

BA-1608

## Villa Pace, (Rosa Ponselle (Jackson) House, Nacirema)

### **Architectural Survey File**

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site ([mht.maryland.gov](http://mht.maryland.gov)) for details about how to make an appointment.

All material is property of the Maryland Historical Trust.

***Last Updated: 06-23-2004***

BA 1608  
Villa Pace  
Valley Road  
Stevenson, Md. 21153  
private

1940

Villa Pace has been carefully constructed in the mold of an Italian Villa. Its cross-shape form and elaborate interior detailing are completely in keeping with the professional occupation of its owner, Rosa Ponselle, a world-reknown opera star.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

BA 1608  
x-883.790  
y-580.100

MAGI # 0316082804

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

VILLA PAGE

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

1526 Valley Road

Second

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Stevenson Post Office — VICINITY OF

Baltimore

STATE

COUNTY

Maryland

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Rosa Ponselle

Telephone #: 484-4616

STREET & NUMBER

1526 Valley Road

CITY, TOWN

STATE, zip code

Stevenson

— VICINITY OF

Maryland 21153

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Baltimore County Courts Bldg.

Liber #: 1761

Folio #: 296

STREET & NUMBER

401 Bosley Avenue

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Towson

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

<b>CONDITION</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>	<b>CHECK ONE</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

VILLA PACE is a rambling one and two storey stuccoed masonry house designed in the twentieth century to recall an Italian villa. The cross-shape of its principal section is masked by varying roof heights and other service wings to the east of the principal cross. Walls are all covered with stucco and roofs are of red tile. The several exterior angles are screened as court yards, one open to the north as the principal entrance, others private. Numerous small details are incorporated to recall the original period and place: windows of varying shapes; fountains and other terra-cotta decorations; arched chimneys; balconies and other iron details.

The principal entrance, at the end of the north transept, opens into a large two-storey foyer; the principal stair rises with an intermediate landing immediately above the entrance. A tall one-storey music room is in the west transept, a lower dining room is in the east and a library is in the south beneath the principal bed chamber. The relative plainness of the exterior surfaces contrasts with the exquisite detail of the interior. All details are carefully designed and wrought to recall the original period and style: tile floors, paneled or vaulted ceilings with painted decoration, carved stone mantels, ornamental wrought iron railings. Each room is different, each a lavishly executed composition. Most of the decorations relate in some way to music, or to flowers, primarily roses, recalling the life and name of the owner.

VILLA PACE was designed by Palmer and Lambden, architects of Baltimore.

BA-1608

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

---

SPECIFIC DATES \_\_\_\_\_ BUILDER/ARCHITECT \_\_\_\_\_

---

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Dating from the third decade of the twentieth century VILLA PACE is a unique, carefully designed and finely wrought example of an Italian villa, regular and irregular at the same time, full of detail at every turn, all planned and executed to reflect and recall the life of its famous owner.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

Villa Pace has been carefully constructed in the mold of an Italian villa. Its cross-shape form and elaborate interior detailing are completely in keeping with the professional occupation of its owner, Rosa Ponselle, a world-reknown opera star.

The seventeen-room house was built by Miss Ponselle and her former husband Carle A. Jackson in 1940. Designed by Palmer and Lambden, Baltimore architects, it carried a post-war price tag of \$500,000. Villa Pace was named after an aria Miss Ponselle sang on the night of her debut with the famous Caruso at the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>1</sup>

The house stands on a prominence overlooking the Valley, on the exact site of a pre-Civil War mansion known as New Stoneton built by Alexander Hamilton Stump on the land tract Lystra.<sup>2</sup> Later this house and considerable surrounding land were acquired by General Felix Agnus, a publisher and manager of the Baltimore American.<sup>3</sup> Under the name Nacirema (which is American spelled backwards), the house was the setting for many parties attended by prominent national political leaders, journalists and businessmen.

After Agnus' death, the house and 191.148 acres were sold in 1926 to James Walter and Margaret (Wolfolk) Carter for \$85,000.<sup>4</sup> Carter razed the old mansion with the intention of building on the site. He did not and on October 9, 1937, the estate was divided into lots and auctioned. Subsequently the mansion site and 155 acres were sold to the Jacksons.<sup>5</sup>

When she purchased the Green Spring Valley property, Miss Ponselle had just retired from a long and distinguished career at the Metropolitan. At the time of her debut in 1918 she was the youngest dramatic soprano on record at the Met, and for twenty years she reigned supreme in the international opera world.<sup>6</sup>

Miss Ponselle has been a guiding light in the cultural development of Baltimore, having started the Baltimore Opera Company and serving as its artistic director. She has coached promising young artists, both local as well as those who have come to her from afar--Beverly Sills, Enrico de Giuseppe, Lili Crookasian, Spiro Malas, to name a few.

Over the years, the public has had the opportunity to tour the beautiful interior of Villa Pace. On such occasions the beneficiaries of her generosity have been the Baltimore Symphony, the Baltimore Opera and the Peabody Conservatory of Music.

Villa Pace - Footnotes

BA-1608

<sup>1</sup> Muriel Dobbin, "Golden-Voiced Mistress of Villa Pace," Sunday Sun Magazine, 8 November 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Baltimore County Wills, Liber J. L. R. no. 2, fol. 108, Towson Court House, Towson, Md. Baltimore County Land Records (BCLR), Liber H. M. F. no. 7, fol. 405, Towson. These records trace the property accumulations by Stump in building his estate and help to place a date on the mansion's construction.

<sup>3</sup> BCLR, Liber J. W. S. no. 162, fol. 350, no. 168, fol. 54, and no. 170, fol 455, Towson.

<sup>4</sup> BCLR, Liber W. P. C. no 638, fol. 1, Towson.

<sup>5</sup> "Real Estate Deals and Building News," undated newspaper article from the files of the Baltimore American library; "Nacirema Auction Saturday," Baltimore American, 3 October 1937; "Nacirema," Sun, 30 September 1937; see note 1.

<sup>6</sup> See note 1.

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Dawn F. Thomas and Robert W. Barnes. The Green Spring Valley: Its History and Heritage, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1978)

Baltimore County Land Records, County Courts Bldg., Towson, Md.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

James T. Wollon, A.I.A., Dawn F. Thomas, Sybl Brown, Research Historians

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Valleys Planning Council

April, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

212 Washington Avenue

828-7807

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Towson

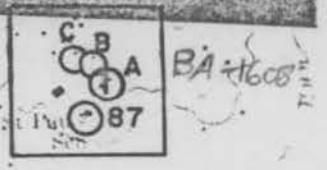
Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory 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  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438







BA-1600

# 1608 Villa Pace G.S.V.H.D  
Rosa Ponselle  
fr. S.E.  
L. Eaton 4/80  
Md. Hist. Trust

BA