

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG 86B-037

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Wilmer's Park

other

2. Location

street and number 15710 Brandywine Road not for publication

city, town Brandywine vicinity

county Prince George's County

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Arthur Wilmer Foundation, LLC

street and number P.O. Box 9 telephone

city, town Brandywine state MD zip code 20613-0009

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Prince George's County Courthouse liber 39 folio 341

city, town Upper Marlboro tax map 156 tax parcel 5 tax ID number 1191378

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
- Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Recorded by HABS/HAER
- Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- Other: _____

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count		
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	5	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	1	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	3	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	_____	_____
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	8	0
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	Number of Contributing Resources	
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:	previously listed in the Inventory	

7. Description

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Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SUMMARY

Wilmer's Park consists of an 80-acre rural parcel on the north side of Brandywine Road in Brandywine; eleven acres of the park were used for music and sports entertainment while the remaining acres remained wooded. Wilmer's Park sat on lands formerly used as a tobacco farm by the Grimes Family; a tobacco barn behind the dancehall is the last vestige of this use of the property. The original park buildings on the site included a large, 6,000 square foot dancehall with five apartments below and a restaurant. Soon after establishing his park, Arthur Wilmer moved his family out to the site and built a ranch house in the early 1950s with a detached garage at the western end of the parcel across the gravel road from the dancehall. A baseball diamond at the southeast corner of the property is the only remaining evidence of the Wilmer's Park's earliest use as a baseball and football park for local "Negro League" teams. Wilmer later added a large, covered stage with wooden bleachers behind the dancehall, as well as an outdoor picnic area, playground, a smaller music stage by the restaurant, and a ticket booth by the entry off Brandywine Road. He attached a fifteen-room motel to the south elevation of the restaurant and dancehall building at the same time. The largest building on the property is formed by the dancehall, restaurant and motel. There is a large field to the north of the dance hall and southwest of the barn and covered stage and another large, open field to the northwest of the barn.

DESCRIPTION

One of the first two buildings constructed in Wilmer's Park was a large, 6,000 square foot dancehall with five apartments below. The dancehall building is a 3 x 5 bay, two-story building with a shallow pitched, half cylindrical roof, originally clad in asphalt shingles. The roof cladding is currently missing in many places and failing in others with exposed insulation and underpinning. The building is constructed of concrete block with brick infill by the roof and windows. The brick forms sills under the main story windows. The southwest façade is clad in brick with wide siding in the roof peak. There is an interior brick chimney at the southwest end of the dancehall. There is a set of flush wooden doors at the southwest corner of the façade that are accessed via concrete steps with a concrete wall. Most of the façade is covered by the rear elevation of the restaurant. There is a shed roof porch with metal supports on the southeast end of the façade that protects the entry to the kitchen for the restaurant, which was housed at that end of the dancehall. The fenestration is symmetrical and deeply set into the building; however, the windows are missing. The dancehall faces southwest and is built into a hill that slopes to the northeast. On the northwest elevation of the building there are five apartments below the dancehall level. Each apartment is one bay and has a door and window in that bay. The windows and doors are missing for the most part, though a screen door remains on the door at the northern end. The entries on the northwest elevation are protected by a one story shed roof porch that was originally clad in asphalt shingles and that runs the length of the elevation. The porch is supported by wooden posts on a brick wall. The porch roof cladding is in poor condition and the post supports have additional supportive structures to keep the roof from falling. There is a one-bay, one-story, flat roof porch supported by wood posts at the southwest end of the northwest elevation that is slightly higher than the roof that runs the rest of the elevation.

Upon entering the dancehall itself, there is a stage at the northeastern end of the room. The floors are wood and the concrete block walls are covered with murals that are reproductions of Duke Ellington album covers designed by local artist Eddie Henderson. According to Wilmer, Henderson was the designer of Ellington's album covers.¹ The window openings are boarded up, the floor boards are warped, and the roof is uncovered in certain places, exposing the interior to the elements. Several fans hang from the exposed rafters. The leather-wrapped bar in the southeast corner of the dancehall remains.

The Restaurant at Wilmer's Park was the other building Wilmer constructed when he first opened the park; it is attached to the southwest end of the dancehall. The restaurant is a 3 x 1 bay, one-story building with a front gable roof clad in asphalt shingles with a thin cornice and shallow pitch. A sign that says "Restaurant" runs along the gable peak. The building is constructed of CMU block with wood siding in the gable peak. There is a pair of vinyl, paneled and glazed doors in the central bay of the façade with nine lights

¹ Eugene L. Meyer, "Pragmatic Promoter Segues from Count Basie to Heavy Metal." *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1989, final edition.

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each. The entry is recessed from the façade and is protected by a wood shed roof with wood post supports. There is a sixteen pane, fixed metal window in the south end of the façade that rests on a thin sill and is protected by a metal awning. There are two sixteen-pane, fixed metal windows on the northwest elevation. The snack bar kitchen is located along the southeast elevation and the dancehall runs along the northeast elevation. The interior of the restaurant has a chair rail with panels above it along the walls. The floors are covered with linoleum tiles. A large bar runs the length of the southeast end, with a cash register, a counter top, and glass cabinet behind it. There is also an entryway to the kitchen and freezer behind the bar. A less formal food stand and kitchen are located to the southeast of the restaurant.

In two later additions to the restaurant and dancehall, Wilmer built a casual food stand and a 15-room motel for his performers and guests. The food stand is a 2 x 1 bay, one-story building with a shallow pitched shed roof clad in asphalt shingles. There are many vents on the roof connecting to the kitchen facilities housed within this building. The building is of CMU construction with large openings for the windows on the two exposed elevations. Since the building was used to serve food, the windows are screened with wood framing, and open at the bottom to allow food to be passed from the kitchen to the customer. There is a wide sill used for a counter at the bottom of each window opening. The counter on the southeast elevation is protected by a shed roof porch with a metal roof, thick wood cornice and metal post supports. This porch connects to the porch over the kitchen and food storage area to the east. Inside the food stand are the remains of the kitchen. To the southeast of the stand is the kitchen and food storage area that connects to the stand and the motel. This 2 x 1 bay, one-story building has a flat roof clad in asphalt shingles with a shed roof overhang with exposed rafter tails that is supported by metal posts and intersects the roof over the food stand. The building is CMU construction with wood framing for two screen doors, one in each bay. There is a smaller building to the northeast of the food storage building that is not visible due to the extensive brush around it.

The last addition to the Wilmer's Park dancehall and restaurant building was a fifteen-room motel that housed the entertainers. This one-story, eight-bay motel has an alternating flat and front gable roof across it, clad in asphalt shingles, many of which have failed. The front gables have full cornice returns that are also clad in shingles. The roof has overhanging eaves which form a sort of porch, protecting the windows and doors from the elements. The motel is of wood-frame construction clad in asbestos shingles. The fenestration is symmetrical, each bay having a window and a door. The windows are single, six-over-six double-hung wood sash with thick sills and frames. The entry doors are paneled wood, glazed with nine lights. The building is currently in poor condition, as many of the doors and windows are missing and have been covered with wood. The building is also overgrown with vines.

When Arthur Wilmer moved his family to Brandywine, he built a house for them on the property. The Wilmer Residence is a 3 x 1 bay, one-story ranch house with an I-shaped, hipped roof clad in asphalt shingles with overhanging eaves, a thick cornice and a shallow pitch. The house is of wood-frame construction with a stone veneer and has an interior stone chimney. The fenestration is asymmetrical with a ribbon of three windows in each bay, consisting of two, four-pane awning windows surrounding a large, single-pane, fixed window. The entry door is off center in the bay and is paneled vinyl with three, single pane diagonal glazings. There is a storm door protecting the entry door. The overhanging eaves provide cover for a small porch by the entry that is elevated and runs the bay, with a metal railing. There is a one-bay, one-story, one-pile addition off the northwest elevation that is clad like the house with an interior chimney and a secondary entry on the façade. The fenestration on the addition is not visible due to the dense foliage around the house.

There is a two-bay, one-story detached garage to the southeast of the house that is similarly clad. The roof has collapsed. The garage is of wood-frame construction with a stone veneer and has a large opening for a door. There is a pond to the east of the garage.

The original building on the Wilmer's Park site was a large tobacco barn that was built when the Grimes owned the property. The ruins of the barn are all that is left today. What remains of this large, 3 x 4 bay, two story, wooden tobacco barn is some of the wood framing and the standing seam metal, front-gable roof. Some parts of the roof are missing. The barn had been clad in vertical wood

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planks, some of which would have been hinged to allow the tobacco to be air-cured; however, much of the wood siding is missing. Some of the interior framing for the hanging of the tobacco is also still intact. Evidence of the location of the doors is obscured by the dense foliage around the barn. The barn is located to the northeast of the Park's entertainment facilities.

Other features Wilmer constructed to enhance his park included a ticket booth, two stages, and a playground with a picnic area. The ticket booth is located off Brandywine Road, and is the first building one passes when entering the park. It is a small, 1 x1 bay, one-story concrete block building with a shed roof clad in asphalt shingles and a wood cornice below the roof line. The doorway is open on the southeast elevation. There are single, three-pane metal windows on the southwest and northeast elevations that have no glass remaining. The roof has collapsed. Inside there is a painted corkboard for event flyers. South of the ticket booth, just inside the park is a playground and picnic area where guests to the park could buy food and trinkets. The picnic building is a small, covered structure with a pyramidal roof clad in asphalt shingles with a thick cornice and wood post supports. The structure is half clad in plywood siding with open spaces, and no windows. There are three open entries to the structure on the west, south, and east elevations. The opening on the south elevation leads to an area partially enclosed by a half wall that extends from the southeast elevation. There is a metal swing set and other playground equipment southwest of the picnic area.

Wilmer's Park had two outdoor stages, a small stage to the west of the main dancehall building and a large stage in the field to the east. The small stage is concrete with three small steps leading to the main stage floor. This stage was originally covered, but the cover is not longer in place.² This stage was intended for smaller acts and political rallies. There is a larger stage to the west of the dancehall that is wooden with a shed roof covering supported by wooden posts. The stage is served by overhead power cables that converge behind the stage. The stage is currently overgrown with brush and is in fair-to-poor condition. There are several sets of wood bleachers set into the hill just southeast of the dancehall, northeast of the motel. The field between the bleachers and the stage provided a space for large crowds when popular performers came to the park.

The majority of the land owned by Arthur Wilmer remains wooded. There is one road that brings visitors into the park from Brandywine Road; this same road serves as the exit. There is an open field next to the entry road on the north side of Brandywine Road that was used for parking. The entry road continues past the ticket booth and a metal gate where it divides. One branch leads northwest to the Wilmer residence and one branch leads north, past the dancehall complex to the open field used for hot air balloon rides and through to the woods at the north end of the lot. An open field surrounds the large stage as well. There is a baseball backstop, what remains of the baseball field, located in the southeast corner of the property. The backstop is metal and is also overgrown.

² In conversation with Bruce Chatman (current owner), September 4, 2008.

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>local history</u>

Specific dates	1947-1970	Architect/Builder	Arthur Wilmer, Developer
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Construction dates	1950s
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Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

SUMMARY

Originally purchased as a hunting ground in 1947, Arthur Wilmer paid \$6,500 for the old tobacco farm in Brandywine once owned by the Grimes Family. Little is known about the Grimes farm, though it appears as early as 1861 on the Martinet Map of the area. The Brandywine area was an established tobacco farming region before the Revolutionary War. Brandywine likely derived its name from the Battle of Brandywine in Pennsylvania during that period. The Pope's Creek Railroad ran through Brandywine in the nineteenth century, and it was expected to grow into a larger city as a result; however, Brandywine remained rural and plans for urban development never came to fruition. The property that would later be home to Wilmer's Park was used as a farm by a number of owners through the mid-twentieth century before it was sold to Wilmer. The tobacco barn from the farm still stands on the property today, although it is in a deteriorated condition. Like most tobacco barns in southern Maryland, this barn is a threatened resource because of its condition and the potential for future development.

Before he owned Wilmer's Park, Arthur Wilmer owned the Little Harlem supper club in northwest Washington DC, located close to the Howard Theatre. After finishing shows nearby, Wilmer's club drew in African-American entertainers like Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Ella Fitzgerald for meals and drinks.³ Wilmer took advantage of these connections when he turned Wilmer's Park into a venue on the Chitlin Circuit in the early 1950s. During the 1940s and 1950s, African-American entertainers could perform at upscale urban clubs and theaters; however, many of these clubs did not allow African-American patrons. Wilmer, and other African-American club owners, reaped the reward by opening their venues to all patrons during segregation. The Chitlin Circuit brought up and coming African-American entertainers to parks, clubs and theaters throughout the south; Wilmer's Park is the last remaining Chitlin Circuit venue in Southern Maryland. A number of notable musicians played at Wilmer's Park on their way up the charts, including a young Chuck Berry, Stevie Wonder, The Dells, Smokey and the Miracles, The Delfonics, Roy Hamilton, Chubby Checker, The Temptations, Fats Domino, B.B. King, Jackie Wilson, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Duke Ellington, Otis Redding, Count Basie, Pattie La Belle and the Blue Bells, Sam Cooke, and Gary U.S. Bonds. In the early 1950s, Ray Charles brought in 15,000 fans to the Park. He was soon followed by another large headlining act, James Brown.⁴

Wilmer accommodated his performers and patrons on the southern 11 acres of his property with a number of facilities, allowing a variety of acts to perform throughout the year. This large property was a perfect rural setting to host the variety of acts that performed on the Chitlin Circuit. The first buildings on the site, constructed in the early 1950s, were a 6,000 square foot dancehall with five apartments below it, and a restaurant.⁵ The dancehall had a jukebox, bar, and pool tables. This venue could be used year-round. It was decorated inside with murals that were reproductions of Duke Ellington album covers designed by a D.C. artist named Eddie Henderson. In the mid 1950's Wilmer added a ticket booth by Brandywine Road with a nearby playground and picnic area for

³ Eugene L. Meyer, "Pragmatic Promoter Segues from Count Basie to Heavy Metal." *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1989, final edition.

⁴ Eugene L. Meyer, "Pragmatic Promoter Segues from Count Basie to Heavy Metal." *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1989, final edition.

⁵ Natalie Hopkinson, "Music, Memories at Wilmer's." *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1999, Prince George's County Extra.

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families. There was a vending stand in the area that sold trinkets, food, and liquor for the events. Wilmer also added a covered stage behind the dancehall with wooden bleachers built into the hill that could accommodate large crowds. The old tobacco barn is located behind this stage and dates to the Grimes Farm. Motel rooms for the entertainers were added in later years near the restaurant and were mostly used as dressing rooms. There was a smaller stage near the entry on Brandywine Road used for more modest acts and crowds.

Before Wilmer opened his property in Brandywine to musicians, he allowed local African-American football and baseball teams to use the fields. Families came to Wilmer's Park to watch their teams play, either in a pick-up game or an organized match. The backstop of the baseball diamond is still on the property today. Wilmer's Park also offered hot air balloon rides that took off from the field behind the barn. The recreational activities continued even after the park was incorporated into the Chitlin Circuit, as the park could be opened for weekend-long events for the whole family.

To keep an eye on his park, Wilmer and his family lived there, keeping the music business in his family. Wilmer built a house for his family not far from the dancehall, on the same property. Some of Wilmer's other relatives and close friends lived in the apartments below the dancehall.⁶ As a result of their regular exposure to the music scene their father brought to the park, many of Wilmer's family members took an interest in the music business. After his death, Wilmer's children took over the park, hoping to continue the musical tradition there.

As desegregation took hold in the late 1960s and early 1970s, urban clubs opened their doors to all performers and patrons dramatically impacting attendance at rural parks like Wilmer's Park. Desegregation also opened up professional sports teams to players of all colors, thus fewer teams remained to play at the park during the day. As African-Americans made great strides, Wilmer's Park suffered. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Wilmer family opened their gates to a variety of acts, including rock groups, heavy metal, reggae and go-go music. The park hosted an annual Jerry Garcia celebration and many Rastafarian events. Despite the effort by the Wilmer family to keep the music playing at Wilmer's Park, the changing nature of music and concert venues brought an end to their success. In the early 2000s the property was sold to the Arthur Wilmer Foundation, owned by African-American developer Bruce Chatman. Future plans for the rural site include a retirement community and a city center, which may eventually have a concert venue incorporated into the property.⁷ Wilmer's Park provided a large venue for concerts and family events in the 1950s and 1960s. With eleven acres dedicated to entertainment and nearly 70 more wooded, the Park's rich history can be felt throughout.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As a major stop on the Chitlin Circuit, Wilmer's Park opened its doors to African-American musicians, entertainers, athletes and fans from the early 1950s through the late 1960s. At the height of segregation, when African-American entertainers were allowed to perform in ritzy clubs, but African-American patrons were not allowed entry, the urban music scene flourished in African-American night clubs. Venues including the Howard Theater in Washington DC and Wilmer's Park were part of the Chitlin Circuit, a group of venues through the southeastern United States that opened their doors to African-Americans and played host to African-American entertainers from the late 1800s through the 1960s. Larger, outdoor venues like Wilmer's Park provided a place to bring the family for the weekend, with a motel, restaurant, dancehall, playground, and baseball diamond. The park's owner, Arthur Wilmer, used his experience and connections developed as the owner of a night club in Washington DC to bring both popular acts and up-and-coming performers to rural Prince George's County. The bandstand at Wilmer's Park showcased everyone from Duke Ellington and Otis Redding to the Temptations, Patti La Belle, and a young Stevie Wonder. The former tobacco farm played an important role in exposing emerging musicians to local African-Americans during a time of segregation.

⁶ In conversation with Bruce Chatman (current owner), September 4, 2008.

⁷ In conversation with Bruce Chatman (current owner), September 4, 2008.

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Chain of Title
Map 156, Parcel 5

Deed 17586:139 May 23, 2003	Theresa Watson, successor and personal representative of the Estate of Arthur W. Wilmer to the Arthur Wilmer Foundation, LLC
Deed 916:189 June 27, 1947	John L. MacDonald, Jr. and Evelyn L. MacDonald to Arthur Wilmer and Mary E. Wilmer
Deed 696:178 July 21, 1943	Anton Nimmerrichter (divorced) to John L. MacDonald, Jr. and Evelyn L. MacDonald
Deed 694:147 January 28, 1943	A. Gwynn Bowie, Assignee for Effie G. Bowie, to Anton Nimmerrichter (bought at auction following his own foreclosure on the property)
Deed 120:321 November 11, 1916	Sarah M. Grimes and Henry W. Grimes to Anton Nimmerrichter and wife (all 3 parcels previously mentioned)
Deed 72:253 July 29, 1911	Elisabeth Winsor to Henry W. Grimes ("Young's Lot," approx. 2 acre parcel)
Deed 54:346 February 8, 1910	The German American Colonization and Land Company to Henry W. Grimes (2.75 acre parcel)
Deed JB 11:402 June 26, 1900	Edward F. Young and Catherine T. Young to Walter W. Grimes ("Young's Lot," approx. 2 acre parcel)
Deed JWB 39:341 February 4, 1897	John F. Grimes, J. Eli Huntt, and Laura S. Huntt to Sarah M. Grimes and Henry W. Grimes (Pemberton, approx. 82 acre parcel)

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Interview, Bruce Chatman (current owner), September 4, 2008.

Rosalind S. Helderman, "Discord at Wilmer's Park Isn't About the Music." *The Washington Post*, June 22, 2007, final edition.

Natalie Hopkinson, "Music, Memories at Wilmer's." *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1999, Prince George's County Extra.

Eugene L. Meyer, "Pragmatic Promoter Segues from Count Basie to Heavy Metal." *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1989, final edition.

Carla Peay, "Wilmer's Park Developers Get a Green Light." *The Washington Informer*, August 2, 2007, final edition.

Smithsonian Institution Research Information System, *Mr. Arthur Wilmer* by Addison N. Scurlock (Slide) ca. 1940.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	<u>80 acres</u>
Acreage of historical setting	<u>80 acres</u>
Quadrangle name	<u>Brandywine</u>

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

Wilmer's Park is located on the north side of Branywine Road in Brandywine Maryland, east of Evergreen Way, west of Letcher Road, and northwest of Ashbox Road. There are small farms surrounding the properties. The property directly north of Wilmer's Park is being reclaimed from mining. The property is located on Prince George's County Map 156, Parcel 5.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Stacy Patterson, Architectural Historian		
organization	The Ottery Group for M-NCPPC Planning Department	date	3/5/2009
street & number	1810 August Drive	telephone	301-562-1975
city or town	Silver Spring	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

CAPSULE SUMMARY

PG 86B-037

Wilmer's Park

15710 Brandywine Road

Brandywine, Prince George's County, Maryland

c. 1947

Private

Wilmer's Park consists of an 80-acre rural parcel on the north side of Brandywine Road in Brandywine; eleven acres of the park were used for music and sports entertainment while the remaining acres remained wooded. Wilmer's Park sat on lands formerly used as a tobacco farm by the Grimes Family; a tobacco barn behind the dancehall is the last vestige of this use of the property. The original park buildings on the site included a large, 6,000 square foot dancehall with five apartments below and a restaurant. Soon after establishing his park, Arthur Wilmer moved his family out to the site and built a ranch house in the early 1950s with a detached garage at the western end of the parcel across the gravel road from the dancehall. A baseball diamond at the southeast corner of the property is the only remaining evidence of the Wilmer's Park's earliest use as a baseball and football park for local "Negro League" teams. Wilmer later added a large, covered stage with wooden bleachers behind the dancehall, as well as an outdoor picnic area, playground, a smaller music stage by the restaurant, and a ticket booth by the entry off Brandywine Road. He attached a fifteen-room motel to the south elevation of the restaurant and dancehall building at the same time. The largest building on the property is formed by the dancehall, restaurant and motel. There is a large field to the north of the dance hall and southwest of the barn and covered stage and another large, open field to the northwest of the barn.

As a major stop on the Chitlin Circuit, Wilmer's Park opened its doors to African-American musicians, entertainers, athletes and fans from the early 1950s through the late 1960s. At the height of segregation, when African-American entertainers were allowed to perform in ritzy clubs, but African-American patrons were not allowed entry, the urban music scene flourished in African-American night clubs. Venues including the Howard Theater in Washington DC and Wilmer's Park were part of the Chitlin Circuit, a group of venues through the southeastern United States that opened their doors to African-Americans and played host to African-American entertainers from the late 1800s through the 1960s. Larger, outdoor venues like Wilmer's Park provided a place to bring the family for the weekend, with a motel, restaurant, dancehall, playground, and baseball diamond. The park's owner, Arthur Wilmer, used his experience and connections developed as the owner of a night club in Washington DC to bring both popular acts and up-and-coming performers to rural Prince George's County. The bandstand at Wilmer's Park showcased everyone from Duke Ellington and Otis Redding to the Temptations, Patti La Belle, and a young Stevie Wonder. The former tobacco farm played an important role in exposing emerging musicians to local African-Americans during a time of segregation.