

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM

NR Eligible: yes
no

Property Name: Bel Air Post Office Inventory Number: HA-1435
Address: 143 North Main Street City: Bel Air Zip Code: 21014
County: Harford USGS Topographic Map: Bel Air
Owner: Historical Society of Harford County Is the property being evaluated a district? yes
Tax Parcel Number: 585 Tax Map Number: 301 Tax Account ID Number: 025500
Project: MD-924 Bel Air Streetscape Project Agency: SHA
Site visit by MHT staff: no yes Name: _____ Date: _____
Is the property located within a historic district? yes no

If the property is within a district District Inventory Number: _____
NR-listed district yes Eligible district yes Name of District: _____
Preparer's Recommendation: Contributing resource yes no Non-contributing but eligible in another context yes

If the property is not within a district (or the property is a district) Preparer's Recommendation: Eligible yes no

Criteria: A B C D Considerations: A B C D E F G None

Documentation on the property/district is presented in:
MIHP form

Description of Property and Eligibility Determination: *(Use continuation sheet if necessary and attach map and photo)*

The commercial building, originally the Bel Air Post office, faces southwest and is located on a large lot on the corner of North Main and Gordon Streets. It is located on the northern end of the Bel Air commercial district. Constructed in 1936, this Colonial Revival building is one-and-a-half stories high and is constructed of coursed ashlar masonry. The original section of the building is five bays wide with a slightly-projecting central pavilion. The three-bay pavilion has a pedimented front-gabled roof sheathed in asphalt shingles while the remaining bays are covered with a flat roof. The water table, cornice, and coping are a contrasting stone. A tall white cupola caps the pavilion and a classical plaster figure decorates the tympanum of the pediment. Fenestration consists of 12/12 windows with stone lintels. The main entrance contains a segmental-arched fanlight with a stone lintel and five-light sidelights. A glass vestibule now shelters the main entrance. Additional details include two recessed stone panels located over the two windows that flank the main entry. The building was expanded in 1964 with the construction of the south wing. The four-bay stone wing, which was designed to be compatible to the original structure, has a flat roof. Two-story and one-story additions and a loading dock are located on the northern portion of the rear (east) elevation.

In addition to its notable Colonial Revival craftsmanship, the interior of the building also contains a significant mural by Washington, D.C. artist William Chalfee. The mural, above the door to the Postmaster's office, depicts Edwin Booth giving a performance in the Courtroom in the old Harford County Courthouse (1850). The mural reflects the use of realism in painting,

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended Eligibility not recommended
Criteria: A B C D Considerations: A B C D E F G None
MHT Comments

Jim Tananous
Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

3/2/2005
Date

Bluntz
Reviewer, NR Program

8/2/05
Date

a style preferred for public art during the 1930s. Chalfee painted murals in several other Federal buildings and was at one time the chairman of the Art Department of American University in Washington, D.C. Today, the building is used as the Harford County Historical Society.

Platted in 1780, the town of Bel Air originally consisted of forty-two lots, laid out on either side of Main Street. Despite its inland location, Bel Air was selected as the county seat in 1882. The Bel Air Courthouse, constructed in 1888, became the anchor of South Main Street, spurring development along the thoroughfare. Gradually, Main Street became concentrated with commercial buildings and served as the center of commerce for the area. Although cross street names along Main Street have changed over time, the original alignment of Main Street and its intersections remain identical to the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century town plans. Main Street continues to function as the commercial district of Bel Air.

The Bel Air Post office was constructed in 1936 under the direction of Supervising Architect of the Treasury, Louis A. Simon. The Post Office was considered the most significant public building erected on Main Street since the construction of the Bel Air Courthouse (1888) and the Bel Air Armory (1915). At the time of the building's construction, the nation was recovering from the Great Depression. Under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the administration realized that post offices were a significant and visible representation of the federal government in communities, from large to small. The construction of new post offices, as well as other federal buildings, was also used as a means to provide jobs for the unemployed. As a result, over three times the number of post offices were built in the 1930s compared to the previous fifty years.

The most common style used for the public buildings, including post offices, was the Colonial Revival style. This style was hugely popular in both public and residential architecture as a proud reflection of the country's past. The recognition of this style began at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 and continued until the 1950s. Reflecting the Roosevelt Administration's philosophy of simplicity and thrift, the Colonial Revival-styled post offices built in the 1930s often were streamlined in terms of architectural ornamentation. While following the classical vocabulary and proportions, these buildings often lacked ostentatious ornamentation. Despite their streamlined features, post office architecture from this time did stress the importance of quality and craftsmanship in terms of materials and design.

Although many of the post offices constructed throughout the country were very architecturally similar on the exterior, the interiors were often uniquely decorated with murals and artwork commissioned by the federal government. The Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (now the Commission of Fine Arts) was the primary sponsor for the art commissioned for post offices. The Work's Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (the Section's program) held competitions to find artists and encouraged realism as the preferred style. The prominent subject conveyed in the artwork was traditional everyday American life and history. The goal of this project was to make art available for those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to see it.

The Bel Air Post Office is a significant example of post office architecture constructed under the Roosevelt Administration and supervising architect Louis A. Simon during the 1930s. The building's Colonial Revival architecture with its modest classical detailing exemplifies the preferred use of streamlined designs, yet it displays the importance of design quality with its superior craftsmanship, building materials, as well as its proportions. Overall, the Bel Air Post Office was successful in creating a commanding presence in the community of Bel Air along the commercial district of Main Street, which at the time of its construction, was composed primarily of modest late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century commercial buildings. The Maryland Historical Trust holds an easement on this property.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended _____ Eligibility not recommended _____

Criteria: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D Considerations: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G ___ None

MHT Comments

Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

Date

Reviewer, NR Program

Date

Representative of the public art and architecture constructed by the federal government during the 1930s, the Bel Air Post Office is eligible under Criterion A as it influenced the attitudes of the citizens of Bel Air about their government during the Great Depression. With its unique WPA mural, the Bel Air Post office is also significant example of the federal government's emphasis on public art that was accessible to the masses during the Great Depression. The property is not associated with any person or group of persons of outstanding importance to the community, state, or nation. Therefore, the Bel Air Post Office is not eligible under Criterion B. With its exceptional Colonial Revival craftsmanship and design, the Bel Air Post Office is a good example of the preference for streamlined Colonial Revival architecture in the design of public buildings financed by the federal government during the Great Depression. With its WPA mural, the Bel Air Post Office is additionally significant as a good example of an important local artist, the use of realism in WPA art, and the use of commissioned art for public buildings. Therefore, the Bel Air is eligible under Criterion C. The Bel Air Post Office was not evaluated under Criterion D. Therefore, it has been determined that the Bel Air Post Office is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

The recommended National Register boundary for the Bel Air Post Office at 143 N. Main Street is tax parcel 585 as noted on tax parcel map 301. The National Register Boundary extends to the existing sidewalk on Main Street. Justification for this is that the sidewalk is part of the streetscape of the commercial core rather than the historic context of this property.

Prepared by: EHT Tracerics

Date Prepared: 3/15/2005

Bel Air Post Office (HA-1435)
143 North Main Street
Bel Air, Maryland
Surveyed by EHT Tracerics, Inc.
March 15, 2005

ADDENDUM

The property at 143 North Main Street was surveyed by staff from EHT Tracerics, Inc. in March 2005 in response to a request made by the Maryland State Highway Administration for purposes relating to the MD-924 Streetscape Project.

Section 4: Owner

Historical Society of Harford County
143 North Main Street
Bel Air
Maryland
Harford County

Section 7: Description

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In addition to its notable Colonial Revival craftsmanship, the interior of the building also contains a significant mural by Washington, D.C. artist William Chalfee. The mural, above the door to the Postmaster's office, depicts Edwin Booth giving a performance in the Courtroom in the old Harford County Courthouse (1850). The mural reflects the use of realism in painting, a style preferred for public art during the 1930s. Chalfee painted murals in several other Federal buildings and was at one time the chairman of the Art

ADDENDUM

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Department of American University in Washington, D.C. Today, the building is used as the Harford County Historical Society.

Section 8: Significance

Platted in 1780, the town of Bel Air originally consisted of forty-two lots, laid out on either side of Main Street. Despite its inland location, Bel Air was selected as the county seat in 1882. The Bel Air Courthouse, constructed in 1888, became the anchor of South Main Street, spurring development along the thoroughfare. Gradually, Main Street became concentrated with commercial buildings and served as the center of commerce for the area. Although cross street names along Main Street have changed over time, the original alignment of Main Street and its intersections remain identical to the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century town plans. Main Street continues to function as the commercial district of Bel Air.

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The most common style used for the public buildings, including post offices, was the Colonial Revival style. This style was hugely popular in both public and residential architecture as a proud reflection of the country's past. The recognition of this style began at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 and continued until the 1950s. Reflecting the Roosevelt Administration's philosophy of simplicity and thrift, the Colonial Revival-styled post offices built in the 1930s often were streamlined in terms of architectural ornamentation. While following the classical vocabulary and proportions, these buildings often lacked ostentatious ornamentation. Despite their streamlined features, post office architecture from this time did stress the importance of quality and craftsmanship in terms of materials and design.

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ADDENDUM

Bel Air Post Office (HA-1435)
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Bel Air, Maryland
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March 15, 2005

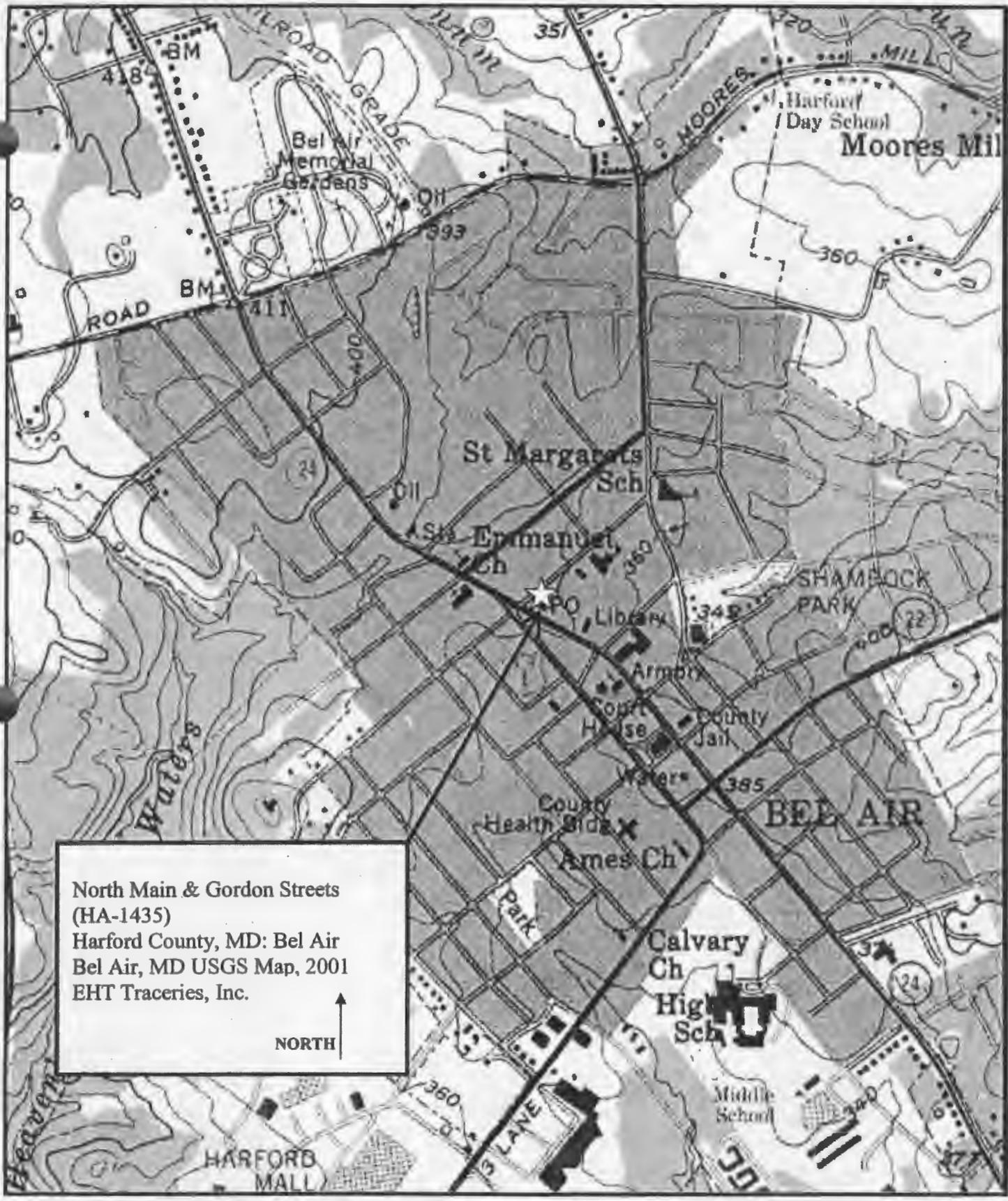
the primary sponsor for the art commissioned for post offices. The Work's Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (the Section's program) held competitions to find artists and encouraged realism as the preferred style. The prominent subject conveyed in the artwork was traditional everyday American life and history. The goal of this project was to make art available for those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to see it.

The Bel Air Post Office is a significant example of post office architecture constructed under the Roosevelt Administration and supervising architect Louis A. Simon during the 1930s. The building's Colonial Revival architecture with its modest classical detailing exemplifies the preferred use of streamlined designs, yet it displays the importance of design quality with its superior craftsmanship, building materials, as well as its proportions. Overall, the Bel Air Post Office was successful in creating a commanding presence in the community of Bel Air along the commercial district of Main Street, which at the time of its construction, was composed primarily of modest late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commercial buildings. The Maryland Historical Trust holds an easement on this property.

Representative of the public art and architecture constructed by the federal government during the 1930s, the Bel Air Post Office is eligible under Criterion A as it influenced the attitudes of the citizens of Bel Air about their government during the Great Depression. With its unique WPA mural, the Bel Air Post office is also significant example of the federal government's emphasis on public art that was accessible to the masses during the Great Depression. The property is not associated with any person or group of persons of outstanding importance to the community, state, or nation. Therefore, the Bel Air Post Office is not eligible under Criterion B. With its exceptional Colonial Revival craftsmanship and design, the Bel Air Post Office is a good example of the preference for streamlined Colonial Revival architecture in the design of public buildings financed by the federal government during the Great Depression. With its WPA mural, the Bel Air Post Office is additionally significant as a good example of an important local artist, the use of realism in WPA art, and the use of commissioned art for public buildings. Therefore, the Bel Air is eligible under Criterion C. The Bel Air Post Office was not evaluated under Criterion D. Therefore, it has been determined that the Bel Air Post Office is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

Section 10: Geographical Data

The recommended National Register boundary for the Bel Air Post Office at 143 N. Main Street is tax parcel 585 as noted on tax parcel map 301. The National Register Boundary extends to the existing sidewalk on Main Street. Justification for this is that the sidewalk is part of the streetscape of the commercial core rather than the historic context of this property.



North Main & Gordon Streets
(HA-1435)
Harford County, MD: Bel Air
Bel Air, MD USGS Map, 2001
EHT Tracerics, Inc.



RESOURCE SKETCH MAP

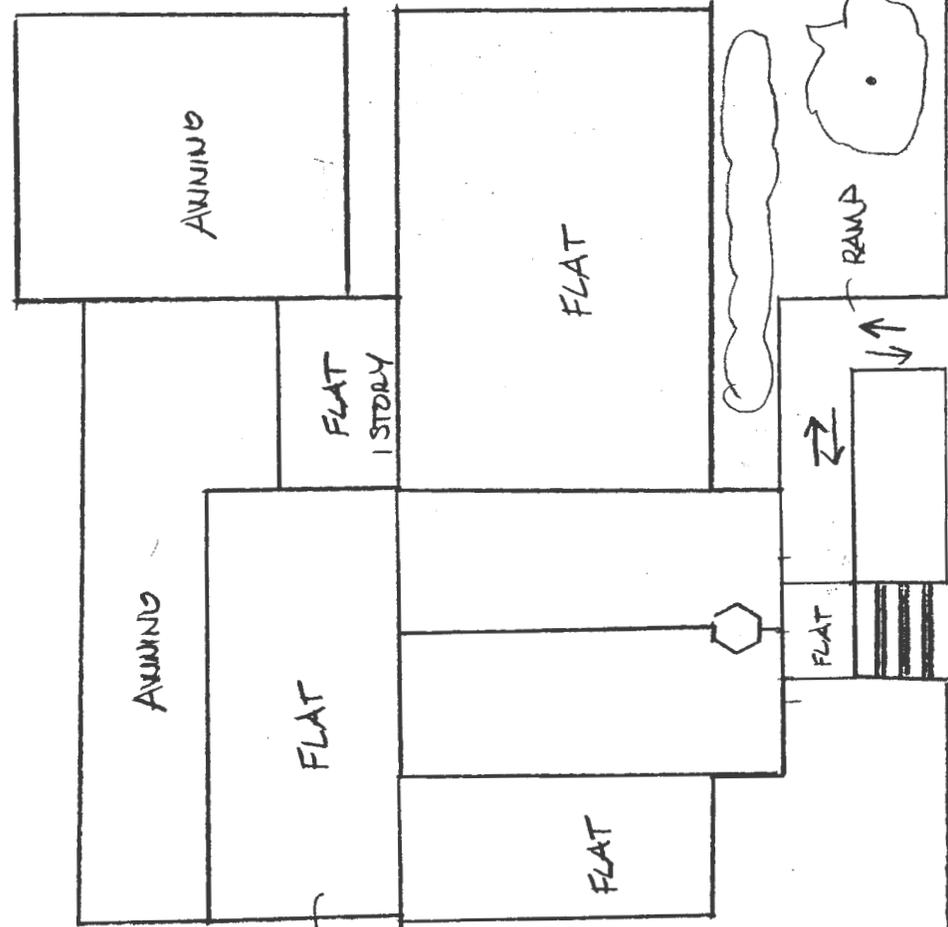
PA-1435

PAVED

BEL-AIR POST OFFICE

BEL-AIR

HARFORD COUNTY

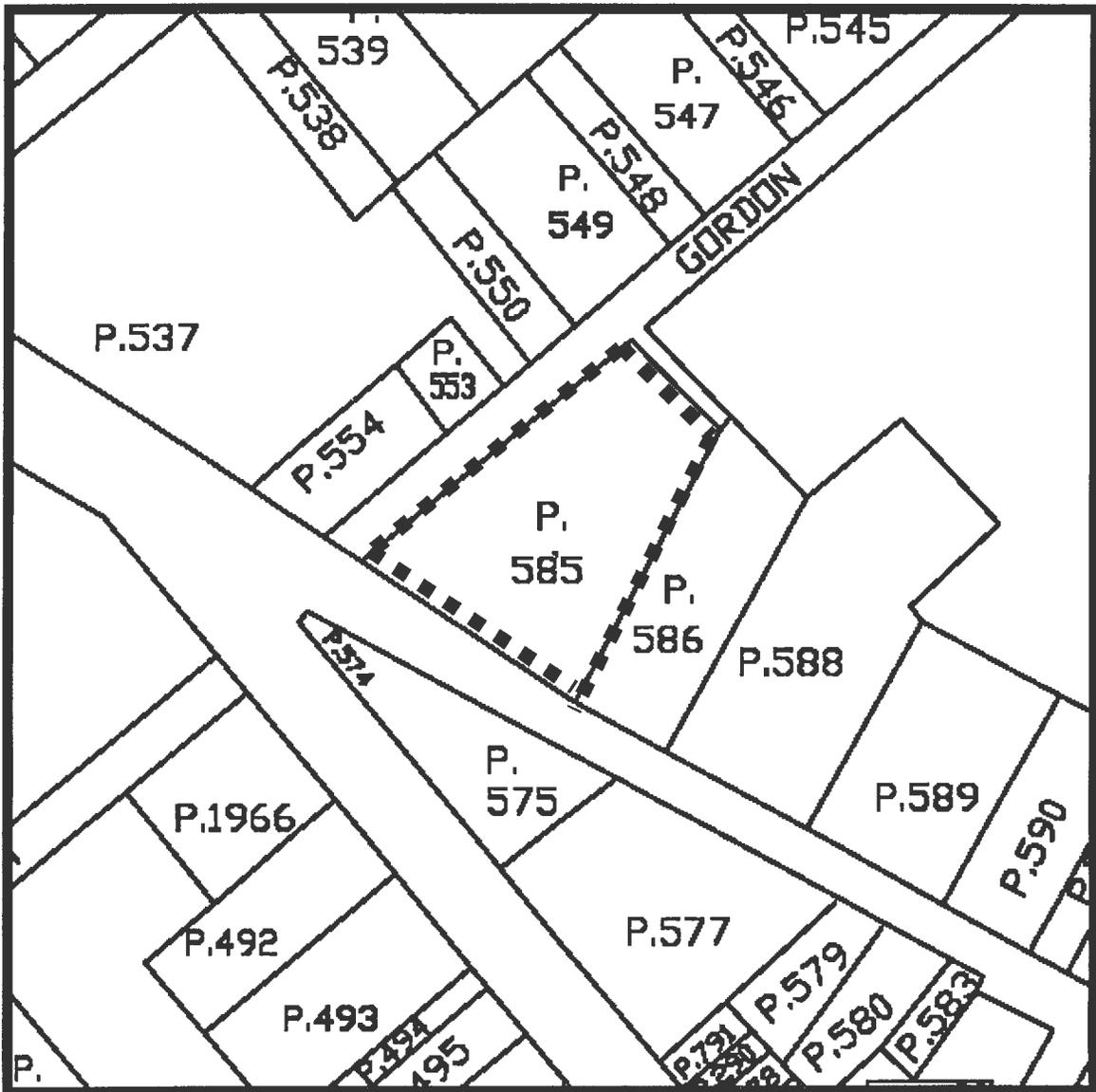


GORDON ST

N. MAIN ST.



NOT DRAWN TO SCALE



National Register Eligible Boundary
Bel Air Post Office (HA-1435)
Harford County, MD: Bel Air

National Register Boundary extends to existing sidewalk on Main Street. Justification for this is that the sidewalk is part of the streetscape of the commercial core rather than the historic context of this property.



HA-L435

Bel Air Post Office,

North Main and Gordon streets

Harford County, MD

EHT Traceries, Inc

March 2005

MD SHPO

Facade and south elevation

Photo 1 of 4



HA-1435

Bcl Air Post office

North Main and Gordon Streets

Harford County, MD

EHT Traccies, Inc

March 2015

MD SHPB

Facade and north elevation

Photo 2 of 4



HA-1435

Bcl Air Post office

North main and Gordon Streets

Harford County, MD

EHT Traceries, Inc.

March 2005

MD SHPO

Rear and north elevations

Photo 3 of 4



HA-1435

Bcl Air Post Office

North Main and Gordon Streets

Harford County, MD

EHT Tracerics, Inc.

3/20/75

MD SHPO

Ear and south elevations

Photo 4 of 4

HA-1435

1936

Bel Air Post Office
Main & Gordon
Bel Air
public

From its disciplined stone work to its handsome cupola, the Bel Air Post Office stands as a fine example of the Colonial Revival of the mid-1930's. A warmer building than the federal buildings built in Washington during the same period, the Post Office has outstanding tracery in the fan light and sidelights around the double front doors and an excellent wide cornice inside the lobby. The foyer decorations are also worthy of note, as is the historical mural on the north wall above the postmaster's office door. Painted by D. C. artist William Chalfee, the mural depicts the famous Shakespearian actor Edwin Booth, a Harford native, in an early performance in the courtroom of the old courthouse.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Bel Air Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

N. Main & Gordon Street

1st

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Harford

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Post Office Department

Telephone #:

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Washington

___ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

D. C.

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Harford County Courthouse

Liber #: 239

Folio #: 26

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

Maryland

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE		CHECK ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" 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

This one and a half story coursed ashlar building is at the southeast corner of North Main and E. Gordon Streets in the Town of Bel Air, Harford County, Maryland. The building was originally five bays wide with a slightly projecting central pavilion of three bays topped by a pediment. The southern bays were added in 1964. The building has a gable roof over the central pavilion and a flat roof elsewhere. The water table, cornice and coping are of a contrasting stone. The central pavilion is obviously the important part of the building. The tall white cupola over it is with the Courthouse cupola, an integral part of Bel Air's skyline. A classical figure in plaster decorates the tympanum of the pediment. Recessed stone plaques are above the two windows. The entrance has a semi-circular fanlight with delicate tracery and five pane over panel sidelights around a pair of glass and aluminum doors. The windows are 12/12 double-hung sash in wooden surrounds set clean in the stone walls.

The first floor interior has a lobby which corresponds to the center pavilion. To the north is the Postmaster's office, to the south a one bay section with the Post Office boxes. Behind the lobby is the work section which fits around to the south of the Post Office boxes.

While the rest of the building is severely utilitarian, the lobby is elegantly decorated. The handsome cornice has a shell motive and a Greek key band with a molding string at top and bottom. The vestibule is decorated with various classical elements including fluted pilasters, a dentil band and a modillion. The door to the Postmaster's office has a full entablature. Behind the lobby and the office and around the south end of the niche for boxes is the open work space. The half story has a workers' lounge and a chamber which overlooks the work area for secret inspections.

The loading dock occupies the north half of the rear (east) elevation.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

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 type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input 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 1936

~~ENGINEER~~ ARCHITECT

A. Simon, Treasury Dept.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This attractive neo-colonial building is not yet 50 years old, but it belongs on the inventory for two reasons: it is an excellent example of its style of Post Office, its decoration and cupola being particularly noteworthy, and it has an historic mural inside.

The Post Office was built in 1936 on the lot where Stevenson A. Williams's house used to stand. It was originally five bays wide. In 1964 the south portion of the building was tastefully added to the structure.

Besides the elegant interior decoration, the building is noteworthy for the mural which is above the door to the Postmaster's office in the north wall of the lobby. By Washington, D.C., artist William Chalfee, the mural depicts Edwin Booth giving an early (1850) performance in the Courtroom in the old Harford County Courthouse. The painting is in the realistic style of the 1930's, a style made famous by Thomas Hart Benton and others. Chalfee painted other murals for Federal buildings and was at one time the chairman of the Art Department of American University in Washington.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

This property occupies parcel #585 in the Town of Bel Air.

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

STATE _____ COUNTY _____

STATE _____ COUNTY _____

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Marilynn Larew, Architectural Historian

5 December 1979

ORGANIZATION

Town of Bel Air

DATE

838-8700

STREET & NUMBER

39 Hickory Avenue

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

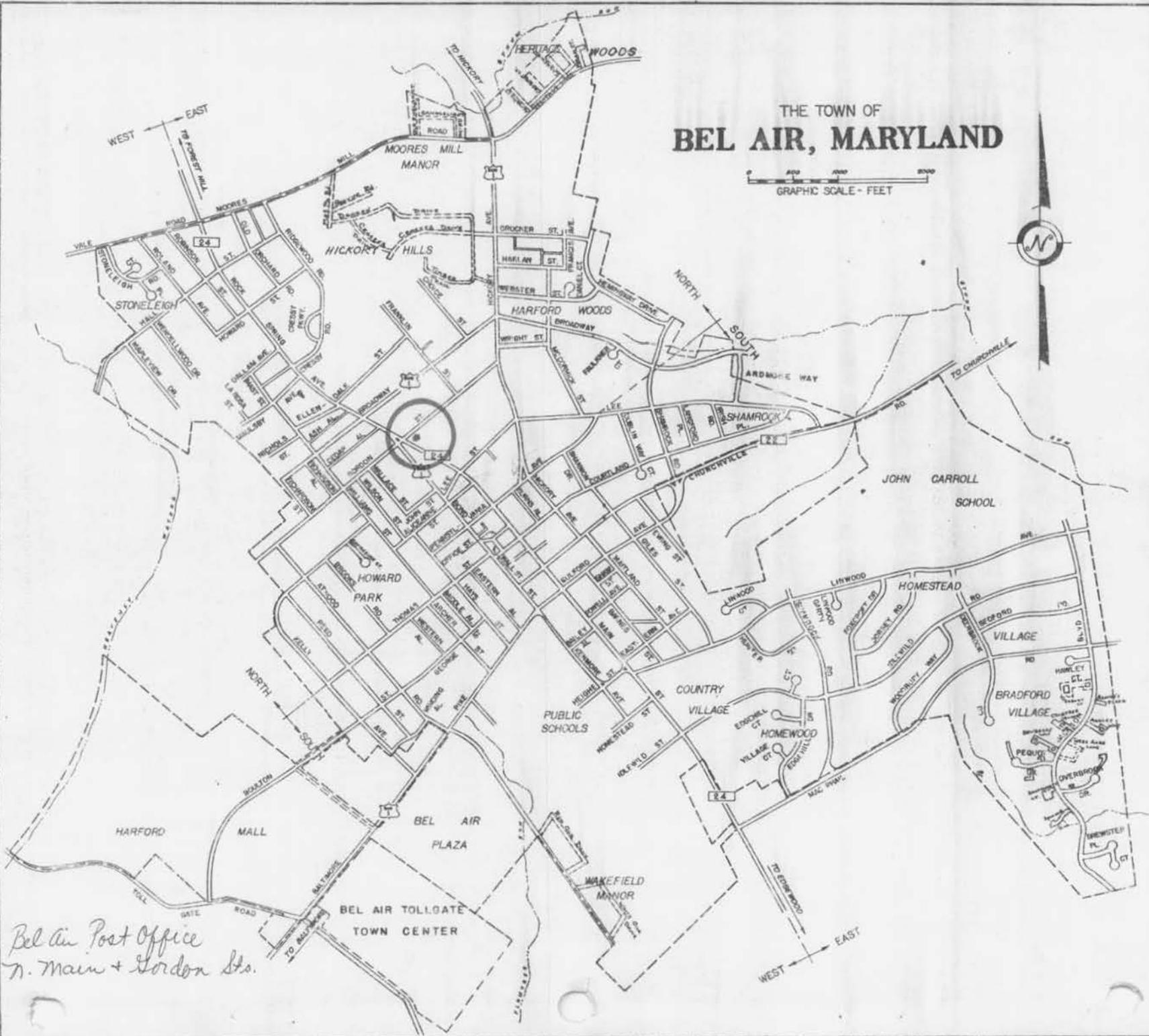
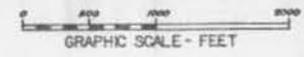
Maryland

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

THE TOWN OF BEL AIR, MARYLAND



HA-1435

*Bel Air Post Office
N. Main + Gordon Sts.*



HA-1435

Bel Air Post Office, Main + Gordon, Bel Air
w. slw
M. Lauer, 1979



U.S. POST OFFICE - MAIN GORDON, BEL AIR
DETAIL of W. ELEVATION
M. LABREW, 979

HA-1435