

HA-1465

1913

Robinson Building  
28 Office Street  
Bel Air  
private

This Colonial Revival building was built to house the offices of William E. Robinson's canning brokerage. Its serene facade gives no clue to its byzantine interior, but a back view shows a series of brick additions that wrap around (and now connect with) the rear of 30 Office Street.

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

The Robinson Bldg.

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

28 Office Street

1st

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Harford

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

30 Office Street, Inc. (Cameron & Reed)

Telephone #: 838-7575

STREET & NUMBER

30 Office Street

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Harford County Courthouse

Liber #: 906

Folio #: 596

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This two story brick building at 28 Office Street in the Town of Bel Air, Harford County, Maryland, completes a block of brick or brick faced office buildings. It is the western neighbor of the Johnson Credit Company property. The building, constructed to make the most of two lots, is very roughly T shaped, projecting around its neighbor, 30 Office Street, and now connected to it by a passageway constructed in 1972. Both 28 and 30 Office Street are owned by the same corporation and both house lawyers' offices.

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

The window treatment of the other elevations is idiosyncratic showing round arches, stone lintels, and brick flat arches. Despite the differences in fenestration, despite the fact that some portions of the building have a water table and some do not, despite the generally irregular "just grew like topsy" effect of all but the front elevation, this building was built all at the same time. A glance at the picture of the rear part of the structure will convince the viewer of the whimsical placing of some of the windows and of the lack of coherence of the design. Probably no architect had anything to do with its design, although the neo-classical front elevation has a serene coherence that the rear portions lack.

The interior has the excentricity of the rear elevation. A narrow hall runs slightly more than half-way down the building on the east side and then takes a jog to the west. Along the front hall are three small offices, the two end ones for lawyers, the middle one for the secretary-receptionist. Three more rooms to the rear of the hall jog are occupied by the same law firm: a clerk's room, storage room, and lawyer's chamber. At the west end of the transverse hall is another suite of offices. There is a second story over the rear part of the building which includes a residence flat with an outside entrance facing Bond Street and some storage rooms. The cross-over from 30 Office Street, next door to the west, is in the upstairs flat.

All the woodwork in the building is severely plain, really just painted lumber. Each room in the forward part of the building has an unattached, large, square transom over the door to provide more light.

Apparently the interior of the building has not been altered since Mr. Robinson's time.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1913 BUILDER/~~ARCHITECT~~ William E. Robinson

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

This irregularly shaped brick office building was built by William E. Robinson to be the home of his canning brokerage business. From then until Mr. Robinson's death in 1934 this small building on the quiet side street in Bel Air was home to a business which during the season regularly saw days when over a million dollars worth of notes fell due, and Mr. Robinson's was only one of several such businesses in the buildings around the courthouse for Harford County. Was regularly one of the largest fruit and vegetable canning counties in the United States.

Besides being a canner and broker, Mr. Robinson was an enlightened employer whose cannery was the scene of a model nursery and school run by an interdenominational committee of Bel Air Women and the Women's Home Mission Board. The workers in the Robinson cannery were itinerant workers, in those days recent Polish immigrants. Around 1920 a pilot project staffed by three young college women provided a nursery for the children while their mothers and older siblings were at work in the cannery. A nurse provided health care and the two young women taught the children English and elementary subjects and religion. A hot lunch was provided for the 30 to 35 children at the nursery, those able to do so paying 3¢ a meal. After the cannery shift was over, the women and older girls attended classes in hygiene, domestic science, sewing, child care and English. Sewing machines were donated. The boys were taught English and Arithmetic. Occasional evening entertainments including stereopticon shows were given to all. This was housed in a pavilion Mr. Robinson built on his Hickory property. He also lent a Ford for the use of the teachers. This was an example of an enlightened rural employer aiding in the Americanization of his workers in a fashion similar to the settlement houses in urban areas.

In 1939 Miriam Robinson Stirling Gempel and Harry E. Karr, Mr. Robinson's daughter and step-brother, the executors of his will (AJ 19/304, 1934) sold the property to Melvin P. Johnson, the owner of the next north property, the former Farmers & Merchants Bank, now Johnson's Credit Company. Mr. Johnson had entered his Commercial career after World War I as a clerk in Mr. Robinson's brokerage firm. Johnson paid \$7000. D. Paul Mc Nabb bought the property in 1943.

Judge Mc Nabb (1895-1963) was born near Mill Green, the only child of James W. and Hannah Scarborough Mc Nabb. He attended law classes at the University of Baltimore while working in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court. He was admitted to the bar in 1926, was elected States' Attorney in 1934 and served until 1950 when he was elected State Senator. He served as Associate Judge of the Circuit Court 1953-54. In

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Herman N. Morse The Country Church in Industrial Zones. New York, 1922.  
Harford County Courthouse Portraits, pp. 26-27.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

This property occupies parcel 828 in the Town of Bel Air:  
 irregular

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

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

M. Larew, Architectural Historian

25 January 1979

ORGANIZATION

Town of Bel Air

DATE

838-8700

STREET & NUMBER

39 Hickory Ave.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
 The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
 Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
 (301) 267-1438

1958 he was elected to the County Commission and served there until his death.

His widow sold the law offices to Donald G. Russell in 1965, and he in turn sold it to Cameron & Reed in 1972. It has served as law offices since Mr. Robinson's brokerage firm moved out.

The small but elegant neo-classical front gives no indication of the amount of space actually in the building, for it goes back and spreads both to the east and west.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
21 STATE CIRCLE  
SHAW HOUSE  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HISTORIC SITES SURVEY FIELD SHEET  
Individual Structure Survey Form

SURVEY NUMBER: HA-1465

NEGATIVE FILE NUMBER:

UTM REFERENCES:  
Zone/Easting/Northing

U.S.G.S. QUAD. MAP:

PRESENT FORMAL NAME:  
Johnson Credit Co.

ORIGINAL FORMAL NAME:  
Farmers & Merchants National Bank

PRESENT USE: Credit Company

ORIGINAL USE: Bank

ARCHITECT/ENGINEER:

~~SKIDDER~~ CONTRACTOR:  
Love Bros. of Bel Air

PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE:  
Excellent (X) Good ( )  
Fair ( ) Poor: ( )

THEME: Architecture

STYLE: Classical Revival

DATE BUILT: 1914

COUNTY: Harford

TOWN: Bel Air

LOCATION: 26 Office Street  
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

COMMON NAME: Johnson Credit Co.

FUNCTIONAL TYPE: Commercial

OWNER: Melvin P. Johnson  
ADDRESS: 26 Office St.  
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC:  
Yes (X) No ( ) Restricted ( )

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:  
Local (X) State ( ) National ( )

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Structural System

1. Foundation: Stone ( ) Brick (X) Concrete ( ) Concrete Block ( )
2. Wall Structure
  - A. Wood Frame: Post and Beam ( ) Balloon ( )
  - B. Wood Bearing Masonry: Brick (X) Stone ( ) Concrete ( ) Concrete Block ( )
  - C. Iron ( ) D. Steel ( ) E. Other:
3. Wall Covering: Clapboard ( ) Board and Batten ( ) Wood Shingle ( ) Shiplap ( )  
Novelty ( ) Stucco ( ) Sheet Metal ( ) Aluminum ( ) Asphalt Shingle ( )  
Brick Veneer ( ) Stone Veneer ( )  
Bonding Pattern: Other:
4. Roof Structure
  - A. Truss: Wood ( ) Iron ( ) Steel ( ) Concrete ( )
  - B. Other:
5. Roof Covering: Slate ( ) Wood Shingle ( ) Asphalt Shingle ( ) Sheet Metal ( )  
Built Up ( ) Rolled ( ) Tile ( ) Other:
6. Engineering Structure:
7. Other:

Appendages: Porches ( ) Towers ( ) Cupolas ( ) Dormers ( ) Chimneys ( ) Sheds ( ) Ells ( )  
Wings ( ) Other:

Roof Style: Gable ( ) Hip ( ) Shed ( ) Flat (X) Mansard ( ) Gambrel ( ) Jerkinhead ( )  
Saw Tooth ( ) With Monitor ( ) With Bellcast ( ) With Parapet ( ) With False Front ( )  
Other:

Number of Stories: 2

Number of Bays: 2

Approximate Dimensions: 75' x 120' irreg.

Entrance Location: Office St.

THREAT TO STRUCTURE:  
No Threat (X) Zoning ( ) Roads ( )  
Development ( ) Deterioration ( )  
Alteration ( ) Other:

LOCAL ATTITUDES:  
Positive ( ) Negative ( )  
Mixed ( ) Other:

ADDITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL OR STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Bank building originally 1 large room (banking room) down and one small room up (directors' room). Mr. Johnson divided the first floor room so as to have a private office for himself. The office upstairs is rented to a retired lawyer.

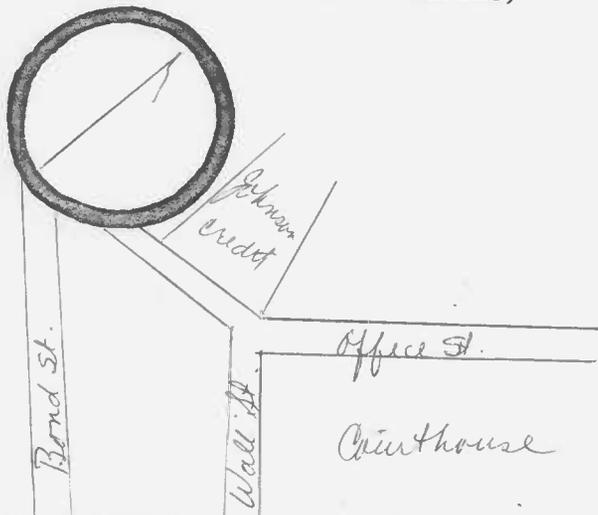
RELATED STRUCTURES: (Describe)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Very well preserved example of small local bank - neo-classical entry.

REFERENCES:

MAP: (Indicate North In Circle)



SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:

- Open Lane( )Woodland( )Scattered Buildings( )
- Moderately Built Up( )Densely Built Up( )
- Residential( )Commercial(X)
- Agricultural( )Industrial( )
- Roadside Strip Development( )
- Other:

M. Larew

RECORDED BY:  
Town of Bel Air

ORGANIZATION:  
30 January 1979

DATE RECORDED:

28 OFFICE STREET

906/596                    13 September 1972  
Donald G. Russell & Edith, w  
                              to  
Cameron & Reed (Chas. H. Reed, Broadnax  
Cameron, Jr., Chas. B. Keenan, Jr., &  
John C. Love)

670/357                    8 March 1965  
Ruth E. Mc Nabb, widow  
                              to  
Donald G. Russell & Edith  
parcel #1  
see plat for 28 Office St. by Glen Deaton

276/123                    21 January 1943  
Melvin P. Johnson & Winifred, w  
                              to  
D. Paul Mc Nabb  
(was mortgaged for \$5,500)

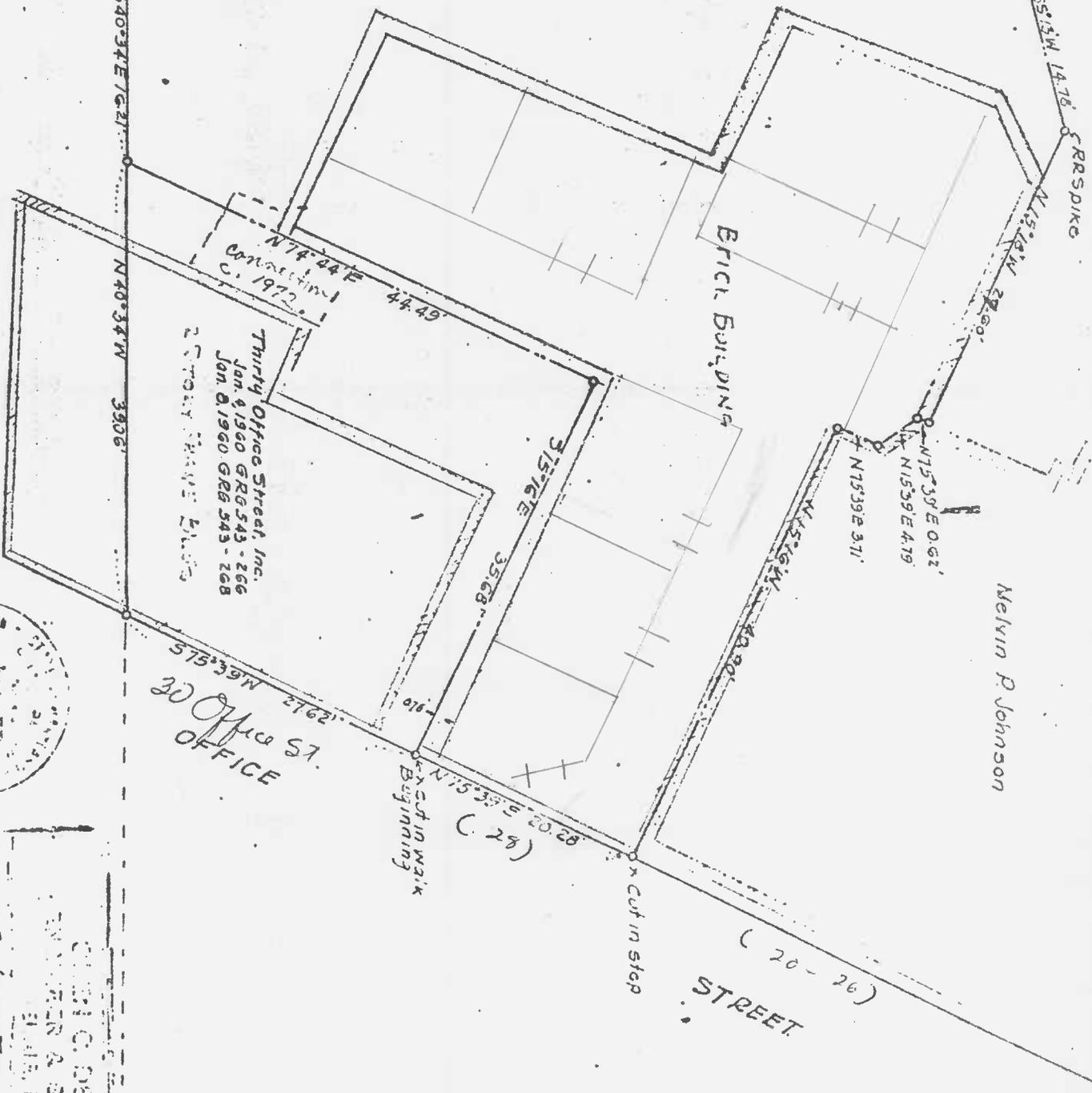
255/402                    15 May 1939  
Miriam R. Sterling Gempel & Harry E. Karr, ex  
of William E. Robinson  
                              to  
Melvin P. Johnson  
\$7,000

139/313                    20 November 1912  
Richard Dallam & Josephine, w  
                              to  
William Robinson  
\$1,250        all of 2 & 4, most of 3 on s-w plat

First National Bank of Maryland

10' Alley, Title in County Commissioners of Harford County  
Right to use in common to lot owners on southeast side.

BOND STREET 66' WIDE



Thirly Office Street, Inc.  
Jan. 4, 1960 GR 6543 - 266  
Jan. 8, 1960 GR 6543 - 268  
2 STOREY BRICK BUILDING



JOHN G. DEATON  
SHERIFF & SHERIFF  
BALTIMORE, MD.  
G.C.D. LOT IN TOWN OF BELAIR, MD.  
TO BE CONVEYED BY DONALD G. RUSSELL  
AND WIFE TO THIRTY OFFICE STREET

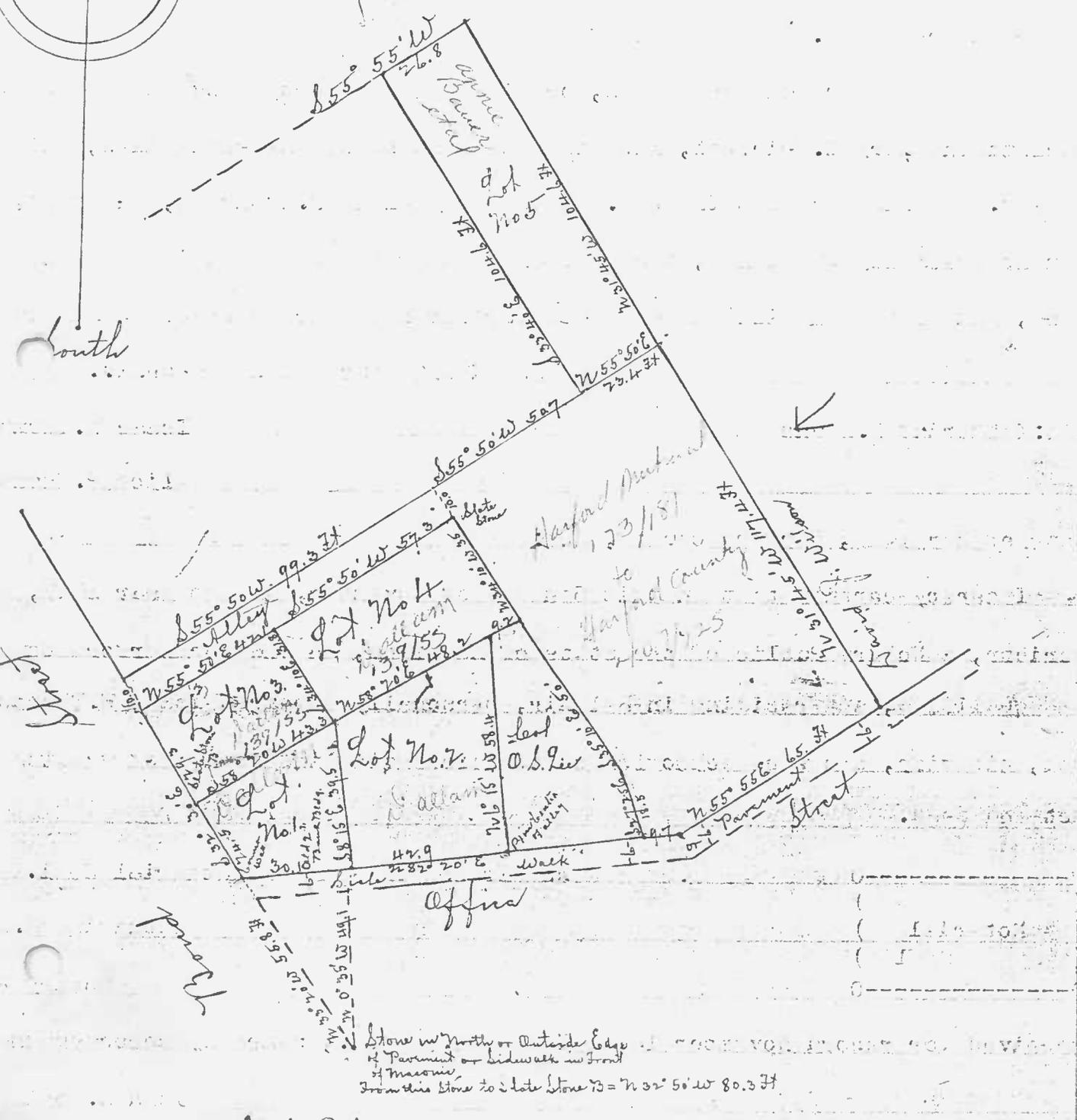
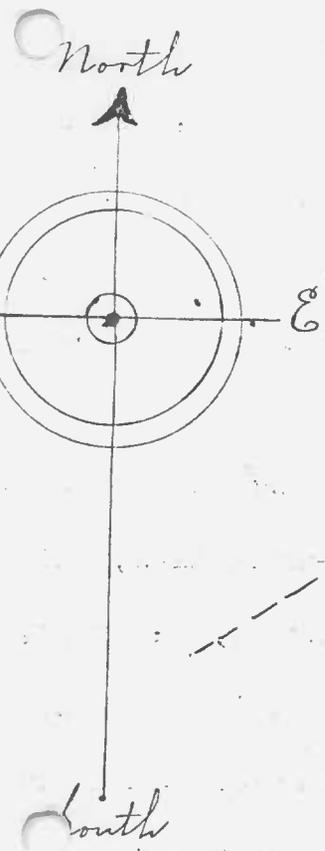
Original line of Court House Lot

ing instrument of writing to be the act and deed of said Smith-Webster Com-

Sarah O. Wright

N.P.

139/57, 1912



First National Bank of Maryland

10' Alley, Title in County Commissioners of Harford County  
Right to use in common to lot owners on southeast side

True Meridian

R.R. SPIKE  
N 55° 13' W 147.8'

ERICI BUILDING

Melvin P. Johnson

Thirty Office Street, Inc.  
Jan. 4, 1960 GR 6543 - 266  
Jan. 8, 1960 GR 6543 - 268

30 Office ST.  
OFFICE

(20-26)  
STREET

Original line of Court House Lot

BOND STREET 66' WIDE



DEED RECORD  
REGISTER & SURVEYOR  
BALTIMORE, MD.

GC 0 LOT IN TOWN OF BELAIR, MD.  
TO BE CONVEYED BY DONALD G. RUSSELL  
AND WIFE TO THIRTY OFFICE STREET

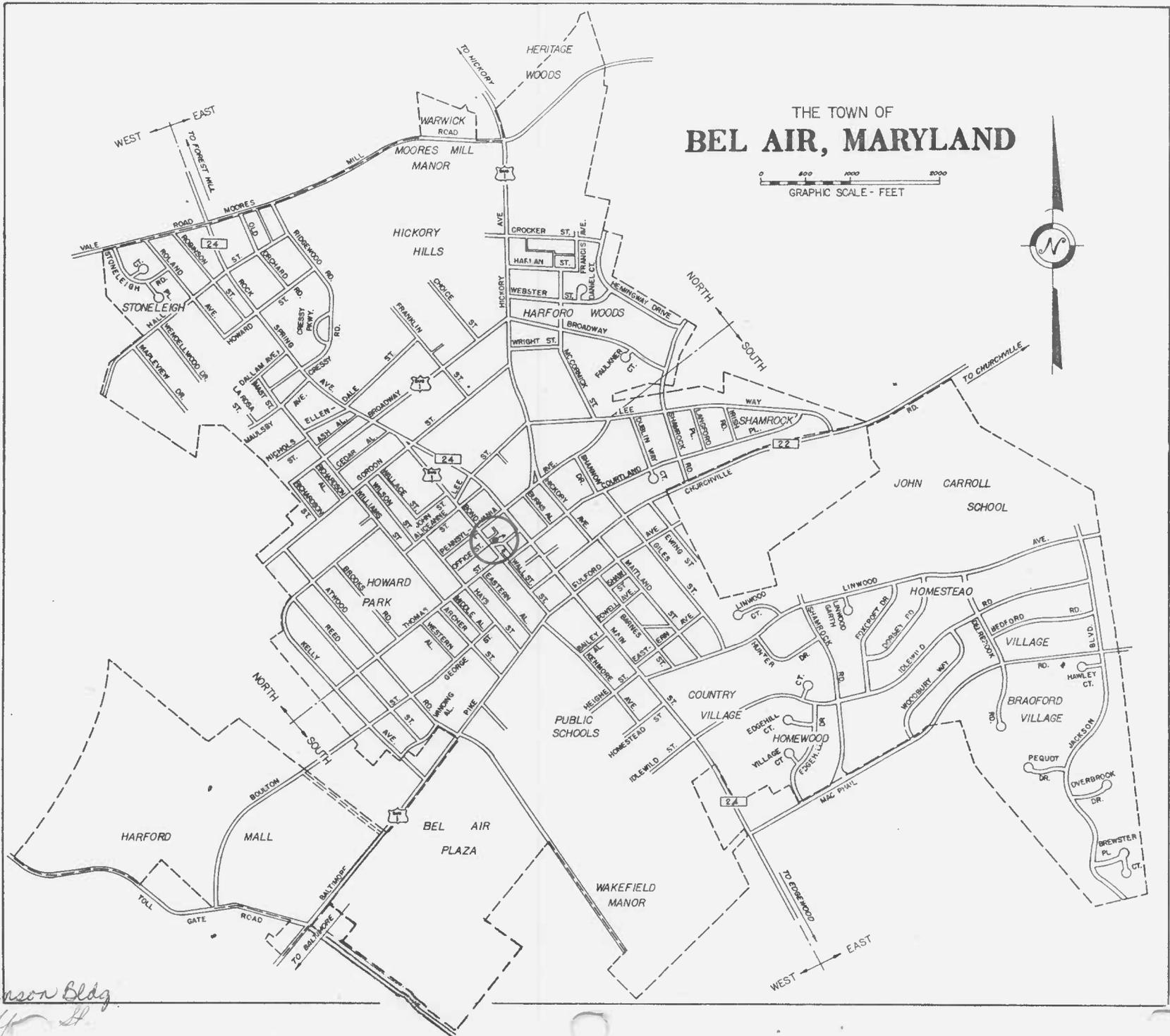
27 Lines  
10  
540°34'E 76.21'  
N 40°34'W 380.8'  
575°39'W 276.2'  
N 15°39'E 20.28'  
N 74°24'E 44.49'  
575°16'E 35.68'  
N 15°39'E 3.71'  
N 15°39'E 0.62'  
N 15°39'E 4.19'

Cut in walk  
Beginning

Cut in stop

Stone

# THE TOWN OF BEL AIR, MARYLAND



HA - 1465

Robinson Bldg.  
28 off St.



H 4-1465

middle =

Robinson Bldg. 28 Office St Bel Air

s elev

M. Larew, 1978



L to R: 30 Office St., 28 Office St., JOHNSON CREDIT CO,  
20 Office St (the Lee Bldg) BEL AIR

South ELEVATIONS

M. LARREW, 1978

HA. 1965



L to R THE REAR (NORTH) ELEVATIONS of

THE LEE BLDG (WITH GABLE), JOHNSON CREDIT CO, 28 OFFICE ST.

HA-1465



28 OFFICE ST, BEL AIR

FACING NORTH

M. L. BREW. 1976

HA - 1465