

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| STATE: Virginia | |
| COUNTY: Prince William | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER 70.2.45.0024 | DATE 2/26/70 |

1. NAME

COMMON:
Bel Air

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Bel Air

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
.9 mi. W of Rt. 640, .6 mi. N of intersection with Rt. 610.

CITY OR TOWN:
(Minnieville vic.)

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| STATE Virginia | CODE 45 | COUNTY: Prince William | CODE 153 |
|-------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____ _____ |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
William E. S. Flory

STREET AND NUMBER:
Route 1 Box 862

CITY OR TOWN:
Woodbridge

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| STATE: Virginia | CODE 45 |
|--------------------|------------|

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Prince William County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Manassas

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| STATE: Virginia | CODE 45 |
|--------------------|------------|

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey, File 76-1

DATE OF SURVEY: 1936 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| STATE: District of Columbia | CODE 08 |
|--------------------------------|------------|

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------|------|
| STATE: Virginia | COUNTY: Prince William | ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | | | |

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Supposedly built in 1740 on the basement of an earlier house, Bel Air is a brick, one-and-one-half story structure set on a high stone foundation with minute dormers and an enormous exterior end chimney on the western end which contrasts with the small interior end chimney on the east end. The brickwork is laid for the most part in Flemish bond. However, on the north facade, considerable rebuilding is obvious and on the east end the bond lapses, at times, into five-course American bond. The south facade has four bays with two of the windows to the west of the central doorway and one to the east. These windows are of the narrow eighteenth-century shape and, although the nine-over-nine sash is correct in theme, it is a replacement. The north front is a symmetrical five-bays wide, but the openings approach a square in shape and, along with obvious rebuilding of much of the wall, do not date from the eighteenth century. Photographs published in 1931 show the tiny dormers, certainly a standard feature in early structures, to be present only on the south front, but these awkward creatures appear today on both broad slopes. Both porches have been changed since 1931, the most notable replacement being the removal of a classical entrance porch in lieu of an unsheltered stone one with side stairs on the south front. Large windows in the stone basement have been partially let into the wall above and topped by brick segmental arches.

The central hall plan features a small open stair hall at the north end and to the west of the entranceway, and, although the robust rail seems quite right for the period, the balusters are a bit slender for a 1740 date. This stair area is separated from the rest of the hall by an archway whose reeded supports might date from the same period as the balusters. The northeast room has been altered in the mid-nineteenth century, but the other rooms have mid-eighteenth century paneling. The most notable feature in the house is the wooden partition between the southwest room and the hall which is supposedly removeable to create a larger area. Complete with paneling above and below the chair rail and two glazed casement windows in the wall, this design is extraordinary.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>History</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Bel Air is thought to have been built by Captain Charles Ewell (1713-?) who married Sarah Ball, daughter of Major James and Mary (Conway Dangerfield) Ball of Bewdley, Lancaster County, in 1736. Thus the Ewells were closely related to the family of George Washington's mother, Mary (Ball) Washington. Colonel Jesse Ewell (1743-1805), eldest son of Captain Charles Ewell, inherited the property, and in 1795 his daughter Frances (1775-1843) married Mason Locke Weems (1759-1825), the first biographer of George Washington. In 1808 or 1809 Weems and his family moved from their home near Dumfries to Bel Air, taking over the house partly to satisfy loans Weems had made to Mrs. Ewell. Weems purchased the remainder of the property upon her death in 1823. After Weems's death the house passed through the Ewell family to Weems's cousins who soon left it, and the house has stood empty for long periods of time.

Born at Marshes Seat near Herring Bay, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, on October 11, 1759, Mason Locke Weems was admitted to the Episcopal priesthood in 1784, serving two parishes in Maryland from 1784 to 1792. By 1793 he had given up a settled rectorship and had become active as a book agent for Matthew Carey of Philadelphia. Although Bel Air was officially his home for the last fifteen years of his life, he spent most of his time traveling up and down the eastern seaboard peddling his books. He is best remembered as the author of The Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington, first published anonymously circa 1800. This work has gone through more than seventy accredited and varying editions, including five in German, from 1800 to 1927. In the fifth edition (1806), the famous story of the cherry tree made its debut. The fact that "Parson" Weems had preached in several Virginia parishes for a short time, including Pohick Church (after Washington had ceased to attend there) was the basis for his claim, in the 1809 edition, that the author was "Formerly Rector of Mt. Vernon Parish."

In addition to his moralistic tracts and pamphlets, Weems is remembered for his biography of General Francis Marion (1809), loosely based on material provided by Peter Horry, one of Marion's lieutenants. Weems died in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1825, and his remains were later brought back to Bel Air where he was laid to rest in the family cemetery.

Architecturally, Bel Air is a fascinating study of structural evolution within the confines of a house measuring 38' x 51'. It is quite possible that the stone foundations date from an earlier period than

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| STATE Virginia | |
| COUNTY Prince William | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER 70-245-0024 | DATE 2/26/70 |

(Number all entries)

8. 1740, as is traditionally held, and it seems obvious that the nineteenth century played freely with the changes in the masonry walls and some interior detailing. Fortunately, Bel Air has not been greatly hurt by these efforts and, in fact, gains a certain dignity and stature for having retained its architectural composure.

6. Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory
1959 Federal
Library of Congress
Washington, D. C. Code: 08

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Report #76-1
1969 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building
Richmond, Virginia Code: 45



