

Pr. Wm. Journal
Aug. 1-2, 1990

Letters

er ways to spend \$35,000

Road a threat to county's heritage

Editor, *The Journal*:

This letter is in response to the threat to Bel Air Plantation posed by the proposed path of Ridgefield Road. This "functional plan" would bisect the remaining acres of Bel Air that serve as a buffer from the cacophony and chaos of the 20th century and thus render its colonial atmosphere virtually non-existent.

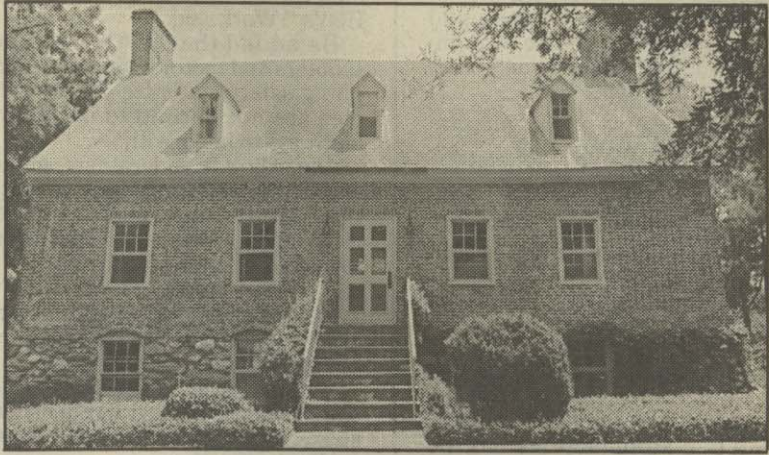
If such an intrusion to the 18th century milieu is allowed, Bel Air might as well be abandoned once again to the black snakes, brambles and barn owls that greeted the Flory family in 1948 prior to their restoration.

Behind Rippon Lodge, built in 1725, Bel Air, built in 1741, stands as the second-oldest house in Prince William County.

Both dwellings were graced by the presence of George Washington, and the historical ties of the Bel Air grounds can be traced back to 1673 as one of a chain of fortresses built in defense against the Susquehanna Indians.

It is well known that Bel Air stood empty and decaying for 18 years, with many of its fine mantelpieces and wooden trim cast outdoors to an inevitable fate, before being rescued and restored to its present-day condition.

A financial sacrifice on such a long-term project is rewarding for its owners, but it is always the county and state that are the ultimate beneficiaries. No one can predict the eventuality of such a



Paul Bates/Journal

property's falling into the hands of the county through a bequest by an owner. Must preservation of historic houses and their surrounding areas be predicated on the availability of the house to the public?

Consider the fate of Waverley, Snow Hill and The Shelter, all structures that were or are located in the Haymarket-Woolsey area.

At one time a showplace of the county, Waverley, after many years of neglect, was burned in 1973 by hippie squatters.

Snow Hill, built in the 1770s, along with Waverley, counted in King Carter's original holdings, is gone forever, burned in 1974.

Lastly, The Shelter, a fine frame house built in the mid-1700s, is now on the verge of total collapse due to decades of neglect.

It is indeed unfortunate that not one of these structures was purchased by someone who could have provided the caretaking and restoration to original glory that each one deserved.

Are the county's prime

historic dwellings to become like endangered species, imprisoned in cages in a zoo, because their surrounding habitats have been thrown to the cataclysmic changes of commercialism?

Surely the county is still reeling from the repercussions of the Third Battle of Manassas (Battlefield) and can observe what happens when historical lands are threatened with encroachment and/or inappropriate commercial use?

None will dispute the need of the county for limited-access roads that will move the traffic in a more expedient manner, but not at the expense of compromising our crown jewels.

The governing representatives of this county have a responsibility to promote controlled development and, at the same time, protect the elements that comprise the historical gems of this area. Let us hope that they will be champions for progress, but heroes in the eyes of historical Prince William County. Relocate Ridgefield Road.

A.N. MARKLE
Woodbridge