

VLR-12/13/88 NRHP-4/21/89

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name French's Tavern (DHL 72-105)  
other names/site number Swan's Creek Plantation, Indian Camp, Harris's Store, the Coleman Place

### 2. Location

street & number 6100 Old Buckingham Road N/A not for publication  
city, town Ballsville  vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Powhatan code 145 zip code 23139

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

[Signature] Feb. 17, 1989  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Director, VA Division of Historic Landmarks  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

COMMERCE: Tavern

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Vernacular

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Wood

Aluminum Siding

roof Wood shake and tin

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

### Summary Description

French's Tavern is a rambling wood-frame complex located in Powhatan County. The eighteenth-century structure consists of five distinct sections. An architectural investigation by Spence-Wenger-Zeiders, Architects, of Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1981, concluded, "As shall be seen from some peculiarities of the complex, it may be that it was purposely built (originally) or extensively remodeled specifically as a tavern during the early 19th century." Prevailing evidence of the latter theory has been borne out by further analysis and historical research since 1981. Many alterations have been made over the years to accommodate the functions assigned to the property; however, the basic structures of the main house, the wing, and the annex have not changed since their construction. The exact date of the original construction, or by whom built, is unknown; however, research leads to the possibility that there was some construction as early as 1733, if not before. The complex is definitely an example of eighteenth-century architecture. There is not another existing structure in the area of its kind.

### Architectural Analysis

French's Tavern is a colonial two-story, wood-frame, vernacular complex. The exact date of construction is unknown; however, a research of the history revealed that a house was built on the property as early as 1733, as explained in the "Statement of Significance." The complex consists of five sections: The main block, the wing, the annex, the hyphen and galleries. The main block is a single-pile, 2-1/2 story, wood-frame, gabled structure on a brick basement that faces south toward the historic Buckingham Road. Contiguous to it, to the west, is a single-pile, 1-1/2 story gabled wing with no basement. Adjacent to the north of the wing is a single-pile hyphen, 1-1/2 story, wood-frame of recent construction, on a brick foundation with no basement. Adjoining the hyphen is a single-pile, two-story, wood-frame, gabled structure, called the annex, which also has no basement. Additionally, there is a two-story gallery on the south elevation of the main block and an enclosed one-story gallery with screen porch on the north elevation.

The exterior of the main block and wing was covered with white aluminum siding in 1976. A combination of original beaded siding and replacement

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1730-1772  
1772-1777  
1807-1842

Significant Dates

1730  
1772  
1807

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

Col. Francis Eppes, Thomas Jefferson  
and Hugh French

Architect/Builder

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In the Macon District of southwestern Powhatan County, twelve miles west of Powhatan Courthouse, is a 120-acre tract of land located one mile equi-distant from Ballsville to the east and Tobaccoville to the west. Resting upon the ridge of the James-Appomattox River Corridor is a rambling 2 1/2-story wooden frame complex on the north side of the Old Buckingham Road. For over 250 years this property has been known alternately as Swan's Creek Plantation, Indian Camp, Harris's Store, French's Tavern, the Coleman Place, and lastly, The Farm. Its present name, French's Tavern, was returned to the property by its current owner, Elmer H. Gish, in honor of Hugh French, who operated a tavern there during the first half of the nineteenth century. This was a period of significant economic growth in the history of the United States when stagecoaching became the chief means of public transportation, and innkeeping became a profitable business. French's Tavern is significant under Criterion A because it is an eighteenth century structure that clearly reflects its use first as the manor house of a large plantation and then as a nineteenth century ordinary. It is the only structure of its kind in the area that is so closely associated with the theme of transportation.

Historical Background

The Old Buckingham Road, which passes in front of French's Tavern, is a historic road. Eighteenth-century Tidewater planters followed what once was Indian path up-country to seat large tobacco plantations. By the mid-eighteenth century, the road connected Warwick, on the south side of the James River, to a place called Buckingham, the plantation of Henry Cary. By the time of the Revolution, the road had been extended to the upper Appomattox River region. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Great Buckingham Road connected the capital of Virginia, at Richmond, to the dark-leaf tobacco trade of Lynchburg and the crops of the valley beyond. The history of French's Tavern reflects the history of the road,

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Virginia: Land Office Patents 13: 484, 1730. Virginia: Virginia State Library Archives.

Cumberland County Deed Book 5: 488-490, 1771 to 1778. Richmond, Virginia: Virginia State Library Archives.

Powhatan County Deed Books 2: 434, 1798: 3: 513, 1807: 21: 272, 1944; 100: 162. 1971.

Hening, William Waller, ed. The Statutes at Large. Volumes VIII and IX. Richmond, Virginia, 1821.

Spence-Wenger-Zeiders, "Architectural Report" and "Plans and Specifications of French's Tavern": Williamsburg, Virginia, 1981. In possession of current owner, Elmer H. Gish, Powhatan, Virginia.

See continuation sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:  
VA Division of Historic Landmarks  
Richmond, VA

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 120 acres

**UTM References**

A 

1	7
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7	5	7	5	8	0
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4	1	5	4	1	2	0
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Zone      Easting                      Northing

B 

1	7
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7	5	8	4	3	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	1	5	3	1	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone      Easting                      Northing

C 

1	7
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7	5	7	9	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	1	5	2	8	1	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

D 

1	7
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7	5	7	6	8	0
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4	1	5	2	8	7	0
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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property is described as a 128 acre tract in Powhatan County, Virginia, as recorded in Powhatan County Deed Book (PCDB) 100, page 162. The enclosed sketch, not to scale, shows the general configuration of the property as described in Plat Cabinet 5, page 120, located in the County Clerk's office. The acreage was reduced to 120 acres by sale in 1960 as shown in PCDB 73, page 176 and survey plat in Plat Cabinet 6, page 251.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the remaining portion of the property which has historically been associated with the tavern since the eighteenth century.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Elmer H. and Agnes E. Gish, owners date September 1, 1988  
organization N/A telephone (804) 492-4982  
street & number 6100 Old Buckingham Road state VA zip code 23139  
city or town Powhatan

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siding remains beneath the aluminum. The annex, as yet unrestored, still retains the original wood siding, and the hyphen is covered with new beaded wood siding.

The foundations are enclosed brick construction with the exterior bricks laid in English and Flemish bond patterns. With the exception of the annex's foundation, the balance is in relatively good condition.

The main block, the wing, and the hyphen, all of which have gable roofs, received new roofing in the fall 1984. Cedar shake shingles replaced the existing tin roof. Remnants of old shingles have been found which indicated that the roofs had been shingled earlier. The two story annex and the two galleries still have the tin roofing, all in good shape. The annex has a gable roof and the galleries have shed roofs.

The tavern has three brick chimneys. The east chimney was built in 1979 to replace the original that was badly deteriorated. The new chimney differs from the original in that the shoulders are ramped rather than stepped. The west chimney is the largest, serving four fireplaces. It is a large square column on stepped shoulders with a corbelled pedimented cap. The condition of this stack is good. The north chimney is similar to the original east chimney and is in need of repair.

None of the present galleries, opened or enclosed, are original to the house. Early photographs show a double-deck gallery that extended the full length of the south side of the main block. This porch was removed in 1947 because of extreme decay and replaced with a single-deck modified porch. This porch was dismantled in 1959 and the present double-deck modified porch was built. On the north side (rear) of the house was an open porch with a shed roof that extended over most of the main house and wing, and formed an L-shaped open hyphen connecting with the annex. This was removed in 1958 and replaced by a screened porch. In the 1960s this porch was enclosed to become the present kitchen. The architectural investigation indicated that the north and south porches were not original to the house and breaks in the siding indicated that additions or changes were made at an early date.

The main house has the typical colonial floor plan of a formal parlor and dining room separated by a center hall. Originally, the center hall extended from the front entrance door to the rear door and back porch. With the addition of the kitchen in 1960, the hall no longer terminates at the back door but leads directly into the kitchen area.

An interesting feature of the center hall is a swinging wall that separates the hall from the parlor. The partition is divided into three panels that swing upward into the parlor and when hooked to the ceiling provide a larger room for special occasions. The parlor, normally 16' x 20', becomes 26' x 20' to accommodate groups for dancing, weddings, and

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other community affairs. A letter in the possession of the present owner describes how the panels were raised to accommodate a wedding in 1900.

The first level floors are tongue-and-groove, random-width, pine boards approximately 1-3/4 inches thick and are original. The walls are composed of two parts. Each has a Federal-style wainscot with a plain wall above and no cornice. The wainscot is uniform throughout the first floor and is original. The wainscot panels are constructed of single pieces of wood approximately 1/2 inch thick, 20 inches wide, and as long as 16 feet in one instance. The panels were sawn smooth on the face side but were left rough on the back side. There is a baseboard composed of two molded boards, and a surbase with a wide fascia. Originally, the walls were plaster on split wood lathes above the wainscot. Much of the plaster and lath was removed in the 1930s and replaced with paneling fashioned from tongue and groove flooring. During the rehabilitation 1982-83, drywall material was put up in lieu of plaster.

Paint colors of the wood trim were restored according to a microanalysis of the original paint conducted by the Art Department of Virginia Commonwealth University. The wainscot, doors, and swinging wall were grained. One original panel of wainscot was left intact to show a sample of the earlier graining. The mantels and baseboards were painted to look like marble.

The fireplace in the parlor room is new brick construction, dating from 1979 when the east chimney was rebuilt. The fireplace surround and hearth are "Spanish Rose" marble and the baseboard in the room was marbled to match. The dining room firebox was repaired in 1982 due to its poor condition. The configuration of the segmented-arch opening was retained and the surrounds untouched. The mantel was marbled to look like slate and the baseboard was painted to match. The mantels in both the parlor and the dining room are typical of the Federal period and are in good condition.

The first floor ceiling is ten feet high and the windows are the original sashes of 9/9 lights with their original panes. There is only one window in the parlor and two windows in the dining room. In the modern kitchen, added in 1960, there are four modern 6/6 windows.

The most obvious alteration of the house are the door placements. In the parlor, a second front door was installed as a private entrance, presumably for those coming to the tavern for private entertainment. This door is adjacent to the original front door which leads into the center hall. The door at the northern end of the center hall is the original back door; however, the adjacent back door was installed to provide an entrance directly into the dining room. It appears that this door was installed to allow food to be brought into the dining room from the outdoor kitchen. In all there are nine doors serving the main house

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first floor rooms and hall. They are of varying styles and sizes: raised panel, flat panel, panel door in the swinging wall, modern door in the kitchen, etc. None still retain the original hardware, although some nineteenth century hardware is extant.

The boxed stairs at the north end of the center hall lead to the second floor. Ascending the winder at the foot of the stairs, the steps lead to a straight run to the second floor center hall.

The floor plan of the second floor is the same as the first floor. A center hall is flanked on each side by a room, 16' x 20' in dimension. The ceilings are lower, seven feet high; the windows, although original, are double hung, 6/6 with the upper sash fixed and only the lower sash operable. The walls have only a beaded baseboard with a wide chair rail.

The center hall contains two boxed stairs: one leads downward to the first floor and the other leads upward to the third floor. The southern end was partitioned in 1970 as a bathroom area. The area beneath the stairs leading to the third floor was originally enclosed as a storage closet. The most notable feature of the center hall is the Chippendale-style railing across the east side of the top of the first floor stairwell.

The rooms on either side of the center hall are bedrooms. The west room has a fireplace; however, the east room does not. The fireplace is constructed with original brick and has a segmented arch similar to the one in the first floor dining room. The mantel is the same Federal style found throughout the house. A built-in closet has been added in one corner and a lavatory with running water was installed in the adjacent corner on the south side of each of the two bedrooms. Recessed lighting was installed in the ceilings of both bedrooms.

There are a variety of doors on the second floor. Each of the bedrooms has one door leading to the center hall. Both are raised, six-panel doors with the panels toward the hall. The east bedroom door is gained on the room side and is the most ornate original graining in the house. The door leading into the bathroom is a modern door but it has been grained similarly to the other doors on the second floor. An original exterior door leads from the bathroom to the second floor gallery. It is cedar-grained on the inside but the outside has been painted white.

The stairs to the third floor begin with a set of winders at the north end of the center hall and continue with a steep straight flight. At the top of the stairs is a Chippendale-style railing similar to the one on the second floor.

The flooring is original and is in good condition. The walls, including the under-eaves portion and the kneewall, have been restored. There is a

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bedroom on either side of the center hall and a half-bath tucked in the hall space. Two closets were built in each of the bedrooms.

All of the doors are batten-type doors. The only original door remaining was used as a pattern for the construction of six others on the third floor. Each of the bedrooms has two small windows. They are located in the east and west exterior walls with one on each side of the chimney stack in each room. The windows are four-light modern units that replaced for the original windows. There are no fireplaces on the third floor.

The basement under the main house is the only one in the complex. It extends under the entire main block. It is currently a large open space but physical evidence indicates that it was partitioned into two rooms at one time. The basement was used for cooking and dining during the days as a tavern. The six-foot fireplace is the largest in the house. It has a segmented brick arch with an iron lintel. When the smoke chamber was rebuilt in 1981, it still contained the iron lug pole as well as the holes that held the crane. The evidence offered by the plastered walls and ceiling suggests that the east end of the basement was a finished room. The west end, which was not as lavishly finished, contained the kitchen. At one time there was an outside entrance into the kitchen along the north bulkhead, but it was sealed up for some reason.

The bottom half of the basement walls is brick, layered in the English bond pattern. The upper half is layered in four-course American bond, three bricks thick. The present floor is concrete, poured in 1953 to replace the original brick flooring. There are places for six windows in the bulkhead, but additions such as porches and the present first-floor kitchen have blocked out two of the windows. The four windows remaining consist of modern sash and glass. The two openings that were in the kitchen room were originally fitted with vertical bars.

The door entering the east end of the basement appears to be the original opening; however, the material of the door and hood, except for some brick, is modern. The door opening on the north wall, which led to the kitchen area, was sealed with brick sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century. The outside door on the east end is a batten type door at the head of the steps. A modern plywood door has been installed at the foot of the steps, flush with the east bulkhead.

The inside stairs leading to the first floor of the main hall are original. They consist of a set of winders that lead to a straight line run to the first floor. Originally, they were enclosed by a plaster wall. There is no door at the basement level, only the door at the head of the stairs.

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The ceiling in the east end or dining area of the basement shows signs of a plaster finish now removed. The west end or kitchen end shows no signs of ever having had a ceiling. The joists and beams are thoroughly blackened with smoke.

In this report, care has been taken to describe the basement area in some detail because of the tremendous interest that it generates. As yet unrestored, it offers the opportunity to study the exposed structural system as well as the dining and food preparation patterns of tavern living. The architectural investigation is the basis of the technical aspects of these statements. The possibilities stated are conjectures.

The wing to the west side of the main block appears to be the oldest section of the complex. It probably was the "grant house" to which Col. Francis Eppes of Bermuda Hundred referred in his will of 1734 as "ye house there lately built." There is evidence that the wing was a separate house at one time. The interior east wall of the structure reveals the exterior siding of the main house. It appears that the east end of the building was removed and shoved against the main building; the west chimney was modified to accommodate the fireplace of the wing, as well as three fireplaces within. Though the date of these changes is unknown, they most likely occurred at the time the tavern began operation. The original flooring of random width pine board exists under a new flooring which was installed in 1984 due to deterioration of the original material. The first floor appears to have been the main living quarters, serving as a kitchen, dining room, living room, and other functions. The ceiling joists, which are exposed, are blackened as if from fireplace smoke or stoves. The pantry partition was removed and replaced with beaded fir paneling and a batten door. The space beneath the box stairs has been enclosed as a closet using the beaded fir paneling and batten door pattern. The wainscot and trim have been painted the original colors, the mantel marbleized a Sienna Marble, and the walls painted white.

Box stairs rise on the west side of the room to a loft on the second floor. There are three steps visible to the room, then a door closes upon winders before they ascend to the landing. The door at the head of the three risers is a six-panel door that has raised panels on the front and flat panels on the back. At the head of the stairwell is a tall wooden column supporting a straight slat railing. On the west wall, at the head of the stairs, is a single window, 6/6.

The room is approximately 10' x 20', including the stairwell space. The flooring is random-width, tongue-and-groove, original pine boards. Although the chimney juts out into the room, there is no evidence that it was used as a fireplace or to accommodate a stove.

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In 1984-85 the loft was insulated and drywall material installed. The low ceiling was attached directly to the roof rafters and collar beam and the original knee walls. The hyphen built beside it below, was raised to a level that allowed a walk-through storage space to the second floor of the annex, with a batten door installed to provide access.

The structure commonly called the annex was built as a separate building, connected to the wing by an open shed-roofed passageway on the ground floor. The annex consists of a large room with a fireplace and a closet that retains its original shelving. On the second floor, another room and fireplace and a slightly larger closet exist. The two levels are connected by a set of steep stairs in the narrow passageway enclosed on the south wall.

The brick foundation is in need of repair, as well as the brick chimney and fireplaces. The walls and ceilings still retain the original plaster and wood trim, wainscot, picture rail, door frames, and doors. The random width, tongue-and-groove, heart pine floors are in place, but are in poor condition. The roof is metal and in good condition.

Within the first floor closet built under the stairwell are two shelves imbedded in the plaster. Written in pencil on the plaster is the name of John Archer, a name closely associated with the Eppes family. Slightly below it is a sentence which reads, "One shirt did not come in." The conjecture held is that the first floor of the annex was Harris's Store owned by Francis Eppes Harris from 1798 to 1807.

The section between the wing and the annex is new construction and contains a sun room or den with adjoining full bath, closet and outside entrance that opens onto a modern patio deck. It was built in 1984 to replace a narrow passageway which joined the wing and annex.

Other features have been associated with the historic tavern throughout the years. A diagram on a following page shows the relative positions of current existing structures, as well as, earlier dependencies which existed during the early nineteenth century when Hugh French operated a 2,000+ acre plantation. These structures, no longer standing, are shown in dotted lines. Current structures are in solid lines.

The two additional contributing properties identified are: (1) the old shed, and (2) the rock spring. The shed, although not an original building, was built in the 1920s from materials of other dependencies that were dismantled. The rock spring provides a flowing stream and was originally the source of water for the place. It is said that children of slaves were kept busy carrying water from the spring to the house.

Two noncontributing buildings are: (1) the modern two-car garage, built in 1981, and (2) the small barn/stable that was constructed of old materials in 1961. Both buildings are useful but not historically significant.

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NOTES

1. Laurence A. Pace, "Analysis of Interior Paint in Selected Areas and Rooms of French's Tavern," a graduate student project conducted by the Department of Art History, Richmond, Virginia: Virginia Commonwealth University, 1983.
2. Spence-Wenger-Zeiders, Architects, Williamsburg, Virginia: "An Architectural Report," 1 June, 1981.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ "Architectural Specifications for the Renovation of French's Tavern," 30 September, 1981.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ "Architectural Plans for French's Tavern," 11 October, 1981.

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for the need for lodging along the highest and driest thoroughfare to the central Piedmont influenced the location of the house.

The history of the house called French's Tavern began in 1730.<sup>1</sup> In that year a Tidewater merchant-planter, Col. Francis Eppes of Bermuda Hundred, who wielded social, political, and economic power, patented 2,400 acres on branches of Deep Creek and the Appomattox Ridge. He intended the land to be a "stage," or middle plantation between the large tracts of land he had already acquired at the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers, and newly patented lands near the mountains. His will, which was probated in 1734, devised the 2,400 acres called Swan's Creek to his two daughters, Ann and Martha. Ann received the "lower moiety. . . including the Quarter where Thomas Rose now lives." Martha received "the other moiety of the tract of land above mentioned called by the name of Swans Creek plantation being at the other part thereof and including ye house there lately built."<sup>2</sup> Ann, who married Benjamin Harris about 1744<sup>3</sup>, had eleven children, who in turn were devised portions of their mother's 1,200-acre Swan's Creek inheritance. Martha's 1,200 acres, which included the house, began a history as tenant property, for two years after her<sup>4</sup> 1746 marriage to John Wayles, she died shortly after childbirth.<sup>4</sup> John<sup>5</sup> Wayles held the land as tenant by courtesy for the infant heir, Martha.

The second significant date in the history of French's Tavern was 1772. Thomas Jefferson fell heir to the land by right of his marriage to Martha, daughter of John Wayles.<sup>6</sup> Martha's 1,200 acres, now called Indian Camp, were remote from Monticello, their home in Albemarle County, and Jefferson needed to settle his share of Wayles's heavy debts.<sup>7</sup> It was logical, therefore, that his brother-in-law, Henry Skipwith, who had married Martha's half-sister, Ann, and lived in the vicinity of the upper Appomattox River at Hors du Monde, take over the land. However, the old English law of entail was still in effect, which meant that inherited land could not be subdivided except by permission of the legislature. Frustrated, Jefferson began his fight to have the law repealed; he finally succeeded when an act was passed to abolish entail on 26 October 1776.<sup>8</sup> On 23 June 1777 Henry Skipwith took possession of Indian Camp and immediately began to sell pieces of the Eppes-Wayles estate. The first parcel sold was a two hundred-acre tract south of Buckingham Road on both sides of Swan's Creek.<sup>9</sup> Francis Eppes Harris, son of Ann Harris, who lived on the adjoining plantation, bought it to erect a grist mill. In 1798 Harris purchased another two hundred acres from Skipwith, this time on the north side of Buckingham Road.<sup>10</sup> He immediately went about the business of setting up a neighborhood store.

At this time, a young entrepreneur, Hugh French,<sup>11</sup> "friendless and penniless," came to Powhatan County from Loudoun to "enter upon the business of life."<sup>12</sup> He became an ordinary keeper at Harris's store.<sup>13</sup> By 1807 he purchased the ordinary from Francis Eppes Harris, who wanted

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to raise cotton in Alabama.<sup>14</sup> French prospered; by the time of his death in 1842, he had acquired 2031-1/4 acres of surrounding land that stretched as far south as the Appomattox River.<sup>15</sup>

In 1833 Blair Bolling, a prominent planter whose home was Centre Hill in northeast Powhatan County, came to French's to catch the stage traveling the main road:

Monday 6th (May) I walked to French's Tavern, dined, and prosceeded [sic] in the stage to Rains Tavern (Cumberland).

Tuesday 14th Left before day in the stage (traveling east from Langhorn's in Cumberland County), breakfasted at French's Tavern and prosceeded to Dickinsons (Macon, Powhatan County) where I got out.

Monday 23<sup>d</sup> (September) Set out in the stage before day, breakfasted at Frenches where I was met by my servant with my carriage in which I prosceeded by the X roads (Smith's Crossroads) to my farm where I arrived to dinner.<sup>16</sup>

Three eras of dramatic transformation (social, political, and economical) were over by the time of Hugh French's death in 1842. His third wife, Lucy L. (Lawson) Hobson Nash French held onto the house tract until her death in 1847. Robert Smith of Powhatan then purchased it.<sup>17</sup> In 1868 Smith deeded it to his newlywed daughter Arabella and her husband John Coleman, whose name appears on the 1888 LaPrade map of Powhatan County.<sup>18</sup> In 1906 Coleman's son Robert who inherited it, but chose instead of living there to move to Mississippi.<sup>19</sup> The Tavern became a rental property.

Between 1931 and 1944, two brothers from Loudoun County, Montgomery and Leonard Downs, held title to French's Tavern alternately, passing it back and forth between themselves.<sup>20</sup> Hay and farm animals were housed in the building.

In 1944 Mr. and Mrs. Cecil McGlothlin of Tennessee were looking for a place to retire when "Mr. Mac" ended his career with the newspaper, the Knoxville New-Sentinel. After acquiring the house that year the McGlothlins began slowly to repair the sorely neglected house and grounds. It was during the McGlothlin's occupancy that the porches were removed, the kitchen added, and the breezeway between the annex and wing replaced with an enclosed connection. In 1971 Mr. Mac" now a widower,

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agreed to sell the place to his daughter Bess and her husband Elmer H. Gish. For ten years, the house remained empty. In 1980 Elmer H. Gish, widowed, married Agnes Evans Pastor and chose to move from Richmond to French's Tavern. Since that time they have gradually worked to rehabilitate the structure.

EHG/AEG

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## NOTES

1. Virginia State Library Archives: Land Office Patents 13: 482.
2. Francis Eppes's will is recorded in Henrico County Deeds & Wills, No. 2, Pt. 1, 1725 to 1737: 459 to 460.
3. Benjamin Harris, Gent., conveyed 150 acres "lying near Bermuda Hundred" to his brother-in-law, Richard Eppes. Benjamin's wife Ann (Eppes) Harris acknowledged the conveyance. Henrico County Deed Book 1744 to 1746 C: 96, 106. When the new Commission of the Peace was issued by the Council for Henrico County on October 23, 1745, it was ordered that "Benjamin Harris be left out." Benjamin next appears as a vestryman of Southham Parish, Goochland County. Southham Parish Vestry Book: 14. The region south of James River was formed into Cumberland County 1748-9 where the remainder of Harris's records are found.
4. The Jefferson Papers, arranged chronologically at the University of Virginia and the Virginia Historic Society, 1732 to 1828. John Wayles married Martha Eppes 3 May 1746. On 23 December 1746, boy and girl twins were born and died. On 31 October 1748, a girl named Martha was born. On 5 November 1748, her mother died, "aged 27 yrs. 6 mo 26 days."
5. A term Jefferson used in a letter to Jerman Baker dated 22 June 1824. This was a letter confirming the title to Indian Camp by Henry Skipwith. Memorandum Books, courtesy of James A. Bear, Jr., and Lucinda Stanton of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville, Virginia.
6. Jefferson's marriage took place New Year's Day at Wayles's home in Charles City County. Dumas Malone, "Attaining Domestic Felicity," Jefferson, The Virginian (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948): 159 and 160.
7. Wayles's debts are covered extensively in Julian P. Boyd, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 15, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958): Appendix.
8. "An Act declaring tenants of lands or slaves in taile to hold the same in fee simple," Hening's Statutes at Large IX: 226. There had been many petitions read to "Dock Entail" on Indian Camp. Hening VIII: 83, 84, 98, 112 and 116. The deed to Henry Skipwith is dated 15 April 1777 in Cumberland County Deed Book 5, 1771 to 1778: 488 to 490. In this deed is also a lengthy historical description of Eppes's patenting the land, its devisal, and Writ of Partition between the two sisters.

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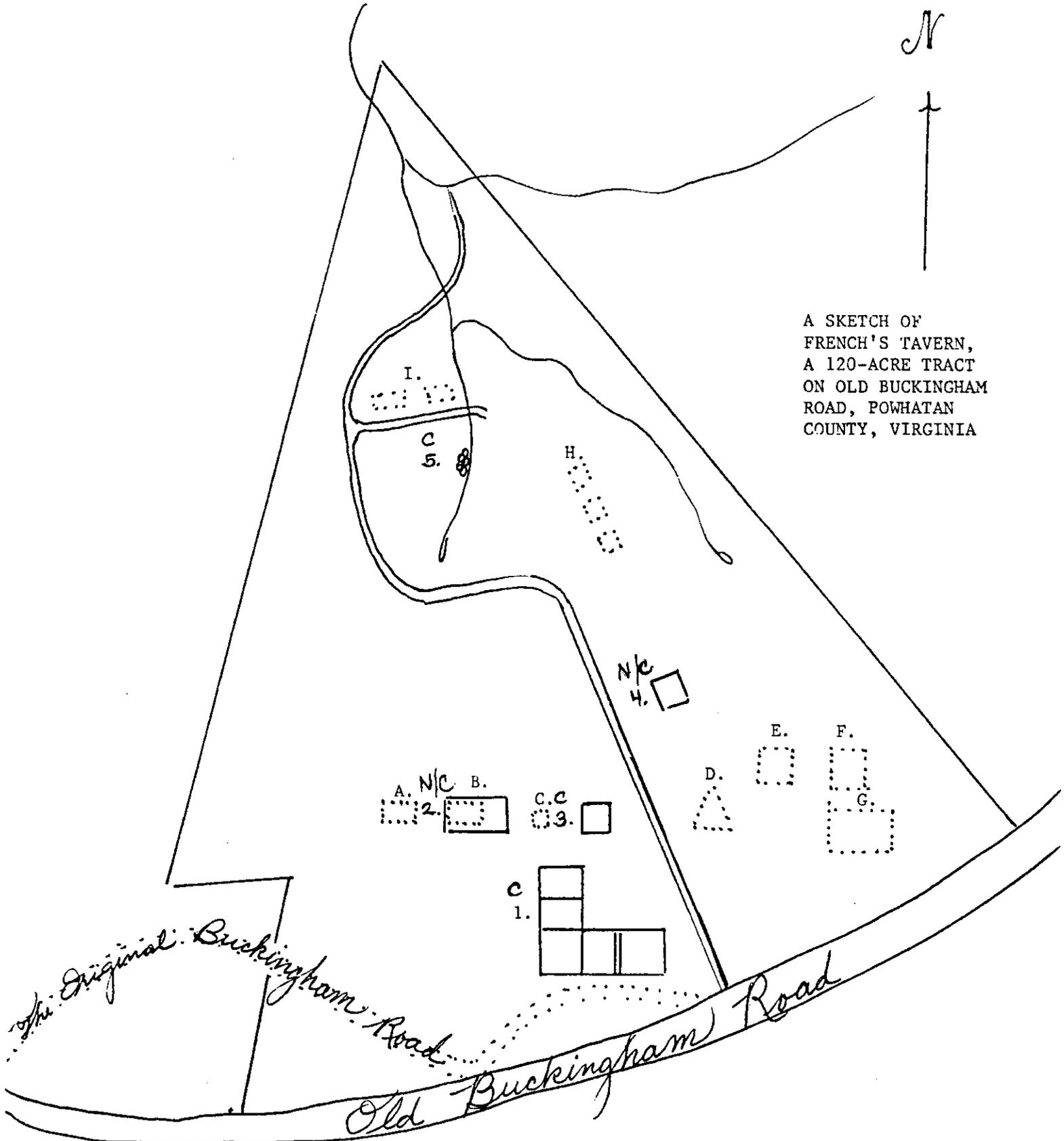
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9. Powhatan County Deed Book 1: 7. Nothing was found to pin down Swan's Creek until the 1842 plat of the estate of Hugh French, dec'd., was located in File Box 76 at the Clerk's Office of Powhatan County.
  10. Powhatan County Deed Book 2: 432. "being a part of Indian Camp Tract north side Buckingham Road."
  11. The genealogy of Hugh French was researched by Melvin Lee Steadman, Jr., recently deceased. The Frenches, Masons, and Washington family were closely connected. In 1736, the will of Hugh French, Sr., Stafford County Wills, 1729 to 1748: 247, Hugh French desired that "M. Washington, the wife of Capt. Augustine Washington have the care and tuition of my Daughter Margaret. . ." The names Mason and Augustine appear throughout French genealogy.
  12. From the obituary of Hugh French: Richmond Enquirer, 20 May 1842: 3, c.6.
  13. Francis Eppes's first ordinary keepers: [Francis Eppes Harris]
 

Elizabeth Kerr	1797-8	<u>Powhatan County Order Book 5</u> : 315
William Sims	1798-9	<u>Powhatan County Order Book 6</u> : 7
Stokes Tunstall	1799-1800	<u>Powhatan County Order Book 6</u> : 194
Hugh French	1800-1	<u>Powhatan County Order Book 7</u> : 264
  14. Powhatan County Deed Book 3: 513.
  15. Clerk's Office File Box 76, Powhatan County Records.
  16. Blair Bolling Diary, 1810 to 1837 (Richmond, Virginia: The Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Division): 167 and 179.
  17. Powhatan County Deed Book 17: 568 (Hereafter P.C.D.B.)
  18. P.C.D.B. 21: 272.
  19. P.C.D.B. 33: 120.
  20. P.C.D.B. 47: 292; P.C.D.B. 50: 28; P.C.D.B. 52: 292.

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A SKETCH OF  
FRENCH'S TAVERN,  
A 120-ACRE TRACT  
ON OLD BUCKINGHAM  
ROAD, POWHATAN  
COUNTY, VIRGINIA



EXISTING STRUCTURES: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Main House;                      2. Garage;   3. Old Shed;   4. Barn;   5. Rock Spring

EARLIER DEPENDENCIES (no longer standing):.....

A. Outdoor Kitchen;   B. Smokehouse;   C. House of Office;   D. Icehouse;  
E. Grainery;   F. Carriage House;   G. Barn;   H-I. Slave Quarters

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES  
JAMES L. CALVE

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FRENCH'S TAIL  
POLK COUNTY, VA

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POWHATAN CO

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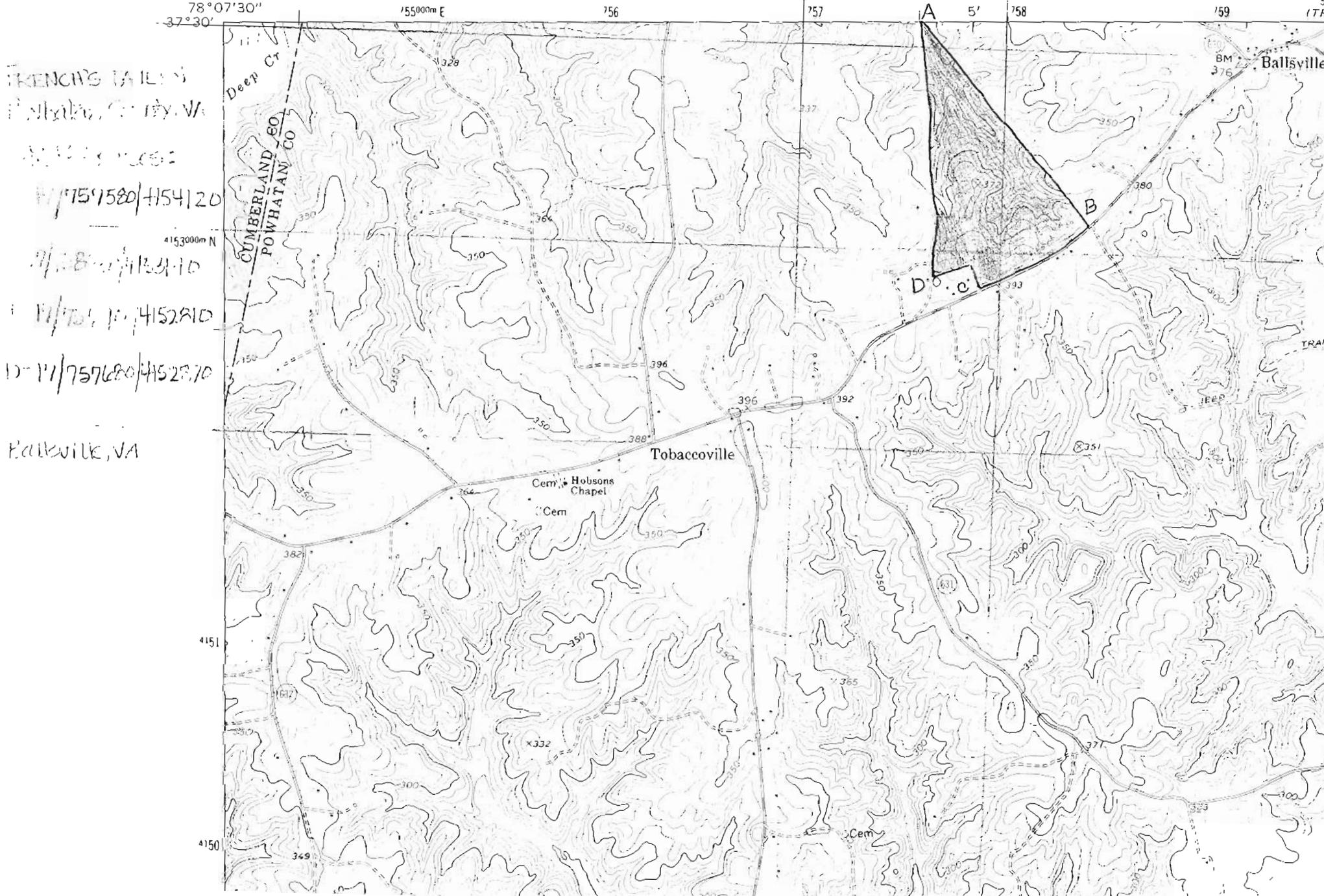
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Ballville, VA

Ballville



FRENCH'S TAIL  
POLK COUNTY, VA

Deep Cr

CUMBERLAND CO  
POWHATAN CO

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Ballville, VA

Ballville

