Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

1. Name of Property
   (indicate preferred name)
   historic  Sis' Tavern
   other     Baby Dee's

2. Location
   street and number  4516 41st Avenue
   city, town        North Brentwood
   county            Prince George's

3. Owner of Property
   (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)
   name             Deloris R. Sprigs
   street and number 4540 Hunt Place, N.E.
   city, town       Washington
   state            DC
   zip code         20019

4. Location of Legal Description
   courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Prince George's County Courthouse
   liber              4978
   folio              300
   city, town         Upper Marlboro
   tax map            50
   tax parcel         7
   tax ID number      17 1975804

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

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Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory

0
Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Sis’ Tavern is located at 4516 41st Avenue in North Brentwood, Maryland. This building is sited on a level, grassy lot that includes mature trees. The building is located on the west corner of 41st Avenue and Wallace Road and has a typical suburban setback for the neighborhood. Concrete sidewalks line 41st Avenue and Wallace Road. The property is mostly enclosed with metal chain-link fencing. A barbeque pit is located northwest of the building.

**STORE**

Constructed c. 1912, this three-bay vernacular store is composed of a one-story main block with a one-story addition on the northeast (side) elevation and several later additions on the side and rear elevations. The small wood-frame building has been re clad with aluminum siding and is set on a solid foundation (materials not visible). The original wood siding is visible on the rear elevation and underneath the aluminum siding on other elevations. A shed roof, covered with asphalt shingles, caps the building. Overhanging eaves and a boxed cornice with brackets complement the roof. An interior brick chimney rises from the rear (northwest) elevation and has a parged cap. The central bay of the façade (southeast elevation) holds a single-leaf metal door with a surround of T-111 siding. The outermost bays hold 2/2 wood-sash windows with square-edged wood surrounds. The southwest elevation of the building is fenestrated with a 2/2 wood-sash window. The northeast (side) and northwest (rear) elevations of the main block have no fenestration.

A one-story, one-bay addition, which appears to have been constructed c. 1920, is located on the northeast (side) elevation of the main block and is noted on the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. The wood-frame addition has been re clad with aluminum siding and is set on a solid foundation (materials not visible). The addition is capped by a shed roof covered with asphalt shingles and finished with overhanging eaves. The façade of the addition is fenestrated with a one-light fixed vinyl window with false six-light vinyl muntins and a single-leaf wood door with a square-edged wood surround. A self-supporting metal awning shelters the entry, which is accessed by poured concrete steps with metal balusters. The northeast elevation is pierced by paired six-light wood casement windows.

A one-story addition (possibly an enclosed porch), which appears to have been constructed c. 1940 based on its materials and construction methods, is located at the junction of the northeast elevation of the main block and the rear (northwest) elevation of the c. 1920 addition. The wood-frame addition is clad with aluminum siding and is set on a solid concrete-block foundation. A shed roof of corrugated metal caps the addition. The northeast elevation of the addition is fenestrated with a band of 1/1 metal-sash windows.

A one-story, one-bay addition, which based on its materials and construction methods, appears to have been constructed c. 1940. The wood-frame addition is clad with aluminum siding and is set on a solid foundation. A shed roof of asphalt shingles caps the addition. Exposed rafter ends complement the roof.
A one-story addition, which based on its materials, appears to have been constructed c. 1950 and is located on the rear elevation of the c. 1940 addition. The addition is constructed of concrete blocks and is set on a solid concrete-block foundation. A front-gable roof of corrugated metal caps the addition, and serves as the base of a second front-gable roof. The second roof provides ventilation and is covered with corrugated metal. A large, exterior-end brick chimney rises from the rear elevation of the addition and has been rebuilt. The northeast elevation is pierced by an opening that holds metal screens.

A one-story, one-bay addition is located on the southwest elevation of the main block and appears, based on its materials and construction method, to have been constructed c. 1970. The addition is constructed of concrete blocks and is set on a solid concrete-block foundation. A shed roof caps the addition and is covered with asphalt shingles. A single-leaf paneled metal door pierces the southwest elevation of the addition.

**Barbeque Pit**

Constructed c. 1970, the barbeque pit of concrete blocks is located northwest of the store.

**Integrity**

The building has a moderate level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship as a result of the application of aluminum siding; however a majority of the additions have achieved historic significance in their own right due to their age. The integrity of location has not been affected. The building maintains a moderate level of integrity of feeling, setting, and association because the building, although now vacant, is still recognizable as a commercial building, which served the community for over eighty years. Further, the building is still an integral piece of the historic building fabric of North Brentwood and is one of the earliest commercial buildings constructed in the community.

The barbeque pit is not historic and therefore not a contributing resource to this property.

Overall, Sis’ Tavern and the associated property maintain a moderate level of integrity.
8. Significance

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Specific dates: c. 1912

Construction dates: c. 1912, c. 1920, c. 1935, c. 1940, c. 1945, c. 1950

Evaluation for:
- National Register
- Maryland Register
- not evaluated

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Sis’ Tavern was constructed c. 1912 at 4516 41st Avenue in North Brentwood, the first incorporated African-American community in Prince George’s County. Owned by Samuel J. Mills, Arthur B. Adams, and Cornelius D. Mecutcheon, the building was initially operated as a grocery. It is probable that Thomas F. Randall, a member of the prominent Randall family whom had been the earliest residents of North Brentwood, leased the grocery before purchasing it outright in 1911. A covenant of the property banned the sale of “intoxicating liquors” as long as the original principals of the sale and their descendents lived within a one-half mile radius of the property. Randall owned the property until 1919, at which time it was sold to Jeremiah Hawkins and his wife, Emma. Hawkins, elected as the first mayor of North Brentwood in 1924, leased the property to tenants during his ownership. The building came to be known as “Sis’ Tavern” during the 1950s and 1960s. Initially leased by Marie Walls (known as “Sis Walls”) from Emma Hawkins, Walls purchased the property in 1966 and continued to operate the building as a tavern until its closure in 1969-1970. With the original liquor covenant no longer applying, according to local sources the tavern was a well-known local watering hole that attracted such acts as Duke Ellington and Pearl Bailey. It later became notorious for the disruption it caused North Brentwood’s residents due to its late-night brawls. Sis’ Tavern retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a central hub of social activity in North Brentwood’s development. Owned by local African-American residents, the property was an important commercial and social fixture in North Brentwood, first as a grocery and later as a tavern, and is still a recognizable landmark in the community. The property is also significant because it was a commercial building operated by African-Americans for African-Americans.
Historic Context

North Brentwood

Sis’ Tavern is located at 4516 41st Avenue in North Brentwood, Prince George’s County. The Town of North Brentwood, incorporated in 1924, is the oldest incorporated African-American municipality in Prince George’s County. The small town is located south of the City of Hyattsville and north of the Town of Brentwood. It is bounded on the east by the CSX (formerly the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad tracks) railroad and to the north by the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River.

New opportunities compounded with growing suburbs attracted many to the in the Washington metropolitan area in the early to mid-nineteenth century. After the Civil War (1861-1865), the expansion of the federal government provided new job opportunities for many, including African Americans. In addition, many African-Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarded Washington, D.C., as the “cultural center of black America” because of the social, cultural, and economic opportunities available. The development of inexpensive and expanding transportation, including the railroad and streetcar lines into Prince George’s County, afforded prospective buyers the opportunity to live further removed from the city, where they could typically purchase land for less than in the District of Columbia.

Captain Wallace A. Bartlett, a white commander of the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War, was instrumental in the development of what would become North Brentwood, a predominately African-American neighborhood in Prince George’s County. Born in New York in 1844, Bartlett worked as a patent lawyer, real estate investor, and director of the First National Bank of Southern Maryland. In 1887, Bartlett moved his family from Washington, D.C., to a 206-acre farm located northeast of the city adjoining a subdivision knows as The Highlands (now known as Cottage City). Bartlett formed the Holladay Land and Improvement Company with J. Lee Adams and Samuel J. Mills in 1891 and platted a residential railroad suburb surrounding his home. The section south of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River was called Holladay Company’s Addition to Highland, while the northern portion was called Holladay Company’s Addition to Hyattsville. The northern part of the Addition to Highland, now known as North Brentwood, was often subject to flooding from the nearby branch of the Anacostia River. These less desirable lots were sold at lower prices than those located in the southern portion of the subdivision, and were marketed towards African-Americans. As in other areas, the availability of marginal land, like the flood-prone land in North Brentwood, often provided an opportunity for African-Americans to purchase land and “enabled black families to achieve comparatively high rates of home ownership.”

The Holladay Land and Improvement Company sold the first lots in 1891 to Henry Randall, an African-American from northern Anne Arundel County. By 1893, Randall’s son, Peter, constructed a dwelling on an adjoining lot. Within a few years, three other members of the Randall family had purchased lots and oversaw
construction of wood-frame dwellings in the immediate vicinity. This northern section of the Holladay subdivision was commonly referred to as Randalltown. The settling of the Randall family in the subdivision was typical of the development of African-American neighborhoods. As noted by historian Andrew Wiese, African-Americans moved to the suburbs for the same reasons as their white counterparts. The “suburban dream” was shared among all Americans in the early twentieth century. African-Americans, like the Randalls, “preferred living in family-based communities, although the family of emphasis was extended rather than nuclear.” Further, many families turned to the suburbs because they were “Faced with low incomes and unstable employment...they sought economic security through various forms of domestic production and sacrifice. They grew extensive gardens, took in work, kept livestock, rented rooms to newcomers, and delayed costly services such as water and electricity.”

In 1898, the City and Suburban Railway Company extended the streetcar lines through Randalltown, connecting the town to Washington, D.C., and provided an inexpensive and efficient method of travel into the nation’s capital. As evidenced in Randalltown, the availability of inexpensive transportation afforded many the opportunity to live further removed from the city, where they could typically purchase land for less expense than in the District of Columbia. Other black families soon moved to the area and began to develop a growing African-American neighborhood.

By 1904, the entire Holladay Company subdivision was named Brentwood, and a post office of that name was established. The name Brentwood was taken from the nearby Brent family property, which was located approximately one mile to the west in Washington, D.C. The Brentwood plantation was established by Robert Brent, the first mayor (1802-1812) of the District of Columbia. The road that led from the old Brentwood plantation (no longer extant) to Bartlett’s new subdivision was known as Brentwood Road and Bartlett applied the name to his community. However, the name of Randalltown was still used to define the black community located in the northern section of the subdivision. The unofficial boundary between the two communities was Webster Street (then known as John Street).

By the early twentieth century, Randalltown was an established community with two churches, a school, and a civic association. The Baptist Church was formed in 1905 under the leadership of Reverend James Jasper and the first church was built in 1908 on the south side of School Street. A congregation of Methodists began to meet as early as 1913, but a church was not constructed until 1920. It still stands at 4037 Webster Street. The first school, which opened in 1902, was built on a lot that had been reserved specifically for its use on Bartlett’s original 1891 plat. The school was later demolished and the site is now a community park with tennis courts. The Brentwood Colored Citizens Association was established in January 1907 under the direction of William Conway, who moved into Randalltown from the District of Columbia in 1905.

Census records, as well as the suburban directory from 1912, provide clear demographic information on the developing community. The working-class neighborhood had grown from a population of 65 in 1905 to 315 people in 1910. Typical employment for the residents of Randalltown included day laborers, domestic workers, seamstresses, drivers and cooks. Some neighborhood residents worked at the Government Printing Office,
served as messengers at government offices, or porters for the railroad. The community also had a grocer, barber, teacher, and school principal.\textsuperscript{13}

The southern portion of the subdivision, which was separated from the black population in Randalltown, was incorporated in 1922 and became the Town of Brentwood. In 1924, Randalltown was incorporated and renamed North Brentwood, making it the first incorporated African-American community in Prince George’s County.\textsuperscript{14} After its incorporation, the Town continued to grow and during the 1920s and 1930s, the population of North Brentwood expanded and improvements were undertaken at a greater rate than previously experienced. Despite the effects of the “Great Flood of 1933,” which caused substantial damage in the community, insurance maps from 1939 and 1940 indicate significant growth. The maps show two churches, a firehouse, three stores, a lumber company, as well as 138 dwellings.\textsuperscript{15}

\section*{Sis’ Tavern}

In 1911, Samuel J. Mills, Arthur B. Adams, and Cornelius D. Mecutcheon acting on behalf of the Holladay Company conveyed the “lot on the west corner of Highland Avenue and School Street” and being part of Block 21 to Thomas F. Randall. The sale of this lot came with the stipulation “that said real estate shall not be used, nor permitted to be occupied, by any party for the sale of intoxicating liquors, so long as the said parties of the first part, or either of them, or their heirs are or may be owners of any land within one-half mile” of the property.\textsuperscript{16} Although no building existed on the property at the time of the sale, the deed suggests the sellers anticipated construction of a commercial building or tavern.

Thomas F. Randall, the son of Henry and Isabella Randall, was born around 1878 in Maryland. His father moved the family to the community being developed by Captain Wallace A. Bartlett in 1891 and purchased the first lots. There, Henry Randall constructed a house for his large family at 4506 Rhode Island Avenue (originally 108 Holladay Avenue) and by 1894, Henry’s son Peter followed suit and constructed a home on the adjacent lot at 4508 Rhode Island Avenue (originally 108 Holladay Avenue).\textsuperscript{17} According to the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Thomas Randall was still residing with his parents and working as a grocery merchant. Around 1903, Randall constructed his own home on Lot 6 of Block 21, which is now known as 4508 41st Avenue. This property is located two lots to the southwest of the lot on the west corner of Highland Avenue (now 41st Avenue) and School Street (now Wallace Road), which was conveyed to him in 1911.\textsuperscript{18} Randall married Anna around 1904 and by 1910, the U.S. Federal Census notes he was a government messenger and the head of a household, which included his widowed sister Edith Randall Mason and her children.\textsuperscript{19} It is likely that after purchasing the lot on the corner of Highland Avenue and School Street that Randall constructed the one-story store and operated it as a grocery.

In 1919, Thomas F. and Anna B. Randall sold the property to Jeremiah Hawkins and his wife Emma F. Quander Hawkins. Jeremiah Hawkins was born in the Brandywine District of Prince George’s County in
1862 and was schooled at the rural black schools of that region. In his early life, Hawkins labored on his father’s farm before taking an interest in local politics. Beginning in 1887, Hawkins began to serve as a delegate to the County Republican Conventions and in 1889, he was one of four county delegates on the Republican State Central Committee. In 1903, he married Emma F. Quander, a native of Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Moving in 1905 to the small, but growing community of Randalltown, the Hawkins family opened a dairy farm on the land adjacent to their home, which was located west of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks. Jeremiah and Emma Hawkins became active in the community as well as in the real estate prospects of the Holladay Company. After William J. Conway retired from the presidency of the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association in 1911, Jeremiah Hawkins succeeded him, serving as president until 1922. His stewardship can be seen as the catalyst for the incorporation of North Brentwood in 1924. In that year, Hawkins was elected the first mayor of the new township of North Brentwood. Emma F. Hawkins would later serve as North Brentwood’s treasurer. The 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map indicates that the building at 4516 41st Avenue was operated as a grocery in 1922 and as a store in 1939. It is probable that the Hawkins family did not operate the store themselves, but instead leased it because the 1920 U.S. Federal Census lists Jeremiah Hawkins as operating a dairy farm and in 1930 as a real estate agent.

In 1939, Jeremiah Hawkins transferred his interest in the property to his wife Emma. In turn, the now widowed Emma F. Hawkins conveyed the building (which is noted on the 1959 Sanborn Fire Insurance map as a restaurant) and property to Marie Walls in 1966.

Marie Alice Daily Walls (also known as “Sis Walls”) was born around 1902 in Maryland. According to the 1930 U.S. Federal Census, Walls was residing at 209 Banner Street (now 4525 Banner Street), leasing one room for $25 a month. She married her husband at the age of 17, although he was not living with her at the time of the 1930 Census. Walls operated the building at 4516 41st Avenue as “Sis’ Tavern” beginning in the 1950s. According to local sources, the tavern became a well-known late-night destination for such acts such as Pearl Bailey and Duke Ellington, who would travel to North Brentwood to play after performing at Howard Theater in Washington, D.C. Due to the covenant in the original deed to Thomas F. Randall regarding the sale of “intoxicating liquors,” it is probable that the original principals of the property and their heirs no longer lived within a half-mile radius of the property. Noted for nightly melees, Sis’ Tavern closed in 1969 or 1970.

In 1978, Marie Walls conveyed the property to Deloris R. Sprigs. Sprigs opened “Baby Dee’s Guest Club,” which remained in business until around 1996. A barbershop was also operating in the c. 1920 addition located on the northeast (side) elevation of the building. However, the shop has been closed for several years. No additional information could be located regarding Deloris R. Sprigs, the current owner of the property. The building is currently vacant.
5 Pearl, “North Brentwood,” 8:4.
8 George D. Denny, Jr., Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George’s County, Maryland (Brentwood, MD: Tuxedo Press, 1997), 281.
10 George D. Denny, Jr., Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George’s County, Maryland (Brentwood, MD: Tuxedo Press, 1997), 283-284.
11 Pearl, “North Brentwood,” 8:10.
12 Pearl, “North Brentwood,” 8:12.
14 Bianca P. Floyd, Records & Recollections: Early Black History in Prince George’s County, Maryland (Upper Marlboro: M-NCPCC, 1989), 111-112.
15 Pearl, “North Brentwood,” 8:17.
18 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Bladensburg, Prince George’s, Maryland, Series T623, Roll 626, Page 7B, Enumeration District 91, Thomas Randall.
21 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Brentwood, Prince George’s, Maryland, Series T625, Roll 674; Page 5B, Enumeration District 96, Image 918, Jeromia T. Hawkins; 1930 U.S. Federal Census, North Brentwood, Prince George's, Maryland, Series 878, Page 1A, Enumeration District 43, Image 419.0, Marie Daily.
22 Jeremiah Hawkins to Emma F. Hawkins, Prince George's County Land Records, 544:27.
23 Emma F. Hawkins to Marie Walls, Prince George's County Land Records, 3270:397.
24 1930 U.S. Federal Census, North Brentwood, Prince George’s, Maryland, Series 878, Page 3A, Enumeration District 43, Image 419.0, Marie Daily.
25 Lillian K. Beverly, interview by Maria Dayton and Paul Weishar, December 2, 2009, North Brentwood, Maryland.
27 Marie Walls to Deloris R. Sprigs, Prince George’s County Land Records, 4978:300.
28 Lillian K. Beverly, interview by Maria Dayton and Paul Weishar, December 2, 2009, North Brentwood, Maryland.
9. Major Bibliographical References


Prince George’s County Land Records

10. Geographical Data

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Sis’ Tavern is located in North Brentwood, Maryland, on a 0.1148-acre tract of land. The southeast edge of the property is bounded by 41st Avenue, while the northeast edge is bounded by Wallace Road. The northwest boundary is lined by a metal chain-link fence. The southwestern boundary follows a metal chain-link fence and a line of mature trees. This building has been associated with Lot 7 as noted on Tax Map 50 since its construction c. 1912.

11. Form Prepared by

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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
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Photo: Sis’ Tavern (c. 1912), North Brentwood, façade (southeast elevation), view looking west. (September 2009)
Maryland Historical Trust
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Sis’ Tavern
Continuation Sheet

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Photo: Sis’ Tavern (c. 1912), North Brentwood, façade (southeast elevation), view looking north. (September 2009)
Photo: Sis’ Tavern (c. 1912), North Brentwood, side (northeast) elevation, view looking west. (September 2009)
Photo: Sis’ Tavern (c. 1912), North Brentwood, rear (northwest) elevation, view looking south. (September 2009)
Sis’ Tavern
Continuation Sheet

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Photo: Barbeque Pit (c. 1970), North Brentwood, view looking south. (September 2009)