

BELAIR, STABLES  
Belair Drive at east end  
of Tulip Grove Drive  
Bowie  
Prince George's County  
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-87-A

HABS  
MD  
17-COLTON,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BELAIR, STABLES

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Location: Belair Drive, at the east end of Tulip Grove Drive, Bowie, Prince George's County, Maryland

Significance: This U-shaped, sandstone stable was built in 1907 for James T. Woodward, then owner of Belair Mansion (ca. 1745). The elaborate stable building reflects Belair's long and distinguished association with thoroughbred horse racing and breeding.

Description: The stable sits on two acres located approximately 1000' northeast of Belair Mansion. Once part of a large estate, the stable building is now surrounded by residential development. The building itself is a U-shape structure with a one-and-a-half-story main block and single-story flanking wings, forming an open exercise yard to the center.

The main block is of local, dark-brown sandstone, in twenty-four-inch-thick random ashlar. At the bottom of the U-shape is an arched opening into the courtyard, under a gable end in the roofline. There are three, diamond-pattern, leaded casement windows with flat arched lintels and wood sills to either side of the archway. It has a slate-covered, hipped roof with two dormers at the east front.

The flanking wings to the rear are of brick, resting on a stone foundation. The wing is nine bays long, with alternating dutch-doors (for the horses) and windows. The windows along the interior exercise yard are six-light metal casements (smaller casements light the stables from the outside).

The interior of the main section houses a caretakers residence, north of the archway, with a doorway from the exercise yard. To the south of the archway is a carriage house. In the flanking wings are the stables, with brick floors and wood stalls.

History:

Belair Stables were built in 1907 for James T. Woodward who purchased Belair Mansion--the 1740s home of Maryland Governor Samuel Ogle--along with 371.4 acres in 1898. Following his death in 1910, Woodward convey his estate to his nephew, William Woodward, having had no children of his own. William Woodward Sr., well-known in horse-racing circles and one-time chairman of the Jockey Club, operated a horse farm here. His "Belair Stables" produced a number of fine thoroughbreds including Gallant Fox (1930) and Omaha (1935), both Triple Crown winners.

The history of thoroughbred horse breeding at Belair dates back to the early 18th century, to the original owner Samuel Ogle. Ogle's reputation as a breeder of fine racing horses was widespread. In fact, the Belair Stables is often recognized as the cradle of American thoroughbred racing, having the distinction of being the only great colonial estate where horse breeding for the purpose of racing was carried on for three centuries.

Horse racing has long been a tradition among the wealthy planter and merchant class in Prince George's County. The county still maintains an equestrian center in Upper Marlboro, the center for horse racing as early as the Colonial era.

The stable was used actively until 1955. William Sr. died in 1953, leaving the estate to his son William Jr., who died tragically just two years later. The property was then sold to Levitt & Sons who developed the current subdivision that surrounds the house and stable. In 1964 Levitt donated the buildings to the City of Bowie who used the mansion for their offices. The stables are now used as a museum dedicated to the history of horse racing and the Belair estate. It also houses the library of the Genealogical Society of Prince George's County.

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Historian:

Catherine C. Lavoie  
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