PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey: PG#79-19-64 Building Date: 1922

Building Name: Crain Highway Monument

Location: Old Crain Highway at Main Street, Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Public/Monument/NA/Excellent/Accessible

Description:

The Crain Highway Monument is a tall bottle-shaped monument, crafted of cut sandstone with concrete trim. It is constructed of roughly cut chunks of local iron-bearing sandstone of variegated shades of gray, brown, rust and red; the plaques, courses of molded trim, cap and finial are of concrete. The base of the monument consists of two high steps built of cut stones. Above this, the square shaft is built of courses of the same red-gray stone topped by a crown molding of gray concrete. Above this, each face of the shaft is ornamented with a plaque. The principal southwest plaque reads: BALTIMORE & SOUTHERN MARYLAND TRUNK LINE --- ROBERT CRAIN HIGHWAY. The same legend appears on the opposite side, on the northeast face of the shaft. There is no legend on the plain southeasterly plaque, but the northwesterly side plaque bears the statement: AT THIS POINT CONSTRUCTION WAS STARTED SEPTEMBER 30, 1922. Above this section of the shaft, another wide course of molded concrete forms a base for the tapering neck of the monument. The shaft curves inward, narrows, and rises to an acorn-shaped finial of concrete. The full height of the monument is approximately 30 feet.

Significance:

The Crain Highway Monument is a handsome monument, built of local stone and trimmed with concrete. It was designed in 1922 by Baltimore architect Howard Sill, and erected in that year to mark the beginning of construction of the important new automobile route between Baltimore and Southern Maryland. The ceremony which marked the beginning of construction took place at Upper Marlboro on 30 September 1922, and at this time the monument was unveiled. The road was constructed over the next five years, and named for Robert Crain whose efforts had made the project possible. The highway was officially opened 22 October 1927. The Crain Highway Monument still stands in good condition in a grassy oval at the west end of Main Street in the town of Upper Marlboro. It is an unusual example of the work of one of Baltimore's early twentieth-century architects, and is a continuing symbol of the advent and growth of automobile transportation in Southern Maryland. It is an established and familiar visual feature of the town of Upper Marlboro, and a landmark for anyone entering the town or seeking direction.

Acreage: circa 1/3 acre

Crain Highway Monument

PG#79-19-64

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Development Periods:

Industrial/Urban Dominance - AD 1870-1930

Modern Period - 1930 to present

Historic Period Themes:

Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Community Planning

Transportation

Resource Type:

Category: Structure

Historic Environment: Town/County Seat

Historic Functions and Uses: Monument/Marker

Design Source: Architect Howard Sill

Survey No. PG#79-19-64

Magi No.

DOE __yes __no

Maryland Historical Trust
State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Crain Highway Monument

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Old Crain Highway at Main Street ___ not for publication

city, town Upper Marlboro ___ vicinity of congressional district 5

state Maryland county Prince George's

3. Classification

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

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

name State Highway Administration

street & number 9300 Kenilworth Ave telephone no.:

city, town Greenbelt state and zip code MD 20770

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. liber ---

street & number folio ---

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title None

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. PG#79-19-64

Condition		Check one	Check one
X excellent	___ deteriorated	X unaltered	X original site
___ good	___ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date of move _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

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

The Crain Highway Monument is a tall bottle-shaped monument, crafted of cut sandstone with concrete trim. It stands on an oval island of grass between the two lanes of Old Crain Highway in the Town of Upper Marlboro. It was built and unveiled in September 1922 to mark the beginning of construction of the Robert Crain Highway (automobile route) between Baltimore and Southern Maryland.

The monument is constructed of roughly cut chunks of local iron-bearing sandstone of variegated shades of gray, brown, rust and red; the plaques, courses of molded trim, cap and finial are of concrete. The base of the monument (approximately 16 feet square) consists of two high steps built of cut stones. Above this, the square shaft (approximately 11 feet square) is built of courses of the same red-gray stone topped by a crown molding of gray concrete. Above this, each face of the shaft (which is slightly inset from the dimensions of the lower shaft) is ornamented with a plaque. The principal southwest plaque reads:

BALTIMORE & SOUTHERN
MARYLAND TRUNK LINE

ROBERT CRAIN HIGHWAY

The same legend appears on the opposite side, on the northeast face of the shaft.

There is no legend on the plain southeasterly plaque, but the northwesterly side plaque bears the following statement:

AT THIS POINT
CONSTRUCTION WAS STARTED
SEPTEMBER 30, 1922

Above this section of the shaft, another wide course of molded concrete forms both a lintel for the plaques and a base for the tapering neck of the monument. The shaft curves inward and narrows as it rises, remaining always square in cross-section. It rises to a crown molding of concrete, on which rests a cyma reversa base surmounted by an acorn-shaped finial, all of concrete. The full height of the monument is approximately 30 feet.

8. Significance

Survey No. PG#79-19-64

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

Specific dates 1922 **Builder/Architect** Howard Sill

check: Applicable Criteria: X A ___B ___C ___D
and/or
Applicable Exception: ___A ___B ___C ___D ___E ___F ___G

Level of Significance: ___national ___state X local

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

The Crain Highway Monument is a handsome monument, built of local stone and trimmed with concrete. It was designed by a Baltimore architect in 1922, and erected in that year to mark the beginning of construction of the important new automobile route between Baltimore and Southern Maryland.

With the advent of the automobile early in the twentieth century, the public began to demand the improvement of ancient roadways, which were narrow, for the most part unpaved, and generally inadequate and dangerous for automobile use. Robert Crain of Charles County became the major proponent of an improved automobile route between Baltimore and the counties of Southern Maryland, appearing often before the State Legislature; by 1922, the Legislature had appropriated one million dollars for construction of the highway. The route was surveyed and laid out, running through approximately 25 miles of Prince George's County, from Priests' Bridge near White Marsh, in a southwesterly direction through Upper Marlboro (the County Seat), to the boundary of Charles County where it connected with an existing direct road into St. Mary's County.[1]

Construction was scheduled to begin in Upper Marlboro in September 1922. The contract for the first 3.53 miles was awarded to G. B. Mullan and Company. The plans called for a monument to be erected at the point of the beginning of construction, sponsored by the Merchants and Manufacturers

---

[1] Official Program, Baltimore-Southern Maryland Trunk Line (Robert Crain Highway), Upper Marlboro, Md., Saturday, September 30th, 1922; Celebrating The Opening of the Robert Crain Highway, Upper Marlboro, Maryland, October Twenty-Second, Nineteen Twenty-Seven, brochure.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. PG#79-19-64

See Notes, Item 8

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name Upper Marlboro **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UTM **References** do NOT complete UTM references

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A				B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan G. Pearl, Research/Architectural Historian

organization Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission **date** March 1993

street & number 14741 Gov Oden Bowie Drive **telephone** 301-952-3521

city or town Upper Marlboro **state** MD 20772

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
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

COMMUNITY PLACE
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023
-514-7600

PS-2746

Association together with the Southern Maryland Society. Howard Sill, architect of Baltimore, was commissioned to design the monument. A large celebration was planned for 30 September 1922 in Upper Marlboro, including the unveiling of the monument.[2]

Howard Sill (1867-1927) had an active architectural practice in Baltimore, and connections, through his marriage, with Prince George's County. In 1892 he married Mary Frances Duvall, a member of the prominent Duvall family from Marietta, and, from that time, maintained a summer place near Marietta in central Prince George's County. He joined the Baltimore architectural firm of Wyatt and Nolting in the 1890s, and opened his own office in Baltimore in 1907. He continued his practice, principally in Baltimore, until a stroke paralyzed him in 1926. Just before his illness, Sill had been selected, with John Russell Pope as his associate, to draw up plans for the proposed Baltimore Art Museum. Sill never recovered enough to return to practice (the museum design was completed by Pope), and Howard Sill died at the age of 60 in 1927.[3]

The highway monument which Sill was commissioned to design in 1922 was to be constructed of native stone. John N. Mackall, who as chairman of the State Roads Commission headed the highway project, requested a distinctive monument, comparable to the stone jug at old Jug Bridge near Frederick. Mackall suggested that a sufficient amount of red sandstone could be found in the vicinity of Upper Marlboro to complete the monument. Sill's design called for a bottle-shaped monument approximately 30 feet high and 16 feet at the base.[4]

Early in August 1922, Mackall, Sill and several others working on the project, came to Upper Marlboro to determine the alignment of the road through that town, and to choose a site for the monument. The townspeople had proposed that the right-of-way should run westward along the lines of Main and Church Streets, but Mackall rejected that route because of the right-angle turns. Instead, the right-of-way was to proceed westward

---

[2] ibid., Prince George's Enquirer, 14 July, 28 July and 11 August 1922.

[3] Biographical file, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

[4] Prince George's Enquirer, 14 July, 11 August, and 1 September 1922.

on Main Street, turning left and proceeding diagonally southwest across the Edlavitch lot and the Sasscer lot, then connecting with the road leading southwest to the Chesapeake Beach Railway station. The committee decided to place the monument in the triangle formed by cutting diagonally across the Edlavitch lot. The Edlavitch lot was purchased, and Roads Commission workmen began extracting stone for the monument from the bank behind (and south of) Trinity Church.[5]

Because of the work of Robert Crain which made the project possible, the new road was to be called the Robert Crain Highway. The ceremony which marked the beginning of construction took place at Upper Marlboro on 30 September 1922, and more than 4000 people attended, carried by train from considerable distances. There were parades and floats, and a picnic lunch was provided for everyone at the Fairgrounds. Mrs. Robert Crain unveiled the monument, and Crain himself was one of the principal speakers at the occasion. The celebration proved to be one of the most momentous events in the history of the town of Upper Marlboro.[6]

M. H. Magruder, Prince George's County Chairman for the Crain Highway project, wrote: "The monument unveiled will stand as a mute sentinel guarding a sacred spot and as a tribute to a great achievement, but more fittingly still as a dedication to the spirit which the occasion engendered, which time itself can not efface."[7]

The road was constructed over the next five years: 31.5 miles long with a pavement of concrete 15 to 18 feet wide. Before it was finished, the Legislature appropriated an additional $250,000 to complete the project. On 22 October 1927 the highway was officially opened; the barrier was dropped by the daughter of Robert Crain and the son of John Mackall.[8]

---

[5] Prince George's Enquirer, 11 August and 1 September 1922.

[6] Prince George's Enquirer, 22 and 29 September, and 6 October 1922.

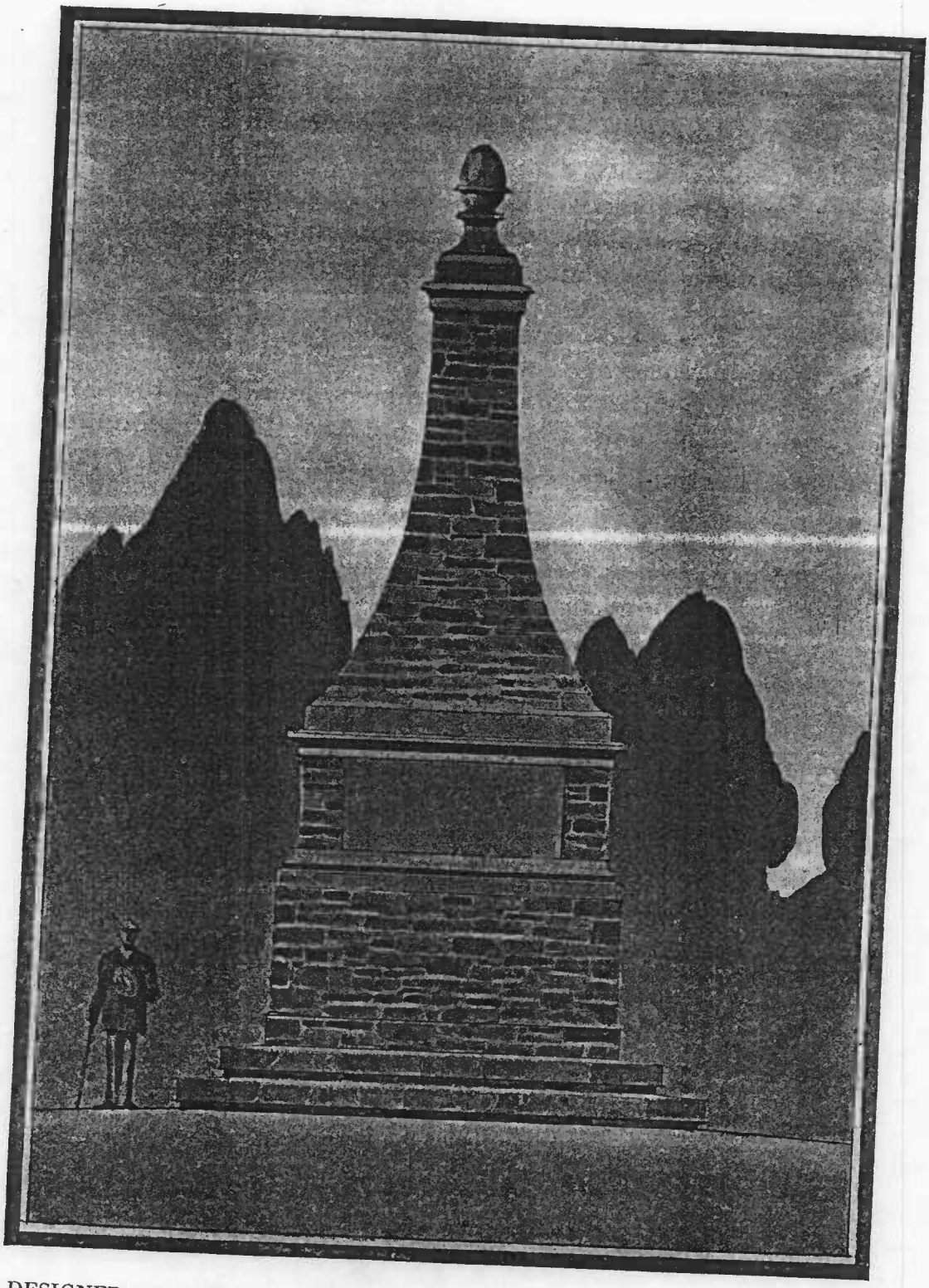
[7] Prince George's Enquirer, 6 October 1922.

[8] Celebrating the Opening of the Robert Crain Highway, Upper Marlboro, Maryland, October Twenty-Second, Nineteen Twenty-Seven, brochure.

The Crain Highway Monument still stands in good condition in the grassy oval at the west end of Main Street in the town of Upper Marlboro. It is an unusual example of the work of one of Baltimore's early twentieth-century architects, and is a continuing symbol of the advent and growth of automobile transportation in Southern Maryland. It is an established and familiar visual feature of the town of Upper Marlboro, and indeed a landmark for anyone entering the town or seeking direction.

PG:79-19-64

WILL MEMORIALIZE THE SPIRIT OF THIS DAY



THIS SHAFT, DESIGNED BY HOWARD SILL, ARCHITECT, WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE CONSTRUCTION, AT UPPER MARLBORO, OF THE NEW HIGHWAY FROM BALTIMORE TO SOUTHERN MARYLAND.

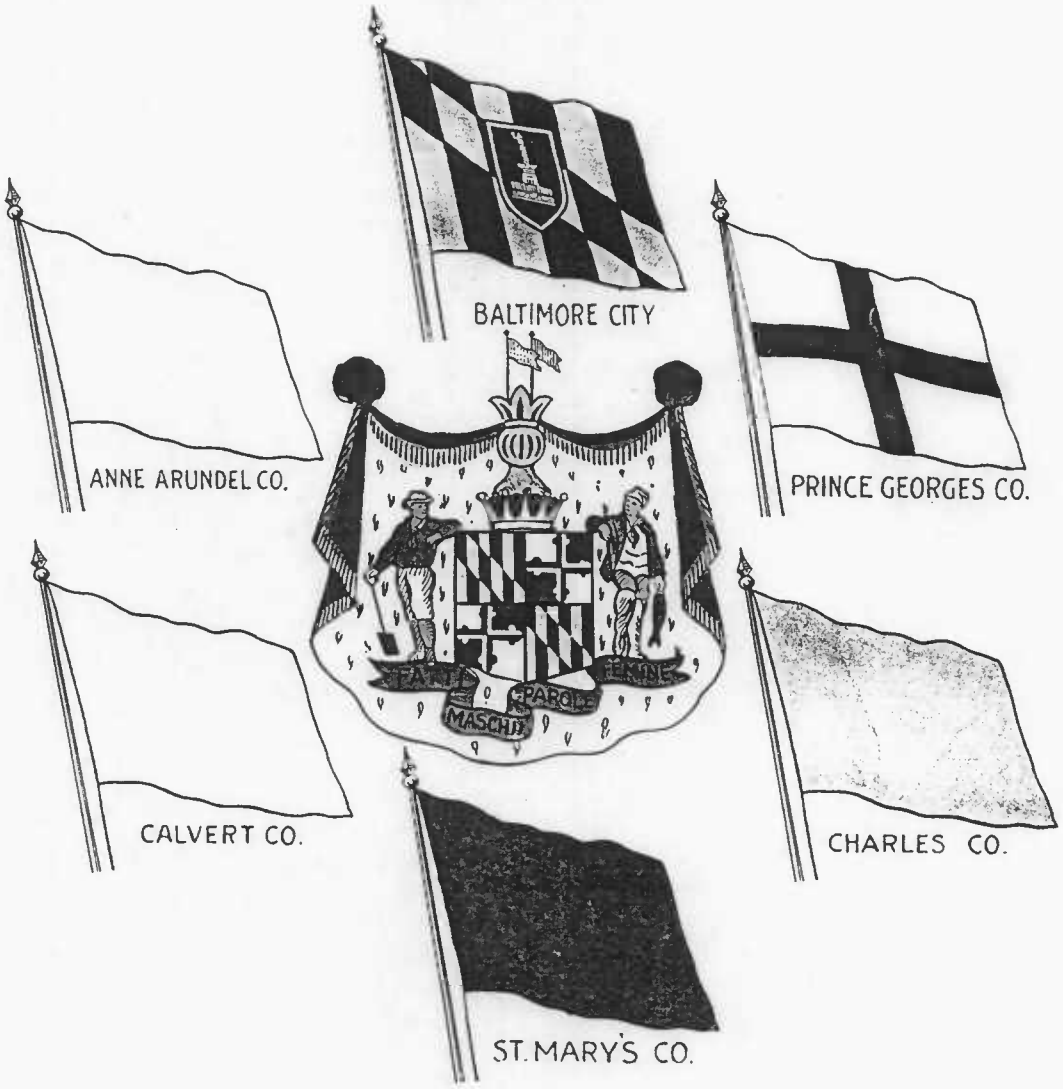
Note: Contract for the construction of the first 3 58/100 miles has been awarded to G. B. Mullan & Co.

PG:79-19-64

OFFICIAL PROGRAM

Baltimore-Southern Maryland Trunk Line

(ROBERT CRAIN HIGHWAY)

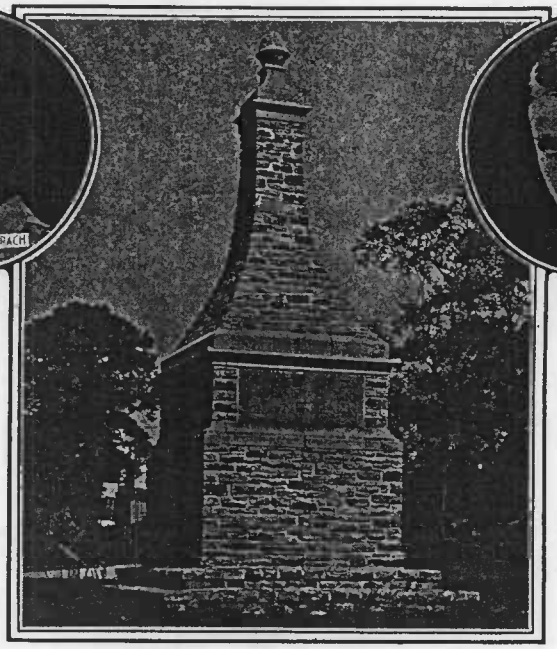


UPPER MARLBORO, MD.

Saturday, September 30th, 1922

PG: 79-19-64

MARGARET CRAIN



JOHN MACKALL, JR.

MONUMENT ERECTED BY

SOUTHERN MARYLAND SOCIETY

and

MERCHANTS AND MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

(Now Baltimore Association of Commerce)

Upper Marlboro, Maryland, September 30, 1922

Commemorating the beginning of the

ROBERT CRAIN HIGHWAY

HIGHWAY OFFICIALLY OPENED, OCTOBER 22, 1927

By Dropping of Barrier by

MARGARET BENNET CRAIN and JOHN N. MACKALL, Jr.

PG#79-19-64

Crain Highway Monument

Upper Marlboro

Prince Georges County

Upper Marlboro

PG + 77-19-64

Crain Highway Monument
Prince George's Co. MD
Susan V. Pearl
December 1992
Southwest face of monument
Neg. # [illegible] MD SHPO

192

AT THIS POINT
CONSTRUCTION WAS STARTED
SEPTEMBER 30.1922

PG # 79-19-64

Main Highway Monument

Prince George's Co. MD

Susan L. Pearl

December 1992

MD SHPO

Northwest face of monument

2 of 2