

## **BRIEF HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JESUP BLAIR HOUSE (THE MOORINGS)**

Jesup Blair House-Local Park is a Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation resource (M 36/6, 1986) and is National Register eligible. The estate has national, state, County, and local significance, [meeting National Register criteria a, b and c.] The property was one of the three original and the only remaining Blair family "country estates" in the Silver Spring area; established for summertime use and rural enjoyment; a bucolic respite from the family's historic Blair House in "Washington City" across from the White House.

The Jesup Blair House is significant for its association with the nationally politically influential Blair family. Built by Silver Spring's founder Francis Preston Blair, advisor to six U.S. presidents, including Andrew Jackson (member of his "Kitchen Cabinet"), and Abraham Lincoln, for son James Blair and wife Mary Blair in 1850. The estate was bequeathed in perpetuity to the people of the State of Maryland by James' and Mary's daughter Violet in 1933. Notable Washington political socialite, Violet Blair Janin dedicated her gift in the name of her brother Jesup.

Naval Officer James Blair named the Mansion "The Moorings," the naval term for anchoring. James Blair was a midshipman on the important United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842), given credit for discovering Antarctica.

James's brother Montgomery Blair served in Lincoln's cabinet as Postmaster General during the Civil War. Montgomery Blair lived at the Moorings Mansion after his "Falkland" was burned to the ground during the Civil War.

The house or "mansion" built in 1850 was called "The Moorings" and consisted, as did the other two Blair country estates in the area, of a house surrounded by a large parcel of land Francis Preston Blair purchased around 1840. The Mansion is situated in the center of what is now Jesup Blair Park, nearly 15 woodland acres containing many old growth oaks, located at the southern end of the Silver Spring Business District, near the Washington, DC boundary line.

The house, which faces Georgia Avenue (originally 7<sup>th</sup> St or Brookeville Pike), is a square, two-story wood frame structure with a two-story rear ell. The front of the house has three bays with the entrance in the center bay. The original six-panel door is framed by a large architrave set atop pilasters, flanked by two, four-light sidelights and an eight-light transom with wavy glass. The windows flanking the front entrance are sixteen-light double casement units. On the second floor are three six-over-six light, double-hung, wood sash windows. The dwelling retains the original center hall floor plan with staircase and balustrade.

The Jesup Blair House and grounds is significant for its associations with Black History, National /Civil War History, and Silver Spring and Maryland History. These include Underground Railroad site, 1850; numerous Civil War events: Union encampment, 1863, skirmish site and burial ground during Confederate General Jubal Early's attack on Washington, 1864, home of Montgomery Blair, Dred Scott's defense attorney at the 1857 Supreme Court and Lincoln's Postmaster General during Civil War, after Confederates torched Montgomery's Falkland estate; and the Blair family's role in the founding and development of Silver Spring, MD, and in Maryland politics.

Jesup Blair House is also significant for its association with prominent MD & D.C. architect of public buildings, Howard Wright Cutler. In 1934 the State commissioned Cutler to adapt the house for use as the Silver Spring Public Library & Community House, 1934 to 1957. In 1941, Cutler and his daughter Katherine Cutler Ficken, first certified woman architect in the State of Md., designed the mansion/Library's wing. Cutler is also renowned for his churches, two listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and schools.