

Fassit House, Berlin vicinity
Worcester County
Maryland

MD. 170

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Baltimore District

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

ADDENDUM TO:
FASSIT HOUSE
(Edward Lee Carey House)
12025 Fassit Lane
Berlin vicinity
Worcester County
Maryland

HABS MD-170
HABS MD, 24-____, 2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum To:
FASSIT HOUSE
(Edward Lee Cary House)

HABS No. MD-170

Location: 12025 Fassit Lane, southern spur about three-quarters of the way toward the end of the road, Berlin, Worcester County, Maryland. Fassit House is located at latitude: 38.285875, longitude: -75.146037. This point was taken from the center point of the main block and was obtained 17 November 2016, using Google Earth (WGS84). There is no restriction on its release to the public.

Significance: Fassit House is significant as a rare extant example of an early eighteenth century dwelling form and for its distinctive and exceptional decorative brickwork. The house was built ca. 1730 for Captain William Fassit as a one-and-a-half story, center hall plan house with a large multi-purpose “hall” or great room to one side and a small chamber and rear-facing stair hall to the other. The glazed brickwork, which combines repeating chevron, diamond and checkerboard patterns, is perhaps the most extraordinary in the state. The interior exhibits paneled walls and other noteworthy decorative features as well.

Description: Fassit House is a one-and-a-half story brick house, three bays by two bays, measuring 40' x 24' with a dormered gable roof exterior end chimneys. The entry is to the center of the house and is on axis with an entry to the rear. The entries are flanked by twelve-over-twelve-light sash windows. The fenestration is slightly asymmetrical, reflecting the variation in the size of the interior rooms.

The most significant feature of Fassit House is its extraordinary brickwork, with glazed brick headers forming patterns in the Flemish-bond brick walls. The south front façade is ornamented by a pattern of repeating chevrons dispersed between the bays. The west side facade is the most elaborate, comprised of a combination of diamond and zig-zag patterns with glazed brick repeating the outline of the roof in the gable end. The brickwork is disrupted by the center chimney and flanking windows, which were rebuilt in the 1950s. At the rear north façade appears a checkerboard pattern of glazed brick. The east end is largely obscured by a modern kitchen addition.

The interior plan consists of a center hall that runs the length of the house and continues to the northeast rear to a stair hall, forming an L-shaped plan. The larger of the first floor's two rooms is the “hall” to the west, with the smaller chamber to the southeast and the stair hall and closet to its rear. The walls in the center hall have a paneled wainscot. The open, two-run, dog-leg stairway has a scroll pattern in the step ends and an unusual S-shaped newel post head. The closet is located in the northeast corner and is lit by a window. The hall has a full, raised-paneled wall at the end wall that includes the fireplace while the remaining walls have a

paneled wainscot and wide, bolection chair rail that carries over onto the full paneled wall. The fireplace includes a paneled overmantel flanked by fluted pilasters with bolection molding around the opening. The ceiling is covered with wide, beaded boards and the window and doorways surrounded are crosssetted. The smaller chamber has paneled wainscoting and a board ceiling. It opens to a kitchen built in the 1950s to replace the original. The second floor is partitioned into three bedchambers.

History: Fassit House was built sometime between 1725, when Captain William Fassit acquired the property, and his death in 1730. An inventory of his widow's estate in 1744 describes the house as "Dwelling house all Brick New in Good Repair." While his son, John Fassit inherited the property, it appears to have been occupied by his mother, Mary Rouse Harrison Fassit, as her inventory also states, "the Plantation whereon [Mary Fassitt] did live."¹ Ownership of the property passed between various family members, and even was sold briefly out of the family, but was regained. John Fassit, Jr. later built a plantation house to the north of Fassit House known as Mayfields in the early nineteenth century, where he then resided. Upon his death in 1846 Fassit House passed to his son Albert J. Fassit, although he appears to have lived at Mayfields as well, likely renting Fassit House to a tenant farmer. By the late-nineteenth century the property had passed to the related Carey family, where it remains today.

Fassit House is one of a handful of extant eighteenth century patterned brick houses remaining on Maryland's Eastern Shore, reflecting a traditional, regional architectural expression. According to Henry Chandlee Forman, Fassit House has the most interesting patterned colonial brickwork in Maryland, which he states can be compared only to Genesar.² The latter dates to the same period as Fassit House, but is now in a ruinous state of repair. Other distinctive patterned brick houses on the Eastern Shore noted by Foreman are John's Point, Make Peace, Clover Fields, Bowlingly, Mount Republican and Paul Jones House. Many more examples of glazed-header brickwork are extant such as Almodington, Arlington and Hayward's Lot.

Of perhaps equal interest is Fassit House's early form including its one-a-half story, gable-roof configuration, and unusual plan with center hall and off-set stairway. During the early eighteenth century most of the dwellings on Maryland's Eastern Shore (and elsewhere in the state) were of wood-frame construction, one-and-a-half stories in height, and consisted of a simple hall-and-parlor plan. Fassit House's brick construction, particular its decorative brickwork, and its more elaborate plan and ornamental woodwork would have made it

¹ Worcester County Register of Wills, Worcester County Courthouse, Snow Hill; as cited in: Touart, Paul B. "Fassitt House," Worcester County, Maryland. National Register Nomination, 1994. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Section 8, Page 8. Note that Fassit is sometimes also spelled "Fassitt."

² Henry Chandlee Forman, *Early Manor and Plantation Houses of Maryland*, 2nd edition revised (Baltimore: Bodine & Associates, Inc., 1982, originally published in 1932), 135.

exceptional for its day. Unlike the tradition (adjoining) hall-and-parlor plan, the center passage mediated between the public and private spheres of the house, creating a more formal arrangement. The off-set stair hall is somewhat unusual as well, allowing for a narrow center passage and more private stair. By the mid- to late-eighteenth century, planter-class dwellings were raised to a full two stories and included a center-passage with stairway.

Among the defining interior features of Fassit House is its paneling and wainscoting. These finish features began to gain favor in more genteel houses at about the time that Fassit House was erected, although full paneled walls generally gave way to wainscoting, beginning about mid-century.³ The paneling and other elements such as the overmantel, pilasters, and finely dentiled cornice as well as its more spacious sizing distinguish the west room as the finest in the house. The smaller chamber, likely used as a dining parlor, had a smaller corner fireplace and wainscoting only. The decorative open stairway is another refined feature of the house, built in an era when the stair would commonly have been an enclosed or boxed winder. As with the latter form, the stair at Fassit House is tucked in a corner, although it is elaborately finished.⁴ Likewise, closed string stairs remain the norm until the mid-eighteenth century as an open string required more expert carpentry work.

Sources: Cary Carson and Carl R. Loundsbury, eds. *The Chesapeake House* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2013.

Forman, Henry Chandlee. *Early Manor and Plantation Houses of Maryland*, 2nd edition revised (Baltimore: Bodine & Associates, Inc.) 1982.

Touart, Paul B. "Fassitt House," Worcester County, Maryland. National Register Nomination, 1994. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, 2016.

³ Willie Graham, "Interior Finishes," in *The Chesapeake House*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl R. Loundsbury (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 318-19.

⁴ Paul Touart speculates that the stairway may be a Federal period enhancement, dating to the late-eighteenth or even the early nineteenth century. Paul Touart, "Fassitt House," section 7, page 3. Touart speculates that the stair may have been added or enhanced toward the latter part of the century.