

CAPSULE SUMMARY
Charles County Fairgrounds (CH: 559)
Fairgrounds Road
Charles County, Maryland

Located between U.S. 301 and the Baltimore and Potomac rail line south of La Plata, the Charles County Fairgrounds is significant for its role in the social and cultural life of Charles County residents since 1945. Agricultural fairs have traditionally provided members of rural communities with a means for recreation, education, and community involvement through the display of agricultural products and livestock, and the holding of competitions. These fairs have also provided an important setting for the promotion and exchange of new ideas regarding progressive agricultural techniques, new technology, and the breeding of crops and livestock.

The buildings at the Charles County Fairgrounds are located in a rural area south of La Plata and east of State Highway 301. This fairground is located on a level, grassy site, and features a variety of supporting buildings, mature trees, shrubs, paved roadways, and a surrounding chain link fence. The twenty-one buildings in this survey group include exhibition halls, the fair office, a ticket booth, a stable, a food stand, and a barn. All of these buildings are one story in height, and vernacular in style. Most of the exhibition halls are grouped in two rows on either side of a grassy central commons. About a hundred feet wide, this commons is adorned with trees and ornamental shrubs.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
MD INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Inventory No. CH: 559

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Charles County Fairgrounds
common/other name _____

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2. Location

=====

street & number Charles County Fairgrounds not for publication ___
city or town La Plata vicinity X state Maryland code MD
county Charles code 17 zip code _____

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification N/A

=====

4. National Park Service Certification N/A

=====

5. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property (Check all that apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing		Noncontributing	
<u>21</u>	<u>0</u>		buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		objects
<u>21</u>	<u>0</u>		Total

Is this property listed in the National Register?

Yes _____ Name of Listing _____
No X

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Fair

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Fair

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7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Vernacular

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Solid, Pier: Poured Concrete, Brick
Roof Gable, Shed: Asphalt Shingle, Standing Seam Metal
Walls Wood Frame, Masonry: Weatherboard, Aluminum, Vertical
Board, Brick, Vinyl, Concrete Block, Standing Seam Metal
other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 7-1

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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties
Charles County Fairgrounds
Fairgrounds Road
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 559
Page 4

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Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance 1945-1950

Significant Dates c. 1945

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation Undefined

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 8-1

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, legal records, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Charles County Land and Will Records. Charles County Courthouse and the Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland.

Eddinger, John. "Where Slots Machines, Tobacco Once Reigned as 'Kings'." The Evening Star (Baltimore), September 23, 1964.

KCI Technologies. Cultural Resources Overview: U.S. 301 Corridor Transportation Study, Prince George's and Charles Counties, Maryland. Maryland: KCI Technologies, July, 1999.

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property Approximately 20 acres

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Charles County Fairgrounds is designated as Parcel 177, Grid 8 as indicated on Map 55.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Charles County Fairgrounds has historically been associated with Parcel 177 since the ground's construction in the second and third quarters of the twentieth century.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title R. Weidlich, C. Novelli, S. Moffett Architectural Historians

organization EHT Traceries, Inc. date Feb. 24, 2000

street & number 5420 Western Avenue telephone 301/656-5283

city or town Chevy Chase state MD zip code 20815
=====

12. Property Owner
=====

name _____

street & number Charles County Fairgrounds telephone _____

city or town _____ state MD zip code _____

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 7 Page 1

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

=====

The buildings at the Charles County Fairgrounds are located in a rural area south of La Plata and east of State Highway 301. This fairground is located on a level, grassy site, and features a variety of supporting buildings, mature trees, shrubs, paved roadways, and a surrounding chain link fence. The twenty-one buildings in this survey group include exhibition halls, the fair office, a ticket booth, a stable, a food stand, and a barn. All of these buildings are one story in height, and vernacular in style. Most of the exhibition halls are grouped in two rows on either side of a grassy central commons. About a hundred feet wide, this commons is adorned with trees and ornamental shrubs.

The buildings in this survey group feature construction methods and materials that were typical of early- and mid-20th-century building technology. While the diversity of building functions and types makes broad descriptive generalizations difficult, the predominant type of construction is wood frame; most of the walls are clad with aluminum siding; and the primary roof type is gable - most often with asphalt shingle or standing seam metal cladding. Less frequently seen are buildings with concrete block or brick construction, or with vinyl, sheet metal, or vertical board siding. Only one building has a shed roof.

The most common building type on this site is the exhibit hall, and most of these are aligned in two rows on either side of the commons. These buildings are long and rectangular in plan, have wood frame construction (except for one), and have shallow gable roofs. Four of these, which stand in a row on the west side of the commons, are identical. Three bays wide, they feature solid concrete block foundations, aluminum siding, and front gable, standing seam metal roofs. Lacking windows, they each have double-leaf paneled wood doors. Another building, identified as a museum, is at the north end of this row. Except for its slightly larger size, it is identical to the other four buildings. On the opposite side of the commons are two more exhibit halls which are almost identical to the above-mentioned buildings. The only feature that differentiates these is that they have aluminum siding across their double-leaf doors; one of these is identified as the Wilhelmina H. Drury Building. One exhibit hall on the commons has corrugated sheet metal siding and a side gable, asphalt shingle roof. Also located in the vicinity is a hall identified as the P.D. Brown Building, which has vertical standing seam metal siding and a standing seam metal roof.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 7 Page 2

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

=====

Buildings which are also rectangular in plan with gable roofs, but have masonry construction, are a building identified as Commercial Building A, an exhibit hall at the back of the fairgrounds, and the ticket booth. Three bays wide, Commercial Building A is constructed of concrete block, but has stretcher-bond brick facing on the front elevation. The front gable roof is clad with asphalt shingles, and the front gable is clad with aluminum siding. Toward the rear of the fairgrounds is a four bay wide exhibition hall of concrete block construction, which has a side gable, asphalt shingle roof. The four bay wide ticket booth has stretcher-bond brick walls, a side gable, asphalt shingle roof, and aluminum siding in the gable ends.

Two buildings which are more agricultural in function are the barn and the stable, which is the largest building on the site. Both are wood frame, and have gable standing seam metal roofs. The barn has the same long, rectangular plan as the other buildings, but has vertical board siding. Designed for holding and showing livestock, the stable is composed of one long, rectangular, gable-roofed central section, with smaller rectangular, gable-roofed wings radiating out, like spokes on a wheel. The radial wings are lower in elevation than the central section, and have partially open walls or vertical board siding.

The fair office is housed in a long, rectangular building with a shallow side gable, asphalt shingle roof. Seven bays wide, this building has been adorned with vinyl siding, shuttered double-hung sash windows, and a panel-and-light front door to create the look of a single dwelling. The form of the building, though, is identical to the exhibit halls lining the central commons.

The two sheds on the fairgrounds are both rectangular in plan, with shallow standing seam metal gable roofs. The smaller shed is located near the stable, and features aluminum siding on the walls and single-leaf door. The larger shed, toward the back of the site has vertical standing seam metal walls and sliding metal doors.

The four remaining buildings are the food stand, the Charles County Chamber of Commerce booth, a picnic shelter, and a tiny schoolhouse that was moved to the site. The food stand is rectangular in plan, and features a solid concrete block foundation, wood frame construction with vertical board siding, and a gable, asphalt shingle roof. The smallest building on the site, the Chamber of

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 7 Page 3

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

=====
Commerce booth is the only building with a shed roof. It also features wood frame construction with aluminum siding, exposed rafter ends, and standing seam metal roof cladding. The picnic shelter is attached to the north end of the shed at the back of the site. Long and rectangular in plan, it has wood frame construction without walls, and a shallow gable, asphalt shingle roof supported by round post supports. The wood frame schoolhouse is rectangular in plan, with a small entrance vestibule. The building is one story in height, one bay wide, and features a brick pier foundation, weatherboard siding, a paneled wood door, 6/6 windows on the side elevations, and a front gable standing seam metal roof.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 8 Page 1

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

=====

Located between U.S. 301 and the Baltimore and Potomac rail line south of La Plata, the Charles County Fairgrounds is significant for its role in the social and cultural life of Charles County residents since 1945. Agricultural fairs have traditionally provided members of rural communities with a means for recreation, education, and community involvement through the display of agricultural products and livestock, and the holding of competitions. These fairs have also provided an important setting for the promotion and exchange of new ideas regarding progressive agricultural techniques, new technology, and the breeding of crops and livestock.

Since before the American Revolution, Charles County's economy was based on the strength of the area's agricultural production. The anchor of Charles County's and most of Southern Maryland's agricultural economy was tobacco. "Tobacco..has provided the Charles County farmer (and many others) with work, property and stony independence for generations and has been the main source of wealth since colonial times."¹ Unfortunately, tobacco is extremely damaging to the fertility of the soil over a period of time and the yield worsens with each season. By the mid 19th century, the soil in Charles County had been exhausted by tobacco and different techniques were introduced to counteract the negative impact of years of tobacco cultivation. The farmers began to experiment in crop rotation and they introduced various types of fertilizers to refresh the soil. By the end of the 19th century, a number of farmers began to diversify their crops by planting potatoes and grains instead of exclusively farming tobacco. The introduction of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad beginning in 1873 allowed the in-land farmers of Charles County to reach markets that had otherwise been unreachable. The railroad led to an increase in agricultural prosperity for Charles County at the turn of the 20th century.²

Tobacco and other cash crops created varying degrees of wealth for the population of Charles County from the large plantations before the Civil War to the simple farms whose remnants are still visible on the landscape today. The agricultural way of life within the

1 Eddinger, John. "Where Slot Machines, Tobacco Once Reigned as 'Kings'," *The Evening Sun (Baltimore)*, 9/23/1964.

2 KCI Technologies, Inc. Cultural Resource Overview: U.S. 301 South Corridor Transportation Study, Prince George's and Charles Counties, Maryland. July, 1999, pg. II-42-45.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 8 Page 2

Charles County Fairgrounds

name of property

Charles County, MD

county and state

=====
boundaries of Charles County controlled not only the economy, but the social aspects of the population. Although Prince George's County quickly developed as a suburb of Washington, D.C. during the early to mid- 20th century, Charles County and its agricultural based society resisted the intense suburbanization that was occurring to its north. Crain Highway, the predecessor to U.S. 301, began construction in 1922 and would eventually be established as the major North/South thoroughfare of the east coast. U.S. 301 helped Charles County change from being an isolated agricultural based society to a tourist and entertainment destination during the 1940s-1960s.³ The Charles County Fairgrounds, established in 1945, gave the local farming community the opportunity to socialize, exchange ideas and techniques, and introduce various types of competitions.

In 1999, the annual Charles County Fair featured displays of home produce, educational exhibits, commercial displays, continuous entertainment, midway rides and games, and a variety of food. Other events were held at the fairgrounds from May through October. A country music festival in May featured local country bands, arts and crafts, children's activities, horse demos, a classic car show, a tractor pull, and line dancing. The Southern Maryland Collectors Car Show and Swap Meet was in June, and during the Fourth of July, a fireworks display was held, with children's games, pony rides, bingo, and live entertainment. In October, the Charles County Rotary Club held a "Lobster Feast" with live entertainment and family activities. As Charles County has rapidly become a suburbanized extension of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the Charles County Fairgrounds continues to be an important element for the display and practice of the agricultural traditions of Southern Maryland.

Architecturally, the buildings at the Charles County Fairgrounds are utilitarian with vernacular features. The largest is the stable, reflecting the traditional importance of agriculture to the local economy. The most numerous building type is the exhibit hall, underscoring the educational role of the fair. Historically, stables were generally similar in appearance to barns, only smaller. After 1830, as horses began to replace oxen for pulling farm machinery and wagons, farmers increasingly began to build structures exclusively designed to shelter horses. The ground

³ Eddinger, 9/23/1964.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 8 Page 3

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

=====

floor was used to house the horses while a loft was used for hay storage. After the middle of the 19th century, stables were increasingly absorbed into the connected building complex of the farm, although some separate stables continued to be constructed into the 20th century. This particular stable is an example of a type which featured a large, rectangular central section with wings that radiated outward, like spokes on a wheel.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Section 8 Page 4

Charles County Fairgrounds
name of property
Charles County, MD
county and state

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National Register Eligibility:

The Charles County Fairgrounds Survey District is not eligible due to the fact that it does not meet National Register Criteria A, B, C, or D. Preliminary research has not revealed any association between the buildings and events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A) or the lives of persons significant in our past (Criterion B). Although the buildings provides an example of vernacular rural architecture, they are neither unusual nor distinguished; they do not represent the work of a master or display high artistic merit (Criterion C). There is no evidence that the properties are likely to yield information important in history or prehistory (Criterion D). Thus, the survey district is not National Register-eligible.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

Eligibility recommended Not Recommended

Comments:

Locally significant for association with
the agricultural history of Charles County -
Criterion A

Review, OPS: *[Signature]* Date: 5/3/2000

Reviewer, NR Program: *[Signature]* Date: 8/14/00

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 559

Charles County Fairgrounds

name of property

Charles County, MD

county and state

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HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Development Period (s):

Modern Period (1930-present)

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme (s):

Architecture, Landscape, and
Community Planning
Social/Educational/Cultural

RESOURCE TYPE(S)

Category: District

Historic Environment: Rural

Historic Function (s): RECREATION AND CULTURE/Fair

Known Design Source: Unknown

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
CH-559

BEL ALTON SURVEY DISTRICT
CH-560

9030 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-565

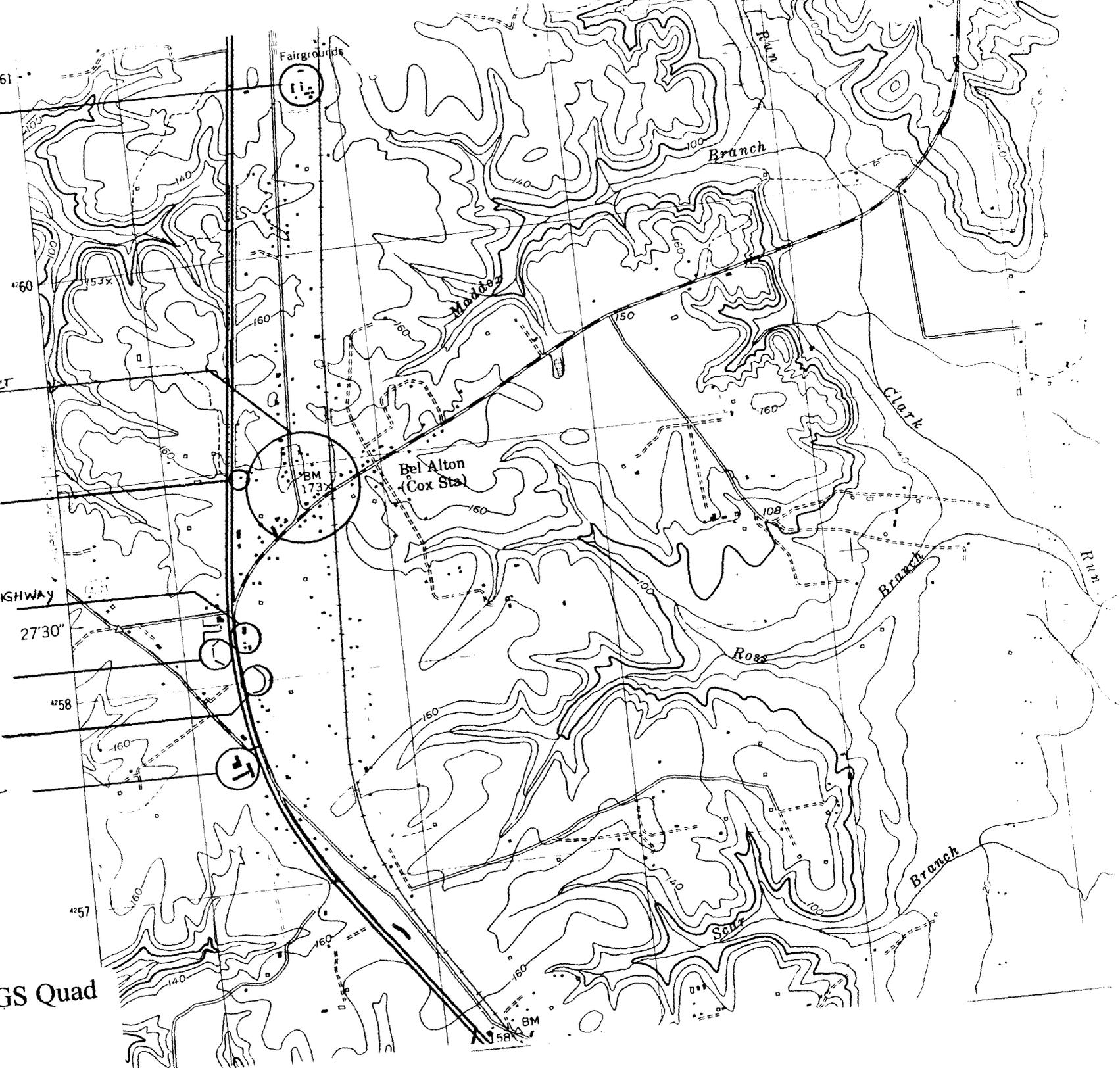
SERVICE STATION, CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-563

9295 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-566

MOTEL, CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-561

BEL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
CH-562

Pope's Creek USGS Quad





Welcome
To **THE CHARLES COUNTY FAIR**
Owned & Operated By Charles Co. Fair Inc.

ENTRANCE

TURKEY
BOOTH

TURKEY
BOOTH

ENTRANCE

CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

TICKET BOOTH

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

1 of 25



CH: 559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
SCHOOL HOUSE

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northeast corner

2 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

MUSEUM

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

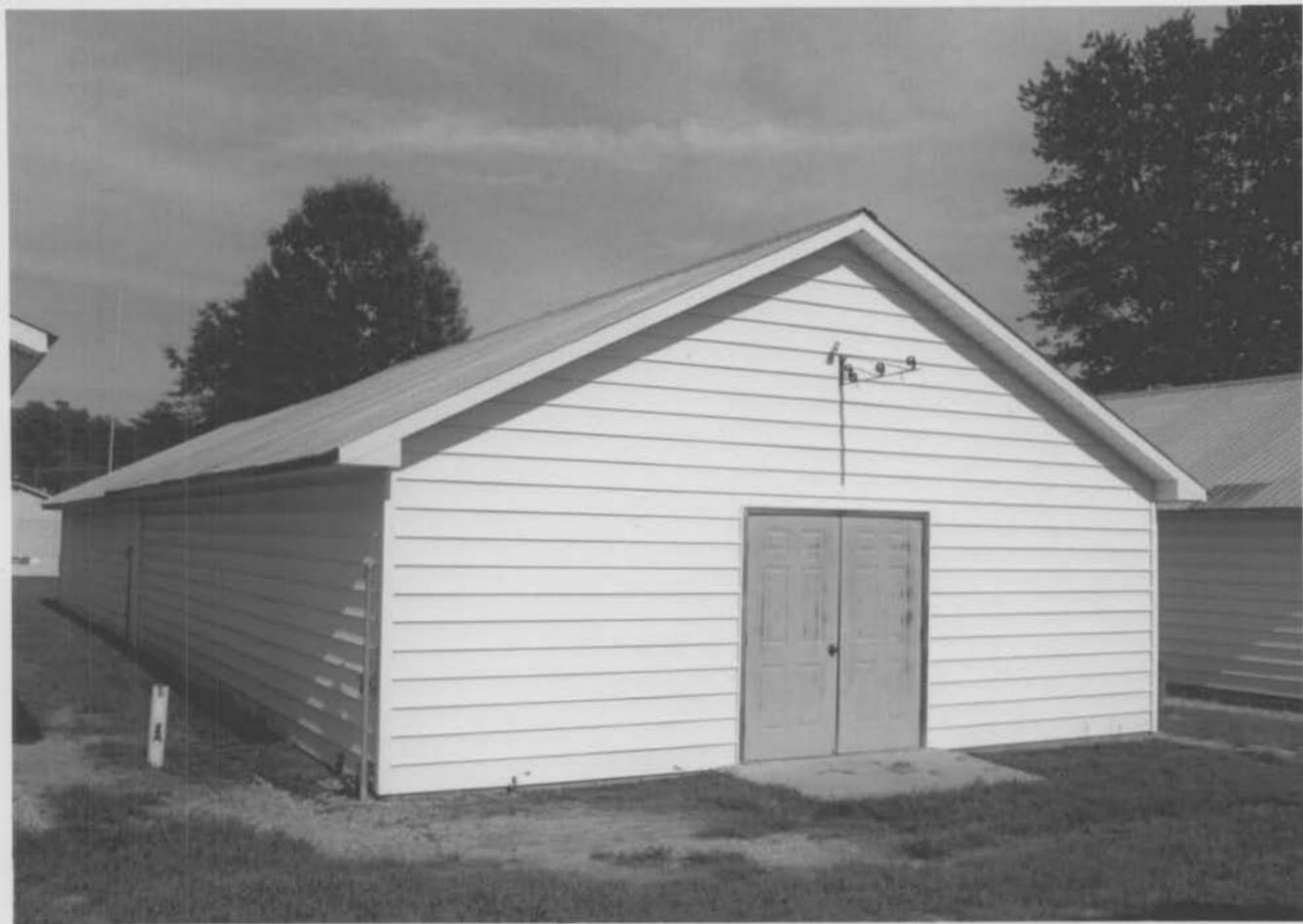
TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

3 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
EXHIBITION HALL
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO
northwest corner
4 of 25



CH 559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

EXHIBITION HALL

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

5 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

EXHIBITION HALL

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

6 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

EXHIBITION HALL

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHAO

northwest corner

7 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

view to the southeast

8 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

COMMERCIAL BUILDING "A"

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

9 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
CHARLES COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

southwest corner

10 of 25



FOOD STAND

FOOD STAND

CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

FOOD STAND

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

11 of 25

A black and white photograph of a small, white wooden building with horizontal siding and a gabled roof. The building is situated on a grassy area. A sign is mounted on the front wall, and a utility pole with wires is visible near the roofline. The photograph has a white border.

WILHELMINA H. DRURY
BUILDING

CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
WILHELMINA H. DRURY BUILDING
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

southwest corner

12 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
EXHIBITION HALL

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

13 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
P.D. BROWN BUILDING
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

northwest corner

14 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

EXHIBITION HALL

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southeast corner

15 of 25



CH: 559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

view to the north

16 of 25



CN:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
BARN

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

northwest corner

17 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

SHED

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

18 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

STABLE

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

19 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

exhibition hall

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

20 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

fair office

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

21 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

picnic shelter

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRAZERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

22 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

shed

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

southwest corner

23 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIR GROUNDS

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SITPO

view to the south

24 of 25



CH:559

CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

view to the southeast

25 of 25