

Historical Architecture OF THE AREA'S PROUD PAST

PART II

Written by **Dan Whetzel**
Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

DOWNTOWN CUMBERLAND'S business district also displays architectural styles associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three significant buildings are located together in the public building complex at the center of town.

The City Hall building, located on North Centre Street between Frederick and Bedford Streets, is the only example of municipal-style architecture in Allegany County. Constructed during 1911-1912 at a cost of \$87,000, the architect was influenced by neo-classicism which drew inspiration from the ancient Greek and Roman builders. The main entrance is flanked by double pilasters, while the cornice projects slightly to become part of the entrance embellishments. One originally planned feature, a dome that was to adorn the roof, never materialized because the \$6,000 cost for the project was considered too extravagant by city officials. While the building's exterior is an understated neo-classical style, the marble interior is ornate and includes a stone and marble rotunda augmented by a 45-foot long Gertrude DuBrau mural depicting the early history of Cumberland. The first part illustrates George Washington welcoming British General Edward Braddock to Fort Cumberland in 1755, while a second section portrays President Washington's appearance in Cumberland during the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794. This painting is believed to be the only one depicting George Washington's first and last times of commanding troops in the field.

Adjacent to City Hall on the corner of Frederick and Liberty Streets is the old Post Office and U.S. Courthouse building. The building's architecture could be described



Left: The Toll Gate House located along National Highway (U.S. Rt. 40) in LaVale, MD.

Below: The Western Maryland Railway Station on Canal Street in downtown Cumberland, MD.

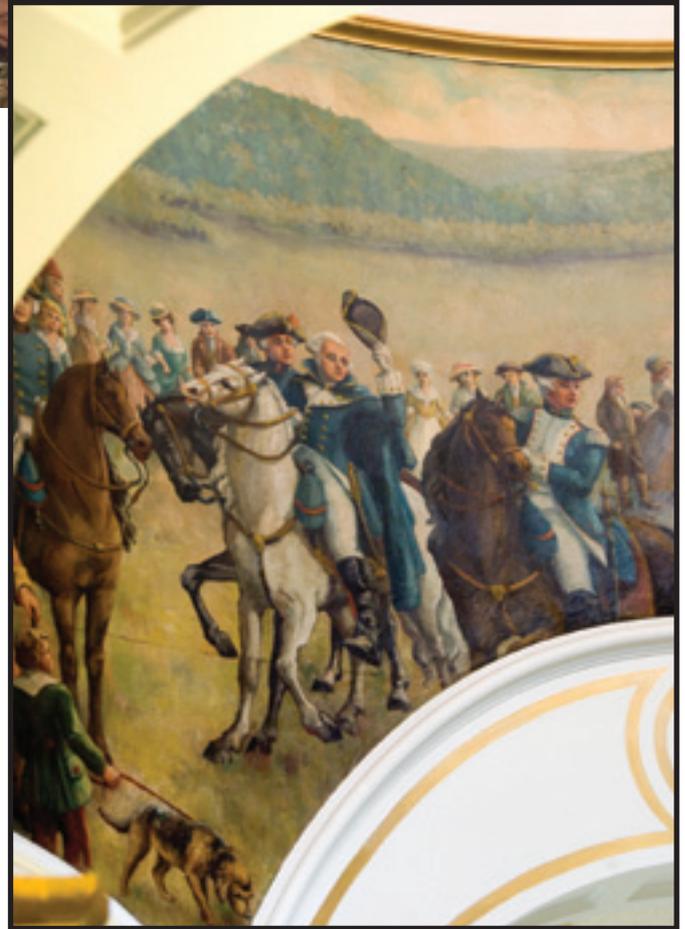


as a modified Georgian Revival because federal architect James K. Taylor combined the dominant Georgian features with Romanesque and Beaux-Arts styles; it is the only example of early twentieth century Georgian Revival style architecture in Allegany County. The upper two stories are brick raised from a stone base, while the three center bays of the facade are defined by four Ionic columns. The



Left: City Hall building on North Centre Street between Frederick and Bedford Streets in downtown Cumberland.

Below: Interior views of the rotunda mural in the City Hall building. The 45-foot long Gertrude DuBrau mural depicts the early history of Cumberland, including George Washington welcoming General Edward Braddock to Fort Cumberland in 1755.



impressive building opened in 1904 and hosted a federal court and post office until 1932, when new facilities were built on Pershing Street. The building was subsequently occupied by the Cumberland Police Department until the late 1970s. Today the building is home to the Allegany County Human Resources Development Commission.

On the corner of Bedford and Liberty Streets stands the landmark Bell Tower building. The building, currently occupied by the Allegany County Chamber of Commerce, remains essentially unchanged since construction in the late 1880s. Sometimes referred to as a “General Grant” period building, the two-story structure has tall double windows, simple molded lintels decorated with scroll motifs, and a Second Empire Revival roof. In the center of the roof is a

wooden bell tower that adds a late nineteenth century feature to the building and also provides the commonly used name for the building — Bell Tower. Ironically, the tower may not have originally held a bell because it was first used as a police headquarters and city jail until 1936, and its location

adjacent to the city fire department would have made a bell unnecessary. Nevertheless, the bell tower (which now contains a brass bell) provides “an interesting visual element to an already pleasing late nineteenth century building.” (*Maryland Historical Trust*)

One block from Bell Tower is the Schwarzenbach building at 128-130 Baltimore Street. The structure is unique to the city’s business district because it is the only one influenced by the Beaux Arts style of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The building was the commercial venture of George Schwarzenbach, a German immigrant who arrived in Cumberland and established a small retail business that later became an upscale men’s clothing store. Designed by Cumberland architect Wright Butler and constructed in 1912, the Schwarzenbach building has four large dormers with double hung sashes and segmented pediments on the mansard, or hip roof. Above the third floor windows are a series of iron arches and scrolled brackets that highlight the Beaux Arts style. Schwarzenbach’s men’s clothing store closed in the late 1970s but the building was subsequently renovated to serve as offices for the Maryland state government.

Located on Canal Street, near Baltimore Street, is the Western Maryland Railway station. Constructed in 1913, the station stands as a proud



Top: Old Post Office/U.S. Courthouse building at the corner of Frederick and Liberty Streets.

Bottom: Schwarzenbach building at 128-130 Baltimore Street.

monument to Cumberland’s transportation heritage. The station became the most important stop on the railroad line between Baltimore and Chicago.

The Western Maryland Railway station’s architectural style could be described as commercial. The brick building is nine bays long and three bays wide. A massive cornice encircles the structure and dormers are set directly over three central bays on the longer façade.

The Western Maryland station fell into a state of disrepair during the 1970s after the rail line merged with CSX and ceased operations, abandoning the building. The Western Maryland Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society led an effort to save the structure from possible demolition. In 1993 the State of Maryland created an agency to oversee historical development plans at the station and surrounding area. Today, the Western Maryland station is beautifully renovated and hosts Canal Place, a regional tourist destination site that includes the headquarters of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, the Allegany County Visitor’s Center, the C&O Canal National Historical Park Cumberland Visitor’s Center, a gift shop, deli, and offices of the Canal Place Authority. Each year thousands of visitors enjoy the

transportation heritage displayed at the Western Maryland Railway station.



Left: The Bell Tower building at the corner of Bedford and Liberty Streets, downtown Cumberland.

Right: The Troug House at 230 Baltimore Street.



A short distance from Cumberland's commercial district stands a private residence referred to as the George Troug House, namesake of the skilled proprietor of the Maryland Etching Glass Works that rose to national prominence during 1893-1911. Originally built in 1902 at 230 Baltimore Avenue, the brick structure was unremarkable until its purchase by George Troug. Local architect Wright Butler collaborated with Mr. Troug to plan a thorough remodeling of the structure at a reported cost of \$40,000. Mr. Butler's architectural skills combined with George Troug's artistic talents, transformed the house into one of the finest residences in Allegany County. The building's exterior reflects features one would find in Switzerland where Troug was educated, yet the overall design does not fall into any one category.

The recessed front porch spans the south façade behind three stone Gothic arches. Interior features include elaborate plate glass doors of colored and leaded glass with representations of grapevines. The house contains "numerous examples of the glassmaker's art, including windows, transoms, panels, and mirrors variously etched, chipped, engraved, beveled, stained, leaded, colored and painted." (*Maryland Historic Trust*). The house was purchased by Chuck and Joni Manto in 2003. The Manto's are planning to offer the Troug House as an executive retreat complete with lodging and meeting rooms.

Six miles west from the city of Cumberland on historic U.S. Route 40 stands one of the most unusual architectural

structures in the region. The LaVale Toll Gate House was constructed in 1836 for the purpose of collecting fees necessary for maintenance costs associated with the government-owned highway. The state of Maryland continued to collect fees at the location until 1878 when the National Road and toll gate house became the property of Allegany County. Later privately owned, the building managed to avoid inappropriate renovations or demolition until it was purchased by the Maryland Historic Trust in 1955. Now restored, visitors can easily access the site via a parking lot and picnic area.

The Toll Gate House is architecturally unusual because of its two-story, seven-sided floor plan. These oddly shaped buildings were specifically designed for the purpose of collecting tolls, so function determined form. The five northern sides form equal angles, one to the other. The two southern sides are longer and meet at a right angle. There is a one-story porch that extends around five sides of the building and a decorative wooden cupola tops the roof. Lost over time are the wooden poles, called turnpikes, which extended from posts near the toll house for the purpose of halting travelers until the required fees were paid. While the pikes have not been used for more than a century, their name still applies to roads where fees must be paid.

The LaVale Toll Gate House is the only structure of its type remaining in Maryland.

The author acknowledges the Maryland Historical Trust for its records of historical sites and Sue Hughes for editorial review.