

KIM HAIRSTON/STAFF PHOTO

In St. John's Church, Marie Scott Brown (left) tells Sarah Lord, a neighbor, about growing up in the historic black enclave of Bare Hills.

## Bare Hills still filled with founder's descendants

By Robert A. Erlandson  
Staff Writer

"Here's where it all began," said Sarah Fenno Lord, pointing to the marble gravestone half-buried in a wooded grove off Falls Road.

The inscription reads: "In memory of Revd. Aquila Scott, who passed away while in the church below, to join the church above. March 28th 1858. Aged 74 years."

Mr. Scott, who died in his pulpit at St. John's Church, Ruxton, and is buried in his own backyard, was a founding father in every sense of the word. He had a dozen children, founded the church in 1833, and established Bare Hills, one of Baltimore County's oldest black enclaves.

Though the community is still

populated largely by his descendants, there are fears it may be losing its black identity.

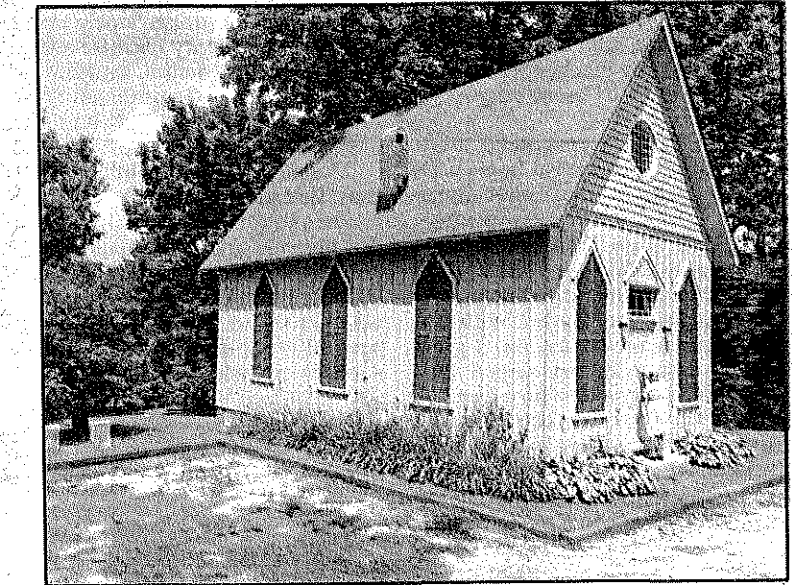
And there is the ever-present possibility of commercial encroachment.

Yet, Bare Hills remains a unique and richly historic neighborhood.

"When a guy like Jim Rouse tries to create a perfect town [Columbia] with a range of economic and ethnic backgrounds, that can be very difficult," said Mrs. Lord, a longtime community activist. "Yet it has existed on this little half-mile

of Falls Road for 150 years."

Mr. Scott's family takes great pride in knowing it was free for several decades before the Civil War. In the late 18th century, Mr. Scott's father, Tobias, saved his master's



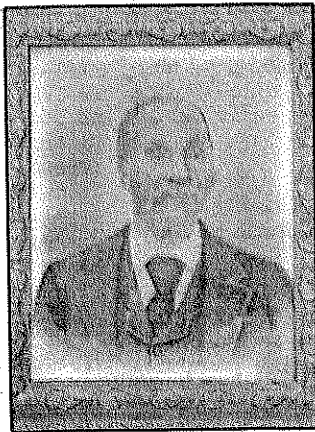
KIM HAIRSTON/STAFF PHOTO

Mrs. Brown unlocks chapel founded by her great-grandfather.

life and won manumission for himself and his descendants. Another source of pride in Bare Hills is that it always has been racially, if not socially, integrated.

"White people have always lived here, and there were never any problems. Most of the [black] people

See **HILLS**, 2C, Col. 2



REV. AQUILA SCOTT

# Bare Hills area fears loss of historic black identity

HILLS, from 1C

here worked as domestics up in the big houses," said Marie Scott Brown, 81, a great-granddaughter of Aquila Scott.

"Nobody had anything but it was a lovely place to live; everybody shared. You lived neighborly but you didn't intrude," she said.

Bare Hills was nice, but not perfect, said Mrs. Brown. For instance, black children couldn't attend Bare Hills School, which was right across the street from where she grew up.

"It was for white children from the city line to Rockland Mills," she said. "I went to city schools, some of the others went to Lutherville."

Since the mid-1700s, the area along Falls Road between Lake Avenue and Coppermine Terrace has been known as Bare Hills because of the serpentine rock found there. Chromite deposits found in 1810 began an industrial era that included a world monopoly on the mineral until 1850. Copper mining began in 1860, and quarries provided building stone.

Dolores Scott, a retired school librarian, has compiled a history of the Scott family. She said it was "very satisfying" to learn how freedom allowed them to prosper when most blacks were slaves.

It was in the 1820s that Aquila Scott — whose name appears as Aquilla on some records — moved to Bare Hills from St. Mary's County. He was a blacksmith and a wheelwright, and being free, he had property rights. In 1839, he bought his first two acres of land on what was then the Falls Road Turnpike. The community, located on the west side of the road, grew as Scott's relatives built homes.

Although most white families lived in big houses on the slopes east of Falls Road, there was no racial dividing line. Bare Hills House, on the west side, is on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1856 by Dr. Horatio Gates Jameson, Jr., a prominent physician, it was later sold to Civil War hero Adm. David Dixon Porter.

Though racial harmony has been a hallmark of Bare Hills, one man tried to maintain the black community's racial identity. In 1902, John Gardman, who married into the Scott family, bought a property called Pleasant View and some other acreage. This led to the only significant expansion of Bare Hills' black community. He farmed the land until 1925, then had it surveyed for building lots. Although whites bid for lots, Mr. Gardman insisted on selling to blacks who could not buy land in or near the city.

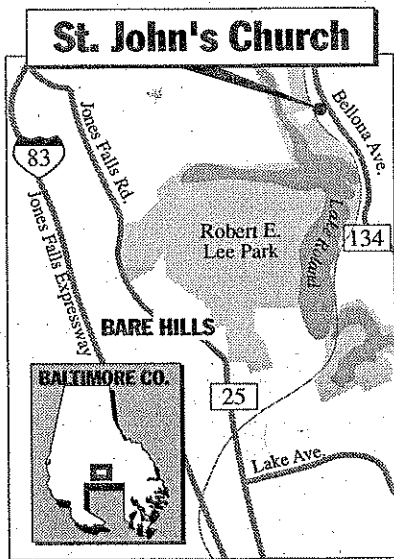
Since then, Pleasant View's secluded streets have become a haven for black professionals and business people. While black families still predominate, several white and racially mixed families have bought homes in recent years, said Valerie Brown, 78, a retired city teacher who heads the Pleasant View Community Association.

"I think Bare Hills is special. It is a community at ease and at home with itself; it is so stable," said Marie Fischer Cooke, a lawyer and president of the Bare Hills Community Association, who owns Bare Hills House. "It is an integrated neighborhood, not just racially but with the commercial area around us. It grew up that way and has stayed that way. There is very little turnover."

What turnover does occur usually involves whites moving in and young blacks moving out. For this reason, some residents fear that Bare Hills may eventually have a white majority.

"Every time a white person moves in, I grind my teeth and think, there goes the neighborhood. I hate to see go white," said Mrs. Lord, who is 81.

Bare Hills' homes are buffered on the west side by the businesses along Clarkview Avenue, and on the east by Robert E. Lee Park, the Lake



STAFF GRAPHIC

Roland watershed. There are businesses along Falls Road from Clarkview Avenue to Old Pimlico Road, and at Lake Avenue and Falls Road, south of the railroad tracks.

But community leaders, who have joined with nearby associations on various issues, say they must guard against further commercial incursion. Their attempts to preserve the scenic nature of their stretch of Falls Road have included blocking a proposed interchange of the Jones Falls Expressway, which would have meant widening Falls Road; opposing the light-rail station at Lake Roland and fighting a bus loop at Old Pimlico Road.

"We're trying to keep Falls Road scenic, it's one of the last rural routes into Baltimore," said Lillian Gardner, 78, a retired social worker who lives in Pleasant View.

"The threats never end," said Mrs. Lord. "It's a tough place to live but it's magical."

In the old days, St. John's Church, on Bellona Avenue, was the center of spiritual life for Bare Hills and for the live-in servants at the big houses in Ruxton. Believed to be Baltimore County's oldest black congregation, it grew out of church services Aquila Scott held at his home.

In 1833, a white landowner named Elijah Fishpaw deeded three-quarters of an acre to five black men, including Mr. Scott, for a cemetery and Methodist Church. The stone parsonage dates from 1833 but the present frame church was built in 1886, on the foundation of the log church, which burned in 1876.

Before 1861, when Lake Roland was created as the city's first reservoir, residents walked across fields and paths to church. Later, most took the train around the lake.

Abandoned in the 1960s for lack of attendance, the church began a rebirth in 1980 when Gail B. O'Donovan, of Ruxton, happened upon the dilapidated chapel during research on a local zoning issue.

"I felt it was an extremely important piece of history because so little black history remains, and the fact that it had been continuously in the hands of one family that had been freed before the Civil War," she said.

Mrs. O'Donovan mobilized forces that included then-Gov. Harry R. Hughes to raise \$108,000 to restore the church and parsonage, which are now on the National Register of Historic Places. An endowment fund was set up to maintain them, and several fund-raisers and special services are held there each year.

## BARE HILLS DAY

The community celebration, Bare Hills Day, will be held at 2 p.m. Aug. 8 in the 6200 block of Falls Road. Events include a covered-dish picnic, games, storytelling, family reunions and recollections of Bare Hills' history. For more information, call Betty Williams at (410) 823-5843.