹⁰ and that he bought the house thinking that a stylish and elegant residence would be desirable; he certainly bought a good deal of additional land on speculation and increased Ireland's original tract of 60 acres to 1,820 acres.

For "stylish" and "elegant" are assuredly what Sion Hill is; no other extant building in Harford County displays such a thoroughly complete and correct understanding of period design dicta. Nor is there any evidence that any building ever did. In overall massing and design and in scale and in refinement of stylish details (see description), the house is the finest building of its time in the county and is equal to the best of the era's dwellings in more cosmopolitan areas such as Philadelphia (such as Mount Pleasant [c.1765] and the Penn family's The Solitude [c.1773]) and Georgetown, District of Columbia (such as Tudor Place

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[1815], Evermay [c.1801], and Cox's Row [c.1815]).

There is no known precedent for Sion Hill in Harford County. No documentation has been found but it is at least arguable that the house owes its rich details not to Ireland or Denison (recall it was unfinished a year before the latter died) but to Denison's daughter, Minerva, and her husband, Commodore John Rodgers. Minerva Denison acquired Sion Hill on her father's death in 1799; she married Rodgers in 1806 and the couple kept a secondary residence in a series of houses in the District of Columbia when he served as President of the Board of Naval Commissioners (1815-1837). It seems highly likely that the Rodgerses finished Sion Hill to reflect stylish houses they would have seen in Washington. It is known that when the couple ordered furniture for Sion Hill they chose furniture that was crafted in the highest style possible, including tables attributed to Duncan Phyfe and a sofa attributed to Charles-Honore Lannuier. The house's splendor was well-known among the federal-era elite: for example in 1815 Mary Boardman Crowninshield learned that her husband was going to visit Commodore and Mrs. Rodgers at Sion Hill and asked him to determine "Is the furniture handsomer than ours?"¹¹

Commodore John Rodgers, known as the "Father of the American Navy",¹² was a son of Colonel John Rodgers, a Scots immigrant who ran the important ferryline across the Susquehanna between Havre de Grace and Perryville, held a monopoly on tavern-trade in those towns, and, according to the Dictionary of American Biography, was the "founder of the most noted of American naval families."¹³

The only complete history of Harford County succinctly observes that "among the sons of Harford...there are none due greater honor than the members of the Rodgers family."¹⁴ While Col. Rodgers himself played an important role in the development of northeastern Maryland and while several of his other children became renowned (for instance daughter Maria Anna, who married William Pinkney, a noted jurist ["the greatest man I ever saw in a court of justice," praised Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney] and diplomat ["America never sent an abler representative to the Court of London," wrote Henry Adams]), the member of the family who achieved undeniable and international importance was Commodore John Rodgers.

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He was educated at home; "through his reading of books about the sea [he] received an impress that determined his career."¹⁵ He entered the infant U.S. Navy in 1798 and was made a First Lieutenant on the frigate Constellation; in 1799 he was promoted to the rank of Captain, "the first lieutenant in the navy under the Constitution to be advanced to this rank"¹⁶ and placed in charge of the sloop Maryland cruising first in the West Indies and then in the Mediterranean.

Thomas Jefferson, during his first administration (1801-1805) sought to reduce the size of the navy. He cut the number of frigates from 13 to 6 and the number of captains from 19 to 9.¹⁷

Rodgers (who retained his commission) fought this policy; in this he was aided by the Secretary of Navy (and his Harford County neighbor) Robert Smith. (Rodgers's oldest surviving child was named Robert Smith Rodgers.) Rodgers was back in his native Havre de Grace in 1802. During this visit he met Minerva Denison. In her memoirs the future bride describes her "uneventful life at Sion Hill", uneventful, that is, "until I met Captain John Rodgers....I had previously heard Captain Rodgers spoken of. His reputation was known to the country....He had been much talked of and published in the papers...but I had never seen him as he was seldom at home, most of his time spent at sea." After the initial meeting "his visits [to Sion Hill] became frequent and his attentions to me very conspicuous. However he was ordered to sea and our love affair made no great progress."¹⁸

Jefferson ordered Rodgers "to sea" to fight the Barbary pirates, then the bane of American and European shipping in the Mediterranean. In 1805, the year before Rodgers married Minerva Denison, he was placed in command of the entire American squadron in the Mediterranean; during the wars with the Barbary Pirates (1802-06), Rodgers wrecked havoc on the enemy, destroying ships and in general "playing a part exceeded in importance by that of no other naval officer...his conduct was cordially approved of by the secretary of the navy and the president and he was hailed and toasted as a popular hero."¹⁹ He also "forced Tripoli to sign a treaty to end slavery of Christians" in 1805.²⁰

In sum, "no other officer played so large a part in" the war as Rodgers. As senior officer he commanded "the blockading fleet off Tripoli...the largest cruisers of the pasha's navy and several smaller craft surrendered to him...during the peace negotiations ...he...was the chief actor....Rodgers...humbled the proud and insulting corsairs, set an example to all Europe of a spirited and

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forcible resistance to extortion and blackmail, strengthened abroad our reputation as a nation for military courage and political initiative, and popularized, trained, and consolidated our infant navy."²¹ These feats are doubly remarkable when it is recalled that he was able to perform them with a navy that had been much-reduced in size. For his many and varied accomplishments Rodgers was made Commodore (then the highest rank in the navy) and was placed in command of the naval flagship President. In July 1807 he was made commander of the "New York Flotilla and naval station...the most important office at the disposal of the naval department."²²

Peace restored, Rodgers resumed his struggles with the cost-conscious Jefferson (and Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin) over naval expenses. Rodgers convinced his superiors to build what were called "gunboats," which are, as Dumas Malone explains, "small craft [which] cost but little to build and almost nothing for maintenance"; Rodgers had demonstrated the merit of these craft "in the shallow waters off the Barbary Coast"; from the president's point of view "they had the further merit of being cheap."²³

Jefferson "sent some of his ablest commanders to building these vessels...[and] in the fall of 1806 Commodore Rodgers was ordered to construct a gunboat at Havre de Grace."²⁴ While thus occupied he also found time to resume his courtship of Minerva Denison and "the date of his marriage...was fixed. The young couple were quietly married in the green room at Sion Hill...The Baltimore Federal Gazette" covered the story in its October 31, 1806, issue and "for some time Commodore and Mrs. Rodgers remained at Sion Hill."²⁵

At about this time Rodgers and Jefferson hit upon a "most interesting proposal with respect to naval vessels that were not in use...[and] proposed to add to the Navy Yard in Washington a dock in which vessels could be 'laid up dry and under cover from sun.'" Dumas Malone notes that as a result of this Rodgers/ Jefferson innovation, Jefferson "brought Benjamin Henry Latrobe to Washington, and that architect and engineer produced a plan so pleasing to him that he afterwards made Latrobe surveyor of public buildings."²⁶ Rodgers remained "interested in the subject of dry docks and...during his first term as navy commissioner [see below] recommended their construction" at Norfolk and Boston.²⁷ Latrobe certainly remained a valued friend to Rodgers and the architect's letters back to his brother, C.I. Latrobe, in England are filled with praise for the seaman. For example on October 28, 1811,

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Latrobe wrote his brother lauding "one of my oldest and most intimate friends, Captain Rodgers....In our little war with Tripoli, he acquired fame of a most undaunted officer....On shore he is a good farmer, a most amiable husband and father, and in all respects, [has] unimpeached and unimpeachable morals. He is also the most powerful man in respect to bodily strength in the country."²⁸

By 1812 Rodgers was Chief Commander of the entire American fleet, the "ranking officer in active service;"²⁹ after war broke out with England in 1812 he fought (and won) several engagements with the British navy in the Caribbean and in the North Sea where he raided the coast of Scotland. The American forces lost most of the war's initial land battles; consequently "while the news...was almost all bad, the spirits of Americans were sustained by a series of victories at sea by ships of the minuscule navy" led by Rodgers.³⁰ Scholars have determined that of all the American naval officers at the time, "he understood best the principles of naval strategy."³¹ After the British burned Washington and moved on Baltimore in 1813, Rodgers "saved Baltimore from attack by obstructing the channel, sinking vessels for that purpose."³²

Rodgers--"my idea of the perfect naval commander," praised noted Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton--retired from active service in 1815 and returned to Sion Hill, although he did serve as President of the Board of Navy Commissioners from 1815 until 1837; that body "ranked next to the members of the cabinet in the administrative hierarchy of Washington."³³ In this capacity he continued to experiment with dry docks and oversaw "the creation of several new naval establishments" including navy hospitals in Philadelphia, Norfolk, Boston, New York, and Pensacola, the first such institutions in America. He was also involved in establishing "the Depot of Charts and Instruments, out of which grew the Naval Observatory...in Washington"; during his last year in office he was planning "a South Seas exploring expedition, which finally set sail in 1838."³⁴

In 1835, towards the end of his career, he encouraged the navy to build "the first vessel of the steam navy...[and Rodgers] made a report recommending the early deployment of steam vessels by the navy."

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Interested in creating a formal training ground for naval officers (his own training having been on-the-job), in 1826 Rodgers began lobbying to establish a naval academy. "In 1831 as president of the navy board he wrote a letter to the secretary of the navy setting forth the views of the commission respecting a naval academy." Rodgers proposed that "the new institution was to be located at Annapolis, and a naval captain was to act as its superintendent. Instruction was to be given in 'all the living languages,' mathematics, surveying, navigation, drawing, and fencing. A small ship-rigged vessel, armed with several cannon, was to be stationed at the school for use in teaching seamanship and the handling of guns."³⁵ (Rodgers died before the Naval Academy was opened officially in 1845.)

When ill health forced him to resign his positions, the National Intelligencer recorded that "Commodore Rodgers, one of the oldest and most faithful of our public servants...has resigned...Few men living have for such a length of time...rendered more important services to their country." He died of cholera in 1838. (Rodgers was not only a war hero, he was punctilious in the extreme in his business life; in his Last Will and Testament he left his "beloved wife Minerva, all and Singular the Estate real, personal, and mixed of which I may die possessed" but took the trouble to remind her to pay his debts including one "due to Mr. Bennett of Georgetown of 15c" as well as three "small debts" to three grocers and "a small sum due [unreadable], apothecary.")³⁶

For years Rodgers's duties had forced his family to keep some sort of quarters in Washington. Beginning around 1820 they lived in a house at Greenleaf Point, at P Street near the navy yard in Southeast Washington. The house has been demolished. About 1835 Rodgers and his family moved to Madison Place facing Lafayette Square. That house was demolished in 1895, replaced with the Belasco Theater, one exterior of which was marked by a plaque inscribed "This was the site of the home of Commodore John Rodgers." But none of these residences--even if they were standing (which they aren't)--would be as intimately associated with the navy hero and his descendants as Sion Hill is.

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Minerva Rodgers lived on in Washington until her own death in 1877. In 1841, three years after the Commodore had died, she gave 1800 acres and Sion Hill to her oldest son, Robert Smith Rodgers;³⁷ in her Will--she identifies herself in that document as "the widow of the late Commodore John Rodgers"--she left \$20,000 cash bequests to each of several children ("that being the price of the house in LaFayette Square") and then set up a complicated Trust for the benefit of her children and grandchildren, with her son Commodore John Rodgers and son-in-law "General M.C. Meigs of the U.S. Army" to manage it. Excluded as a beneficiary of the Trust was "my son Robert, [he] having received the Gift of the Farm in Maryland called Sion Hill."³⁸ (While in the District, Louisa Rodgers, one of Minerva's and John's daughters, met and married Montgomery C. Meigs, future Quartermaster General of the Union Army in the Civil War and builder of such well-known Washington landmarks as the Pension Building, the Washington Aqueduct, and the Capitol dome; it is from this marriage that the present owner of Sion Hill is descended.)

Four successive generations of the Rodgers family would continue the first Commodore's extraordinary role in shaping the U.S. Navy. They would also (and concurrently) maintain Sion Hill as their principal residence. Robert Smith Rodgers was born (1809) and died (1891) at Sion Hill. After earning his degree in engineering at the University of Pennsylvania "from 1830 to 1841 he served as an assistant civil engineer in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Enlisting as a private in the United States Army at the beginning of the Civil War, he was soon promoted to the rank of Colonel and was engaged chiefly in the battles of the Shenandoah Valley."³⁹

Although Robert Smith Rodgers served in the army, the navy maintained its formidable presence at Sion Hill: in 1841 (the year he received Sion Hill and the year he retired from the surveying business) Robert Rodgers married Sarah Perry, daughter of Commander Matthew C. Perry (1794-1858) thereby creating a most impressive naval union. Interestingly, as a youth of 16--long before he was chosen in 1852 to "open" Japan, "the most important diplomatic mission ever entrusted to an American naval officer"⁴⁰--Matthew Perry had served under Commodore John Rodgers during the wars with the Barbary pirates on the President; Perry was much influenced by his commanding officer, for, according to the Dictionary of American Biography, "John Rodgers [was] a bluff disciplinarian who stamped many of his qualities upon the young subaltern."⁴¹

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Connections between America's two premier naval families continued when Ann Maria Perry, sister of Matthew and Oliver Hazard, married George Washington Rodgers (1787-1832), a younger brother of Commodore John. The family's nautical contributions continued in that cadet branch, too, for G.W. Rodgers fought in the Barbary wars and in the War of 1812; "Congress recognized his services by voting him a silver medal and his native state rewarded him by giving him a sword."⁴² George Washington Rodgers and Ann Maria Perry Rodgers had a son, Christopher, who was Superintendent of the Naval Academy (that institution his uncle had envisioned and planned) from 1877-78 and then served as commander in chief of the Pacific squadron from 1878-80. "Several [of their sons] reached the highest naval rank."⁴³ An astonishing quantity of Perry memorabilia (prints and furniture from Japan as well as uniforms, a dispatch box, portraits, etc.) still fills Sion Hill.

If Robert S. Rodgers was an agriculturalist and--inexplicably--an army man, his brother, Commodore John Rodgers II (1812-1882) continued the Rodgerses' extraordinary naval associations. Born at Sion Hill, he entered an early version of the Naval Academy in 1828 (after a year at the University of Virginia), was graduated and saw duty in the Mediterranean and in the Seminole War; promoted to Lieutenant, from 1842-1860 he "was in charge of vessels on surveying expeditions in the Mediterranean, North Pacific, and Arctic Ocean." In 1852 "he succeeded Commander Cadwalader Ringgold as commander of the North Pacific Exploring and Surveying Expedition," sailing into the Arctic Ocean "where he explored unknown regions and obtained information that corrected the Admiralty's charts."⁴⁴

He started his service in the Civil War with the rank of Commander, but Lincoln had him promoted to rank of Commodore, citing the "zeal, bravery, and good conduct" so characteristic of the family. Serving under Admiral duPont, John Rodgers II was honored by being allowed to "hoist the first American flag on the rebellious soil of South Carolina." After the war, he was Commandant first at the Boston Navy Yard (1866-'69) and at the Mare Island Navy Yard (1873-'77) in California. In the interim, he was sent to the Pacific in 1871 to attempt to negotiate a treaty with Korea. (He was unsuccessful.) He also served as Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, which his father had established: from 1877-82 and "secured for the observatory its present site and made certain its reconstruction on more ample lines."⁴⁵ At his death he was "the senior Rear Admiral on the active list."⁴⁶

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John Rodgers II's substantial contributions to the navy are matched by those of his nephew, Robert S. and Sarah Perry Rodgers' son, John Augustus Rodgers. Born at Sion Hill in 1848, he entered the Naval Academy in 1863, eventually seeing duty in "European, Asiatic, and home waters."⁴⁷ During the Spanish-American War, he was executive officer of the U.S.S. Indiana, and was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral "for eminent conduct in battle."⁴⁸ In 1904 Admiral Rodgers was among the few navymen with vision enough to push for use of wireless telegraphy: he chaired and eventually convinced a committee to adopt that invention. In 1910 he retired from active duty to teach at Harvard and at the Institute of Naval Technology. He died at home at Sion Hill in 1933 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Admiral Rodgers married Elizabeth Chambers and they had three sons. Alexander was an explorer who was unfortunately lost and presumably died in the Yukon. Robert was an architect; he practiced in New York but designed a pump house and a garage at Sion Hill for his parents. (He died a bachelor.) There was also Commander John Rodgers (1881-1926). By a quirk, he was born in Washington, D.C., not at Sion Hill and the compilers of The Dictionary of American Biography were quick to note this oddity and to point out that "the Rodgers' home was at Havre de Grace, Maryland."⁴⁹

Educated at Lawrenceville and at the Naval Academy (from which he was graduated in 1903), young Rodgers saw action "during the World War...in the submarine service and on North Sea mine barrage duty."⁵⁰ Commander Rodgers was just as interested in new technology as his forbears had been: his great-grandfather, the first Commodore, developed steam-powered battleships; his father had advocated use of the telegraph; the younger Rodgers pioneered naval aviation. He was just the second American naval officer to be licensed as an aviator and from 1922 until 1925 he established and was "commander of the Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii."⁵¹ In 1925, while he and four other men were flying back to Hawaii after a trip to San Francisco, their plane crashed in the Pacific 400 miles short of their goal. After floating at sea for several days Rodgers was rescued and was then given a desk job as Chief of the Bureau of Naval Aeronautics, "in recognition of his sterling qualities as an aviator and his ability as a seaman and navigator."⁵² But this did not suit his personality and he resigned in 1926 to resume flying and experimenting. That August, he was placed in command of a "new scouting seaplane squadron created for experimental purposes at San Diego."⁵³ After 11 days

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in San Diego, Rodgers was piloting a plane to Philadelphia, when it crashed in the Delaware River and killed him.

Commander Rodgers had no children, thus 1933, the year his father, Admiral Rodgers, died, might serve to mark the end of Sion Hill's period of significance if for no other reason than that future owners have not borne the Rodgers surname -- although these owners are all descendants of the first Commodore John Rodgers.

These owners, moreover, have been always aware of how important the spirit of the first John Rodgers is to Sion Hill and have kept the house and farm going almost as a memorial to him. For instance, in her Last Will and Testament (probated in 1944), Elizabeth Chambers Rodgers (the flying Rodgers's mother and Admiral Rodgers's widow), takes a good deal of trouble to explain how she chose to "dispose of my estate known as Sion Hill...inherited by me from my late husband." Continuing, "I intend to make such disposition as, in my opinion, will most fully assure the indefinite continuance of the premises in the possession and control of a descendant of John Rodgers." To this end, she left Sion Hill to her nephew, John Meigs; he, in turn, passed the property to its present owner, Montgomery Meigs Green, in 1946.⁵⁴ Somewhat miraculously, these later owners have been able to fulfil Elizabeth Chambers Rodgers's wishes and Sion Hill--mansion and outbuildings, gardens and Bay vistas--remains nearly unchanged since John and Minerva Rodgers' day, an intact reminder of the time when Commodore John Rodgers established, at Sion Hill, "the most noted of American naval families."

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BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The 315 acres included in this nomination constitutes all the land which has descended in family ownership with the house. It represents the full extent of the land directly associated with the resources during the periods and areas of significance. Although the present-day tax assessment maps for Harford County illustrate the property as being divided into multiple parcels, the property is visually one unit with the complex of resources standing on only parcel number 198. The remaining parcels are undeveloped with no standing structures, but are a part of the grounds and setting addressed in the significance section. Physically surrounded by the Sion Hill property but intentionally and expressly excluded from the nomination is the property called Mount Felix, parcel number 443 on the boundary map. The history of Mount Felix is separate and different from that of Sion Hill. Mount Felix was developed in the mid-nineteenth century on land acquired from the Rodgers family, but not by the Rodgers family. No resources associated with Sion Hill are located on the Mount Felix property. As Mount Felix is distinctly separate historically from Sion Hill, and physically concentrated in a clearly defined and physically non-intrusive area, the decision was made to exclude the property entirely rather than include it and mark it as non-contributing.

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The property consists of the parcels encircled by the broken line but excluding the Mount Felix property, parcel 443.

