

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG: 69-005-16

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Peace Cross
other _____

2. Location

street and number Annapolis Road at Route 1 _____ not for publication
city, town Bladensburg _____ vicinity
county Prince George's County

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
street and number 6600 Kenilworth Avenue telephone _____
city, town Riverdale state MD zip code 20737

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. _____ liber 2511 folio 99
city, town _____ tax map 50 tax parcel 67 tax ID number 02 0145946

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- _____ Contributing Resource in National Register District
- _____ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
- _____ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- _____ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
- _____ Recorded by HABS/HAER
- _____ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
- X Other: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning, Prince George's County Planning Department

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
_____ district	<u>X</u> public	_____ agriculture	_____ landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
_____ building(s)	_____ private	_____ commerce/trade	_____ recreation/culture	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<u>X</u> structure	_____ both	_____ defense	_____ religion	_____	_____ sites
_____ site		_____ domestic	_____ social	_____	_____ structures
_____ object		_____ education	_____ transportation	_____	_____ objects
		_____ funerary	_____ work in progress	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total
		_____ government	_____ unknown		
		_____ health care	_____ vacant/not in use		
		_____ industry	<u>X</u> other: Memorial		
					Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory
					<u>1</u>

7. Description

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Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one-paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Peace Cross, located at the intersection of Annapolis Road (Maryland Route 450) and Baltimore Avenue (U.S. Route 1) in Bladensburg, is a cast concrete memorial cross constructed 1919 -1925. The cross is forty feet high with arms extending five feet from the center. The Peace Cross stands on a traffic island; the traffic island is a small green space at this busy juncture of roads and features a flagpole, located adjacent to the cross, and planting beds, which surround the cross.

MONUMENT

The forty-foot Peace Cross is a memorial to residents of Prince George's County who lost their lives during World War I (1914-1918). The cross is constructed of cast concrete with exposed aggregate selected for its color and distribution; the cross is a tan color comprised of chipped flint material aggregate. Inlaid decorative accents of chipped deep pink granite embellish the Peace Cross. A thick, centrally placed band of the pink granite runs along the north and south sides of the cross. The east and west sides have a thin inlay of pink granite aggregate outlining the shape of the cross, located a few inches from the perimeter of the structure.

The arms of the cross extend five feet from the center on each side and are supported by unadorned, arched concrete brackets; the arms also have arched brackets on top, suggesting the form of a Celtic cross. Contrasting gold, red, green, and blue aggregates were used to form medallions on the crossings. The two medallions display a gold star within a green laurel wreath that is set on a blue background. "U.S." is written in the center of the star with a dark red aggregate. The bottom of the cross has an inscription on each side: "endurance" on the south, "valor" on the west, "devotion" on the north, and "courage" on the east.

The Peace Cross is set on a base of cast concrete in a tan aggregate, matching the cross itself. The base has a bronze tablet on the south side of the base. The tablet states, "This memorial cross is dedicated to the heroes of Prince George's County, Maryland who lost their lives in the Great War for the liberty of the world." The bronze tablet then lists the names of the forty-nine soldiers from the county who lost their lives during the war. After the list of names, the tablet reads, "The right is more precious than peace. We shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts. To such a task we dedicate our lives (Woodrow Wilson)."

INTEGRITY

The Peace Cross retains a high level of integrity. The cross is unaltered with the exception of restoration work undertaken during the 1960s by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

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Improvements made to the intersection of the major roads surrounding the Peace Cross have not affected the cross's integrity of feeling, setting, location, or association. The design, materials, and workmanship of the Peace Cross have not been compromised. Thus, the Peace Cross has sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a work of John Earley and a memorial to soldiers who lost their lives during World War I.

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

Specific dates	1919-1925	Architect/Builder	John J. Earley
Construction dates	1919-1925		

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Peace Cross, constructed from 1919-1925, is significant as a monument to Prince George's County residents who lost their lives in the line of duty during World War I. The Peace Cross is located at the eighteenth-century site of the Bladensburg Port landing, a significant location that served as the hub of colonial and early nineteenth century life in Bladensburg. The design of the Peace Cross is the work of master craftsman and contractor John J. Earley, founder of the Earley Process for concrete. The cross retains a high level of integrity, which conveys its significance as a monument and as the work of a master designer.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Peace Cross is located in Bladensburg, which was established in 1742. Bladensburg was an important port town during colonial times and the site of the Battle of Bladensburg during the War of 1812 in 1814. The port at Bladensburg was established to cater to tobacco growers on the Eastern Branch (Anacostia River) of the Potomac River. At the time, the mouth of the Anacostia River was one mile wide and twenty to forty feet deep, which made the port at Bladensburg the most well protected port in the region. Bladensburg was "one of the safest and most commodious harbors in America, being sufficiently deep for the largest ships for about four miles above its mouth."¹ Bladensburg retains several eighteenth century residences and commercial buildings, as well as a nineteenth-century church, that illustrate the town's colonial and Federal periods. The town's residential areas are located east of Annapolis Road, which is the commercial corridor in the community. The residential area was platted in sections as Decatur Heights in 1914 and 1917; the area has a high concentration of early-twentieth-century buildings.²

The former Bladensburg Port landing, which was the center of economic and social life in Bladensburg well into the nineteenth century, was chosen as the location to construct the Peace Cross. The Prince George's Memorial Committee was formed after World War I for the express purpose of raising funds to erect a

¹ Town of Bladensburg, "The Port O' Blandensburg," <http://www.bladensburg.com/html/history.html#Port> (accessed July 2, 2007).

² Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and Prince George's County Planning Department, *Historic Sites and Districts Plan* (1992), B-16.

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monument to the county's war dead.³ Ground was broken for the cross in September 1919 at the same time the new road between Bladensburg and Annapolis was dedicated. The new road was named the National Defense Highway to honor the fallen soldiers.⁴

John J. Earley designed the forty-foot cast concrete Peace Cross. Earley, an artist, artisan, and architect, maintained a studio in Washington, D.C. and was best known as a master of concrete technology. At a young age, John Earley came to know Basil Taylor, a man with whom he would become closely associated with in business for the next forty years. Earley and Taylor became known in business as a plaster and stucco firm. They received both private and government work, with one of their commissions being the remodeling of the interior of the White House during President Roosevelt's first term.⁵

Known as the "Man Who Made Concrete Beautiful," Earley promoted the use of exposed concrete aggregate. Earley achieved his "architectural concrete" through his experimentations with the proportions in which concrete is mixed, to create a uniform appearance. The uniform appearance of the concrete was a departure from the characteristic concrete block appearance of most concrete surfaces, and allowed buildings finished in concrete to have a more stylized appearance. Notable examples of other known works associated with the work of John Earley include: the Baha'i Temple of Light in Wilmette, Illinois, Meridian Hill Park in Washington, DC, and the Replica of the Athenian Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee.⁶ The colored concrete used in the Peace Cross exhibits the uniform appearance Earley pioneered with his architectural concrete.

Construction of Earley's design began in 1919 but insufficient funds halted construction in 1922. In February of that year, the Commissioners of Bladensburg resolved to convey the site of the Peace Cross to the Snyder-Farmer Post of the American Legion, which promised to complete the project.⁷ The Legion was able to raise enough funds, and the project was completed on July 12, 1925 at a total cost of \$10,000. A parade preceded the unveiling ceremony, which featured a keynote address from Representative Stephen W. Gambrill.⁸

During the 1950s, the State Roads Commission made several improvements to the intersection where the Peace Cross stands. A longstanding controversy over ownership of the parcel of land where the cross stands was resolved in 1956 by a Circuit Court ruling. The court ruled that title should be vested to the State of Maryland.⁹ In 1960, the State of Maryland deeded the land to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning

³ Shirley Baltz, "Peace Cross," (PG: 69-005-16) Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form (1985). Records of the Snyder-Farmer-Butler Post #3 American Legion.

⁴ Shirley Baltz, "Peace Cross," (PG: 69-005-16) Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form (1985).

⁵ EHT Traceries, *George Washington University Plan Sites* (2006).

⁶ EHT Traceries, *George Washington University Plan Sites* (2006).

⁷ Commissioners of Bladensburg to the Snyder-Farmer American Legion Post, Prince George's County Land Records, 421:381.

⁸ Washington Post, "Legion Dedicates Bladensburg War Memorial Cross," page 14, July 13, 1925.

⁹ Prince George's County Records, Law #7755.

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Commission, which has owned and maintained the site since.¹⁰ A small ceremony hosted by the Snyder-Farmer-Butler Post of the American Legion was held in July 1975 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the monument's dedication.¹¹

¹⁰ State of Maryland to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Land Records, 2511:99.

¹¹ Shirley Baltz, "Peace Cross," (PG: 69-005-16) Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form (1985), 8:1.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Baltz, Shirley. "Peace Cross" (PG: 69-005-16) Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form, 1985.

Franciscan Monastery. "John Joseph Earley." <http://www.myfranciscan.org/index.cgi/229>.

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and Prince George's County Planning Department, *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, 1992.

Prince George's County Land Records.

The Washington Post, "Legion Dedicates Bladensburg War Memorial Cross," July 13, 1925.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property .33

Acreage of historical setting .33

Quadrangle name Washington East

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

Since the monument's completion in 1925, it has been associated with Parcel 67 of Tax Map 50. The Peace Cross is located on a flat grassy area at the intersection of Annapolis Road (MD 450) and Baltimore Avenue (U.S. 1). Bladensburg Road also crosses through the juncture of Annapolis Road and Baltimore Avenue. These three roads create a crescent-shaped area where the Peace Cross stands.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Elizabeth Breiseth and Paul Weishar, Architectural Historians		
organization	EHT Traceries, Incorporated	date	October 2007
street & number	1121 5th Street NW	telephone	202.393.1199
city or town	Washington	state	DC

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

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Chain of Title

Deed 421: 381
February 25, 1922

Commissioners of the Town of Bladensburg to Snyder-Farmer Post 3,
American Legion

Law #7755
1956

Circuit Court rules the property should be vested to the State of Maryland

Deed 2511: 99
October 25, 1960

State Roads Commission of Maryland to Maryland-National Capital Park and
Planning Commission (with the covenant that no structure or commercial sign
shall ever be erected on the parcel conveyed in this deed)

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Photo: Peace Cross, view of the east elevation, looking west.

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Photo: Peace Cross, view of the west elevation, looking east.