



STAFF RECOMMENDATION

September 12, 2007

TO: Historic District Commission

FROM: Jeffrey Winstel, AICP, Historic Preservation Planner III

SUBJECT: Evaluation of Significance of 8305 Hectic Hill Lane

DESCRIPTION: Subdivision 0504

OWNER: Zion Avissar
1616C Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on the assessment of the history and architecture of the site, Staff finds that this property meets the adopted Rockville criteria for a local historic district. The house at 8305 Hectic Hill Lane is an example of 1940's – 50's Colonial Revival residential architecture and is eligible under Criterion B: architectural and design significance, for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The house also meets the threshold for significance under Criterion A, for its association with influential lawyer and civic leader, David E. Betts. The Period of Significance for the property is from 1951 to 1957, which is the standard 50-year cut-off date unless the property is of exceptional significance.

In addition to the criteria, additional factors as cited in the City of Rockville's Comprehensive Plan, and the lack of information on the significance of the architectural style need to be considered. It should also be noted another property in Rockville has strong association with the career of David E. Betts.

The current owner, Mr. Zion Avissar, is opposed to the historic designation. He has filed for a demolition permit and a building permit for a new residential structure on the site. The forestry review has been completed and the final record plat is scheduled for review by the Planning



Commission on September 26, 2007. In addition, the owner has applied for and received consent from the heirs of David and Maude Betts (Cromwell Owners) for the plans of the new residence, as per Liber 1349, Folio 97 the "Declaration". (attached).

Architectural Significance

Constructed in 1951, the Betts/ Davis House at 8305 Hectic Hill Lane is a Colonial Revival brick rambler or ranch house. The house is built into a slight hillside and consists of a gable-front end section that is 1 ½ stories in height, a long eave-oriented middle section and a slightly lower rock-faced garage addition on the opposite end. The massing of the house is horizontal and the structure is sited to emphasize this effect, surrounded by open lawn that slopes down into the adjacent lot. The house faces a large (estimated to be 5,000 sq. ft. +) recently constructed 3-story house. The driveway off Hectic Hill Lane leads to the back elevation -- the façade does not front on a street and presumably faced an expanse of open lawn before the adjacent new house was constructed.

The eave-oriented shallow slope gable main roof has a cross gable on the rear slope, is covered in recent textured asphalt shingles, and has copper gutters and downspouts. Two chimneystacks pierce the roof ridge and are clad with random ashlar quartz stone facing. The three sections of the façade are not on the same wall plane; the gable-front end section projects out from the middle section, which is differentiated from the garage by the cladding materials and a slight recession. The gable front and middle sections are American bond painted brick and the garage is faced with random ashlar quartz stone facing.



West façade, northern section



West façade, southern sections

The north 1 ½-story gable end section's facade has a molded cornice with returns. Three windows pierce the broad brick wall – a 6/6 light sash under the gable apex and two 4/4 light sash symmetrically placed at the first floor level. Remaining shutter dogs and hardware suggest shutters were originally features of this section of the façade. Without the shutters, the ratio of solid to void on this wall is high, due to the broad face of the wall and the small sized windows. A side 8/8-sash window is on the south-facing wall that turns toward the middle section. All windows of the house, except those on the back addition, appear to be original wood sash and muntins.

The middle section of the house contains a variety of window types along with the front entry door. From the north to the south end of the elevation this section has an 8/8-sash window, a

recessed entry stoop with door, sidelights, attenuated fluted pilasters, and a picture window consisting of a large central pane flanked by two 6/6-sash windows. The bay window, which follows, has a flared hip copper sheathed roof and the same random ashlar quartz facing on the apron that characterizes the garage and chimneystacks. The bay window has a large central multi-light window with original wood muntins, and two 6/6-sash windows. The bay itself is wood faced with raised molding delineating a slightly projecting cornice board. The next opening is another 8/8 sash window followed by a small oculus window with square light muntins. The recessed entry door is fronted by a slate flagstone entry stoop connecting to a front walk that continues past the façade and leads to the garage on the south elevation.



Recessed front entry



Façade bay window

The south elevation of the building is the stone-faced garage, which is capped with an asymmetrical gable. The elevation contains a small molded cornice with returns similar to those found on the north end façade segment, a circular louvered vent, a central 8/8 sash window and a vertical board side door. Boxwoods line part of the foundation.



South elevation, garage sidewall.



Circular louvered vent. Notice detail of stonework, upper right corner and projecting sill stone



The rear elevation contains a pair of overhead garage doors and a small retaining wall separating the garage from the core of the house.

Rear elevation, garage doors

The rear elevation cross gable section projects out from the southern slope of the main roof. The face of this gable has two projecting header courses, implying a structural function, and a tall rectangular louvered vent opening with sill. The small cornice line continues on the face of the gable as cornice returns. The gable has another rear entrance and tripartite kitchen windows consisting of adjoining 6/6 sash.



Rear elevation kitchen gable

A large rectangular sunroom is located off the rear wall. This addition has a shed roof and flat horizontal wood siding with large fixed glass panes on three sides. The addition has little relation to the style, design, scale and materials of the rest of the house.



Rear elevation with sunroom addition.

Interior

The interior of the house consists of a formal living room and dining room, kitchen, laundry room, family room or “rec” room, 4 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms. The master suite has two bathrooms – one blue and one pink – a fireplace and a separate dressing room. Wood floors dominate throughout the house and appear to be in good condition except for a few areas of severe buckling. Cornice molding with dentil rows are apparent in the formal areas of the living room and dining room and even the guest bathroom off the foyer area.

The house has many original interior features including light fixtures, molding, bathroom fixtures, kitchen cabinets and two classical fireplace surrounds (these have been removed from the wall and are stored in the garage, along with what appears to be the original brass dining room chandelier) and built in corner cabinet niches in the dining room. These semicircular shelves are capped with a scalloped concave lining and trimmed by fluted surrounds with end blocks and keystones. The dining room also has vertical board wainscoting.



Dining Room, corner niche cabinet



Guest bathroom, molding and window trim

The Betts House was constructed in the early 1950s and represents the simplified versions of Colonial Revival style popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Colonial Revival was the most prevalent architectural style of the first half of the twentieth century.¹ Variations of the style continued well into the later half of the twentieth century and still continue in house design today.

The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 started America’s interest in its colonial architectural heritage.² In 1877, prominent architects McKim, Mead, and White undertook a widely publicized tour of historic houses in New England for the purpose of studying the Georgian and Adams architectural styles of America’s colonial past. Their resulting designs for landmark Newport, Rhode Island mansions established the pre-1900 subtypes of the style: the asymmetrical Victorian with superimposed Colonial details and the more symmetrical rectangular shape with a hip roof. Both emphasized exaggeration of period detail over authentic replication of colonial examples.

¹ Lee and Virginia McAlester, A Field Guide to the American House, (New York, NY, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984) , 324.

² *ibid.*

From 1900-1930, the Colonial Revival style reached its zenith. Although larger in scale than original buildings from the period, the detailing and proportions were reflective of the Colonial originals. New printing methods resulting in wide dissemination of photographs led to more accurate representations of the historic precedents. McAlesters attributes the increases in accuracy to two periodicals.

In 1898 *The American Architect and Building News* began an extensive series call “The Georgian Period” with photographs and measured drawings of Colonial Work with text.” This was joined in 1915 by the *White Pine* series of Architectural Monographs, which was dominated by photographs of colonial buildings. These and similar ventures lead to a wide understanding of the prototypes on which the Revival was based. Colonial Revival houses built in the years between 1915 and 1935 reflect these influences by more closely resembling early prototypes than did those built earlier or later.³

Changing post-WWII tastes simplified the Colonial Revival style. The later examples featured side gable orientation of dominant façade elements, simple stylized door surrounds, cornices, and other stylistic details that suggest rather than duplicate original Colonial Revival decorative elements. Small round windows were widely used in the late 1930s, ‘40s, and early ‘50s on Colonial Revival Houses.⁴ These types of porthole windows, common in Art Deco architecture, suggest modernist influences on these later versions of the style.

In Marcus Whiffen’s *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to Styles*, the Colonial Revival style is not listed among the “Styles that Reached Their Zenith” chapter headings, however Georgian Revival is identified for the 1890-1915 period. He dismisses later versions of the style due to changing tastes, drawing an unflattering connection between McKim, Mead and White’s Newport Rhode Island Taylor House (1885-86) and “that long line of suburban houses of which the so-called ‘Williamsburg-style’ boxes of today’s subdivisions are dwarfish and degenerate descendants”.⁵

Claire Lise Cavicchi provides a Montgomery County summary of the style in *Places from the Past*. She defines the phase into two periods: 1875-1900 and 1900-1945. As with other descriptions of the style, she refers to the 19th century versions as retaining Victorian massing and having Colonial detailing, while the early 20th century versions represent more accurate representations of the originals. She does not discuss the mid-century paired down version of the style.⁶

³ *ibid*, 326

⁴ *ibid*, 332

⁵ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture since 1780: A Guide to the Style*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1969) 160.

⁶ Claire Lise Cavicchi, *Places from the Past: The Traditions of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County, Maryland* (Silver Spring, Maryland, M-NCPPC, 2001), 72.

The Betts House contains several elements that are consistent with the later Colonial Revival residential style -- the dominant gable on the façade, the simplified cornice line and door surrounds, and the small circular window with rectangular muntins. In addition to these stylistic elements, the house evidences a delineation of space by architectural elements. The garage end bay has a rusticated treatment with the asymmetrical gable, vertical board door, and the stonework around the circular louvered vent. This stands in contrast to the detailed trim of fluted pilasters with pedestal, shaft and capitals that surround the main entrance. These contrasting treatments delineate the functions of the interior space from the exterior.

Although the design of the house clearly suggests this is not a 1950s track house, within the context of Colonial Revival architecture, it would have to be considered a less important example. Architectural historians clearly define the style are having its zenith in the first 3 decades of the twentieth century. Consistently, the accuracy of the Colonial Revival houses from this period is referenced as superior than the earlier versions that are house forms from a different era with Colonial Revival detailing attached. The same can be said for the Betts house: it is a ranch house, which is no more a Colonial house type than an asymmetrically Queen Anne style house with a corner tower and sleeping porch.

History and Significance

In 1950, William H. Trail deeded 20 acres of land along Rockville Great Falls Road to David E. and Maude W. Betts. William's parents, Hezekiah and Elizabeth Trail, had owned the land since 1868, when they purchased it from Joshua C. Gilpin. Hezekiah Trail was on the original Board of Directors for the Rockville Cemetery Association, founded in 1880.⁷ In the late 1960s, the Trail family farm and a portion of the Rockville Heights subdivision became the Fallsmead Homes development. The exception to this was the acreage deeded to the Betts.⁸

The 20- acre tract of land, referred to in the deed as "Exchange and New Exchange" and "Trails Meadow" became "Betts Brainchild". The deed stated that the Betts "intended to divide the land into parcels to be used as home sites". Covenants attached to the deed stipulated that all parcels shall be used exclusively for private dwellings, the minimum lot size was 2 acres and the houses must be no higher than 2 ½ stories. The location of any house and the "exterior design" has to be approved in writing by Mr. and Mrs. Betts. The parcels were accessed off Hectic Hill Lane, which was and is a privately held roadway.

In 1951, the Betts built the Colonial Revival style ranch house at 8305 Hectic Hill Lane. In 1954, a 2-acre parcel was sold to James and Madeline Davis, who built a house immediately to the west of the Betts House. Subsequent development was limited to the Cromwell family, who are related to the Betts, and Adolph Gude Jr., a member of a prominent local family in the nursery business.

David E. Betts was born in Chicago Illinois in 1911. His father was President of the American Association of Railroads.⁹ The Betts family moved to Chevy Chase in 1920. In 1930 David E.

⁷ Eileen S. McGuckian Rockville Portrait of a City, (Franklin, Tennessee, Hillsboro Press,2001), 85.

⁸ Ibid, 169

⁹ Journal, July 19, 1982.

Betts started his own law practice in Rockville. During World War II he served in the United States Army Air Corps, in the Air Transport Command rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

As the Senior Partner in the law firm of Betts and Murdock, he became one of the most well respected real estate lawyers in the area. His law offices were located at 2 Perry Street and then 22 West Jefferson Street, a 1959 Georgian Revival office building commonly referred to as the Jefferson Building.¹⁰ He served as the President of the Montgomery Bar Association (1957–58) and President of the Maryland State Bar Association (1972-73)¹¹. He was a member of the American Law Institute¹² and was a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation¹³. He was Counsel to the Mayor and Council of Rockville, and General Counsel to the Rockville Volunteer Fire Department. He was a Director and member of the Trust Commission of the Suburban Bank, Director of Suburban Mortgage Company and Vice Chairman of Board of Trustees of Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, and President and Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the Rockville Academy.

In addition to his law career and involvement with civic affairs, Mr. Betts was a member of Christ Episcopal Church for 45 years. He served as a warden and vestryman for the church, and sang in the choir for 35 years. He also performed in many Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas at the Little Rockville Theatre. He was “known for cajoling area government officials with his witty letters and appearances”, which often included regaling “Rockville City Council with a song”.¹⁴ His brother-in-law Valentine Wilson eulogized him in the Sentinel, recalling that he “played the Saxophone and he used to lead us in snake dances up and down Upton Street”. He died in his house in 1982.

His wife, Maud (“Sis”) Wilson Betts was a 5th generation Washingtonian and was born in Rockville. She was active in the Colonial Dames, Lords of Maryland Manor, and served on the Board of the Montgomery County Historical Society. In 1952, she became one of the first people to survive open-heart surgery and the first to have a second operation a few years after.¹⁵ Mrs. Betts oversaw the renovation and enlargement of the Christ Episcopal Church in 1965 and was instrumental in the construction of the Jefferson Building (22 W. Jefferson, Christ Episcopal School) in Rockville. According to a family member, Maud was also responsible for the design of the house at 8305 Hectic Hill.¹⁶ Maud Wilson Betts died in 1992.

During 1950s when David E. Betts was Counsel to the City of Rockville, the city underwent a major change in its government. Rockville: A Portrait of a City discusses Rockville’s emergence as a modern city. During this time, Rockville went from less than one square mile to over seven

¹⁰ Rockville City Directory, (1961, R.L. Polk & co. Publishers, Rockville, Maryland).

¹¹ “Centennial Pictorial: 100 Years of Legal Traditions, 1894-1994” Montgomery County Bar Association.

¹² A 3,000 member elected professional organization founded in 1923 formed to “address uncertainty in the law through a restatement of basic legal subjects that would tell judges and lawyers what the law was”. www.ali.org

¹³ “The Fellows is an honorary organization of attorneys, judges and law professors whose professional, public and private careers have demonstrated outstanding dedication to the welfare of their communities and highest principles of the legal profession”. www.abfn.org

¹⁴ Journal, July 19, 1982

¹⁵ Journal, December 4, 1992

¹⁶ Oral interview, telephone James Cromwell, conducted by Eileen McGuckian, Executive Director peerless Rockville Ltd. 9/11/07

square miles in area. The population increased nine-fold.¹⁷ In 1950 Rockville had a five-member Mayor and Council and was helped out by an appointed clerk, manager, bailiff, and attorney. The water emergency of 1953 provided an impetus for a new political organization, Citizens for Good Government. With a new slate of candidates they won the mayor's office and all the council seats. The new government appointed David L. Cahoon as acting city clerk and city attorney. David Betts was counsel to the city government before the "Revolution of 1954." He apparently did not play an influential role in the most historically significant events associated with the city during this period.

Historic Association

The historic significance of the house at 8305 is largely derived from the structure's association with the life of David E. Betts. He built the house in 1951 and divided by deed the Hectic Hills' 20 acres in 1950. His area of significance is law; Mr. Betts had a distinguished career in law as represented by his leadership role in the field and the prominent positions he held in local civic and political affairs in Rockville. A building closely associated with his area of significance (law) is his former law office, which was located in a suite at 22 West Jefferson Street, the Jefferson Building. Designed by John F. Stann, AIA, of Stann and Hilleary, this building is still extant and is in good condition and is now the Christ Episcopal Church school building.

The National Register guidelines for historic significance associated with a person's life recommend comparing a property under consideration "with other properties associated with that individual to identify those resources that are good representatives of the person's historic contributions"¹⁸. Considerations should be given to the "length of time that a resource was associated with an individual, the strength of association with the person's productive life and important achievements, and historic integrity when determining which properties are most appropriate in representing his or her significance".

The Jefferson Building was constructed in 1959, although he was counsel to the City of Rockville prior to this (his former office was at 2 Perry Street, which is no longer extant) there is no evidence that his work with the counsel should be considered as having influence in the field of law. He was, however, president of the Montgomery County Bar Association prior to the construction of the Jefferson Building, (1957-8), but was President of the Maryland State Bar Association (1972-73) while his office was in the Jefferson Building. The Jefferson Building clearly has a strong association with his practice of law.

Existing Planning Documents

A review of the City of Rockville comprehensive plan and the Historic Resources Management Plan indicates no reference to this architectural style during this period or in this geographic area. Although the date of the house is over 50 years old, and therefore meets the age threshold for historic consideration, the 2002 City of Rockville, Comprehensive Master Plan places emphasis on another age limit. In the "Historic Preservation" chapter of the plan, "Potential Designation of

¹⁷ McGuckian, p 155.

¹⁸ National Register Bulletin 32: Guidelines for Properties Associated with Significant Persons Discussion and Examples.

New Historic Districts”, the document states, “Although Rockville’s housing stock built 50 or more years ago should be evaluated, structures that were built to [sic] prior to 1945 should be the top priority areas for new districts”.¹⁹ According to this, the 1951 Betts House would not be a priority for designation.

The plan goes on to state that “the desires of the community within the proposed districts, the advantages and disadvantage of designation, and financial or fiscal benefits or burdens associated with designation, and other factors” should be considered when creating new districts.²⁰ In addition to the owners, the neighbors oppose this potential designation. Although the definition for a historic district in this case is the property boundaries for 8305 Hectic Hill, the property, as previously stated, is part of the a 20-acre area that is protected by deed to be administered by the descendents of David E. Betts. The administrators of the deed restrictions are the residents of Hectic Hill Lane. As the property is not visible from a public roadway, the residents of Hectic Hill Lane can define the “community within the proposed district”.

The Historic Resources Management Plan (November 1986) divides Rockville’s history into context periods, with the last one being 1931 – present: County Seat to Satellite City of the Nation’s Capital. One of the data gaps identified is “History of city government during the progressive decades, 1940s – present. Sites associated with local governmental leaders or events”. In Chapter IV: Management of Historic Resources by Planning Area, Planning Area 14 is described as having only 4 historic resources, all from the agricultural thematic unit and none from the 1931 – present period. The 2-3 year implementation schedule for Planning Area 14 is to indicate locations of these resources on a City map. The 5-10 year implementation plan is to prepare site-planning criteria for the historic sites and provide architectural guidelines for the homeowner of historic resources.

Archeological resources: Low potential

The property and adjacent properties have been used for residential purposes since the 1950s. The potential for significant soil disturbance is great and any context for artifacts would have likely been negated.

Attachments:

Owner’s request for evaluation/demolition

MHT Form

Criteria Checklist with staff evaluation

¹⁹ City of Rockville Comprehensive Master Plan, “Chapter 8 – Historic Preservation: Potential Designation of New Historic Districts”, pgs. 8-11.

²⁰ *ibid.*

CHAIN OF TITLE

8305 Hectic Hill Lane

- 1868 Joshua C. Gilpin to Hezekiah Trail L 7 F 316
- 1913 Hezekiah and Elizabeth Trail to William H. Trail L 234 F152
- 1934 William H. Trail to Mary T. Nicholson L 565 F 387
- 1950 Mary T. Nicholson and William H. Trail to David E. Betts and Maude W. Betts
L 1349 F 95
- 1982 David E. Betts dies testate willed Maud W. Betts, in whole
- 1993 Maude W. Betts died testate James J. Cromwell appointed Personal Representative of
Estate of Maude W. Betts. Conveys to Barbara Betts Cromwell. L 11954 F 166
- 1996 Barbara Betts Cromwell dies Nov. 1995. James J. Cromwell Personal Representative of
the State of Barbara Betts Cromwell, to Elisabeth L. James, James J. Cromwell, Jr. and
David C. Cromwell, as tenants in common. L 14332 F 639
- 2000 David C. Cromwell conveys his 1/3 interest to James J. Cromwell and Elisabeth L. James.
L 18402 F 294
- 2004 An acre of above 3 acre site conveyed from Elisabeth C. Brower (also known of record as
Elisabeth L. James) and James J. Cromwell, Jr. to James J. Cromwell Jr. as sole owner. L
26343 F 282
- 2006 James, Elisabeth L and Mike to EFF & Jay LLC. L 32982 F. 657
- 2006 EFF & Jay LLC to Zion Avissar et al.

Historic Designation Criteria Checklist

The Historic District Commission (HDC) uses the following checklist to assist it in evaluating the significance of nominated multi-resource and single-site historic districts. Standing structures and sites, including archeological sites, must be determined to be significant in one or more of the following criteria to be found eligible for designation:

A. Historical and cultural significance:

- A. Is the site of a significant historic event
- B. Is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society

The house at 8305 Hectic Hill Lane was the residence of David E. Betts from 1951 – 1982. Mr. Betts was a prominent Rockville attorney and civic leader.

- C. Exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities
- D. Has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City County State Nation

B. Architectural and design significance:

- A. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction

The house at 8305 Hectic Hill Lane is an example of the later period of Colonial Revival residential architecture popular in the 1940s and 1950s.

- B. Represents the work of a master
- C. Possesses high artistic values
- D. Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- E. Represents an established or familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape

Historic Integrity of structure and site:

"Substantially Altered" (basic shape, original façade plan, windows and doors have been obscured or changed)

Minor alterations (porch removal or enclosure, roof material replacement, siding added over old siding, basic mass and fenestration intact)

Exterior alterations to the property appear to be limited to a large rear addition sunroom. The house suffered from moisture damage and flooding, resulting in a few significantly buckled floor boards.

Original or near original condition (all changes reversible)

Outbuildings present and recognizable

Original site and setting largely preserved (lot size, environmental character trees, setbacks, streetscape)

Environmental character is altered with the large (5,000 + sq. ft.) house directly across from the subject house (approximately 150'). Historically this would have been open land.