

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Bel Alton High School

Other names/site number: CH-562

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 9501 Crain Highway

City or town: Bel Alton State: MD County: Charles

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

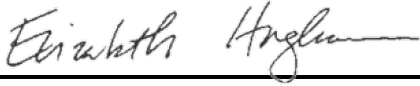
I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 x A B x C D

	12/17/2024
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Maryland Historical Trust</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____	_____
Signature of commenting official:	Date
_____	_____
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
-

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Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>4</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education/School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education/School

Government/Government Offices

7. Description

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Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals/Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Concrete piers

Walls: Concrete block, brick and stucco

Roof (front and side gable): Asphalt shingle

Other: chimneys: brick, porches: concrete, columns: wood, lintels: brick, decorative elements: brick

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Charles County Board of Education (School Board) purchased five parcels between 1923 and 1957 to build elementary and high schools for African Americans living in southern Charles County. Bel Alton High School, which dates from 1938, is the second building constructed on the site. Bel Alton High School’s initial appearance was as a one-story, nine-bay school building with an attached three-bay, one-story auditorium. The building is oriented to the east, but the west-side classrooms also have the same bank of large windows to enhance the lighting. At its opening, the high school had indoor plumbing, running water, and electricity, which were important features, as many residents of the county at the time were using outhouses and oil lamps. Between 1954 and 1959, improvements included the addition of four classrooms and offices in a separate annex building to the west (1954), a two-story addition with a basement cafeteria that was attached on the high school’s south wall (1954), an addition to the annex (1957), and an industrial arts/agriculture building with a gymnasium that was attached to the south side of the industrial arts building constructed northwest of the auditorium (1959). The School Board planned the construction of the annex, the cafeteria wing, industrial arts and gymnasium buildings in 1948, and their construction during the period of significance makes them contributing resources that demonstrate Bel Alton High School’s significance. Bel Alton High School closed in 1966 as a segregated high school but continued as an integrated junior

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high school until 1969. The school complex remains the most complete example of the segregated schools in Charles County constructed during the twentieth century.¹ Since 2006, the high school has been restored and serves as the Bel Alton Community Development Center.

Four buildings contribute to the significance of Bel Alton High School: Bel Alton High School (1938), the High School Annex/Elementary School (1954, 1957 conversion), Industrial Arts/Shop and Agricultural Building (1959), and the Gymnasium (1959). There is only one noncontributing building on the property, the Pumping Station (2006). The property retains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

Narrative Description

Bel Alton Schools Timeline (based on review of Charles County School Board Minutes, newspaper articles, and aerial photographs from 1952, 1957 and 1963 from Historicaerials.com):

- 1923 Bel Alton Colored School, a Rosenwald School, is constructed and opens
- 1937 Bel Alton Colored School receives a two-room addition on the south side and becomes an elementary (graded) school
- 1938 Bel Alton High School with auditorium is constructed and opens
- 1941 Bel Alton Elementary School receives a second two-room addition on the south side
- 1954 High School Annex with four classrooms and offices is constructed
- 1954 Cafeteria/Assembly Room wing with other improvements to main building is constructed
- 1957 Bel Alton Elementary School (six rooms) is destroyed by fire
- 1957 High School Annex is converted to Elementary School and a second wing constructed
- 1959 Industrial Shops/Agricultural Building and Gymnasium is constructed
- 1966 Bel Alton High School closes as a segregated high school
- 1969 Integrated Bel Alton Middle School and Elementary Schools close

Grounds (Photo 25)

Since the elementary school was constructed in 1923, the Bel Alton High School grounds have changed several times in response to the needs and uses of the property. Currently, the original high school, high school annex/elementary school, agricultural and industrial arts building, and gym are surrounded by a perennial garden in front of the high school building, trees and grass lawns. Along the frontage of the property, a row of crepe myrtle trees have been planted. A gravel one-lane driveway extends perpendicularly from the highway to the west to pass in front of the former high school annex/elementary school at the rear of the property, and an arm extends at a right angle to pass in front of the high school building, where it opens into a parking area on the north side of the auditorium. Parking spaces extend from the driveway on the south side of the high school and elementary school. A contemporary basketball court with two hoops stands on the southeast end of the Bel Alton High School property. Its location is the site of the 1922/1923 “Bel Alton Colored School” that was destroyed by fire in 1957.

¹ John Jasper, “What Happened To: 1956 High School Graduates” *The Afro American*, January 18, 1958, P. A5.

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Basketball Court and Baseball Diamond (Photos 22 and 23)

A basketball court with two hoops and a set of bleachers are in the southeast corner of the property. The 1963 aerial photograph shows a baseball diamond in its current location in the southwest portion of the property. Students also used the area between the baseball diamond and basketball court as a playing field for flag football. This area now includes the pumping station. It was not a formally marked area during the historic period. These areas do not contribute to Bel Alton High School.

Pumping Station (2006) (Photo 24) [NC]

On the south side of the main driveway, south of the Annex, the property contains a pumping station and a substation, both of which are enclosed with tall chain-link fencing. These are not historic and do not contribute to the architectural significance of the Bel Alton High School.

Bel Alton High School (1938) [C]

Main Pile Exterior² (Photos 1-6)

Bel Alton High School is a one-story, eleven-bay building that faces east. It features flat, front, and side gable roofs that cover (from the north) a three-bay, front gable auditorium wing, a two-bay flat roof hyphen, and a center main pile with two projecting front gable two-bay wings and a side gable roof pile with the school's main entrance. The center bay has two batteries of four windows on each that are also nine-over-nine double-hung windows on either side of the main entrance. The entrance has double-leaf doors, each with a single light in the top portion of each leaf. A twelve-light transom is above the doors. The main entrance in the side gable bay is defined by a front gable porch supported by two pairs of "colonial" or Tuscan-type columns standing on a concrete floor with three concrete steps. An ADA ramp extends from the south edge of the porch to the front sidewalk, and ADA handrails are on either side of the porch stair (and throughout the building). The two projecting bays each contain batteries of five windows and boxed cornices. Each front gable section has an arched gable vent in the peak of each gable. A smaller window with four-over-four lights that is a separate bay is in each front gable portion of the building. The hyphen wing between the main pile and the auditorium has paired nine-over-nine double hung-windows with cathedral glass in each light. The gable roofs are all clad in asphalt shingles. The exterior walls are of concrete block, while brick is used for door and window surrounds. The exterior is entirely covered with beige stucco. The windowsills are lug brick sills and hold nine-over-nine double-hung windows in each of the four- or five-window banks. The entire main pile is defined at the top of the façade wall above the windows by a plain frieze. From the exterior, the classrooms are distinguished from bathrooms and closets by the size of the windows (classroom windows are larger). This portion dates to the original

² Attached photos go around the building starting on the east side at the north end and move to the south elevation, the west elevation and the north elevation. Likewise, the interior photos move from room to room starting at the north end going to the south. .

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construction in 1938. The building stands on concrete piers in the main pile and also beneath the auditorium, while the cafeteria and basement floors are on a concrete foundation.

Auditorium Wing (1938) (Photos 3 and 26)

At the north end of the main pile is the front gable, three-bay auditorium that is half a story taller, and projects one foot in front of, the main pile's façade. In the peak of the gable is a circular gable vent. The auditorium joins the building on the north side, connected by the "hyphen" wing. Like the classroom portion of the building, two sets of paired windows are nine-over-nine double-hung windows on either side of a double leaf door, each of which has a single light in the top. The entrance is covered by a porch with a front gable roof supported by two pairs of "colonial" or Tuscan-type columns standing on a concrete porch with two steps below (all of the stair handrails attached to various porches at entrances are ADA-compliant). Above the portico roof is a raised brick-covered-with-stucco "triumphal" arch that surrounds the entire entrance and extends to the bottom of the wall. The auditorium's east façade and north elevation contain five double-hung, nine-over-nine windows, each with seven-light fixed transoms above. On the north elevation extending from the east side of the double door to beyond the auditorium's west wall, there is a flat roof awning supported by metal poles over a sidewalk. The second bay of the north elevation also contains double wood-and-glass doors with bars on the inside. A single-light fixed transom is above the door. On the southwest end of the auditorium is a shed roof addition with an exit stair. This portion dates to the original construction in 1938.

Auditorium North Elevation (Photo 17)

The north elevation consists of the exterior of the auditorium, with three sets of paired nine-over-nine double-hung windows. A double leaf door with three paired horizontal windows in each leaf is in the second east bay, while the windows are in the first, third and fourth bays. There is a five-light transom above the windows in the first east bay, while the transom is covered in the third and fourth bays. There is no transom above the exit doors, but it is covered by a flat roof awning supported by metal poles that extends beyond the west elevation of the building.

Auditorium West Elevation (Photo 15 and 16)

The west elevation has two six-over-six double-hung windows in the north and south bays of the building. In the gable above, the former window has been covered over. The entire elevation is clad in beige stucco. Metal vents at the bottom of the wall provide for air movement around the concrete piers.

Main Pile West Elevation (Photos 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15)

The west elevation mimics the shape of the east façade with the auditorium wall extending approximately six feet beyond the hyphen wall. The two front gable portions have boxed cornices above a plain frieze that extends from the northernmost front gable wing across the center wing to the south front gable wing, which is similarly decorated with the boxed cornices. There is an exterior entrance to the raised basement well area that contains the heating equipment. The exterior wall is of common bond brick, with concrete stairs leading to the well. The brick wall contains a solid core door with a brick surround and a metal vent. An interior brick chimney extends through the roof near its peak on the west side. A second exterior

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shouldered brick chimney is attached to the west wall adjacent to the south of the exterior stairway. A double leaf door with four horizontal lights in each marks an exit from the main pile. It is aligned with an entrance in the former High School Annex, but there is no covered connection. The two west front gable wings have batteries of five double-hung nine-over-nine windows with a smaller four-over-four window marking an interior closet. On the ground floor of the 1955 cafeteria section, on the west elevation, is a one-story, on-bay flat roof addition that provides a covered entrance to the basement area offices.

Cafeteria/Assembly Room wing and Building Stair South Elevation (Photos 9, 10 and 11)

The south elevation contains the south walls of the cafeteria wing, with two projecting bays that contain the elevator on the east and the enclosed stair hall on the west. The stair hall exterior has three six-over-six double-hung windows in the second floor that light the stairway leading to the raised basement. A solid core door below leads to the basement area offices and the stairs. To the east, a decorative raised brick course above two attached concrete block pilasters identifies the presence of the interior stair hall on the exterior. While the stair hall is not entirely enclosed on the interior, its three exterior walls form a flat roof attachment that adjoins the main portion of the south wing. To the east of the south elevation is a three-bay, one-story, shed roof addition that encloses a vestibule; the building elevator is behind the vestibule (this is a 2006 addition to make the building accessible). The one-story flat roof wing to the west has three six-over-six double-hung windows in the south elevation in the second story. The elevator portion is not original to the school.

Cafeteria/Assembly Room Wing (1954) (Photos 7)

At the south end of the center pile is a two-story flat roof addition that is of concrete block clad in stucco. The second story has a bank of four double-hung nine-over-nine windows, while the raised basement has six-over-six double-hung windows that are smaller on both the east and south elevations. Entrances on the south elevation lead to the basement level or the stairs leading to the school interior. The School Board constructed this portion of the building and classrooms in 1954 to provide a cafeteria and assembly room in a raised basement.

High School Interior (Photos 27 through 41)

The entrance hallway contains a second set of double doors approximately three feet beyond the main entrance which lead to a short hall that connects to the center hall running north and south. The floor throughout is covered with linoleum or carpeting with cove molding and the ceilings have acoustic tile panels. The walls are painted white and are drywall replacements. There are seven classrooms, and each room has the above-described windows as well as closets that are original to the design. The doors leading to the hallway are each paneled, with three horizontal lights in the top half of the doors. Fixed six-light transoms are above each door.

Central heating and air conditioning, electricity and security systems are part of the early twenty-first century restoration of the building, but all of these are unobtrusive and do not detract from the historic nature of the building.

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The 1954 construction of the two-story cafeteria portion of the building also provided a second floor that contained two classrooms, each with four double-hung, nine-over-nine windows in the east and west walls. This area was reached by two sets of stairs, one from the interior center hall and a second set of stairs on the south wall that led to the basement but at the ground-floor landing led to an outside door. A raised basement below held the cafeteria/assembly room. The lower area was not accessible during field visits because others control the space. It includes a three-bay by one-bay one-story addition that has a stairway leading to the basement level at the southwest corner of the classroom building. On the south elevation, the passenger elevator is contained within an enclosed shaft surrounding the elevator equipment. A one-bay by one-bay one-story shed roof addition provides the lobby to the elevator and access to outside with the exit door on the west elevation.

Industrial Arts/Shop and Agriculture Building (1959) [C] (Photos 18 and 19)

The Agriculture and Industrial Arts/Shop building stands to the west/northwest of the Auditorium and was constructed in 1959 based on designs by Washington, D.C. architect James J. Baldwin. Baldwin designed two wings to provide an area for students to learn basic small building construction. The second wing forms the agricultural area where students learned improved farming techniques. The building is a one-story, concrete block with a flat roof. The window surrounds are lug brick, and some are spalling. On the east elevation, there is a two-bay garage with one wooden rolling door and a single door. The west wing had three square windows, with a single door cut into the left side of the second window, a second rolling garage door, and in the southernmost bay, a fourth square window and (based on its size) a double-hung window. On the west elevation, some of the boards have been removed to reveal metal frame windows holding ten panes of glass in one half of the window (and another ten panes of glass in the boarded over section). Most of the building's windows and doors, including the rolling doors, have been boarded up by plywood, which, along with the roof, are failing. On the west elevation is a third garage door in the south bay where the gym is attached. A ruinous outbuilding that may have functioned for either mechanical, plumbing, or electrical purposes is on the northwest edge of the shop building. The building is locked, but its condition prevented an interior viewing. The building is contributing and is currently subject to a perpetual Maryland Historical Trust Preservation Easement.

High School Annex/Elementary School/Jude House (1954 and 1957) [C] (Photo 21)

During the 1954 improvements, Charles County School Board constructed a four-classroom annex designed by James J. Baldwin. The one-story, concrete block building stands on a concrete foundation and is covered by a composite shingle side gable roof. It stands west of the High School Building and faces south. It is approximately 25 or 30 feet from the high school building. In 1957, the School Board constructed the west wing of the building to accommodate additional classrooms, each of which features an exterior door. Both wings are of concrete block, but the west wing has brick quoins and concrete block pilasters and is not as tall as the east wing. The interior spaces have been altered to accommodate the current use as a residential facility. The windows and doors also have been replaced and are not as large as the originals. Several openings in the west wing have been covered over with vinyl siding. There are brick lintels in the windows and door surrounds. A large front-gable portico extends from the south façade, and there is a front gable one-story addition at the rear of the building. The gable portion of the wing

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is clad in the same vinyl siding as the windows and doors. Both the portico and the addition have been added since 2006. An interior view was not available during field visits due to security concerns. The building is contributing and is currently subject to a perpetual Maryland Historical Trust Preservation Easement.

Gymnasium Building (c.1959) (Photo 20) [C]

The gym is attached on the shop's south elevation, west of the high school building. It is a two-story concrete block building. The building's entrance is on the east façade and there is a flat roof portico supported by metal poles extending across the face of the gym. The various windows and doors are boarded over. All of the windows are in the second story; there are corresponding windows on both the south and north elevations and these have been boarded over. A previous inventory photo from 1999 shows five multi-paned, rectangular windows with metal frames and square lights on the south elevation. Double doors are in the ground floor level beneath the first and fifth windows in the south elevation, while there is one door on the north elevation, and these are currently boarded over with failing plywood. Red brick headers surrounding the windows and doors are visible with some bricks spalling. An exterior red brick chimney is attached to the north wall of the gym and extends above the roof. On the west side of the gym is a one-story concrete block building that contains offices and locker rooms. The building is contributing and is currently subject to a Maryland Historical Trust Preservation Easement.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

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

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE (BLACK)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1938 to 1969

Significant Dates

1937, 1938, _____

1949-1955 _____

1962, 1964, 1966, 1969

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Herman F. Lund (1937-1938)

James J. Baldwin (1947 to 1955)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Bel Alton Colored High School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C in the areas of architecture, education, ethnic heritage (black), and social history with a period of significance of 1938 to 1969. Bel Alton High School opened in 1938, closed in 1966 as a segregated high school, and continued as an integrated junior high school until 1969.

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The history of African American education in Charles County began following the adoption of Maryland's 1864 Constitution ending enslavement. Starting in 1867, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) came to Charles County to assist trustees in purchasing land to establish schools and churches for small communities. Agency and activism by African Americans around education continued into the twentieth century. Actions by teachers, parents, and students between 1919 and 1969 in the small rural African American communities in southern Charles County enabled them to achieve an improved education for their children. Historian David Taft Terry has called the 1930s the period of "struggle" by African Americans in Baltimore in the face of strict segregation to achieve their rights as American citizens. In Maryland's counties, "the struggle" often centered on aspects of education and citizens' rights. Between 1936 and 1966, Bel Alton High School in southern Charles County was the result of parents, teachers and students' activism and agency, and it represents African American educational history in Charles County.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Significance and Integrity

Bel Alton Colored High School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C in the areas of architecture, education, ethnic heritage (black), and social history, with a period of significance of 1938 to 1969. It was a high school from the mid-twentieth century through 1966 that the Charles County School Board used solely for African American secondary education in eastern Charles County during legalized segregation. By 1930, Charles County had five high schools, four for white students, located in Hughesville, Glasva, La Plata, and Nanjemoy, with only Pomonkey for African American use. Starting in 1936, African Americans living in the small communities in southern Charles County began to advocate for a high school that their children could conveniently attend. Because of Pomonkey High School's location on the west side of the county, students from all over the county faced difficult transportation issues due to poor roads and two-hour bus rides. While some could afford to board at the school, others could not. School ended for them after completing seventh grade, regardless of their ambitions or abilities.

In 1936, Bel Alton resident Blanche Tolson contacted "Colored Schools Supervisor" J.C. Parks to give her support for a new high school for children living on the east side of the county. Tolson, along with the Bel Alton Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), rallied teachers, parents, and students from nearby communities to fundraise and advocate for the new school. The agency and activism by African Americans living in small communities in southern Charles County caused the School Board to construct the Bel Alton High School.

Bel Alton High School opened in September 1938 and immediately became overcrowded as children returned to complete their high school education. The students benefitted from the state school authorities' decision in the late 1930s to allow African American students to have the same school terms and to study similar subjects as white children. In that way, state school

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authorities sought to “equalize” the differences between the two school systems without dramatically increasing costs for the African American schools. Students, parents, and teachers valued the education provided at Bel Alton High School, because it provided the opportunity for students to achieve more than their parents. The school closed in 1966 as a segregated high school. Between 1938 and 1966, the school provided nearby African American residents with a central place to achieve better education as they worked to obtain their rights as American citizens. The school complex remains the most complete example of the segregated schools in Charles County constructed during the twentieth century.³

Bel Alton High School meets NRHP Criterion C (architecture) as the sole example of a complete high school building in Charles County, Maryland with associated gymnasium, industrial arts/shop, and agricultural building, along with the high school annex that was enlarged to accommodate the African American Bel Alton Elementary School, for use by African American children during segregation through 1966. The Charles County School Board lacked a comprehensive plan for African American secondary education buildings during the twentieth century. Starting in 1920, the School Board made use of the Rosenwald Fund and constructed the Pomonkey High School and 12 primary schools in the county. The Pomonkey School received several additions as more children sought to receive an education; however, only its 1932 auditorium/gymnasium and connected entrance hall remain standing. These alone are not sufficient to exemplify an African American high school. None of the 12 Rosenwald one- and two-teacher buildings in the county that the School Board constructed remains standing, as documented in the *Rosenwald Schools of Maryland* Multiple Property Documentation Form completed in 2014 by Susan Pearl. As a result, Bel Alton High School remains the only fully representative high school used by African Americans within Charles County during the mid-twentieth century.

In 1937, the School Board called upon a local professional engineer and builder, Herman F. Lund, to complete the design. Bel Alton High School is the only known high school building in Charles County that Lund designed. He provided a design that combines Colonial Revival, Beaux Arts Revival, and Progressive School designs. An important Progressive School feature is the batteries of four or five windows for each classroom. Colonial Revival designs are found in the high roofs to help provide ventilation, and the “colonial” type columns found on the two entrance porches. The central corridor with double-loaded classrooms is an example of a Beaux Arts circulation plan. The eleven-bay building that is the main high school building consists of classrooms, offices, a cafeteria/assembly room wing, and an auditorium with indoor plumbing and electricity.

³ In a 1958 article in *The Afro American*, John Jasper noted that the state’s twenty-eight “colored” high schools sent 311 students representing the upper half of their graduating classes in 1956 to state colleges including Morgan, Coppin, Bowie, and also the University of Maryland and Towson State Teacher’s College, indicating that the state’s colleges were open to African Americans by Fall 1956. See John Jasper, “What Happened To: 1956 High School Graduates” *The Afro American*, January 18, 1958, P. A5. After 1966, a number of the “colored” high schools were closed and then demolished. In some instances, the counties chose to build new integrated schools on those sites. Other schools remain standing, and some have been converted to churches, community centers and African American museums. Of the former high schools listed in the 1958 article, portions of Pomonkey High School, Charles County, along with Lakeland in College Park, Bates in Annapolis and Brooks in Prince Frederick remain standing in western shore counties.

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While the classroom wing and auditorium are original to the initial construction period, the school was enlarged in 1954 with the construction of the cafeteria wing on the south side of the main building and a four-classroom annex that stands west of the main building. The School Board constructed a six-bay addition to the annex in 1957, following the fire that destroyed the 1923 Rosenwald Bel Alton “Colored” Elementary School. Two additional buildings, the Gymnasium and the Industrial Arts/Agricultural Building, were both completed by 1959. These additional resources contribute to the significance of the Bel Alton High School. Starting in 2006, with the support and contributions of the Bel Alton High School Alumni Association, the main high school building was carefully restored on the exterior, while in the interior, the original classrooms remain in place, but some are currently arranged to accommodate office uses rather than classrooms. The changes do not alter the characteristics that make Bel Alton High School an excellent example of a mid-twentieth century high school.

Based on the foregoing discussion, Bel Alton High School retains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

Charles County Settlement: 1640s to 1799

Settlement of Charles County by English colonists began in the late 1630s and early 1640s as people began to move west and north from St. Mary’s County. By 1658, the population had grown, and the Governor’s Council established a courthouse in Port Tobacco at Moore’s Lodge to reduce the distance residents traveled to deal with legal issues such as establishing land ownership. Initially, landowners worked with English or Irish immigrants, generally people for whom an owner had paid passage, who agreed to be indentured as domestic servants or as farm workers. Because farmers could gain large profits from growing tobacco, the farms became plantations (generally 500 acres or more) dedicated to producing tobacco as the sole crop for profit. Tobacco required almost year-round cultivation and a dependable workforce. Julia King notes that by 1660, planters began to use enslaved Africans that they acquired, rather than indentured English or Irish people that worked as house servants and field hands. By the end of the seventeenth century, the “slave society,” which mandated lifelong servitude to those identified as African descendants, had been established in Charles County.⁴

Throughout the eighteenth century, growing tobacco remained a successful, if difficult and time-consuming venture in Charles County. Further, it required a readily available workforce of enslaved Africans or African Americans or white workers, often including an owner’s family members. By the time of the American Revolution in 1775, Charles County’s society became established: elite planters with large landholdings and enslaved persons, middling planters with smaller amounts of land and fewer enslaved workers, along with sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Enslaved persons were landless and held under tight control.⁵ Although Charles

⁴ Julia King, et al., *Pathways to History Charles County Maryland, 1658-2008*, p. 23 and Cathy H. Thompson and Nicole A. Diehlmann, *In the Midst of these Plains*, p.12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25

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County's society had been set, the County lacked a centralized education system. Roman Catholic and/or Anglican elite planters who could afford it, hired private tutors for their children, relied on local priests and ministers, or sent their children to Europe or the few Maryland schools then established to be educated.⁶

Educating White Children in Charles County during the Nineteenth Century

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Maryland General Assembly turned to considering how to provide citizen services and ways to pay for them. The National Road connected western states such as Ohio and Indiana to Cumberland. Construction of the Baltimore Turnpike benefitted Frederick and Hagerstown, and the entire system connected these western areas to Baltimore and its port.⁷ Charles County also participated in the state's growth, with Port Tobacco and Benedict providing services to ship products to Baltimore via the rivers and Chesapeake Bay.

In 1817, the General Assembly developed a plan to fund free public schools in each county. The chosen funding method used profits from the newly established Baltimore Turnpike from Baltimore to Cumberland to generate the state's portion. Additionally, the Legislature created boards of commissioners for each county. The Legislature first named five men from Charles County in 1817, and then increased the named to seventeen men in 1821, to be the County's school trustees. The trustees would oversee school construction in four districts and provide annual reports about expenditures for monies received through the County's Orphan Court. The new school law specifically stated that the law applied only to white children. African American children, regardless of their status as free or enslaved, were not identified as eligible to attend school.⁸

The School Commissioners set up primary schools in Charles County's four districts, first choosing a central location and then building a schoolhouse sufficient to hold 30 children. The Legislature updated the law several times during the 1830s, creating school districts to serve children in a particular district regardless of distance.⁹ By 1841, School Trustees for School No.

⁶ Cox, McClane [STANTEC], *Maryland's Education History and Architecture A Context Study*, p. 8. Eighteenth century schools in Maryland included West Nottingham Academy in Cecil County, started by a Presbyterian minister in 1744, Charlotte Hall in St. Mary's County established in 1774, Friends School in Baltimore, started in 1784 by Quakers, and Georgetown Preparatory School in Bethesda, started in 1789 by the Rev. John Carroll, who became the first Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States. He was ordained as a member of the Society of Jesus, an order of priests.

⁷ PAC Spero & Company and Louis Berger and Associates, *Historic Highway Bridges in Maryland 1631-1960 Historic Context Report* (October 1995), pp. 17-20

⁸ MSA, "School Records for Charles County," *The Archivists Bulldog*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 13, 1999), Editor: Patricia V. Melville. See also, Maryland State Archives at msa.maryland.gov, Chapter 256, Session Laws of 1817 and "A Supplement to an Act for Distribution of a certain Fund for the purposes of establishing Free Schools in the several Counties therein named," Chapter 114, Session Laws of 1820, pp. 1866-1873. The five Charles County men originally named, and renamed a second time in the 1820 supplement, included Joseph Green, George Robertson, Thomas Price, Samuel Chapman, and George D. Parnham. All were enslavers, having as few as sixteen and as many as one hundred and one enslaved workers. The 1820 U.S. Census for Charles County identifies some of the enslaved as not naturalized citizens, but people likely born in Africa. Also, Cox|McLane [STANTEC], p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.* Also, most children by age 8 were able to walk to school and up to five miles was considered an acceptable distance.

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4 in Election District No. 2, indicated in an annual report that “children attended school irregularly because their parents were indifferent to their need to learn,” which was a common problem in Charles County throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Those in state and county governments concerned with education as well as outside experts frequently discussed the question of appropriate education for rural children.¹¹ The trustees deplored the general lack of interest that they saw at the local level. For many parents and children, learning the alphabet and numbers to be able to read and know basic arithmetic, as well as writing a name, were sufficient for children during the nineteenth century because they served as important contributors to the support of the family, especially on a farm.¹²

Maryland adopted a new state constitution in 1864 that included a requirement for a statewide public school system. In 1868, the General Assembly passed the first law, Chapter 407, Acts of 1868, providing schools for all children. The law created the State School Board of Education with a School Superintendent to oversee the state system, while a three-person Board of School Commissioners for each county oversaw local schools. The General Assembly also enacted a tax law to pay for the system. However, it was not regularly collected, which left the local systems underfunded. The lack of funds resulted in buildings in poor condition and poorly paid teachers, while the counties struggled with debts when unexpected expenses occurred. The General Assembly wrote the 1868 law requiring the county school commissioners to take charge of all school buildings. Martenet’s Map of Maryland (Figure 1) from 1886 shows the white school near Cox’s Station, but it is not the school located at 9780 Bel Alton-Newtown Road, which is part of the Bel Alton Historic District.¹³ By 1899, the Charles County School Superintendent reported that there were 75 schools for white children in the county and that children attended school nine months a year.

¹⁰ MSA, “School Records for Charles County,” *The Archivists Bulldog*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 13, 1999), Editor: Patricia V. Melville, P. 58. The County’s election districts increased in the late nineteenth century, but it appears that District 2 was the Hill Top District southwest of Port Tobacco. School trustees were a group of three men who oversaw school construction, repairs and before School Superintendents were hired in the late nineteenth century with authority to hire teachers.

¹¹ *The Sun*, “Question of More Practical Education of Rural Children,” March, 19, 1909, p. 9. A delegation from the State Grange Society attended a meeting to ask that more agriculture and home economics be provided to rural students “instead of dead languages.”

¹² Cox, McClane [STANTEC], *Maryland’s Education History and Architecture A Context Study*, p. 8.

¹³ State Department of Education, “Origin,” downloaded from <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/13sdoe/html/sdoef.html>; Also see “County School House, site” Maryland Inventory of Historic Places (MIHP) No. CH-316, which the owner in 1984 stated was a former school building.

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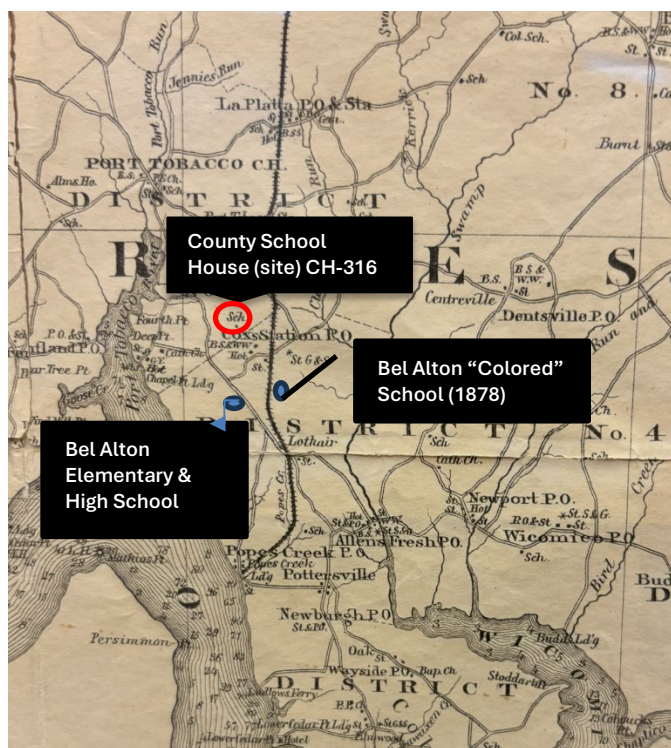


Figure 1. Martenet's Map of Maryland, 1886 showing locations of Country School House (a school for white children), Bel Alton Colored School (constructed 1878), and the 1923- and 1938-constructed Bel Alton Elementary and High Schools.

Examples of African Americans Learning to Read in Antebellum Maryland

For freed African Americans in the nineteenth century before the Civil War, there were few opportunities to obtain a primary education, although Clarence Kenneth Gregory notes in *The Education of Blacks in Maryland: an Historical Survey* that the Oblate Sisters of Providence established St. Frances Academy “to teach free black girls,” many from Haiti, in Baltimore in 1829, where they learned to read and write. He further notes that freed African Americans in Baltimore were able to form Sunday Schools and literary societies where people also learned to read. One resource that became available to the freed community in Baltimore came from Nelson Wells (d. 1850), who left money for educating African Americans. The Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People used the legacy to establish the Baltimore Normal School in January 1865, as the predecessor to the State Normal School at Bowie.¹⁴

Nina H. Clarke and Lillian B. Brown, writing about African American education in Montgomery County, Maryland, note that Mary Coffin, a Quaker who taught at the Fair Hill Female Academy (white) from 1854 to 1865, taught Bible reading and name writing to enslaved

¹⁴ Gregory, Clarence Kenneth, *The Education of Blacks in Maryland: an Historical Survey*. [Abstract]. In the twentieth century, the Oblate Sisters also helped to teach African American Roman Catholic children in St. Mary's County at the Cardinal Gibbons Institute located at St. Peter Claver Church, but this does not seem to have been the case in Charles County.

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and freed women in Sandy Spring in the evenings after school had finished.¹⁵ Another example of an enslaved person learning to read in Maryland before the Civil War is discussed by Lynn Bowman regarding the life of the Reverend Thomas Henry, an African American who was born enslaved in St. Mary's County in 1794. As a child there, Henry's enslaver, Richard Barnes, required his workers to attend the local Roman Catholic church, where the Jesuit priest taught them to memorize the catechism. Henry's enslaver sent him to Washington County in 1814, to become a blacksmith. In 1818, Henry was apprenticed to a white blacksmith, Abraham King, in Hagerstown. King was a Methodist and with his family regularly held Bible studies that included Henry. As a result, Henry converted to Methodism and through his association with the King family, learned to read the Bible. Henry gained his freedom in 1821. After 1830, he left the Methodist Church to become a minister at the Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, where he helped teach other African Americans, both freed and enslaved, to read the Bible.¹⁶

Although these examples show that some African Americans in Maryland were able to learn to read before the Civil War, it was not a complete education. There is no historical evidence or anecdotal story about enslaved or freed people in Charles County learning to read before the end of enslavement.¹⁷ While the evangelical Baptist and Methodist denominations had churches in the county by the early nineteenth century, there is no information showing the presence of an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. In 1845, after a group of freed and enslaved men escaped to Montgomery County enroute north, enslavers passed resolutions requiring that freed and enslaved people attend church services when a white minister was present.¹⁸ Since settlement, many residents were either Roman Catholic or Episcopalian, and these enslavers did not teach their workers to read.

African American Civil Rights: 1864-1896

As part of post-Civil War reconstruction in 1866, the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act to provide freed African Americans with access to public transportation, hotels, and opera houses. When the new law proved ineffective, particularly in the southern states, Congress followed up with three Constitutional amendments, outlawing enslavement (XIII, 1865), establishing citizenship, due process and equal protection under state laws (XIV, 1868), and suffrage (XV, 1870), providing constitutional guarantees as American citizens to the newly freed people.¹⁹ These alone did not ensure that African Americans would be treated equally or receive

¹⁵ Clarke, Nina H. and Lillian B. Brown, *History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961*, P. 1. Also, Montgomery History Special Collections, Fair Hill School (Sandy Spring) correspondence and school brochures, 1850s-1860s, <https://montgomeryhistory.org/digital-maryland/>

¹⁶ Lynn Bowman, *Ten Weeks on Jonathan Street, the Legacy of 19th Century Hagerstown, Maryland*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁷ Maryland State Archives, *Legacy of Slavery in Maryland*, records that Charles County had 567 freed people in the 1820 US Census, 913 freed people in the 1850 US Census and 1068 freed people in the 1860 US Census. Also, in 1863, recruits at the Colored Troops Recruiting Station at Camp Stanton near Benedict did receive some instruction during their training, but the primary focus was training as soldiers to fight.

¹⁸ King, Julia, *Pathways to History Charles County Maryland 1759-2008*, p. 101

¹⁹ Starting in 1935, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made legal arguments that the XIV Amendment provided guarantees that African Americans should be able to attend professional schools even if the only such school was at the white university.

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the same benefits, such as public education, as white citizens. Congress passed a second Civil Rights Act in 1875, attempting to strengthen African American civil rights. In 1883, the Supreme Court heard a group of cases about the 1875 law that are collectively called “the Civil Rights cases.” The court ruled against the United States, stating that while the Fourteenth Amendment provided citizens protection only under federal and state laws and actions, Congress lacked authority to require private owners or companies to comply with federal laws. Congress took no further action, and during the following 20 years, African Americans could be welcomed at a hotel or restaurant only to return a second time and discover they were no longer welcome. The Supreme Court formulated the “separate but equal” standard that limited African American civil rights in 1896, in its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537, 1896). The case involved a Louisiana state law requiring African Americans to sit in a separate railroad car from white travelers; the ruling stated that this law did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as the railroad provided “equally” for both groups of travelers. With that decision legalizing every form of segregation, an amalgam of laws, policies and customs that came to be called “Jim Crow” began.

Examples of “Jim Crow” in Maryland included a state law passed in 1904 requiring that steamships and railroads have separate accommodations on trains, trolleys, boats and ships for both whites and African Americans. But several of the restrictions came about through white’s behavior and what whites believed to be customary. As African Americans began to become educated, mobile and activist, many whites expressed fear and distaste at what they believed would become “social equality” between them and African Americans. Many whites based their fears and distaste on their status as superior because of their whiteness, social skills, education, and well-behaved lives while they considered African Americans to be ignorant, sexually permissive, and unclean. Further, many whites expected African Americans to be subservient, remaining a lower class perpetually in servitude.²⁰ Through 1964, white Marylanders required physical separation from African Americans for housing through racial covenants, restaurant service, and separate drinking fountains.²¹ Charles County also had separate waiting rooms at doctors’ offices and separate church picnics and county fairs.

Nineteenth-Century African American Education in Charles County

The history of African American education in Charles County began first with the outlawing of enslavement by the passage of the 1864 Maryland State Constitution. Newly freed people, eager to enjoy freedom, hoped to construct schools and churches, demonstrating their activism and agency. However, because many lacked farming equipment such as plows and mules, they first worked as sharecroppers with annual contracts until they earned enough money to purchase needed equipment and make donations of money and labor for building churches and

²⁰ Brugger, Robert, *Maryland A Middle Temperament 1634-1980*, p. 422-423

²¹ Maryland passed a civil rights law in 1963 that required public access for African Americans at restaurants. The law was superseded by the federal civil rights law in 1964. *The Negro Motorists Green Book*, published between 1936 and 1961 by Victor and Alma Green, had listings for every state in the contiguous United States because “Jim Crow” requirements could occur at any time.

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schools.²² Construction occurred slowly due to the devastation caused by the war. Although no fighting occurred, the U.S. Army occupied Charles County in 1861, and little farming occurred as men joined either the Confederate States or the United States armies. With the loss of enslaved labor and the lack of money or credit to finance farming, it took several years for farmers to plant sufficient crops for a profit.

Although the 1864 state constitution required a public school system, it did not address African American education. In 1867, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) joined with the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People to assist freed people in establishing schools and churches in Maryland (and elsewhere in the former Confederate states). The Freedmen's Bureau worked with African American communities throughout the state to obtain land upon which one-room schoolhouses were constructed, and to hire teachers to educate their children. Older adults could also attend school, but the primary group was children aged six to 20. The Freedmen's Bureau required each community to raise funds and obtain clear title to a school parcel, generally one acre, and then the materials for constructing the school would be provided by the U.S. Government. Between 1867 and 1870, new owners filed deeds for seven schoolhouse lots near Nanjemoy, Pomonkey, Bryantown, Benedict, Newport, Port Tobacco, and Mount Pleasant with the Charles County Clerk's Office. The deed for the Pomonkey school lot also mentioned construction of the new Methodist Episcopal Church that was to be built by members. The Freedmen's Bureau ended its work in Maryland in 1870, although at least five schools continued in Charles County.²³ In 1872, the General Assembly repealed the 1868 Public School Law to require that the county school commissioners take control of the African American schools. By 1899, the county had 30 schools for African American children.²⁴

The areas near the white Charles County villages named in the 1868 school deeds were generally outside any village proper. However, the Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church and Pomonkey School opened on Metropolitan Church Road in 1868, and the two buildings helped establish Pomonkey village as an African American enclave.²⁵ Also, the deed for the Benedict "Colored" School land stated that a church would be constructed near the school. Until the end of the twentieth century, Charles County remained rural, and the primary occupation was farming tobacco and silage corn. African American men continued to work as farmers, either as

²² The 1870 U.S. Census for Charles County shows a number of African American farmers who rented their houses and worked as farm laborers.

²³ *The Sun*, "Freedmen's Schools in Southern Maryland," September 6, 1867, P. 4; and "Colored Schools in Maryland, West Virginia and the District of Columbia," November 23, 1867, P. 4. Fundraising and land purchase usually fell to the Trustees of the school, most frequently a group of three local men, although women also acted as Trustees in the twentieth century. In the cases of the Freedmen's Schools, several of the Trustees were white. "Maryland and Delaware, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872." Images of Charles County Deeds for school lots. Deeds can be found in Charles County Land Records (CCLR) GAH Liber 2 at Folio 15 (Nanjemoy), 44 (Budd's Creek), 47 (Pomonkey), 48 (Dent), 49 (Benedict) and 50 (Bryantown) for schools and at least two churches. All the deeds were filed on December 8, 1868.

²⁴ Among the children considered to be "colored" and sent to segregated schools were those who identify as members of the Piscataway tribe.

²⁵ Nicole A. Diehlmann, "Pomonkey Historic District" (CH-1021) (2023) p. 8-35

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sharecroppers or tenant farmers. By the early twentieth century, some became owners of small farms, generally five to 25 acres in size. The 1880, 1910, and 1920 U.S. Censuses for the Allen's Fresh District also indicate that African Americans lived among white farmers regardless of whether they owned or rented the land that they worked.²⁶ These same censuses further show that few African American children attended school during this period.

Although small and isolated, the combination of a school and church or school and social hall or store is recognized as a common African American community center. Architectural historians and historians writing about Charles County, including Cathy Thompson and Nicole Diehlmann, as well as Christine Arnold-Lourie, identify that after the Civil War, African Americans constructed churches, schools and social halls as they formed local communities.²⁷ At the time, the Bel Alton High School property was made up of farms that included both white and African American farmers. It is not possible to say conclusively why there was no formal community center for African Americans near Bel Alton until the early twentieth century. However, retired African American teacher Mary B. Neal observed in her oral interview that many of the farmers near Bel Alton in the mid-twentieth century were tenants rather than landowners and that lack of stability may have impeded their ability to establish a community center.²⁸ Neal spoke of a time after 1929 when she first came to Charles County. However, both Washington, D.C. and Baltimore attracted white and African American residents from the county, which steadily lost population between 1870 and 1920, as shown in the decennial censuses.²⁹

Baltimore and Potomac Railroad, Bel Alton "Colored" School, and Bel Alton

Construction of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1873 created a depot called Cox's Station five miles south of La Plata. Frederick Stone owned a 175-acre farm called Equality south of Cox's Station and he too sold land in 1872 to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company.³⁰ Construction of the railroad tracks made land near them less

²⁶ U.S. Census, Heritagequest, 1880, 1910, 1920. Names used from 1880 included Harry and Cecelia Norris, whose four daughters were school age but not in school, Michael and Walter Ann Diggs, whose two children Frances (12) and John (11) were both in school, while younger children were not. In the 1910 census, John O. and Eliza Frederick (Fredwick) whose daughter Maggie could not read, while their son Grant (19) could read and write. From the 1920 census, William H and Matilda Wills, with six children, three of whom were 7, 8 and 9, but they also were not in school and could not read or write. Mrs. Wills could both read and write.

²⁷ Thompson, Cathy H. and Nicole Diehlmann, *In the Midst Of These Plains, Charles County Buildings and Landscapes*, p. 22, and King, Julia, Christine Arnold-Lourie and Susan Shaffer, *Pathways to History Charles County Maryland, 1648-2008*, p. 124. Others writing about African American communities include Edie Wallace, "Reclaiming the Forgotten History and Cultural Landscapes of African Americans in Rural Washington County, Maryland," *Material Culture* Vol. 39 (2007). Wallace states that community centers occurred among scattered farms and the edges of white towns. Also, Robert D. Rivers, Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form for Gibson Grove, M:29-39, in July 1992, cited the 1868 establishment of the Gibson Grove church and school in southwest Montgomery County as the start of the Gibson Grove community.

²⁸ Mary B. Neal, "Oral History" by John Wearmouth, November 2 and December 2, 1988 on file at the College of Southern Maryland Study Center.

²⁹ King, Julia, *Pathways to History Charles County Maryland 1759-2008*, p. 127

³⁰ Frederick Stone (1820-1899) was a lawyer, U. S. Congressman, Maryland Delegate, and judge of the Court of Appeals of Charles County, Maryland. He did not live at Equality but inherited the property from an aunt. His grandfather, Michael Jenifer Stone patented Equality (MIHP No. CH-99) in 1796.

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attractive to many buyers and thus the land could be obtained at a lower price. Responding to a request from African Americans living near Cox's Station, in 1877, the School Commissioners purchased a one-acre parcel from at Equality's northern boundary near Tile Spring for a new primary school, on the east side of the railroad tracks. The deed was not completed until 1878, when they constructed the one-room school.³¹ The building is not described in any newspaper advertisement, but the common design used by the School Commissioners for the African American schools before 1920 called for a 24-foot x 18-foot front gable roof building with one room. It had two windows on each lateral elevation and a single window in the middle of the short wall opposite the front entrance.³² The McConchie School shown in Figure 2, which was constructed in 1912, is like the one described in the newspaper advertisement for the Pomonkey Neck and McConchie schools. An enclosed vestibule was not mentioned in the request for "Proposals" and was likely optional. The School Commissioners did not make an effort to change the school designs between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Figure 2: McConchie One-Room School, which is a Charles County one-room school, was constructed in 1912 and used by African Americans until 1952. Photo by Author

³¹ Charles County Land Records (CCLR), Liber AGS 2 Folio 403-405, Frederick and Jennie Stone to Charles County School Commissioners for one acre. The parcel passed to the Digges Family and is located at 9420 Crystal Lane, Bel Alton (Tax Map 64, Parcel 106). Due to a fire that destroyed the Charles County Courthouse in 1892, the School Board's minutes from 1872 through 1892 were lost. Likely, patrons met with the School Commissioners to request a building and identified a lot of land.

³² "Proposals," *Maryland Independent*, August 18, 1893, P.3 advertises for the Pomonkey Neck "Colored" School, and McConchie "Colored" School still stands at the Charles County Fairgrounds. Its size fits the advertised description.

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Samuel Cox sold a large parcel surrounding the Cox's Station depot to the Southern Maryland Development Corporation in 1891.³³ Robert D. Wills, who ran both a general store and a blacksmith business in Bel Alton, was part of the development company. Wills laid out two hundred 50-foot x 150-foot lots to create the village called Bel Alton. The plat for the village shows housing lots, but none set aside specifically for either a white or African American school building. After 1873, the School Commissioners oversaw the construction of a one-room school for white children, located at 9780 Bel Alton-Newtown Road (this is not the same building as shown in Figure 1), on Bel Alton's west side. A second room was advertised for construction in 1893, but the white school was closed in 1927 when the white children were sent to the new La Plata school.³⁴ Neither Spring Hill, north of Bel Alton, nor Faulkner, south of Bel Alton, attracted the same kind of residential or commercial development as Bel Alton before 1920.³⁵

Twentieth-Century Education for African Americans in Maryland and Charles County

In response to the Maryland General Assembly's request in 1916, Abraham Flexner and Frank D. Bachman of the General Education Fund in New York provided their study, "Public Education in Maryland," (1916) to the Maryland State Board of Education. The report contained photographs and assessments of the state's many one-room school buildings, as well as a critique of the education, both of which were deemed inadequate for all of Maryland's children. Flexner and Bachman recommended consolidating as many of the one-room schools as possible and developing a standard curriculum for all children attending public schools. School authorities agreed to the basic curriculum of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics along with History, English Grammar, Science, Music, Industrial Arts (carpentry and home economics), and penmanship for all students. However, many parents and county officials questioned the utility of having to study Latin if a child would not attend college. The report also acknowledged the difficulties in providing adequate housing for teachers who taught in rural areas and small villages, where there was inadequate housing available for newcomers.³⁶

After reviewing the Flexner and Bachman study, the General Assembly passed a new law requiring that schooling be available for all children aged six to 18, including attending high school through the tenth grade.³⁷ The mandatory attendance law required that children remain in school until they were 12 years old unless they were gainfully employed. Although the law continued to allow a seven-month school year for African Americans as opposed to the nine months established for the white schools, there were several requirements that would be beneficial to Charles County's African American students.

³³ Cox was a local landowner who assisted John Wilkes Booth and an associate after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865. Charles County Land Records Liber JST Folio 650 (1891).

³⁴ A "Notice" by Charles County Board of Education Secretary G. W. Berry requested proposals to construct a one-room addition to the standing Bel Alton school building appeared in the *Maryland Independent* on Friday, August 18, 1893 P.3. The notice specifies that it is for the white Bel Alton School, which remains standing at 9780 Bel Alton-Newtown Road in the Bel Alton Historic District (MIHP No. CH-560). The 1880 US Census shows several white families with children living in the "Allens Fresh" area near Samuel Cox.

³⁵ Historical Topo Map Explorer, US Geological Services Wicomico Quadrangle Maps from 1894, 1902 and 1920

³⁶ Flexner and Bachman were associated with John Dewey, a leading figure in the early twentieth century progressive school movement.

³⁷ Maryland State Archives, "Chapter 506" Session Laws of 1916, p. 1045-1947, downloaded from <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000534/html/am534--1045.html>

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In 1917, the State School Board hired J. Walter Huffington (1877-1953), a white man, to serve as the School Supervisor for all “colored” schools for the State.³⁸ Huffington prepared a report in July 1918 to explain his work supervising teachers and visiting schools throughout the state to ensure African American children’s education. He also stated that the State Board of Education had secured an appropriation from the Julius Rosenwald Fund for Colored Schools, and that grants of \$400 or \$500 for one-teacher or two-teacher schools respectively would be available to individual African American communities. The community would be responsible for raising at least a matching amount, while the County School Board would also have to provide funds.³⁹ Huffington appears to have also assisted the Charles County School Board by identifying two women to serve as “Colored Schools Supervisors” between 1917 and 1919.

Chapter 20, Subsection 142 of the new public education law required each county school board to establish a “central colored industrial school” in order to teach “domestic science” and the appropriate industrial arts as determined by the local school board.⁴⁰ The School Board took no action until 1917, when it first hired Mary Eslanda Smith-Swann and Blanche Furniss (or Furness) to serve as the “Colored Schools Supervisor.” Smith-Swann worked from 1917 until January 1919, and Furniss worked from January to August 1919. Both women worked with local children and parents, planting gardens and canning produce. During this time, Charles County also employed both a Farm Agent and a Home Demonstration Agent who worked with both white and African American groups to improve farming practices as well as domestic skills. Activities also included the “Home Makers” Club (Colored) for school children. Leah D. Woodson, the County Home Demonstrator in 1919, worked with Blanche Furniss at the Pomonkey Industrial School, as well as Home Makers Clubs at the Bel Alton, Tompkinsville, and La Plata “colored schools.” Activities included raising chickens and painting the interior of the Bel Alton “Colored” School.⁴¹

As part of the 1916 law, the General Assembly also set the salaries for the African American teachers at a lower rate than white teachers because many legislators believed that the teachers were poorly educated, without at least a high school degree, if not a college degree. The Legislature tasked the State Board of Education with establishing appropriate curricula for each grade as well as good designs for school buildings, thus ending the long-running debate about what constituted a sufficient course of study for educating rural students. Although the curriculum argument included both white and African American students, many white school authorities believed that African Americans were incapable of learning the same things as whites. Further, white school authorities expected that African Americans would not consistently

³⁸ Laws of Maryland, Chapter 506, P. 1008, downloaded from <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000534/html/am534--1008.html>

³⁹ Huffington, “Supervision of Colored Schools 1918,” PP 5-6 Although the grants were said to be \$400 to \$500, by 1922 when plans were made for both Benedict and Bel Alton Colored Schools, the grant for the one-Teacher school was \$500, while the two-Teacher school grant was \$800. Neither of the African American communities in Benedict or Bel Alton matched the donation of \$500 because they did not have the ability provide that kind of funding.

⁴⁰ Maryland State Archives, Session Laws of 1916, Chapter 20, p. 1045, downloaded from <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000534/html/am534--996.html>

⁴¹ Charles County Board of Education, “Minutes,” January 1917 to September 1919; also *The Maryland Independent*, “Home Maker Notes Colored Clubs” April 25, 1919, p.3

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pursue an education beyond a few years, particularly in rural areas, since families depended on financial contributions to be made by all family members capable of working.⁴² Although educating African American children in the first half of the twentieth century in Charles County could be irregular, parents regularly made sacrifices, such as allowing a child who could assist with farm work to attend school and live separately during the week, to achieve a better life for the next generation(s) through education.⁴³

Joseph Christopher (J.C.) Parks, “Colored Schools Supervisor,” and Charles County’s African American Schools from 1919 to 1961

In 1919, the Charles County School Board hired Joseph Christopher (J.C.) Parks (1892-1969) (Figure 3), to be the “Colored School Supervisor” in Charles County.⁴⁴ He is best known for his work as Supervisor from 1919 to 1961, advocating for “education with vision” for African American children, overseeing school construction and improvements, and recommending qualified teachers to hire. He also served as the liaison between the School Board and the school patrons (trustees, parents, students, and teachers at a particular school), as well as supervising and advising teachers about classroom issues. Further, he helped lead the teachers to secure equal salaries in 1941 through his work for the Maryland Colored Teachers Association (MCSTA) between 1928 and 1941.⁴⁵

⁴² When J. Walter Huffington, the State Colored Schools Supervisor, testified during the trial in *Murray v. University of Maryland* in 1935, he stated that children picked berries during the summer and for that reason the county school boards reduced the school year for African American children. See *University v. Murray*, 169 Md. 478 (1936) although *Murray* initially brought the case, it is listed by the Appeals Court title. *The Afro American*, “Md. Whites Have Longer Term and Better Transportation,” Jul. 27, 1935, P.23.

⁴³ Gregory, Clarence Kenneth, *The Education of Blacks in Maryland: an Historical Survey*, Pages 264-265. Martin, Robert, Ph.D., personal communications with Author, January 15, April 26 and May 8, 2024. Dr. Martin noted that his older brother, Ollie Martin, who lived on the family farm in east Charles County, attended Pomonkey High School during the 1930s, possibly into the early 1940s. He was a weekly boarding student, staying with a family in Pomonkey but returning home during the weekends. Martin’s father gave up having regular assistance with farm work while Ollie attended school. When Robert and his other siblings attended Bel Alton High School in the 1950s and early 1960s, they rode the bus to school on a daily basis, remaining available to assist with work on the family farm.

⁴⁴ After 1915, the term “School Commissioners” became the Board of Education or School Board.

⁴⁵ Between 1917 and 1919, the Charles County Board of Education hired two women, Mary Eslanda Smith-Swann and Blanche Furniss (or Furness) to serve as the “Colored Schools Supervisor,” Smith-Swann worked from 1917 until January 1919 and Furniss worked from January to August 1919. Due to World War I restrictions and the ‘Flu Pandemic in 1918-1919, both women worked with local children and parents, planting gardens and canning produce. Smith-Swann resigned in January 1919. No explanation was given, but her new name “Swann” suggests that she married and moved from Charles County. Furniss is listed as a Somerset County teacher in the 1910 Census, where she lived with her parents in Princess Anne. No other information was found.

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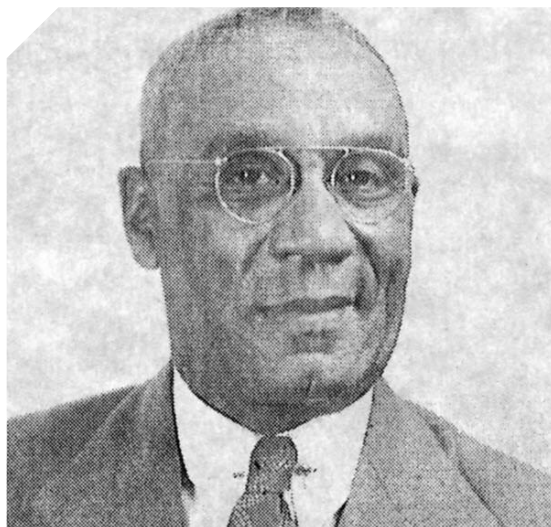


Figure 3. J.C. Parks, Charles County “Colored Schools Supervisor”
undated photo JC Parks Elementary School, Charles County

Parks started the Supervisor’s job well prepared to oversee the County’s African American schools. He graduated from Hampton Institute in 1917 with an education degree, and the year before had received a certificate in Building Trades which enabled him to draft and read building plans. The training did not qualify Parks as a professional architect, which then required additional training with a qualified architect.⁴⁶ Parks was a “race man” -- someone identified as a person who worked to help all African Americans improve their lives. Although he is best remembered for school construction, his advocacy for educating children as a way to improve the lives of the county’s African American residents was an important contribution. Through 1961, his continued activism for Charles County African American education benefitted both Charles County and Bel Alton High School.⁴⁷

Parks began teaching in Queen Anne’s County in 1917, but he was drafted by the U.S. Army in June 1918. He remained in Europe with the Army until 1919, after which he returned to Maryland. Although not explained in the School Board minutes or the annual School Board report, he likely met with Huffington, who recommended him for the position in Charles County. While Parks was away, Huffington began using the Rosenwald Fund for constructing African American schools in Maryland. Between 1920 and 1931, Parks worked to construct 12 schools, a teacherage, and an industrial shop using the Rosenwald Fund and building plans for African American children in Charles County.

Between 1917 and 1932, Julius Rosenwald, President of Sears, Roebuck and Company, first established the Rosenwald Foundation in collaboration with Booker T. Washington to fund

⁴⁶ Albert I. Cassell (1895-1969) was Parks’ contemporary. He worked with a local architect in Baltimore to learn drafting while attending the Baltimore Colored High School and attended Cornell University in Ithaca, NY to study architecture. He was drafted in 1918 but returned to Cornell and received his degree in Architecture in 1920. He then worked as an architect at Tuskegee Institute before returning to Howard University to open the School of Architecture.

⁴⁷Smith, Kathryn Gettings, J.C. Parks House Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form, MIHP No. CH-143

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challenge grants to African American communities. The fund assisted in the construction of 4,977 one-to-ten-teacher schools in 17 southern states from Maryland and Kentucky to Texas. In Maryland, local African American communities constructed 156 schools between 1917 and 1932. In the *Rosenwald Schools of Maryland* Multiple Property Documentation Form, historian Susan Pearl states that the total number included 58 one-teacher buildings, 68 two-teacher buildings, 15 three-and-four-teacher buildings, 15 buildings for five or more teachers, three industrial shops, and two teacherages. Pearl further states that J. Walter Huffington, the State “Colored Schools Supervisor,” served as the Rosenwald Fund’s State Agent.⁴⁸

Because Charles County did not yet have a high school for African American children, Parks undertook the proposed Pomonkey County Training School as his first project in 1920. He applied for the Rosenwald Fund grant and then obtained the plans from the fund for the building. Parks also had to fundraise among the prospective patrons for the local citizen donation to match the Rosenwald Fund challenge grant. The school patrons responded by taking up collections at mass meetings, dinner dances, and picnics.⁴⁹ In the School Board “Minutes” between 1917 and 1924, the school is variously referred to as the “Industrial School,” “County Training School,” or “High School.” The terms were used interchangeably, but to African Americans it meant a high school education such as could be obtained from public high schools for African Americans in Baltimore or Washington, D.C. To whites it meant training African Americans in industrial arts to improve farming skills and light construction for boys and for girls, domestic sciences, including home economics courses that improved cooking, sewing, and canning skills. If children acquired these skills, white school authorities believed they would be best prepared to be good farmers and continue living in Charles County. In his 1918 report, Huffington proposed a “County Training School” for construction in Pomonkey, which could be used to train children who wanted to be teachers. Many local parents, as well as students, either in seventh grade or out of school since it ended with seventh grade, advocated for the school, frequently appearing at School Board meetings to voice support. On Charles County’s west side, many African American families did not solely rely on farming as an income source, but also worked at the Indian Head Powder Factory, a U.S. Navy munitions factory. Even for unskilled laborers, the jobs and pay were regular. Their prosperity enabled parents and children to hope for improved lives through further education.⁵⁰

The Pomonkey High School building, constructed in 1920, was an example of the “County Training School” used by the Rosenwald Fund [Figure 4]. The Charles County School Board enlarged it by adding two more classrooms in 1923, with the teacherage and industrial shop constructed in 1928 and 1931 respectively.⁵¹ Space in the teacherage also served as a girls’

⁴⁸ Pearl, Susan, *The Rosenwald Schools of Maryland* Multiple Property Documentation Form (2014)

⁴⁹ Advertisements in *The Maryland Independent*, “Mass Meeting,” Feb. 6, 1920, P. 4, “School Notice,” Feb. 6, 1920, P. 4, “First Annual Tournament and Ball,” April 13, 1920, P. 4, “Come! Come!” April 8, 1921 P. 4 and “Stop! Look! Listen!” July 25, 1924, P. 3, Port Tobacco, MD

⁵⁰ Howard, Salome Freeman, “Oral History,” by John Wearmouth, May 10, 1990. Howard discussed her father working at the Indian Head factory and that he started in the early 1890s. He sent her and her brother to Roman Catholic schools in Virginia.

⁵¹ A “teacherage” was a dormitory type building used by women teachers if the schools they served lacked properties where they could board or rent.

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dormitory for female students who chose to board rather than commute daily.⁵² Other students, including males, boarded at other homes nearby.⁵³ As school started in 1920, the students began to study in eighth, ninth and tenth grade classes. If a student finished tenth grade, they would receive a graduation certificate. The Rosenwald building remained in use as the high school until 1931, when a second building was constructed. The 1920 building became the Pomonkey Elementary School, but it was destroyed by fire in 1943.



Figure 4. Pomonkey High School, Pomonkey, Charles County, c.1920-1923 (Courtesy of Fisk University, Rosenwald Fund Archives). This building became the Pomonkey Elementary School, but was subsequently destroyed by fire.

Students who lived outside Pomonkey worked to save money to be able to attend Pomonkey High School.⁵⁴ From 1920 until 1932, because the county lacked many paved roads,

⁵² EHT|Tracerics, "Identifying and Evaluating Rosenwald School Facilities," P. 1; and Pearl, Susan G., "Rosenwald Schools of Maryland" National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form Page E1. Pearl does not describe the Pomonkey High School as a boarding school.

⁵³ Gregory, Clarence Kenneth, *The Education of Blacks in Maryland: an Historical Survey*, Pages 264-265. Martin, Robert, Ph.D., personal communications with Author, January 15, April 26 and May 8, 2024. Dr. Martin noted that his older brother, Ollie Martin, who lived on the family farm in east Charles County, attended Pomonkey High School during the 1930s, possibly into the early 1940s. He was a weekly boarding student, staying with a family in Pomonkey but returning home during the weekends. Martin's father gave up having regular assistance with farm work while Ollie attended school. When Robert and his other siblings attended Bel Alton High School in the 1950s and early 1960s, they rode the bus to school on a daily basis, remaining available to assist with work on the family farm.

⁵⁴ The high school had several names that were used interchangeably by Charles County school officials, African American patrons and friends, and the local newspapers. It was a county training school at one time, likely because the Rosenwald Fund used that name for the type of school building; Pomonkey was also an "industrial school" and then a "high school." Home Makers Clubs Colored Girls" *The Marland Independent*, Friday, April 25, 1919, P. 3

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with little public transportation available for African American children, many students boarded at school or with local residents. Starting in 1932, the School Board, with the assistance of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the Rosenwald Fund, paid for bus transportation that took children from Tompkinsville in southeast Charles County two hours each way. Students would start the two-hour trip at 7:00 a.m., arrive at school at 9:00 a.m., leave school at 5:00 p.m., and arrive home at 7:00 p.m.⁵⁵ The Pomonkey High School served African American students from 1920 to 1969 in three different buildings as a Charles County public school. A remnant of the 1932 and 1952 high school building and the gymnasium remain standing, but not the complete school, so it is not comparable to Bel Alton High School.⁵⁶

While parents and students planned a new high school, some residents sought better primary schools. In September 1920, a delegation of school patrons from District 9 appeared before the School Board to request a new school near Benedict in the northeast part of Charles County. The original school constructed in the neighborhood was a Freedmen's school dating from the late 1860s. The School Board agreed to construct a new school, and the patrons offered to raise \$150. At a subsequent meeting, the patrons indicated that they raised \$200, which was used to pay for the school site. The Rosenwald Fund record for the school notes that the community ultimately paid \$250, while the County contributed \$1375, and the Rosenwald Fund provided \$500 for the one-teacher school. The Benedict School's design allowed the building to be placed facing either north or south, known as the Rosenwald Fund "School Plan 1A."⁵⁷ The school is described here to provide an example of one type of Rosenwald School that was built in Charles County around the same time as the Bel Alton "Colored" School. Although the Benedict "Colored" School was surveyed during the Charles County Historic Resources Survey in 2001, it no longer stands on Prince Frederick Road.⁵⁸

History of the Bel Alton High School Property: 1911 to 1966/1969

In 1911, the St. Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society purchased an acre of land at the intersection of Iring Road with Crain Highway from Thomas R. Gardiner, the landowner of Equality, and constructed the "Bel Alton Social Hall," where in 1919 and 1921, Oscar Frederick advertised Christmas dances.⁵⁹ The society was part of the mutual aid movement that African Americans participated in after the end of enslavement to ensure financial help for doctor's bills and funeral expenses. The society appears to have been associated with African American

mentions the Hill Top Club members taking poultry work to earn money for their board bills at the "Industrial School" which is what Pomonkey was called.

⁵⁵ Rosalie Whiting Kelly, "Tompkinsville Colored Two-Room School" in *Our Legacy One- and Two-Room Schools of Charles County*, PP. 108-109. See also Charles County Board of Education, "Minutes," May 12, 1931

⁵⁶ Smith, Kathryn Gettings, "Old Pomonkey High School" Maryland Inventory of Historic Places Form for CH-503 (1998). Most recently, Nicole Diehlmann included the Old Pomonkey High School in the historic district nomination for the Pomonkey Historic District (2023), CH-1021.

⁵⁷ CCBOE *Minutes*, September 7, 1920 and April 5, 1921; Rosenwald Fund Archives, "Benedict School, Charles County, Md."

⁵⁸ Cathy Thompson and Dorothea Smith, personal communications with author, June 4, 2024.

⁵⁹ From the land records for the Bel Alton schools, it is difficult to determine exactly where the property was, but it appears that part of it faced Crain Highway while the northern boundary touched Irving Road.

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Roman Catholics in the area, but it did not become a community center until the early twentieth century.⁶⁰

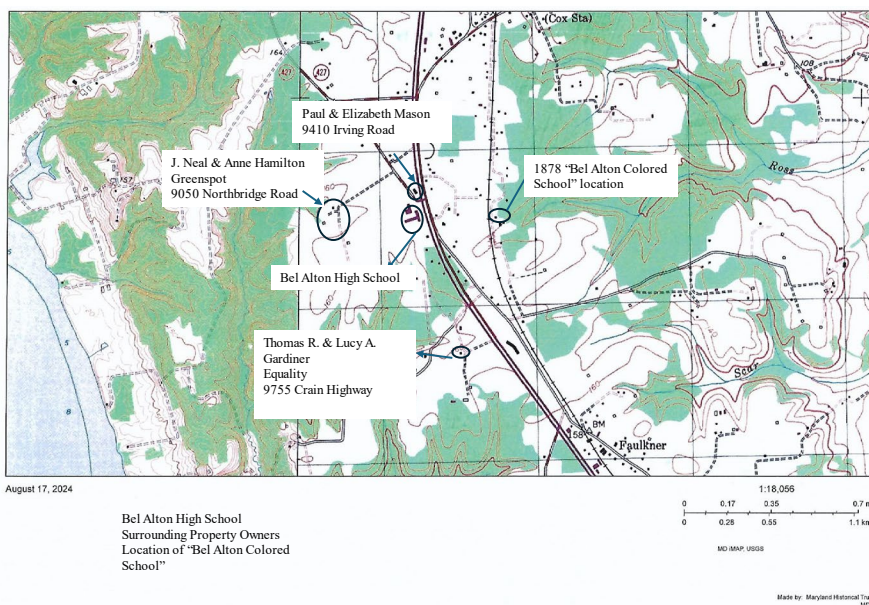


Figure 5: Location Map showing 1878 Bel Alton “Colored” School, 1938 Bel Alton High School, and three surrounding property owners, for location purposes only and not for boundaries. The 1923 Rosenwald Bel Alton School was immediately south of the high school’s location.

“Bel Alton Colored School,” a Rosenwald School

On November 1, 1921, a delegation of Bel Alton school patrons attended the monthly School Board meeting to request a “better” school. Although Parks did not attend the meeting, he met with the group of interested parents and trustees to discuss their request prior to the School Board meeting. As he typically did, he also advised the School Board through F.B. Gwynn, School Superintendent, of the request by writing Gwynn a letter so that the meeting between the Patrons and School Board would be productive. Two School Board members present “endorsed” the request and promised to seek funding. The patrons returned to discuss the new school on June 6, 1922, and the School Board agreed to request \$500 as the County’s contribution, and an additional \$500 from the Rosenwald Fund, managed by J. Walter Huffington for Maryland.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, there are no records for the St. Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society mentioned in the recent Charles County histories or earlier studies, and the Archives at Georgetown University that hold the Society of Jesus’ records do not have any information. Based on a review of advertisements in *The Maryland Independent* between 1916 and 1921, there were four such groups that advertised: St. Francis in Grosstown, St. Mary’s in Bryantown, Cobb Neck (this does not have an associated church name) and St. Thomas in Bel Alton.

⁶¹ Clark, Alcena Modesta Key, “Oral History,” by John Wearmouth, December 18, 1988; CCBOE, “Minutes,” November 1, 1921 and June 6, 1922. In *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Mary S. Hoffschwelle states that each state designated an individual to serve as the contact person to receive an annual allocation for school construction. Maryland’s 1916 school law required that the State “Colored Schools Supervisor” be a white man and J. Walter Huffington as the Supervisor was designated to oversee the annual allocation and give grants from \$400 to \$800 depending on the size of the school.

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The Rosenwald Fund Archive records also show that in 1922 and 1923, the Bel Alton patrons contributed \$225, \$1200 came from public (county) funds, and the Rosenwald Fund provided \$500 (Figure 5). The \$225 contribution paid for the two acres of land south of Bel Alton purchased from Lucy A. and Thomas A. Gardiner, the owners of Equality (Figure 5).⁶² The new school lot was directly south of the St. Thomas Society property and the deed transferring the land to the School Board identified it as “the Negro Social Hall lot.” The School’s Trustees sold the 1878 school building and parcel located on the east side of the Baltimore Potomac Railroad Pope’s Creek Branch to Robert L. Digges and his wife, Catherine, on October 10, 1922, for \$60.00.⁶³

Bel Alton School,	Md.
Charles County	
Two acres of land	
One-teacher type	
Built under the 1922-23 budget	
Application No. 10-B	
Total cost	\$1,925.00
Negroes	\$225.00
Whites	
Public	1,200.00
Rosenwald	500.00

Figure 5. Bel Alton School Rosenwald Fund Information Card 1923 (Courtesy Fisk University, Rosenwald Fund Archives)

In his role as “Colored Schools Supervisor,” Parks prepared applications for school funding such as the Jeanes Fund for teacher pay, Slater Fund for industrial arts instruction, and Rosenwald Fund for buildings, and worked with School Superintendent F.B. Gwynn and Huffington to obtain plans to be used at different school sites.⁶⁴ The two-acre site for the new

⁶² Between 1923 and 1957, the Charles County School Board purchased five parcels totaling 12.76 acres on the west side of Crain Highway (US 301). Parcel 1: Charles County Land Records (CCLR) Liber 40 Folio 415, Gardiner to School Board, April 2, 1923, Parcel 2: Liber 68 Folio 540, J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to School Board, May 25, 1938, Parcel 3: Liber 68 Folio 542, Paul and Elizabeth Mason to School Board, May 27, 1938, Parcel 4: Liber 68 Folio 543, St. Thomas Beneficial Society to School Board, May 25, 1938, and Parcel 5: Liber 130 Folio 543, Francis E. and Anne D. Hamilton to School Board, June 19, 1957.

⁶³ CCLR, Liber 39 Folio 525, (1922) for the 1878 school and parcel; Liber LWMA 40 Folio 415 (1923) for the 1923 “Bel Alton Colored School”

⁶⁴ The Jeanes Fund provided funding for teachers’ salaries while the Slater Fund provided funding for industrial education, and the Rosenwald Fund provided funding for schools, libraries and school transportation.

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“Bel Alton Colored School” was on the west side of MD 3 (Crain Highway/US 301), which the Maryland State Roads Commission constructed in 1911. Like the railroad in 1872, the new highway split the Equality property into two parts, and the owners sold land near the highway. Its initial construction likely allowed the St. Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to purchase the parcel near the intersection of MD 3 with Irving Road.

The “Bel Alton Colored School” faced east and made use of Rosenwald Fund Plan 1, a one-teacher school facing either east or west. It opened in October 1923 with two teachers to serve the communities from Spring Hill, Bel Alton, and Faulkner, or the children living within a five-mile radius who could walk to the school. The “Waldorf Colored School” photograph (Figure 7) from the 1940s shows a Rosenwald School Plan No. 1, a one-teacher school that faced west that was similar to “Bel Alton Colored School.” It, too, was a one-teacher school that used the industrial room as a second classroom because of the large number of children who attended.⁶⁵ Pearl further notes in the *Rosenwald Schools of Maryland* Multiple Property Documentation Form that the Waldorf School does not survive.



Figure 7. The Rosenwald Fund Waldorf Colored School c.1940s. Because the school faced west, the classroom windows are on the left side of the building. (Source: NARA)

⁶⁵ Charles County Board of Education, “Minutes” for monthly meetings November 1, 1921 and June 6, 1922. The School Board Minutes indicate that the Bel Alton Colored School met in an unidentified rented building near Bel Alton while the new building was constructed. Rosenwald Fund Archives, “Bel Alton School, Charles County, Md.”

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The School Board ultimately purchased 12.76 acres between 1923 and 1957 from adjoining property owners, including a Roman Catholic beneficial society, to construct primary, elementary, and secondary schools with ancillary buildings surrounded by playgrounds and playing fields. The School Board constructed the different schools in response to statewide educational requirements and to the residents who advocated for a high school.

During 1922 and 1923, Parks oversaw the completion of three Rosenwald schools, starting with Pomonkey High School, and both Bel Alton and Benedict one-teacher schools. Through his leadership, the Charles County School Board constructed 12 Rosenwald Schools, along with a teacherage and an industrial shop by 1932.⁶⁶ The teachers discussing the primary schools in *Our Legacy: One and Two-Room Schools of Charles County*, identify both primary schools as two-room schools because the School Board assigned two teachers to each to teach first through third grades and fourth through seventh grades. However, the Rosenwald Fund design called the buildings a one-teacher school classroom with a separate workroom. Having two teachers at a school reduced the number of children that each teacher had to teach. From an economic point of view, hiring two teachers and designating the more senior as the “principal teacher” allowed that teacher to receive a higher salary. A teacher’s pay would increase with seniority in the county school system (and this applied to white teachers as well).

As part of his advocacy for Charles County’s schools, Parks consistently sought the best teachers he could find. In addition to hiring graduates from the State Normal School at Bowie, which was the state’s African American teachers’ college, he hired graduates from a variety of schools such as Virginia Union College, Virginia State College, Hampton Institute, North Carolina State College, West Virginia State College, Howard University, and Ohio State University. He traveled, but he also regularly communicated with colleagues at these schools. Huffington is also known to have advertised for teachers at these schools. As the largest group of African American professionals in Charles County, the teachers modeled middle class values to their students and the parents. Because many came from other states and had college educations, they also brought different points of view and experiences to share with Charles County’s residents.⁶⁷ Because Charles County was rural, teachers received the minimum salary allowed by the State law. That made middle class African American teachers reluctant to come to the county, or for a quality teacher to stay for more than a few years, although many did remain.⁶⁸

The Rosenwald Fund schools were a success for the African American communities that had been able to obtain a school by 1932, when the program ended following Rosenwald’s death. But as well-built and well-intended as they were, they did not address the Maryland school

⁶⁶ Susan Pearl indicates in the Maryland Rosenwald Schools National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form (2014) that none of Charles County’s Rosenwald Schools remain.

⁶⁷ In their Oral Histories, Lena Smith Dyson, Mary B. Neal and James Washington state that each was told to contact Parks about a job in Charles County, after contacting Huffington. See College of Southern Maryland, Lena Smith Dyson, Mary Ellen Neal[e], and James Milton Washington Oral History interviews by John Wearmouth

⁶⁸ Charles County Retired School Personnel Association, *Our Legacy, One- and Two-Room Schools of Charles County*,” Editors John M. and Roberta J. Wearmouth (2009)

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system's fundamental problem: whites discriminated against African Americans by denying their children the same education as white children. A decent school building did not guarantee equal school terms or teaching the same subjects that white children received. In Charles County, by 1930, the School Board had constructed five high schools in the county. There were four high schools for white children, located in La Plata, Waldorf, Pomfret, and Hughesville, but only Pomonkey High School for African American children, who were either required to travel from all areas of the county to attend the school or pay boarding fees. Further, the School Board began consolidating the white schools and moving children into separate graded classes so that they learned the same lessons with other similarly aged children. Although the county's African American elementary school-aged children were in graded classes, they still attended school in one-and-two-room buildings. Parks understood the issue and with others worked to make changes to the system.

In 1935, the Bel Alton patrons requested a two-room addition for the "old school," but the School Board advised that they apply to the County Commissioners before they would agree to the request. The County Commissioners agreed to provide the funding, and the new design was soon completed. The design for the new classrooms called for two 20-foot x 30-foot classrooms, and a 6-foot x 35-foot-long hallway between the new and old rooms. The new rooms created a much larger building and left open the option for a future addition that could be constructed on the south side of the school, in anticipation of more students. Indeed, during the Depression, more children attended school and stayed longer because there were fewer jobs, which undoubtedly spurred the activity of the Bel Alton Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) (Figure 8).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ CCBOE, "Minutes," February 12, 1935. The Bel Alton Colored School addition plans are in the J.C. Parks Collection at the Charles County Department of Planning and Growth Management.

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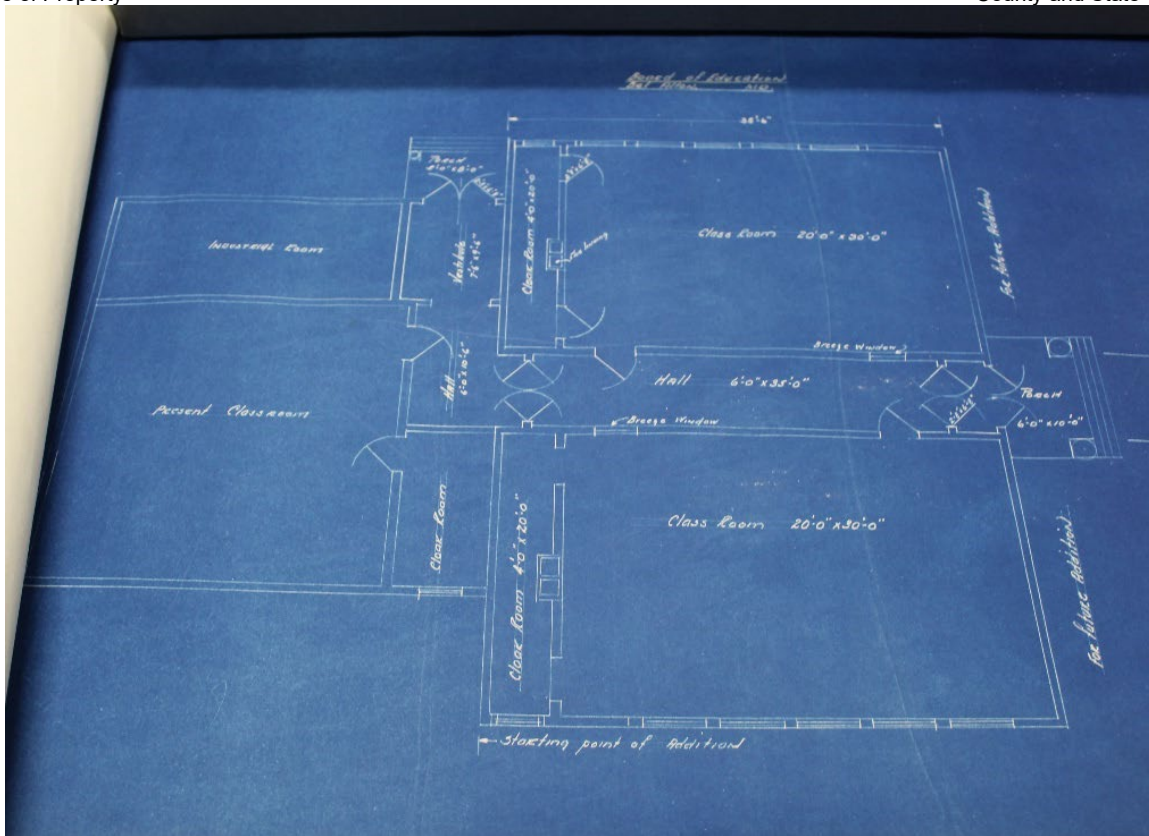


Figure 8. 1923 Bel Alton one-teacher Rosenwald School on left and new two-room addition with new orientation to the south on right.

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African American Activism and Bel Alton High School Construction: 1936 to 1938

In the fall of 1936, Mrs. M. Blanche Tolson (Figure 9) of Bel Alton wrote to Parks about obtaining a new high school on the east side of Charles County for African American children. Tolson had helped found the Bel Alton PTA. Although this PTA seems to have been the most active in the cause, other individuals and groups in the southern part of the county also assisted with advocating for a new high school. The Tompkinsville PTA was the first to raise \$100 to support the new high school, and Mrs. Alice Butler of Rock Point made a trip to Annapolis to advocate for the school. Between February and April 1937, the entire Charles County Legislative Delegation supported S.B. 151, "AN ACT to authorize the County Commissioners of Charles County, upon the recommendation of the County Board of Education, to issue coupon bonds to the extent of Twenty-five Thousand Dollars (\$25, 000. 00) on the faith and credit of said County for erecting, equipping and furnishing a new High School Building for children of the negro race" which passed both legislative houses. Governor Harry Nice signed it to become effective on June 1, 1937. When word reached the School Board on June 15, 1937, the Board President signed the resolution requesting the County Commissioners to sell coupons for the \$25,000 bonds, which occurred in September 1937 (Figure 10).⁷⁰ The activism and agency of the parents, teachers, and students in the small rural African American communities in southern Charles County demonstrates their determination to achieve a better education for themselves and their children.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Charles County Retired School Personnel Association, *Our Legacy One- and Two-Room Schools of Charles County*, P. 108 Rosalie Whiting Kelly in her 1984 Oral History stated that the Tompkinsville PTA was the first to raise \$100 for the new high school. Mary Butler Thomas recalled in 1992 that her mother, Mary Butler, traveled to Annapolis in an article by Kurt Rudermant "For Former Students, Bel Alton was their Gateway to Education," *The Maryland Independent* on April 17, 1992. For the school bond law, see Session Laws 1937, Chapter 304, <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000412/html/am412--574.html>. Given the smoothness of the law's passage, it seems likely that Walter Mitchell, who had been a state Senator representing Charles County had been working to move it forward. His appearances on behalf of the County's African Americans is noted in the School Board's minutes from time to time.

⁷¹ Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Archive, Mrs. Blanche Tolson, "A History of the Bel Alton P.T.A." an undated account. Mrs. Tolson also provided an account in the 1942 "Yearbook," and it appears that she remained involved with the P.T.A. into the 1960s. Ruderman, Kurt, "For Former Students, Bel Alton was their Gateway to Education," Mary Bulter Thomas (Class of 1942) recalled that her mother, Alice Butler. traveled to Annapolis. Terry, David Taft, "The Struggle and the Urban South, Confronting Jim Crow in Baltimore before the Movement," P.1..

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Figure 9. Mrs. M. Blanche Tolson, Bel Alton High School Parent-Teachers Association
Undated photo, Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Archive

At the March 9, 1937 School Board meeting, the Charles County Colored Federation of Parent-Teachers Associations attended and presented resolutions the group had passed. These echoed the complaints that the state's African American teachers' association had published in a 1934 *Afro American* article.⁷² The resolutions called for proper heating of the school buildings, extending the school term to 170 teaching days in 1936-1937 and to 180 teaching days for the 1937-1938 school year, with teachers paid fully for the extended time.

In 1935, Charles Hamilton Houston (1895-1950) and Thurgood Marshall (1908-1993), the attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), started prosecuting cases regarding segregated schools. Among the first was the case brought on Donald Gaines Murray's behalf in Baltimore. Murray wished to attend the University of Maryland Law School in Baltimore, where he lived. However, the University was a segregated school, and he was refused admission because he was African American. The NAACP brought suit using the Fourteenth Amendment because the University received public funding from the state. Maryland African Americans paid taxes, some of which the University received. The state law prohibited African American people from attending a white school. The NAACP demonstrated that the state's policy denying access to all taxpaying citizens was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Maryland State Court of Appeals ordered that Murray be admitted in 1936. Houston and Marshall hoped that the NAACP cases attacking segregated schools would benefit the sharecroppers, laborers, and food service workers -- the people who lacked champions to help them fight for their civil rights. The legal cases that the NAACP brought did not have a direct effect on the Bel Alton High School story, but the school benefited from such proceedings as whites responded at the national and state levels to address different

⁷² *The Afro-American*, "Maryland Whites Rob Children of Equal Public School Facilities," September 29, 1923, p. 23

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aspects of segregated education starting in the late 1930s and culminating in the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954.⁷³

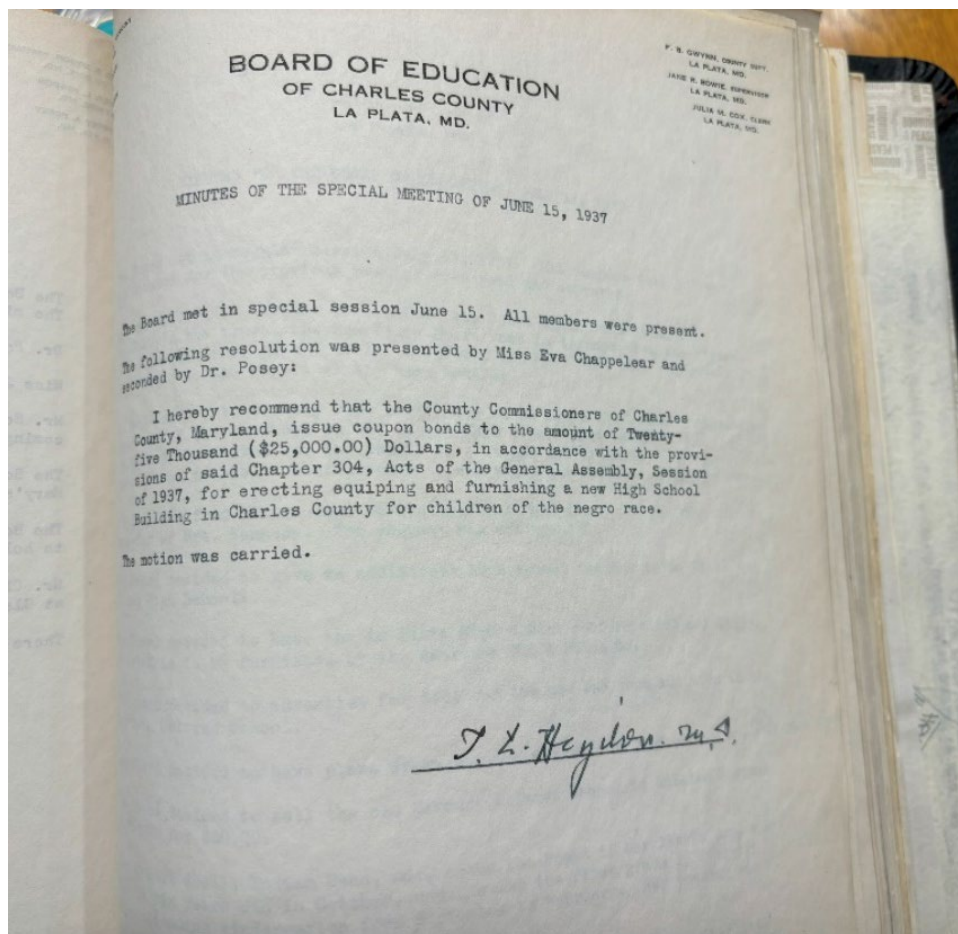


Figure 10. Charles County Board of Education Resolution Dr. T. L. Higdon, School Board President signed June 15, 1937, requesting the County Commissioners to issue \$25,000 in school bonds to pay for new High School

The minutes for the School Board's July 13, 1937 meeting indicate that the Board made the decision to construct a high school based on plans drawn by Mr. Herman F. (H.F.) Lund (1903-1989), a local engineer and builder. Lund was professionally qualified to design a school building, and his initial plan showed only five classrooms. The School Board requested additions, which seem to have included two more classrooms and lavatories, and the school opened with seven classrooms instead of the five that Lund originally drew. The new school featured electricity, restrooms, and running water from a well from its opening. These were

⁷³ Tushkent, Mark V., *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court 1936-1961*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 6

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important features, since most of Charles County remained rural and many residents at the time continued to use outhouses and oil lamps.⁷⁴

By December 1937, the School Board recognized Bel Alton, five miles south of La Plata, as the location for the new school. There is no explanation in the School Board minutes, but it was then the case that both the Pomonkey Elementary School and the Pomonkey High School were in the same building, but in different wings.⁷⁵ Having the schools adjacent to one another in rural areas such as Charles County in the 1930s reduced the amount of land needed for each school because both could share common elements such as driveways, playing fields, and auditoriums, which was the case for the Bel Alton Elementary and High Schools.⁷⁶ A centralized location also helped in a rural county with many unpaved roads and poor transportation. The school's location outside any town, but equidistant from La Plata, Rock Point, and Dent, and near other eastside towns such as Newport, Tomkinsville, and Malcolm made it a relatively convenient location for students to travel.

The school building reflects Colonial Revival, Beaux Arts, and Progressive School designs, several of which are also associated with Rosenwald School designs, and the Works Project Administration (WPA) designs found in two other rural African American schools in Maryland. The Colonial Revival designs are found in the use of the high roofs as well as the columned entrance porches that use "colonial" columns. Bel Alton High School's design provided a well-lighted building with batteries of both four and five windows in each bay. Unlike the WPA school projects, Lund's design had narrower frames so that there was more glass than frame to increase the classroom lighting. The two projects completed by the WPA between 1936 and 1938, the Centreville-Ridgely Colored School (WPA Project No.125) from 1936 to 1937 and the Port Deposit Colored Elementary School (WPA Project No. 583) from 1936 to 1937, featured one or two batteries of five large double-hung windows in the classroom wall.⁷⁷ The Centreville-Ridgely School was a two-room high school, and each bank lighted a room.

The online photo of the Centreville-Ridgely School shows only the empty window frames rather than installed windows. But it is evident that the windows were large and meant to help light the classroom's interior. At Port Deposit School the sashes of windows have different configurations with 12 lights in the top sash and nine lights in the bottom. The State School Board required that before any county undertook school construction, they needed to consult with the state. Albert S. Cook, the State Superintendent from 1920 to 1940, frequently consulted with Charles County about its schools. It is possible that either Cook or Huffington, the "State

⁷⁴ CCBOE, "Minutes" July 13, 1937. Lund's plans are in the J.C. Parks Collection at the Charles County Department of Planning and Growth Management, La Plata

⁷⁵ In the School Board minutes from 1932, Pomonkey High School received a new building. A second addition was constructed in 1938, and that housed the elementary school.

⁷⁶ This is still the case for the La Plata High School and Elementary schools which are less than half a mile distant from each other. Schools in Bel Air, Harford County and Williamsport, Washington County also have multiple schools adjacent to one another.

⁷⁷ Neither building appears to be included in the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. For further information, see University of Maryland Archives, WPA Project No. 125:

https://archives.lib.umd.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/554710 and WPA Project No. 583:
https://archives.lib.umd.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/359794

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Colored Schools Supervisor,” recommended the tall windows. However, the windows are also similar to those used by the Rosenwald Fund schools, which also drew upon Progressive School designs, so Lund had several examples from which to choose, including the adjacent “Bel Alton Colored School.”

An important feature of the high school is the “double loaded” rooms, meaning that a central corridor runs north to south with classrooms on both the east and west sides of the corridor. Lund attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and graduated with his engineering degree in 1928. In making the central corridor high school design, it seems that perhaps Lund drew on his Beaux Arts training because the design of the center hall provides a recognizable circulation system that is a hallmark of Beaux Arts designs.

On February 8, 1938, the School Board purchased lots adjacent to the Bel Alton Colored School on the west side of MD 3 (Crain Highway), obtaining parcels from the Hamiltons and the Masons, farmers and owners of the adjoining land, along with the St. Thomas Society. The Bel Alton PTA paid the School Board \$414.02, and an additional \$91.02 the following month, totaling \$505.02 as a payment for the twelve acres of land to be used for the school.⁷⁸ The old “Negro Social Hall” or St. Thomas Society building is not named in the deed transferring the parcel to the School Board. However, shortly after the high school opened in Fall 1938, members of the African American Bel Alton Home Makers Club appeared and requested that they be allowed to use the “old hall” for their meetings. It appears that the building remained on the school property and that the Bel Alton PTA improved it. In School Board minutes, it was called a classroom and a dwelling that enabled the PTA to make some money. However, no description exists and no further information is available. There was also a “teacherage” across the highway from the school where teachers lived.⁷⁹

Bel Alton High School: 1938 to 1966

The high school opened in September 1938 for seventh through tenth grades, with the adjacent expanded four-room Rosenwald building serving as the elementary school housing first through sixth grades. At the time, a student completed high school after passing eleventh grade. Rising tenth grade students attending Pomonkey High School but living on the east side of the county transferred to Bel Alton High School. The local children who stopped attending school after completing seventh grade because they could not afford the cost of boarding or transportation to attend Pomonkey High School also returned to school. The school quickly became overcrowded. That fall, the seventh-grade class had 98 members on opening day in 1938. Tolson’s two stepdaughters, Sophia (Class of 1940) and Dorothy (Class of 1943) Smith, as well as Quentin Mason (Class of 1943) were among those students who filled the school to capacity. Sophia was 16 when she graduated and served as the 1940 Class Salutatorian, while Mason, as a member of Bel Alton High School’s New Farmers of America, won the corn silage

⁷⁸ CCLR, J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to County Board of Education, Liber 68 Folio 40 May 25, 1938; St. Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to County Board of Education, Liber 68 Folio 43 May 25, 1938; Paul and Elizabeth Mason to Count Board of Education, Liber 68 Folio 542, May 27, 1938; Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton, to County Board of Education, Liber 130 Folio 244, June 19, 1957. The School Board sold the property to the County Commissioners in 1991. See also, CCBOE “Minutes” February 8 and March 16, 1938.

⁷⁹ Cora Marshall, personal communications with author, March 24, 2024.

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judging contest in 1939. Mary Butler, Alice Butler's daughter also returned and graduated in 1942. None of this would have been possible without opening Bel Alton High School as a result of the parents, teachers and students' activism and agency.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ College of Southern Maryland, "Bel Alton High School Class of 1942 50th Anniversary Celebration," Bel Alton High School File; *The Afro American*, "New Farmer Heads in Md." Nov. 9, 1940, P.2. Mason is mentioned. Also, Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Archives, "1939-1965 Commemorative Yearbook" lists the graduating classes with each valedictorian and salutatorian. 1940 US Census, downloaded from HeritageQuest, Enoch Pratt Free Library.

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Figures 11 and 12. Bel Alton High School Cheerleading team (late 1950s) and Basketball team (early 1960s) (Courtesy Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Archives)

In the final annual edition of *The Rag*, which was the high school's monthly newspaper, in June 1942, the editors noted that the female students taking home economics helped to make

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student lunches during the year using the school's Home Economics classroom kitchen, and that the students also ran an aid station while learning first aid.⁸¹ Between 1938 and the early 1950s, sports were limited to annual field day competitions with Pomonkey High School, but Bel Alton also participated in the larger field days with schools from outside of Charles County.⁸²

The Rag also had an article by Mary B. Neal, Bel Alton Elementary School Principal, where she reported that a second two-room addition had been added to the 1923 Rosenwald building. While the rooms were under construction in 1941, the elementary school children attended classes in the high school auditorium. The School Board approved additional alterations for the elementary school in 1947 that included improved plumbing and heating. Until those were constructed, the children used outhouses, and the large student population made the situation unsanitary. The improvements were made, but in 1957, the six-room wooden school burned, and the children were transferred to the High School Annex.

School Consolidation and Improvements: 1947 to 1959

In 1947, the School Board formed a Building Committee and held a meeting with the County's Legislative Delegation to urge full support for the state's school funding program for school bonds. A total of \$800,000 would make the improvements the School Board hoped to achieve, and Senator James B. Monroe spoke in favor of the request.⁸³ The African American schools' share was \$200,000, with the largest portion of \$120,000 going to the construction of a new shop building and a four-classroom and office annex at Bel Alton High School that would be immediately west of the main school building. Washington, D.C. architect James J. Baldwin provided the industrial shop and annex buildings' designs. Baldwin advertised in *The Evening Star* and requested proposals for improvements to Bel Alton High School, including a four-classroom annex building.⁸⁴ It was urgent to expand the school since projections at the time anticipated that Bel Alton High School's student population would rise from 262 students in 1948/1949 to 546 students in 1954/1955. However, in 1949, the County Commissioners chose not to fund the proposed improvements for the high school, but did approve heating and indoor bathrooms to the elementary school.⁸⁵ Parks expected that with the construction of an annex that he reported in 1951, Bel Alton High School would have 11 classrooms.⁸⁶

As improvements planning continued, the issue of teachers' salaries came up. At the time, both white and African American teachers with a college degree were paid between \$1700 and \$2400 annually, which was the lowest amount in the state.⁸⁷ The issue was not the same as

⁸¹ College of Southern Maryland, "Bel Alton High School Class of 1942 50th Anniversary Celebration," Bel Alton High School File

⁸² *The Baltimore Sun*, "Sollers Point Team Takes State Track championship," May 21, 1950, P.SP-8; and "Sollers Point Track Winner" Takes First Place in Class A of State Championship," May 16, 1954, P. 3D

⁸³ *The Washington Post*, "\$800,000 School Program To Start in Charles County," May 17, 1947, P.3

⁸⁴ *The Evening Star*, "Advertisement for Bids," April 29, 1948, P.C-4

⁸⁵ "Charles School Fund Slashed to \$744,000," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1949, P. B3

⁸⁶ *The Afro-American*, "Modern School Plan Underway," Feb. 24, 1951, P.13

⁸⁷ The state's minimum salary for a qualified teacher with a college degree was \$1500 a year. The low salaries did not attract top teachers who could receive more money elsewhere. Between 1920 and 1968, many of the African American teachers attended summer school at Hampton Institute, Morgan State College, Bowie State College, Howard University, with many attending New York University in New York City.

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the unequal salary law from 1916 when the General Assembly set teachers' salaries and paid the African American teachers less than whites because they taught African American children (the law penalized any teacher who taught African American children). The 1938 lawsuit, *Mills v. Board of Education of Anne Arundel County*, filed by the NAACP for equal salaries had resolved the issue for all African American teachers and principals in the state.⁸⁸ Governor Herbert O'Connor signed the equal pay law in 1941, and Parks as the Executive Secretary of the MCSTA attended the law signing. However, as had been true in the nineteenth century, Charles County continued not to spend enough money on schools, whether it was buildings, students or teachers' salaries. The costs of having two separate systems meant that the county split the available money between them but not equally. The county regularly spent two-thirds of the student cost on a white child and one-third on an African American child. While this split was patently unfair, the underlying issue was that the total amount that the county used needed to be increased so that each child could be fully funded, and the teachers well-paid to provide an excellent education system.⁸⁹ Although the budgets made by the School Superintendent were approved by the School Board, it was the county commissioners who made the final decision.

In 1951, Parks stepped back from his role as the sole Charles County "Colored Schools Supervisor" to serve as "Colored Elementary Schools Supervisor." Between 1919 and 1951, Parks supervised all of the County's "colored" schools. In that role, he advised teachers in one- and two-room schools, as well as the PTAs, principals and teachers at the junior high and high schools. He was also frequently called upon to make minor building repairs such as replacing a broken glass pane. The job required him to own a car, and the School Board gave him some funding for expenses. In 1951, he gave up supervising junior high and high school faculties and interacting with those students, to focus solely on the elementary schools' facilities, faculty, and students. He remained in that role until his retirement in 1961. Charles County students could look forward to a future with adequate school buildings. Parks still worked toward achieving "education with vision," as the 1958 "Golden Panther" dedication described one of his sayings, but changes at the national level were occurring that would again affect Charles County's school children, both white and African American.⁹⁰

As part of the proposed improvements planned by the School Board in 1947, the need for school consolidation for the remaining 15 one- and two-room schools used by African American children was most important. One result of the NAACP's school lawsuits was that in Charles County, the School Board sought ways to make school facilities comparable if not completely equal. By 1951, the School Board had three new elementary schools either under construction or in final planning stages for construction for African American children: 1) a ten-room school in Marshall's Corner, 2) an eight-room school with offices in Wayside and Mount Hope, and 3) the earlier Mount Hope two-teacher school became a classroom annex. Although Parks anticipated that every child would be in a "modern classroom" by fall 1952, there were a few delays.⁹¹

⁸⁸ The Anne Arundel County case, *Mills v. Board of Education of Anne Arundel County*, 30 F. Supp. 245 (D. Md. 1939)

⁸⁹ This continues to be the case in the twenty-first century as Maryland counties continue to struggle with meeting the funding requirements of the Blue Ribbon Commission.

⁹⁰ Bel Alton High School Alumni Association, "Archive."

⁹¹ *The Afro American*, "Modern School Plan Under Way," February 24, 1951, P. 13

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Not all of Charles County's white residents were pleased to have African American consolidated schools in their neighborhood. In 1950, after the School Board purchased the land for the Wayside school, a white landowner raised objections, stating that the new school would cause his property as well as the Christ Church (Episcopal) Wayside to be devalued. The local African American community expressed its objections if the Charles County School Board chose to locate the school to another property. Ultimately, the School Board retained the original property to build the elementary school.⁹²

Starting with the 1950-1951 school year, Bel Alton High School began to teach students in the twelfth grade and graduated the first class in June 1951.⁹³ That same year, the school also began to offer students three different programs of study, tracking students into the Academic, Commercial, or General program areas, depending on the student's interests and abilities. These developments helped make Bel Alton High School's offerings more aligned with the typical high school experience of preparing students for a future beyond high school and home. Among the colleges, students chose Maryland State College in Princess Anne, Bowie State College, Morgan State College, Howard University, Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes (these are historic names used in the 1950s). Teachers were important resources for inspiring students to attend college, and their experiences helped expand students' horizons. Many students who studied in commercial courses found jobs with the federal government in Washington, D.C., while students studying industrial arts found jobs locally.

In 1954, construction of the improvements planned for Bel Alton High School in 1948 started. A new wing was added to the south side of the main building, with a raised basement and several classrooms on the first floor. The basement area became the cafeteria and assembly room. West of the main building, the four-classroom annex was constructed and aligned by a covered walkway between the two buildings. In 1959, the gymnasium and industrial arts/shop buildings were constructed on the northwest side of the main building. Even though the School Board knew that it would need to integrate the school system, the buildings represented improvements that would help the current students.

Despite the hardships they faced, Bel Alton High School teachers strove to reinforce a positive self-image among students. Some teachers came from other states, including Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. Parks sought faculty who could help inspire Charles County children. The high school's first principal, Sinclair Swann, who served from 1939 through 1942, was from Bermuda.⁹⁴ Cora Marshall, the high school English teacher, came from Salisbury.⁹⁵ Salome Freeman Howard, born in Charles County, graduated from Xavier College in New Orleans and attended high school at a Roman Catholic boarding school in Virginia.⁹⁶

⁹² *The Afro American*, "Dilly-Dally on Site Causes threat of Suit," July 15, 1950, P. 14

⁹³ Brown, Jack D. et al., *Charles County Maryland A History Bicentennial* Edition, P. 265. The School Board allowed both Bel Alton and Pomonkey high schools to extend secondary education to a twelve-year program, and in 1945 that the county's white high schools were able to extend their programs to twelve years.

⁹⁴ *The Evening Sun*, "Albert S. Swan Mass Slated Tomorrow, February 8, 1972, p. 13

⁹⁵ Marshall, Cora, Personal Communications with Author, March 4, 2024

⁹⁶ Salome Freeman Howard, Oral History Interview by John Wearmouth May 10, 1990

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Another avenue for achievement came through participation in the school's extracurricular activities. Throughout its history, Bel Alton had a variety of clubs, sports, band, and school choir that supported different student interests to help prepare them for roles outside of school and home. The Drama Club, Choir, New Farmers of America and New Homemakers of America clubs, basketball, volleyball, and track teams as well as cheerleading reinforced the positive self-image message. Initially, students participated in the statewide field days, basketball tournaments, and musical festivals, as well as games at the local level.⁹⁷ While Bel Alton had a baseball diamond and outdoor basketball court, the school lacked a gymnasium until 1959, when it was constructed along with the industrial arts/shop building. Into the 1960s, Charles County remained rural, and the School Board slowly developed athletic programs that required large financial investments for fields, structures, and equipment for both white and African American schools. As a result, Bel Alton's male students could play flag football, but not tackle football, because they lacked equipment.⁹⁸

After 1959, the School Board made no further efforts to adapt Bel Alton High School to the necessary standards for a 1960s junior or high school. The buildings had more uses and many more children than expected in 32 years. The Elementary School principal, Mary B. Neal, reported that before construction of the 1941 two-room elementary school addition, the overflow of children attended classes in the High School Auditorium. Following the 1957 fire, Mary Emily Whalen (Class of 1958) recalled that some elementary school classes were held in the high school's basement.⁹⁹ Salome Howard, the Physical Education teacher, also reported in her Oral History that she and female students shared the auditorium with the male students because they lacked separate gymnasium facilities, as had been reported in the 1947 *Evening Sun* article. The expense of making further improvements to the buildings would cost more than constructing a new building that would be more practical and useful for providing a high school education.

Integration in Charles County: 1954 to 1970

In 1952, the Supreme Court began hearing the five segregated school cases that collectively are called *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education*, a case that began in Topeka, Kansas. For the NAACP attorneys, with Thurgood Marshall as the lead attorney, the oral arguments and pleadings culminated nineteen (1935 to 1954) years of litigation about the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment that guarantees all citizens equal protections under a state's laws -- the same law that the NAACP used to sue the University of Maryland in 1935 in the *Murray v. University of Maryland* case about Murray's admission to the law school. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court announced its decision for Mr. Brown and other plaintiffs, ruling that school segregation was illegal ("Brown I"). In Maryland, the State and County School Boards all took a "wait and see" approach until the Supreme Court gave guidance on how the School Board should proceed. A second decision that overturned the 1896 *Plessy* decision came on May 31, 1955 ("Brown II"), urging all school boards to take steps to desegregate schools with

⁹⁷ *The Afro American*, 1950, "Sollers Point Team Takes State Track championship," May 21, 1950, P. SP-8, "Sollers Point Track Winner" Takes First Place in Class A of State Championship," May 16, 1954, P. 3D; also, *The Washington Post*, "Bel Alton, 34-30," Jan. 20, 1961, P.B-8

⁹⁸ Matthews Nolan Wills, personal communication with author, January 23, 2024

⁹⁹ Whalen, Mary Emily, Personal Communications with Author, January 23, 2024

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“all deliberate speed,” which caused the Charles County School Board to create a committee, take a citizens’ poll, and slowly move forward.¹⁰⁰

After receiving guidance from the State School Board and the Attorney General that the Supreme Court’s ruling was the law of the land in 1956, the School Board began the integration effort by announcing that first graders could integrate schools beginning in the 1956-1957 school year. They took no action for high school students. Known as a “Freedom of Choice” plan, integrated classes would be added each year until all twelve grades had integrated. That year, no white children applied to attend Bel Alton High School or Elementary schools. In 1957, perhaps at Park’s behest, five African American boys chose to attend school at the Indian Head Elementary School. However, the School Board had not planned to provide bus transportation for the children. One boy’s house stood near the white school’s bus route, but the driver did not pick him up. The child’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Hart, filed a lawsuit against the School Board. Before the trial started, however, the School Board agreed to allow the child to ride the bus, and the case was dismissed.¹⁰¹ The lawsuits demonstrated that local residents were prepared to litigate to obtain their rights.

Although school integration between 1955 and 1967 was its own event, it should be seen in the context of the activism and agency of African Americans after World War II. Men returned from fighting and loyally supporting the United States’ efforts, expecting some changes from the daily discrimination they and their families faced. Instead, changes occurred incrementally. The Supreme Court decision overturning segregated schools helped make African Americans as a group more activist and willing to take on white opposition because it was clear that there were judges who could make favorable decisions.

One Civil Rights event began in 1961, when a diplomat, Ambassador Adam Malik Sow from the African nation of Chad, was denied service at the “whites only” Bonnie Brae restaurant on U.S. 40 in Edgewood, Harford County, Maryland. He complained to both Secretary of State Dean Rusk and President John F. Kennedy. The event embarrassed Kennedy, since his foreign policy goal was to demonstrate that American democracy was a better form of government than Soviet communism. Several other African diplomats also complained, and the Kennedy Administration, through the State Department, worked with Maryland Governor J. Millard Tawes to change the Maryland public accommodations law. Along U.S. 40 between Baltimore City and Cecil County in Maryland were 47 “whites only” restaurants. When members of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) learned of Ambassador Sow’s denied service, they

¹⁰⁰ The Supreme Court heard a total of five cases about school segregation to provide the *Brown* decision: *Briggs v. Elliott* (South Carolina), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (Virginia), *Gebhart v. Belton* (Delaware) and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (District of Columbia). The decisions for Brown I and Brown II are cited as 347 U.S. 483 and 349 U.S. 294. CCBOE, “Minutes,” August 29, 1955, July 3, 1956, and February 25, 1964, Author’s personal communications with Jean Wills Stewart, November 15, 2023 and Marlene Randall Jamieson, May 7, 2024.

¹⁰¹ *The Afro American*, “Praises Vote Drive,” May 31, 1958, P. 2 and “Policies in County Schools,” February 15, 1958, P. 20

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supported the cause by protesting that as American citizens they, too, were not able to eat at these restaurants.¹⁰²

During May 1962, CORE expanded the protests and worked with college students on “Freedom Rides,” to demonstrate against the “whites only” policies of the restaurants on a ten-mile stretch of U.S. 301 in and around La Plata and as far west as Pomonkey. College students, including African American students from Morgan State College and the Charles County Branch of the NAACP, participated. Luther Stuckey, President of the NAACP Charles County Branch, addressed the group when they met at the Beehive Masonic Lodge in Pomonkey. Salome Freeman Howard, the Bel Alton teacher, was among the local Charles County “adults and youths” that the *Afro American* reporter, Frank Hunt, noted participating in the demonstrations, holding signs and picketing in front of each restaurant. As had been the case in the realm of education, both Tawes and the General Assembly were reluctant to exert leadership to bring about integration. Although efforts by the Governor and General Assembly to change the public access law began in 1961, it was not until March 1963 that the law was finally passed.¹⁰³ The local protests however, demonstrated that the African American community was active and expected change. In response to the activism, Charles County created a 12-member Human Rights Commission that was headed by J.C. Parks, starting in 1963. They investigated local complaints about businesses in the county that refused services to African Americans.¹⁰⁴

The CORE demonstrations caused the Charles County Branch of the NAACP to remain active. After attending the 1963 NAACP Annual Convention in Chicago and witnessing the actions of the Chicago NAACP Branch’s Youth Council, Salome Freeman Howard organized one at the Bel Alton High School. The Youth Council met at the Bel Alton High School to plan events. Between 1962 and 1964, Howard organized the students from both Bel Alton and Pomonkey High Schools in a variety of protests about grocery store hiring practices and “whites only” policies at local restaurants on US 301 and conducted demonstrations in Washington, D.C.¹⁰⁵ (Figure 11)

¹⁰² Renee Romano, “No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961 to 1964” *The Journal of American History*, P. 551

¹⁰³ Frank Hunt, “Protestors Hit Route 301 Cafes,” *The Afro American*, May 5, 1962, P. 14; also Salome Howard Freeman Oral History. Howard was President of the NAACP Charles County Branch in the 1950s.

¹⁰⁴ “Charles Asks Racial Board,” *The Baltimore Sun*, July 19, 1963, P. 21

¹⁰⁵ Both Jean Wills Stewart and Marlene Randall Jamieson recalled participating in the meeting at the high school and also demonstrating in Washington DC

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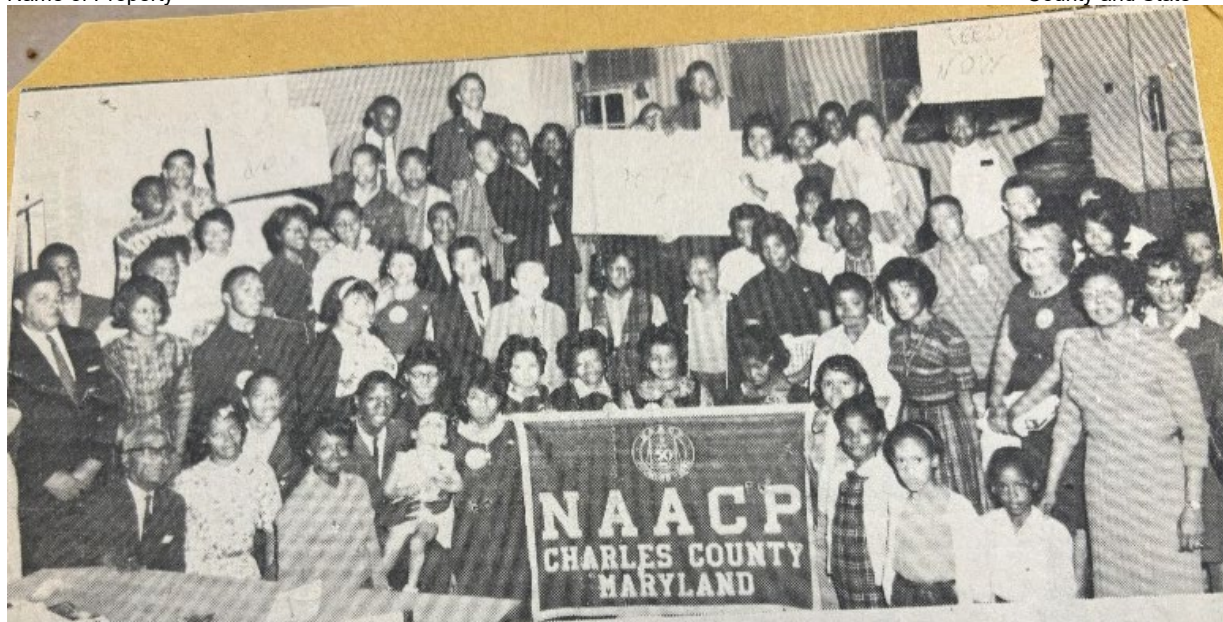


Figure 11. 1964 Photo of NAACP Charles County Branch Youth Council. Salome Howard is the woman in the light-colored dress on the right, and JC Parks is seated on the left. (Courtesy Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Archives)

Starting in 1962-1963, the School Board continued its “freedom of choice” program for school integration, and allowed high school students wishing to transfer to formally apply to the School Board and attend a meeting before entering La Plata High School (this was more than a white student transferring from another jurisdiction would be required to do). When the freedom of choice policy first started in 1956, the School Board anticipated that all schools would be integrated by 1962-1963, but that did not happen. Some Bel Alton High School teachers told their students that the white schools taught more advanced courses and that led to some leaving Bel Alton.¹⁰⁶ By 1964, the School Board still required an application, but a student did not have to appear for the request to be granted. That year, the School Board also required parents to affirmatively indicate their child’s school choice to ensure that all parents understood that the white schools were open to African Americans. Although more African American children attended La Plata High School, Bel Alton High School continued to operate as an all-African American school, since no white children applied to attend.¹⁰⁷ While many adults worked to integrate Charles County, African American parents and children hesitated to change schools. For parents, the issue was fear of reprisals, either on them or their children. People found the television images of angry white mobs and armed National Guardsmen at schools unsettling. In other states, people lost their jobs, and their properties were attacked for taking a stand for integration. Further, while Charles County had both white and African American populations, the two groups had few regular interactions because of the long history of enslavement and then segregation that had formalized interactions so that each group was largely unknown to the other.

¹⁰⁶ Jean Wills Stewart, Personal Communications with Author, November 15, 2023 and May 29, 2024

¹⁰⁷ Two white children whose parents owned property near Pomonkey High School chose in 1964 to attend rather than traveling to La Plata.

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In Charles County, individual students transferring to La Plata High School reported being ignored and physically attacked while in school, particularly during the first year, although in subsequent years, the situation improved as students got to know one another.¹⁰⁸ Other African American students riding buses reported that white children tried to order them to sit at the rear of the bus. In 1965, one fight started on the school bus from La Plata High School ended in the death of the student when the white boy's father shot and killed the African American student.¹⁰⁹ The students used the event to protest by marching from La Plata High School to the county courthouse.¹¹⁰

Starting in 1964, the School Board also asked African American and white teachers and principals to change schools (generally in pairs), so that a school would have a white principal and an African American vice principal. Teachers who taught the same subjects transferred, so that the white teachers came to Bel Alton High School. Both Salome Howard and Cora Marshall transferred to La Plata High School to teach science/physical education and English respectively. Although Howard did not remember any difficulties, Marshall recalled that a white teacher would leave the teacher lounge each time she entered. A mutual friend explained that the white teacher had difficulties in her life and Marshall should not take it personally.¹¹¹

Following the *Brown* decision, the US Congress passed two civil rights laws in 1957 and 1960 to move integration along. As civil rights demonstrations occurred more frequently, the Johnson administration worked with Congress to enact the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The law dealt with all aspects of civil rights, and Title VI "Education" specifically required that all unintegrated schools receiving federal funding for various programs, become fully integrated. Many school systems had tried to say that integration was met if a school had one African American teacher or student. However, that was not sufficient for the federal government.

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission, which was established as part of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, monitored school desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland counties. During 1966, the Maryland State Advisory Committee held meetings to learn about the school situation, initially including 18 counties before six submitted an "Assurance of Compliance," agreeing to desegregate by the 1967 school year. Charles County did not choose that method, but instead the County School Superintendent, Bruce G. Jenkins, stated that the School Board had approved a plan to construct two new high schools and establish "feeder schools" that would become a "geographical zone plan" so that students attended the elementary, middle or senior high school nearest to where they lived, regardless of whether the child was white or African American. Additional information contained in the February 1966 advisory committee report showed that Charles County had nine desegregated schools, with a total of 627 African American students and 5,178 white students. The number of African American teachers on biracial staffs at county schools was also small: 13 out of 181, while the rest remained in the

¹⁰⁸ Susan Kinzie, "Brown Brought Trauma and Triumph In Charles," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2004, P. Q4

¹⁰⁹ "Students March after Shooting," *The Afro American*, November 13, 1965, P. 13. Carroll Johnson, 15, was the boy who was shot and killed by Robert C. Tipton, who was later acquitted.

¹¹⁰ Jamieson, Marlene Randall, Personal Communications with Author, May 7, 2024

¹¹¹ Cora Marshall, personal communications with author, March 24, 2024.

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eight segregated schools, where eight white teachers also taught. The schools had an enrollment of 3,375 African American students.¹¹²

A member of the Charles County Branch of the NAACP, Mrs. Mary Queen, who was the branch's vice president and also the Chairwoman of the branch's Education Committee, spoke about the prospects for Charles County's school integration. Her chief concern was that the School Superintendent had not given a firm date for the start of the zone plan (which relied on the County Council's approval to fund necessary school construction), but the "freedom of choice" was not working. Some schools had become overcrowded because while African American students were permitted to enter the school, no white children applied or were assigned to the African American schools.¹¹³

By 1966, the School Board implemented the "zone plan" for the three county high schools and continued with the elementary and middle schools during the 1967-1968 school year, thus ending the "freedom of choice" plan. Bel Alton High School closed as a secondary school in 1966, and the teachers were either transferred to other schools or left the county. The high school principal, James Sweatt, and vice principal, James Milton Washington, were offered jobs as administrators at the School Board's office, and a white man, James Campbell, became the principal of the integrated Bel Alton Middle School, serving both African American and white children as one of the feeder schools for La Plata High School. The Bel Alton Elementary School also remained open. Elnor Pinkney, who had been the principal of the school from 1952 until 1966, became the consolidated elementary-middle school's vice principal until 1969, when the school finally closed. While integration did not occur smoothly in Charles County's schools, it did occur by 1967, when the federal Commissioner of Education accepted the county's proposed zone plan.¹¹⁴ Approval by the commissioner meant that the county continued to receive the federal education funding allocation that helped pay for school lunches and milk, vocational training, and capital outlays. In Charles County's case, the amount was \$599,000, a considerable sum for the county.¹¹⁵

African American residents in Charles County participated in "the struggle," between 1919 and 1969, to achieve better schools and education for their children. During those years, the county moved from one-room schools with outhouses to integrated schools where students studied with both white and African American children and received an equal education. Since 1938, teachers, parents, and students have valued the education provided at Bel Alton High School, and it continues to be well regarded by the local communities. Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall both hoped that the NAACP's lawsuits would bring beneficial change to the people who lived outside the urban centers with few champions to help fight for their rights. Through their activism and agency, the African American patrons of Bel Alton High

¹¹² Maryland State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, "Report on School Desegregation in 14 Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland Counties," February 1966, P. 17 downloaded from University of Maryland School of Law, Marshall Law Library, <https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12s1966.pdf>

¹¹³ Ibid., PP. 18-19

¹¹⁴ College of Southern Maryland, SMSC, Bel Alton High School, 1942 "Yearbook," Salome Freeman Howard Oral History and Mary Emily Whalen personal communications with author, January 23, 2024.

¹¹⁵ Roger J. Nissly, "\$20 million at stake for Md. Schools," *The Afro American*, May 22, 1965, P. 8

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School, along with parents, teachers, and students, achieved the educational equality they sought between 1938 and 1966.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Department of Planning, Bel Alton High School Alumni Association archives, College of Southern Maryland Studies Center

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): CH-562

10. Geographical Data

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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Acreage of Property 12.76 Acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- 1. Latitude: 38.452553 Longitude: -76.991247
- 2. Latitude: 38.451864 Longitude: -76.990561
- 3. Latitude: 38.450604 Longitude: -76.99003
- 4. Latitude: 38.449948 Longitude: -76.992963
- 5. Latitude: 38.4522 Longitude: -76.9930007

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- 1. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 2. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 3. Zone: Easting: Northing:
- 4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

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

The Bel Alton Colored High School stands on the west side of Crain Highway (US 301) southwest of Irving Road, consisting of 12.76 Acres as shown on the Charles County Tax Map 64 for Parcel 74, and Charles County Plat Book Liber 59, Folio 75 filed by the County Commissioners of Charles County on July 3, 2012.

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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Parcel 74 consists of five individual parcels that were purchased by the Charles County School Commissioners and School Board that have been associated with the Bel Alton Colored High School since the Charles County School Commissioners purchased the first parcel in 1922, and includes land purchases for this location through 1957.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Anne E. Bruder, Architectural Historian _____
organization: Anne E. Bruder Architectural History _____
street & number: 4000 N. Charles Street, Apt. 1205 _____
city or town: Baltimore state: MD zip code: 21218
e-mail anne_brunder@hotmail.com _____
telephone: 443-970-7852 _____
date: September 10, 2024 _____

Additional Documentation

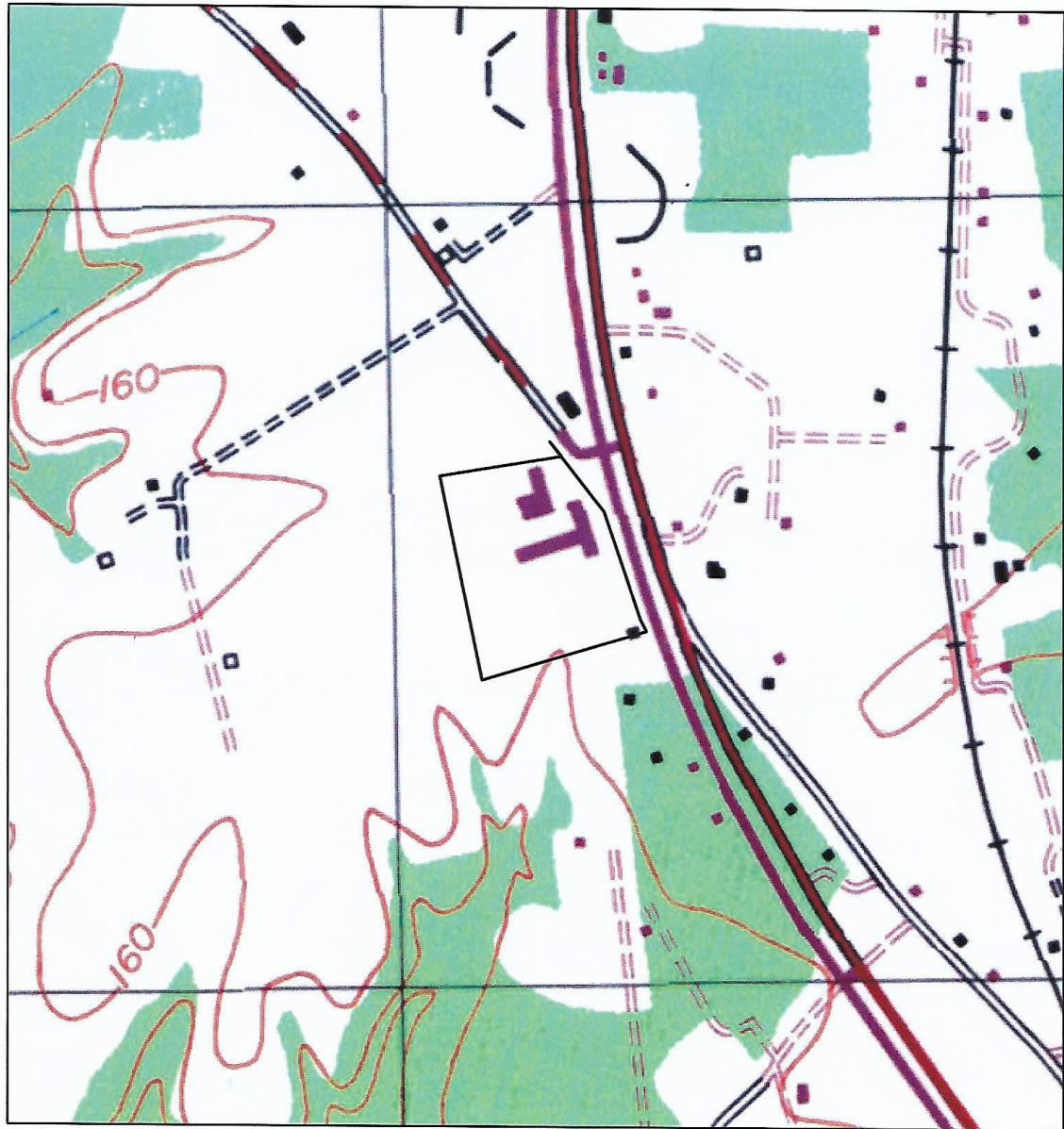
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

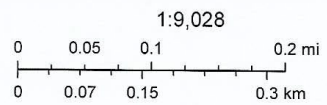
Charles County MD
County and State

Medusa Printout



August 15, 2024

Pope's Creek USGS 7.5' Quadrangle
Bel Alton High School
9501 Crain Highway
Bel Alton Charles County



MD IMAP, USGS

Made by: Maryland Historical Trust
MDP

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Bel Alton Colored High School

City or Vicinity: Bel Alton

County: Charles

State: Maryland

Photographer: Anne E. Bruder

Date Photographed: November 15, 2023, January 23, March 14, and July 27, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Bel Alton High School

Name of Property

Charles County MD

County and State



1 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0001)

View of Bel Alton High School main entrance east façade looking west. The Bel Alton High School Class of 1946 gave the metal high school sign as their graduation gift

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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County and State



2 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0002)
View of Bel Alton High School looking south at east façade

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



3 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0003)
View of Bel Alton High School Auditorium east elevation

Bel Alton High School
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4 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0004)
View Bel Alton High School looking at north end of east façade (classroom wings and hyphen)

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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5 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0005)
View of south end of east façade showing classroom wing

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



6 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0006)
View of Bel Alton High School south wing

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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7 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0007)
View of Bel Alton High School cafeteria front looking west

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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8 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0008)
View of Bel Alton High School southeast elevation looking west

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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9 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0009)
View Bel Alton High School south elevation east bays (including elevator addition)

Bel Alton High School
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10 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0010)
View Bel Alton High School south elevation west bays looking north

Bel Alton High School
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11 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0011)
View of Bel Alton High School west elevation south bays looking east

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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12 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0012)
View of Bel Alton High School west elevation looking east

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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13 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0013)
View of Bel Alton High School looking southeast general view of west elevation

Bel Alton High School
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14 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0014)
View Bel Alton High School toward read entrance of school showing proximity of former High School annex entrance looking southeast

Bel Alton High School
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15 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0015)
View Bel Alton High School west elevation looking at north end

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



16 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0016)
View Bel Alton High School looking north at west elevation hyphen and auditorium south wall

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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17 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0017)
View Bel Alton High School looking south at auditorium north end

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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18 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0018)
View of Bel Alton High School east façade of Industrial Arts and Agricultural Building

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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19 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0019)
View of Bel Alton High School east façade of Industrial Arts and Agricultural Building with east façade of Gymnasium

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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20 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0020)
View of Bel Alton High School 1967 Gym south and east walls

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



21 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0021)
View of Bel Alton High School at south façade of former High School Annex/Bel Alton
Elementary School/Jude House

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



22 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0022)
View of Bel Alton High School 2006 basketball court looking south

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



23 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0023)
View of Bel Alton High School 2006 baseball diamond looking south

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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24 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0024)
View of Bel Alton High School looking southwest at 2006 pumping station

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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County and State



25 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0025)
View of Bel Alton High School showing school frontage

Bel Alton High School
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26 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0026)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Auditorium porch looking west

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



27 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0027)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Auditorium looking west at stage

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



28 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0028)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Auditorium looking northeast at exist doors and windows

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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29 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0029)
View of Bel Alton High School showing bathroom showing windows with cathedral glass

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

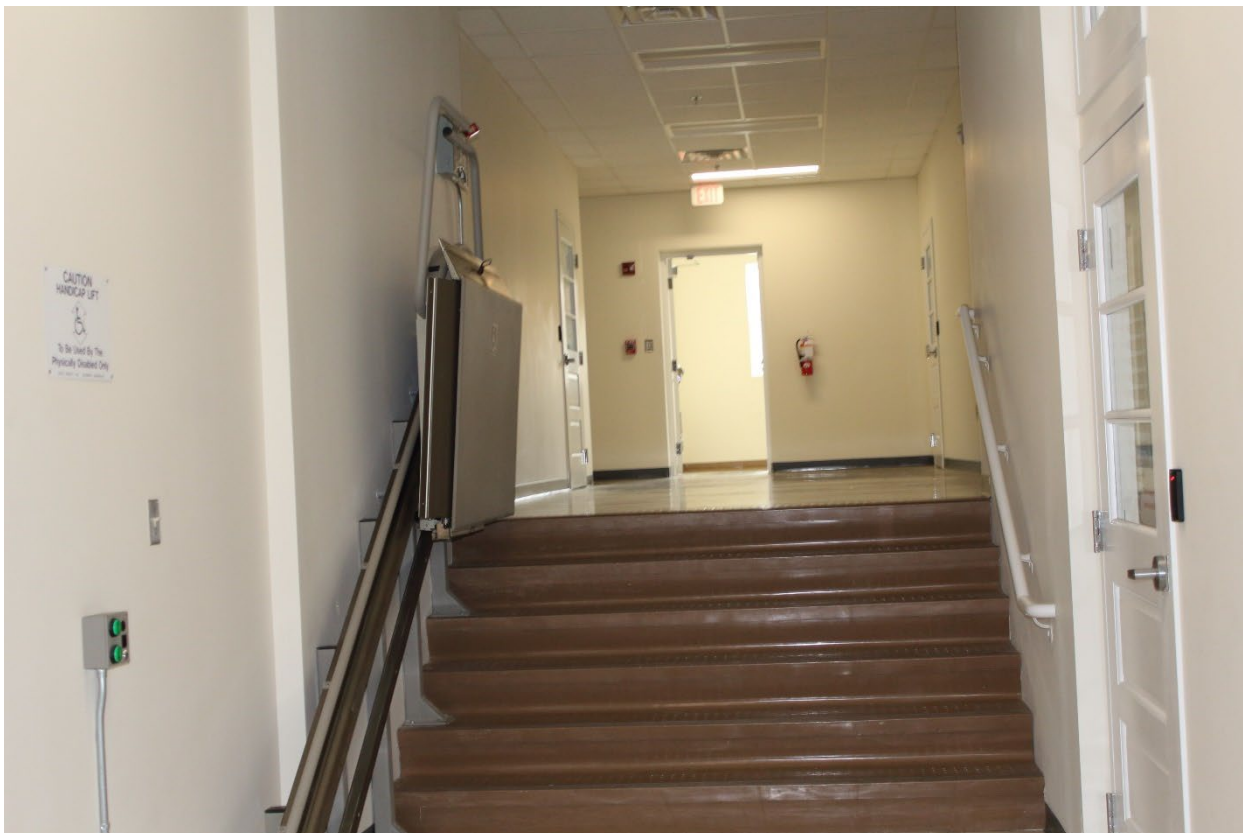
Charles County MD
County and State



30 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0030)
View of Bel Alton High School showing center passage looking south towards south stairs

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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31 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0031)
View of Bel Alton High School showing south stairs and hallway in south addition second floor

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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32 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0032)
View of Bel Alton High School showing high school entrance hall interior looking east

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

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33 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0033)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Bel Alton High School Office

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



34 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0034)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Classroom on east side looking northeast, closets in approximate location of former cloakroom

Bel Alton High School
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35 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0035)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Classroom on east side looking southeast with drop ceiling

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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36 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0036)
View of Bel Alton High School showing west hall showing exist towards high school annex
(now Jude House)

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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37 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0037)

View of Bel Alton High School showing Classroom on east side looking northeast

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



38 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0038)
View of Bel Alton High School showing Classroom on west side showing former cloakroom window with four over four lights

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
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39 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0039)
View of Bel Alton High School showing south addition hall looking north

Bel Alton High School
Name of Property

Charles County MD
County and State



40 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0040)
View of Bel Alton High School showing south exit stair with exit door on left

Bel Alton High School

Name of Property

Charles County MD

County and State



41 of 41 (MD_Charles_BelAltonHighSchool_0041)

View of Bel Alton High School showing stair leading to basement area of former Cafeteria

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Capsule Summary
CH-562
Bel Alton High School
9501 Crain Highway
Bel Alton, Maryland
Circa 1937
Private

Constructed circa 1937, the Bel Alton High School was the first public high school for African-American students in Charles County and was one of only two African-American high schools operating in the county in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Charles County Board of Education purchased the property on which the school sits as five separate parcels of land. The assembled property on Crain Highway (MD 301) eventually held a high school, an elementary school, and associated outbuildings, including an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building, a grouping of buildings indicative of P.W.A. schools constructed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Bel Alton High School, constructed circa 1937, opened for its first academic year in 1938. The high school operated from 1938 until 1965, when Charles County integrated its school system.

The Bel Alton High School is located at the crossroads of MD 301 and Irving Road in Bel Alton, Charles County. Designated as 9501 Crain Highway, county tax records indicate the property is also associated with the address 9505 Crain Highway. This one-story, eleven-bay school building is designed in the Colonial Revival style. The building is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The main block of the school building is one story in height and five bays in width. Covered by a side gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, the main block also features two projecting front-gabled bays. The side gable

roof has triangular louvered vents in the gable ends. Two chimneys are located on the main block. The interior chimney is stretcher-bond brick construction with arched hoods. An exterior-side shouldered chimney constructed of 6:1 American-bond brick is located on the rear (west) elevation. A one-story, two-bay flat-roofed wing is located on the north elevation of the main block. A front-gabled auditorium wing comprises the northernmost section of the school building. To the south of the main block is a two-story, one-bay flat-roofed wing. A two-story addition with a flat roof is located along the southern elevation of the school's south wing. The addition has a one-story, shed-roofed projection. Furthermore, the school has a one-story addition on the rear elevation. Additions to the school were constructed circa 1948 to meet the needs of the growing student population. To the rear of the school are four associated freestanding buildings: a former annex to the high school/elementary school, an agricultural building/gymnasium, a concrete-block pump station, and a prefabricated shed. The level grassy lot has gravel and paved driveways as well as scattered mature trees and shrubs. Overgrown vegetation surrounds the site.

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

1. Name of Property

historic Bel Alton High School

other

2. Location

street and number 9501 Crain Highway __ not for publication

city, town Bel Alton __ vicinity

county Charles

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

name County Commissioners of Charles County

street and number PO Box 2150 telephone

city, town Bel Alton state Maryland zip code 20646-0167

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Charles County Courthouse liber 1529 folio 526

city, town LaPlata tax map 64 tax parcel 74 tax ID number 04-009908

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District
- Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- Recorded by HABS/HAER
- Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- Other: _____

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	3	2
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	_____	_____
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	3	2
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	_____	_____
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory 4	
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		

7. Description

Inventory No. CH-562

Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

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

The Bel Alton High School, currently undergoing restoration and renovation to become a community development center under public-private partnership, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway (MD 301) and Irving Road in Bel Alton, Charles County. Designated as 9501 Crain Highway, county tax records indicate the property is also associated with the address 9505 Crain Highway. The Bel Alton High School, constructed circa 1937, opened for its first academic year in 1938. This one-story, eleven-bay school building is designed in the Colonial Revival style. The building is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The main block of the school building is one story in height and five bays in width. Covered by a side gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, the main block also features two projecting front-gabled bays. The side gable roof has triangular louvered vents in the gable ends. Two chimneys are located on the main block. The interior chimney is stretcher-bond brick construction with arched hoods. An exterior-side shouldered chimney constructed of 6:1 American-bond brick is located on the rear (west) elevation. A one-story, two-bay flat-roofed wing is located on the north elevation of the main block. A front-gabled auditorium wing comprises the northernmost section of the school building. To the south of the main block is a two-story, one-bay flat-roofed wing. A two-story addition with a flat roof is located along the southern elevation of the school's south wing. The addition has a one-story, shed-roofed projection. Furthermore, the school has a one-story addition on the rear elevation. Additions to the school were constructed circa 1948 to meet the needs of the growing student population. To the rear of the school are four associated freestanding buildings: a former annex to the high school/elementary school, an agricultural building/gymnasium, a concrete-block pump station, and a prefabricated shed. The level grassy lot has gravel and paved driveways as well as scattered mature trees and shrubs. Overgrown vegetation surrounds the site.

Exterior Description:

The façade (east elevation) of the main block holds a double-leaf metal door with a 12-light wood transom. A one-story pedimented portico frames the main entrance. Paired Tuscan columns support the portico, which is enclosed by square metal balusters. A concrete ramp with square metal balusters extends south from the portico and leads to concrete sidewalk with a decorative pentagonal design. The entrance is flanked by ribbons of four 9/9 windows with lug sills that are clad in stucco. The bay north of the main entrance also has a 4/4 window with a stucco-clad lug sill. The projecting front-gabled bays on the main block have ribbons of five 9/9 windows with lug sills clad in stucco. The southern front-gabled bay also has a 4/4 window with a stucco-clad lug sill. A wood frieze board runs along the façade of the main block. The projecting front-gabled bays on the main block feature semi-circular louvered vents in the gable ends. The projecting bays also have raked cornices with returns. The one-story, two-bay wing located on the north elevation of the main block has two sets of paired 9/9 windows. The windows have rowlock sills clad in stucco. A flat roof with metal coping covers the wing.

Located north of the flat-roofed wing is the auditorium wing. The auditorium wing is three bays wide and one story in height; the auditorium is higher than the one-story wing to its south. The auditorium's main entrance holds double-leaf metal doors with a 3-light wood transom. A one-story, one-bay pedimented portico with Tuscan columns frames the entrance. A raised, arched brick surround with stucco infill encircles the façade

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 2

entrance and portico. Paired 9/9 windows with 7-light wood transoms flank the auditorium entrance. The windows are set on rowlock sills clad in stucco. A louvered oculus vent is located in the gable end of the auditorium wing. The gable has a raked cornice and returns. The northern elevation of the auditorium wing features an off-centered double-leaf metal entry with a 2-light wood transom. One set of paired 9/9 windows are located to the east of the northern entrance and two sets of paired 9/9 windows are situated west of the entry. The windows have 7-light wood transoms and stucco-clad rowlock sills. A one-story, five-bay flat-roofed porch runs along the north elevation and wraps around the northwest corner of the auditorium wing. Metal posts support the porch. The northernmost bay projects well beyond the remainder of the rear (west) elevation. Unlike the façade, the west elevation of the auditorium wing has only two single windows on the north and south edges of the wing.

The 9/9 and 4/4 windows along the west elevation are grouped in ribbons of four and five and mirror the location of the window groupings on the façade (east elevation). The northernmost 4/4 window on the façade is mirrored with a 6/6 window on the west elevation. The windows sills on the west elevation, some of which are rowlock brick construction, are all clad in stucco. A double-leaf metal door with a 1-light transom is adjacent to the exterior-side chimney on the rear elevation of the main block. A wood frieze board runs along the rear elevation of the main block. The projecting gable-roofed bays on the west elevation have raked cornices with returns. A one-story, two-bay addition is located along the southernmost bays of the building's rear (west) elevation. The addition is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. A flat roof with metal coping covers the addition. Fenestration consists of three sets of tripled 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with lug sills, which are clad in stucco. A single-leaf metal door is located at the basement level of the addition. The entry to the addition is covered by a one-story, one-bay flat-roofed porch with metal posts.

The southern elevation of the school is obscured by a two-story, four-bay addition with a flat roof. The addition is concrete-block construction clad in stucco. The first story has a single-leaf metal door. A former stair was enclosed by the addition, but its form is still visible due to ghosting. The second story has 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with lug sills clad in stucco. The east bay of the addition is slightly higher than the rest of the addition and has a one-story shed roof projection on its south elevation. The shed-roofed addition has a single-leaf metal door on its west elevation and tripled 6/6 vinyl-sash windows with stucco-clad lug sills.

The facade of the two-story southernmost bay of the school has 6/6 vinyl-sash replacement windows with stucco-clad sills on the first story. A ribbon of four 9/9 windows is located on the second story. A flat roof with metal coping covers the southern bay of the school building.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 3

Interior Description:

An auditorium is located in the northernmost bay of the school. Covered by a front-gabled roof, the auditorium has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. Currently under renovation, the auditorium has a concrete floor and no baseboards. Restoration plans call for finished floors and baseboards. A canted stage, flanked by stairs, is located along the western wall. Two small rooms are located at the top of the stairs behind the canted walls of the stage. The rise of the stage is clad in wainscoting. The walls are treated with painted drywall. Three pilasters are located on the north wall between the windows and two pilasters are located on both the east and west walls. A chair rail with an ogee-profile and crown molding encircle the auditorium. The room features paired 9/9 windows with 7-light wood transoms and two sets of exterior double-leaf metal doors.

The main corridor abuts the set of double-leaf interior metal doors leading to the auditorium. The corridor has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. The walls are painted drywall with rubber baseboards. Single-leaf wood classroom and office doors with lights and 6-light wood transoms run the length of both the east and west corridor walls. The doors have square-edged wood surrounds. The corridor has vinyl-tiled floors. A stair with metal rails is located where the two-story wing of the school begins. The stair is being renovated and currently has untreated wood treads. Double-leaf entrances to the building are located on both the east and west walls. Both entrances are located at the end of short side corridors. Each short corridor has multiple double-leaf doors. Two restrooms and a closet are located on the east wall, immediately south of the auditorium.

Classrooms of various sizes are located along the east and west walls of the main corridor. The classrooms all have drop ceilings with the same acoustical tiles found in the corridor and auditorium. The walls consist of painted drywall. Classroom floors are clad in either blue or white vinyl tile with rubber baseboards. Each classroom has either a four or five ribbon of 9/9 windows with square-edged wood surrounds. The windows have deep interior ledges.

The main office is located along the west wall of the main corridor, in line with the building's main entrance. Like the rest of the interior, the office has a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles. The office has painted drywall with rubber baseboards. The office floor is carpeted. A ribbon of 9/9 windows runs along the west wall of the room. A closet and an interior office are accessed through single-leaf doors on the north wall of this room.

Two rooms that will not be used as classroom space are located on the west elevation of the corridor. Both rooms have drop ceilings with acoustical tiles and painted drywall. The smaller room will be used as a conference room. The larger room has a molded wood baseboard, an ogee-profile chair rail, and crown molding below the drop ceiling. This larger room is known as the Heritage Room.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 4

A third room, located immediately south of the auditorium on the west wall of the corridor, is under renovation to become a kitchen. Both the concrete-block construction of the walls and the wood-frame construction of the rafters are exposed. A portion of the floor is missing.

Secondary Resources:

Jude House (former High School Annex and Elementary School):

Constructed circa 1955 with a circa 1960 addition, the one-story, forty-two-bay building is concrete-block construction set on a solid foundation. A front-gabled roof clad in asphalt shingles covers the building. The gable ends are clad in vinyl siding. There is a slight height difference between the eastern and western wings of the building. The eastern wing was an annex to the Bel Alton High School that was built circa 1955. Constructed circa 1960, the western wing replaced the wood-frame elementary school located on the property and destroyed by fire. The western wing features an interior-side chimney of stretcher-bond brick construction with a concrete cap. Fenestration on both the north and south elevations consists of 1/1 vinyl-sash windows with lintel panels clad in vinyl siding. The building has a combination of rowlock and concrete lug sills. The south elevation features a double-leaf door with a lintel panel clad in vinyl siding. Five single-leaf metal doors are located along the north elevation of the building. The east elevation features a front-gabled porch framing a single-leaf metal door. The porch has metal posts and turned metal balusters. The interior of the Jude House was not accessed at the time of survey.

Agricultural Building/Gymnasium:

Constructed circa 1949, the one-story, two-bay agricultural building is concrete-block construction. A flat roof with metal coping covers the building. The façade (east elevation) features a roll-up, paneled wood door and a single-leaf entry. The single-leaf entry is boarded-up with plywood. The north and west elevations are not visible due to overgrown vegetation. A gymnasium constructed during the late 1960s is attached to the agricultural building via a one-story hyphen of concrete-block construction. A flat roof with metal coping covers the hyphen. The hyphen's façade is in line with the agricultural building, but the gymnasium's façade is set back. The hyphen has single-leaf doors on the east and south elevations. The gymnasium is two stories in height with one-story projections along the entire length of its façade (east) and rear (west) elevation. Including the hyphen, the gymnasium addition is twelve bays in width. The gymnasium has an exterior-side chimney of stretcher-bond brick construction. Fenestration consists of two roll-up doors, boarded-up single-leaf doors and windows, and 8-light wood casement windows with rowlock sills and dog-ear brick lintels. A one-story, six-bay flat-roofed porch is located on the facade of the gymnasium and is in line with the façade of the hyphen. Metal posts support the porch, which is L-shaped. The southern elevation features double-leaf wood doors on the first story and glass-block windows on the second story. The interior of the agricultural building/gymnasium was not accessed at the time of survey.

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 7 Page 5

Pump Station:

A one-story, one-bay storage shed of concrete-block construction is located in the southwest corner of the property. The building has a gable roof clad in asphalt shingles and a plain fascia board. The northern gable end is clad in plywood. Two white storage tanks flank the shed. One tank is located along the west elevation of the shed and the other is along the shed's south elevation. Constructed circa 2006, the interior of the shed was not accessed at the time of survey.

Prefabricated Shed:

A one-story, one-bay prefabricated shed, erected circa 1980, is located to the west of the former elementary school. The non-historic shed is clad in vinyl siding and covered by a gambrel roof. The interior of the shed was not accessed at the time of survey.

8. Significance

Inventory No. CH-562

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates 1937 - 1957 **Architect/Builder** Unknown

Construction dates 1937, 1948, 1949, 1955, 1960, 2006

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Constructed circa 1937, the Bel Alton High School was the first public high school for African-American students in Charles County and was one of only two African-American high schools operating in the county in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Charles County Board of Education purchased the property on which the school sits as five separate parcels of land. The assembled property on Crain Highway (MD 301) eventually held a high school, an elementary school, and associated outbuildings, including an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building, a grouping of buildings indicative of P.W.A. schools constructed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The high school operated from 1938 until 1965, when Charles County integrated its school system. Bel Alton High School housed grades 9 through 11 from 1938 until 1950. In 1950, the school added grade 12. Thus, students who had completed grade 11 advanced to grade 12, and there was no graduating class in 1950. The County Commissioners of Charles County purchased the site from the Charles County Board of Education in 1991. The one-story building, located west of the Bel Alton High School and now known as the Jude House, is currently being used as a rehabilitation center. The high school is undergoing an exterior restoration and an interior renovation made possible by a public-private venture in order to convert the property into a community development center.

Historic Context:

Created by an Order in Council in 1658, Charles County was home to Maryland's second largest seaport, Port Tobacco. Founded in 1634 and settled on the site of the Potopaco Indian village, Port Tobacco was such a large port it was listed on early world maps. At the time, tobacco was the primary export crop in Charles County. Tobacco is a labor-intensive crop that created a high level of dependence on slaves in Charles County as well as in neighboring counties during the mid-eighteenth century.¹

Like many counties in Maryland, Charles County experienced an occupational shift from farming to other trades and industry prior to and after the Civil War (1861-1865). The silt build-up in the river and port at Port Tobacco during this period made access increasingly impossible, which led to new centers of commerce in the

¹ MD 301 Historic Context Report, EHT Tracerics, December 1998.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 2

county. The shift from tobacco farming to trades and industry accelerated further with the establishment of the railroad in La Plata, three miles east of Port Tobacco.²

With the arrival of the railroad in La Plata in 1869, the Chapman and Stone families ceded rights of way for the laying of the tracks. The resulting town took its name from the Chapman's "La Plata Farm." Rail service began in 1873, which was the same year the first post office was established. In 1895, with the continued decline of Port Tobacco's role as a major seaport coupled with the burning of the county courthouse, the county seat was moved from Port Tobacco to La Plata.³ As county seat, La Plata experienced increased industrialization, population growth, and demographic changes. According to the Federal census, the population of Charles County in 1870 was 15,191. Of these 15,191 residents, almost 10,000 were classified as non-Caucasian. By 1880, both the total population increased to 18,548 and the non-Caucasian population topped 10,000. It was not until 1920 that Caucasians in Charles County outnumbered the non-Caucasian population by approximately 1,000 people.⁴

During this period of political and social change after the Civil War, newly freed African Americans bonded together in close-knit communities tied together by social support networks such as churches, schools, and fraternal/social associations. The education of former slaves and their children became an important element of these early African-American communities. Philanthropic organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau often assisted in the establishment of elementary and technical schools by providing funds and materials for the construction of buildings. These buildings often served as churches as well as schools, and functioned as focal points for growing African-American communities. Beginning in 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was one of the primary sources of financial assistance for African-American communities nationwide that sought to build their own schools. Often, the construction of churches and schools occurred on lands tenanted or granted to African-American farmers by white landowners.

While the Rosenwald School Fund had both a drastic and positive impact on schools for African Americans in the South, the initiative was discontinued in 1932 just prior to the construction of the Bel Alton High School. During the Great Depression, there was a lull in construction of school buildings throughout the United States. Yet, between 1934 and 1938, the Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) made grants and loans for school building amounting to \$113,155,766 per year. During this period, 1,965 school buildings were constructed throughout the Continental United States. Nearly two-thirds of these schools were erected in suburban and rural areas like Bel Alton and La Plata. The advent of improved roads and school buses spurred the consolidation of schools into large-scale districts across the country during the first two decades of the twentieth century while aid received from the P.W.A. also improved the types of educational facilities that were erected. The new

² <http://www.vistitcharlescounty.com/sites.htm>

³ <http://www.visitcharlescounty.com/cities1.htm#laplat>

⁴ MD 301 Historic Context Report, EHT Tracerics, December 1998.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 3

schools provided classroom space for subjects such as science, art, music, and workshop. The facilities often included auditoriums and/or gymnasiums and libraries.⁵ Indicative of P.W.A. schools, the Bel Alton High School had an auditorium, a freestanding gymnasium, and an agricultural building.

Although the non-Caucasian population outnumbered the Caucasian population until 1920, Charles County did not have a public African-American high school until 1937. Pomonkey High School, the first private African-American high school in the county, opened in 1922. Local educator Alice Freeman (Young) recalled during an oral history that Pomonkey High School was the first African-American high school in the area, which included both Charles and St. Mary's counties; however, Pomonkey was only an option for those students who could afford the tuition. Joshua Lodge from the Order of Good Samaritans donated land for the school building. The two-story, wood-frame school operated until 1969.⁶

Land acquisition for the construction of a public high school in La Plata for African-American students occurred over a thirty-year period. The County Board of Education of Charles County began to buy land in the early 1920s. In 1923, the board purchased a parcel of land from Lucy A. and Thomas R. Gardiner, owners of a local farm. After construction had begun on the school building, the Board of Education was able to acquire a second parcel of land from James Neal and Mary E. Hamilton in 1938. The Hamiltons also owned and operated a farm. In the same year, 1938, both Paul and Elizabeth Mason, farm owners, and the Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society sold land to the county's Board of Education. A final parcel was purchased from Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton in 1957. The Board of Education held the land until 1991, when all five parcels were sold to the County Commissioners of Charles County. The 12.76 acres and its associated buildings, with the exception of the Jude House, are leased to Bel Alton High School Alumni Association Community Development Corporation (CDC) by the Charles County Commissioners. The Bel Alton Alumni Association CDC is redeveloping the site to serve as an economic and community development center for low-income residents. As part of this initiative, the exterior of Bel Alton High School has been restored to its original appearance.

The design of the Bel Alton High School is characteristic of Colonial Revival-style schools built in the early and mid-twentieth century. Popular in the United States between 1880 and 1955, the Colonial Revival style resulted from the rebirth of interest in the colonial English and Dutch houses of the eastern seaboard coincident with the Philadelphia Centennial. Stylistic details in Colonial Revival buildings are primarily drawn from the Georgian and Federal styles. While Colonial Revival buildings of the first quarter of the twentieth century reflected their colonial influences more clearly, those constructed after World War II (1941-1945) were simplified, with details suggesting rather than duplicating the original examples.

⁵ Alice Barrows, "Schools," *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*, Volume I, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986), pp. XVIII-XXII.

⁶ <http://www.csmd.edu/Library/SMSC/ccschools/schools/listb.htm>

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 4

It is possible the Bel Alton High School is a Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) school building from the 1930s, although no documentation has been located to date to confirm this thesis. Characteristic of P.W.A. schools as well as rural educational facilities constructed nationwide in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Bel Alton High School features a side-gabled roof with projecting front gable bays, window ribbons, and pedimented front gable porticos over the main entrances.

Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Inventory of
Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. CH-562

Bel Alton High School, Bel Alton, Maryland
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 5

Chain of Title:

- April 2, 1923: Lucy A. Gardiner and Thomas R. Gardiner, her husband to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 1
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 40 Folio 415
- May 25, 1938: J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 2
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 540
- May 25, 1938: The Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 4
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 543
- May 27, 1938: Paul and Elizabeth Mason to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 3
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 542
- June 19, 1957: Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 5
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 130 Folio 244
- January 15, 1991: Board of Education of Charles County, Maryland to County Commissioners of Charles County, Maryland
PARCELS 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 1529 Folio 526

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. CH-562

Alice Freeman Young, Oral History. November 16, 2002. <http://www.csmd.edu/Library/SMSC/ccschools/schools/listb.htm>

Barrows, Alice. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*, Volume I. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986.

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

Rivoire, J. Richard. *Homeplaces: Traditional Domestic Architecture of Charles County, Maryland*. Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1990.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 12.76
Acreage of historical setting 12.76
Quadrangle name La Plata

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The property at 9501 Crain Highway (also known as 9505 Crain Highway) is currently designated as Parcel 74, Grid 7 as indicated on Map 64. The Bel Alton High School had been associated with Parcels 73 and 74 since its construction in 1937. However, Parcels 73 and 74 have been combined into one parcel (Parcel 74), changing the property's historical association circa 2000.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Elizabeth Breiseth, Architectural Historian		
organization	EHT Traceries, Inc.	date	October 2006
street & number	1121 Fifth Street, NW	telephone	(202) 393-1199
city or town	Washington	state	D.C.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties 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
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

RESOURCE SKETCH MAP

GRAVEL PARKING

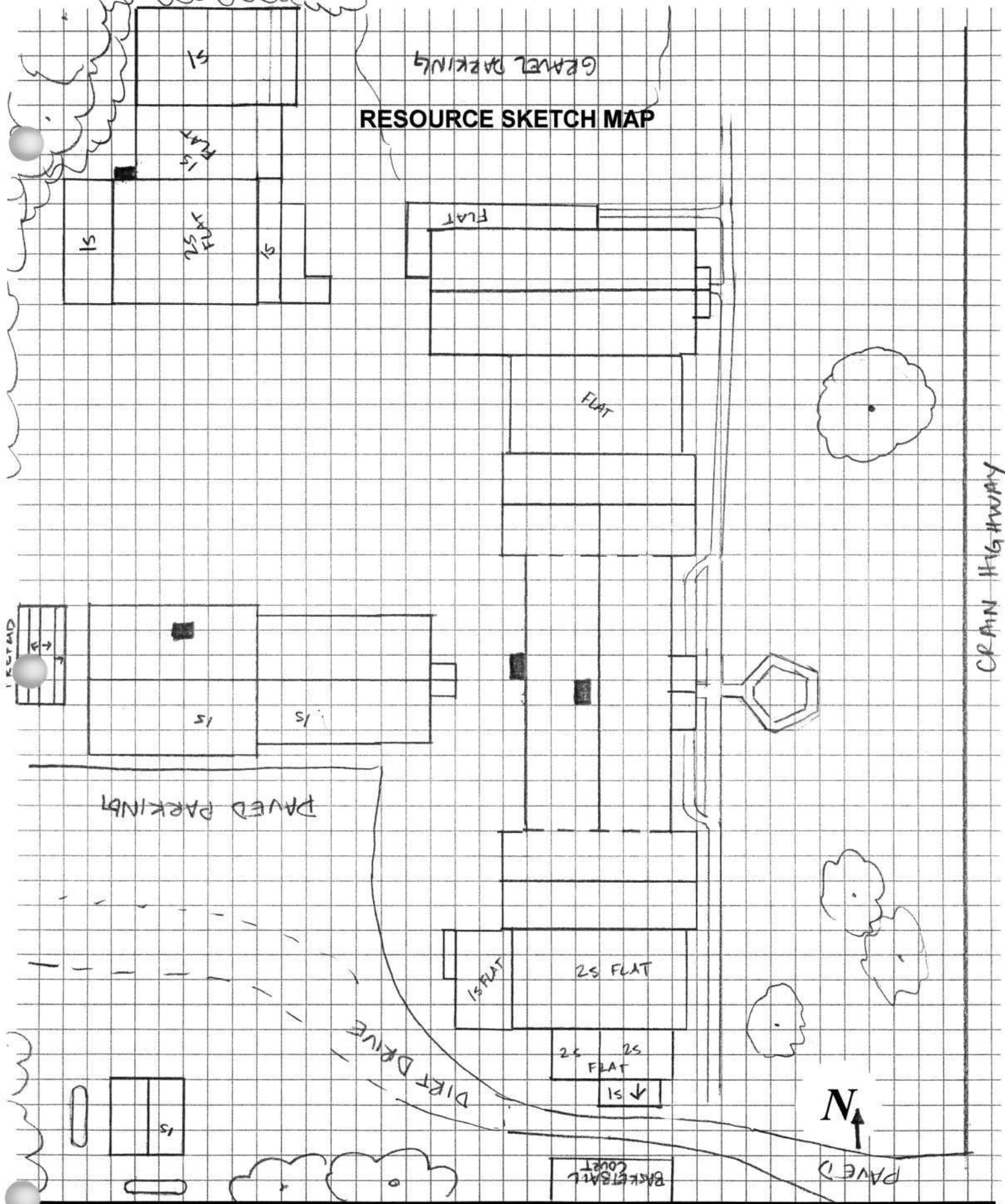
CRAN HIGHWAY

PAVED PARKING

DIRT DRIVE

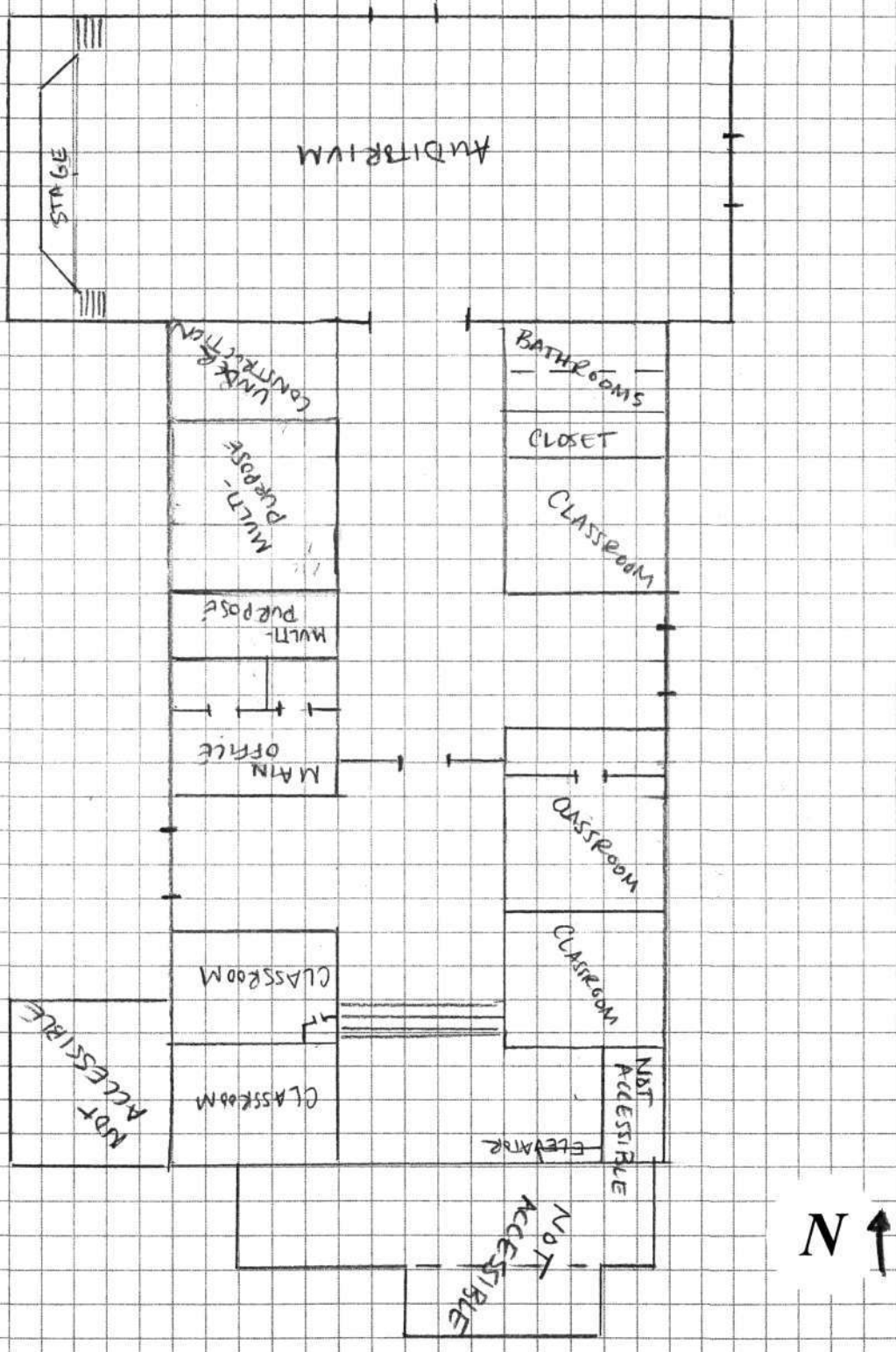
N ↑

PAVED

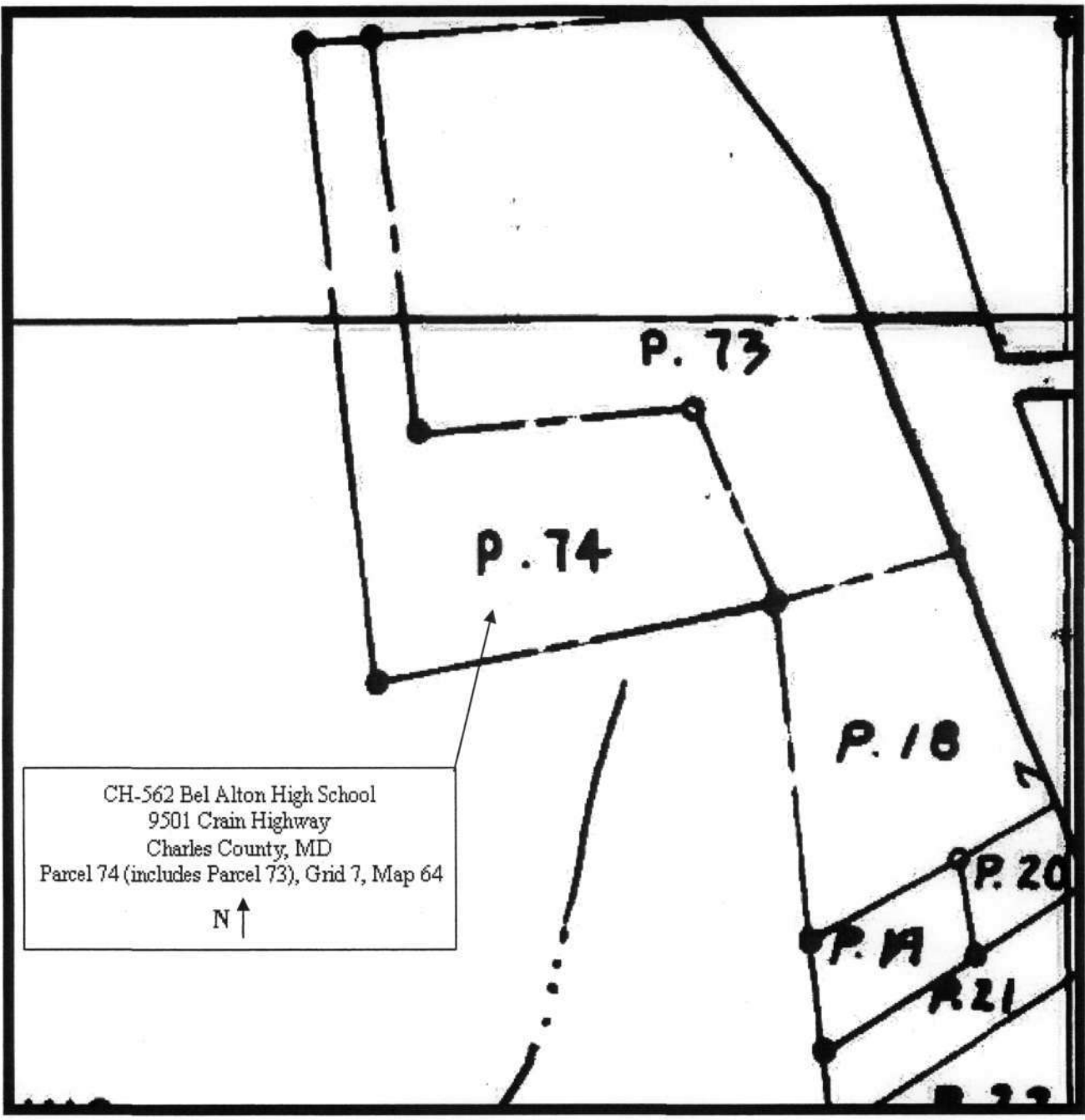


ID#: CH-562 Name: Bel Alton High School, site plan
 Address: 9501 Cran Highway
 Town/Town Vicinity: Bel Alton, MD County: Charles

RESOURCE SKETCH MAP

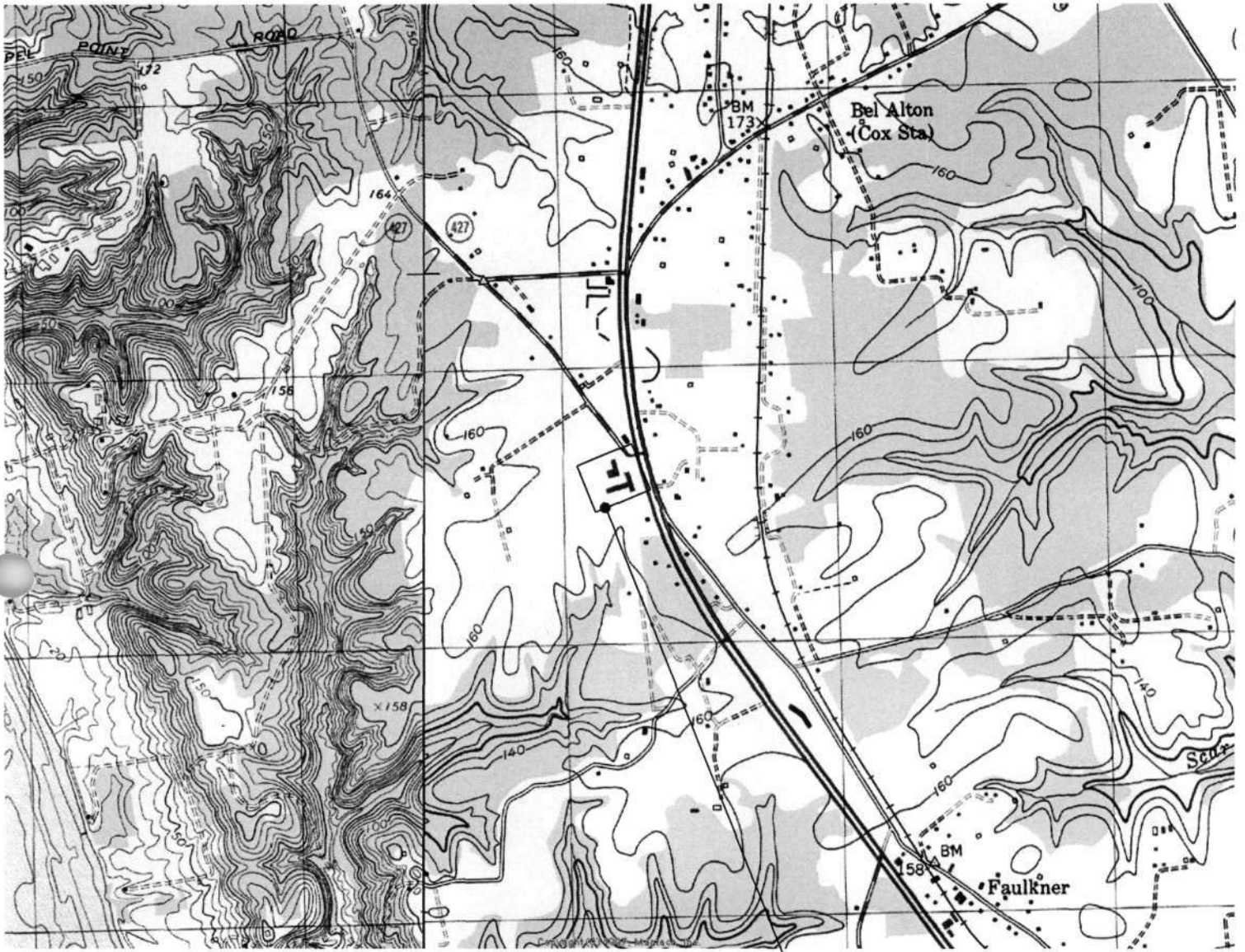


ID#: CH-562 Name: Bel Alton High School, Interior
 Address: 9501 Crain Highway
 Town/Town Vicinity: Bel Alton, MD County: Charles



CH-562 Bel Alton High School
9501 Crain Highway
Charles County, MD
Parcel 74 (includes Parcel 73), Grid 7, Map 64

N ↑



CH-562
9501 Crain Highway (MD-301)
Charles County, MD: Popes Creek
Bel Alton, MD
USGS Map
EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2006





CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southeast toward the north and west elevations of
Bel Alton High School



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking east toward Bel Alton High School and the
Jude House.

2 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest toward the facade of Jude House.

3 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southeast along the rear elevation of
Bel Airton High School.

4 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

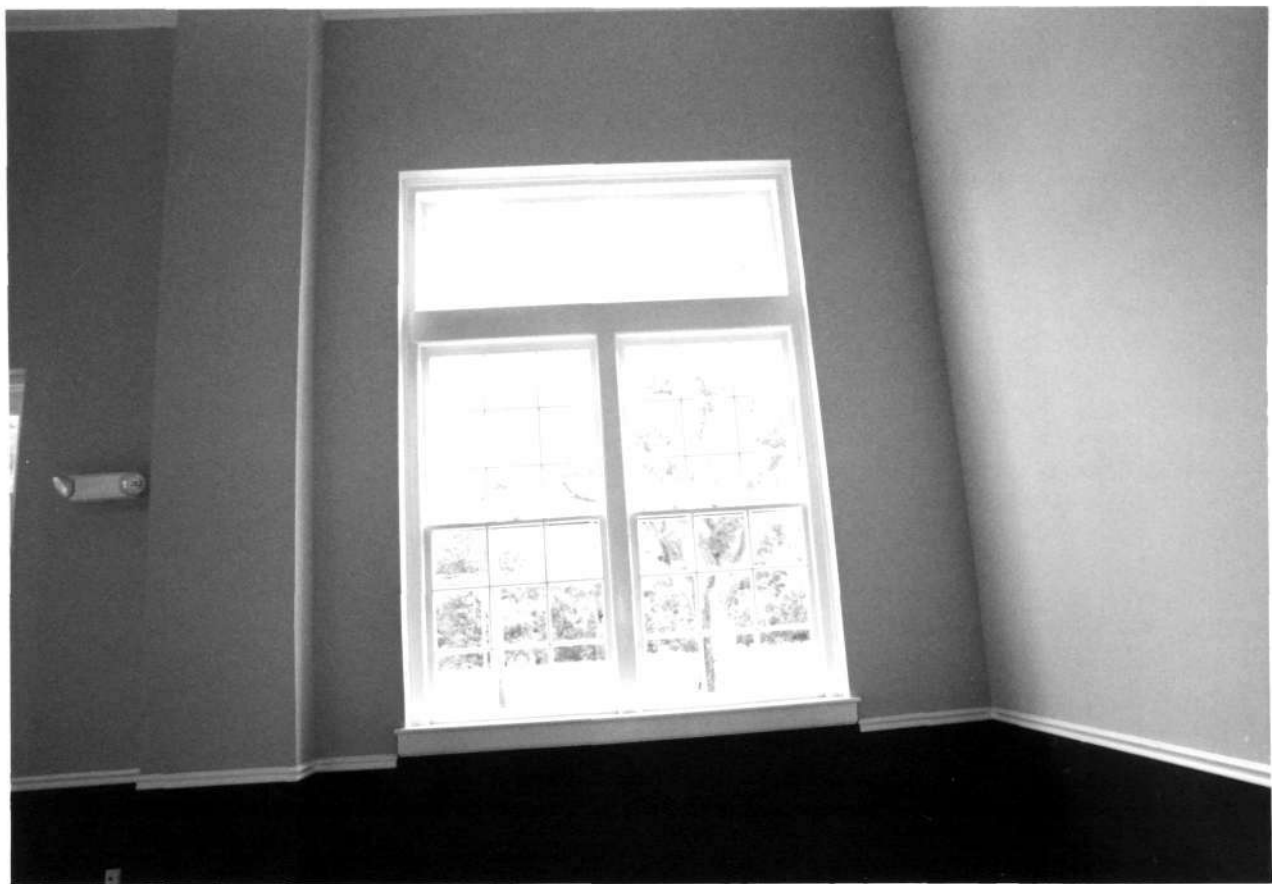
Charles County, MD

Tracey's

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest toward gymnasium.



CH-542

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Alton High School interior, east wall of auditorium

6 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceris

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Airton High School interior, west wall of auditorium

7 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Tracey

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Air High School interior corridor, looking west

8 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Airton High School interior corridor, looking south



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Air High School classroom interior, east wall

10 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Bel Air High School interior, northeast auditorium
corner

11 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traveres

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking west at the Bel Airton High School
auditorium facade

12 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northwest at the agriculture buildings
facade.

13 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northeast toward gymnasium

14 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traces

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking Southwest toward the rear elevation of
Jude House

15 of 20



CH-562

Bel Airtan High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking northeast along the rear elevation of
Bel Airtan High School.

16 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking southwest toward pump station.

17 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

South elevation of Bel Alton High School

18 of 20



CH-562

Bel Air High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Facade, Bel Air High School

19 of 20



CH-562

Bel Alton High School

Charles County, MD

Traceries

September 2006

Maryland SHPO

Looking southwest along Bel Alton High School's
facade

20 of 20

CAPSULE SUMMARY
Bel Alton High School (CH: 562)
9505 Crain Highway
Charles County, Maryland

Constructed in 1937, the Bel Alton High School served as one of the early high schools in Charles County. It was constructed as the first standard high school for African-Americans in the county. The property on which the school sits was purchased by the Board of Education as five separate parcels of land. The first of these parcels was purchased in 1923 and the three subsequent parcels were all purchased in May 1938. In 1957, the final parcel of land was purchased. Bel Alton High School is one of only two pre-World War II high schools remaining in Charles County.

The high school, now known as the Bel Alton Facility, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway and Irving Road. The Colonial Revival style school building is two-stories in height and eleven bays in width. Set on a concrete block foundation, the masonry walls are clad in stucco. The main building is currently vacant and the windows have been boarded shut with plywood. Two brick chimneys rise from the asphalt shingle gable roof and a two-story, concrete block addition sits on the southern end of the school. To the rear of the school, there are three additional buildings: another school building, a gymnasium, and a shed.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
MD INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Inventory No. CH:562

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Bel Alton High School
common/other name Bel Alton Facility

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 9505 Crain Highway not for publication
city or town Bel Alton vicinity state Maryland code MD
county Charles County code 17 zip code 20611

=====

3. State/Federal Agency Certification N/A

=====

4. National Park Service Certification N/A

=====

5. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property (Check all that apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing		Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>		buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		objects
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>		Total

Is this property listed in the National Register?

Yes Name of Listing _____
No

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties
Bel Alton High School
9505 Crain Highway
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562
Page 2

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

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: Government Office

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Solid: Concrete Block
Roof Side Gable: Asphalt Shingle
Walls Masonry: Concrete Stucco
other _____

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

See Continuation Sheet No. 7-1

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

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

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

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

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

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties
Bel Alton High School
9505 Crain Highway
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562
Page 4

=====
Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Ethnicity

Period of Significance 1937-1950

Significant Dates 1937
1991

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation Undefined

Architect/Builder Unknown

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

See Continuation Sheet No. 8-1

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties
Bel Alton High School
9505 Crain Highway
Charles County, Maryland

Inventory No. CH: 562
Page 5

=====
9. Major Bibliographical References
=====

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

Barrows, Alice. *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-39*, Volume I. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986.

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

Rivoire, J. Richard. *Homeplaces: Traditional Domestic Architecture of Charles County, Maryland*. Crownsville, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1990.

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property 12.760 acres

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

The property at 9505 Crain Highway is designated as Parcels 73 and 74, Grid 7 as indicated on Map 64.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Bel Alton High School at 9505 Crain Highway has been associated with Parcels 73 and 74 since its construction in 1937.

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title R. Weidlich and C. Novelli, Architectural Historians
organization EHT Traceries, Inc. date July 9, 1999
street & number 5420 Western Avenue telephone 301/656-5283
city or town Chevy Chase state MD zip code 20815
=====

12. Property Owner
=====

name County Commissioners of Charles County
street & number P. O. Box B telephone _____
city or town La Plata state MD zip code 20646-0167
=====

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 7 Page 1

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====

The Bel Alton High School, now known as the Bel Alton Facility, is located at the crossroads of Crain Highway and Irving Road. The level grassy lot has a gravel driveway and scattered mature trees and shrubs. Constructed in 1937, the Colonial Revival style school building is two-stories in height and eleven bays in width. Set on a concrete block foundation, the masonry walls are clad in stucco. The main building is currently vacant and the windows have been boarded shut with plywood. Two brick chimneys rise from the asphalt shingle gable roof and a two-story, concrete block addition sits on the southern end of the school. To the rear of the school, there are three additional buildings: another school building, a gymnasium, and a shed.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The façade or east elevation of the school is eleven bays wide. The windows are generally grouped together in bands of four or five. In total, there are thirty-four window openings on the façade, all of which have been boarded shut. Some of the windows have rowlock brick sills and the remainder have wood sills and lintels. Front gable bays and porches adorn the façade. There is a one-story, three-bay porch and a one-story, one-bay portico, both with Tuscan columns. An arched brick molding frames the pedimented portico. There are two, double leaf, wood flush doors with lights. Like the windows, the lights in the doors and the transoms above have been boarded shut. The gable ends are defined by semi-circular and circular vents and molded wood cornice returns. Three large, circular vent pipes rise from the ridge of the side gable, asphalt shingle roof. At the southernmost end of the building, there is a two-story, one-bay addition with a flat roof.

A one-story, five-bay porch extends across the north elevation. Metal posts support the metal shed roof of the porch. Behind the porch is a double leaf door opening with a transom, both of which are boarded shut with plywood. Also boarded shut with plywood are three window openings with rowlock sills.

There are twenty-four window openings across the rear or west elevation. Although they have been boarded shut with plywood, the sills and lintels are visible. Some of the windows have rowlock brick sills and the remainder have wood sills and lintels. A double leaf, flush metal door pierces the west elevation. The

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 7 Page 2

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====
exterior chimney is laid in six-course American bond and the interior brick chimney, which rises from the rear roof slope, is laid in stretcher bond. A molded wood cornice with returns adorns the front gable bay. The flat roof addition is three bays wide at the rear. Like the other windows, these openings are covered with plywood.

The two-story, four-bay flat roof addition completely obscures the south elevation. It is clad in stucco and the exterior stairway has been enclosed with stucco. The single leaf entry and the first story window openings are boarded shut with plywood. At the second story, there are two window openings that are boarded shut and one window opening with a 4/4 metal window. This is the only window on the building that remains visible. There is also a one-story addition with a flat roof and stucco cladding. Like the rest of the building, the window openings are covered with plywood.

SUPPORTING BUILDINGS:

The secondary school building and the gymnasium were constructed in the middle of the twentieth century. The school is one-story in height, one bay in width, and forty-two bays deep. Constructed of concrete block, the building has double leaf wood panel-and-light doors and 1/1 aluminum windows. Square, wood posts support the one-story, one-bay front gable porch. A front gable, asphalt shingle roof covers the school.

The gymnasium is one-story in height and fourteen bays wide. Constructed of concrete block, the building contains three roll-up garage doors and a one-story, seven-bay porch with metal posts. A central brick chimney rises from the flat roof. At the rear of the secondary classroom building, there is a 1980s era shed. One-story in height and one bay in width, the shed is clad in vinyl siding and is covered by a front gambrel, asphalt shingle roof.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 8 Page 1

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====
Constructed in 1937, the Bel Alton High School served as one of the early high schools in Charles County. It was constructed as the first standard high school for African-Americans in the county. The property on which the school sits was purchased by the Charles County Board of Education as five separate parcels of land. The first of these parcels was purchased in 1923 and the three subsequent parcels were all purchased in May 1938. In 1957, the final parcel of land was purchased. Bel Alton High School is one of only two pre-World War II high schools remaining in Charles County.

In the years following the Civil War, newly freed African-Americans bonded together in close-knit communities tied together by social support networks such as churches, schools, and fraternal/social associations. The education of former slaves and their children formed an important element of these early African-American communities. Philanthropic organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau often assisted in the establishment of grade and technical schools by providing funds and materials for the construction of buildings. These buildings often served as churches as well as schools, and functioned as focal points for growing African-American communities. Beginning in 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was a source of financial assistance to African-American communities who sought to build their own schools. The churches and schools were often constructed on lands tenanted to African-American farmers by white landowners.

The Bel Alton School is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style schools built in the early and mid-twentieth century. Popular in the United States between 1880 and 1955, the Colonial Revival style resulted from the rebirth of interest in the colonial English and Dutch houses of the eastern seaboard coincident with the Philadelphia Centennial. Stylistic details in Colonial Revival domestic buildings were drawn primarily from the Georgian and Federal styles. While Colonial Revival buildings of the first quarter of the twentieth century reflected their colonial influences more clearly, those that were constructed after World War II were more simplified, with details that suggested rather than duplicated the original examples. The Bel Alton High School is possibly a Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) school building from the 1930s. Like other P.W.A. schools, it features a side gable roof with projecting front gable bays, bands of windows, and pedimented front gable porticos and porches over the main

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Section 8 Page 2

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====
entrances.

During the Great Depression, there was a lull in construction of school buildings throughout the United States. However, between 1934 to 1938, the Public Works Administration made grants and loans for school building amounting to \$113,155,766 per year. During this period, 1,965 school buildings were constructed throughout the Continental United States. Nearly two-thirds of these schools were erected in suburban and rural areas. The first two decades of the 20th century saw large-scale school district consolidations all across the country, which was brought on by the advent of improved roads and school buses. Aid received from the P.W.A. also improved the types of educational facilities that were erected. The new schools provided classroom space for subjects such as science, art, music, and work shop and the facilities often included auditoriums and/or gymnasiums and libraries.¹

National Register Evaluation:

The Bel Alton High School is eligible due to the fact that it meets National Register Criteria A and C. Preliminary research has revealed an association between the building and events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A), as well as an association with the architecture of the PWA. The property, however, does not have any association with lives of persons significant in our past (Criterion B). There is no evidence that the property is likely to yield information important in history or prehistory (Criterion D). Thus, the property is National Register-eligible.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

Eligibility recommended Not Recommended

Comments:

¹ Alice Barrows, "Schools," *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration 1933-39*, Volume I, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986), pp. XVIII-XXII.
Review, OPS: [Signature] Date: 11/4/99

Reviewer, NR Program: _____ Date: _____

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 562

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Development Period (s):

Modern Period (1930-present)

Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme (s):

Architecture, Landscape, and
Community Planning
Education

RESOURCE TYPE(S)

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Rural

Historic Function (s): EDUCATION/School

Known Design Source: Unknown

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

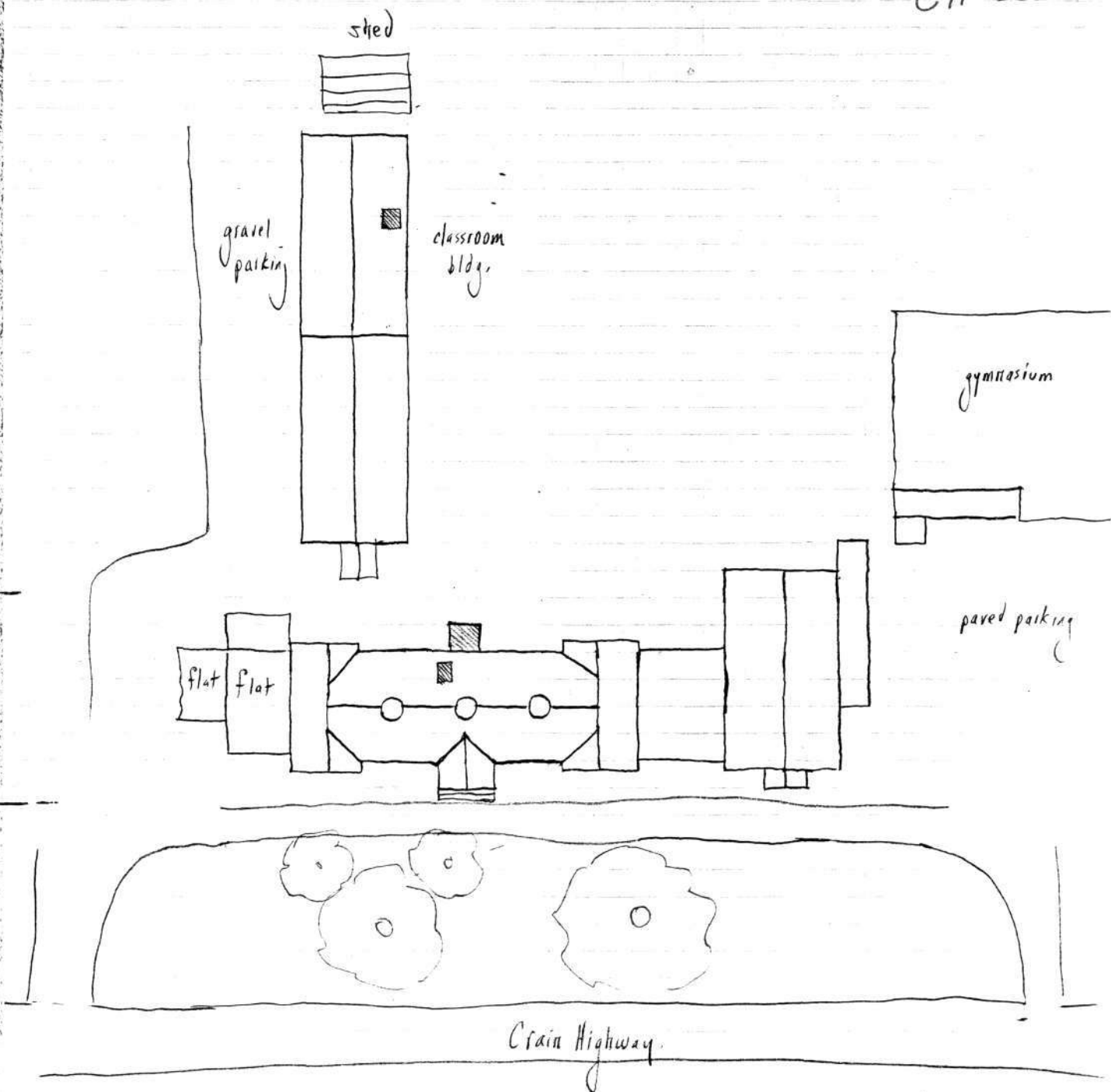
Inventory No. CH:562

Bel Alton High School
name of property
Charles County, Maryland
county and state

=====
Chain of Title:

- April 2, 1923: Lucy A. Gardiner and Thomas R. Gardiner, her husband to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 1
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 40 Folio 415
- May 25, 1938: J. Neal and Mary E. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 2
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 540
- May 27, 1938: Paul and Elizabeth Mason to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 3
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 542
- May 25, 1938: The Saint Thomas Catholic Beneficial Society to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 4
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 68 Folio 543
- June 19, 1957: Francis P. and Anne D. Hamilton to The County Board of Education of Charles County
PARCEL 5
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 130 Folio 244
- January 15, 1991: Board of Education of Charles County, Maryland to County Commissioners of Charles County, Maryland
PARCELS 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 1529 Folio 526

CH-562



Bell Alton High School CH: 562
9505 Crain Highway

Charles County
Maryland

Resource Sketch Map 1999
Not Drawn to Scale

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CHARLES COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
CH-559

BEL ALTON SURVEY DISTRICT
CH-560

9030 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-565

SERVICE STATION, CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-563

9295 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-566

MOTEL, CRAIN HIGHWAY
CH-561

BEL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
CH-562

Pope's Creek USGS Quad



CH-562



CH:562

BELL ALLEN HIGH SCHOOL

9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

east elevation

1 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

northeast corner

2 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPO

south elevation

4 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

west elevation

3 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

classroom building, south elevation
6 of 6



CH:502

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD

TRACERIES

JUNE 1999

MD SHPD

gymnasium, southeast corner
05 of 6



CH:562

BELL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL
9505 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO

classroom building, south elevation

6 of 6

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