

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey #: P.G. #68-64 Building Date: ca. 1900

Building Name: Burrhus House

Location: 4809 Ravenswood Road, Riverdale, Maryland

Private/Residential/Occupied/Good/Inaccessible

Description

The Burrhus House is a two-and-one-half story frame house which stands on one of the original lots of the 1890's subdivision of Riverdale Park; it is roughly square, with hip roof and two full-height projecting gables, and a one-story wraparound porch with Victorian decorative detail. The principal north facade has a semi-octagonal projecting bay surmounted by a pedimented gable with round-arch window and raking cornices decorated by stencilled vergeboards. The entrance is west of the projecting bay, sheltered by a one-story hip-roof porch which originally wrapped around the west elevation of the house; the westerly section of this porch has been enclosed, but the north section has chamfered posts, jig-sawn fan brackets, and plain balustrade railing. The original second-story veranda above the north section of the porch has been enclosed. The house is sheathed with gray asbestos shingle over narrow horizontal board; windows are 2/2 double hung sash. The house rests on a high brick foundation which encloses a full basement. The hip and gable roof is covered with gray asbestos shingle; cresting marks its central ridge. Interior plan consists basically of four unequal spaces. The staircase has a heavy turned newel and turned balusters; one original incised slate mantel survives.

Significance

The Burrhus House is a good example of the late Victorian frame dwellings which were being built in the suburbs of Washington at the turn of this century. It is Foursquare in plan, varied by porches, projecting bays and Victorian decorative details; it was, from the early years of the Riverdale Park suburb, a handsome and noticeable landmark in this community. This land was purchased out of the Riversdale estate in 1887, and construction of dwellings began in the 1890's. The Burrhus House was built around the turn of this century by the Riverdale Park Company on Lot 5 of Block 27; it was considered to be one of the most attractive and representative of the dwellings, and a photograph of it was prominently placed in the Riverdale Park real estate booklet. In 1903, the house was sold by the Company to Frederick C. Burrhus, a clerk for the U.S. War Department; it was the Burrhus family home until 1960. The Burrhus House is still a noticeable landmark in the Riverdale community; although altered by the enclosure of the wraparound porch and the second-story veranda, it still retains elements of decorative detail, and the characteristic profile of this early suburban dwelling type.

Acreeage: 9,000 square feet



# 7. Description

Survey No. P.G.#68-64

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

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

The Burrhus House is a two-and-one-half story frame house which stands on one of the original lots of the 1890's subdivision of Riverdale Park; it is roughly square, with hip roof, but is varied by two full-height projecting gables. The house is further embellished by a one-story wraparound porch with Victorian decorative detail.

The principal north facade is composed of a projecting bay to the east, and the entrance bay to the west. The projecting bay is semi-octagonal and a full two-and-one-half stories high; it is surmounted by a pedimented gable which encloses a 1/1 round-arch window. The pedimented gable was originally sided with rectangular wood shingles; its raking cornices are decorated by plain vergeboards with stencilled block design. The windows which light the three faces of the bay are 2/2; they have plain board surrounds, and those on the first story have a narrow outer molding:

The entrance is into the north principal facade, just west of the projecting bay. It has a plain board surround with narrow outer molding. The door opens into a stairhall which takes up the northwest quadrant of the house.

This north entrance is sheltered by a one-story hip-roof porch which originally wrapped around and sheltered the entire west elevation of the house. This westerly section of the porch has been enclosed in recent years, but turn-of-the-century photographs show it with the same chamfered posts, jig-sawn fan brackets, and plain balustrade railing which still survive in the northerly section of the porch. This enclosed west porch is now lighted by two 2/2 windows designed to resemble the original windows on the second story. The south elevation of this enclosed west porch is lighted by a modern single-pane picture window, flanked by a narrow 2/2 window on each side. Originally there was a second-story porch above the present northerly section of the porch, opening from the second story hall; turn-of-the-century photographs show it with a shed roof, plain balustrade railing, and curved open-work brackets on the corner posts which formed arched openings. This second-story porch has been enclosed since 1966, forming a small additional room with shed roof, and lighted by two 6/6 double hung sash windows side by side.

The basically square plan of the house is further varied by a cross-gable in the southerly bay of the east elevation. This east cross-gable is a full two-and-one-half stories, but is not pedimented. Its raking cornices are embellished with the same decorative stencil work as the north projecting bay. In the upper gable at loft level is a small 1/1 round-arch window, which, like that in the north projecting bay, has a plain board surround with narrow outer molding. Each of the first and second stories of the cross-gable is lighted by two 2/2 windows side by side.

The south (rear) elevation of the house is the most plain. There is a kitchen entrance positioned asymmetrically in the westerly bay, accessible by a flight of concrete steps. Just west of this flight of steps, a new concrete ramp leads down into the basement entrance. Above this entrance on the first story is a modern projecting three-window bay which lights the kitchen.

The house is sheathed with gray asbestos shingle over original narrow horizontal board. Original windows are 2/2 double hung sash and most windows have black louvered aluminum shutters. The house rests on a high brick foundation which encloses a full basement. The hip and gable roof is covered with gray asbestos shingle over two layers of wood shingle. The deeply overhanging eaves have an ornamental jigsaw rafter end at each corner of the south elevation. There is one gable dormer centered in the west plane of the hip roof; the dormer encloses a 2/1 window, and has no decoration. This dormer shows in the turn-of-the-century photographs.

There are two tall corbelled brick chimneys. One rises from the east plane of the roof just north of the east crossgable; this chimney serves a fireplace in the east wall of the north parlor. The other is nearly centered in the south plane of the roof, and serves a fireplace in the south parlor. Cresting, with plain balustrade railing, marks the central ridge of the hip roof.

Interior plan of the main block consists basically of four unequal spaces, with the entry/stairhall in the northwest quadrant. The three-run stair rises along the south wall of the stairhall, turns 90° at a landing and rises along the west wall, then turns again and runs east to the second story over the front door. The staircase is open string, with a heavy turned newel and turned balusters. There is dark wainscot panelling on the wall side of the stair. One original mantel survives in the southeast parlor; the fireplace is positioned diagonally in the southwest corner of the parlor, and is embellished with an incised slate mantel. A newer wood mantel replaces the original slate mantel which once adorned the fireplace in the north parlor. Floors are generally of narrow boards, and baseboards are high with crown molding. Most interior doors have five molded panels. Surrounds of doors and windows are typical multi-band moldings of the end of the nineteenth century, with bullseye corner blocks.

In the rear yard south of the house, brick foundations are visible on the east edge of the lot. Farther to the southeast are remnants of other brick and stone foundations. A small creek (a tributary of the Northeast Branch) runs through the southwest corner of the lot.

The Burrhus House fronts directly on Ravenswood Road (originally Adams Avenue). Inside the chain-link fence north of the house are small herb garden plots.

# 8. Significance

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

Specific dates ca. 1900 Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
and/or

Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Level of Significance:  national  state  local

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

The Burrhus House is a good example of the late Victorian frame dwellings which were being built in the suburbs of Washington at the turn of this century. Although it is basically Foursquare in plan, its lines were varied by porches, projecting bays and Victorian decorative details, and it was, from the early years of the Riverdale Park suburb, a handsome and noticeable landmark in this community.

The land on which this suburb was built, had been part of the Riversdale plantation from 1801, when Henri Joseph Stier, a Belgian aristocrat, had purchased approximately 800 acres north of Bladensburg, and had begun to develop his plantation. After Stier's return to Belgium in 1803, completion of the Riversdale mansion and management of the plantation were taken over by his daughter and her husband, Rosalie and George Calvert. The Riversdale plantation became a model of its type, and remained in Calvert family possession for three generations.<sup>1</sup> After the death in 1864 of Charles Benedict Calvert (son of George and Rosalie Calvert), a commission was appointed to divide the plantation among his heirs; a 300-acre dower lot, including the mansion and the family burial ground to the northwest, was laid off for Calvert's widow.<sup>2</sup> This 300-acre dower lot (as well as the 175-acre lot adjoining it on the north) was sold in 1887 by the Calvert heirs to John Fox, president of the Riverdale Park Company, a New York real estate syndicate which then began development of the suburb of Riverdale Park.<sup>3</sup> The land was platted in 1889 by surveyor D.J. Howell. Streets were laid out in a grid pattern, straddling the Washington line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which ran north and south through the new community, and offered to residents easy commuting into the Federal City. Park spaces, and circles of green were provided in the plan, and parkland was reserved around the Calvert mansion which was preserved "as a sacred relic of an era replete with historic memories."<sup>4</sup> Streets were named for the Presidents of the United States, Washington through McKinley, as well as for other distinguished statesmen such as Clay, Lafayette and Beale.<sup>5</sup>

Construction of dwellings began in the 1890's. All were of frame construction, and reflected the popular taste of the period, as illustrated in the house plan catalogs of those years. Some were pyramidal-roof Foursquares, others front-gabled or cross-gabled; many were highlighted by projecting bays or corner towers, and almost all had prominent wraparound porches with jigsaw decorative detail. By the turn of the century, the new suburb had approximately 60 dwellings, a Presbyterian Church, a handsome Victorian schoolhouse and railroad station; the latter two public buildings were built by the Riverdale Park Company. There were several general stores, and telephone and telegraph communication was available. Concrete sidewalks were constructed, and sewers were provided for the principal streets.<sup>6</sup> Because of its convenient location, its efficient line of transportation into the City, its primary school, and its picturesque tree-lined streets, Riverdale Park became one of the most desirable residential suburbs in the Washington area.

The Burrhus House was built around the turn of this century by the Riverdale Park Company on Lot 5 of Block 27, a lot which fronted on Adams Avenue, and which was watered by a small tributary of the Northeast Branch. This house was considered by the Company to be one of the most attractive and representative of the Riverdale dwellings, and a photograph of it was prominently placed in the Riverdale Park real estate booklet which was published by the Company in the early years of this century.<sup>7</sup> In 1903, the house, and Lots 4 and 5 of Block 27, were sold by the Company to Frederick C. Burrhus, a clerk for the U.S. War Department from New York State.<sup>8</sup> This handsome dwelling became the Burrhus family home. Frederick Burrhus died in 1928, and his widow in 1943; their daughter, Jessie Burrhus, made this her home until 1960.<sup>9</sup>

The Burrhus House was well known to the community in the early years of the century because of the activities of the Burrhus' son, Harold C. Burrhus (1891-1916). As a boy, Harold Burrhus was skilled in electrical wiring, and he rigged a telegraph line between his house and that of his friend and neighbor, Willie Meyer. Before his fourteenth birthday, Harold Burrhus had been hired by residents of the town to wire other houses in the community. Young Burrhus was a member of the Riverdale Presbyterian Church, and it was he who installed electric wiring in the church building. First-hand information about the young community of Riverdale Park is available through the meticulous diaries kept by Harold C. Burrhus during his teenage years. Burrhus died at a very young age, after attending the University of Cincinnati in Ohio.<sup>10</sup>

The Burrhus House is still a noticeable landmark in the Riverdale community. Although altered by the enclosure of the wraparound porch and the second-story veranda, it still retains elements of decorative detail, and the characteristic profile of this early suburban dwelling. It is significant, also, in that it was the childhood home of a young man who had considerable influence in his community.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
STATE HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY FORM  
Statement of Significance (continued)

Survey No. P.G.#68-64

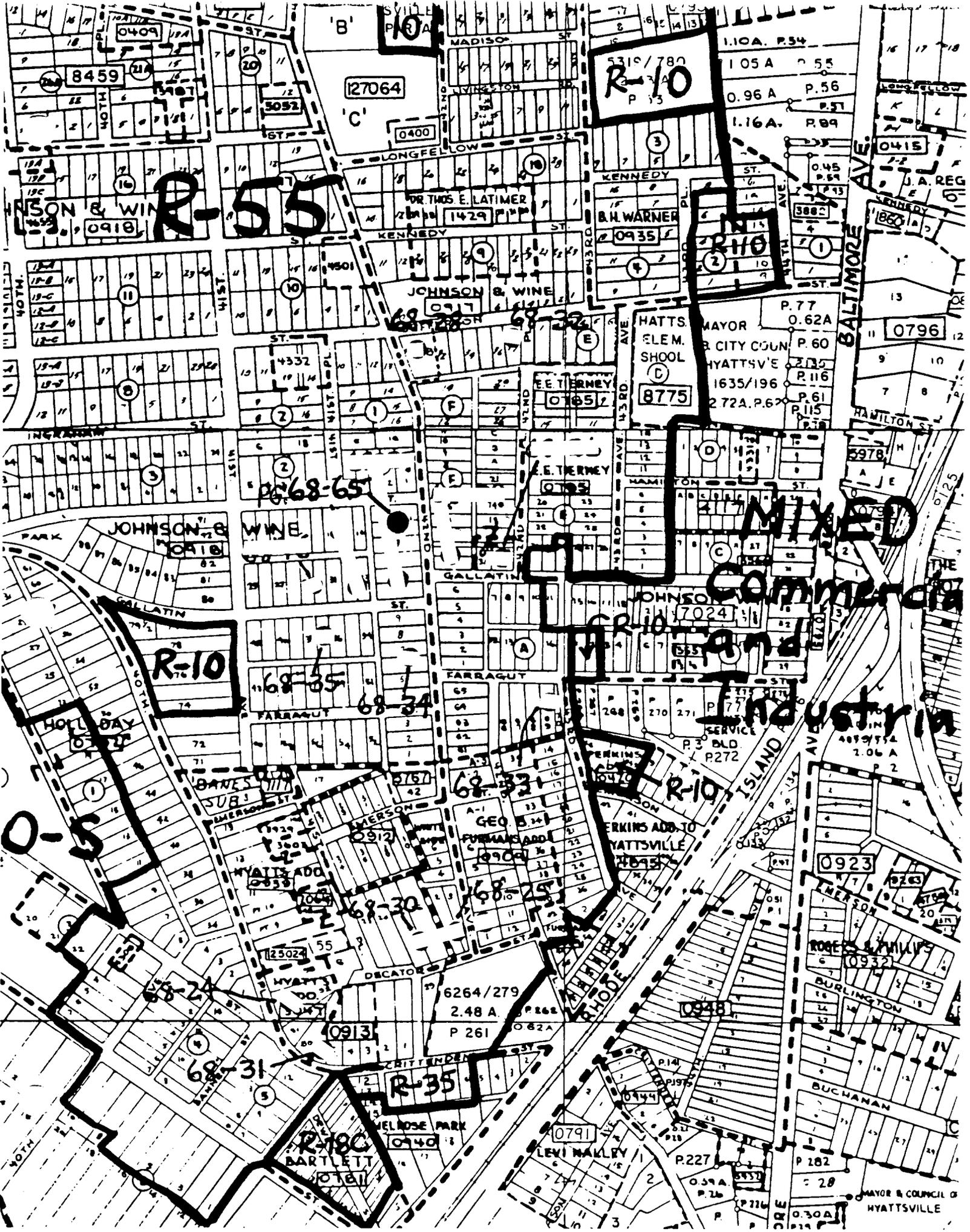
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Notes

- 1 See Riversdale, Historic Structures Report, 1979, Part II, History (S.G. Pearl).
- 2 Prince George's County Equity #475.
- 3 Prince George's County Deeds JWB #8:426, 520; JWB #12:484; JWB #13:614.
- 4 Riverdale Park Real Estate booklet (undated), circa 1904.
- 5 Prince George's County Plat JWB #5:747, 688; Riverdale Park Real Estate brochure (undated) circa 1904.
- 6 Riverdale Park Real Estate booklet; "Riverdale Park" article, source unknown, ca. 1899.
- 7 Ibid., cf. also tax assessments for Election District #2, 1898-1906.
- 8 Prince George's County Deed, #19:487; Census records of Prince George's County, 1900, 1910,
- 9 Stones and Bones, Prince George's Genealogical Society, 1984. Prince George's County Deeds #861:26, #2502:439.
- 10 History of the Town of Riverdale, 1920-1970, pp. 18-24.





**R-55**

**R-10**

**R-10**

**R-10**

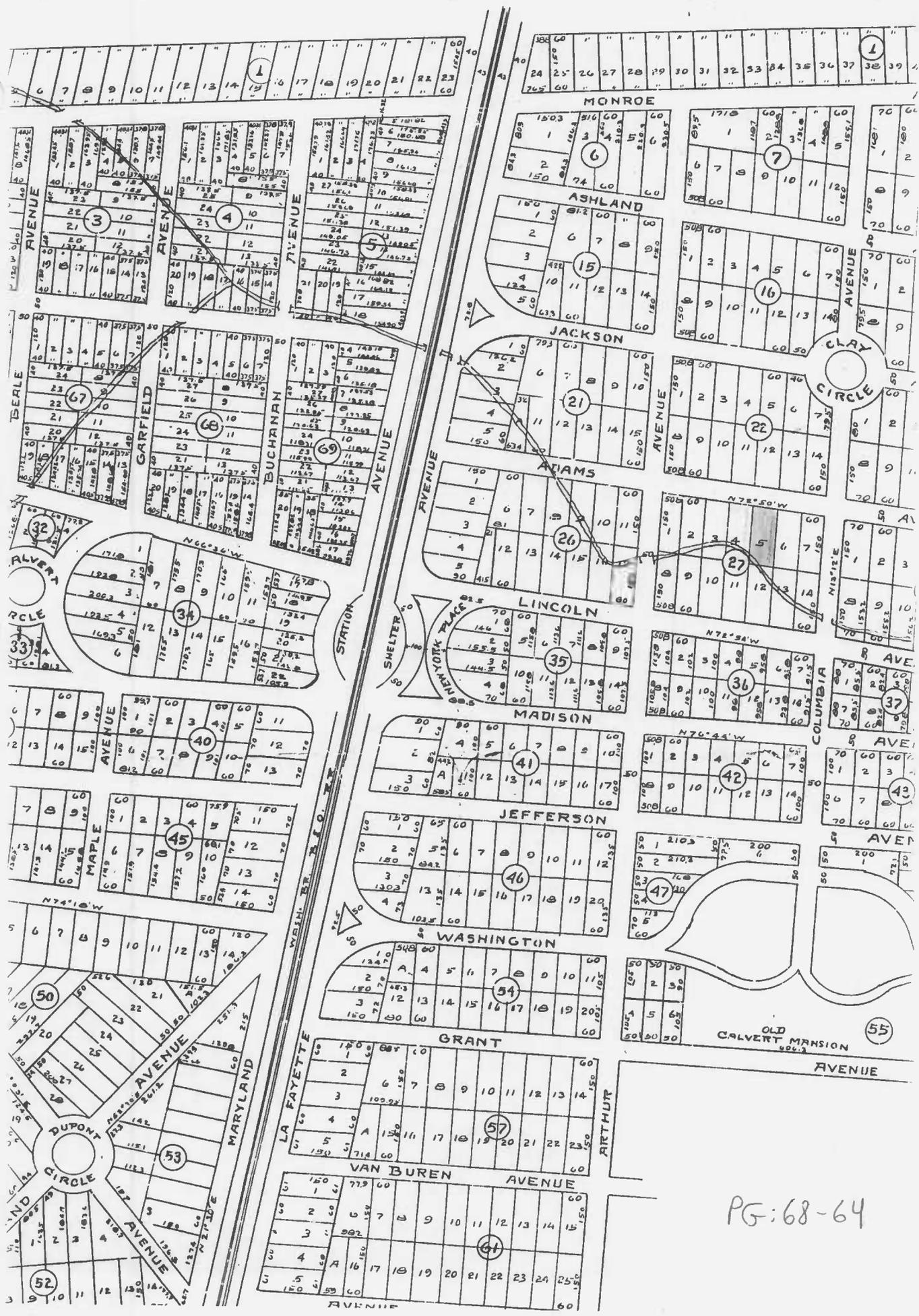
**R-10**

**R-35**

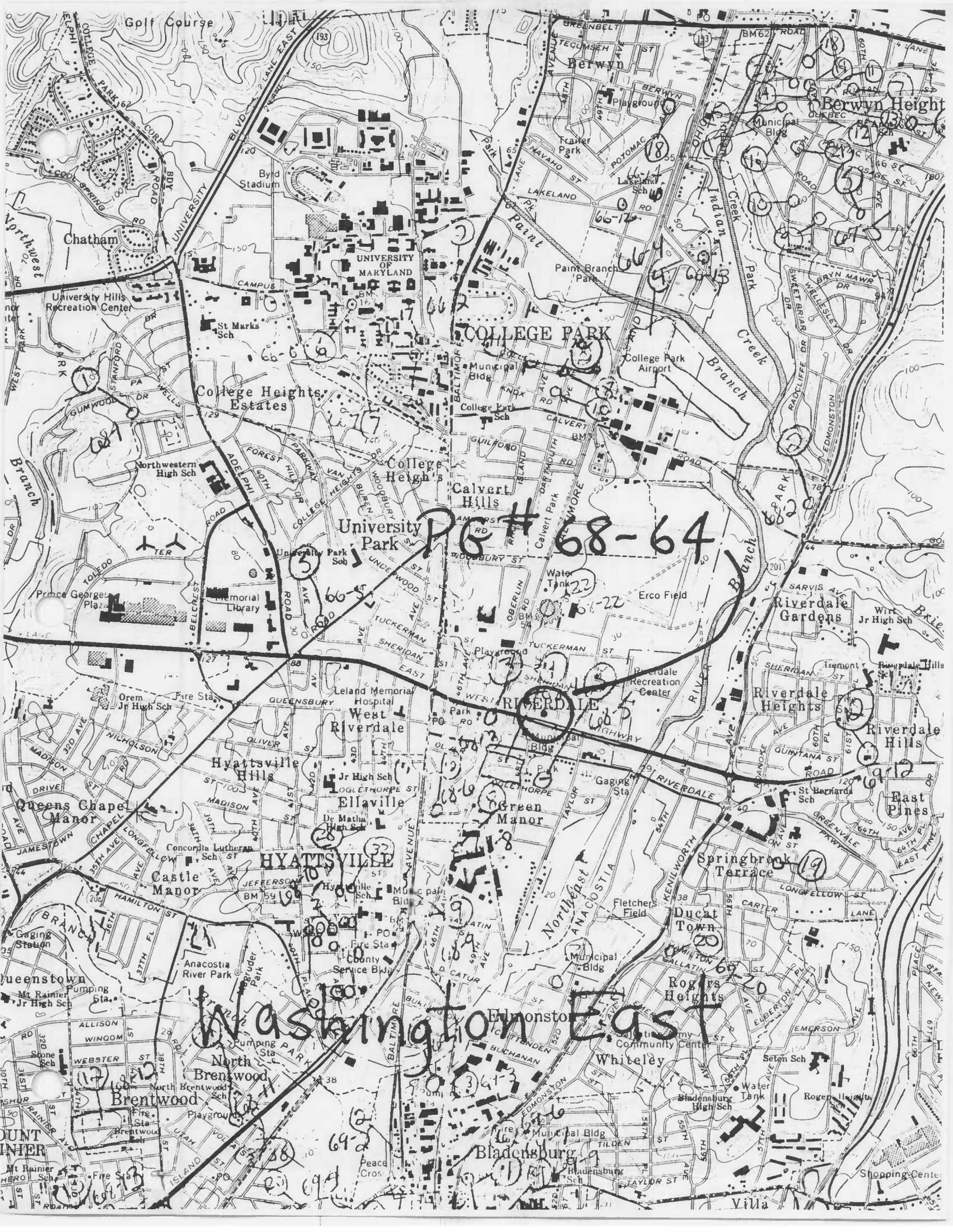
**R-18C**

**MIXED Commercial and Industrial**

MAYOR & COUNCIL OF HYATTSVILLE



PG:68-64



Golf Course

193

BM62

Chatham

Byrd Stadium

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Paint Branch Park

COLLEGE PARK

College Park Airport

College Heights Estates

Northwestern High Sch

College Heights

Calvert Hills

University Park

PG# 68-64

Prince Georges Plaza

Memorial Library

Erco Field

Riverdale Gardens

Leland Memorial Hospital

West Riverdale

Riverdale

Riverdale Heights

Riverdale Hills

Queens Chapel Manor

Hyattsville Hills

Jr High Sch

Ellenville

Green Manor

St Bernard Sch

East Pines

Castle Manor

HYATTSVILLE

Hyattsville Sch

Springbrook Terrace

Ducat Town

Rogers Heights

Washington East

Edmonston

Whiteley

Queenstown

ALLISON

Brentwood

Bladensburg

North Brentwood

Bladensburg

Villa

Shopping Center



PG # 68-64

Burrhus House

Prince Georges Co. Md.

Susan G. Pearl

December 1988

Northwest elevation

Reg: Md. Hist. Trust  
Annapolis, Md.

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PG #68-64

Burkha House

Prince Georges Co. MD.

Jessie G. Park

December 1788

North elevation

Mrs. Mat. West. Street,

Annapolis, MD.

2 of 2



PG 6864

Burke's House

Prince George's Co, MD.

Susan H. Pearl

December 1988

North elevation, detail

Fig: Md. Nat Trust,  
Annapolis, MD.

3-7



16<sup>th</sup> 68.64

Buckhorn House  
Prince George's Co. Md.

Susan S. Pearl

December 1988

Northwest elevation

Map: Md. Nat. Trust, Annapolis MD

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Pg #68-64

Buckhead House

Prince George's Co., MD.

Susan S. Beare

December 1988

North Street

Obj: Md. Nest Threat

Annapolis, MD

5 2 2



Pg # 68-69

Buckles Race

Prince Georges Co MD.

Susan H. Pratt

Even Co 1988

Archaeological

Reg. Md. Hist. Trust.

Annapolis, MD.

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