CAPSULE SUMMARY
Bel Alton Motel (CH-566)
9295 Crain Highway, Charles County

Constructed in 1952, the Bel Alton Motel is one of seven motels surveyed as part of the Maryland 301 Transportation Corridor Survey. The Bel Alton Motel Company purchased the property in 1955 and resold it to the Brunnabend family in 1957. The motel and surrounding property remained in the Brunnabend family's possession for nearly forty years. The Bel Alton Motel is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style motels built along Crain Highway in the middle of the 20th century.

The Bel Alton Hotel is located on a level, grassy lot on the west side of Crain Highway. The Colonial Revival style motel has a two-story, central section flanked by one-story wings. It is set on a solid concrete foundation and the masonry walls are clad in stucco. Horizontal sash windows light the motel rooms and an exterior concrete chimney rises above the hipped roof. An in-ground swimming pool is located at the front of the motel and a garage is situated to the rear.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
MD INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Inventory No. CH:566

==========

1. Name of Property

==========

historic name Bel Alton Motel

common/other name _____

==========

2. Location

==========

street & number 9295 Crain Highway not for publication _____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)

X private
____ public-local
____ public-State
____ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

X building(s)
____ district
____ site
____ structure
____ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	3	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	0	objects
2	4	Total

Is this property listed in the National Register?

Yes ____ Name of Listing _____

No X

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Hotel

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Solid: Concrete Block
Roof Hipped: 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.

==========

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Commerce

Period of Significance 1952-1957

Significant Dates 1952

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Beecher, Mary Ann. "The Motel in Builder's Literature and Architectural Publications," In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, edited by Jan Jennings. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press for the Society for Commercial Archeology, 1990.

Brown, Jack D., et. al. *Charles County Maryland: A History*. New Jersey: Custombook, Inc., 1976.

Carley, Rachel. *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

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

Jakle, John A., Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers. *The Motel in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Margolies, John. *Home Away From Home: Motels in America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

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" Postcards from Americana." www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/card.html, accessed 22 November 1999.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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

Watson, James Douglas. *Prince George's County Past and Present*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Lithograph Co., 1962.

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property 9.40 acres

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

The property at 9295 Crain Highway is designated as Parcel 5, Grid 1 as indicated on Map 64.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The building at 9295 Crain Highway has historically been associated with Parcel 5 since its construction in 1952.

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11. Form Prepared By

==========

name/title R. Weidlich and C. Novelli, Architectural Historians revised by L. Trieschmann (July 8, 2000)
organization EHT Traceries, Inc. date February 29, 2000
street & number 5420 Western Avenue telephone 301/656-5283
city or town Chevy Chase state MD zip code 20815

==========

12. Property Owner

==========

name Kathy I. Pings
street & number 9295 Crain Highway telephone
city or town Bel Alton state MD zip code 20611

The Bel Alton Hotel is located on a level, grassy lot on the west side of Crain Highway. Built in 1952, the Colonial Revival style motel has a two-story, central section flanked by one-story wings. It is set on a solid concrete foundation and the masonry walls are clad in stucco. Horizontal sash windows light the motel rooms and an exterior concrete chimney rises above the hipped roof. An in-ground swimming pool is located at the front of the motel and a garage is situated to the rear.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The façade or east elevation of the motel is twenty-one bays in width. The two-story central office features multi-light five-sided window bays at both the first and second stories and a three-sided hipped roof, projecting bay. One-story, nine bay porches supported by metal posts define the one-story side wings. Twenty-seven 2/2 horizontal sash wood windows, some of which are paired, pierce the façade and nine flush wood doors lead to the motel rooms.

At each end of the one-story wings, there is a one-story, stucco-clad wing with a hipped roof. Connected by hyphens, the northernmost wing is twenty-five bays in width and the southernmost wing is thirty bays in width. The side wings have one-story porches, supported by metal posts, that extend the full width of the façade. Horizontal 2/2 windows, some of which are paired, and single leaf, wood flush doors pierce the facades. Atop the asphalt shingle hipped roofs are four-sided cupolas with vents.

The north elevation of the motel has no openings and is relatively devoid of ornamentation. Its only relief is a painted sign that reads, COLOR TV, SWIMMING POOL, AIR CONDITIONED, ROOM PHONES.

The rear elevation of the northernmost wing contains fifteen 2/2 horizontal sash windows covered by yellow awnings. Twenty 2/2 horizontal sash windows pierce the rear of the central portion, which is further defined by two additions. The one-story, side gable addition features a concrete block foundation, aluminum siding, and a 1/1 aluminum window. The two-story rear addition is clad in asbestos shingles and has one-light aluminum sliding windows and an exterior end chimney that is clad in stucco. The southernmost wing features eighteen 2/2 horizontal sash windows,

fifteen of which are covered with yellow awnings. Like the north elevation, the south elevation is devoid of openings and decoration.

SUPPORTING BUILDINGS:

There are three signs at the front of the motel that date to the early 1950s. They appear to be original to the site. Metal posts support the neon signs. The main sign reads MOTEL Bel Alton. The other two are ENTRANCE and (NO) VACANCY signs.

At the rear of the motel, there is a 1960s garage that is two stories in height and two bays in width. It is constructed of concrete block and covered by an asphalt shingle gambrel roof. On its east side, there is a one-story, three-bay side wing with a gable roof.

There are three modern prefabricated shed at the rear of the property.

==========

Constructed in 1952, the Bel Alton Motel is one of seven motels surveyed as part of the Maryland 301 Transportation Corridor Survey. The Bel Alton Motel Company purchased the property in 1955 and resold it to the Brunnabend family in 1957. The motel and surrounding property remained in the Brunnabend family's possession for nearly forty years. The Bel Alton Motel is characteristic of the Colonial Revival style motels built along Crain Highway in the middle of the 20th century.

Motel History

The introduction of the automobile led to the public's fascination with touring and convenient accommodations soon began to develop across the country for this touring public. Originally referred to as cabin camps or tourist camps, these accommodations became known as auto courts, tourist courts, motor hotels, motor lodges, autel, and most commonly as motels. Motels, like hotels provided lodging for travelers, however, the motel was typically located along a highway and provided the motorist with direct access to individual parking spaces. The number of roadside motels along America's highways increased from six hundred to more than forty thousand between the late 1920s and the 1950s.[1]

Predating the motel were other forms of roadside accommodations that were spawned by the automobile. They often consisted of free campgrounds with parking and community restrooms. Hoping to encourage a higher class of clientele, the owners of the campgrounds began to erect low-cost cabins. These cabins, the precursor of the modern motel, provided the tourist with comfort, convenience, and privacy. However, the tourist was often expected to provide his own provisions. "At the U-Smile Cabin Camp...arriving guests signed the registry and then paid their money. A cabin without a mattress rented for one dollar; a mattress for two people cost an extra twenty-five cents, and blankets, sheets and pillows another fifty cents. Each guest was given a bucket of water from an outside hydrant, along with a scuttle of firewood in the winter."[2] By the late 1920s, camp cabins became more modernized,

1 Mary Ann Beecher, "The Motel in Builder's Literature and Architectural Publications," *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, edited by Jan Jennings. (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press for the Society for Commercial Archeology, 1990), p. 115.

2 "Postcards from Americana: Cabin Camps and Cottage Courts," www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/card.html, accessed-22 November 1999.

with hopes to attract more tourists, thus evolving into motels. Typically, the motels were operated by the owners of gas stations, grocery stores, or food stands. The first motel opened December 12, 1925 in San Luis Obispo, California. James Vail's Motel Inn, with accommodations for 160 guests, was located on one of the busiest U.S. motor routes.[3]

Although the Depression was very destructive to the hotel industry, the motel industry thrived because Americans continued to vacation by automobile. The small, independently owned, owner managed motel, also referred to as mom-and-pop operations, dominated the motel industry in this period. The resulting competition helped raise the standards of the entire motel industry. New motel development leveled off during the early 1940s, however as gasoline rationing during World War II limited the number of tourists on the roads. Following the war, prosperity prompted the new construction of small-scale, individually owned motels. In fact, many returning veterans entered into the lucrative motel business that was springing up along America's highways. A 1946 manual, funded by the Veterans' Administration, touted the prospects of opening a roadside motel, but also warned of the difficulties it involved. The manual stated, "The operation of a successful motor court takes hard work, 7 days a week, the year round. This endeavor should not be viewed as one where it is possible to sit in the sun by the side of the road and ring a cash register."[4] The motels of the 1940s and early 1950s were often small in scale with an average of only twenty-five rooms.

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, motel construction boomed. These motels no longer took the form of individual cottages, but took the form of fully integrated buildings under a single roof.[5] Corporate chains with systemized and centralized operations brought an end to the individually operated motel during the 1950s.[6] Local builder Kemmons Wilson erected a motel with a community swimming pool, and air conditioning and a television set in every room. Additional provisions included free ice, free baby cribs, free kennels and dog

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[3] *The People's Chronology* is licensed from Henry Holt and Company, Inc. Copyright © 1995, 1996 by James Trager. All rights reserved.

4 John Margolies, *Home Away From Home: Motels in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 90.

5 "Postcards from Americana: Motor Courts, Inns, and Highway Hotels," www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/card.html, accessed 22 November 1999.

6 Beecher, p. 116.

food for family pets, and no charge for children under 12 who shared their parents' accommodations. In 1951, Wilson decided that the motel business was "the greatest untouched industry in America" and opened the first Holiday Inn on U.S. 70 in Memphis, Tennessee the following year. He went into partnership in 1953 with builder Wallace E. Johnson to found the motel chain.[7] By 1964, there were at least 61,000 motels in the country.[8]

During the period between 1930 and 1955, motel design and construction were regularly featured in builders' journals and architectural publications. Although vastly outnumbered by domestic designs, both sources printed plans and photographs of motel units and site plans of their overall organization with some regularity. While there was little discussion of style, the exterior appearances and landscaping of the motels was emphasized in order to attract the passing tourist. Originally, nearly all of the motel units were freestanding with the covered gasoline station as the focal point. During this period, most motels consisted of small cottages, often interconnected by covered parking places. Covered parking spaces were later walled in to provide additional rooms, resulting in the single-story, continuous row motel form. Moreover, it was more economical to join the rooms in a continuous row. Rather than having to provide individual heating, electricity, and plumbing for each cabin, the joined rooms could share mechanical and electrical systems. As the exterior designs became more elaborate, so did the interior spaces. The interiors of the early units were single-spaced and small with little ornamentation. The units often included combined living rooms, sleeping rooms and kitchenettes. However, by the 1950s, motels began to eliminate kitchenettes from the plans because of the addition of restaurants in or near the motels.[9]

The motels of the 1940s and 1950s had relatively few amenities. "Fewer than 6 percent of all motels had pools; fewer than 8 percent had restaurants, even within walking distance; fewer than 20 percent had room phones; and fewer than 28 percent had any carpeting on the floors of the rooms. There would be a very small

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7 *The People's Chronology* is licensed from Henry Holt and Company, Inc. Copyright © 1995, 1996 by James Trager. All rights reserved.

8 John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 45.

9 Beecher, pp. 115-117.

registration area, but there were few lobbies, lounges and meeting rooms."[10] The basic unit shapes remained primarily the same since the 1940s and single row layouts continued to be popular for their economy. However, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the one-story buildings gave way to two- and three-story buildings, blurring the distinction between the motel and the hotel. In fact, these multi-story buildings resembled hotels much more than the motor courts that they replaced. The motels of the 1960s contained between 150 and 300 rooms, which were most often arranged back-to-back along a central utility core. These larger motels also provided many amenities that their predecessors lacked, including swimming pools, bars, restaurants, coffee shops, meeting rooms, lobbies, and telephone switchboard service. The aim of the motel proprietors was to provide the traveling guest with the amenities and comforts of a downtown hotel with the convenience of being located along the interstate.[11]

Motels tended to be more utilitarian in nature than a palette of architectural expression. There were six main stylistic trends used in motel construction between 1930 and 1955. These styles were rooted in the popular housing forms and were seen on domestic buildings in the trade literature of the times. The motels most frequently exhibited features of the Craftsman, Colonial Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Modern styles. Other themes seen in motel construction were the rustic aesthetic theme and those based on the western style ranch house, while others were simply vernacular. There were even thematic representations, but for the most part, the buildings were one-story, relatively nondescript, interconnected lines of rooms. "Owners employed stucco, adobe, stone, brick, whatever was handy, to attract guests."[12] One of the main attractions which was used to differentiate one motel from the other was the use of elaborate signage. "Motor courts began to sport giant signs that dominated the motel grounds visually. The sign, with its elaborate neon display, was intended to provide a vertical dimension to an otherwise low-to-the-ground building configuration."[13] The signs, typically located by the side of the highway at the motel's entrance, advertised the amenities and services available for the traveler.

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10 *Home Away From Home: Motels in America*, pp. 91-92.
11 *Home Away From Home: Motels in America*, pp. 95-96.
12 "Postcards from Americana: Motor Courts, Inns, and Highway Hotels."
13 Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, p.47.

Motel History along US 301 Corridor

The greatest increase in commercial development along U.S. 301 was seen in the years following World War II. This was a result of the expansion of Route 301 across the Potomac River. "Motels and restaurants sprang up to accommodate tourists, sportsmen and others who passed through or stopped in Charles County."[14] This same expansion took place in Prince George's County, providing travelers with accommodations as they traveled from New York to Florida. The 1949 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Upper Marlboro, Prince George's County, Maryland indicates one such enterprise. The Marlboro Hotel was located along Crain Highway near Main Street and consisted of the motel, a restaurant, an office and an auto sales building. Nearby amenities included another restaurant, a movie theater, a filling station and an auto repair and service station. By 1958, there were a total of 43 establishments in Prince George's County that provided hotel, motel, or trailer park services. Road maps also promoted the motel trade along U.S. 301, attracting tourist with advertisements touting such places as Waldorf of the Highways, a 90-unit motor court and restaurant with an Olympic size swimming pool. The tourist trade and commercial transportation networks relied heavily upon these services as they traversed the highways of the nation and numerous examples continue to dot the landscape of Prince George's and Charles Counties.

Building History

The Bel Alton Motel was constructed on property owned by the Watchman family, who purchased it in 1952 from Lela Rice. Two years after the construction of the building, the property was sold to the Bel Alton Motel Company. Within two years, the Brunnabend family purchased it, maintaining ownership and operating the motel until 1998.

14 Jack D. Brown, et. al., *Charles County Maryland: A History*, (New Jersey: Custombook, Inc., 1976), p. 66.

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National Register Evaluation:

All of the essential physical features are present and visible to properly represent its significance within the thematic context of Motels on the US 301 Corridor. The building is one of only a few Colonial Revival style motel complexes remaining along this highly traveled commercial corridor, and stands as a final representative of the thousands of motel courts erected during the mid- to late 20th century. Continuing to serve as a motel with restaurant amenities, the property retains integrity of design, location, setting, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling.

The Bel Alton Motel was erected in 1952, and has not yet reached the fifty year age requirement suggested by the National Park Service in order the properly evaluate its significance. Thus, the Bel Alton Motel has been determined not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. When the property has reached fifty years of age, it should be re-evaluated for its significance. Within the thematic study of transportation-related resources along the US 301 Corridor, the motel would then be a contributing resource and potentially eligible under criterion A.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

Eligibility recommended _____ Not Recommended X

Comments: DUE TO AGE

Review, OPS: [signature] Date: 10/25/00

Reviewer, NR Program: [signature] Date: 11/3/00

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 566

Bel Alton Hotel
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
Commerce

RESOURCE TYPE(S)

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Rural

Historic Function (s): DOMESTIC/Hotel

Known Design Source: Unknown

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH: 566

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

==========

Chain of Title:

January 9, 1923:	E. Lee Jameson to Jesse H. and Lela D. Rice Land Records of Charles County Liber WMA 40 Folio 47
August 25, 1934:	Jesse H. and Lela D. Rice to James C. Mitchell Land Records of Charles County Liber 59 Folio 380
August 25, 1934:	James C. Mitchell to Jesse H. and Lela D. Rice Land Records of Charles County Liber 59 Folio 381
August 12, 1952:	Lela D. Rice to Henry H. and Anna M.D. Watchman, Sr., Henry H. Watchman, Jr., and Mary Elizabeth Watchman Land Records of Charles County Liber 103 Folio 37
August 18, 1955:	Henry H. and Anna M.D. Watchman, Sr., Henry H. Watchman, Jr., and Mary Elizabeth Watchman to Bel Alton Motel Company Land Records of Charles County Liber 119 Folio 396
December 5, 1957:	Bel Alton Motel, Inc. to Charles and Isabella Brunnabend, Jr. Land Records of Charles County Liber 133 Folio 30
April 21, 1978:	Charles and Isabella Brunnabend, Jr. to Thomas C. Hayden, Jr. Land Records of Charles County Liber 570 Folio 218
April 21, 1978:	Thomas C. Hayden, Jr. to Charles and Isabella Brunnabend, Jr. Land Records of Charles County Liber 570 Folio 218

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES
CONTINUATION SHEET

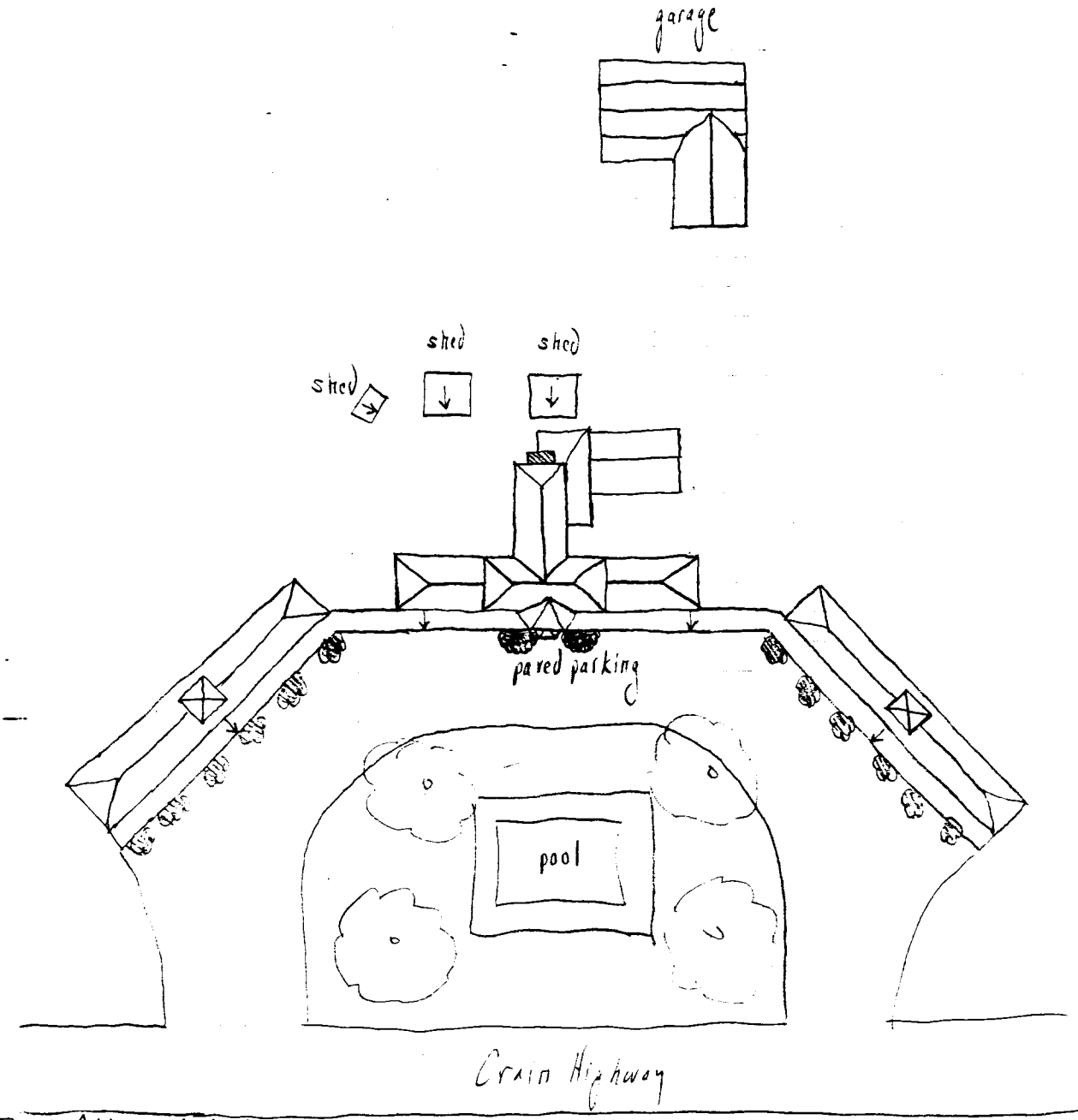
Inventory No. CH: 566

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

==========

August 12, 1992: Isabella Brunnabend to Isabella Brunnabend and Kathy I. Pings, Trustees of the Brunnabend Family Trust
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 1698 Folio 95

April 30, 1998: Kathy I. Pings, Trustee of the Brunnabend Family Trust and of the Charles Brunnabend, Jr. Exemption Equivalent Trust to Kathy I. Pings, individually
Land Records of Charles County
Liber 2554 Folio 113

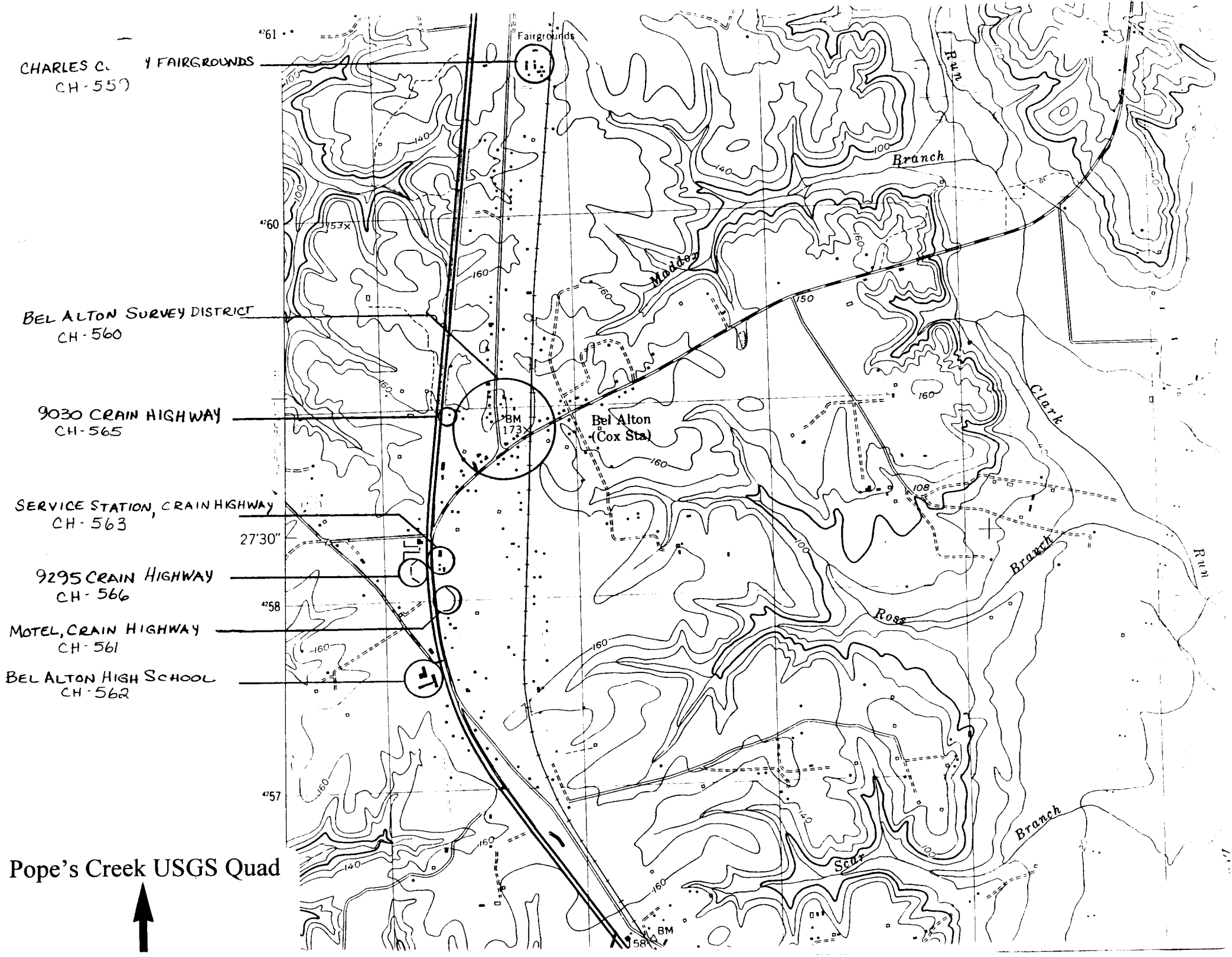


Bell Alton Motel
9259 Crain Highway CH:566

Charles County
Maryland

N →

Resource Sketch Map Not Drawn to Scale 1999


CHARLES C... Y 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
Fairgrounds
Bel Alton
(Cox Sta)
BM
173
27'30"
Maddox
Branch
Run
Clark
Ross
Branch
Run
Scar
Branch
BM
158
Pope's Creek USGS Quad

OFFICE
MAIN ENTRANCE
VACANCY
MOTEL
SWIMMING POOL
AIR CONDITIONED • ROOM PHONES

CH:566
BELL ALTEN MOTEL
9259 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO
east elevation
1 of 4

OOL
PHONES

CH-506
BELL ALTON MOTEL
9259 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO
northwest elevation
2 of 4

CH-566
BELL ALTON MOTEL
9259 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO
west elevation
3 of 4

CH-566
BELL ALTON MOTEL
9259 CRAIN HIGHWAY
CHARLES COUNTY, MD
TRACERIES
JUNE 1999
MD SHPO
southwest elevation
4 of 4