HAGERSTOWN LANDMARKS RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties # WA-HAG-178

Property Name/Address: Washington County Almshouse, 239 North Locust St., Hagerstown, Maryland

Description/Significance: A two story gable-roofed brick building on a raised stone basement, six bays wide, constructed in 1799-1800 as the Washington County Almshouse. Significant for its association with early efforts to provide relief for the poor in Maryland; a rare example of the type of building constructed to serve as a county almshouse at the turn of the nineteenth century and possibly the earliest extant purpose-built almshouse in the state.

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

I. Geographic Organization: Western Maryland
II. Chronological/Developmental Period(s):
    Agricultural/Industrial Transition, 1815-1870
III. Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s):
    Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Community Planning
IV. Resource Type
    Category: Building
    Historic Environment: Urban
    Historic Function(s) and Use(s):
        DOMESTIC/institutional housing
    Known Design Source: Seth Lane, builder

Form Prepared by: Peter E. Kurtze
109 Brandon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21212
June 30, 1992

HAGERSTOWN LANDMARKS RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties # WA-HAG-178

Property Name/Address: Old County Almshouse, 239 North Locust St., Hagerstown, Maryland

Description/Significance: A two story gable-roofed brick building on a raised stone basement, six bays wide, constructed in 1799 as the County Almshouse. Represents Hagerstown's early architectural and social history.[1]

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

I. Geographic Organization: Western Maryland
II. Chronological/Developmental Period(s):
    Agricultural/Industrial Transition, 1815-1870
III. Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme(s):
    Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Community Planning
IV. Resource Type
    Category: Building
    Historic Environment: Urban
    Historic Function(s) and Use(s):
        DOMESTIC/institutional housing
    Known Design Source: Unknown

Form Prepared by: Peter E. Kurtze
109 Brandon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21212
August 15, 1991

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[1] Description/significance information prepared by Paula S. Reed, PhD, Architectural Historian, Preservation Associates, Inc., Hagerstown, Maryland.

Survey No. WA-HAG-178

Magi No.

DOE ___yes ___no

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Washington County Almshouse

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 239 North Locust Street n/a not for publication

city, town Hagerstown ___ vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county Washington

3. Classification

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

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

name

street & number telephone no.:

city, town state and zip code

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Washington County Courthouse liber

street & number 95 West Washington Street folio

city, town Hagerstown state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title n/a

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. WA-HLG-178

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

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

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE COUNT: 1

The former Washington County Almshouse is located at 239 North Locust Street in Hagerstown, Maryland. It stands on the west side of the street, facing east, set back a short distance from the sidewalk. The building is constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond, and stands two stories high above a raised basement of random limestone rubble. The brickwork is painted red; mortar joints are treated with a grapevine profile. The principal (east) facade is six bays wide; the entrance is located in the third bay from the north, at basement level, within a modern brick vestibule. The remaining bays at basement level are defined by 6/6 sash windows with plain frames and molded sills. The stone masonry rises to the level of the top of the window frames, and the window openings are headed with brick arches. On the ground floor, window openings have splayed jack arches, 1½ bricks high; windows comprise replacement 2/2 sash within frames which retain early ovolo/fillet backband trim. The second bay from the north has been infilled with brick; an entrance formerly was located here. On the upper story, window frames also have ovolo/fillet backband, and all but one (the third from the south) retain early 9/6 sash. The facade is capped with a boxed cornice with bed mold; the cornice stops at the gable ends. The gable roof is sheathed in standing seam metal. A double-flue parapet chimney is located at each gable end, and a single interior chimney rises from just below the ridge on the east slope, at the fourth bay from the south.

The brickwork of the south gable end is also laid in Flemish bond. A transomed entrance (apparently a mid-19th century alteration of a presumed original feature) is centered at ground floor level. This opening is surmounted by a single-brick jack arch. A large 9/9 window is aligned above the entrance on the second story, within an opening with a 1½-brick-high splayed jack arch. A 6/6 window lights the attic. Window trim is consistent with that on the east facade. The eaves are finished with tapered rakeboards, and a broad parapet chimney rises from the peak of the gable.

The rear (west) elevation is laid in five-course bond. This elevation is six bays wide, with an entrance located in the second bay from the south at ground level. A window opening marks the location of a stair landing to the south of the entrance bay. Two cut-in entrances flank an infilled window opening at the second bay from the north. Window detailing and cornice conform to the pattern of the east facade.

8. Significance

Survey No. WA-HAG-178

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

Specific dates 1799-1800 **Builder/Architect** Seth Lane, builder

check: Applicable Criteria: x A __B x 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.

Built in 1799-1800, the former Washington County Almshouse is significant under criterion A for its association with early efforts to provide relief for the poor in Maryland. It derives further significance under criterion C as a rare example of the type of building constructed to serve as a county almshouse at the turn of the nineteenth century, and may be the earliest extant purpose-built almshouse in the state.

The Inventory of the County and Town Archives of Maryland offers a succinct summary of the events leading to the development of the Washington County Almshouse, drawn from the record of Acts of the county government:

> In colonial Maryland each county cared for its own poor; but no almshouses or workhouses were built until 1768 when an act of Assembly made provision for such houses in each of five counties, and before the revolution the poor of two other counties were likewise provided for. Five trustees forming a closed corporation were put in charge of this new institution. No trustee was obliged to serve longer than five years; and being discharged in rotation, they were to choose a successor of one of their number at the end of every year. They were to meet four times a year for the transaction of business. When they had purchased the land, built and furnished the houses, they were to appoint an overseer, who was to serve during their pleasure. Lastly, the trustees were to compel the poor to work, and in this they were to be aided by the sheriff and constables. . . .
>
> Washington County's almshouse is not mentioned specifically until 1796 when the whole system for the care of paupers in that county was reorganized (Acts 1796, ch. 22). Seven trustees were appointed, one to retire from office each

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. WA-HAG-178

See Notes, Section 8, Page 7

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Hagerstown, MD

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 Peter E. Kurtze

organization

date June 30, 1992

street & number 109 Brandon Road

telephone (410) 296-7538

city or town Baltimore

state MD 21212

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

PS-2746

Early 9/9 sash survive in two windows on the ground floor; the upper story has 6/6.

The north gable end is also characterized by five-course bond. A single window opening is centered on the second story and attic levels; the ground floor has two windows, probably cut in.

The interior was not available for inspection. An 1887 Sanborn Map indicates two transverse partitions in the basement, and also shows a one-story, rectangular outbuilding at the rear of the house.

> year and to be succeeded by a new trustee elected by his colleagues. They were to meet four times a year and to appoint an overseer. The latter was to keep a list of all the poor, beggars, vagrants, vagabonds and offenders who were entrusted to his care. He was also required to keep accurate accounts of money received and expended as well as an inventory of all property in his custody. He must compel the inmates to work and to wear a badge "upon the shoulder of the right sleeve of the uppermost garment" on which was to appear the letters P. W. cut in red or blue cloth. Since there were as yet no proper accommodations for his charges, the overseer was permitted to rent a suitable house in the neighborhood of the courthouse. A part of this act was amended in 1797 putting the appointment of new trustees (to be reduced to a total of three) in the hands of the justices of the county court and authorizing the trustees to purchase land and contract with workmen for the erection of an almshouse (Acts 1797, ch. 34). The three newly appointed trustees, Henry Schnebly, William Heyser and George Neigh [*sic*], advertised for bids for a brick "poorhouse" March 28, 1799. . . .[1]

The trustees' advertisement appeared in the Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser, and provided basic specifications for the proposed building:

> Mechanics take Notice.
>
> The subscribers, trustees of the poor, for Washington county, wish to let the building of a brick house, in Elizabeth-town, for the poor of said county, 36 by 60 feet, two stories high: they have a plan for the said house, to be seen in the hands of Wm. Heyser, who will receive proposals for completing the whole of the Mason and Brick work, and Plastering, in one contract, and the whole of the Carpenter's and Joiner's work in a separate contract -- the contractors to furnish all materials necessary, except locks and hinges.
>
> Proposals will be received until Saturday the 13th day of April next -- no persons need apply but workmen, nor workmen except they can give sufficient security for the faithful performance of their contract.
>
> HENRY SCHNEBLY
> WILLIAM HEYSER
> GEORGE NEY
>
> Hagerstown, March 28, 1799.[2]

Construction was under way by the winter; the contract for the

carpenter's and joiner's work apparently went to one Seth Lane, who on January 15, 1800 offered a ten-dollar reward for information leading to the conviction of "some covetous person or persons [who] have at sundry times committed depredations on my Property, by stealing Plank from the Poor House in this town."[3] The building was completed and occupied later that year.[4]

In 1816, the levy court was authorized to construct additional buildings and to purchase land for a poorhouse graveyard.[5] Despite the addition of a three-story brick building to the almshouse complex,[6] overcrowding had reached intolerable proportions by 1824, and the levy court was authorized to dispose of the property and purchase a poor farm. This act was repealed the following year, and additional accommodations for workhouse inmates were provided in part of the new county jail.[7]

When the almshouse was constructed, its surroundings were relatively sparsely developed; as the city of Hagerstown expanded during the nineteenth century, the location of the almshouse became a concern.

> . . . [I]n later years [the proximity of the almshouse buildings] and their situation on one of the principal routes of travel were felt to be serious evils, as the effect of town influence upon the institution was generally acknowledged to be bad, and the public location rendered it a convenient lodging-place for tramps and other idlers. The reports of the grand juries year after year called attention to these facts, and recommended the selection of a more remote site, and the erection of a building better adapted to the purposes of an almshouse. . . . The subject continued to be agitated, and at a meeting of the Farmer's Club, in 1873, Dr. Maddox read an essay upon the condition of the almshouse, in which he strongly urged that the buildings then in use be sold, and that a farm, remote from the influences and associations of the county-seat, be procured as a site for the institution. These suggestions met with the unanimous approval of a large body of influential tax-payers present . . .[8]

A committee presented the Club's recommendation to the county commissioners. Their opinion was reinforced by the findings of Dr. C. W. Chancellor, Secretary of the Maryland State Board of Health, who conducted a survey of public institutions throughout the state and presented his report to Governor John Lee Carroll in 1877. The Chancellor report excoriated the Washington County Almshouse as "a

common nuisance . . . dilapidated and altogether unsuitable for the purposes of an almshouse."[9] Chancellor found a total of 110 inmates, 29 of whom were insane, occupying the two almshouse buildings; in addition to presenting a graphic picture of living conditions, his report incidentally offers valuable information on the historic use of space in the buildings:

> . . . The keeper occupies the principal part of the main building, and the only thing that looked like civilization about the premises was his apartments, and two rooms in the rear part of the building, occupied by two gentle tidy old ladies, who with their own feeble hands arranged and kept clean their respective apartments, while all around them was cheerless and repulsive to a degree that cannot be described. In this same building there are inmates of all ages, sexes and conditions, some insane, some idiotic, others weak minded and depraved. Separation of sexes is not provided for, nor does it seem to be cared for, and the results of such promiscuous association need not be enlarged on. But bad as was the condition of affairs in this building, that of the one on the opposite side of the road was found to be incomparably worse. The rooms were overcrowded, filthy and noisome to an incredible degree. The floors, the walls, the bedding all bore testimony of the neglected condition of this foul receptacle. The sexes occupied the same rooms, mingled together and cohabited as if poverty created no distinctions.
> . . .
> . . . [T]he entire establishment is imperfectly ventilated, utterly without sanitary regulations and destitute of the commonest conveniences of life. There are no water closet arrangements; the inmates use vessels in their rooms and then empty them in the adjoining fields. The whole atmosphere of the establishment is contaminated, and cannot fail, sooner or later, to endanger the sanitary condition of the neighborhood.[10]

Rooms contained as many as six persons; crowding, the mixture of sexes and races, lack of ventilation, and insanitary conditions led Chancellor to conclude that "surely the enlightened people of Washington county will not endure this place much longer."[11]

Chancellor's report, which included the shocking details of the specific cases of several inmates, prompted a bitter response from the trustees of the poor for Washington County. In a lengthy rebuttal published in the Baltimore American on August 27, 1877, the trustees denied several of Chancellor's observations, accusing him of malicious

misrepresentation; with specific reference to the accusation that the almshouse buildings were "old and dilapidated," they asserted

> . . . While some of the buildings are old, they are substantially built of brick, two and three stories high, well lighted and well ventilated, and not more than two years since were thoroughly renovated and repainted. Three times a year the buildings are whitewashed throughout, as well as the surrounding fences and outbuildings. Regularly every Friday the rooms and halls of the different hoses are scrubbed thoroughly, it being the constant object of the management to keep the house clean and orderly.[12]

Despite the protests of the Trustees of the Poor, Chancellor stood by his report, supported by testimonials from such respected figures as Dr. John S. Conrad, Superintendent of the Maryland State Hospital for the Insane.

As early as 1824, efforts had been initiated to induce Washington County government to purchase a farm to replace the almshouse; the Trustees for the Poor had repeatedly offered this suggestion, which had also been expressed by the Farmer's Club and other citizens. Throughout the period preceding the controversy over the Chancellor report, however, the county budget had proven insufficient to support such an improvement. In 1878, in the wake of the Chancellor allegations, John Nicodemus purchased a 112-acre farm located north of Hagerstown, and presented the property to the Washington County Commissioners "for the accommodation of the poor and indigent of the county, and for an almshouse and the general uses of like character which the interests of the county and its people may require."[13] The following year, a new facility, to be known as Bellevue Asylum, was under construction; Dr. Chancellor himself had visited and approved the site, and had contributed to the development of plans, which were prepared under the direction of architect Frank E. Davis of Baltimore. This was a state-of-the-art institution; constructed of brick on a raised stone basement, it stood two stories high, and was cruciform in plan. Its two axes measured 152 and 133 feet, and contained 74 apartments to accommodate 150 inmates. Separate accommodations were provided for the sick, and for male and female inmates; the violent insane were segregated from harmless inmates in a separate wing. The building was furnished with running water, and special provisions were made for adequate ventilation and sanitation.[14]

The building was completed and the last of the inmates moved from the old almshouse in July, 1880; Dr. Chancellor presided over the classification of cases. The total cost of construction was $26,000,

part of which was raised through the sale of the old almshouse property.[15] The Bellevue Asylum remained in service into the mid-20th century, when county almshouses were replaced by State owned and operated chronic disease hospitals under a program devised in 1940 by then-Governor O'Conor.

Notes:

1. Inventory of the County and Town Archives of Maryland. The Historical Records Survey, Division of Women's and Professional Projects, Works Progress Administration. No. 21: Washington County (Hagerstown). Baltimore: Historical Records Survey, 1937. (Hereinafter cited as Inventory).

2. Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser, March 28, 1799.

3. Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser, January 15, 1800.

4. J. Thomas Scharf, History of Western Maryland. Orig. pub. Philadelphia, 1882; rpt. Baltimore: Regional Publishing Co., 1968, p. 1162.

5. Inventory, p. 91.

6. Scharf, p. 1162.

7. Inventory, p. 91.

8. Scharf, p. 1162.

9. C. W. Chancellor, M. D., Report on the Public Charities, Reformatories, Prisons and Almshouses of the State of Maryland. Frederick: Baughman Brothers, 1877, pp. 152-155.

10. Chancellor, p. 152.

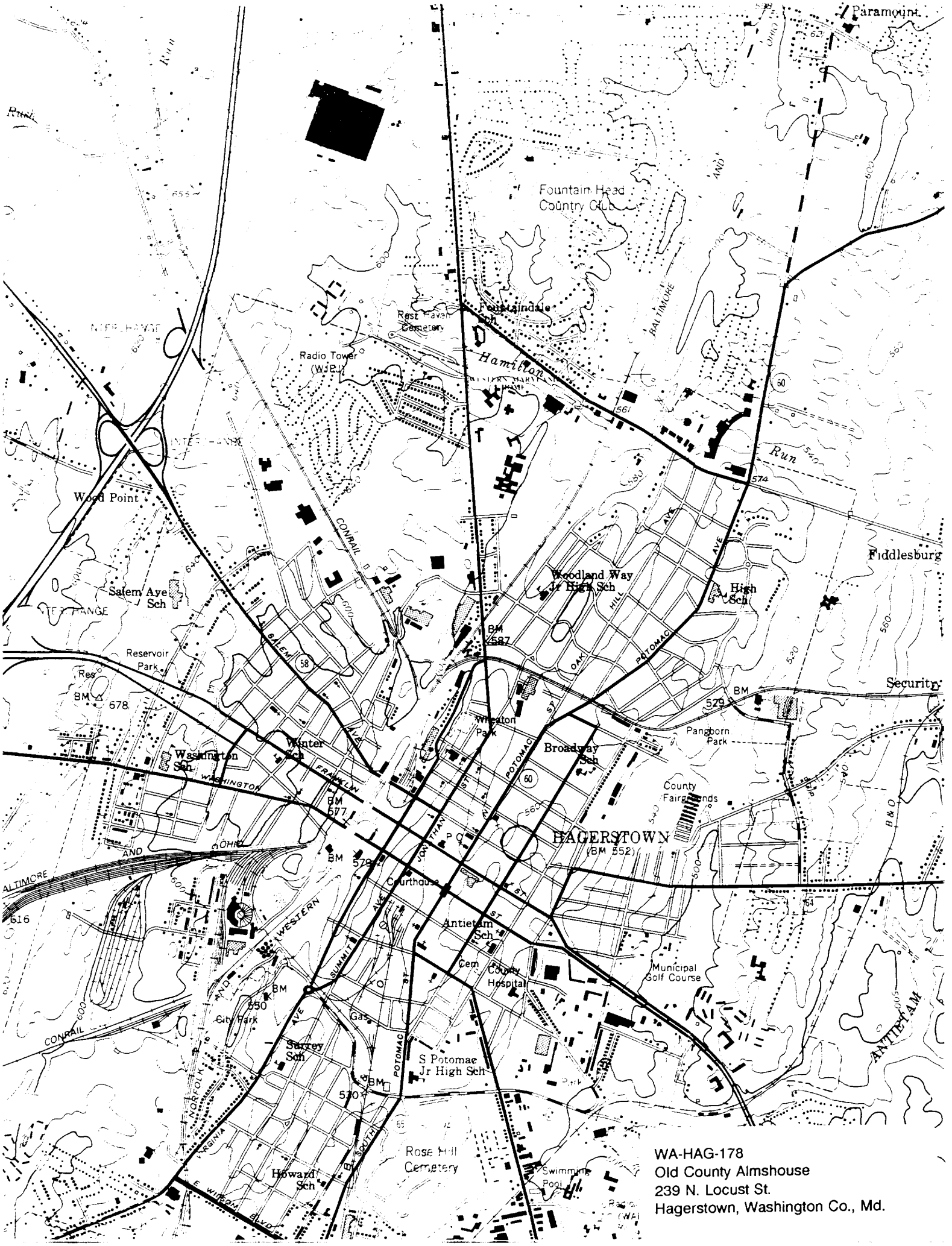
11. C. W. Chancellor, M. D., Report on the Public Charities, Reformatories, Prisons and Almshouses of the State of Maryland. Frederick: Baughman Brothers, 1877, pp. 152-155.

12. "Dr. Chancellor's Report. The Washington County Almshouse. An Answer from the Trustees of the Poor -- Denials and Explanations." Baltimore American, August 27, 1877.

13. Scharf, p. 1163.

14. Scharf, pp. 1162-1164.

15. Scharf, p. 1164.



WA-HAG-178
Old County Almshouse
239 N. Locust St.
Hagerstown, Washington Co., Md.

WA-HAG-178

239 N. LOCUST ST.

HAGERSTOWN MD

7/91 P. KURTZE

VIEW FROM SOUTHEAST