

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Crisfield Historic District
other names/site number S-127

2. Location

street & number Chesapeake Avenue, Main Street, Tyler Street N/A not for publication
city, town Crisfield N/A vicinity
state Maryland code MD county Somerset code 039 zip code 21817

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>259</u>	<u>44</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		<u>260</u>	<u>45</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
[Signature] 5/29/90
Signature of certifying official Date
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. Patrick Andrews 7/9/90
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)
for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

S-127

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellingDOMESTIC/secondary structureCOMMERCE/TRADE/businessCOMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellingDOMESTIC/secondary structureCOMMERCE/TRADE/businessCOMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late VictorianQueen AnneColonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick, stonewalls woodbrickroof slate asphaltother wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

The Crisfield Historic District comprises a cohesive collection of houses, churches, and commercial buildings within the town of Crisfield in southern Somerset County, Maryland. These resources date primarily from c. 1870 to 1930 and reflect the rapid growth of the town as the center of the booming Chesapeake Bay oyster industry during that period. The district encompasses much of Crisfield's main residential and commercial areas, locally known as "uptown" to distinguish it from the "downtown" commercial and industrial area along the Tangier Sound waterfront. The district is primarily characterized by frame houses set on lots of various sizes with varying setbacks. The largest and most elaborate of these houses are located along Main Street, Maryland Avenue, and Somerset Avenue and reflect the influence of the Queen Anne Colonial Revival, foursquare, and bungalow trends. The side streets off these principal avenues are lined with two-story, three-bay vernacular dwellings of the period, some with restrained mass-produced Victorian ornament. Along the back streets, numerous modest two-story, two-bay frame houses, erected to accommodate workers in seafood packing plants and related industries survive. Some of the early 20th century houses in the district are constructed of brick, stone, or concrete block. These materials were also chosen for the Colonial Revival and Art Deco commercial buildings along Main Street toward the west end of the district. The district also includes several noteworthy Gothic and Colonial Revival church buildings. Overall, the district retains a high level of integrity. Alterations are generally reversible and incompatible intrusions are few. The Crisfield Armory was listed in the National Register in 1985.

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Continuation SheetCrisfield Historic District
Somerset County, Maryland

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Section number 7 Page 7.1

NOTE: Numbers with an S prefix refer to Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties catalog numbers.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Crisfield, Maryland (population 3,078) is located in southern Somerset County on the Little Annemessex River, a tributary of Tangier Sound. Somers Cove is a natural inlet that was converted into the town harbor. Principal road access to Crisfield is provided by MD 413 which intersects U.S. 13 north of Westover.

Although incorporated in 1872, the city's streets were evidently defined a few years after the railroad was completed on 1866. Planned loosely on a grid system, Crisfield is divided into two distinct sections, "uptown" and "downtown." "Downtown" consists principally of the city wharf, seafood packing houses, ship yards, and commercial buildings, all of which are oriented to Maryland Avenue or the few side streets. In contrast "uptown" has a larger commercial district along with the bulk of Crisfield's single-family dwellings. The post office and at least five churches are sited along or near Main Street. Upon entering Crisfield a dual highway, known as Maryland Avenue, follows the old railroad bed to the city wharf. (The old track has been taken up.) Somerset Avenue and Main Street branch off Maryland Avenue to create a triangular-shaped system of principal roads. Extending from the three main avenues are numerous side streets laid out on a rudimentary grid plan. The Crisfield Historic District is located in the "uptown" area; as a result of a series of devastating fires, the "downtown" area no longer retains sufficient integrity for Register listing.

Crisfield's historic buildings are a mixture of brick, frame, rusticated stone, and concrete block structures that date from the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century (1875-1930). In general the structures that line Crisfield's streets stand on varying sized lots with differing setbacks from the sidewalks. Not surprisingly the larger houses tend to be located on larger lots and set farther back from the sidewalk. The most common alterations to the frame buildings are layers of artificial siding which in most cases did not involve the removal of period trim. Houses from the middle and lower class levels have also suffered from poor maintenance and its attendant deterioration. The buildings which fall into this fifty-five year period of significance comprise the major portion of the city and represent the city's principal growth as the oyster and seafood exporting center of Maryland. In addition, the period marks the city's slow decline following the depletion of the Bay's resources.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Although Crisfield's regional history dates to the late seventeenth century, few buildings within the incorporated limits of the town are pre-Civil War structures. The earliest houses located within the historic district include a handful of structures that date to the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century before the railroad link to Somers Cove in 1866.

The scarcity of mid nineteenth-century houses in Crisfield is the result of the relative impermanence of modest frame houses in a low-lying, poorly drained terrain. In addition, it appears that many owners rebuilt or replaced older houses as the oyster harvest profits increased. Still standing in Crisfield is a small collection of dwellings erected during the early years of the 1870s. Located on the northwest corner of Somerset Avenue and West Main Street is the McCreedy house (S-327), a two-story tee-plan frame house sheathed with weatherboards and decorated with eave and porch brackets. The snake-shaped porch brackets are especially unusual. Another house which belongs to this group is the Doctor Sterling Office (S-314) at 320 West Main Street, a two-story bracketed house covered by a hip roof with front and side gables. A pair of bay windows mark the east end, and an elaborate Victorian porch stretches across the main facade. Two other nearby frame houses from the same period are the Whittington-Long house (S-315), at 315 West Main Street, and the Dr. Somers house (S-316), located at 313 West Main, both two-story, three-bay weatherboard frame houses. The Whittington-Long house is covered by an uncommon hip roof, while the Dr. Somers house is defined by a standard gable roof with a center cross gable. Each house has a two-story service wing to the rear.

During the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century, the oyster harvests were at their peak. Accordingly, it was during this period (1875-1930) that Crisfield's most elaborate houses were erected. Sited primarily along Main Street, Maryland Avenue, and Somerset Avenue, these large rambling dwellings clearly reflect the prosperity that financed their construction. Following the then popular Queen Anne and later revival styles, these houses were elaborately finished with rich exterior and interior details. By far the most intricately crafted house is the Pauline Crockett house (S-318) at 205 West Main Street. The exterior alone carries a wider variety of wall and window treatments than any other similar dwelling in Crisfield. Distinguished by its irregular plan and steeply pitched slate roof, the Crockett house is sheathed with a combination of narrow weatherboards, decorative shingles, and

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

elaborate woodwork. Rising from the east side is a Frank Furness-style brick chimney with a heavily corbelled cap and a multi-faceted shaft. The interior is fitted with the best of quarter-sawn oak woodwork and plaster walls. Built on a smaller scale without as much attention to contrasting exterior finish are the Bradshaw Funeral Home (S-317) at 306 West Main Street, the Whittington house (S-321) which stands on the northeast corner of West Main and Third Streets, and the Orrie Lee Tawes, Sr. house (S-323) at 25 West Main. Each house has an irregular plan, a steeply pitched roof with multiple projecting gables, a corner tower, and a wraparound porch. Several of these finer houses are finished inside with elaborate plaster ceiling decoration, as found in the Orrie Lee Tawes, Sr. house.

Less ambitious houses with distinctive exterior and interior features include the Albert Sterling house at 23 West Main Street (S-324), built around 1900 with a fancy Eastlake-style front porch of arched wooden screens that stretch between turned posts. The porch railing is also notable with turned posts, turned balusters, and a molded handrail. Between the principal railing posts are rectangular wooden panels with six round holes.

As the town outgrew its nineteenth century limits, early twentieth century Colonial Revival and bungalow style houses were erected along Somerset Avenue and East Main Street. One of the house types most characteristic of Somerset Avenue is the large two-story, "four-square" dwelling popular during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Accompanying the large houses erected along Crisfield's principal streets are rows of modest frame houses for middle income families. Many of the houses on Pine and Locust streets and Chesapeake Avenue are standard two-story, three-bay frame structures with a minimum of decoration confined to embellished eaves and fancy porches. By the early twentieth century some houses were raised in brick or rusticated concrete block.

The domestic architecture of Crisfield also includes rows of simple two-story, two-bay company or workers' housing that were erected for the labor force hired by the numerous packing companies. Located primarily on back or side streets, these frame houses were executed with little attention to decorative exterior finish. Located along Chesapeake Avenue is a relatively complete row of identical two-story two-bay frame workers houses; groups of similar dwellings occur on Fourth Street.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Crisfield's most significant commercial architecture falls neatly into the period of principal growth (1875-1920), and includes utilitarian brick store buildings of the late 19th century; during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, notable Art-Deco and Colonial Revival structures were erected as well.

The oldest commercial architecture depicted in Crisfield photographs from the post-Civil War Era no longer stands. Quickly erected frame warehouses and store buildings, in addition to more substantial brick structures such as the Opera House and the first Customs House, either succumbed to fire or were torn down. In their places, masonry buildings (mostly brick) were assembled during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps the earliest store building to survive with an exact date of construction is the Crisfield Flower Shop, built in 1887 at 219 West Main Street. Along with being one of the oldest store buildings, it is well-preserved with its intact plate glass storefront and bracketed mid-level cornice. Most distinctive is the decorative brick pediment and cornice. The 1887 date is embossed in brick numbers.

In general, the commercial and seafood industry buildings in Crisfield are mid to late twentieth century structures erected in concrete block or a variety of more modern materials. The relative impermanence of frame stores and packing houses required replacement after one of the damaging town fires or after advanced deterioration.

Equally impressive are a handful of commercial structures standing within the "uptown" business district. Prominent among these is the Peyton Pharmacy building, a three-story, five-bay brick block that occupies a site on the south side of West Main Street. Highlighted by an expensive Flemish bond facade of glazed bricks, the main elevation is topped by an elaborate brick cornice with an adjacent band of lozenge-shaped glazed brick patterns. The second and third floor multi-pane windows are surmounted by an unconventional use of stone lintels and keystones.

All of the commercial buildings, west of the Peyton Pharmacy on the south side of Main Street and west of the Saltz Furniture Store on the north side, post-date the 1928 fire. As a result, these blocks of brick buildings offer a variety of design inspirations, principally Art Deco. The design references are relatively simple,

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

but nevertheless clearly stated. The "uptown" branch of the Bank of Crisfield (S-311), is a good example with its vertical emphasis in the tall recessed entrance bay and flanking side panels. The more intricate linear decoration of the door handles is also a noteworthy Art Deco design.

Since the 1928 fire demolished the old Opera House, it was necessary to rebuild. In its place a movie arcade was erected with simplistic design references to the prevailing popular Art Deco. The large, three-story yellow brick block is divided into three bays by four slightly projecting brick pilasters that are capped by ball finials. Highlighting the second and third floor window openings as well as the parapet roof are bands of liver-colored brick borders.

By contrast, a new Colonial Revival post office was built in Crisfield in 1933. Erected across the street from the movie arcade, the post office is a single-story three-bay Flemish bond brick structure flanked by shorter single-story wings. The main building is trimmed with a bold modillioned cornice and topped by a bell-curved cupola. The arched front entrance is framed by a classically inspired architrave and entablature. Located to each side of the front door are relief sculptures of classical profiles. The lobby entrance interior has not been altered significantly since the 1930s. The high ceiling is embellished with a dentiled cornice, and classically inspired chandeliers still hang in place.

Lastly, Crisfield's church architecture dates from the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century, and includes the most elaborate Gothic Revival designs in Somerset County. Mount Pleasant M. P. Church (S-92) and the Immanuel M. E. Church (S-319) are impressive Gothic Revival churches, while the First Baptist Church (S-93) is a grand architectural statement in the neo-classical style.

Mount Pleasant M. P. Church stands on the south side of west Main Street at the corner of Third Street. The High Victorian Gothic Church, built in 1892, is oriented on a longitudinal plan with the principal gable roof running on a north/south axis. Rising on the west side of the church is a four-story bell tower topped by a tapered octagonal spire. Trimmed with granite capped buttresses, the tower also contains the principal Gothic arched entrance. The granite datestone is fixed in the lower corner of the tower base. The gable front elevation is distinguished by a larger, tripartite colored glass window, two flanking lancet

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

windows, and the upper portion of the wall is marked by a colored glass lunette window. On the northeast corner a shorter two-story octagonal tower is lighted by lancet windows, and it is decorated with terra cotta medallions.

The Immanuel M. E. Church, on the other hand, is a large rusticated granite Gothic Revival church built on the north side of West Main Street in 1909. Two pyramidal roofed towers rise on each principal front corner with the main entrance and belfry on the southeast corner. Larger Gothic arched tripartite windows light the three main gabled elevations on the south, east, and west.

Two black congregations, St. Paul's A. M. E. Church and Shiloh United Methodist Church, are located within the historic district. The St. Paul's A. M. E. Church is a significant Gothic Revival tee-plan structure erected by Crisfield's black Methodist congregation in 1906. A former church, built in 1886, was destroyed by fire. Aside from a capping of the bell tower, the Gothic Revival style features have remained largely intact.

There are no cemeteries associated with these churches due to the restrictive lots on which these churches stand. Instead, a town cemetery was laid out along Somerset and Chesapeake Avenues. This large town cemetery not only contains hundreds of nineteenth and twentieth-century grave markers, but also an impressive group of Victorian iron fences. Surrounding at least seven separate plots are highly ornate iron fences, three of which are stamped Champion Iron Fence Company, Kenton, Ohio. There is no comparable collection of cemetery fence in Somerset County. Standing in the front portion of the graveyard is a memorial statue to commemorate those soldiers who died in World War I.

Principal Buildings in the Crisfield Historic District

S-92 Mount Pleasant M. P. Church, West Main Street

Built in 1892, the Mount Pleasant Church is one of the most elaborate High Victorian Gothic Revival churches in Somerset County. The longitudinal plan brick church has a four-story bell tower on the west side and a two-story octagonal tower to the east. Gothic arched door and window openings are flanked by buttresses capped by granite blocks, and granite string courses embellish the front and side walls.

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Crisfield Historic District
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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

S-93 The Baptist Temple, Corner of East Main and Somerset Avenues

The Baptist Temple, erected in 1921, stands out as the most impressive neo-classical building in Somerset County. Still benefiting from the lucrative oyster industry, the members of this congregation erected an ambitious brick church on a Greek-cross plan with a bold temple front and a massive polygonal drum that supports the red-tile dome.

S-118 Crisfield Armory, East Main Street, (National Register listed 1985)

Standing in the eastern residential district of the Multiple Resource nomination, the Crisfield Armory, built in 1927, is a two-story crenellated brick structure supported by a raised foundation. The center entrance is flanked by two, three-story towers, and the towers are flanked by two-story, two-bay sections. Attached to the back of the main building is an elevated one-story drill hall covered by an arched roof and supported by buttresses.

S-305 St. Paul's A.M.E. Church, Corner of Broadway and 4th Streets

Built in 1906, the seven-course common bond Gothic Revival brick church is covered by a steeply pitched patterned slate roof. A three-story tower rises in the northeast corner of the ell plan church. A marble corner stone, located in the northeast corner of the north leg, states the first church on the site was erected in 1886 and that it burned on May 20, 1906. Tripartite sanctuary windows are flanked by narrow lancet window openings. The bell towers has been capped.

S-306 Crisfield Arcade, West Main Street

This large three-story yellow-brick building occupies a major corner in "uptown" Crisfield. In addition the site has played a pivotal role in town history. The Crisfield Opera House, which formerly stood on this property, burned along with a major part of the business district in 1928. After the fire, the Crisfield Arcade and large commercial blocks were raised in simplistic Art

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Deco designs. The Arcade was built in a yellowish pressed brick with liver-colored trim around the window and door openings. Small ball finials top each of the plain pilasters that define the three-bay building.

S-307 Crisfield Post Office, West Main Street

The Crisfield Post Office was built in 1933 in a popular Colonial Revival design. The Flemish bond story-and-a-half main block is flanked by single-story brick wings. The principal facade is marked by three arched openings, a central door and two windows. A modillion skirts the perimeter of the roof, and a bell-curved cupola rises from the slate roof. The interior has not been significantly altered and retains Colonial Revival fittings.

S-310 Peyton Pharmacy Building, West Main Street

Three stories high and five bays wide the Peyton Pharmacy building stands out as one of the most prominent commercial structures in "uptown" Crisfield. In addition to its size, the building is distinguished by a Flemish bond brick facade with glazed checkerboard brick pattern. A band of glazed brick lozenge designs stretches below the corbelled brick cornice. This building is historically noteworthy as well because it marks the point on the south side of Main Street where the 1928 fire was halted.

S-314 Dr. Sterling's office, 320 West Main Street

Dr. Sterling's office is a two-story, three-bay Victorian frame house erected around 1870. The center hall main block is covered by a hip roof with gables extending on three sides. The perimeter of the roof is trimmed with brackets. Also noteworthy are the first floor bay windows and the highly ornate front porch. The house is now covered with aluminum siding.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

S-315 Whittington-Long House, 315 West Main Street

Standing on the south side of West Main Street, this two-story, three-bay frame house is highlighted by a two-story Tuscan columned front portico. The hip roofed house has an ell service wing, and a single-story brick flower shop was added to the front of the house in 1924.

S-316 Dr. Somers House, 313 West Main Street

The Dr. Somers house is a two-story, three-bay frame house built during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Sheathed with weatherboard siding and trimmed with corner pilasters, the house has a center cross gable and a single-story front porch. The porch still retains its seamed tin roof covering. Extending to the rear is a two-story service wing.

S-317 Bradshaw Funeral Home, 306 West Main Street

The Bradshaw Funeral Home is one of a collection of turn of the century Queen Anne frame houses erected during the height of the oyster harvests. Following the popular Queen Anne style this group of houses is marked by similar features which include an irregular plan, a complex roof shape, a corner tower, a wraparound porch, and Contrasting wall materials.

S-318 Pauline Crockett House, 205 West Main Street

The Pauline Crockett house was erected during the late nineteenth century on an elaborate scale with an unusual amount of exterior detail. Built on a raised brick foundation, the irregular plan frame house is covered by a steeply pitched slate roof, and is sheathed with a wider array of exterior woodwork than any other house in Crisfield. Rising from the central portion of the house are two brick chimneys. The easternmost stack has a multi-faceted shaft and a corbelled cap.

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S-319 Immanuel United Methodist Church, West Main Street

The Immanuel United Methodist Church and the Mount Pleasant M. P. Church are two most intricate examples of the Gothic Revival style in Somerset County. In contrast to the Mount Pleasant Church, Immanuel was built in 1909 with rusticated granite on a tee-plan. Rising in the two south corners of the main block are two entrance towers of varying height. The southeast tower contains the principal Gothic arched entrance as well as a third story belfry. The pyramidal roof is covered with slate. The southwest tower, on the other hand, is only two stories high. Similar to the main tower is the slate covered pyramidal roof and the Gothic arched entrance.

S-320 Crisfield Flower Shop, West Main Street

The Crisfield Flower Shop is a noteworthy commercial building standing in the "uptown" business district. The two-story, three-bay by four-bay rectangular brick structure retains one of the few unaltered Victorian storefronts in Crisfield. Large plate glass display windows flank a recessed double-door entrance, and a bracketed mid-level cornice defines the second floor level. Highlighting the parapet roof is a decorative brick cornice with the date 1887 embossed in raised brick numbers.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

S-321 Whittington House, West Main Street

The Whittington house occupies a principal corner in the "uptown" section of Crisfield near the Mount Pleasant M. P. Church. Erected during the years surrounding the turn of the 20th century, the two-and-a-half story frame house rests on a raised brick foundation and is covered by a steeply pitched slate roof. Distinguishing the southwest corner is a three-story octagonal tower and stretching across the front and west side is a wraparound porch.

S-324 Albert Sterling House, 23 West Main Street

The Albert Sterling house is less impressive in size than some of its neighbors, but the gable-front turn of the century dwelling has a distinctive Eastlake style wraparound porch consisting of arched wooden screens, turned support posts, and a turned post handrail. The modified side hall/parlor plan interior has survived with a large portion of its period woodwork.

S- 325 McCready House, Corner of Main and Somerset Avenues

The McCready house is an important dwelling in Crisfield's east end residential district. Not only is it one of the earliest and best preserved of the c. 1870 frame houses, but it defines a prominent intersection that was once the eastern limit of town development. Surrounded by a white picket fence, the tee-plan McCraedy house is sheathed with narrow weatherboards and covered by a medium pitched wood shingle roof. The perimeter of the roof is trimmed with brackets, and the wraparound porch is decorated with an unusual snake-shaped bracket. Attached to the back of the house is a single-story service wing. A row of contemporary outbuildings including a privy, smokehouse, and a garage stand along the back line of the property. This corner house site is one of a few to survive with a picket fence.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

S-326 Chesapeake Masonic Lodge No. 147, West Main Street

The Chesapeake Masonic Lodge No. 147 is a well-built Classical Revival Flemish bond brick structure that stands on the southwest corner of Main Street and Somerset Avenue. The rectangular structure is finished with classical features including concrete quoins and a bold temple front of four Tuscan columns that support a decorated pediment. A modillioned cornice stretches around the entire building. Fixed in the northeast corner of the structure is a 1926 date plaque.

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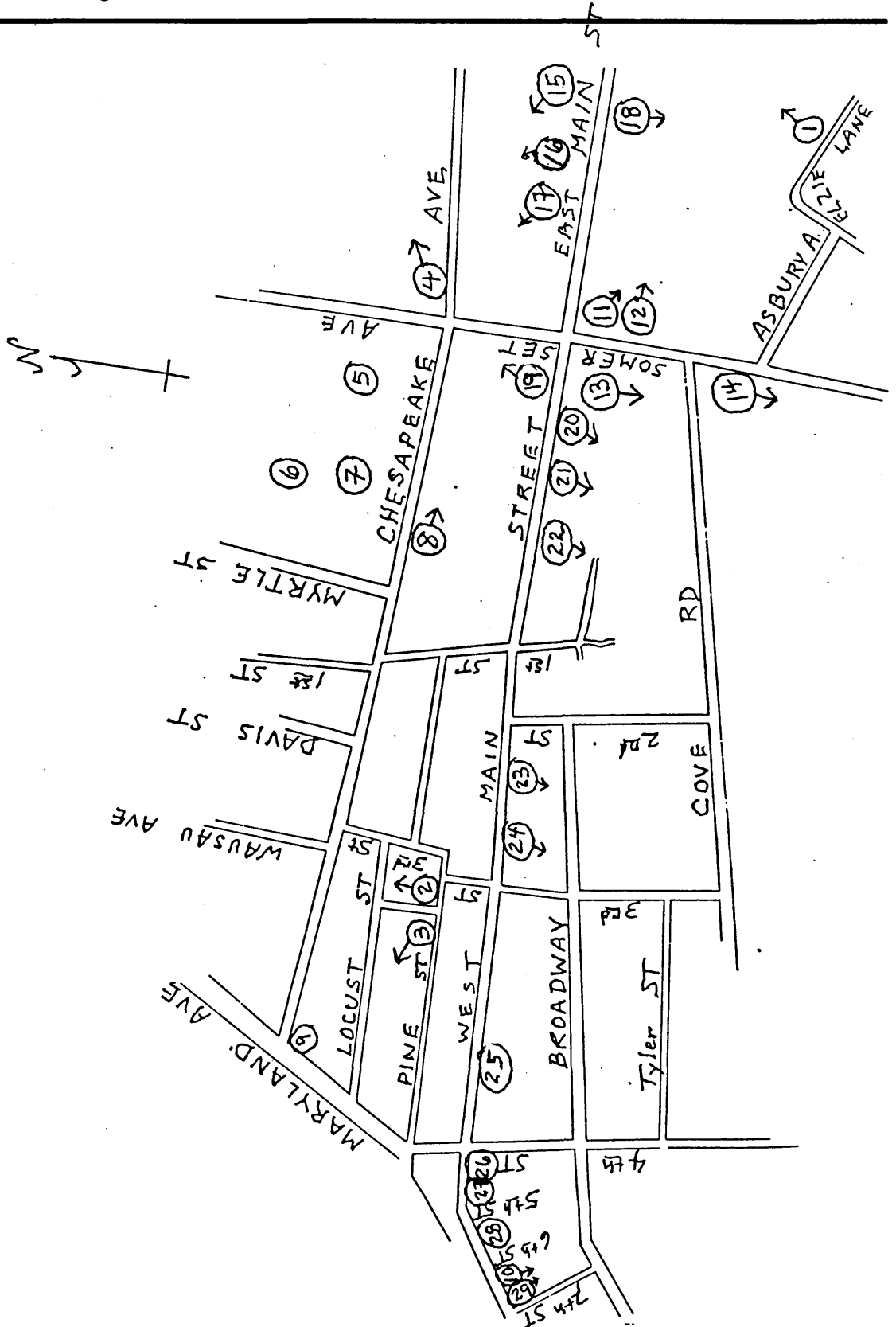
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arrows indicate views

PHOTOGRAPH MAP



8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture
Commerce

Period of Significance
1866-1930

Significant Dates
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Crisfield Historic District is architecturally and historically significant for several reasons. Crisfield was the principal center of the Chesapeake Bay seafood industry for the State of Maryland and for other east coast markets from the mid nineteenth century until the early twentieth century. Reflecting the town's explosive growth through this period, Crisfield retains an excellent collection of late nineteenth-century Victorian and early twentieth-century revival architecture. Crisfield's group of Queen Anne style houses include the most elaborate examples in Somerset County and appropriately represent the substantial profits accumulated during the several decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Equally important are the scores of less elaborate frame dwellings that comprise the largest part of Crisfield's domestic architecture. These less expensive dwellings housed the middle and working classes that constituted the backbone of the town's society. Crisfield's religious architecture, built during the most prosperous years of oyster harvests, includes Somerset County's most elaborate High Victorian Gothic churches. The black community shared in the oyster profits and were able thereby to finance construction of two prominent Gothic Revival brick churches. The significant commercial architecture of Crisfield largely dates from the same period (1880-1930) and includes notable examples of utilitarian store buildings as well as distinctive classical revival bank buildings. Due to the 1928 fire a group of replacement commercial buildings follow simplistic Art Deco designs. Finally, located in the city cemetery on Somerset Avenue is the largest collection of decorative iron fence in the county. Surrounding seven family plots are elaborate iron fences shipped for the most part from the Champion Iron Fence Company in Kenton, Ohio.

See continuation sheet 8/1 for HISTORIC CONTEXT and MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN data.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet No. 9/1

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 105 acres (approx.)

UTM References

A

1	8
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4	2	6	0	3	0
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4	2	0	4	1	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Zone Easting Northing

B

1	8
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4	2	6	0	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	2	0	3	4	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Zone Easting Northing

C

1	8
---	---

4	2	4	5	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	2	0	3	7	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

D

1	8
---	---

4	2	5	0	3	0
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4	2	0	4	2	5	0
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USGS quad: Crisfield, MD

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries are delineated on the Resource Sketch Map and consist of the indicated property and curb lines.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet No. 10/1

11. Form Prepared By

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HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Eastern Shore

Chronological/Developmental Periods:

Agriculture-Industrial Transition	A.D. 1815-1870
Industrial/Urban Dominance	A.D. 1870-1930

Prehistoric/Historic Period Themes:

Architecture, Landscape Architecture and
Community Planning

Economic (Commercial and Industrial)

Resource Type:

Category: district

Historic Environment: urban

Historic Functions and Uses:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

COMMERCE/TRADE/ business

COMMERCE TRADE/specialty store

Known Design Source: none

See Continuation Sheet No. 8/2

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HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Although known today as a principal supplier of hard- and soft-shell blue crabs, the early history of Crisfield is tied inextricably to the oyster. Crisfield prospered as a terminus of the Eastern Shore Railroad, and, most importantly, as the heir to the rich oyster beds of Tangier Sound. Not only was the oyster the town's economic mainstay until the twentieth century, but the discarded shells served as the very foundation of the town itself.

The development of Crisfield predates its official incorporation (1872)¹ by more than two centuries. With initial settlement of Somerset County during the early 1660s, "Emessex," the tract where Crisfield was laid out, was patented to Benjamin Summers (sic) on February 10, 1663, for three-hundred acres.² Throughout the ensuing two hundred years, "Emessex" was subdivided and sold numerous times, but Somers family ownership of various parcels continued until the Twentieth century. In an effort to improve land access to "Somers Cove," the principal harbor for the immediate area, a petition was drawn to open a public road in 1842. The importance of this public right-of-way was clearly stated in the county land records.

The petition of the subscribing citizens of Annessex in said County, respectfully showeth that we labor under great inconvenience for the want of a public road and landing at Somers Cove, which is our principal harbor and landing in the time of Ice, and whereas the way is nearly stopped up and we apprehend it soon will unless a public road is opened.³

With a public road to "Somers Cove" and immediate water access to Chesapeake Bay, the Annessex River village evidently developed into a moderate sized agrarian and watermen's community as the century neared its midpoint.

In sharp contrast to the relative quiet of the early nineteenth century, "Somers Cove" expanded in a few short decades to a nationally recognized exporting center for the Chesapeake Bay oysters and other seafood. By 1866 "Somers Cove" was joined to the string of nearby urban areas with a spur line of the Eastern Shore Railroad, later known as the New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk Railroad. To honor the spur line's chief promoter, "Somers Cove" was renamed for John Woodland Crisfield.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT (continued)

The oyster industry, which had been growing steadily in the Chesapeake region as Yankee traders sought to supplant the exhausted beds off the New England coast, burgeoned in Crisfield upon completion of the rail link.⁴ During the same period, Crisfield's importance in maritime commerce increased, as it developed into a busy port connecting shipping lines between Baltimore and Norfolk. As a result, the town boomed with rapid construction of oyster plants, commercial structures, and quickly-erected housing for workers, businessmen, and ship captains. As the population of Crisfield increased so did its land area. Discarded oyster shells were dumped into the marsh and used to create firm ground for additional development. By 1877, the railroad was extended to the town steamboat wharf, and a roundhouse was erected along its path. A rare glimpse of Crisfield's appearance during 1879 was written for Harper's Weekly,

A town of oysters built on oyster shells. Such is Crisfield. A man buys a building lot at the bottom of the harbor and then purchases oyster shells to raise it above high-water mark. Crisfield stands, as it were, up to its knee in the water of a little harbor that cuts jaw-like into the end of a small peninsula formed by the Annemaessec (sic) River on the north and Pocomoke Sound on the south.

A general whiteness illumines the streets of Crisfield; a crisp rattle of loose shells sounds under the tread of the pedestrian, a salt breeze blows from the beautiful waters of Tangier Sound, tainted, alas! by a slight odor of defunct oysters. Oysters, oysters, everywhere in barrels, in boxes, in cans, in buckets in the shell and out... Along this (the railroad) and in the side streets collect the houses, all of frame, varying in architecture from the cottage to the negro shanty. Along the waters edge are a number of large barn-like buildings - the oyster packing houses.⁵

While oysters were the predominant resource affecting Crisfield's early growth, significant industries soon developed to exploit the abundant finfish, wildfowl, and terrapin.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT (continued)

The quick riches provided by the oyster industry instigated the construction of large frame warehouses, workers' housing, and stores, in addition to more substantial houses "uptown" for the affluent oyster packing house owners and ship captains. By 1877, less than a dozen years after the first engine arrived, more than two-hundred structures lined the town streets.⁶ The harbor, punctuated with piers and choked with boats, steamers and schooners, carried on the largest oyster trade in the state. During the same period, Crisfield sponsored employment for over six-hundred registered sailing vessels, and the Maryland oyster harvests reached their peak. In 1874 fourteen million bushels were extracted from bay waters.⁷

Fast money was made in Crisfield, and it was also spent. The Maryland State Gazette published the commercial profile of Crisfield in 1871, which gives an adequate impression of daily life. To supply the everyday needs of Crisfield's diverse populace, no fewer than fifteen merchants advertised their businesses, and eight hotels, saloons, and boarding houses provided cheap rooms and entertainment.⁸ In an effort to accommodate his cross-section of customers, Robert H. Croswell offered a variety of items to outfit one's body, one's boat, or perhaps a boudoir. Not to forget his practical agrarian patrons, Croswell carried hardware, queensware, cutlery, twine, hair, doors, sash, and guano.⁹

The rapidly growing town supported six full-time carpenter-builders as well as an equal number of ship carpenters. It is highly likely that a fair number of ship carpenters applied their skills to domestic buildings during their off-season. Even though only six shipbuilders were noted in 1871, Henry Hall recorded in his Report on the Shipbuilding Industry, (1884), more than 1400 fishing vessels in Crisfield, although 700 of them were log canoes not large enough to register at the customs house. He also stated that around 175 oyster boats were fashioned on the lower Shore yearly and that there were twenty marine railways. Hall credited this growth to private builders or watermen themselves, who assembled their own boats either in the woods or in their backyards.¹⁰

Additional listings in the Maryland Gazette included four oyster packers, A. R. Crockett, N. Dixon, C. C. Gardner, and T. H. Goodsell; one physician, two blacksmiths, one barber, one minister, and five shoemakers.¹¹

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HISTORIC CONTEXT (continued)

The get-rich-quick philosophy permeated Crisfield through the peak years of the oyster harvests, which exacerbated century-old rivalries between Virginia and Maryland watermen. Severe competition for oyster beds instigated barroom brawls, oyster-knife stabbings, or even gun battles between warring oystermen on the open bay. Depletion of the oyster beds during the first half of the twentieth century only served to heighten animosity among watermen. The attendant lawlessness in Crisfield and on the Bay gave the Maryland town a reputation not unlike that of the rough, mid-western mining towns.

Even though several fortunes were made in Crisfield through the post-Civil War years, reinvestment in more substantial, safer buildings was not accomplished. In 1883, the inevitable occurred. The first of Crisfield's great fires ravaged the downtown section of closely-set frame packing houses and stores. Thirty years later, fire completely destroyed adjacent Jersey Island, another site of oyster packing. Best remembered by town residents is the 1928 conflagration that reduced the "uptown" commercial district to ashes. After an 8:00 p.m. showing of "Love," starring Greta Garbo and John Gilbert, fire started in the Crisfield Opera House and spread through a large section of the business district.¹² Soon after, a three-story arcade, replacing the Victorian opera house, and rows of two-story brick commercial buildings were raised on the site of the former stores.

The economic upheaval of the Great Depression coincided with the depletion of the Chesapeake Bay oyster beds by overfishing to halt Crisfield's expansion. The city is currently beginning a revival based on tourism and industrial development.

Footnotes:

1. Woodrow T. Wilson, History of Crisfield and Surrounding Areas on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Gateway Press, Baltimore, 1974, p. 8.
2. Somerset County Land Grants, Ruth T. Dryden, p. 148, Printed Privately, no date.
3. Somerset County Land Records, Somerset County Courthouse, AH/514, 2/28/1842.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT (continued)

Footnotes (continued)

4. Survey files of the Maryland Historical Trust, S-127, Crisfield Multiple Resource Area, prepared by Peter E. Kurtze and Peggy Bruns Weissman.
5. "A Peninsular Canaan," Harper's Monthly Magazine. May 1879.
6. Bicentennial Edition of the 1877 Atlas of Somerset County, published by Lake, Griffing and Stevenson.
7. John R. Wennersten, The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay, p. 137, as taken from Caswell Grave, History of Oysters in Maryland, Baltimore, 1912.
8. Maryland State Gazette, 1871.
9. 1877 Lake, Griffing, and Stevenson Atlas.
10. "Report on the Shipbuilding Industry," Government Printing Office, 1884, as cited in Frederick Tilp's book, The Chesapeake Bay of Yore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Inc., Annapolis and Richmond, 1982, pp. 115-121.
11. Maryland State Gazette, 1871.
12. Woodrow T. Wilson, History of Crisfield, pp. 63-67.

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Bicentennial Edition of the 1877 Atlas of Somerset County, first published by Lake, Griffing, and Stevenson.

Henry Hall, "Report of the Shipbuilding Industry," Government Printing Office, 1884.

Maryland State Gazette, 1871.

"A Peninsular Canaan," Harper's Monthly Magazine, May 1879.

Somerset County Land Grants, Ruth T. Dryden, printed privately, no date.

Somerset County Land Records, Somerset County Courthouse, Princess Anne, Maryland

Survey files of the Maryland Historical Trust, S-127. Crisfield Multiple Resource Area, prepared by Peter E. Kurtze and Peggy Bruns Weissman.

Frederick Tilp, The Chesapeake Bay of Yore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Inc. Annapolis and Richmond, 1982.

John R. Wennersten, The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, MD, 1981.

Woodrow T. Wilson, History of Crisfield and Surrounding Areas on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Gateway Press, Baltimore, 1974.

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, Somerset County, Maryland Historical Trust, Annapolis, MD

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BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundaries of the Crisfield Historic District were selected to encompass the cohesive group of historic resources which retain integrity of form, materials, feeling, and association and to exclude properties whose integrity has been compromised by incompatible alterations or advanced deterioration, or which do not relate to the themes or period of the district's significance. Immediately south of the southern boundary is an area which was formerly characterized by frame workers' housing, but which has been extensively cleared in recent years; the few small houses which remain are severely deteriorated, to the point where they no longer retain sufficient integrity of form and materials to be considered contributing to the district. Southwest of the district is a recent housing development and marina. West of the western boundary, along Maryland Avenue to the waterfront, the "downtown" commercial and industrial area of Crisfield has suffered a series of devastating fires and rebuildings into the mid-20th century, so that it has lost integrity. Northwest of the district, along Maryland Avenue and to the north, are areas characterized by a high percentage of incompatible alterations and mid-20th century development. Likewise, beyond the northern and eastern boundaries one encounters an increasing concentration of mid-20th century buildings interspersed among earlier structures, compromising the integrity of setting, feeling, and association for those areas. More intense study on integrity issues has to be made to address eligibility for the areas bordering the district to the north.

CRISFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT

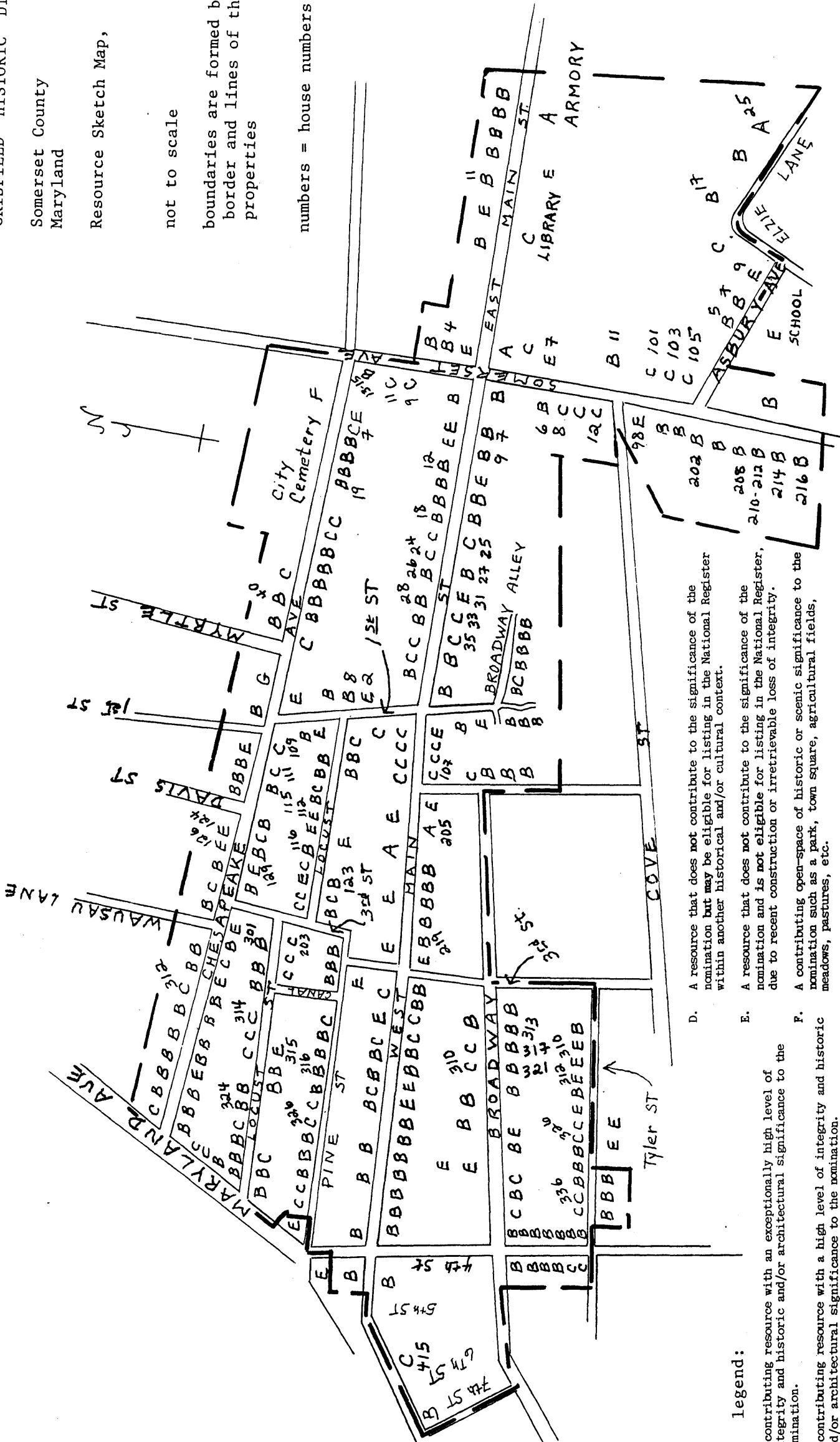
Somerset County
Maryland

Resource Sketch Map, 1989

not to scale

boundaries are formed by the
border and lines of the indicated
properties

numbers = house numbers



Legend:

- A. A contributing resource with an exceptionally high level of integrity and historic and/or architectural significance to the nomination.
- B. A contributing resource with a high level of integrity and historic and/or architectural significance to the nomination.
- C. A contributing resource with a low level of integrity whose restoration could be enhanced by sympathetic rehabilitation or restoration or by research documenting historic significance unknown at the time of nomination.
- D. A resource that does not contribute to the significance of the nomination but may be eligible for listing in the National Register within another historical and/or cultural context.
- E. A resource that does not contribute to the significance of the nomination and is not eligible for listing in the National Register, due to recent construction or irretrievable loss of integrity.
- F. A contributing open-space of historic or scenic significance to the meadows, pastures, etc.
- G. A non-contributing open-space which is of no significance to the nomination and is not eligible for listing in the National Register, such as a parking lot, etc.