



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) _____

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

We as the owners of the property known as "Church Hill" wish to provide a means to essentially preserve its existing identity, including the structure, dependencies, and remaining acreage. The property was purchased in 1965 by the previous generation with the appreciation for its architecture, historic presence, and value as a part of Gloucester County's and Virginia's colonial roots. With its close proximity to Gloucester Courthouse and a widening radius of commercial development in the vicinity, including high-density housing, retail, and alternative energy installations, we wish to preserve, as practicable as possible, Church Hill's representation of history in our community.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes _____ No X

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes X No _____

1. General Property Information

Property name: Church Hill (originally Mordecai's Mount)

Property address: 7943 John Clayton Memorial Highway

City or Town: Gloucester

Zip code: 23061

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Gloucester
County _____

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building X Site _____ Structure _____ Object _____

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 168+(-)

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural X

Briefly describe the property's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

Church Hill is situated approximately one mile east of the Gloucester Courthouse Historic District off US Rt 14. The site is bounded by the Ware River, Cow Creek, and the highway. The acreage also adjoins historic Ware Episcopal Church, which was the benefactor of land given by the original owners of the property. General historic records, including those of Ware Church, show that Mordecai Cooke (1650-1718) gave the land to the church for its relocation to the present setting. At the time, Church Hill was known as "Mordecai's Mount", and the resultant name change most likely came sometime after this transaction. The house, which is centrally

located in the acreage, has partially burned twice in its history but has remained on the original foundations of the mid-17th century. It is bordered primarily by English and American boxwoods. There are two boxwood and crepe myrtle terraces immediately behind the house, as well. Aside from the Ware River to the south and Cow Creek to the east, there are two natural springs (one used formerly as a primary water source for the household) and a small pond. The land is high, approximately 75 ft. above sea level, where the house sits, with natural drops as it approaches the river and creek.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Colonial frame with metal seamed roof

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: unknown

If the builder is known, please list here: unknown

Date of construction (can be approximate): original foundations said to date to mid-1600's. Current structure is 18th – 20th century, primarily

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

Church Hill has been used as a private residence for the entire time the Van Leeuwen family has owned it (since 1965), with no evidence of any other uses documented in its history. The traditional and current use is agricultural, with approximately 56 acres currently under cultivation.

The existing colonial-style structure is 4,902 sq. ft., which includes minor additions from the present and past centuries. As stated, the basic facility is said to be on the original foundations that date to its days as "Mortdecai's Mount". It has been properly maintained and upgraded over the years with sensitivity to its historic past. Inspection of framing timbers and construction methodology visible in the attic show mortise & tenon and pegged-joint framing (see pictures). Likewise, much of the timber frame is hand hewn or rough-cut sawn. The exterior is wood clapboard that was covered by beaded vinyl siding in the early 1990's. There are four Ionic-style wooden columns supporting the two-story portico at the front entrance. It is not certain their age, but they are said to have been added in the early 1900's, after both fires. The roof is heavy gauge metal raised seam that likely dates to the early 1900's, and after the last fire. The enclosed photos from the historic archives of the local newspaper (Gloucester-Mathews Gazette-Journal) give an interesting documentary of Church Hill's exterior appearance between the first and second fires. The oldest remaining portion of the house appears to be the west downstairs and upstairs, which is substantiated by those photos.

Most interior moldings and trim are handmade, with cornice and crown moldings being multiple layers. The living room is paneled in walnut and has a walnut mantel and fireplace surround. The entire downstairs floor (except kitchen) and main staircase is walnut, which was laid in the 1940's, according to local tradition. The wood was sourced from the property, per that tradition.

Another notable addition, traditionally thought to have been built in the early 1900's is an all-brick "recreational" room at the south of the house. It has a 14 ft., two-bay fireplace that funnels into a two-story massive chimney. The room has brick floors and walls, and exposed wood trusses. It was upgraded with spilt unit A/C in 2003, when the entire house was centrally air-conditioned, but the rustic room still relies on the fireplaces for heat.

The "brickroom" is thought to have been built from reclaimed bricks from another historic home in the area. There is a brick with the date of 1802 and another with some cryptic letters (see photos).

The final noteworthy addition is an attached guest cottage built in 2003. This is 800 s.f. one-story (with full attic) facility that has all the amenities of an independent small home.

Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

The primary outbuilding is the 4,892 s.f. monitor-style two-story barn. The first floor walls are brick laid in Flemish bond pattern on a concrete floor with exposed beams. There is a small finished cellar. It was thought to have been built in the early 1900's. There is some speculation regarding the use of the barn as a poultry facility during the Great Depression, and it contains two large built-in grain storage bins. Some older residents opined that the second floor (which has many windows) was used as an enemy plane-spotting outpost in WWI or WWII. The facility has been maintained and has a new roof and upgraded concrete foundations below the exposed support beams.

There is also remnants of two former post barns, approximately 150 yards to the east that served as hay and cattle facilities. One clearly had a slaughterhouse function. Other than reclamation of some of the "barn wood", they have not been preserved.

Another feature to mention are remnants of an old landing road that ran from what is now Rt. 14 (John Clayton Mem. Hwy.) to the Ware River. Before the highway was expanded to four lanes, there was even a separate entrance off it, marking the beginning of the road. Most of the road has been absorbed by cultivation and forest growth, but evidence of it remains from the deeply gullied path worn through the woods from carts bringing commodities to the waiting flat boats. The most apparent evidence remains at the river, where cypress, cedar, or some rot-resistant timber of the day can still be seen jutting into the river, just beneath the waterline.

While not an independent feature, the accompanying pictures include groupings of artifacts that have been discovered over the 52 years of ownership. The photos are a relatively small representation of what has been collected. Most were discovered accidentally (from planting, landscaping, or just walking the fields). No formal archeological excavation has been done since our ownership; only the occasional sweep with a metal detector or walk in the fields. Based on the design and deterioration of the bottle glass, china, and metal items collected, it appears that they span several centuries. The oldest appear to support the written accounts of Church Hill's timeline and origin.

Lastly, Church Hill is the subject of a number of iterations of basically one ghost story that dates to the 18th century. This portion of its history is likely the most popular and well documented, ironically, due to popular culture perhaps. The "Ghost of Elizabeth Throckmorton" (or Elizabeth Taliaferro as one recent author re-told it) will not be discussed for this effort. However, many online and bound ghost storybooks can be used as reference points. These include the works of L. B. Taylor, John P. Hunter, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia Lamkin, and Jenny & Marguerite du Pont Lee.

4. Property's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Every source appears to agree that Mordecai Cooke II built upon the Church Hill site and did so for the property known as Mortdecai's Mount in the mid to late 1600's. The original land grant was 1,174 acres. With the possible exception of the current owners, there appears to be some noteworthiness to most all previous occupants:

- Mordecai Cooke was a prominent figure in Gloucester County. He was the county's sheriff, a member of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, and served as a vestryman at Ware Episcopal Church, where his headstone resides. Cooke's younger brother, Thomas, was born two years later and was known for his close friendship with Sir William Berkeley. (1)
- Mordecai's Mount was passed into the Throckmorton family when Gabriel Throckmorton married Frances Cooke in 1690. By then, it was already being referred to as Church Hill. Frances Cooke was one of the four children Mordecai Cooke had with his wife, Frances Ironmonger. According to American genealogy expert Gary Boyd Roberts, the Throckmortons were of royal British descent. Many residents of Gloucester, Mathews, and the area also trace their heritage to Mordecai Cooke. (2)
- From the Throckmorton family, Church Hill passed through inheritance to the Taliaferro family, notably and eventually to Judge James Lyons Taliaferro in the late 1800's. It was during his ownership that the second fire took place. Judge Taliaferro is interred at Ware Church. Judge Taliaferro's son, Gen. Wm. Booth Taliaferro, is credited for assisting Thos. Calhoun Walker in being admitted to the VA State Bar in 1887. Walker is an historic African American at many levels and remained a Gloucester resident his entire life. There is a considerable number of Taliaferro offspring that still live in Gloucester and the area today. (1)(3) (6)
- E. Wright Noble and Emily Sue Noble bought Church Hill sometime after the death of Judge Taliaferro in 1928. It is Noble, after selling another historic Gloucester site, "Colraine", that is generally credited with much of the upgrades to the house, including the columns, the barns, and terraces. He began his business life as a chemist with RJ Reynolds Tobacco, later becoming a stockbroker and entrepreneur. He is listed as a "capitalist" in the 1930 US census. Both Nobles are interred at Ware Church. (1)
- Upon Noble's death, his widow sold Church Hill to E. Stewart & Lillian H. James sometime in the late 1950's. James was a real estate broker and investor and predeceased his wife. Lillian was the national president of the Children of the American Revolution in the mid 1950's. Both Jameses are interred at Ware Church.(1)(5)
- Evan B, Sr. and Jane A. Van Leeuwen purchased the property in 1965 from Lillian James. After remodeling of the kitchen, we moved to the property in March of 1966 from Norfolk, VA.

(1) Ware Episcopal Church website

(2) 'Descendants of Mordecai Cooke of Mordecai's Mount, Gloucester', Hathitrust Digital Library, Univ. of Wisconsin

- (3) Ibid
- (4) Winston-Salem Journal, 2014
- (5) United States Congressional Serial Set, vol. 11999 (online)
- (6) Blackpost.org

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

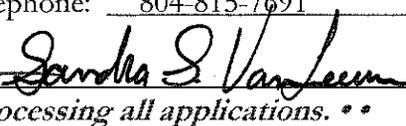
name/title: Evan Balfour Van Leeuwen, Jr. and Sandra Speros Van Leeuwen (husband & wife)

organization: _____

street & number: 7943 John Clayton Memorial Highway,

city or town: Gloucester state: VA zip code: 23061

e-mail: a72olds88.com@me.com telephone: 804-815-7691

Legal Owner's Signature:   Date: 2/28/18
•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: _____

organization: _____

street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

6. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

name/title: J. Brent Fedors, County Administrator

locality: Gloucester County, VA

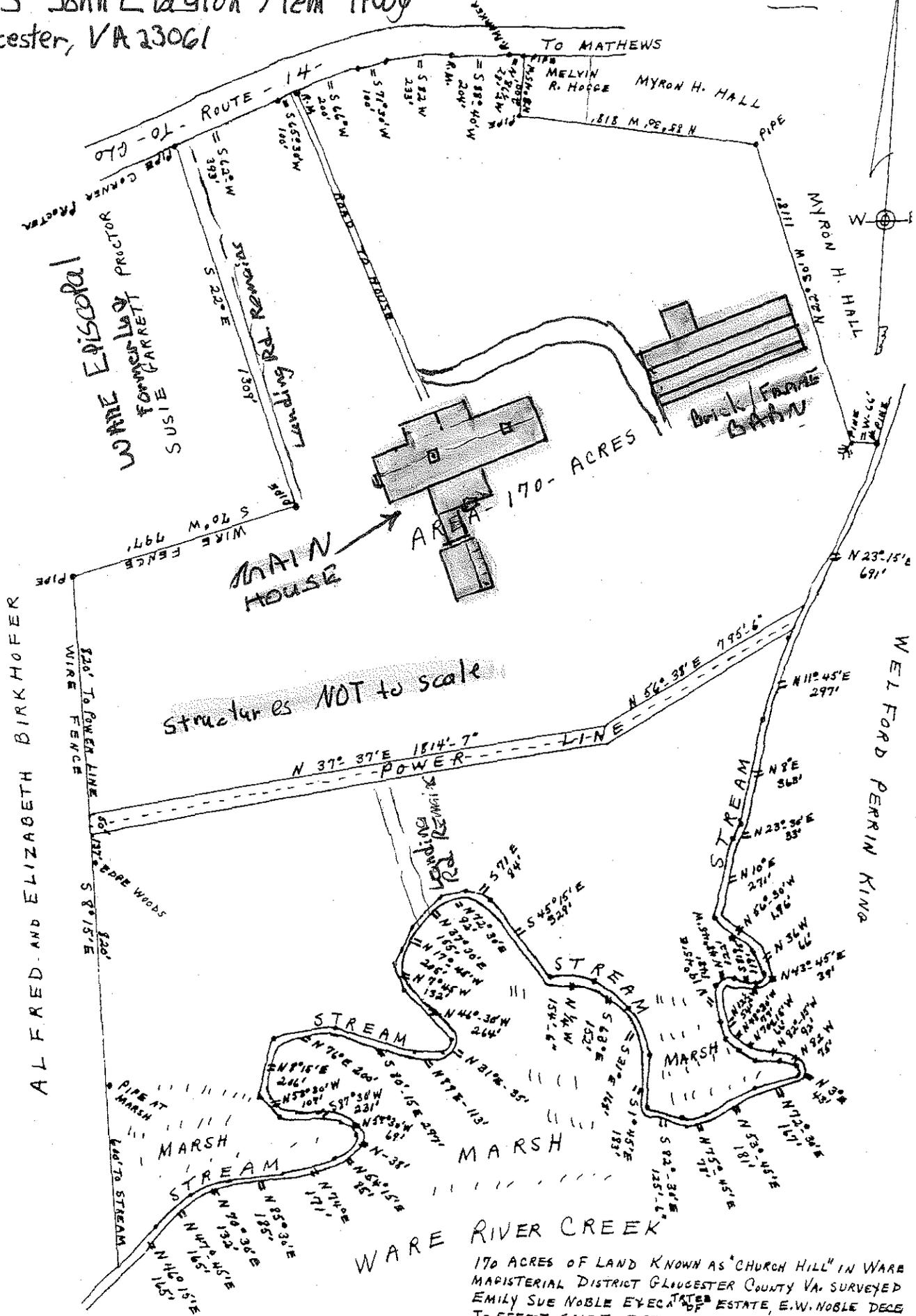
street & number: 6467 Main St.

city or town: Gloucester state: VA zip code: 23061

telephone: 804-693-4042

7943 John Clayton Mem Hwy
 Gloucester, VA 23061

PLOT 1895-30 APPRX



170 ACRES OF LAND KNOWN AS 'CHURCH HILL' IN WARE
 MARISTARIAL DISTRICT GLAUCESTER COUNTY VA. SURVEYED
 EMILY SUE NOBLE EYECAT OF ESTATE, E.W. NOBLE DECE
 TO EFFECT SALE TO E. STEWART & LILLIAN H. JAMES.

APRIL 26TH 1955
 SCALE 1" = 300'

R. F. HEYWOOD
 CERT SURVEYOR

Google Maps 7943 John Clayton Memorial Hwy, Gloucester, VA 23061

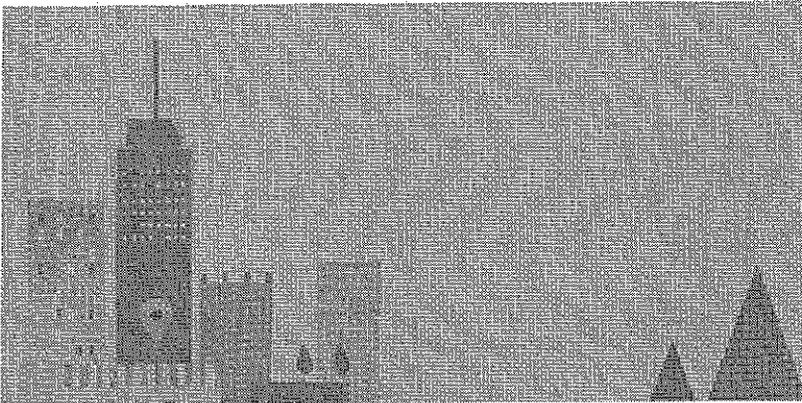


Imagery ©2018 Google, Map data ©2018 Google 500 ft

Google Maps 7943 John Clayton Memorial Hwy



Map data ©2018 Google 2 mi



7943 John Clayton Memorial Hwy
 Gloucester, VA 23061