



Cancelled!

The Blair Station Post Office and Annex delivered over to developers

In light of the fact that Silver Spring, Maryland is unincorporated and our community does not have a mayor, I make the following proclamation:

WHEREAS, historic preservation is an effective tool for managing growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering local pride and maintaining community character while enhancing livability; and

WHEREAS, historic preservation is relevant for communities across the nation, both urban and rural, and for Americans of all ages, all walks of life and all ethnic backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, it is important to celebrate the role of history in our lives and the contributions made by dedicated individuals in helping to preserve the tangible aspects of the heritage that has shaped us as a people; and

WHEREAS, "Making Preservation Work!" is the theme for National Preservation Month 2007, cosponsored by the Silver Spring Historical Society and the National Trust for Historic Preservation

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jerry A. McCoy, founder and president of the Silver Spring Historical Society, do proclaim May 2007, as National Preservation Month, and call upon the people of Silver Spring, Maryland to join their fellow citizens across the United States in recognizing and participating in this special observance.

Wow—do I feel empowered!

All kidding aside, every month is National Preservation Month for our society's very small group of board members. For the past nine years we have volunteered thousands of hours working to educate the public of the importance of preserving our community's diverse and irreplaceable heritage.

Our society has participated in some wonderful preservation and educational outreach projects over the years: the restoration of Silver Spring's 1945 Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station (listed



The Blair Station Post Office, located at 8045 Newell Street, operated from 1949 to 1999. Historic test site in 1957 of TRANSORMA, the building was razed in 2003 to build condos (photo on right). Photo by Jerry A. McCoy, 1997.



on the National Register of Historic Places), the adaptive reuse of the 1946 Canada Dry Bottling Plant (a portion of which was incorporated into the Silverton Condominiums), and publication of the pictorial book, *Historic Silver Spring* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).

For every success we have had though, there have been irretrievable losses—the 1998 demolition of the 1927 Maryland National Guard's Silver Spring Armory on Wayne Avenue by owner Montgomery County (listed on the county's own Master Plan for Historic Preservation), the 2003 demolition of the ca. 1935 Little Tavern Hamburger Shop on Georgia Avenue by owner Pyramid Atlantic (for "Phase Two" of a planned construction project that has yet come to fruition), and the 2003 demolition of the 1949 Blair Station Post Office and Annex in south Silver Spring by 8045 Newell Street, LLC (for construction of the Newell Street Lofts Condominiums).

It is the loss of this post office and annex that I've been thinking about lately due to the recent passing of the 50th anniversary of a historic event that occurred there, an event that would have been commemorative not only locally but nationally and, yes, internationally.

The Blair Station post office was constructed in 1949 at 8045 Newell Street, occupying a corner lot at the intersection with Kennett Street. Named after founding "father" Francis Preston Blair, whose 1845 mansion *Silver Spring* was still standing to the south, construction of this post office represented the tremendous growth that downtown Silver Spring experienced after

World War II. With growth continuing unabated for the next decade, a much-enlarged mail processing facility was constructed next door at 8045 Newell Street in 1954. This annex was designed by Silver Spring architect Clifton B. White (1890-1962).

Due to Silver Spring's close proximity to the U.S. Post Office Dept. and its technicians in Washington, DC, the Blair Station Post Office was chosen in the fall of 1956 as the testing site for TRANSORMA, the first semi-automatic mail sorting machine to be tested in the United States. Described by postal officials as potentially being "as history-making as the Pony Express, the train, and

the plane in speeding up mail handling" ("New Gadget to Route Mail Faster Will Get Test Here," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 21, 1956), the installation and operation of TRANSORMA marked the first time in the then 181-year history of the American postal system that letter mail was sorted by a machine.

The rather foreboding name of this machine was in reality an acronym for TRANsport, SORTing, Marchand, and Andriesen (its two original Dutch inventors). Weighing 31,000 lbs. and measuring 13 feet high by 50 ft. long, the machine filled nearly an entire room of the 1954 annex once assembly was completed



Technicians install the TRANSORMA on January 24, 1957. Operators sat above the mail slots in the area yet to be assembled. Courtesy Silver Spring Post Office.