

PIKE HALL

CIRCA 1789

In the colonial period, an early trail meandered west from the sea through the wilderness that became Washington County. This trail was incorporated into the Bank Road complex that joined the National Pike at Cumberland. A section of this early road is called West Washington Street in Hagerstown. Along this road, at the western edge of the city, stands a two-story stone and log home, partially hidden by trees. Pike Hall is seven bays wide, presenting four windows and three doors to face the road on the first-floor level.

The western, log section of the house was built first, but the exact construction date isn't known. In 1789 Conrad Oster purchased 53 acres of land, parts of *Resurvey on Nicholas Ridenour's Pond, Henry's Last Shift* and *Hager's Delight*, from David Ridenour. Conrad's wife Eve was a granddaughter of Nicholas Ridenour, so this was a sale within the family. It could be that Conrad and Eve built the log house after they acquired the land, or it might have been the work of an earlier settler. The entrance to this home is in its east bay; and opens into an ample hall. There is a stairway on the right and another exterior door

The log section of this building was built in the 18th century. The stone wing was added in 1838. At one time it served as a stagecoach stop called The Sign of the Swan. Photo by Kevin G. Gilbert/Herald-Mail Company. Additional photos in the color section C-29.



at the other end of the hall. To the right is a living room with a cooking fireplace. The second floor was probably a sleeping loft.

In 1838 a stone wing was added to the east side of the hall. This addition was set back from the log house to allow room for a double porch with its chamfered posts supporting the main roof span. The floors were also a step higher than those of the log section. The stone corners are quoined, and beside the door in the east wall is a hand-cut stone that reads, *JO 1838*.

There is a dining room and a living room on the first floor of the stone wing. The living room has a large cooking fireplace with an interior stone chimney and an original cupboard built in beside it. Both these rooms are entered from doors on the porch. Upstairs there are two chambers, both with fireplaces, simple original mantels and another original cupboard. A door leads out onto the upper porch. A later frame wing was added on the north side of the stone wing to accommodate a modern kitchen.

Pike Hall has had a varied history. At one time it was a stage coach stop offering dinner, breakfast and lodging, as well as care for horses. In the February 26, 1801, edition of *The Washington Spy*, it was advertised as *The Sign of the Swan* and run by the Ridenour family. Some say it was a speakeasy during Prohibition. There were apartments at Pike Hall during World War II and a hippy commune after that. When Frances Horst first saw the house, it had been badly abused. The log section had replacement doors and windows, half the logs were rotted and the floors sagged on decaying joists. Lewis Horst even refused to go upstairs. But, fortunately for Pike Hall, Frances had fallen in love. After weeks of cajoling, Lewis grudgingly agreed to purchase the Hall, but Frances was to be responsible for all the work. He would have nothing to do with it. But, of course, the day after signing the papers, he was making plans to jack up the first floor.

It was no easy job. All the logs between the rear windows and a third of the logs in the front wall needed to be replaced. A new shake roof and new systems were needed. Nine-over-six sash windows were ordered to replace the ones in the log wing. They arrived as six-over-nine and had to be installed upside down. The fireplace was completely gone, and the chimney was suspended in the west wall by some act of will. This fireplace was replaced following the clues left behind as to its size and shape. A cinder block support was built in the basement to carry the weight of the masonry. New moldings were made to match the old when woodwork was missing. The stair rail with its simple turned balusters was stripped of paint and refinished. New oak six-panel

doors were made, six-over-six windows were built for the stone wing and new wide oak floors were laid. When they cleared the front yard, the Horsts discovered it was paved with cobblestones, testament to the days when Pike Hall was a coach stop and inn.

The kitchen, the frame wing to the north, presented a special challenge. Frances wanted an old house with the conveniences of a modern kitchen. She had wood countertops built with an old iron hand pump standing over the kitchen sink. Water flows when the unobtrusive spigots are turned. The ceiling is old tin between wood beams, and the cupboards are made from narrow beaded boards. An electric stovetop is built into the counter, but at the heart of the room is an antique Penn Iris wood-burning kitchen stove. When there is time, the steady heat of the wood stove, filling the room with warmth and cooking the food evenly, is Frances's choice. It's a wonderful, comfortable room.

In the basement, there is a large cooking fireplace in the east wall still equipped with its original crane. This space, lighted by north windows, is becoming a family room to be furnished with antiques.

Beside the house is a log wash house that Frances designed and had built from old materials. It is a comfortable space with a huge fireplace at the far end. When workmen mistook her instructions and plastered the interior of the building, she laboriously removed the plaster to expose the old logs once more. There is also a log smokehouse that was removed from another spot and rebuilt here. And there is a privy. When the existing privy was lost during the clearing process, Frances took a design used in Williamsburg and had it copied for her yard. From a house in Richmond listed in the National Register of Historic Places, she copied a massive chimney with a waist-high stovetop that was added at the rear of the kitchen wing. This chimney also supplies the flue for the kitchen woodstove.

The Horsts are collectors of antiques, particularly primitives and oddities, like the corncob organ that fills a spot in the dining room. In the log-wing living room, there is an area beside the fireplace that is filled with old children's toys and furniture. This special place for grandchildren is called "the Apartment." Cupboards are filled with precious antique toys—Grandmother's toys—and assortments of crocks and sponge ware. The house shows the Horsts' passion for collecting and for preserving. It is filled with character.