



*Stephanie Rawlings-Blake*  
Mayor

**COMMISSION FOR  
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL  
PRESERVATION**

*Tom Liebel, Chairman*

**STAFF REPORT**



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

**August 9, 2016**

**REQUEST:** City Council Bill # 16-06986 - Designate as a Baltimore City Landmark:  
George W. King/Abraham Briscoe House - 1232 Druid Hill Ave.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval

**STAFF:** Lauren Schiszik

**PETITIONER(S):** Councilman Eric T. Costello

**OWNER:** Bethel A.M.E. Church

**SUMMARY:** Designate this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List.

**SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

The property is located on the southwest side of Druid Hill Avenue near the intersection with Lanvale St. in the Upton's Marble Hill neighborhood. The property is located just outside of the Upton's Marble Hill local historic district. The district is primarily residential, but also contains two historic churches, a YMCA, and a historic bank. The houses are traditional, marble-stepped brick rowhouses, exhibiting either Queen Anne or Italianate influence. Typical details are bowed fronts, original wood double doors, conical roof towers at corners, corbelled brickwork, roof cresting, and arched doorways. The integrity of the district remains high, as little alteration has taken place.

Upton's Marble Hill Historic District is important as one of Baltimore's earliest African-American middle class neighborhoods and for its well-preserved architectural detail. The lengthy list of historically prominent residents includes Harry S. Cummings, Sr., one of the first two blacks admitted to the University of Maryland Law School (1887), and the first black Baltimore City Councilman, T. Willis Lansey, who founded the Ideal Federal Savings and Loan (1920). Others were Henry Hall, a prominent engineer and educator, John Murphy, Sr., founder of the Afro-American newspaper, and Violet Hill White, Baltimore's first black female police officer. In 1900, the Federal Census showed the neighborhood to be entirely white (except for a few black servants) and probably of German-Jewish origins.

By 1910, a major racial change had taken place; the 1500 block of Druid Hill Avenue, for example, had only two white families in that year. This influx of black homeowners included teachers, postal employees, clerks, porters, coachmen, and domestic servants who were able to

own or rent quality housing in the district. In 1985, the first section of the Upton district was designated, with approximately 51 rowhouses in a one-block area between McCulloh Street, Druid Hill Avenue, McMechen, and Mosher Streets. The expansion of the area in May 1990 raised the number of structures to 184 and the area of the district to about 7 blocks under the name Upton's Marble Hill, recognizing the local tradition of the neighborhood's immaculate white marble steps.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description: 1232 Druid Hill Ave. is a three bay wide, three story tall, brick Italianate rowhouse. It is largely rectangular in plan, 20 feet wide, by 80 feet deep. The first floor entrance is located on the right bay, and features a large carved stone arched surround capped with an ornamental keystone, paneled double doors with a transom, and marble steps. The first floor is located above a stone water table, and the raised basement is also faced with stone. The windows on the first floor and basement contain non-historic replacement windows. The window openings on the second and third stories are largely boarded up, though some are missing both windows and boards. All of the window openings feature stone sills and jack arch lintels. The building also features a decorative Italianate cornice. The north elevation of the building is a party wall, now exposed due to the demolition of 1234 Druid Hill Ave. The rear of the property features a three story brick ell, and a small rear yard.

## **BACKGROUND**

- The property was condemned by the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development on August 23, 2008. Condemnation is a determination that a property is unsafe, and this determination allows the City to require that the property owner maintain the property, or the City can take steps to take ownership of the property.
- On September 21, 2015, applications were made for the demolition of both 1232 and 1234 Druid Hill Ave. The final demolition permit for 1234 Druid Hill Ave. was issued on October 16, 2015, and the building was demolished over the course of the next several weeks. The permit for 1232 Druid Hill Ave. was not paid for or picked up, and thus was not officially issued by DHCD.
- The request to consider the designation of 1232 Druid Hill Ave. on the Potential Landmark List was submitted in November 2015 by Baltimore Heritage, Inc.
- At the January 12, 2016 hearing, the Commission listed this property on the Commission's Preliminary Landmarks List.
- At the April 12, 2016 hearing, the Commission considered the demolition of the rear ell, as submitted by the owner, Bethel A.M.E. Church. The Commission approved the demolition of the rear ell by hand, finding that it was structurally unsound. The Commission as required that the owner submit a plan to stabilize the rest of the structure.
- On June 20, 2016, City Council Bill # 16-0698 was introduced by Councilman Eric T. Costello, Sharon Green Middleton, and Mary Pat Clarke to designate this building as a Baltimore City Landmark.

## **PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES**

Designate this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List.

## **ANALYSIS**

CHAP staff has reviewed the landmark designation report and has determined that the property is eligible for designation as a potential landmark under Criteria 1 and 2.

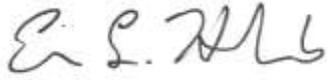
The property is significant under Criterion 2 for its association with George W. King. King was a prominent printer that lived at this property from 1883 until his death in 1898. This is the only structure associated with Mr. King that survives today. King was the founder of the Kings Brother printers, a prominent Baltimore firm that was active from the 1850s-1950s. The King Brothers served as the official printer for Baltimore City government in the mid-to-late 1800s, and also was the official printer for the State of Maryland for many years. King also served as a Councilman for Ward 7 in 1872 and 1873, and was also very active in a variety of other business and municipal activities, including organizing a Typographical Union. This was his final home, purchased at the end of his career, and representative of his success as a businessman.

Following King's death in 1898, his family rented out 1232 Druid Hill Avenue to Abraham Briscoe, an African American wagon driver, and his family. The history of this house during the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century is significant under Criterion 1, for its association with the broad patterns of Baltimore history. It is representative of the racial transition of this neighborhood, and efforts of African Americans both before and during the Great Migration to seek opportunities in the city of Baltimore, engaging in civic activism and civil rights on an individual and collective basis. Several institutions in this area, including churches, schools, and social organizations, have been designated for the role that they have played in the civil rights activism of the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, but no designation has recognized the important roles that these individual homes played, where activism also occurred on an individual and institutional basis. The home, through those living in it, was host to fundraising activities for fraternal organizations, mutual beneficial societies and youth programs, as well as social clubs and literary societies. These fundraising activities were often run by women, like the Misses Briscoe's lawn party hosted at 1232 Druid Hill Ave. These organizations were crucial in the African American community. Neither government nor society offered them economic or social nets, while also actively limiting their civil rights and opportunities. Therefore, these organizations were a lifeline. In the late 1920s - 1930s, the first floor apartment of the building was the office of Mount Zion cemetery. In 1931, 1232 Druid Hill Avenue was also the office for Bishop A. L. Gaines, presiding Bishop of the Second Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Church.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS**

The property is not located within a CHAP district; therefore, comments from an Architectural Review Committee are not applicable. However, CHAP did inform the following stakeholders: Marble Hill Community Association, Inc., Upton Planning Committee, Upton's Marble Hill Architectural Review Committee, Baltimore Heritage, Inc., Baltimore National Heritage Area, and Preservation Maryland.

Staff recommends a finding of approval for designation of this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List because it meets criteria 1 and 2 of CHAP's criteria for designation.

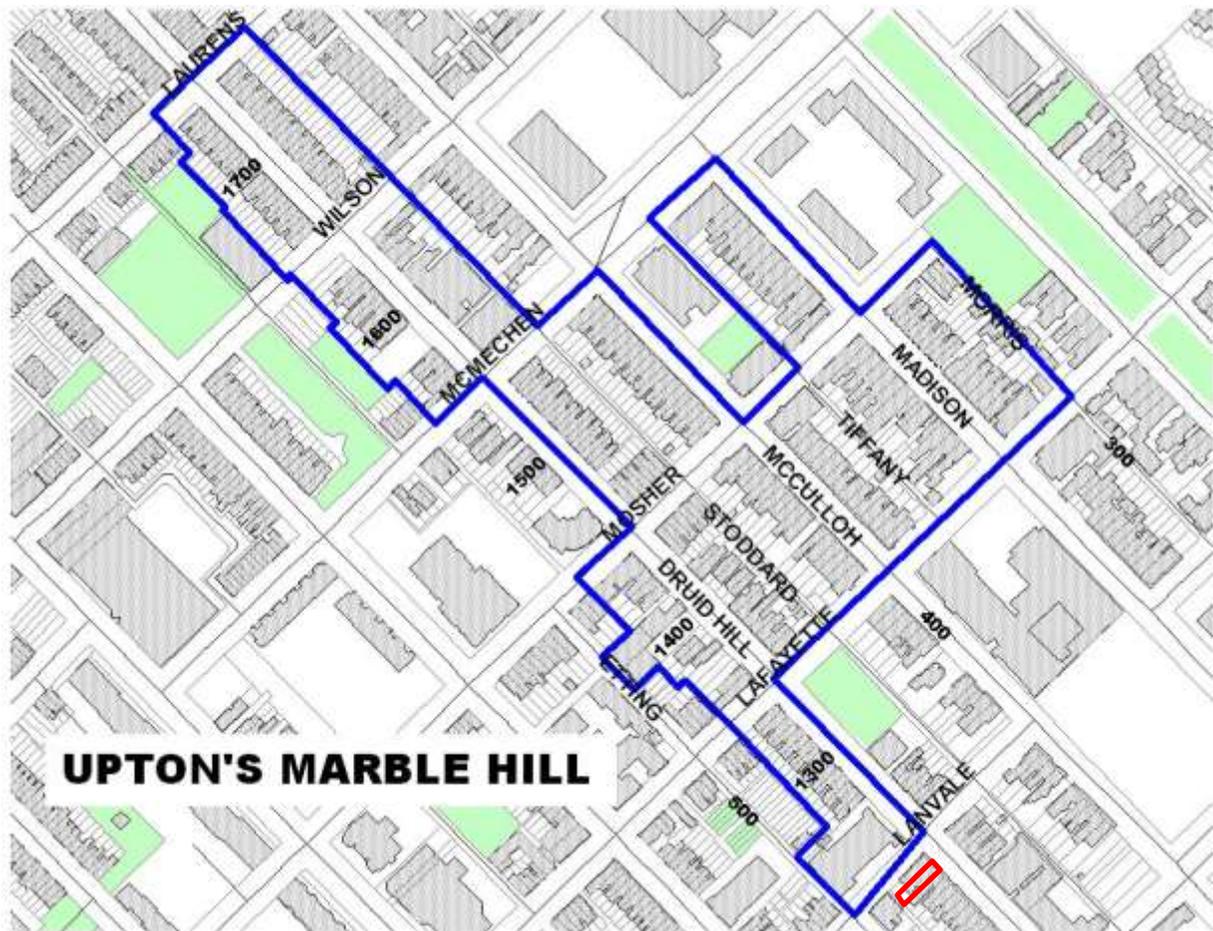


**Eric Holcomb**  
**Director**

## MAP AND IMAGES



*Map 1: Google map of the property.*



Map 2: The property (outlined in red) is located just outside of the Upton's Marble Hill historic district (outlined in blue).



Image 1- Aerial view of site, looking south. The building is outlined in red.



*Image 2 – Façade of the property, facing west. Photo taken December 2015.*



*Image 3 – North elevation of property. Photo taken December 2015.*



Image 4 – Rear (east elevation) of property. Photo taken December 2015.

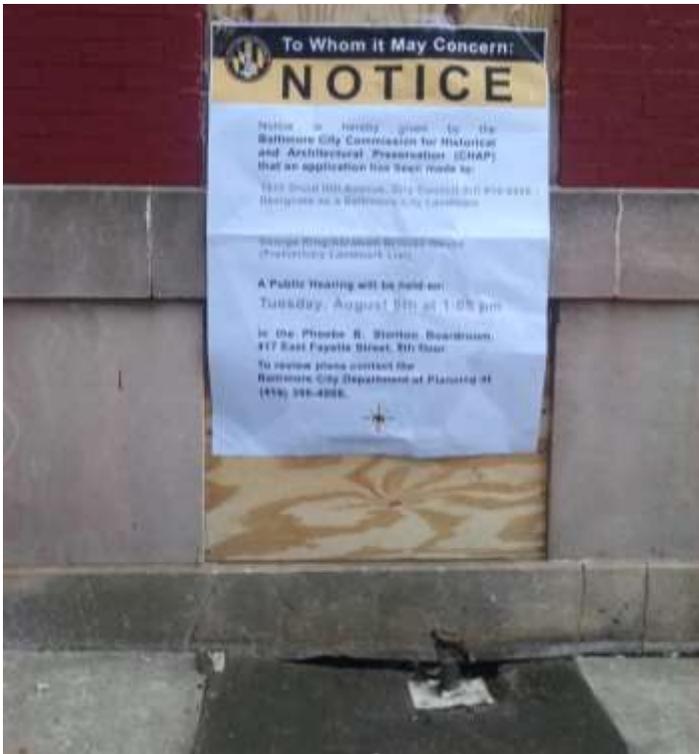


Image 5 –Hearing Notice, posted July 29, 2016.