

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

2301-2303 and 2353 LAURETTA AVENUE (ROWHOUSES) (Edmondson Avenue Historic District)

HABS NO. MD-1443

Location: 2301-2303 and 2353 Lauretta Avenue, City of Baltimore, Maryland.

The 2301-2303 Lauretta Avenue rowhouses are located at latitude: 39.293974, longitude: -76.653359. The coordinates represent the approximate center of the party wall between the two adjoined buildings and were obtained on 30 May 2024, using Google Earth (WGS84).

2353 Lauretta Avenue is located at latitude: 39.294002, longitude: -76.654609. The coordinates represent the approximate center of the rowhouse and were obtained on 2 July 2024, using Google Earth (WGS84).

There is no restriction on their release to the public.

Significance: Constructed in 1923-1924, the rowhouses located at 2301, 2303, and 2353 Lauretta Avenue reflect West Baltimore's early twentieth century growth as a streetcar suburb that developed near the Edmondson Avenue streetcar line. In addition, the properties are representative of the mid-twentieth century racial transition of West Baltimore resulting from the demand for decent and affordable housing that changed segregated European American neighborhoods to largely African American communities. These porch-front rowhouses also represent architectural trends influenced by the "daylight" rowhouse design that incorporated an altered floor plan in order to provide a window in each room. This design change was in response to the larger and more commodious dwellings being built in surrounding suburbs. The 2301, 2303, and 2353 Lauretta Avenue rowhouses are significant as contributing elements of the National Register-listed Edmondson Avenue Historic District.

Description: 2301, 2303, and 2353 Lauretta Avenue are located within a row of twenty-seven two-story, two-bay porch-front brick rowhouses on the south side of Lauretta Avenue between North Bentalou Street and Wheeler Avenue. The 2301-2303 rowhouses are at the southeastern end of the row near North Bentalou Street and the adjacent B&P Railroad tracks. The 2353 Lauretta Avenue rowhouse is at the western end of the block adjacent to Wheeler Avenue. Edmondson Avenue, one of Baltimore's major thoroughfares, is located one block to the north; the Franklin-Mulberry Expressway / U.S. Route 40 is one block to the south. The location of the rowhouses provided easy access to the streetcar public transportation on Edmondson Avenue as well as to the industries located along the rail line, including on Franklin and Mulberry Streets. The rowhouses have side hall entries and window arrangements that

mirror the adjacent house, with one wide first-floor window opening that matches the height of the entry door and two second floor, symmetrically placed double-hung windows. The façades have brown brick laid in a running bond pattern with soldier courses located above the basement and second floor windows.

The three houses have open front porches surrounded by low brick walls with integral piers. Each brick porch wall is punctuated with paired basement windows about 8" above grade and a staircase leading to the porch/first floor level that aligns with each entry door. The sloped porch roof canopies for the three units are supported by non-original posts atop the brick piers. All three rowhouses have flat roofs that slope from north-to-south behind wide painted wooden cornices with simple detailing.

2301 Lauretta Avenue

2301 Lauretta Avenue is an end unit with its entry door on the west end of the façade. In a real estate listing in the June 16, 1924, edition of *The Sun*, 2301 Lauretta Avenue was described as having “7 rooms and bath.”¹ At the time of the exterior survey and photo documentation in September 2021, the front porch was in poor condition and partially caved in; the original front lawn area had been paved over; the transom above the front door had been replaced; the large first-floor window was boarded up; and the rear elevation had totally caved in.

The east side elevation consists of a painted brick wall with a parged stone foundation, two single-pane basement windows, and three one-over-one windows on each of the first and second floors. The first- and second-story windows are topped by segmental brick arches, and two of the first-floor windows have been boarded up. The central masonry section of the east wall are topped by a parapet that steps downward from north-to-south in three equal segments and there is a painted brick chimney rising from the rear of the first segment that was flush with the wall. On the rear elevation, there is a two-story extension clad with vinyl siding and supported by turned wooden posts.

At the time of the interior inspection, which took place sixteen months after the September 2021 exterior photo documentation, the interior had been recently renovated with all new finishes. There was an unpartitioned first floor with a staircase on the west wall and an open kitchen in the southern (rear) end of the space. The only remaining original interior element was the painted wood stair railing. All wall and ceiling finishes were newly painted gypsum board, and the floor was partially finished with composite planks. The second-floor level consisted of a front and rear bedroom, a smaller side room, a bathroom, and a hallway. All second-floor wall and ceiling finishes consisted of newly painted

¹ “2301 Lauretta Ave.,” *The Sun* [Baltimore], 16 June 1924, 14, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

gypsum board. The flooring was a mix of composite and ceramic tiles. At the time of the interior inspection, the missing rear wall of the house had been re-built.

2303 Laretta Avenue

2303 Laretta Avenue has its entry on the east end of the façade, with the large first-floor window containing an original lower stationary “picture” window with a decorative stained-glass panel above.

The rear (south) elevation has more in common with the other inside rowhouses (2305-2351) on the block, with a fieldstone basement-level wall, a brick first-floor exterior wall, and a second-floor, aluminum-sided cantilevered room projecting beyond the masonry first and second floor bearing walls. At the time of the survey, the architectural elements of the south-facing basement wall were blocked from view by a plywood panel; however, based on the interior inspection and the floorplan for the adjacent houses, this wall likely has a basement door and window similar to the rowhouses to the west. The first floor of 2303’s rear elevation has a non-original metal porch with a large metal awning and stairs leading to the ground level.

2303 Laretta Avenue shares an open alley with its neighbor to the west that serves all three levels of both buildings (2303 and 2305) as a lightwell / ventilation shaft allowing for windows opening out into the alley. The alley extends south-to-north about one-third of the overall depth of the buildings and its partially exposed west and south elevations facing the alley consist of fieldstone at the basement level with brick above. On the south side of the block, this open alley feature is seen on rowhouses 2303-2325, but is not included in either 2301, 2327-2353, or the north side of the block.

The interior of 2303 Laretta Avenue was described as having two apartments, each with “3 rooms and a bath” in a real estate listing in the May 27, 1948, edition of *The Sun*.² At the time of the survey, the interior was arranged as a single occupancy residence consisting of an entry foyer, living room, dining room, kitchen, and stair hallway on the first level, and a stair hallway, bathroom, a north and south bedroom, and a centrally located side room on the second level. All ceiling finishes were fiberboard tile and all walls were clad with hardboard wood paneling except for the kitchen and bath, which have areas of ceramic tile and painted gypsum board. Flooring throughout the house was a mix of wood, carpet, and ceramic tile.

2353 Laretta Avenue

On the façade of 2353 Laretta Avenue, the westernmost building in the row, the basement windows have been filled in with concrete. The large first-floor

² “West Balto,” *The Sun*, 27 May 1948, 32, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

window is a one-over-one replacement window. The side wall is similar to the 2301 side wall on the eastern end of the row. The main differences are the off-white troweled stucco finish in lieu of painted brick, the presence of one additional basement window, and a slightly different location of a second-floor window.

On the rear elevation, there is a basement-level door with masonry stairs at the western end. On the eastern end, there is a projecting entrance bay with a door accessed by several metal stairs. The second floor has two one-over-one windows. Similar to the side elevation, the rear elevation has a troweled stucco finish.

Although the interior was not available for survey, 2353 Laretta Avenue was described as having “3 furnished apts. with 2 baths” in a real estate listing in the November 28, 1952, edition of *The Evening Sun*.³

The rowhouse at 2353 Laretta Avenue appeared to be occupied and in good condition at the time of the survey.

History: Residential development in the Edmondson Avenue Historic District flourished with the western expansion of the city’s boundary in 1888 and the extension of the Edmondson Avenue Electric Streetcar line in 1900. The convenience afforded to commuters by the streetcars supported initial development of the former A.S. Abell estate by builder-developers John F. Piel and John K. McIver, and later development by other lesser-known firms including the Progressive Building Company.⁴

By approximately 1915, the style of the houses in this area of Edmondson Avenue was transitioning from “flat front rowhouses with marble trim” to “daylight” rowhouses that had front porches and a floor plan that facilitated more rooms with windows and therefore provided more daylight.⁵ This transition is credited to developers in the city feeling the competition from suburban developers who were able to provide freestanding houses.⁶

In 1922 and 1923, the Edmondson Realty Company transferred to the Progressive Building Company some property described as “Laretta, nr. Bentalou,” although it is unclear how much property was involved in those

³ “Colored,” *The Evening Sun* [Baltimore], 28 November 1952, 50, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

⁴ Eli Pousson, “Edmondson Avenue Historic District, B-5187,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2010), 8-1.

⁵ Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Belfoure, *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 128.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

transfers.⁷ The Progressive Building Company began its construction on Laurretta Avenue on the south side of the 2300 block. On December 16, 1923, it reported that it had sold four houses on the south side, i.e., 2301, 2317, 2325, and 2327.⁸ By February 1924, the company had sold at least four more houses on the south side of the block, including 2303, 2305, 2307, and 2319 Laurretta.⁹ All of these earlier houses, which were constructed between 1922-1923, included the lightwell / ventilation shaft between two houses, reflecting the growing influence of daylight houses.

In March 1924, the Progressive Building Company filed plans with the City Building Inspector for the construction of thirty-seven dwellings, including houses at the western end of the south side of the 2300 block as well as the entire row of houses on the north side of the block. The properties listed in the newspaper were 2300-2348 Laurretta Avenue (on the north side of the block) and 2331-2353 Laurretta Avenue (at the western end of the south side of the 2300 block). The total projected cost of the construction for the new group of houses was estimated to be \$100,000.¹⁰

In April and May 1924, the Progressive Building Company advertised the “Corner House” at 2300 Laurretta Avenue, describing features such as porch front; six rooms plus a kitchenette and bath; and “steam heat, washtubs in cellar and all modern conveniences.” The house was also promoted as being located “one square south of Edmondson Avenue.”¹¹ On May 4, 1924, the Progressive Realty Company announced the sale of five rowhouses on the north side of the block, i.e., 2304, 2306, 2308, 2310, and 2312.¹² Interestingly, none of the later houses on the western end of the southern side of the street or the entire northern side, included a lightwell / ventilation shaft.

The Progressive Building Company and the Progressive Realty Sales, Inc. were credited with constructing and selling over eighty of the rowhouses within the Edmondson Avenue Historic District.¹³ In 1926, a complaint was filed against

⁷ “Real Estate Transfers,” *The Sun*, 14 July 1922, 14, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 08 June 2024; “Real Estate Transfers, Baltimore City,” *The Sun*, 16 August 1923, 17, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

⁸ “Real Estate Deals and Building News,” *The Sun*, 16 December 1923, 25, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 8 May 2022.

⁹ “Real Estate Deals and Building News,” *The Sun*, 14 February 1924, 17, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 8 May 2022. The newspaper lists the sale of 2319 West Laurretta Avenue twice with different purchasers named, most likely a typographical error.

¹⁰ “Real Estate Deals and Building News,” *The Sun*, 1 March 1924, 14, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 6 June 2019.

¹¹ “Corner House,” classified advertisement, *The Sun*, 27 April 1924, 33; “Corner House,” classified advertisement, 25 May 1924, 29; “\$4000,” classified advertisement, *The Sun*, 11 May 1924, 31, <https://www.newspapers.com>, all accessed 6 June 2019.

¹² “Real Estate Deals and Building News,” *The Sun*, May 4, 1924, 21, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 6 June 2019.

¹³ Eli Pousson, “Edmondson Avenue Historic District, B-5187,” 7-25 – 7-29.

the company for an overdue promissory note. The complaint alleged that the Progressive Building Company “had long been conducted at a loss” and that it was insolvent.¹⁴

From the date of their construction in 1924 to the present, all the rowhouses on Lauretta Avenue between North Bentalou Street and Wheeler Avenue have been used as single family, duplex and three-apartment residential dwellings with the possible exception of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, which may have been used as a dry goods store as evidenced by an application for such use listed in the July 29, 1925, edition of *The Sun*.¹⁵

The rowhouses in the 2300 block of Lauretta Avenue were originally purchased and occupied by blue- and white-collar Caucasian homeowners. Census records from 1930 indicate that residents of the 2300 block worked in a variety of working-class occupations. In 1930, the variety of occupations reflected the industry and businesses of the area, such as machine shop foreman, furniture salesman, blacksmith, bricklayer and candy store proprietor. In the 1940 census, occupations in these rowhouses were akin to those of ten years prior, with the addition of steamfitter, plumber, newspaper pressman, department store salesman, and janitor. The houses continued to be owner occupied by Caucasians.¹⁶

Like many other areas of Baltimore, the Edmondson Avenue Historic District experienced racial tensions and white homeowners’ resistance to desegregation. At an April 1925 meeting in West Baltimore to protest tax assessments, there was “denunciations of those who... are furthering the negro invasion... by selling properties to negroes.” Former State Senator William J. Ogden criticized people who “are making a business of getting possession of a dwelling in a white block and selling it to negroes.” Ogden advocated for property owners in all-white blocks to sign an agreement that they would not sell to African Americans, maintaining that “competent lawyers... had pronounced such agreement entirely legal.”¹⁷

So called “white flight” occurred between 1955 and 1960 as people of color increasingly moved into the district’s dwellings and white occupants moved out of the area to the suburbs further from the city. This significant change in demographics was brought about by decades of unsatisfied demand for better and more affordable housing that had been denied to African Americans prior

¹⁴ “Alleges Firm is Insolvent,” *The Sun*, 23 October 1926, 9, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁵ “To Pack Groceries,” *The Sun*, 29 July 1925, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁶ United States Census Data, 1930-1940 United States Census Data, 1930-1940; <https://www.census.gov/data.html>, accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁷ “Taxpayers Hold Protest Meeting,” *The Sun*, 4 April 1925, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 29 May 2019.

to World War II. Evidence of formalized segregation can be found in newspaper listings such as the Real Estate offering for 2353 Lauretta Avenue under the category title “COLORED” in the November 28, 1952, edition of *The Evening Sun*.¹⁸ The rowhouse at 2303 Lauretta Avenue was similarly listed for sale in the February 27, 1960, edition of *The Evening Sun*.¹⁹ By the late twentieth century, the residential neighborhood that became the Edmondson Avenue Historic District was primarily home to African American residents.

- Sources:
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<https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.
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- “Colored.” *The Evening Sun*, 27 February 1960. <https://www.newspapers.com>,
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<https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 6 June 2019.

¹⁸ “Colored,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 November 1952, 50, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

¹⁹ “Colored,” *The Evening Sun*, 27 February 1960, 16, <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31 August 2023.

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accessed 31 August 2023.

“West Balto.” *The Sun*, 27 May 1948. <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 31
August 2023.

Historians: Nancy L. Zerbe; Steven Patrick, ARCH², Inc., 2021-2024.

Project

Information: The documentation of 2301 and 2303 Lauretta Avenue was undertaken in 2021-2024 as mitigation in accordance with the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for the Frederick Douglass Tunnel Program, formerly the Baltimore & Potomac (B&P) Tunnel Replacement Program. 2301 and 2303 Lauretta Avenue will be demolished to make way for the realignment of the Northeast Corridor associated with a new 1.9-mile-long tunnel north of the existing tunnel alignment. 2353 Lauretta Avenue, located at the western end of the 2300 block, has been photo documented; however, it will not be demolished as part of the Frederick Douglass Tunnel Program. The documentation project was sponsored by the United States Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), in coordination with the Maryland Historical Trust. It was prepared by Nancy L. Zerbe, Principal Investigator, and Steven Patrick, Historian, of ARCH², Inc. Renee Bieretz prepared the large-format photography. Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect, advised the project.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

2301-2303 AND 2353 LAURETTA AVENUE (ROWHOUSES)

HABS MD-1443

(Edmondson Avenue Historic District)

Baltimore

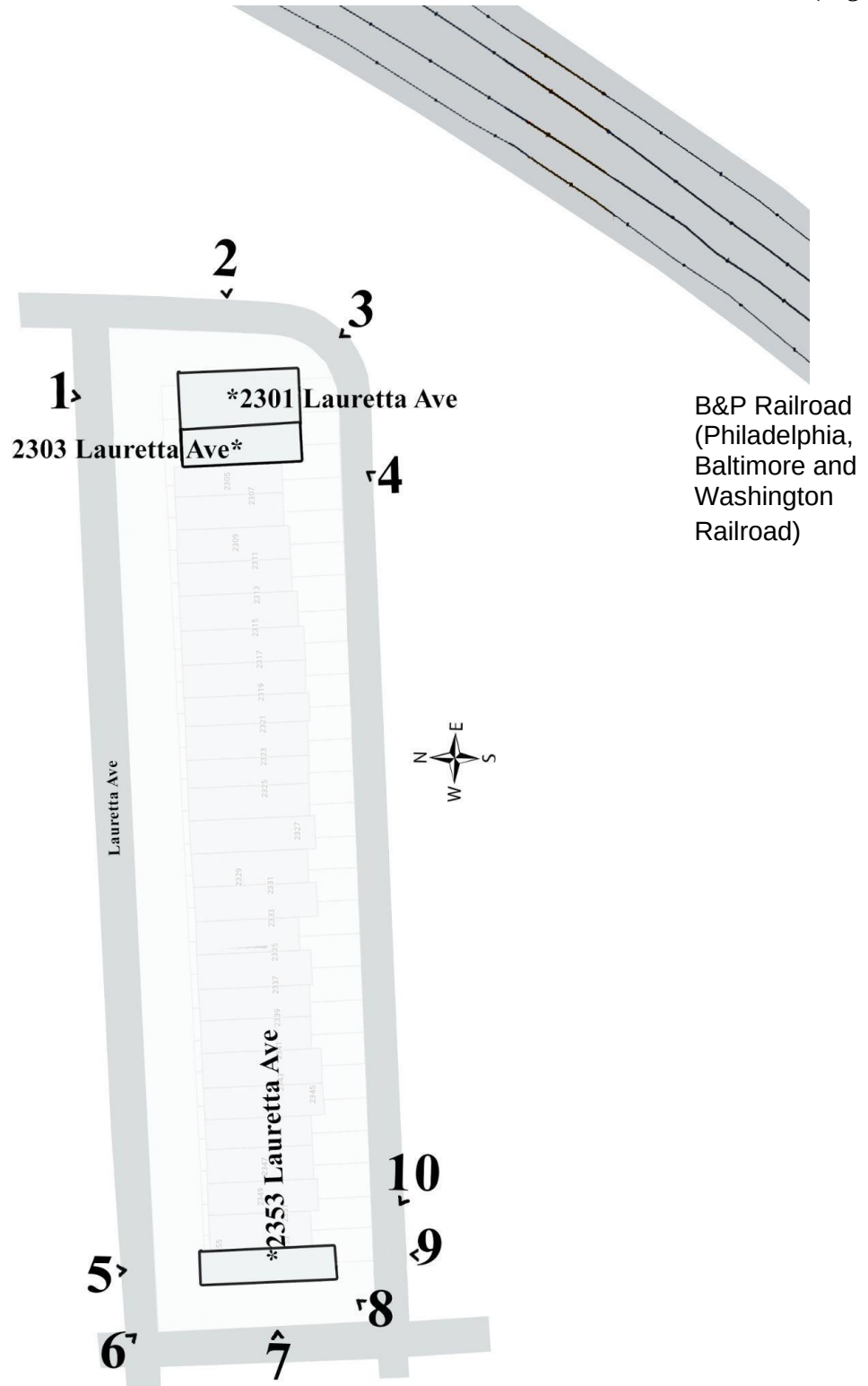
Maryland

INDEX TO BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Renee Bieretz, photographer, September 2021

MD-1443-1	Elevation view of 2301 and 2303 Lauretta Avenue, looking south.
MD-1443-2	Elevation view of 2301 Lauretta Avenue, looking west.
MD-1443-3	Perspective view of 2301 and 2303 Lauretta Avenue, looking northwest.
MD-1443-4	Perspective view of 2301 and 2303 Lauretta Avenue, looking northeast.
MD-1443-5	Elevation view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking south.
MD-1443-6	Perspective view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking southeast.
MD-1443-7	Elevation view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking east.
MD-1443-8	Perspective view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking northeast.
MD-1443-9	Elevation view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking north.
MD-1443-10	Perspective view of 2353 Lauretta Avenue, looking northwest.

2301-2303 and 2353 LAURETTA AVENUE (ROWHOUSES)
HABS MD-1443
INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS
(Page 2)



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-1



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-2



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-3



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-4



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-5



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-6



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-7



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-8



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-9



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEE INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS FOR CAPTIONS

HABS No. MD-1443-010

