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For immediate Release

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Windy Hill Farm at Bowensville Open

For Maryland House & Garden Pilgrimage

The Calvert Garden Club is sponsoring an 11-site tour of a few of the beautiful and historic homes and institutions of Calvert County during the Maryland House and Garden Pilgrimage on May 17. Visiting these sites we have learned many local stories and legends, viewed beautiful gardens and heard the history of early education in 1880's one-room schools. Here is the first in a series of articles about them to share with you written by Garden Club members.

The love of a farm and growing things "grows" deep in the Gibson family, owners of Windy Hill Farm. There's plenty of physical evidence. The rolling hills are full of well-tended flowers, theme gardens, trees and bees. The rambling farmhouse—poised picturesquely on a hill—shelters three generations of family (at least for now) and their pets. A large, former tobacco barn, various outbuildings—including greenhouses, a smokehouse and utility sheds full of equipment and 'farm stuff'—provide more evidence.

This lovely picture wasn't always so. Mary Ellen (Mrs. Terence) Gibson tells the story of her parents' coming to Calvert County. She and her parents were living in Cheverly, MD, in the early 1950's, but her father, James Hindel, always wanted to live on a farm. They visited many properties in the state and ultimately came to Calvert County to look around. When they first visited the Windy Hill property, the farmhouse and outbuildings were in disrepair; they had to climb in through a window to get inside. But they loved the place, and in 1953 it became the Hindels' home, and the restoration and evolution of home and landscape began.

The house and farm had a long history prior to the current owners. The property was cut out of a 750-acre tract owned by Cephas Bowen. The original dwelling, a 1-1/2 story frame house, was built for newlyweds Rosa Bowen and Samuel Hammett in 1840 and was almost immediately enlarged to the side and to two full stories.

Sotholn Hammett was a farmer, waterman, slave owner and self-taught veterinarian and physician. Even at this time, the property included a tobacco barn with stables, chicken house, hog pen, smokehouse, corn crib and mill, a tenant house (once housing slaves), Dr. Hammett's medical office and a one-room school. The tenant house and doctor's office were destroyed along the way. The little school was moved across the road to become the school for black children; a larger school for white children was built nearby. In the 1880s, the house was a linchpin of the growing

community around the intersection of Sixes and Adelina roads. The community became known as Bowens, sometimes Bowensville, whose 'downtown' consisted of the schools, a doctor's office, a mill and a store that later also housed the post office. In keeping with community spirit, a large 'ice hole' was maintained on the farm for communal use. The freshwater stream running through the property was dammed up in winter so that large chunks of ice could be harvested. The ice blocks were placed in the 30 to 40-ft deep hole, layered with insulating straw and covered. This storage method kept the ice cold for use throughout the summer. The Hammett Farm was self-sufficient: raising its own meat, vegetables, apples, cherries, black walnuts and herbs; all they had to buy was sugar, coffee and spices. The property remained in the Hammett family until it was purchased by the Handel family.

Today, the Windy Hill farmhouse retains many of its original features. Much of the exterior trim on the old sections is original. On the side entrance porch, embedded in concrete, is part of the grist mill, where the farmers ground their corn and wheat for flour. The walls and ceilings of the main entrance hall remain covered in embossed tin, an 1800's fashion. The pine floor of the hall and the black walnut staircase handrail are undoubtedly from trees on the property, and in the former tobacco barn, original pegged cypress beams form the central framework, over and around which a larger structure was built more recently. The foundations of the little school house can still be seen near the entry driveway under a spreading oak tree. The smokehouse is still there, and another original outbuilding has been somewhat modified to serve as a seedling and cutting nursery.

But, the more recent owners have definitely made their own imprint. Further additions to the farmhouse were made in the 1970's '80's and 90's. The old gardens of forsythia, lilacs, iris and azaleas were restored and enhanced. Mrs. Gibson's grandfather, Dr. J.B.S. Norton was a renowned professor and botanist at the University of Maryland in the first quarter of the 1900's, with a special interest in daylilies. Many of his cultivars populate the grounds. His antique writing desk stands in the Windy Hill hallway. Mary Ellen is an avid gardener; husband Terry came from a tobacco-farming family in Lower Marlboro. Their son Jamie has a doctorate in horticulture, their daughter-in-law Suzi is a biologist and also studied horticulture. Grow things, is what they love to do. Mary Ellen, Jamie and Suzi share the large, modern greenhouse beyond the tobacco barn. Mary Ellen raises the household plants; Jamie conducts research on plant nutrition as part of his work for a private global firm; and Suzi raises herbs, heirloom tomatoes and geraniums, and other plants for sale to local markets. Many of these flowers and herbs can be found in the gardens around the house. Jamie has made placards for the gardens giving the names of the flowers and plants in each setting.

Mary Ellen also manages the beehives. Although her last hives were lost to cold this winter, new hives will be set up this spring, hopefully in time to pollinate the local trees and gather enough nectar to make sufficient honey for the hives to survive. Visitors may notice the 'Bee Crossing' sign! And one more thing: visitors will certainly notice the "bottle trees" in the gardens. These delightful garden features are bright blue wine bottles affixed to a central pole planted in the ground and are said to ward off evil spirits. They will certainly bring smiles to the faces of pilgrimage visitors, young and old alike.

To tour Bowensville and 10 other historic sites, information is available at www.mhgp.com or www.calvertgardenclub.com. A gourmet lunch box for \$15 must be ordered and pre-paid by May 1 at www.jefpat.org. Proceeds from the tour will benefit the restoration of historic gardens at the Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum.