

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey #: P.G. #67-13 Building Date: 1889

Building Name: Cross-Russell House

Location: 5805 Ruatan Street, Berwyn Heights, Maryland

Private/Residence/Occupied/Good/Inaccessible

Description

The Cross-Russell House is a two-and-one-half-story frame house. It has a hip and gable roof, and is distinguished by a projecting double bay in the principal (north) gable end. The house is asymmetrical, with two non-aligned gable ends facing east and west. The principal north facade consists of a projecting gable and a side wing extending to the west. The principal gable end is distinguished by a semi-octagonal bay on the first story. A double window arrangement is cantilevered above it on the second story. The north gable end is sheltered by a one-story hip-roof porch with chamfered fluted posts, closed jigsaw brackets, and perforated frieze course. The porch wraps around the east facade to the main entrance in the north facade of the east gable end. The cornice is boxed, with crown molding, and returned at the east and west gable ends. A one-story shed-roof porch shelters the rear (south) facade.

Significance

The Cross-Russell House is a good example of a suburban dwelling with Queen Anne style decorative motifs. Probably built from a pattern book design, it was distinguished by ornate window treatment, and was one of the first houses built in the 1888 town of Charlton Heights, now known as Berwyn Heights. The Town of Charlton Heights was platted in 1888 by Edward Graves, on 383 acres of land bounded by the Branchville Road and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Graves sold the land to the Charlton Heights Improvement Company in that year, and the company immediately began construction of dwellings ordered by pattern through the mail. The subject house was built in 1889 by Ebenezer Cross, who in the previous year had purchased three unimproved lots from the Charlton Heights Improvement Company. It was probably constructed from a pattern book design as were the other early houses in Charlton Heights. The Cross family built the house as an investment, and never lived there. Since 1980, this has been the home of the Russell family. In recent years, the house has undergone several changes, principally the closing of one window (with ornamental balcony) in the west wing. It retains, however, most of its original trim, it is a significant reminder of the first dwellings in this late Victorian suburb, and is still a distinctive landmark in Berwyn Heights.

Acreage: 11,250 square feet

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Cross House

and/or common Russell House

## 2. Location

street & number 5805 Ruatan Street \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Berwyn Heights \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 5

state Maryland county Prince George's

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

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

name Thomas Russell

street & number 5805 Ruatan Street telephone no.:

city, town Berwyn Heights state and zip code Md. 20740

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. P.G.Co. Courthouse liber #5328

street & number Main Street folio 91

city, town Upper Marlboro state Md.

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title None

date \_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input 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 of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Cross-Russell House is a two-and-one-half-story frame house. It has a hip and gable roof, and is distinguished by a projecting double bay in the principal (north) gable end. The house stands on one of the original lots of the 1888 town of Charlton Heights, now known as Berwyn Heights.

The house is asymmetrical, with two non-aligned gable ends facing east and west; the principal north facade consists of a two-bay-wide projecting gable, and a side wing extending two bays to the west. The principal gable end is distinguished by a three-window semi-octagonal bay on the first story. A double window arrangement is cantilevered above it on the second story: the two 2/2 windows project slightly under a dentilled cornice and small pent roof, separated by a narrow balustered balcony and an arched perforated bargeboard. Above this second story window arrangement, the gable end is sided with fishscale shingles painted pink, and there is a small square single-pane window. The north gable end is sheltered by a one-story hip-roof porch with chamfered fluted posts, closed jigsawed brackets, and perforated frieze course. The porch wraps around the east facade, to the main entrance in the north facade of the east gable end. This door has a large transom and plain board surround.

A second story window in the first (north) bay of the west wing has recently been structurally closed. It had a balustered balcony similar to that on the north gable end.

The horizontal board siding of the building is covered with gray asbestos shingle. Windows are 2/2 double hung sash with plain board surrounds painted pink, as is most of the trim. Some windows have pink louvered shutters. The cornice is boxed, with crown molding, and returned at the east and west gable ends; within these returned cornices at third level are two small square windows on the east and one on the west, surrounded by fishscale shingle siding, painted pink. The hip and gable-roof is covered with gray asbestos shingle, and there are two tall corbelled brick chimneys. A one-story shed-roof porch shelters the rear (south) facade. The building rests on a high brick foundation.

There is a small gable-roof shed directly south of the house.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" 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/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1889 **Builder/Architect**

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
and/or  
Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  
Level of Significance:  national  state  local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Cross-Russell House is a good example of a suburban dwelling with Queen Anne style decorative motifs. Probably built from a pattern book design, it was distinguished by ornate window treatment, and was one of the first houses built in the 1888 town of Charlton Heights, now known as Berwyn Heights.

In 1887, Edward Graves of Washington, D.C. purchased 383 acres south of the Branchville Road and bounded on the west by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He engaged the firm of Newby and Howell to survey and plat a new residential community, and called it Charlton Heights.<sup>1</sup> The plat of 1888 showed 50-foot-wide streets, criss-crossing at varied angles, and lots of approximately 50 by 200 feet. Graves sold the land in 1888 to the Charlton Heights Improvement Company, which immediately began construction of dwellings ordered by pattern through the mail. Within the same year, the Company began to sell lots, some unimproved, and some with new houses already erected.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the first year, approximately 20 houses had been built, and the new town became the home principally of professionals who used the Baltimore and Ohio railroad to commute into Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup>

For the next three years, the Charlton Heights Improvement Company continued to sell lots, but with only limited success. In 1892, Edward Graves, the developer, and James Waugh, secretary of the Company, both of whom resided in Charlton Heights, bought the remaining unsold lots; they continued to sell them, and the Charlton Heights Improvement Company ceased operations. In 1896, by an act of the Maryland General Assembly, the town was incorporated, and its name was changed to Berwyn Heights. It continued to grow slowly; by 1910, the population was slightly over 150, and there were 38 dwellings.<sup>4</sup> Today most of the lots have been filled in by 1950's subdivision housing, and Berwyn Heights is a quiet residential community with curving streets and old trees, set back and somewhat secluded, between two major highways.



The subject house was built in 1889 by Ebenezer Cross, who in the previous year had purchased three unimproved lots from the Charlton Heights Improvement Company. It was probably constructed from a pattern book design (the specific design has not yet been identified), as were the other early houses in Charlton Heights.<sup>5</sup> The Cross family built the house as an investment, and never lived there; for the next 15 years the house changed hands several times, passing to a trustee, then back to Mary, widow of Ebenezer Cross, and always occupied by tenants.<sup>6</sup> In 1904 Mrs. Cross sold the house to Richard Breden, a Post Office employee, whose home it was until 1921. It was the home of Frederick and Mary Klein until 1945.<sup>7</sup>

Since 1980, this has been the home of the Russell family. In recent years, the house has undergone several changes, principally the closing of one window (with ornamental balcony) in the west wing.<sup>8</sup> It retains, however, most of its original trim, is a significant reminder of the first dwellings in this late Victorian suburb, and is a distinctive landmark in Berwyn Heights today.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Prince George's County Deeds, JWB #9:127, 130; Prince George's County Plat, JWB #10:309.

<sup>2</sup> Prince George's County Deeds, JWB #11:543; R. W. Shoppell Modern Houses, 1887; Artistic Modern Houses at Low Cost, 1888; Beautiful Homes, 1887; Building Plans for Modern Low Cost Houses, 1884, etc.; cf. Charlton Heights Improvement Company deeds, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1888-1890; Census for Prince George's County, E. D. #1, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> JWB #20:496; JWB #21:225; JWB #22:53; G. M. Hopkins map, 1894; Census for Prince George's County, E.D. #1, 1900, 1910; Prince George's County Tax Assessments 1890-1910; Skarda, D.D., Berwyn Heights - History of a Small Maryland Town.

<sup>5</sup> Prince George's County JWB #10:727.

<sup>6</sup> Prince George's Deeds JWB #17:21; JB #2:618; JB #11:398; Prince George's County Will JBP #1:227; Prince George's County Tax Assessments, 1888-1900.

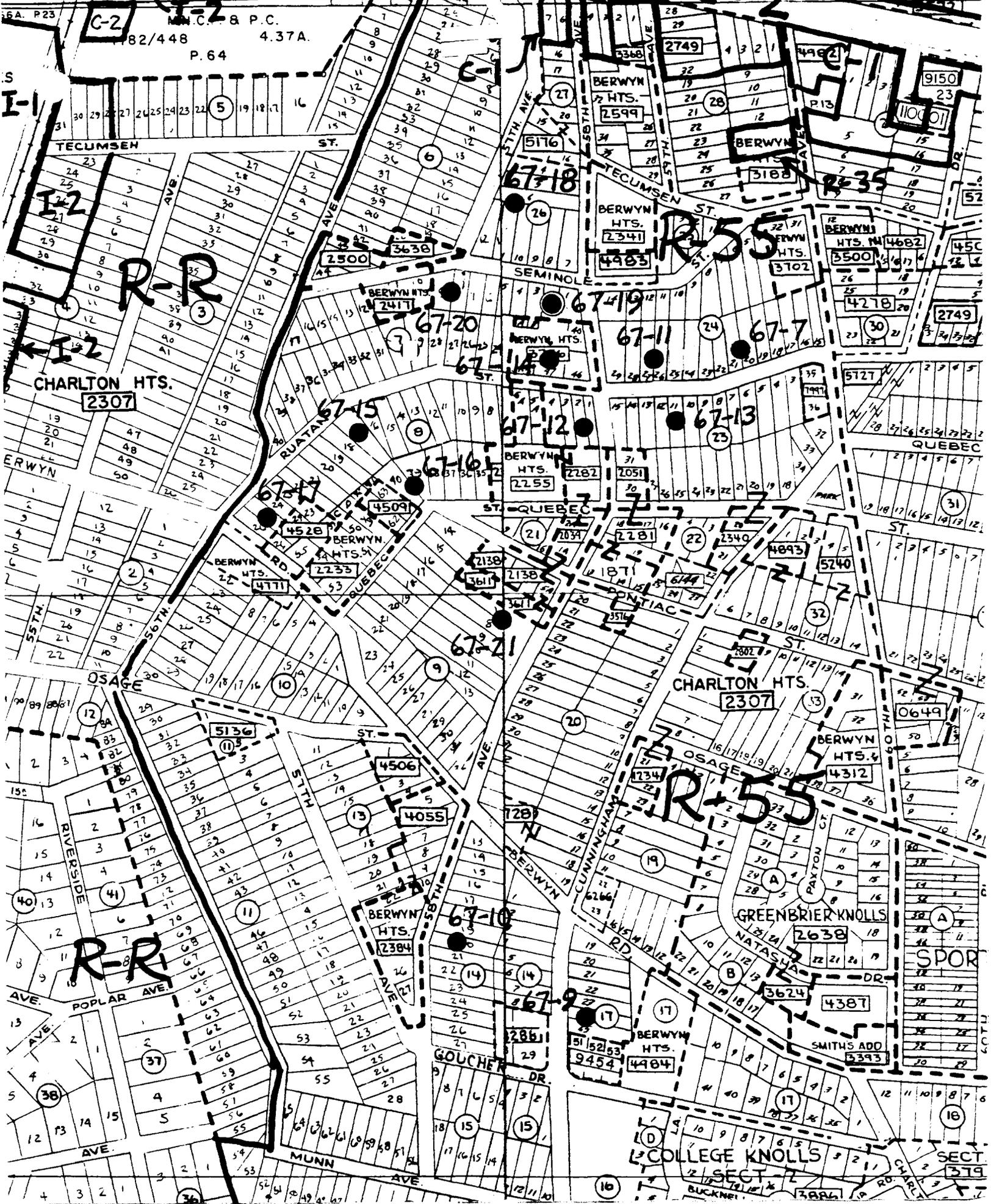
<sup>7</sup> Prince George's County Deeds #18:281; #69:238; #91:108; #163:461; #169:315; #766:355.

<sup>8</sup> Prince George's County Deed #5328:91; interview with owners, spring 1986.

GREENBELT RD.

P. 64-13 I-1

M.C. & P.C.  
82/448 4.37A.  
P. 64



R-R

R-55

R-55

R-R

CHARLTON HTS.  
2307

CHARLTON HTS.  
2307

BERWYN HTS.  
2384

GREENBRIER KNOLLS  
2638

BERWYN HTS.  
4984

SMITHS ADD  
3393

COLLEGE KNOLLS

SECT. 2  
379

BUCKNEI

3886

RD.



P.G. #67-13

Cross-Russell House  
Prince George's County, MD.  
Susan G. Pearl  
March 1986  
North elevation  
Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD.



P.G. #67-13

Cross-Russell House  
Prince George's County, Md.  
Susan G. Pearl  
March 1986  
West elevation  
Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD.



P.G. #67-13

Cross-Russell House  
Prince George's County, Md.  
Susan G. Pearl  
March 1986  
East elevation  
Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD.



PG#67-13

Cross-Russell House  
Prince George's County, MD  
Susan G. Pearl  
March 1986  
North elevation, close-up  
Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD