

Nomination to Baltimore County Landmarks List

Inventory No. BA 214

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic The Ridge (preferred)
 other Abell Mansion (1892-1955); Ridge School (1955-2000)

2. Location

street and number 1306 West Joppa Road — not for publication
 city, town Riderwood (Towson vicinity) — vicinity
 county Baltimore County

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

name In process of transfer from Baltimore County to new owner
 street and number _____ telephone _____
 city, town _____ state _____ zip code _____

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Record Office, County Courts Bldg. liber _____ folio _____
 city, town Towson, MD tax map 69 tax parcel 267 tax ID number _____

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 type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	_____	_____	sites	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	_____	_____	structures	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	_____	_____	objects	objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	Total	Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown				
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use				
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:				
						Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
						<u>1</u>	

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.

The Ridge Mansion, currently vacant, was constructed in 1892-1893 as a dwelling and subsequently functioned as a school from 1955 until 2000. The building is an excellent example of the Beaux-Arts style as it was applied to domestic architecture in the late nineteenth century. Occupying a prominent site in the Riderwood neighborhood of Baltimore County, the structure is exceptional due to its grandiose scale, rich variety of materials, and its many notable exterior architectural features. Moreover, it is the only known documented historic structure in Baltimore County fully executed in the Beaux-Arts style.

The mansion is located on the north side of West Joppa Road, just west of its bridge across Charles Street. Facing south, the mansion is prominently situated on a rise (the "ridge" paralleling Joppa Road) approximately 125 feet from the road. The setting of the building is an extensive landscape composed of 14 acres of rolling, grassed terrain complete with manicured grounds and lawns. Much of the property is steeply sloped, northward from the mansion down to Bellona Avenue. The mansion is accessed by a long asphalt drive that leads to several parking areas located to the south and east of the mansion. The site contains the mansion and several ancillary structures, including a large freestanding modern building located approximately 50 feet southwest of the mansion.

The two-and-one-half-story mansion has a complex plan comprised of a pyramidal and side-gable roof main block and a two-and-one-half-story, mansard-roof rear wing. An imposing two-and-one-half-story, two-by-one bay, intersecting gable is centrally located on the façade (south elevation) of the building. The intersecting gable is pedimented and features modillions, an accented ocular window, and a two-story bay window topped by terra cotta detailing and a balustrade. A one-story hip and flat-roof open porch wraps around the façade and side elevations and is supported by fluted ionic columns. A balustrade extends along $\frac{3}{4}$ of the facade. The roof is intersected by a flat-roof square cupola, as well as numerous dormers and chimneys. Several bay windows project from the walls of the front and side elevations.

The exterior wall fabric is pressed, yellow, common-bond brick and the roof sheathing is slate shingle. The cornice line is articulated by hallmark Beaux-Arts style elements: a brick entablature with modillions on the main block and a terra cotta entablature with a terra cotta swag motif on the intersecting gable. Fenestration consists of replacement one-over-one double-hung-sash windows set in rectangular openings with splayed brick lintels and marble sills. The primary entrance is located within the west bay of the intersecting gable and is an elaborate paired wood panel door flanked by tracery-work sidelights and engaged fluted columns and topped by an elliptical fanlight. Other exterior architectural features include elaborate Palladian windows in the dormers on the façade and within the pedimented gables on the side elevations. The cupola features engaged ionic pilasters, arched window openings topped by keystones, and a wide entablature.

The property is in good condition and retains a high degree of its architectural integrity. Modern additions to the building include some replacement windows and the removal of an original balustrade above the porch. Modern additions to the site include chain-link fencing and a prefabricated shelter above the path leading from the mansion to the freestanding modern building. The one-story, flat roofed building, constructed ca. 1960 to provide classrooms, clearly is non-contributing to the setting of the historic mansion.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" 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 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 type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates _____ Architect/Builder Baldwin & Pennington, architects

Construction dates ca. 1892

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.)

Ridge Mansion is possibly the only fully developed Beaux-Arts style house in the county and was designed by a notable architectural firm for the manager and president of Baltimore's leading daily newspaper. The house is constructed of the best materials with terra cotta trim to accentuate the hydraulic brick walls. The setting is one of the best points available near Towson for a notable structure. No expense was spared in its construction. The first owner was a noted philanthropist. The original family donated the entire premises for educational purposes, and their bequest was carried out for almost fifty years.

The ground at the Ridge Mansion site was acquired by George W. Abell from Charles F. Pitt, Jr., on March 5, 1890. (1) It was Abell's intention to build a major country residence. Abell was one of the heirs to the fortune built up by Arunah S. Abell, the publisher since 1837 of the *Baltimore Sun*. The elder Abell had owned the entire area now know as Guilford, and the family had sold out for development in 1888. "Guilford" was originally a very large mansion built for General McDonald in an Italianate style and it was demolished by the Roland Park Company to build their choice suburb.

George W. Abell selected the Beaux-Arts style that was coming to the fore and engaged the architects Baldwin and Pennington of Baltimore to design it. (2) The firm of B. & P. were responsible for a great deal of the downtown financial area of Baltimore and for most of the stations and office buildings of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad throughout the territory of that rail line. They also designed numerous Catholic churches and church related institutions, Mr. Baldwin being a noted Catholic, and almost thinking he had a corner on the church's building program, dismayed that church contracts were going to George A. Frederick and Thomas C. Kennedy.

There is not much published architectural data about the Abell Mansion project. In his booster book called, *Baltimore, Maryland*, George W. Englehardt in 1895 stated that John Stack & Sons were the contractors on the suburban home of George W. Abell (3). The county weekly reported in May 1892 that Abell had demolished a house already standing on his property in preparation for building-- that structure had been Ridgelawn or Ridge Lawn, the residence of George H. Carman, Esq., clerk of the county court. In 1879, Ridge Lawn had been occupied by Edmund Wolf but it was no match for the house Abell contemplated. (4) By October of the same year, the same paper ran a story quoted from the *Baltimore News*, stating that the house was ready to roof in the next three or four weeks with completion expected in the following July. (5)

A number of details appeared in this article: On the first floor there was to be a large parlor, library, reception hall, dining room, pantry, butler's pantry, and servants' hall and kitchen. The breakfast room was behind the reception hall. On the second floor were nine bedrooms, two linen closets, and two halls. On the third floor were eight bedrooms, two linen closets and two bathrooms, a wine storeroom, and another large hall. The front bedrooms on each floor were large and those in the rear were smaller [probably for servants]. There was a tower above the third floor, over the central stairway, 16 feet square and 24 feet high (61 feet from the ground) to provide a better view than from the ground. From the bottom steps of the house it was possible to see the spires of Notre Dame

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College and the Church of the Redeemer, both on Charles Street Extended, also the Sheppard Asylum, a large part of Lake Roland with the trains creeping along the Green Spring Valley Branch and also the dome of the courthouse at Towson. A path from the eastern end of the house led to a building being constructed to house the bowling alley and billiard room.

Mr. Abell's fencing was reported to have been consumed by a woods fire on West Joppa Road by the *Maryland Journal* of April 1, 1893. The tax assessor had enrolled the new construction in the Transfer Book for the Ninth District by 1894, showing:

Geo. W. Abell
Brick Dwelling n. side Joppa Road \$30,000. (6)

Oddly enough, the Transfer Book started in 1896 listed the same brick dwelling as worth only \$20,000. At any rate, one source stated some sixty years later that George W. Abell never lived long enough to move into his 30-room mansion. He died on May 1, 1894, according to *The Sunpapers of Baltimore*, the official history of the newspaper.

The obituary in the Towson weekly, the *Maryland Journal*, quoted the *Sun's* own obituary and noted that Abell had probably enjoyed the summer of 1893 in the house--it was only a summer place in spite of its high finish and massive size. Mr. Abell lived the rest of the year at 1225 Madison Avenue, a row long ago obliterated by modern projects near the State Office Building.

Abell was born in 1842 and attended the University of Maryland when it was located on Mulberry Street near Cathedral. John Pendleton Kennedy, ex-cabinet officer and founder of the Southern school of novel writing, was university provost when Abell studied at Maryland. He was graduated in the Class of 1861; then he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1864 but never practiced for any client other than his father's corporation. Eventually, the founder of the newspaper turned management over to his son, stating that he was doing a much better job than himself. In 1871, Abell married Jane Frances Webb, daughter of a noted city jeweler. They had two children, Jennie M. Abell and Charles Shepperdson Abell.

At the time of his sudden death, Mr. Abell's luggage was packed for a trip to England on the Cunard Line's *Lucania*. His funeral took place at the Baltimore Cathedral and the sermon was given by James Cardinal Gibbons. Burial was at "Bonnie Brae," now known as New Cathedral Cemetery. The *Sun* obituary reported on the great house:

Mr. Abell had just completed a home at his country place, "The Ridge," near Sherwood Station on the Northern Central Railway. His tastes were strongly democratic and he took great delight in watching the construction of his new house and in suggesting to the architects little details that would make it all the more homelike and convenient. When it was completed to his taste he was delighted and said to his brother, "Well, if I am permitted to live here for ten years, I will be content." He lived less than a year, to enjoy the new house. (7)

Mr. Abell had been a major contributor to the construction of the marble church on the ridge at Towson, The Church of the Immaculate Conception. Newspaper accounts even stated that this long a-building shrine was to be called The Abell Memorial:

The fine new Catholic Church at Towson will be known as a memorial to the late George W. Abell, of the Baltimore *Sun*, whose family, no doubt, contributed largely to its erection. (8)

Mr. Abell's death left the congregation with a debt they were not able to retire until the 1940s, just to pay for the one-tenth or so of the cost not met by the time it opened in 1903.

The Catonsville weekly paper made a brief mention of the spectacular new house:

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Vice -President Stevenson and General Catchings member of the House of Representatives from Mississippi, spent Sunday with Representative Talbott at his home in Lutherville. During their stay, Mr. Talbott took his guests for a drive around the country, including Towson, and showed them "The Ridge," the country residence of the late George W. Abell. Judge Burke, Mr. D. C. McIntosh, and State's Attorney Duncan called in the afternoon and were introduced to the distinguished visitors. (9)

The 1898 *Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland*, published in Philadelphia by George W. Bromley showed the estate as "Sherwood Park," home of Mrs. George Abell, sandwiched between Lutherville Avenue and Joppa Road. Lutherville Avenue was later renamed Bellona Avenue, which creates two intersections of Bellona and York Road, one in Lutherville, one in Govanstown. Present Greenwood Road was nameless in the 1898 atlas. The name "Sherwood Park" probably reflects the fact that Riderwood and its train station were called Sherwood at times in its history--which created confusion because Cockeysville farther out the tracks contained both a Sherwood Church and a Sherwood Distillery, and the use of the name there went back to the 1830s.

The 1915 edition of the Bromley atlas shows this property without an estate name but the house is color-coded red for brick construction, and its footprint is very irregular, many projecting wings and pavilions. The owner was shown as B. W. Duke---the person Mrs. Abell later married--although his name was given as William B. Duke in other sources. Mrs. Duke died in 1912.

In 1916, in agreement with her brother Charles S. Abell, Mrs. Frances T. Homer, Jane Mary Abell by birth and the daughter of George W. Abell, came into ownership. (10) When she died in 1939, the *Jeffersonian* called her "Mrs. Homer of the Ridge." (11) Mr. Homer had died nine years before--and had been an 1892 graduate of Loyola College with an MA degree in 1894; he had been an attorney. (12) The name "Ridge" was the more authentic because as stated in the obituary of the original builder, it was "The Ridge" in 1893.

The next owners were Jane Homer Lee, granddaughter of George W. Abell, and her husband Dr. Ferdinand Christian Lee. In deeds made in late 1954 and early 1955, the Lees gave the 14.393-acre house parcel and another 0.304-acre parcel to the Baltimore County Board of Education as a gift. The deeds contain no covenants or restrictions. The two Sunpapers reported that the property was to be used for special education although there is nothing in the deeds so specific. (13)

The property was called The Ridge School, and there was no demand to name it for any of the families who had lived there. In 1999, the LPC intern, Danielle Swift, obtained interior photographs of the rich paneling and fittings, stained glass of the nineties that were still in perfect condition. The rooms had much the atmosphere of a gentlemen's club in the tradition of Mead, McKim and White, somewhat like the present Engineer's Club and the old Garrett-Jacobs house at Edmondson Village called "Uplands." This elegant atmosphere was the work of Baltimore architects, not the high-style geniuses that Mrs. Henry Barton Jacobs imported to supposedly talent-less Baltimore.

In 2000, the special education program at The Ridge was discontinued. (14) The property was advertised for auction to take place on January 17, 2002. (15) At the December 13, 2001, meeting of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Dr. Douglas Carroll, as a citizen, brought up the concerns of preservationists about the lack of final protection on this structure. The Commission voted then and there to hold a hearing on the next possible date, allowing for the 45-day notice required by law, which would be February 14,

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2002. This house has been on the Maryland Historical Trust Inventory since March 20, 1968, when the survey of notable buildings was in the hands of volunteers from the Baltimore County Historical Society. The mansion was listed in the earliest days of identifying significant structures and bears MHT Inventory Number BA 214.

At the auction on January 17, 2002, the highest bidder was Marc Munafo who offered \$2.2 million. Mr. Munafo stated that he was unsure of what he would do with the property. Loni Ingrham of the *Towson Times* described the buyer:

But he has a sentimental attachment to it. His company built the classroom building beside the mansion when he was just a little boy. "I love this land and love this mansion," he said, noting he won preservation awards. "Oh yeah, I would like to keep the mansion. (16)"

The losing bidders had represented Bnos Yisroel School of Baltimore City.

NOTES:

1. Baltimore County Deeds, JWS 178:593.
2. *Baltimore County Union*, October 1, 1892.
3. George W. Englehardt, *Baltimore, Maryland* (Baltimore, 1895), p. 58.
4. *Baltimore County Union*, May 14, 1892.
5. *Baltimore County Union*, October 1, 1892.
6. Baltimore County Transfer Book, Election District 9 (1885---), 1894 Update, f. 244-245.
7. *Maryland Journal*, Towson, May 5, 1894. Also, "George W. Abell Dead, President of A. S. Abell Company, Publisher of the Sun," *Baltimore Sun*, May 2, 1894.
8. *Baltimore County Union*, September 24, 1904.
9. *Argus*, Catonsville, August 2, 1894.
10. Baltimore County Deeds, WPC 458:396.
11. *Jeffersonian*, September 22, 1939, obituary. Also, *Sun*, September 16, 1939.
12. *Sun*, March 4, 1930.
13. "Ridge Mansion Given County," *Evening Sun*, January 4, 1955. Also, "Ridge Estate Given County," *Sun*, January 5, 1955. Baltimore County Deeds, GLB 2623:422, GLB 2614:78 and 112.
14. Chrystal Clifford, "Ridge School Closes After 45 Years," *Jeffersonian*, November 30, 2000.

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15. Andrew A. Green, "County to Sell 20 Acres," *Sun*, December 24, 2001, p. B-1. Also, adv. p. B-11. Also, Walter Herman, "History in the Making, Ridge School Property in Ruxton, Garrison Station Up for Sale," *Jeffersonian*, January 10, 2002.
16. Loni Ingraham, "Ridge Property Draws \$2.2M Bid," *Towson Times*, January 23, 2002.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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10. Geographical Data

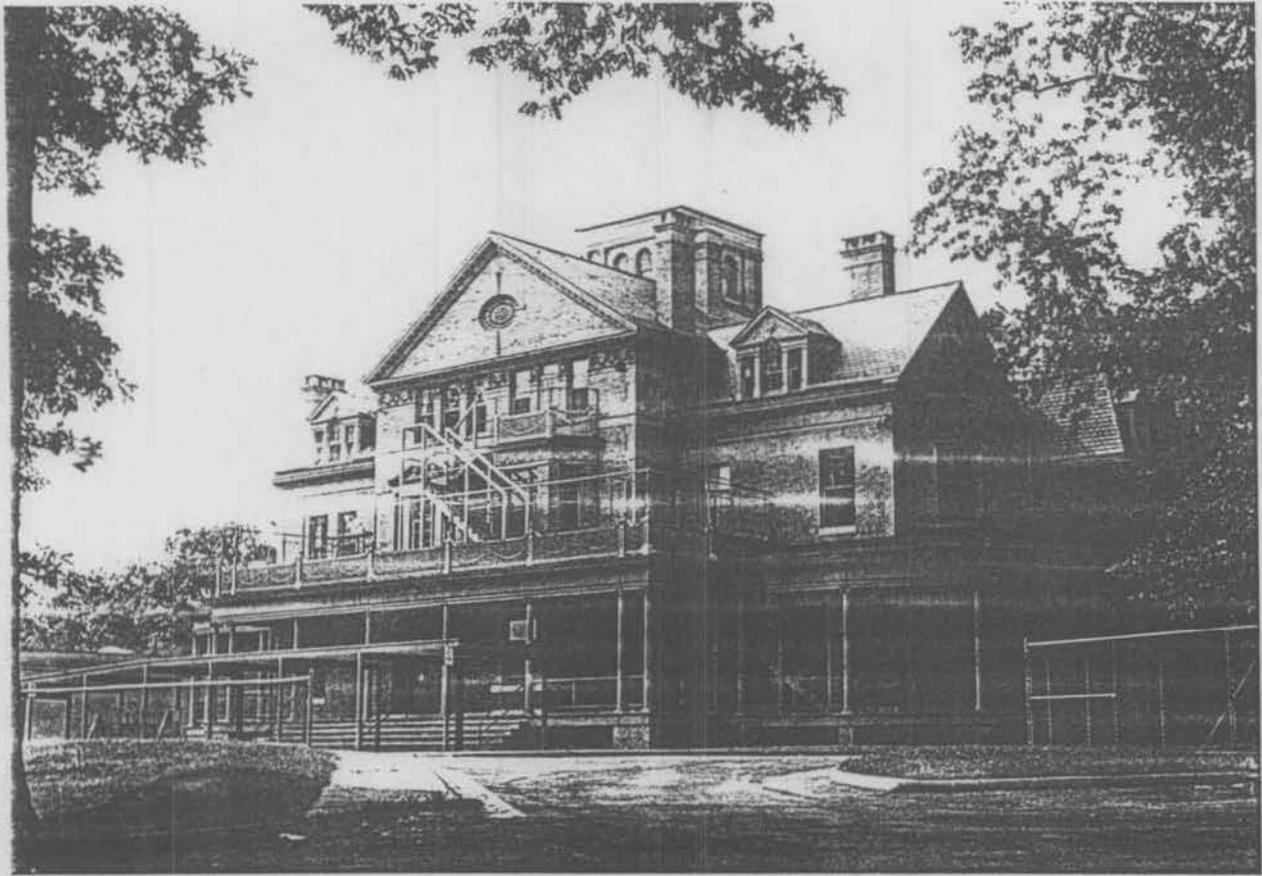
Acreage of surveyed property ca. 14.92 ac.
Acreage of historical setting ca. 14.92 ac.
Quadrangle name Cockeysville, MD

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Emily Paulus, Architectural Historian/Planner; John W. McGrain, County Historian		
organization	Baltimore County Office of Planning	date	February 2002
street & number	County Courts Building, 401 Bosley Avenue	telephone	410-887-3495
city or town	Towson	state	MD



View northwest showing south and east elevations, ca. 1967



View north showing south elevation, December 2001.

1. STATE <u>Maryland</u> COUNTY <u>Baltimore Co.</u> TOWN <u>Towson</u> VICINITY <u>Dist. IX</u> STREET NO. <u>W. Joppa Rd.</u> ORIGINAL OWNER <u>George W. Abell</u> ORIGINAL USE PRESENT OWNER <u>Balt. Co. Bd. of Ed.</u> PRESENT USE <u>Special School</u> WALL CONSTRUCTION <u>yellowish brick</u> NO. OF STORIES		HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY <u>214</u> INVENTORY <u>3.7-215</u>	
2. NAME <u>Ridge Mansion</u> DATE OR PERIOD <u>1894</u> STYLE ARCHITECT BUILDER <u>George W. Abell</u>		3. FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS USE	
4. NOTABLE FEATURES, HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND DESCRIPTION		OPEN TO PUBLIC	
<p>Built by George W. Abell, son of Arunah S. Abell, who established the Baltimore Sunpapers. Built of yellowish brick, with 30 rooms, wide porches, extensive grounds, lawns and trees.</p>			
5. PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE <u>Endangered</u> <u>Interior</u> <u>Exterior</u>			
6. LOCATION MAP (Plan Optional)		7. PHOTOGRAPH	
8. PUBLISHED SOURCES (Author, Title, Pages) INTERVIEWS, RECORDS, PHOTOS, ETC.		9. NAME, ADDRESS AND TITLE OF RECORDER <u>Baltimore Co. Hist. Soc.</u> <u>Agriculture Bldg.</u> <u>Texas, Md.</u> <i>(where HABS report)</i> DATE OF RECORD <u>March 20, 1968</u>	

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND PHOTO - THIS MAY BE ADDED ON SHEET OF SAME SIZE