

Harmony Hall (BATTERSEA)
(Broad Creek) Maryland

(PRINCE GEORGES CO.)

↙
Friendly Vicinity

HABS No. 10-8

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAN AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Maryland

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FOLIOS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
John H. Scarff, District Officer
1012 Keyser Bldg., Baltimore, Maryland

HARMONY HALL
or
Battersea
Broad Creek, Prince George's
County
Maryland

Owner: Mr. Charles W. Collins.

Date of Erection: About 1723.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.¹

Additional Data: See following pages.

¹ See also the following reference:

Forman: Early Manor and Plantation Houses of Maryland, 11,
83, 84, 92.

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HARMONY HALL

"Battersea"

Harmony Hall represents what remains of an 18th century house situated at the headwaters of Broad Creek in Prince George's County, Maryland, on a gentle slope which leads down to tidewater a few hundred feet distant. The brick building which stands today, was the central portion of the house as it stood in the latter half of the 18th century, and was, no doubt, the original house as first built. Wings, however, were added on the north and south at an early date but at the time of my acquisition of this property there was nothing left of the wings except portions of the stone foundations partly buried in the earth.

The tract of land on which Harmony Hall is situated was patented on October 27, 1662 under the name of "Battersea" by Humphrey Haggett, a lawyer, who practiced in the country court, and a residence has been on this site from that time to the present.

In 1668 title to this property passed to Richard Iles and Philip Mason. The property was divided in half at that time and the west half on which the dwelling house was situated was taken by Philip Mason who conveyed it to William Ayler. It next passed by will in 1718 to William Ayler, Jr. and is described in the will as "my own dwelling plantation" indicating the existence of a plantation dwelling house on this property. The will of William Ayler, Jr. is dated 1755 and title to the property passed to the eldest son, John Ayler, although this is not clear from the language of the will. John Ayler who described

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himself in the deed as "of Charles County, grandson and heir in tail of a certain William Tyler, late, of Prince George's County") conveyed 100 acres of Battersea to James Marshall, gentleman (date not known). This was the northwest portion of the tract upon which Harmony Hall now stands.

According to local tradition the present building was constructed in 1723, the year in which the present brick building of Broad Creek Church (St. John's) nearby was built and by the same contractor. William Tyler, Jr. was the owner at the time and lived there until his death in 1755. The early parish records (now preserved in the archives of the Washington Cathedral) show that the contract for the church was let January 26, 1722 to John Lane who agreed to do the brick work for 16,000 pounds of tobacco. On the same day a separate contract was let to John Bradford, carpenter, for the woodwork including the roof, porch, window frames, doors, doorcases, window-shutters, pulpit pews and gallery. Bradford's compensation was 14,000 pounds of tobacco. A quantity of bricks were left over after the church was finished in 1723 and according to local tradition these bricks were used in the construction of Harmony Hall.

Several changes were made in the structure of Harmony Hall from time to time but there is still sufficient internal evidence of an early date. For example, the floor boards are not tongue and grooved but have straight edges and are doweled together with black walnut pegs cut by hand and set in at intervals. The chimney breasts are paneled without mantel pieces and the paneling is simple in form and extends to the

ceiling. As originally built, the house lacked the dormer windows and the bull's eye cornice which now appear on the road front to the east. These appear to have been added about 1768 which was the year Broad Creek Church was enlarged under an appropriation of 56,000 pounds of tobacco authorized by the General Assembly in 1763 to be levied by the parish. As a part of this remodeling of Harmony Hall, the road front door was changed from a single six panel door into a larger and higher double door. The bricks used at this time in refashioning the doorway and in the bulls' eye cornice are hand-made but smaller and redder than the original bricks. The early workmanship and design is apparent. The house originally had three windows in the north, and four in the south end, but these were closed up probably at the time of the above mentioned changes. For example, the beautifully paneled cupboard in the dining room, which gives evidence of an early date, has behind it in the outer wall the jack-arch of one of these closed windows. The river front to the west stands today as it was originally built, except for the steps which were added in 1930.

In the readjustment of the status of the Protestant Episcopal Church after the Revolutionary war, Rev. Joseph Messenger was installed as rector of Broad Creek Church in 1781. He was thus the third rector of this church since it was founded in 1692. During a portion of the period of his ministry he occupied Harmony Hall as the parsonage. (See Life and Times of Walter Julian Addison by Murray, page 132.)

The ownership of Harmony Hall by the Magruder family of Maryland began with its purchase by Anoch Magruder (great grandson of the immigrant,

Alexander Magruder) from James Marshall, gent., September 6, 1769. He owned the property until his death in 1786 and left it to his daughter, Sarah, who had married Col. Wm. Lyles, an intimate friend of General George Washington. Amos Magruder was a great landowner, and it is assumed that he lived in this house until he built Mt. Lubentia near Largo. There is evidence that his son lived there in great style at the close of the 18th century, although the title to the property was in his sister, Sarah.

The name Harmony Hall was given to the place in 1793 by Mrs. Walter Mulany Addison who was Elizabeth Messelius, daughter of the celebrated colonial portrait painter, when she, as a bride, lived there for a year in 1792-93. Walter Mulany Addison was of the fourth generation of the Addisons born in Maryland, being a direct descendant of Colonel John Addison who emigrated from England in 1670 and who founded Broad Creek Church in 1692. Walter Mulany's great uncle Henry Addison was the rector of this church, beginning his ministry in 1742 and Walter Mulany himself became its fourth rector, beginning as assistant in 1800. John Addison, a brother of Walter Mulany, married also in 1792, Miss Sarah ^{dan. Major Andrew Leitch} Leitch, who was killed in the battle of Harlem Plains and who was an aide to General Washington. The two brothers, Walter Mulany and John Addison, were heirs respectively to Oxon Hill Manor and Wieseborough Manor, but both of these estates were at the time held by leasees. The two young couples thereupon rented from Mr. Dennis Magruder, executor of his father's will, the brick mansion on Battersea and lived here for one year. So happy and harmonious was their experience that Mrs. Walter Mulany Addison

in a sentimental gesture named the place harmony Hall. This name and the romantic story surrounding it outlived the legal name (Battersea) and the place has been known as harmony Hall ever since, having long ago been incorporated in the county records.

Dennis Magruder was a man of great wealth having inherited from his father large holdings of land in southern Maryland. He divided his time between his beautiful home, Mt. Lubentia near Largo, and harmony Hall. The tradition still remains of his coach and four going back and forth between the two places with uniformed out-riders. Dennis Magruder was in his prime at the turn of the century when he moved in the highest social circles in Washington as well as among the county families of southern Maryland. He was noted for his elaborate entertainments of distinguishing guests both at harmony Hall and Mt. Lubentia.

There are many evidences of the friendship of the Magruder family at harmony Hall with the Washington family at Mt. Vernon. A few minutes walk from harmony Hall is old Broad Creek Church where Washington worshiped from time to time, especially when the roads were impassable to Pohick on the Virginia side. He could make the trip by water all the way from Mt. Vernon to the door of Broad Creek Church and the tradition of these journeys in his barge, rowed by his slaves, is still alive in the community. The original pew used by him in the church bears a memorial placed there within recent years by a member of the Washington family.

According to local tradition Washington frequently, after attending services at Broad Creek Church, stopped for dinner at harmony Hall.

In 1779 Dennis Magruder had married Ann Contee. The Contees were

close friends of the Washington family at Mt. Vernon and there are evidences of visiting back and forth, mention being made in Washington's diary of the Contee's stopping at Mt. Vernon. The distance between Harmony Hall and Mt. Vernon is very short, particularly by water. It will be remembered that travel in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia in the early days was more frequent by water than by land on account of the absence of good roads.

About a quarter of a mile down the road from the church on a corner of the Harmony Hall tract, there was in Washington's day a tavern called the White Horse Sign. This tavern was one of the local landmarks in Washington's day. It was on the Piscataway-Alexandria road, the chief thoroughfare to the north on the Maryland side of the Potomac in colonial days, and Washington, no doubt, paused there upon occasion during his frequent going back and forth on this side of the river.

Broad Creek occupied a status in the early civilization of Maryland far different from that which it occupies today. It will be remembered that the settlement of Maryland by the English began at St. Mary's City about 50 miles south of Broad Creek in 1634. A little less than thirty years later the first colonists began to settle around Broad Creek. It is worthy of note that the leadership in the colonization around Broad Creek was taken by gentlemen of birth and education who held allegiance to the Church of England. It was from the first a Protestant community and remained so. At the time that the church and such residential buildings as Harmony Hall, Water, Oxon Hill Manor, Warburton Manor, Frankland and others of this period were constructed, this settlement

marked the furthest point north of the white man's civilization of southern Maryland. There were no cities to the north of Broad Creek. Alexandria and Georgetown were chartered nearly a century later and the city of Washington built nearly a century and a half later. The cities of that day were to the south, that is, St. Mary's City, Leonardtown, Piscataway, Upper Marlboro, and Annapolis. Transportation was had by sail boats, barges, horseback, carriage, and stage coach. When the railroad was adopted generally as a means of transportation no line was built along the Maryland shore of the Potomac. In fact the shoreline being indented with so many tidewater estuaries made the construction of a railroad impractical. As a consequence this whole territory became gradually cut off from contact with the progress of civilization as it developed to the north. Plantations and estates were abandoned and many old manor houses, which once boasted of the highest social distinction, fell into ruins. The use of the automobile however and the construction of automobile roads (following in many cases the old stage coach roads) are gradually bringing this part of Maryland into renewed contact with the progress of the world while still preserving the glamor of romance and adventure of that early day.

Author: Charles W. Collins, National Press Building, Washington, D. C.

Approved: Major H. Brooks Price, District Officer

by *Wm. M. Rittichouse*

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

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10500 Livingstone Road
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Addendum to
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