

PH6354872

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED  
MAY 5 1977  
DATE ENTERED NOV 10 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC **\*\*** Bon Air

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER South of Laurel Brook Road, 7/8 mile west  
of Fallston Road

CITY, TOWN Fallston  VICINITY OF First

STATE Maryland CODE 24 COUNTY Harford CODE 025

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 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 checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mr. and Mrs. C. John Sullivan

STREET & NUMBER Box 193

CITY, TOWN Fallston  VICINITY OF Maryland 21047

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Harford County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER Main Street

CITY, TOWN Bel Air STATE Maryland 21014

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE 1936  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN Washington STATE D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	ca. 1830	

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Bon Air is of stone, stuccoed and scored in imitation of ashlar, three stories in height, with a steep hipped roof distinguished by a pronounced splay or "kick" at the eaves. Its north front is of three bays, its south front five. An entrance is centered in each facade. A single brick chimney rises at each end of the main house, flush with the end walls. An "L" shaped service wing of similarly stuccoed stone extends easterly, then southerly. Now two stories in height, it was originally one-and-a-half stories, as evidenced by outlines in its north gable end, its stuccoed frame second story walls, and by an early painting of the house preserved within.

A hipped roof porch of one story shelters the north entrance and a long shed-roofed porch extends clear across the south front.

The central window in the second story of the north front and all second story windows of the south front retain wooden casement sash, each sash in the central windows containing ten lights, in the others eight. The central bay of the south front appears externally to contain a typical casement window, but internally it is seen to be a pair of French doors which once gave access to a second story porch, documented by the early painting of the house and by its outline on the wall. Other windows have eight-over-eight sliding sash. First story windows have flat-paneled shutters while louvered blinds flank second story windows.

Centered on the north roof is a small dormer containing a six-light casement sash; a larger dormer with a six-over-six window lights the attic story in the easterly bay, but the westerly bay is void of dormers on the north front. A centered pediment lights the attic story on the south front, containing a four-light casement sash; it is flanked by a single dormer on each side, each containing a six-light casement sash. Small wood pinnacles rise from each end of the roof ridge, extensions of the trussed roof structure inside.

The steep hipped roof and the casement windows instantly mark Bon Air as French. The sliding sash windows are contemporary with a few other early 19th century modifications which may be observed within.

A central hall contains the principal staircase, which extends to the third or attic story; the staircase rises above the north entrance which, together with overwhelming tradition, suggests that the south entrance was considered the principal entrance originally. A single room flanks the central hall on either

See continuation sheet #1

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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      1794

BUILDER/ARCHITECT    Claudius Francis Frederick

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

de la Porte

America has been called a nation of emigrants, but buildings truly representing any culture but that of the British Isles are relatively rare. Harford County has several structures with a distinct French ancestry; of them Bon Air is one of the most important.

Bon Air was built in 1794 by Francois de la Porte, a fact documented by a datestone on the south front of the house: F.D.L.P., A. 1794. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax records would normally be an important part of the documentation for a house of Bon Air's age, but these records for both the Upper and Lower Gunpowder Hundreds are lost. Historic structures with authentic datestones or construction dates established in contemporary archival documentation are rare, and very important. They become the standard against which other structures, without proven dates, can be compared when a construction date is sought. However, Bon Air's unique French detailing places it in a class of its own, so there are few, if any, undated historic structures which can be dated by comparison with it.

The builder was Colonel Claudius Francis Frederick de la Porte, Colonel en Second of the Vennois Regiment, who came to Harford County with Rochambeau during the American Revolution. Tradition tells us that several officers by the name of de la Porte were found in Rochambeau's army that crossed the Susquehanna into Harford. Impressed with Harford's beauty, they returned after the surrender of Cornwallis, as did Major De Gimat and Captain Grame. In 1793 Claudius Francis Frederick and his wife, Betsy Herbert, appeared in Harford and purchased from Moses Dillion a tract of land at the head of lovely Laurel Brook, part of "Bond's Forest" which they renamed "Bon Air." They may have come from the island of San Domingo to escape the terrible uprising. Frederick must have had money as he paid six hundred pounds current money for one hundred and seventy-six acres of Bond's Forest, plus sixteen acres called "Clark's Abode."

Amid old trees that have sheltered it for over one hundred years, the old stone house with its scarred stucco covering suggests

See continuation sheet #4

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Forman, Henry Chandlee. Early Manor & Plantation Houses of Maryland. 1934, p. 126  
 Harford Courthouse Land Record Office.  
 Harford County Directory. 1953, p. 304.  
 Register of Wills of Harford County  
 Don Swann. Colonial & Historic Homes of Maryland. 1975.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 26.13 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 8	37, 83, 4, 0	4, 37, 42, 0, 0	B	1, 8	37, 84, 0, 0	4, 37, 38, 9, 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1, 8	37, 83, 0, 0	4, 37, 36, 6, 0	D	1, 8	37, 79, 4, 0	4, 37, 37, 6, 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

E 18/ 378020/ 4373930

Beginning at a point on the south side of Laurel Brook Road 2,200 feet west of Fallston Road, moving SSW paralleling the driveway to Bon Air for 900 feet to a point, then ESE 500 feet to a point, then SSW 900 feet to a point, then WNW 1,300 feet to a point, then NNE 660 feet to a point, then east 600 feet to a point, then NNE 1,100 feet to a point on the south side of Laurel Brook Road, then east 100 feet to the beginning.

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 C. John Sullivan

DATE August 2, 1976 bjn

ORGANIZATION	DATE
Harford County Comm./Maryland Historical Trust	838-0390/267-12
STREET & NUMBER	TELEPHONE
Box 193	
CITY OR TOWN	STATE
Fallston	Maryland 21047

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*John W. Pearce* 5/2/77  
 SHPO

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE
<i>W. M. ...</i>	11/10/77
ATTEST:	KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
<i>W. M. ...</i>	DATE 11-7-77
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

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Bon Air  
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

DESCRIPTION (continued)

side. The westerly room of the first story has a plaster cornice and portions of a plaster medallion centered in the ceiling. The easterly room has a china cupboard with arched glazed doors built in the space north of the chimney breast.

Patches in the wall and terminations of chairrail indicate that the south entrance has been made narrower. That door and its trim, other six panel doors and their trim, and the sliding sash windows and trim associated with them, probably date from the same period of remodeling, circa 1830.

The staircase is distinctively different from typical Harford staircases in the late 18th century, undoubtedly due to its French designer. Built principally of black walnut, its molded rail, turned newels and balusters and molded stringer are all of non-English profiles; all these elements, including the balusters, are joined by pinned mortise and tenon, an unusual detail. Each flight commences with a straight run, terminating at the next floor above with a short series of winders. Hand-made wrought iron nails in the treads and risers and in the boarding which encloses space beneath the flights indicate that the staircase is original.

All original mantels in the four rooms of the main house remain in place. Of black walnut they, like the staircase, are of a French design, consisting of an architrave, cyma recta frieze, and a molded cornice shelf, all with profiles and proportions just a little different from the usual mantels of the period with British ancestry.

Original doors remain in the second story, also of black walnut, also French in design; they are of two flat panels which are flush with the stiles and rails of the hall side. Rails, the horizontal member of the door's frame, have edges planed to an ogee profile; stiles, the vertical member of the door's frame, have chamfered edges which terminate short of the rails. Wrought-iron locks and thumb latches comprise the original hardware remaining on most of these doors.

See continuation sheet #2

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PAGE 2

DESCRIPTION (continued)

The chairrail, or sur-base as it was called in the 18th and early 19th century, includes a molded cap of walnut.

At unaltered second-story windows, a heavy, structural, wooden frame lines the opening, its members joined with pegged mortise and tenon. An ogee backband applied to the frame forms a classical architrave surround. The sash are located toward the outer surface of the wall and open inwardly. Muntins are not of the customary profile, undoubtedly the result of their French ancestry. A long wrought iron bolt secures the sash closed at the top, and a short bolt secures them at the bottom. The wrought-iron backplates of the top bolts are shaped to a decorative pattern.

The trussed roof is of great interest. Partially concealed by the plaster of the finished attic rooms, its upper portions are visible above the ceiling, and its lower elements can be deduced by visible components within the finished portions of the attic. Tie beams, or the bottom chord of the truss, extend awkwardly above the attic floor across the structure at the partitions which form the central hall, and beneath the roof peaks; at these four points, principal rafters, or the top chords of the truss, rise to the roof peak; an intermediate tie or collar beam, at the attic ceiling joint level, spans between the principal rafters, and supports a centered king post, or vertical chord in the truss, which extends upward to receive the principal rafters, and beyond, to support a ridge beam; king posts at the two ends of the ridge extend through the roof to become finials externally. Purlins at about the mid-point of the slope are supported by the principal rafters and, in turn, provide mid-span support for the common rafters. The common rafters are supported at their top ends by the ridge beam, and atypically they are not joined in pairs; each common rafter extends beyond the ridge beam, to the opposite slope. Diagonal bracing extends from the king posts to the ridge beam, in a plane parallel to the latter. The purlins are approximately square, laid parallel to the rafters, allowing the ceiling joists to be "V" notched against them for rigidity.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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DESCRIPTION (continued)

The kitchen is in the outer corner of the "L" shaped service wing, and retains its large, arched cooking fireplace. An unfinished larder extends north of the kitchen, containing a staircase which originally lifted out of the way, against the ceiling. The first room of the service wing, next to the main house, and an adjacent corridor leading from the main house to the kitchen beyond, were refinished in the circa 1830 period. The stone walls of the service wing extend a few feet above the second floor, and notches in the masonry forming the lower areas of the window openings correspond to the locations of dormer windows, seen in the old painting of the house.

Preserved with the old painting is an early drawing of the grounds, showing the driveway describing a square around the house in its present pattern, with all the domestic and farm outbuildings arranged along its outer side. Most of these buildings still stand, and much of the driveway is depressed below a fall, to suggest concealment. Many of the outbuildings, some with exterior entrances to the second stories through tall dormers, suggest their French origin.

Bon Air was the dwelling of a wealthy man, and the extent of the French detailing throughout the house and its outbuildings suggests that its first owner brought carpenters and joiners, blacksmiths and possibly masons with him to his new seat in Maryland, recreating the spirit of a rural seat in northern France.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

a peaceful bit of Normandy. The wings look as if the builder had planned to form a typical French courtyard and, had he joined the farm buildings to the house, the other side would have had an air of "North of France flavor."

Frederick lived only three years at Bon Air. He died in 1797, and left all his property to his wife, Betsy Herbert. She lived in luxury, but like her husband did not enjoy it long as her death occurred in 1803. She was buried in the family cemetery beside her husband. The last de la Porte to own Bon Air was Pierre Louise August Marchand, a nephew of Francis. He inherited the land in 1827, only to sell it to Francas Gallaga four years later. From him it was acquired by Caleb Harman, from whose possession it passed to Benjamin Ferris of Wilmington, Delaware. In 1854 the little chateau came into the hands of James T. Watson, and remained in the Watson family for one hundred years. Following the Watsons the property was owned by Marjorie Kelly and is now being transferred to C. John Sullivan and his wife.

The significance of Bon Air lies today, much as it did 182 years ago, as unique architectural example of French artistry and culture at the time of our country's birth. The structure is all the more important in contrast to the prevailing homes of the period, modeled as they were essentially after the influence of the British Isles. Architectural evidence suggests that the wealthy F.D.L.P. brought his own joiners, blacksmiths, masons and artisans with him to recreate an exact replica of a rural seat in Northern France, "new-found" in the colonies in 1794.

Today, in 1976, Bon Air remains substantially virginal, not only in architectural preservation, but in its environmental setting amidst 26 acres remaining to the original tract of rolling woodland and fields.