FHR 6-300 (11-78)

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HA-1716

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic: Bel Air Courthouse Historic District

and/or common: Bel Air Courthouse Historic District

2. Location

street & number: Office, Courtland and Main Streets — n/a not for publication

city, town: Bel Air — n/a vicinity of — congressional district: Second

state: Maryland — code: 24 — county: Harford — code: 025

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
X district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	X commercial	___ park
___ structure	X both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	X government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	X not applicable	___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name: See Continuation Sheet No. 1 (less than 50)

street & number:

city, town: ___ vicinity of — state:

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.: Harford County Courthouse

street & number: Main Street

city, town: Bel Air — state: Maryland 21014

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title: Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory (see Continuation Sheet No. 8) — has this property been determined elegible? ___ yes X no

date: 1979 — ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records: Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town: Annapolis — state: Maryland 21401

7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
X excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	X original site
___ good	___ ruins	X altered	___ moved date n/a
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Number of Resources Contributing	Noncontributing	
18	1	building
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
2	0	objects
20	1	Total

Number of previously listed National Register properties included in this nomination: 0

Original and historic functions and uses: commercial, government, residential

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

The Bel Air Courthouse Historic District is a small cohesive group of buildings, mostly two to three stories of brick or frame construction that were erected or renovated in the nineteenth to early twentieth century period and border the Harford County Courthouse which is a grand scale brick structure. The terrain gently rises from Main Street to the courthouse, more so along Courtland Street than Office Street, and slopes down to Bond Street. Although the courthouse is set back with a lawn in front, the district has a small and crowded characteristic created by the low scale buildings and the narrowness of the streets. The buildings exhibit various stylistic influences, classical, Renaissance and Georgian Revival, and Victorian but the majority are simple in form and decorative detail. From the Main Street side, the district has a small town turn of the century feel. From the Bond Street side, this feeling is abruptly intruded by the huge scaled contemporary courthouse addition added in the 1980s. The only other non-contributing aspect is a small scale 1960s building at 4 Office Street. Adding to the historic character of the district are two eighteenth century survey stones along Bond Street that mark the county plot.

For History and Supporting Documentation, see Continuation Sheet No. 9

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The following resources are located in the Bel Air Courthouse Historic District. All but the building at 4 Office Street and the 1980s addition to the courthouse contribute to the historic and architectural significance. The names listed here for the resources are generally historic names. The numbers given in parentheses are Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory numbers.

38 South Main Street (HA-218)
Harford County Courthouse

The Courthouse is a two story hip roofed brick I shaped structure that was built in three sections. The original portion, the center of the I, is an 1858 Italianate building that was designed by J. Crawford Neilson of Baltimore. In 1904, the crossbars of the I were added in the Renaissance Revival style. These additions were designed by John A. Dempwolf of York, Pennsylvania. A large scale multi-level brick structure of contemporary design was added to the west or back end in 1981 replacing two late nineteenth century buildings (see Section 6). The principle or Main Street elevation is symmetrical with a central projecting pedimented pavilion, rustication on the first floor; quoining, a projecting brick cornice, round arch windows on the second floor. Although the interior retains fragments of nineteenth and early twentieth century woodwork, the interior was extensively altered in the 1980s.

30-34 South Main Street (HA-1451)
Herman's Store

Located at the intersection of Office Street, this two story painted brick structure was erected in 1867-1868 with alterations in the 1890s. The building has a low hip roof, four bays along Main Street and three along Office Street on the second floor; a storefront and beveled doorway on the first floor; and a bracketed cornice. The upper floor windows are casements with transoms and iron balconies. A recent addition is attached along Main Street.

100 South Main Street (HA-1452)
Stagmer's Hotel

This three story stuccoed commercial structure, originally a hotel and later a carriage manufactory, was built a few years following the Civil War with the third floor added in the 1880s. The building measures approximately four bays along Main Street by five bays with a three bay wing on Courtland Street. The first floor has shop fronts under a wide cornice that wraps around the corner. A late nineteenth century shop front faces Courtland Street near the back of the building. Most upper level windows are double-hung windows with two-over-two sashes. The interior of the upper stories are used as apartments.

See Continuation Sheet No. 3

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

4 Office Street

Errected about 1960, this two story brick structure is contemporary in design and has a shop front on the first floor and two sets of casement windows on the second.

6-8 Office Street (HA-1461)
Preston Gilbert's Law Office

This three-bay two-story office building, erected in 1871, is typical of the simple frame structures built for offices and shops in town in the 1870s and 80s. With its mild cornice it is a good example of the reserved yet elegant style preferred in town. (A slightly plainer example is at 31 West Courtland Street between the Old Aegis Building and the County Extension Agent's Office. Preston Gilbert, a local attorney and Bel Air's first Mayor, built the building for his office in 1871. After his death it housed dentists' offices for many years. Today it has a business service on the first floor and apartments upstairs.

12 Office Street (HA-1462)
Second National Bank Building
George Archer, architect, Bel Air

Erected in 1900, the building is a two story, flat-roofed, stone rubble building with a smooth stone facade in a restrained Beaux-Arts style reminiscent of some of the simpler Ernest Flagg buildings which were built at the same time at the Naval Academy. The facade is divided into three bays by the strong vertical lines of the rusticated quoins and two similar pilaster strips, all decorated at the top with cartouches. The center bay is entirely occupied by the two story entrance arch. The entry is recent, but the three windows in the top of the arch are original. The flanking bays each have a clean-set 1/1 double-hung window in the first story and a deeply-set oval bulls-eye window with a stone frame decorated with raised keystone shapes at the cardinal points in the second story. The vertical movement of the facade is balanced by the strong horizontals of an architrave and a dentil-banded cornice topped by a parapet with projecting panels over the quoins and pilaster strips. The building's east elevation shows signs of having been raised. About half-way up the northeast corner brick quoins begin and the quality of the stone work appears different. Perhaps the building was originally only 1½ stories tall.

14 Office Street (HA-1462)
Reed Building

Now a part of the Second National Bank Building, this nineteenth century building is a two story brick structure with a hipped roof. Originally the entrance was to the east and had long window lights and a three-paned transom.

See Continuation Sheet No. 4

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

A similarly designed window was to the west. The second story windows were 1/1 double-hung, set in wooden frames. When the two buildings were incorporated, the entrance and window in the first story were replaced with two pairs of double-hung 6/6 windows. The three second story windows became 6/6 and acquired louvered shutters. The corbelled strip between the first and second stories remains. The original inside end chimney in the west elevation was removed at the time of the renovation.

18 Office Street (HA-1463)
Harford Mutual Building
John B. Hamme, architect, York, Pennsylvania

Now a county office building, the structure is a two story red brick building built in 1930 in the commercial style and decorated with classical stone detail applied to the facade. The front is divided vertically into three bays of equal size by four pairs of fluted stone pilasters with palm leaf capitals. Horizontal movement is supplied by the rest of the stone decoration: a smooth coursed stone base, projecting beneath the pilasters, recessed in between and rising to sill level in the first story, a restrained architrave topped by a simple cornice with a dentil band, pairs of recessed panels between the stories, and similar panels on the parapet above the paired pilasters. The windows are paired in each bay, 6/6 set in stone surrounds with stone sills and topped by flat arches of brick with stone keystones. The entry, in the center bay, is a modern aluminum framed glass double door with a single pane transom. The interior has been slightly modified since the county bought the building, but it retains its slightly-off-center hall, with the offices to the east being narrower than those on the west. A pair of matching open string stair cases rise along the west side of the hall, front and back. In each the turned newel post is surrounded by balusters; the stair rail rises in a graceful line, to a pair of dark thin, turned balusters of a different pattern from the thinner, white painted balusters of the stair and landings. The two staircases are of unusual grace and beauty for a commercial establishment.

20 Office Street (HA-1464)
Lee Building

This five bay brick facaded two story brick building was erected in the 1860s with later additions and alterations. The present appearance dates from 1936 when the building was joined to the Farmers and Merchants Bank to the west.

26 Office Street (HA-1464)
Farmers and Merchants Bank Building

Erected in 1914, this building was a one bay structure before 1936 when the second door was placed in the facade for access to the second story. The formal entry is composed of modified corinthian columns supporting a dentiled pediment with a thin cornice. The present doors are replacements - two glass doors framed in aluminum and topped by the original semi-circular fan light

See Continuation Sheet No. 5

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

with thin vertical panes. A stoop composed of two concrete steps flanked by brick ends leads to the entry. A brick parapet caps the facade and follows the line of the pediment, screening the flat roof. The new entry is a plain aluminum and glass door set in a wooden surround. A separate rectangular window with five vertical panes is set above the door to give additional light to the hall and staircase.

28 Office Street (HA-1465)
Robinson Building

The front (south) elevation of the Robinson Building, erected in 1913, is two bayed with a thick dentilled cornice topped by a parapet with recessed panels and a thin stone coping. The cornice line and coping are echoed in the Johnson buildings to the east. A large composite window occupies the west bay. This window has a semicircular fan light over three large panes, the flanking panes being narrower than the center one. Thick mutins separate these panes. A neo-classical doorway with a thick cornice occupies the eastern bay.

30 Office Street (HA-282)
Second National Bank Building

This two story aluminum sided building with a hipped roof and off-center chimney was built in 1870 and extensively renovated. The building was first used as a tavern and the owner lived upstairs. The present hall and open string, single run staircase possibly a result of the 1888 renovation, but that stair was described as being in the Queen Anne style, so this stair may be from the 1932 renovation. After the 1888 renovation the building had a porch on the west which was enclosed in the 1932 renovation at the time the building's present Greek Revival appearance was constructed. The frame structure is five bays on Office Street and four on Bond Street. The shape is that of a fat and warped L caused by the projection of the enclosed porch into the right of way of Bond Street and the addition of a bathroom and office on the north end of the Bond Street side. The windows are double-hung sash, 6/6 flanked by decorative shutters. The entry is in the second bay from the west end of the Office Street elevation. The door has six panels and is framed in sidelights of three panes and a four pane top light with single pane corner blocks. A stone foundation can be seen on the Bond Street side.

11 Courtland Street

This 1930s two story brick structure with a flat roof has shopfront on the first floor and three sets of double-hung wooden sash windows.

See Continuation Sheet No. 6

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

17 Courtland Street (HA-219)
Archer Building

Erected about 1867, the structure is a five bay, two story brick building with a hipped roof with an interior chimney, newer than the building, inside the east elevation. The front (north) elevation shows double-hung 6/6 windows flanking a vaguely Greek revival entry with long, three pane window lights, a six-pane transom and double doors, paneled below, glass above. The west elevation, on the alley is windowless; the east elevation is up against the next building. The rear (south) elevation is made up ot three bays. The outside bays, containing a pair of double-hung windows on each level, (some 6/6, some 2/2, some 1/1 apparently as they needed to be replaced) flank the central bay, with a 6/6 double hung window in the stair landing and an 8'5"x14'3" single story gable roofed shed which contains a bathroom on each side of the hall leading to the rear door. The interior is a central hall plan with two offices on each side. A dog-leg open-string staircase rises along the west side of the hall. The turned newel post, balusters and stair rail are original. Upstairs, besides the two offices on each side of the hall, there is a small chamber of probably 20th century origin over the first floor entry. The interior retains much original decorative detailing.

21 Courtland Street (HA-1390)
Harford Democrat Building

Now adorned with a pseudo colonial door surround and shop window, this three-bay brick office was once a plain three-bay building with six-over-six windows set in flat brick arches and a side door set in under a flat brick arch. Thus, it was typical of the small brick office buildings built around the Courthouse Square in the years after the Civil War, just as its recent retouching reflects this century's fondness for "colonial" details. James D. Watters and William Bouldin built the structure in 1869 to house their newly established newspaper, The Harford Democrat. Both soon ceased to have a connection with the paper, but the journal continued to be published in the building until 1922. The next year the Bel Air Electric Company bought the building. After being absorbed by the Consolidated Gas, Electric Light and Power Company, the Company finally came to rest in the corporate name the Baltimore Gas & Electric Company in 1955. The colonial facade dates to a 1940 renovation by Alexander Shaw of Bel Air and Taylor and Fisher of Baltimore.

25-27 Courtland Street (HA-1392)
Holden Building

This five bay, two story common bond brick office building with a slate hipped roof and decorative brackets supporting the thin cornice was built about 1869. Today, it presents a vaguely colonial look; it acquired a broken pediment doorway sometime after 1960. The coherent facade (north elevation) disguises the fact that this was two buildings as late as 1932. No picture of the buildings has been found, but since they were built at the same time as the B G & E Building, they probably looked like it: a three bay structure with

See Continuation Sheet No. 7

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

entrance in either side bay. The windows are 6/1 double hung sash set in moulded surrounds with wooden sills and flat arched tops with a bead at the top. There are six sills and flat arched tops with a bead at the top. There are six windows across the second story front, the center two being slightly irregularly spaced. In 1960 the center entrance showed a brick flat arch over a single pane transom. The glass door was flanked by long single pane side lights. Today there is a broken pediment supported by pilasters framing the entrance. The transom remains. The door (to the west) is aluminum framed and has a solid pane to the east as a companion. One step led up to the door; Courtland Street slopes to the west here and the top of one cellar window shows in the west end bay.

29 Courtland Street (HA-1393)
Aegis Building

This two and a half story brick facaded building was an ordinary frame structure with a front porch. It has been a shop, a bakery and an ice cream parlor. When John D. Worthington, Sr., bought the building to house his newly purchased newspaper in 1905, he added one bay to the sides, thus bringing it out to the sidewalk, and gave it its present brick facade. The round-arched, three-over-three window in the middle bay of the second story maintains the traditional connection between front gables and such windows, but, in this case, the gable is occupied by a datestone which reads "The Aegis 1856-1905." It was the home of The Aegis until 1963. It now houses county offices.

31 Courtland Street
Dunnigan Building

Although this small two story, three-bay building errected in 1885, has a typical Victorian commercial facade, it has only front and rear walls and relies on its neighbors to provide side coverings. Mrs. Barbara Ferry Dunnigan built it next door to her hotel. It served as a shop with lawyers' offices upstairs. Mrs. Dunnigan and her son, Edward Ferry, also owned three other buildings in that half block, including the hote, the old Aegis Building Building and the west half of the Holden Building.

33 Courtland Street (HA-1395)
Mrs. Dunnigan's Hotel

When this two and a half story frame hotel was built shortly after the Civil War, Bel Air was still the small southern courthouse town shown on the 1858 map. In those days, the town's most important businesses were the inns or hotels clustered around the courthouse which sheltered the visitors on court days. In 1906 Mrs. Dunnigan defaulted on a mortgage and the Harford Mutual Fire Insurance Company bought the building. They remodeled the premises, in the process adding the vault in the basement and the classical detail on the facade. In 1921 the Harford Mutual moved to 18 Office Street and Smith-Webster

See Continuation Sheet No. 8

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

took over 33 Courtland. Smith-Webster went bankrupt two years later. In 1937 Harford County bought the building, and since then it has housed the School Board and is currently the County Extension Agent's Office.

Survey Stones 1 and 2
#1 Office Street at Bond Street (HA-1466)
#2 Courtland Street at Bond Street (HA-1396)

These small stones, about 1 foot high and well worn, were set in 1782 to denote the county lot in Bel Air. Originally four in number, the easterly two have been lost with time.

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS: (continued)

Two nineteenth century buildings were demolished in 1980 for construction of the courthouse extension. Both buildings were recorded by the Historic American Building Survey in 1980 with funding assistance of the Maryland Historical Trust and the Town of Bel Air. The two buildings were:

Masonic Temple
MHT survey #HA-1242 HABS #MD-319

This imposing Queen Anne brick structure, erected in 1886 and the most complex building in town with the possible exception of the County Courthouse, was one of Bel Air's earliest architect-designed buildings. Planned by Jackson Gott of Baltimore and built by Bel Air's Master Builder Jacob Bull, the massive towered building rose four stories from Bond Street, had a restaurant on the Bond Street side and had offices on the first floor on the Wall Street side. The Town Hall on the second story served until well into the 20th century as Bel Air's Civic Center, with facilities for plays, dances and concerts. The third floor was the lodge hall for the Mt Ararat Lodge #44 of the Masons, and had a notable timbered ceiling.

Harford National Bank
MHT survey #HA-1243 HABS #MD-320

Designed by architect George Archer, this brick and stone building was Harford County's only example of the nationally-popular Richardson Romanesque style. The solid yet graceful arches of the structure expressed in brownstone all the worth and stability anyone could desire in a home for Bel Air's first bank, the Harford National Bank. The eyebrow dormers added a trace of humor and lifted the heaviness of the design. Built in 1889-1890, the building was listed in the National Register in 1980.

8. Significance

HA-1716

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
X 1800–1899	X commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	X politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1855-1930s **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Applicable Criteria: A, C
Applicable Exceptions: none
Significance Evaluated: local

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Bel Air Courthouse Historic District is the only cohesive concentration of buildings in the commercial section of Bel Air that best represents an important aspect of the growth and development of this county seat. From 1880 through the beginning of World War I, canning of fruits and vegetables was the third most important industry in Maryland. Harford was one of the counties which led the state in the industry. As the legislative center of the county, Bel Air also developed as the financial and commercial center which it still holds today. The two-street town rapidly expanded with residential additions and the center of town was in-filled with commercial buildings. The expanded importance of the community during this period is emphasized with major additions in 1905 to the courthouse in a Renaissance Revival style and the boldly designed financial institutions surrounding the courthouse. Of particular note are the Second National Bank and Farmers and Merchants Bank Buildings on Office Street which are elaborately fronted Georgian Revival structures from the first quarter of the twentieth century. These noteworthy buildings combined with the more modest and conservative structures which make up the bulk of the district reflect the role, attitudes, and nature of Bel Air from the mid-nineteenth to mid twentieth century.

See Continuation Sheet No.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT:

Bel Air, the seat of Harford County, is an administrative, market, and service community with a population of around 10,000 and an area of approximately two square miles. While Harford County is a rapidly developing area in the metropolitan orbit of Baltimore City, it has few other incorporated towns. Besides Bel Air, there are Havre de Grace, Edgewood, and Aberdeen. The latter two towns are heavily influenced by their respective military installations, the Edgewood Arsenal and the Aberdeen Proving Ground. Havre de Grace, half the county away, has been a center of shipping and industry. Bel Air, on the other hand, was, until the 1950s, a village whose only reason for existence was the county courthouse. In 1950 the population was only 2,500. Up to that time the only industry the town ever had was a merchant flour mill established by the Reckford family in 1886, unless the several small 19th century carriage works (of which no trace remain) qualify as industry.

Bel Air was laid out in 1780 by Aquilla Scott on a portion of his inheritance named Scott's Improvement Enlarged, frequently referred to as Scott's Old Fields. Each of the 42 lots consisted of one-half acre, fronting on Main Street for approximately 75 feet.

The town limits then extended on both sides of Main Street from approximately 75 feet north of the Methodist Church (in those days marked by a White Oak Tree) to about 300 feet beyond the Baltimore Pike on the south and from Bond Street on the west ot Dallam Place on the east.

Aquilla Scott's Old Fields was chosen the County Seat in 1782. The Act of 1784 which conferred certain powers on the County Commissioners decreed that henceforth Scott's Old Fields should be known as "Belle Aire."

In 1798 there were 25 houses of which 23 were of wood, 2 of brick and only one part stone. Of the 14 out-kitchens one was of brick; there were 14 stables of wood, four meat houses and one spring house (according to the 1798 tax assessment list).

By 1858 the number of buildings in Bel Air was approximately 70. Office Street and Courtland Street (then called Leeds Street) had been cut through to connect Bond with Main Street; the latter two at the time continued north to the flatiron corner. Oddly enough only Office Street had been improved with stores, shops and offices, but by 1878 the Misses Robinson had given up their store on the corner of Main and Courtland and their lot, previously empty from there to Bond Street, was filled with offices and other business establishments.

From its beginnings in 1782 until 1870, Bel Air was a quiet courthouse town. It received no significant immigration of people other than English, Scots-Irish, Germans, and blacks until the 1890s when the first Jewish merchant

See Continuation Sheet No. 10

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

arrived. The town retained its English village life and the genteel social stratification that went with it long after neighboring areas had been transformed by immigration. Controlled by the land owning gentry and the legal fraternity, Bel Air slumbered gently, waking briefly as the quarterly court sessions brought more lawyers as well as defendants, witnesses, and hangers-on to town. The local militia rode quickly to the defense of Baltimore in 1814, and citizens followed the Gold Rush to California, but the town changed little, expanding a little along Main Street and Bond Street, but the 1860 town limits had grown only a couple of blocks north and one south from Acquilla Scott's original town plat. Besides the courthouse, a few law offices, and a few homes, the Town had a newspaper, usually four taverns, and three general stores. There were no regulated market days and no provision store. The Bel Air Academy provided a classical education for young men, and Miss Davenport's Seminary provided a watered-down version of that as well as training in the social graces for young ladies. A Presbyterian and a Methodist Church provided religious services. The 1858 map shows 63 structures large and small.

The Civil War brought internal division to Bel Air. Occasionally Union calvary clattered through looking for southern sympathizers. Mr. Bissell who kept the inn across Main Street from the courthouse went south to serve and came back North to die at Gettysburg. Bel Air's Union sympathizers under Col. Edwin Webster joined the Seventh Maryland Regiment. Confederates drifted south and served in various units.

The post-Civil War Expansion of Bel Air falls into two periods defined by the advent of the railroad in 1883. Major development of Courthouse Square on Courtland and Office Streets and north and south on Main Street occurred before the arrival of the iron horse; development of the Main Street-Rock Spring area around the railroad yards waited until the Maryland Central chugged into town. The incorporation of Bel Air in 1874 was both a cause and an effect of the new needs of the expanding town. Leaders argued that Harford County could not adequately provide the services necessary for further community growth. Further commercial expansion resulted from incorporation. Thus, Bel Air's downtown district was essentially in place before the arrival of the railroad at the northern edge of town.

Population figures for 1870 show 497 white and 136 black residents in town, a total of 633 people, some four-and-one-quarter times the 1860 figures. Such growth is as difficult to explain as the sudden decline between 1850 and 1860 was, especially since the war years intervene. The 1870 population of 633 is two-and-one quarter times the 1850 population of 280, which shows a doubling in a little under a generation, so, whatever the cause, for Bel Air, the "American multiplication table" of population growth was back on the track.

See Continuation Sheet No. 11

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

The 1880 census takers counted 793 residents in town, an increase of one-and-one-quarter times in ten years and an indication that more than natural increase was taking place.

What caused this spurt of growth? In many areas the immediate post-war period was a time of recession and commercial confusion; for example, in the state as a whole the 1870s saw a long agricultural depression. The answer to Harford County's prosperity - and Bel Air's - was a judicious combination of Harford's traditional agricultural base with new technology from the industrial revolution. Harford's prime location on the Chesapeake Bay between the growing metropolitan areas of Philadelphia and New York City to the north and Baltimore and Washington, D.C., on the south combined with its fertile soil made it a prime candidate for truck farming and commercial canning.

Tin-plated containers began to replace glass bottles for processing in 1839, and the following year oyster canning gained a foothold in Baltimore. Before the decade was out Baltimore made cans led the industry. During the same period the commercial canning of tomatoes began in Pennsylvania, and farmers on the Delmarva penninsula entered the field during the war. When George Baker began canning vegetables in a small building near Churchville in the fall season of 1867, county farmer-businessmen were on their way to three quarters of a century of economic development which brought prosperity to Bel Air. By the 1880s canning employed more workers than any other industry in the state, and, from that decade through the First World War, canned goods ranked second or third in the value of product in the state. In 1917 there were 98 canneries in Harford County alone.

Canning was the first major industry in the county. Bel Air had not 19th century canneries of its own, but canning brokers early made Bel Air a financial center, and prosperous farmers and merchants shopped in town. As transportation improved, dairy farming also proved profitable. Harford's fertile acres were the "industrial plant" that made Bel Air a prosperous town.

Even as George Baker made plans for the fall canning season in 1867, other plans were maturing in Bel Air which would lead to a rash of new buildings that would complete the development of the Courthouse Square area. Some of the new buildings would be of brick, but, while more substantial than much of Bel Air's previous commercial construction, their design would still be simple: three bays wide and two stories tall with, in some cases, a bit of decoration at the roof line.

On the south side of the Square, Leeds Street, as Courtland was then called, ran between Main and Bond, but, save for Joseph Robinson's Store on the Main Street corner, the Robinson lot that formed the south border of the street was undeveloped. Joseph Robinson left the still almost vacant land to his wife and

See Continuation Sheet No. 12

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

daughters. In 1841 Mrs. Robinson and daughter Catherine were dead, and the remaining daughters, Mary, Martha and Ann, sued to have the property divided by the court. In the meantime, Mary and Martha ran a millinery shop in what had been their father's store. In 1867 the partnership of Herman Stump, Jr., Henry W. Archer, and Stevenson Archer (the younger) bought the lot from the Robinsons for development.

They promptly leased the east half to Mrs Barbara Ferry Dunnigan, a widow with children, who had married Barney Dunnigan, later bailiff of Judge Watter's Court. Mrs. Dunnigan lost no time in constructing a hotel on her Bond Street corner. The original building, a simple three-bay, two-and-one-half story frame structure on a raised basement, still occupies the site. Mr. Dunnigan ran a liquor store in the basement until local option put him out of business. Mrs. Dunnigan filled the rest of her lot by building the frame section of the Old Aegis Building around 1882. This building originally had a front porch. Several shops occupied the first level at various times with the shop-keepers living upstairs, until 1905 when John D. Worthington, Sr., purchased the property and added the present gable-topped brick facade. He moved his newly purchased newspaper there, where his heirs kept it until 1963.

Stump, Archer, and Archer leased the Main Street corner of the former Robinson lot to Allen J. Prigg in August 1867. Prigg razed the old Robinson Store and built his hotel, a two-story frame structure with a two-story veranda, on the Main Street side. This building was usually called Stagmer's Hotel after William Stagmer, who added the third story in the 1880s. Stagmer's and Dunnigan's hotels joined the Eagle on Bond Street, Bissell's and Dallam House on Main Street, and hotel encirclement of the courthouse, begun two generations earlier, was complete.

The increase in hotel accommodations on Courthouse Square would lead one to suspect a similar increase in legal business, and this suspicion would be correct. Even as the hotels were going up. Herman Stump and Henry Archer were busy erecting a two-story, five-bay, hip-roofed brick office building at 17 Courtland. Lawyers have occupied the building's four suites of offices (two per floor) ever since, at least one in every generation being an Archer, Esq. The least altered building on Courtland, the Archer Building, is not typical, however. Its center hall makes it unique in Bel Air. The rest of the town stuck to the realiable three-bay, side hall plan.

The other two brick buildings on Courtland are more typical. The Baltimore Gas and Electric Building was built in 1869 by James D. Watters and William Bouldin to house their newly-formed newspaper, the Harford Democrat. That durable paper was published in the building until 1919. When the newspaper moved to Aberdeen the Bel Air Electric Company moved into the building at 21 Courtland.

See Continuation Sheet No. 13

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

Next door to the east, today's five-bay Holden Building was originally two separate buildings, both of them identical to the Harford Democrat building. (The unified facade is a 20th century rationalization.) The west building opened in 1869 with Frank Glenn's restaurant on the ground floor. Glenn's restaurant is something of a landmark because it was Bel Air's first recorded eating establishment unconnected with a hotel. It began as an oyster bar, but the bivalves left when local option came: who wants oysters without beer? Glenn, a law-abiding chap, tried the green-grocery business but it was not the same. He soon moved out and the building became the law office of Stevenson A. Williams, and J. T. C. Hopkins.

The east portion of the present Holden Building, leased first by Thomas Armstrong and then by Mrs. Dunnigan, had a frame office building on it in 1868. The Williams and Hopkins law practice apparently prospered, because they obtained the lease for that building in late 1881, and by 1884 they had constructed a three-bay, two-story brick office building, the duplicate of their building to the east, on the western lot. The Harford National Bank moved into the ground floor in 1884. Upstairs the law library occupied the back room and the law firm of Bradford and Lyle had the front room.

Therefore, by 1884, all but two of the present Courtland Street buildings were in place, half of them substantial brick structures, and many of them, then and now, with legal associations.

Lawyers, however, weren't the only ones putting up new buildings. In 1867 another three-bay, two-story brick structure rose across the square on the Main Street corner of Office Street. William Herman built his store on the rubble of the 18th century store house he tore down to make way for his more modern building. Its modillioned upper cornice and its bracketed window cornice are probably original and make it fancier than the unadorned office buildings on Courtland Street.

Office Street had developed early in Bel Air's life. By 1858 seven buildings stood on the north side of the street and housed two stores, a newspaper office, and some lawyer's offices. One of these buildings, A. L. Jarrett's, was a two-story brick structure. In the 1870s two buildings filled out Office Street and finished the post-bellum spurt of commercial construction: the 1870 Cameron and Reed building and Preston Gilbert's law office. Gilbert's office was a duplicate of the two-story frame shops with decorative cornices on Main Street. It and the 1885 Ferry Office Building stand as the town's best preserved examples of this once very common style.

Major construction in the town's business district had been completed by 1883, but infill buildings continued north and south along Main Street, and Courthouse Square.

See Continuation Sheet No. 14

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

The enumeration of 34 lawyers in a census of occupations in 1889 should prepare one for the observation that Courthouse Square was filling up; indeed, with the exception of the 1930 renovation of the Harford Mutual Insurance Building, the Square was complete as it is today by 1914.

Mrs. Barbara Ferry Dunnigan and her son built a small office building next to her hotel on Courtland Street. It is very like Preston Gilbert's Law Office across the Square and is in no way unusual except that, tucked between two older buildings, it has only two walls to call its own, the front and the rear.

John D. Worthington, Sr., bought the two-sided building's other supportive neighbor in 1905. Known today as the Old Aegis Building its present brick facade dates from Worthington's ownership.

Across the Square, wealthy canning-broker William E. Robinson built an office in 1913. The Robinson Building displays a transitional facade with a classical doorway and cornice and rather Queen Anne segmental-arched composite window.

Robinson was an interesting man, Besides being one of the county's leading agricultural entepreneurs, he was also an enlightened employer, an example of a rural businessman aiding in the Americanization of his workers in a fashion similar to the settlement house programs in urban areas. Cannery workers were ininerant workers in those days, most of them recent Polish immigrants. (This situation continues, of course; only the nationality is different.) To care for the workers' children, Robinson helped an inter-denominational committee of Bel Air churchwomen and the Women's Home Mission Board establish a model nursery and school on his property. Around 1920, three young college women staffed the nursery and taught the children English, religion and various elementary subjects. A nurse provided health care; others provided a hot lunch for the 30 to 35 children at the nursery - those able to do so would pay 3¢ a meal and those who weren't wouldn't. After the cannery shift was over, the women and older girls attended classes in hygiene, domestic science, sewing, child care and English; the boys learned English and arithmetic. Occassional evening entertainments took place in a pavillion Robinson built for the project on his Hickory property.

In 1914 Robinson sold the lot next door on Office Street to Bel Air's third bank, the Farmers and Merchants National Bank. The bank then used the land to erect its offices; the building's Colonial Revival facade is wholly occupied by a handsome entrance topped by a pediment.

See Continuation Sheet No. 15

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

In 1926 the Farmers and Merchants purchased the Lee Building, an old frame structure next door. There had been building on that lot very early, perhaps as early as 1817; there was certainly something on the lot in 1834. Williams's sketch of the original courthouse reveals Lytle and Wann's store there, its front elevation peeking out between the trees. Charles Bouldin printed a newspaper in the building in the 1840s, but whether the present building is the same structure is not certain. Bouldin's son, William, may have built the present structure in 1870. Historical architectural research is less than an exact science. In any event, it is certain that Otho Scott Lee practiced law in the frame building from 1889; Lee's widow sold it to the bank and then it got a new brick facade, presumably to match it a bit better with its neighbors. The frame house is still there, by the way: it can be seen from the alley.

The facelift nearly completed the Square; stores, banks, newspapers, the insurance company, canning brokers all revolved around the courthouse, as Bel Air had always done, continues to do, and probably always will.

Expansion continued at a slower pace after 1900, mostly infill in previous additions, although two blocks of South Hickory (formerly Dallam Place) were developed between 1900 and 1920. By the end of the First World War there was a serious housing shortage in Bel Air.

Between 1868 and 1920 commerce became differentiated and specialized; dry goods stores, provision stores, hardware stores, and the like replaced the pre-war general store. Restaurants appeared and taverns disappeared, or went underground, because of local option prohibition laws. Bel Air had been isolated from 19th century developments before the Civil War despite its position on the Baltimore-Philadelphia high road. Increasingly after 1868 the town moved towards a healthy provincialism that would in turn disappear after the advent of the automobile. A large migration of Scots-Irish from the back country of North Carolina in the 1920s provided the first large infusion of new blood in Bel Air's history. Immigrant stock that was not Germanic or Celtic did not arrive in town in any numbers until the World War II military expansion in the county. The old land owning gentry, tied by marriage to newcomers, continue to dominate the town. Today, even with the addition of a regional shopping center and housing developments, Bel Air retains the air of a village. Main Street has been hurt by the shopping mall and struggles to find a new identity with specialty shops and restaurants.

Bel Air's architectural heritage is solid but modest in style. Brick was not a favorite building material. Neither was stone. Except for the courthouse, a few law offices, the banks and churches, and one or two stores, Bel Air built in frame and three bays wide. The front gable Victorian house is still widely representaed, and a modest, reserved, almost inhibited Queen Anne style was popular. Probably because it lacked an upwardly-striving

See Continuation Sheet No. 16

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

bourgeoisie, Bel Air avoided the excess of the Victorian Era. The town has a wealth of solid, comfortable, liveable, friendly old buildings, many of them entering their second century of quiet and competent existence.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

Larew, Marilyn M. Bel Air: The Town Through Its Buildings. Edgewood, MD: Published for the Town of Bel Air and the Maryland Historical Trust, 1981.

Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory: Harford County. Marilyn Larew, Surveyor, 1980.

Walsh, Richard and William Fox. Maryland: A History 1632-1974, Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1974, p. 403

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Boundary Description: The boundaries consist of the present back property lines of those parcels that line Office and Courtland Streets between Main and Bond Streets.

Boundary Justification: The district encompasses the most cohesive section of the commercial area that reflects the town's development from the nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. The surrounding commercial area is very fragmented by new construction or parking lots such as those directly across Main Street from the courthouse and to the back or extensively altered historic buildings that have integrity problems from new design and materials.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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See Continuation Sheet No. 16

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Approximately 4 acres

Quadrangle name Bel Air, Maryland

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	384020	4376980
B	18	384110	4376860
C	18	383990	4376770
D	18	383920	4376880
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet No. 16

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andrew Bristow

organization Harford County Historical Society date 13 March 1985

street & number 615 Hickory Avenue telephone 301-838-8650

city or town Bel Air state Maryland 21014

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature J Mitchell 6-12-85

title date

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

OWNERS OF PROPERTY:

Eleanor T. Chekey
c/o Christian Chekey
31 East Lee Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

William L. Harrison
17 Hunter Drive
Bel Air, MD 21014

Red Cloud, Inc.
P. O. Box 416
Ellicott City, MD 21043

T. Leo Sullivan
17 Courtland Street West
Bel Air, MD 21014

Grace Rosenberg
42 West Gordon Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Carolee B. Getz
26 South Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Agatha McVey
c/o Evan A. Chriss, Trustees
1200 Garrett Building
Baltimore, MD 21202

Donald G. Smith Estate
c/o John Kane, Attorney
4 Office Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Joan H. Hodous
8 Office Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

First National Bank of Bel Air
c/o Ronald E. Leppo, Manager
12 Office Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Melvin P. Johnson
P. O. Box 126
Bel Air, MD 21014

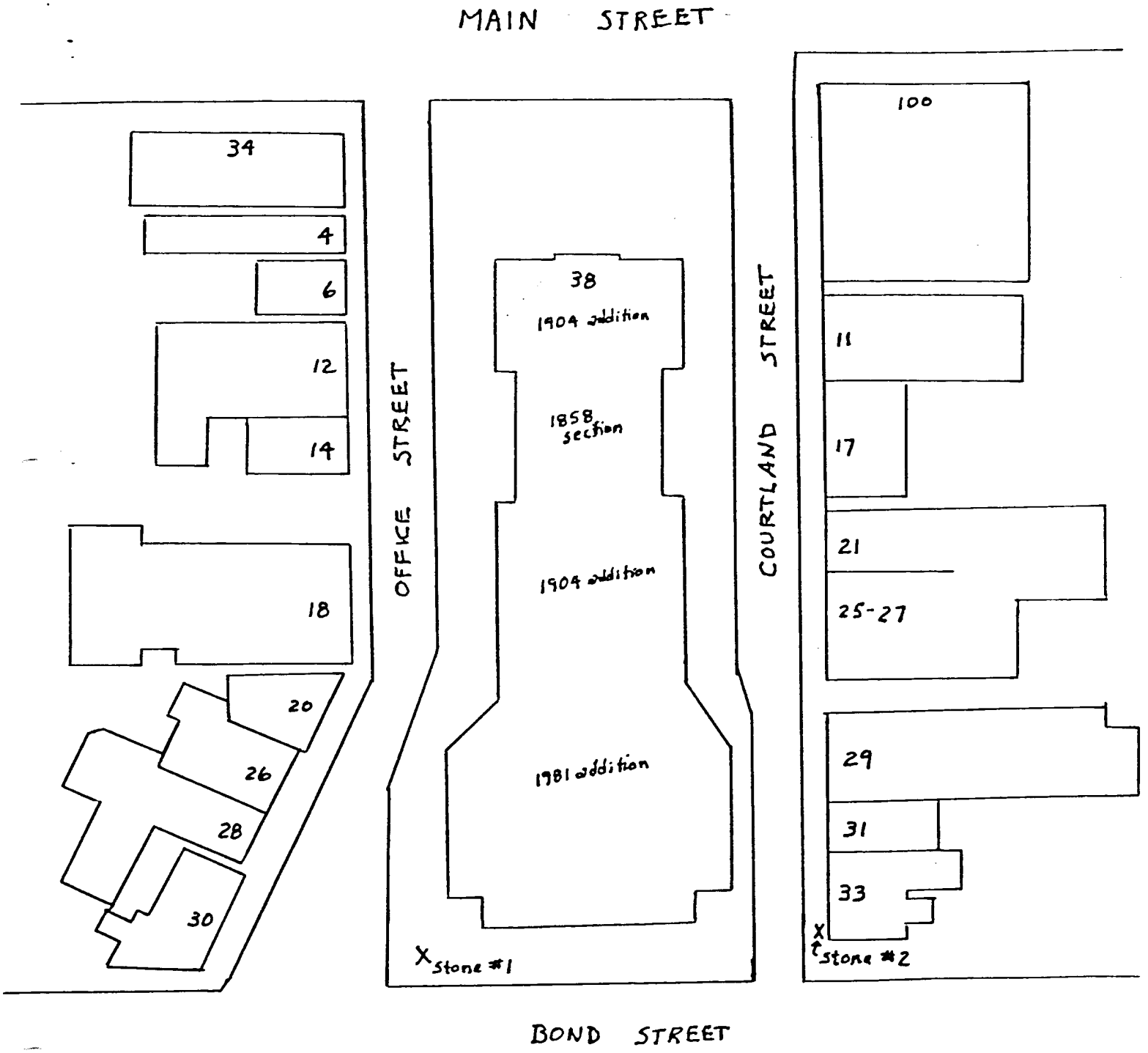
Carmon & Reed
c/o Charles Reed, Esq.
30 Office Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Harford County
c/o The Hon. Habern W. Freeman, Jr.
County Executive, Harford County
220 South Main Street
Bel Air, MD 21014

Bel Air Courthouse Historic District

Harford County, Maryland

for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, 1985



district includes courthouse and the buildings standing along Office and Courtland Streets between Main and Bond Streets

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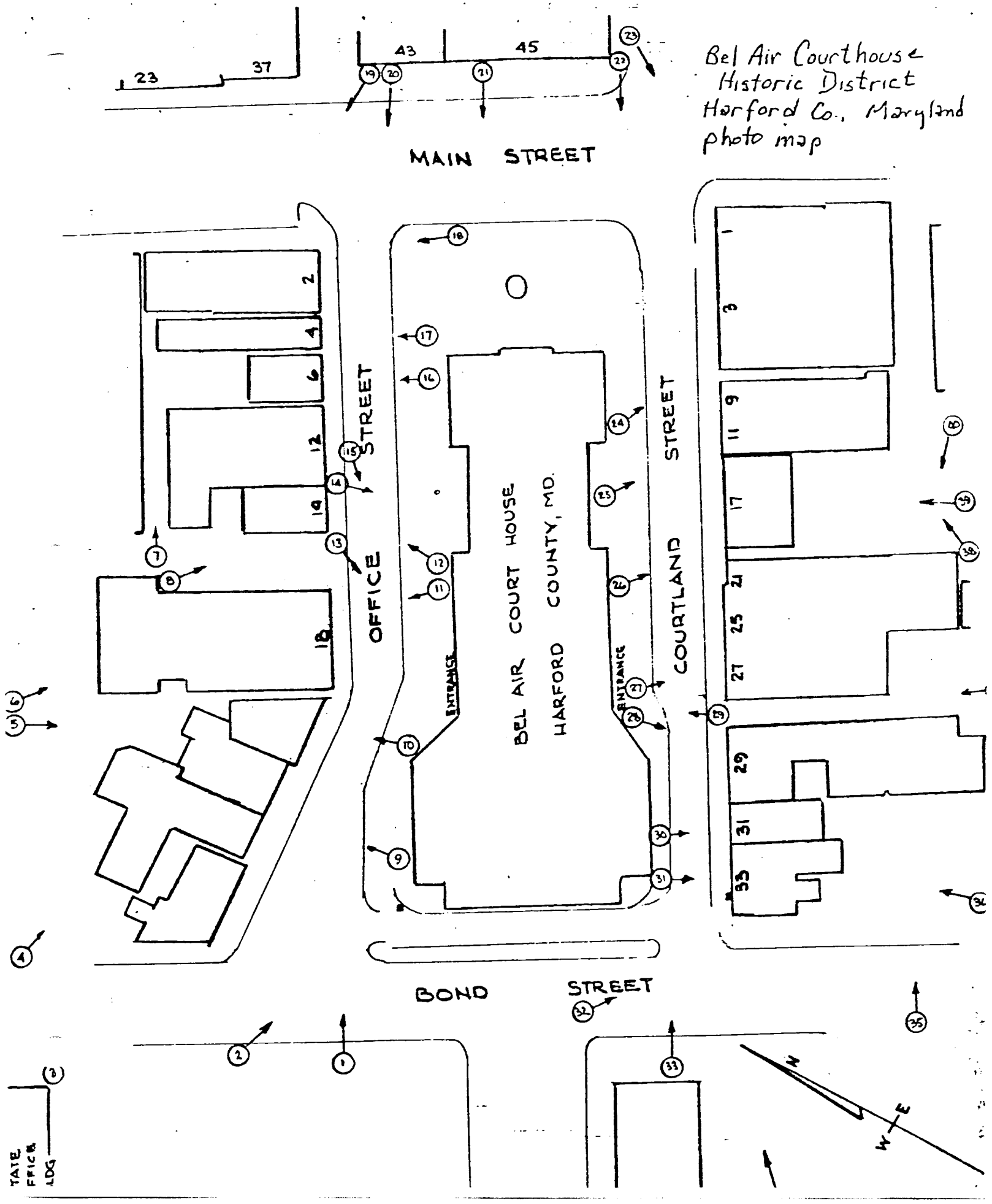
Bel Air Courthouse
Historic District
Harford Co., Maryland
photo map



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Bel Air Courthouse
Historic District

Harford Co.
Maryland

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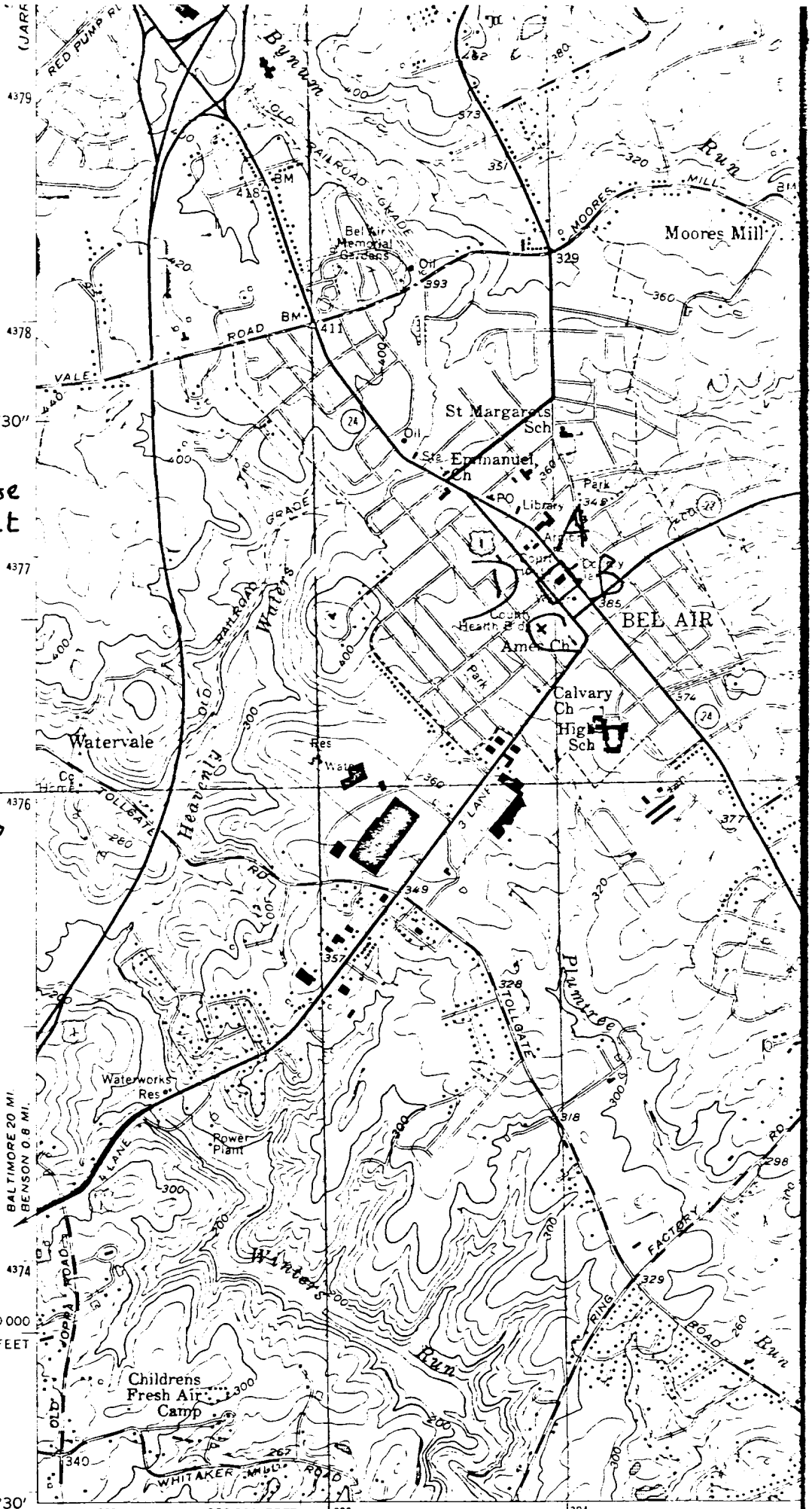
B 18/384110/4376860

C 18/383990/4376770

D 18/383920/4376880



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

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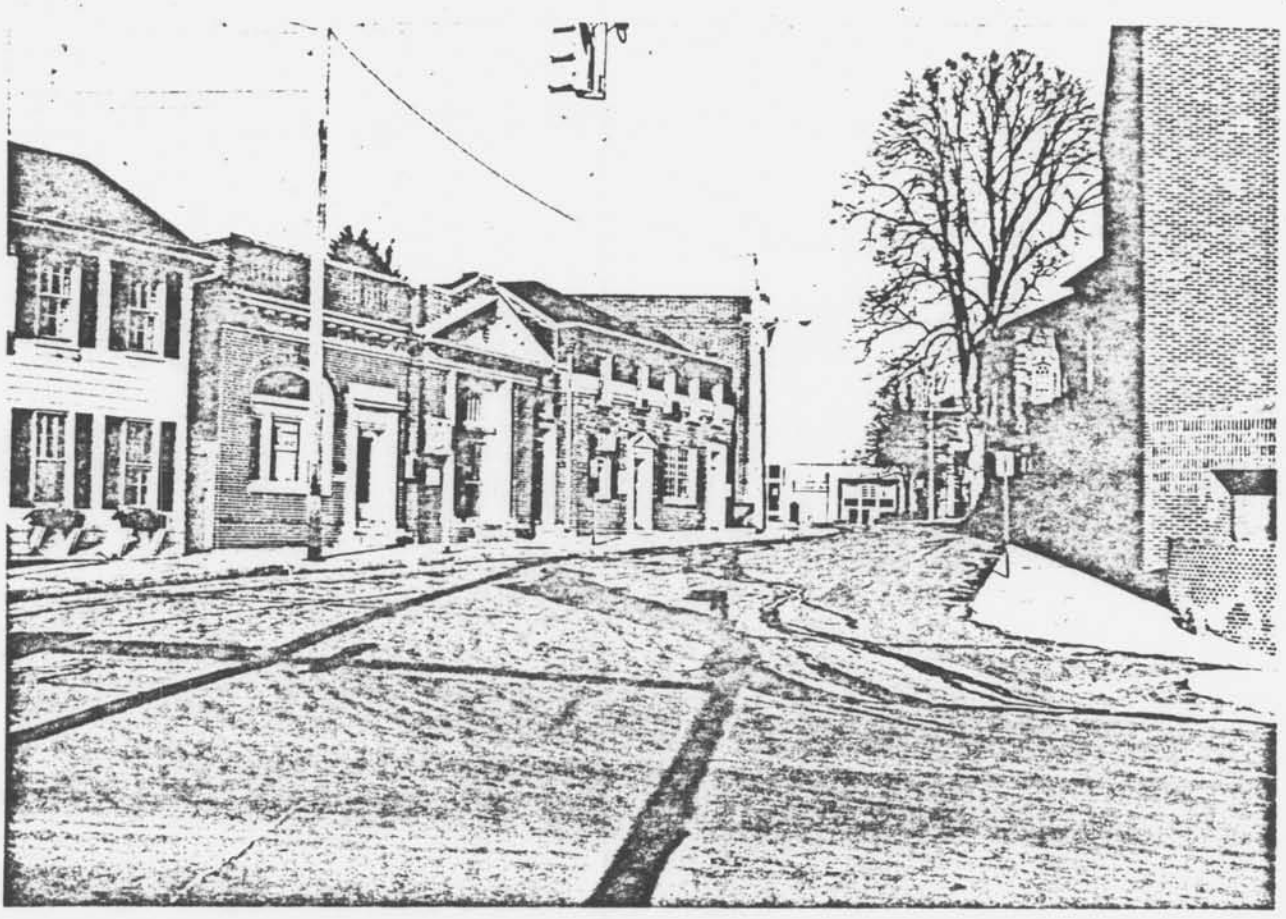

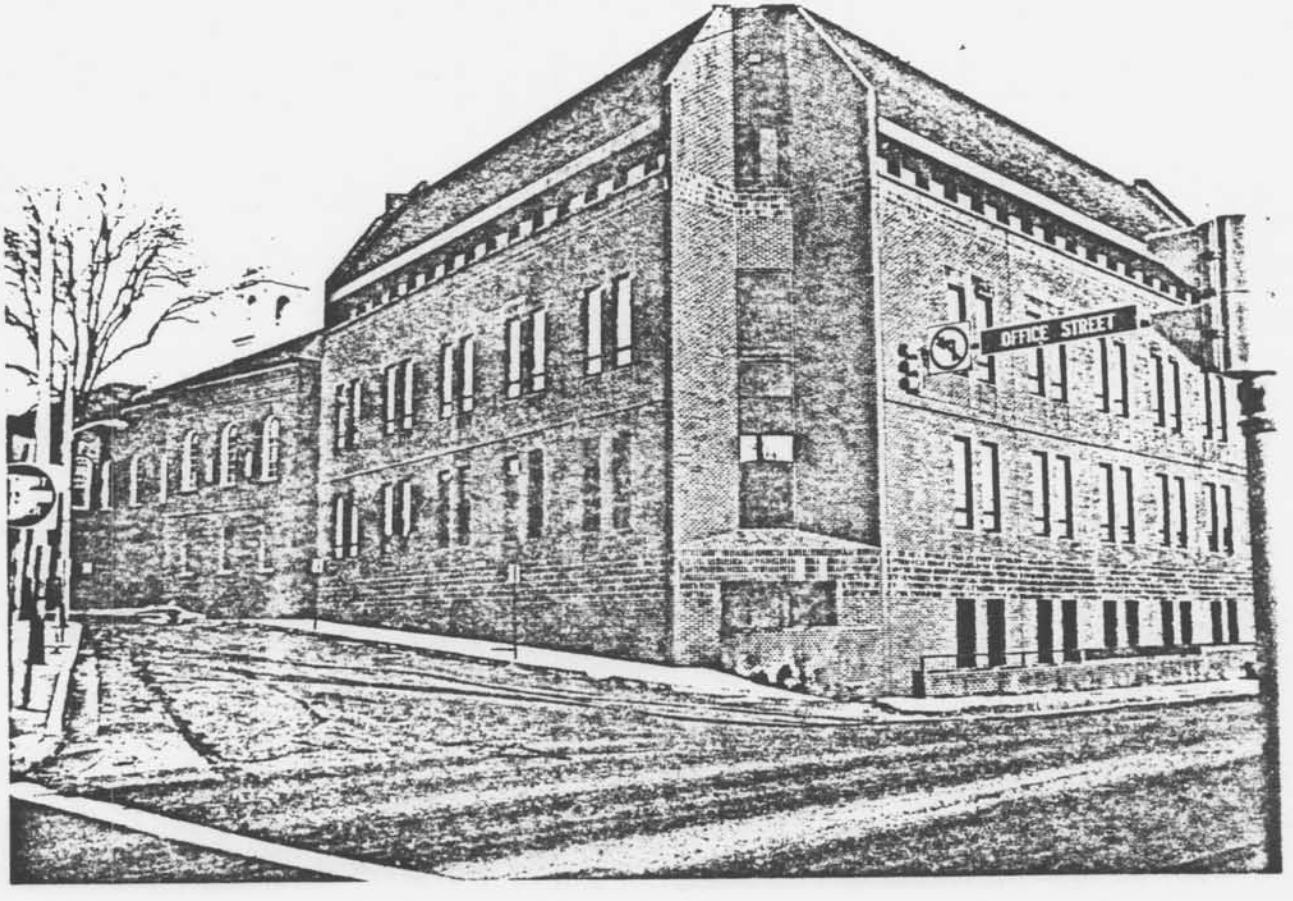

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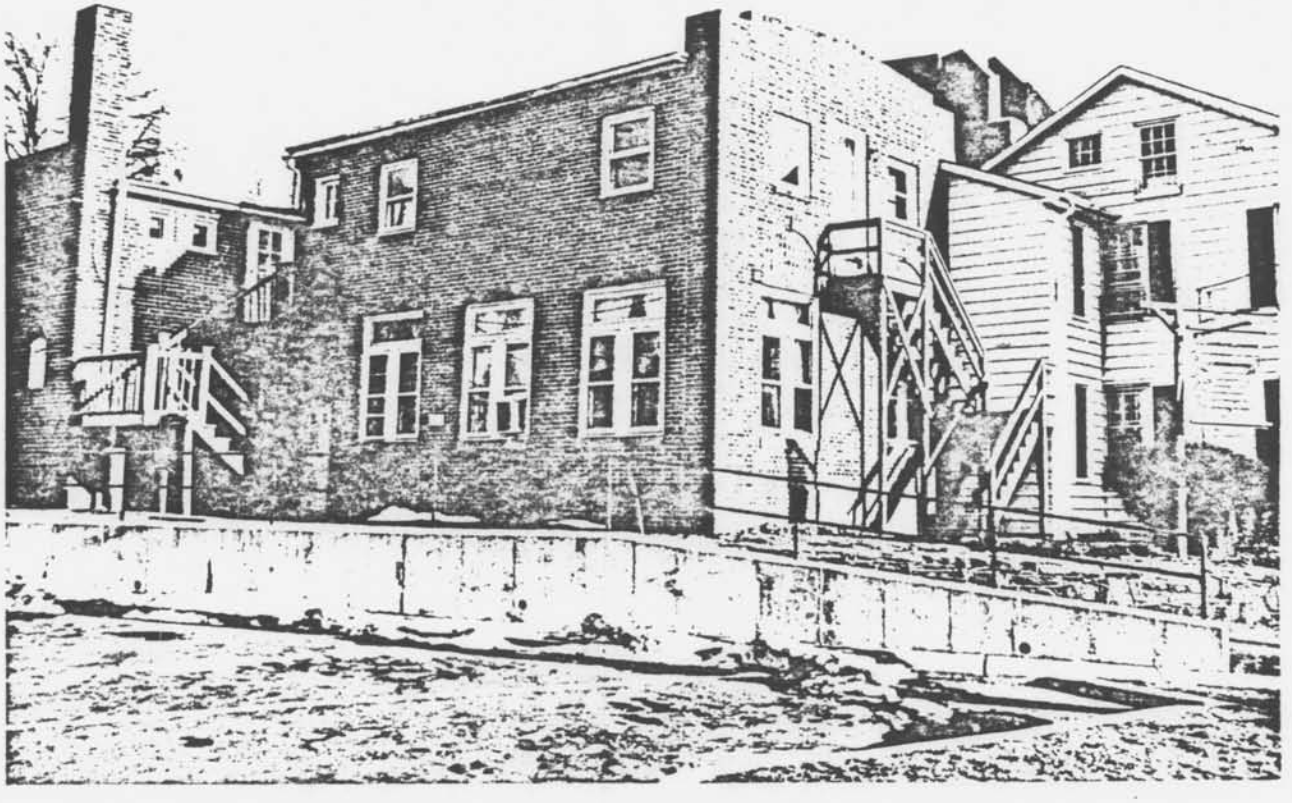

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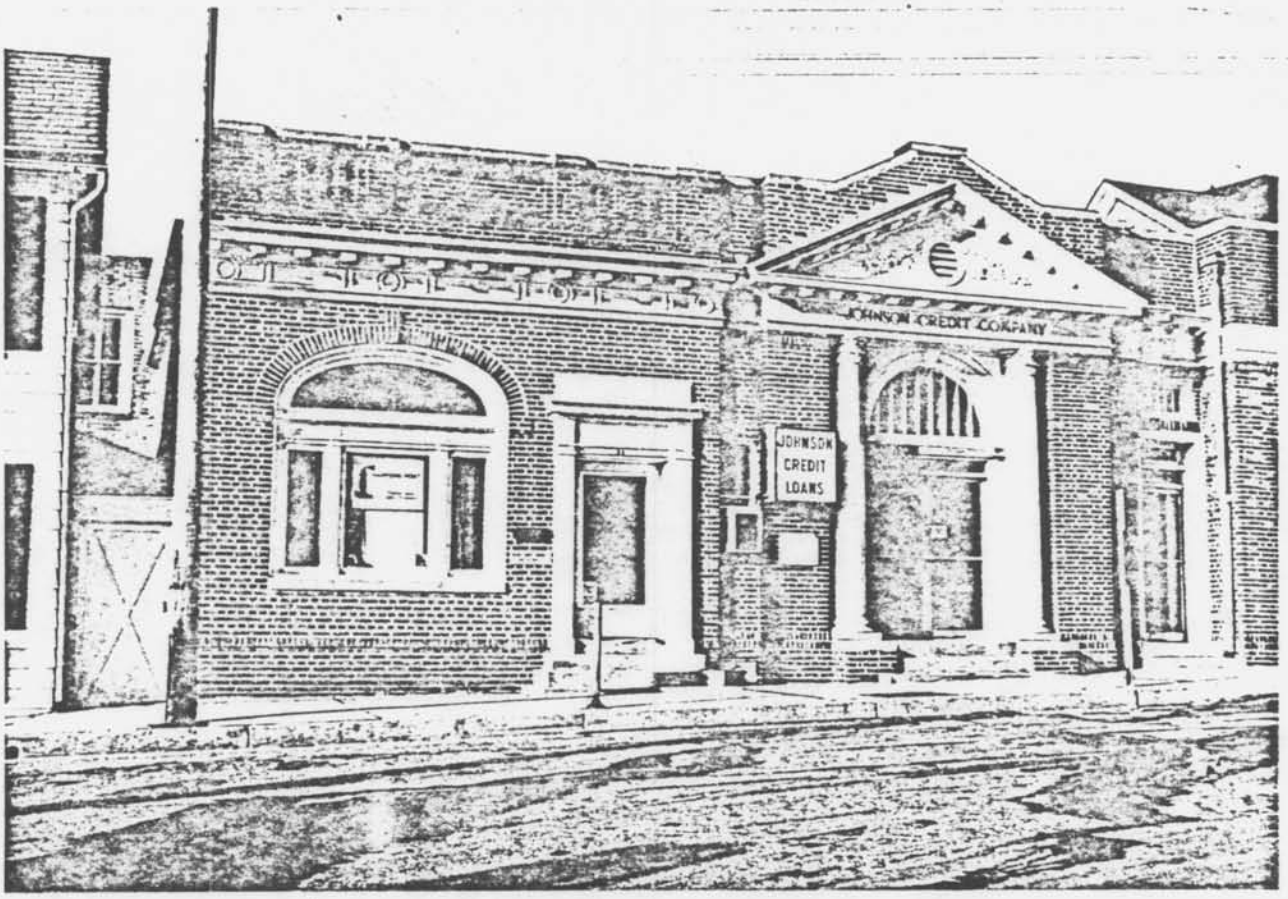

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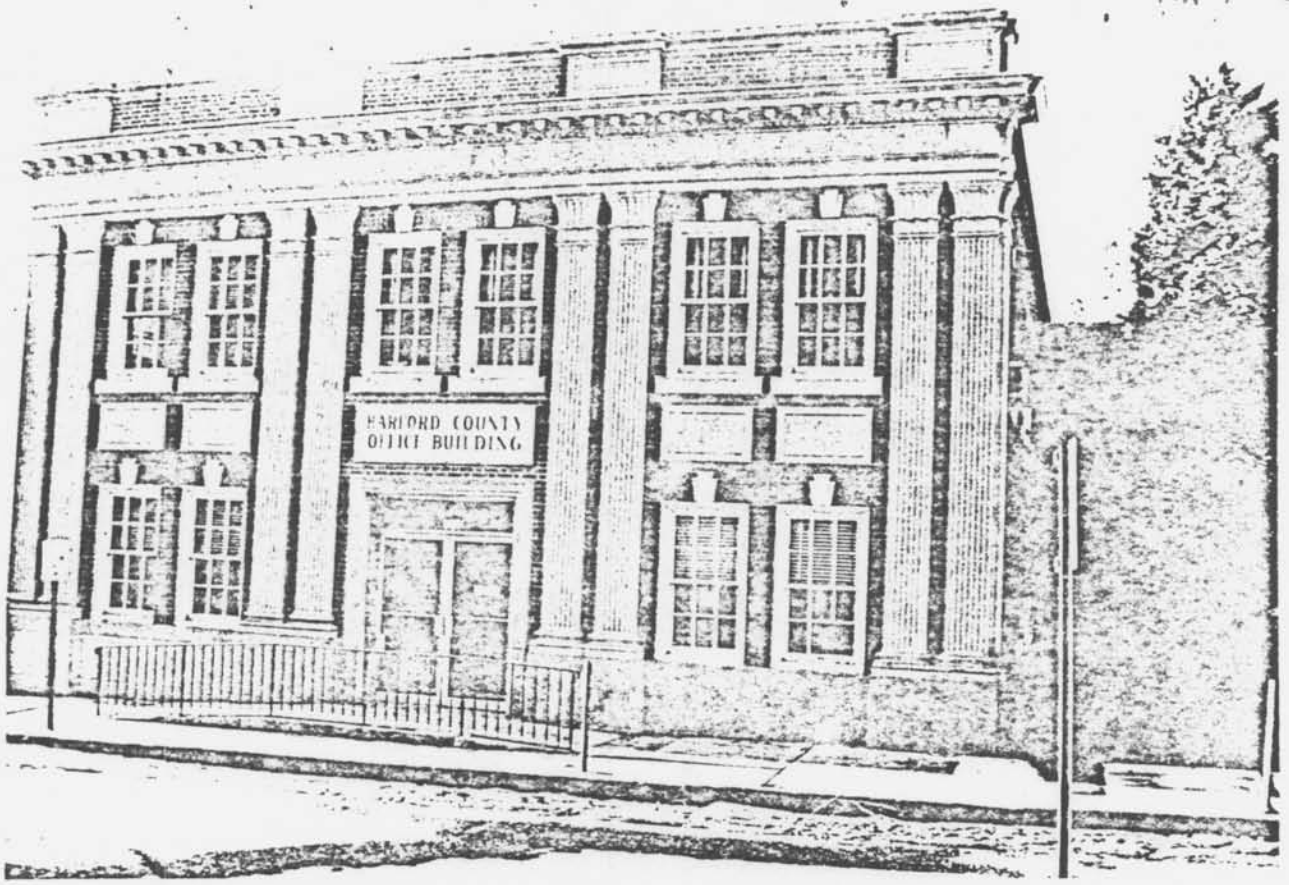

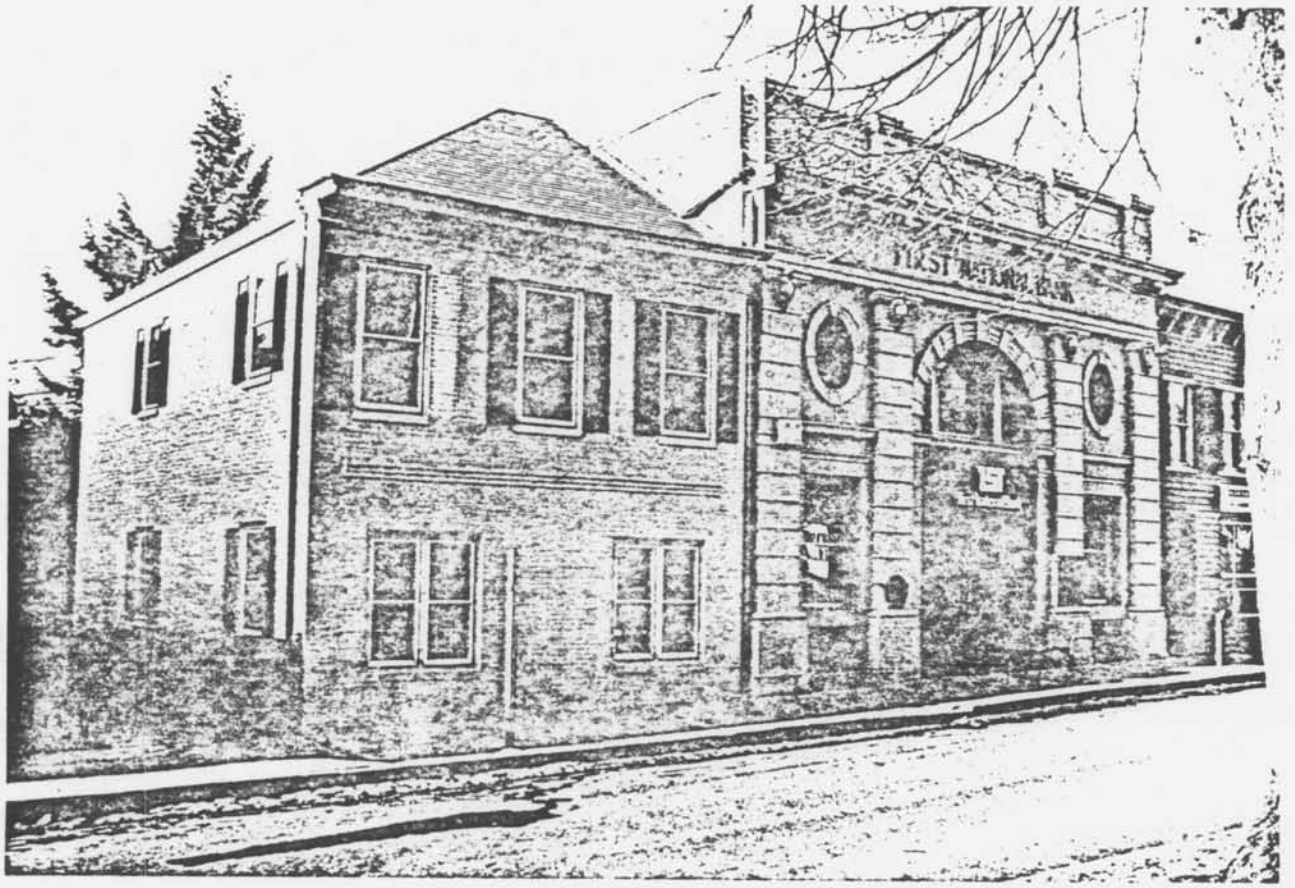

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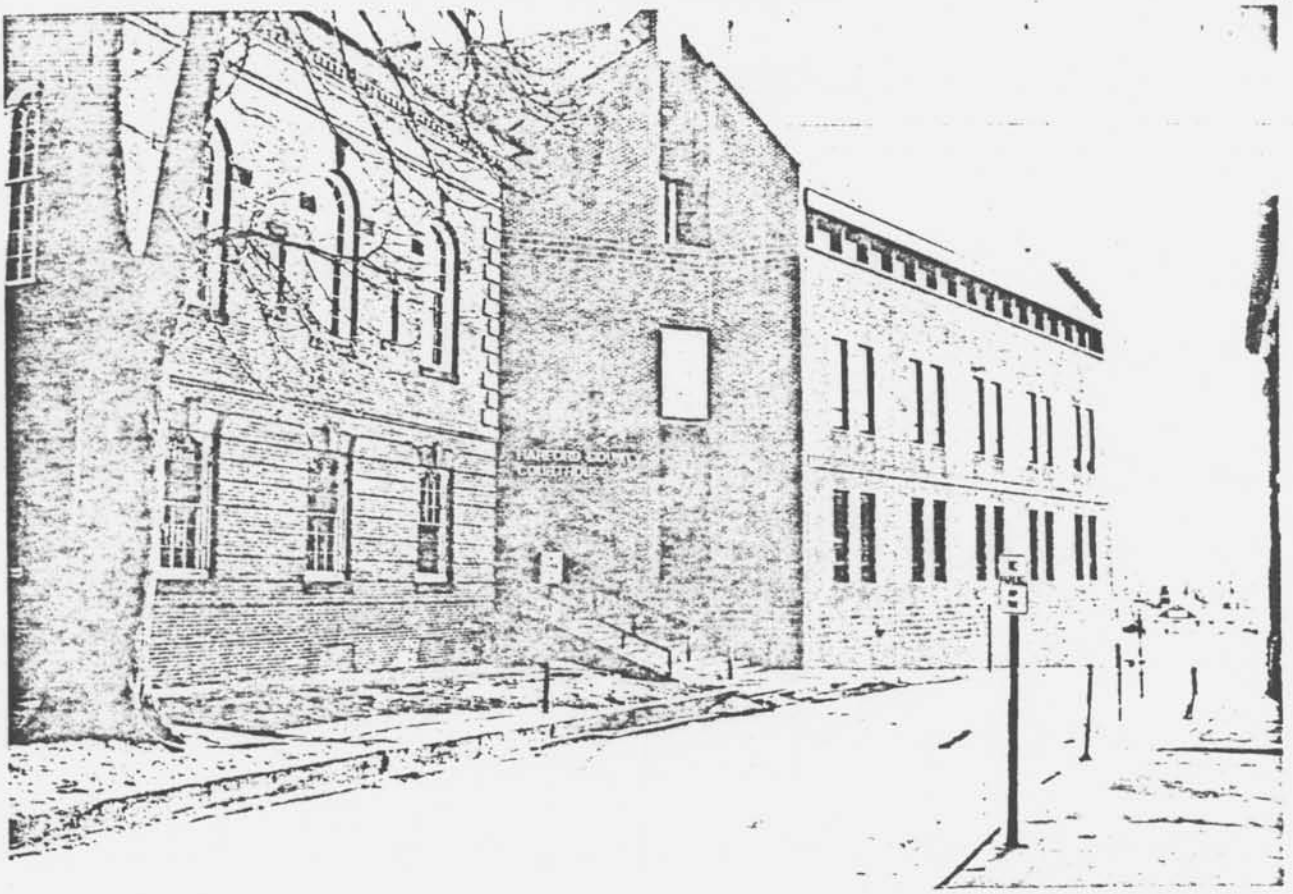

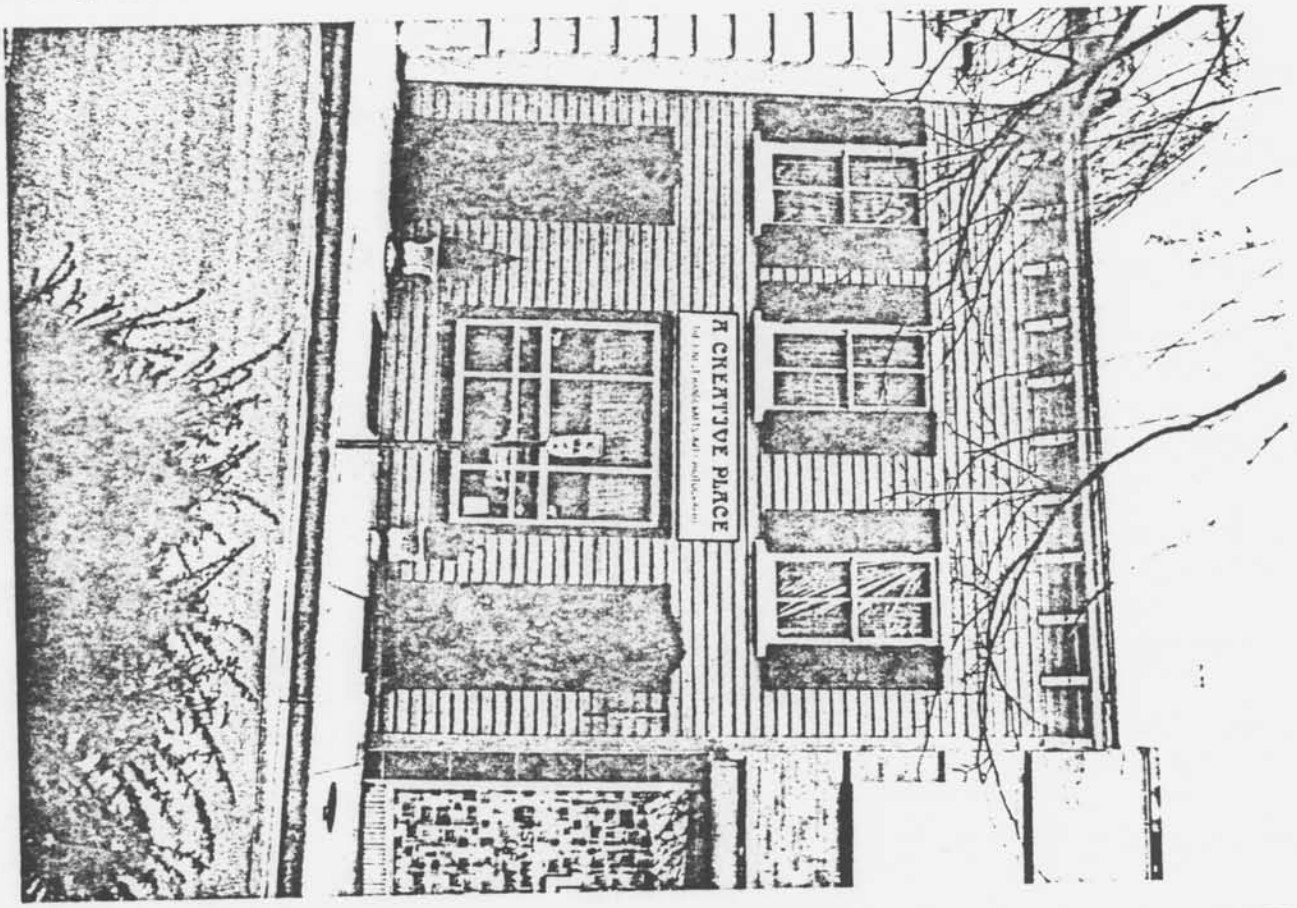

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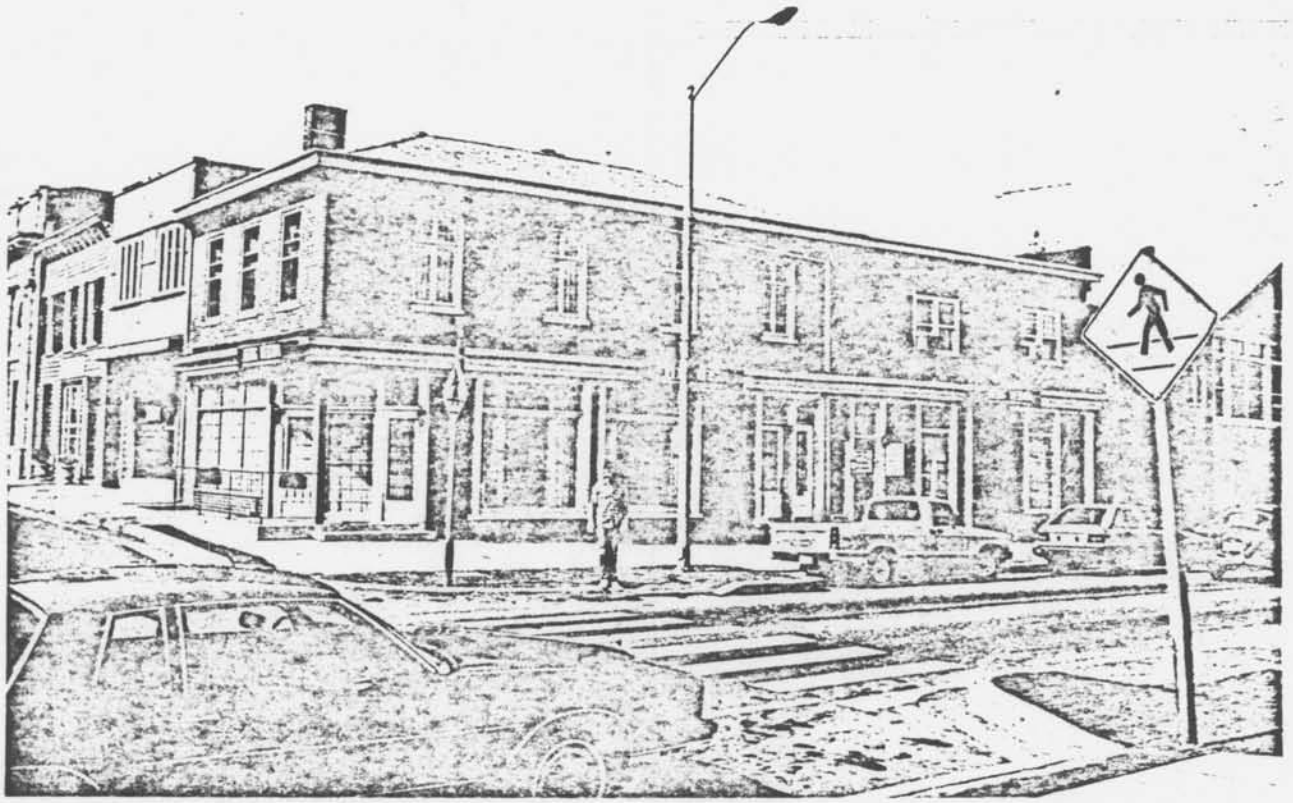

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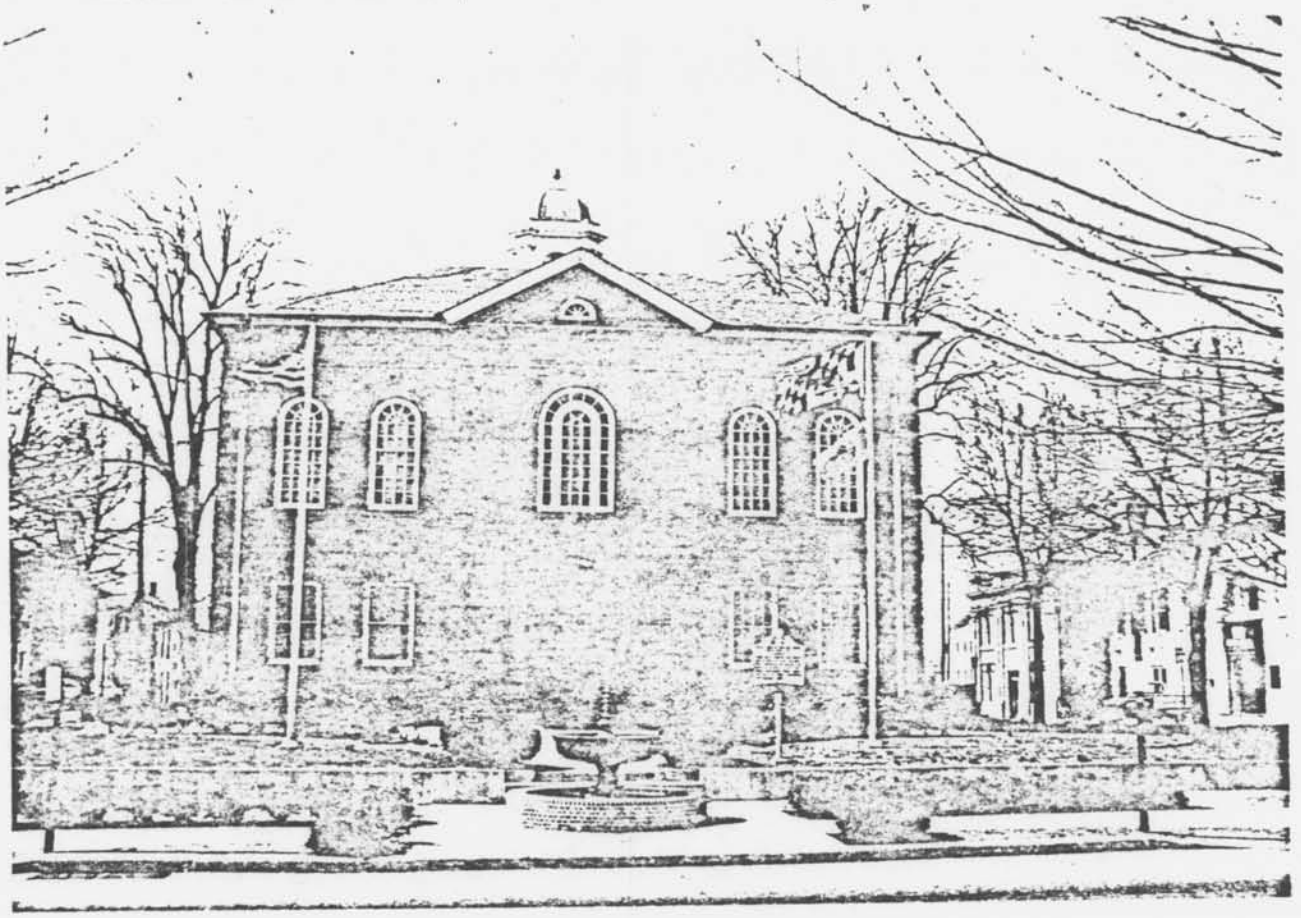

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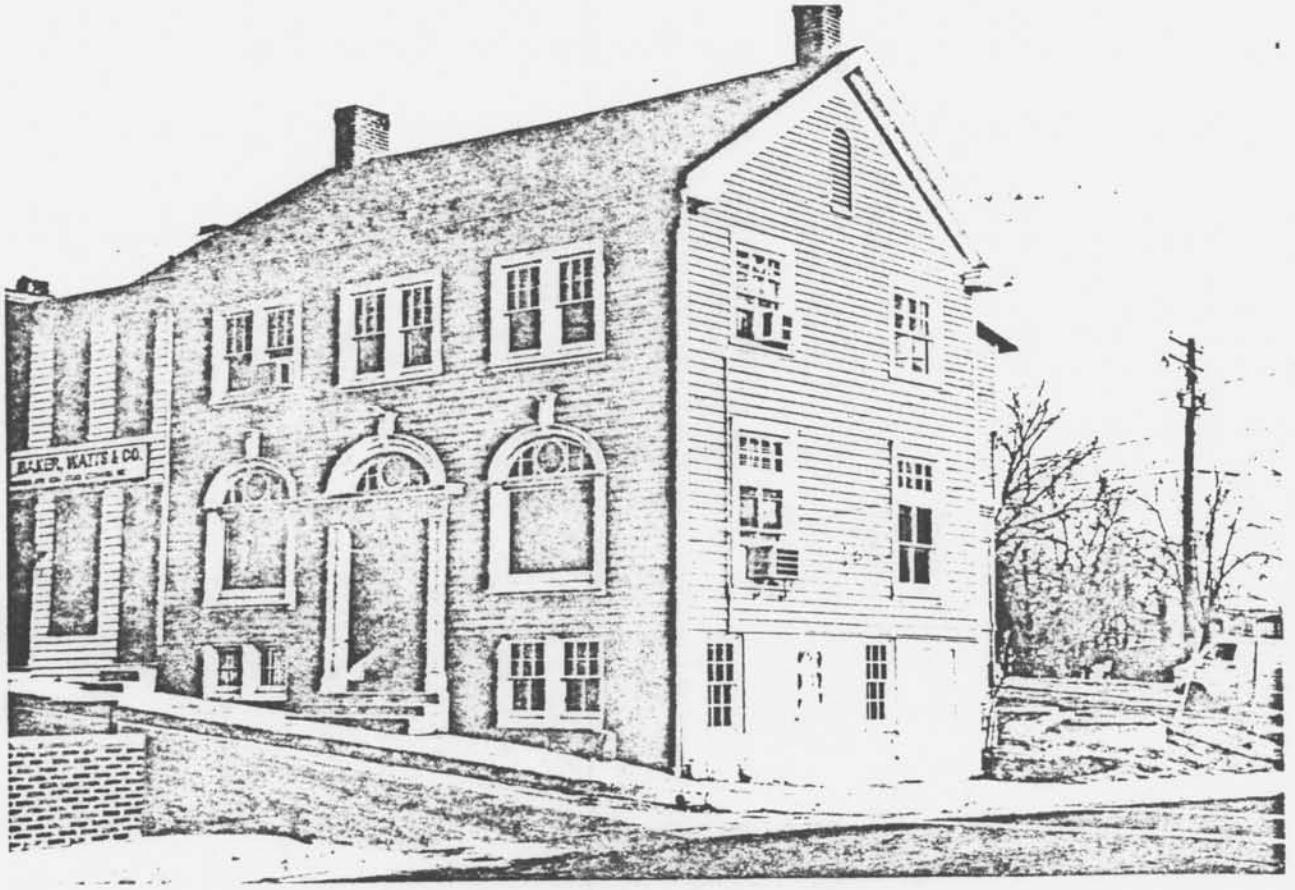

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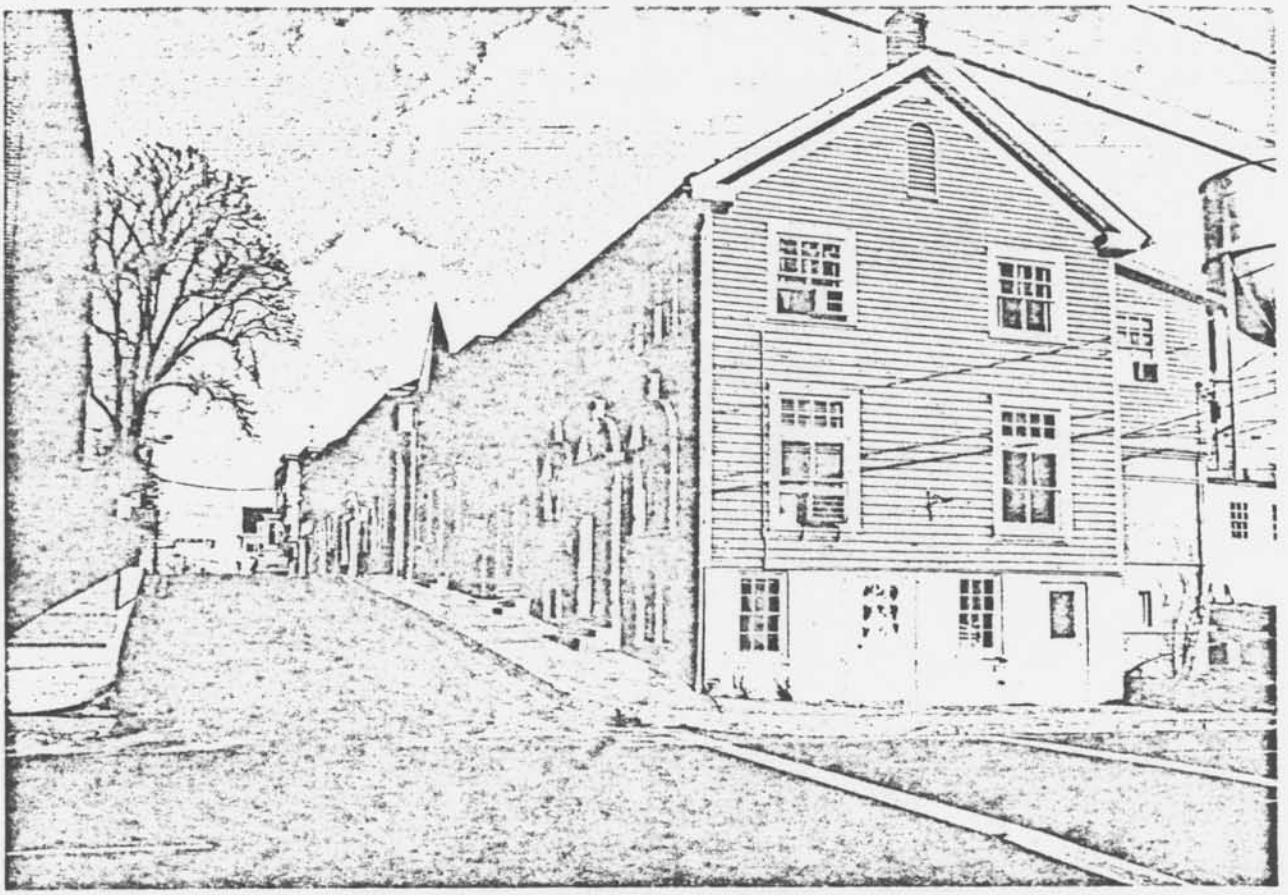

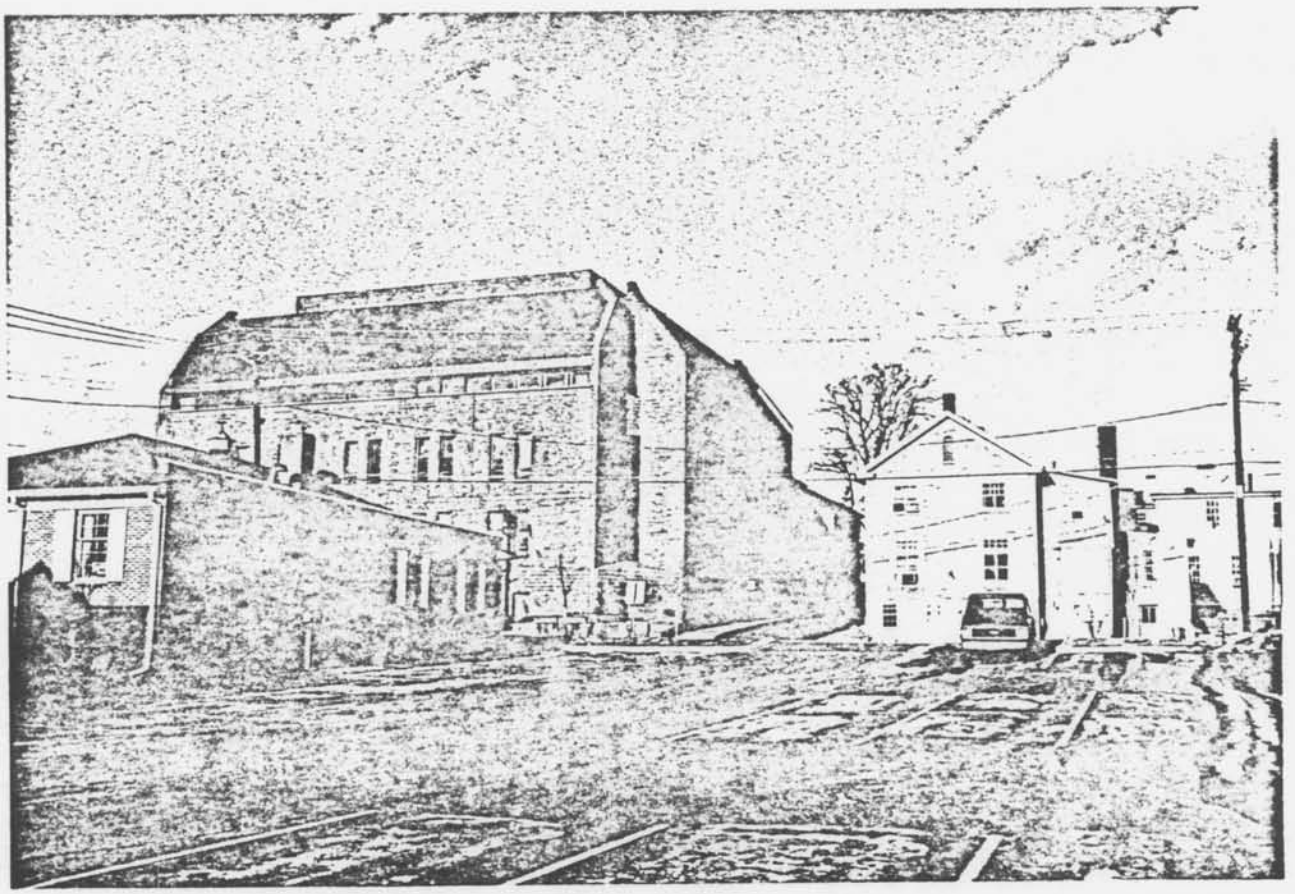
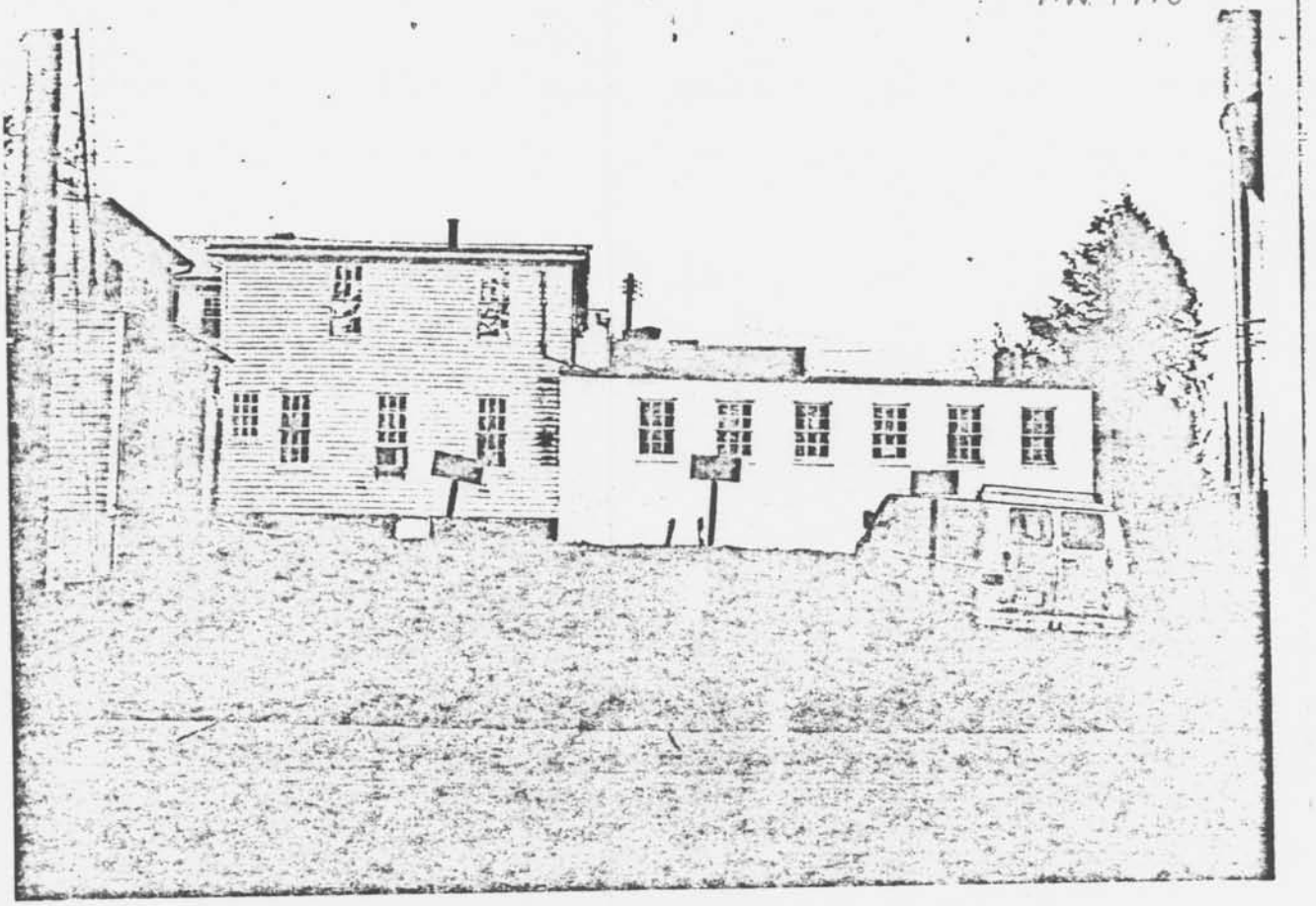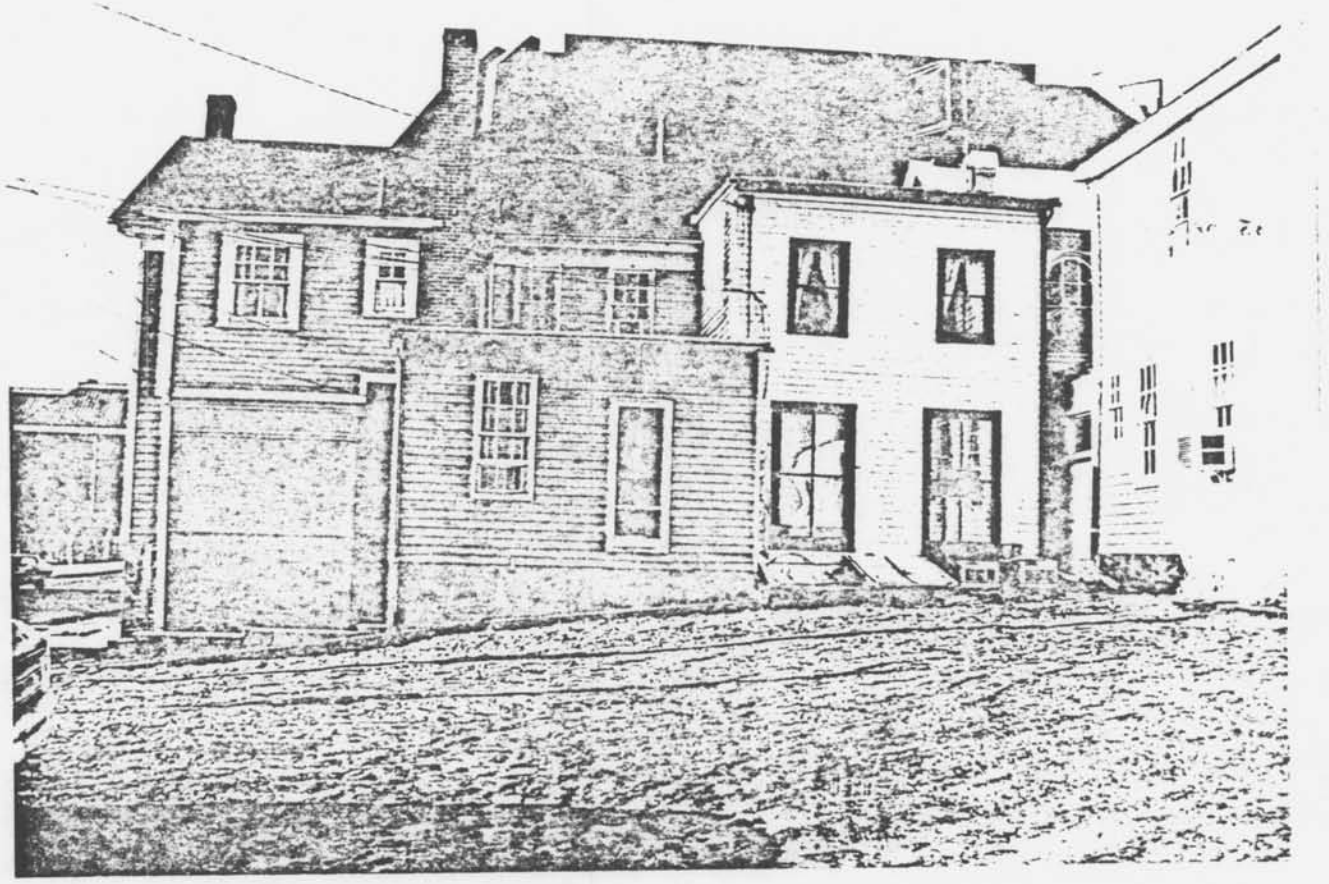
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