

VLR-2/20/90 NRHP-12/21/90

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.

I. Name of Property

historic name: BRENTSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
other names/site number: DHR File No. 76-338

2 Location

street & number: Both sides of Bristow Rd., roughly bounded by Old Church Rd. & Issac Walton Rd. N/A not for pub
city, town: Bristow X vicinity
state: Virginia code: VA county: Prince William code: 153 zip code: 22013

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
X private	building(s)		
X public-local	X district	23	5
public-State	site	2	
public-Federal	structure		
	object		
		25	5
			Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Civil War Properties of Prince William Co. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 3

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 xmeets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Henry C. Miller Date 1 Nov 1990
Director, VA Department of Historic Resources
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)
GOVERNMENT/ Courthouse/ Correctional Facility
DOMESTIC/ Single Dwelling
RELIGION/ Religious Structure
EDUCATION/ School

Current Functions
GOVERNMENT/ Offices
DOMESTIC/ Single Dwelling
RELIGION/ Religious Structure
RECREATION/ Outdoor Recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)
Early Classical Revival
Federal
Greek Revival
Other: Frame I House

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Red Sandstone
walls: Wood/ Weatherboard, Brick
roof: Metal/ Tin
other:

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

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

	nationally	statewide	<u>locally</u>					
Applicable National Register Criteria	A		B	C	D			
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)	A		B	C	D	E	F	G

Areas of Significance
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1822-1940

Significant Dates
1822, 1893

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
N/A

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

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

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:
X State historic preservation office
Other State agency
Federal agency
X Local government
University
Other
Specify repository: PRINCE
WILLIAM PLANNING DEPT.
VIRGINIA DEPT. OF HISTORIC
RESOURCES

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property: 27

UTM References

A.	/	/	/	B	/	/	/
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C.				D.			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the proposed Brentsville Historic District is shown on the accompanying map entitled " Department of Public Works, Prince William County, VA, Base 66 N.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes contiguous original lots of Brentsville that were platted in 1822 and that contain resources that relate to the growth of the village from its founding until the mid-twentieth century.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	William T. Frazier/Nancy Borr/Susan Smead		
organization	Frazier Associates	date	July 1989
street and number	213 N. Augusta Street	telephone	(703) 886-6230
city or town	Staunton	state	VA zip code 24401

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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Brentsville is a village located in the center of Prince William County, two miles southeast of Bristow and three miles directly south of Manassas. It is southeast of the point where Old Church Road (Route 649) meets Bristow Road (Route 619) which bisects the district. The land around the village is dotted with small ponds. Just to the north and northeast of Brentsville, the land slopes down to Broad Run; to the southeast the grade drops to Cedar Run. These two tributaries join east of Brentsville to form the Occoquan River. The settlement originally developed around the fourth Prince William County Courthouse that was built there in 1820-22.

The nominated historic district includes approximately 27 acres of mostly level land. It encompasses nearly half of the original Brentsville plat of 56 acres that included a three-acre public square and a three-acre tavern square. The plat was laid off into a grid containing a total of 21 squares and 70 lots in 1822. The settlement was located on the major east-west road between Dumfries and Hay Market. This road bisected Brentsville and became Main Street. Other originally platted side streets from east to west included Foster, Providence, Bristoe, Center, Union, and Fox Streets. Hooe Street paralleled Main Street and created a second row of lots on the southern boundary of the village. Most of the platted streets were not constructed and the former right of ways are in many cases used as driveways today. The only public street that has been developed is Barbee Street which includes the original Bristoe Street and part of Hooe Street.

The proposed Brentsville district contains 33 resources. These include the courthouse, a jail and a school, three churches, 11 houses, one ruins of a dwelling, a tavern square site, and 14 outbuildings. All resources, except for the Presbyterian Church, one recent ranch-style house and three garages, are classified as contributing. The contributing outbuildings include two barns, a garage, three chicken coops, a washhouse, a workshop, a smokehouse, a servant's house, and a vacant cottage.

The jail was built at the same time as the courthouse. Although a few of the early houses still exist, the majority of the dwellings were built in the late 1800s. One house was built in the early 1940s. The school is also twentieth century, while the two contributing churches date from the middle and late nineteenth century.

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There is more stylistic diversity among the public and religious buildings in Brentsville than among the residential structures. The former group includes examples of styles ranging from the Federal style to early twentieth-century vernacular, while most residences are classifiable as turn-of-the-century I-houses.

Architectural Analysis

The Brentsville Courthouse (VDHR 76-21), built in 1820 in the Federal style, is one of the oldest surviving structures in the community, and represents the reason for the founding of the village. This building is already a Virginia Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register as a part of the multiple property listing: Civil War Properties of Prince William County. It is a simple two-story structure with Flemish bond brickwork making up the front, or south wall, while the other walls are built in three-course American bond. It has a stone foundation of rough coursed, locally quarried red sandstone. The gabled front facade has three bays, with a central keyed semicircular arched entrance containing a fanlight transom. In the gable is a round opening with a recessed plaque inscribed with the architect's name, William Claytor (of Orange County), and the date of 1822, when construction was completed. The sash is six-over-six, with a tripartite window over the main entrance. The five-bay side walls contain central entrances located between pairs of shallow arch-topped windows added at a later date. The later windows have brick sills, while the original windows have stone sills. Interior brick chimneys with corbelled caps rise from the south corners of the courthouse, and a smaller brick chimney tops the northeast corner. On the roof there is a frame octagonal cupola with a finial.

Sharing Brentsville's public square with the courthouse is the Brentsville Jail (VDHR 76-231), which dates from about 1820-22. This structure is also listed as a part of the courthouse complex as a Virginia Historic Landmark and is on the National Register. A two-story, gable-roofed brick building laid up in five-course American bond, the jail is a double-pile building with a three-bay front facade and two-bay side walls. The windows are mostly two-over-two sliding sash. Two one-over-one sliding sash windows fitted with steel bars have been added to the second floor level of the rear wall. The front and rear facades have windows with segmental arches, while the side wall windows have flat arches. Two brick interior end chimneys rise from the roof. The chimney at the east end is smaller and has a corbelled cap. Under the gable roof is a molded brick cornice, and in the gable is a stone tablet inscribed with the name of the

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builder, James Drisco Masson. The jail rests on a stone foundation, with the remains of a molded brick water table above it.

An early twentieth-century public building stands on the public square to the west of the Brentsville Courthouse. This is the Brentsville Schoolhouse (VDHR 76-278), a white painted frame building constructed around 1910. This one-story structure has a brick foundation and a shed-roofed frame addition at the rear. One of the few remaining one-room schoolhouses in Prince William County, it has five large windows across the front with six-over-six sash. The front entrance, a five-panel door with a three-light transom, is under a hood extending from the roof and resting on triangular knee brackets. An interior brick chimney with a corbelled cap rises from the roof near the east end, and has a newer flue with a metal cap behind it. The school's original interior is largely intact. The original office to the courthouse was located on the site of the school building and the gallows were behind the courthouse.

Among Brentsville's three churches, the oldest is St. James Episcopal Church, now Hatcher's Memorial Baptist Church (VDHR 76-25), built in 1847 south of Brentsville's public square. Of coursed rubble red sandstone that was locally quarried, it is a tall, one-story, gable-roofed structure in the Greek Revival style, with a lower one-story, gable-roofed wing of matching sandstone construction to the rear. To the north side is a lower one-story, flat-roofed, cinder block addition. The front entrance, in the west gabled end, has a large, stuccoed-over, semi-circular arch over a double door. Before the addition of a low, frame entrance vestibule, the door had multiple-pane sidelights. The side walls have three bays, with louvered windows dating from the 1960s. These replaced multi-paned sash windows. Heavy pilasters designate the bays on each wall, and there is a water table extending around the building at the base of the pilasters. Below the gable is a molded stone cornice, while the pedimented front gable and the rear gable have wooden molded cornices. The rear gable also has stone gable returns. Originally the front and rear gables were clad with weatherboards, but now they are covered with pressed tin.

Brentsville Union Church, otherwise known as Brentsville Pentecostal Church (VDHR 76-295) is the other contributing church building in the village of Brentsville. Built about 1875 on land west of the public square that was part of the old tavern lot, the church was founded for use by different religious denominations. Its function has been superseded by the building of the Brentsville Presbyterian Church, a twentieth-century church of cinder block construction that is

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located next to the Brentsville Jail. The Union Church is now used for storage. It is a one-story, frame building on a stone foundation, with a three-bay gabled front facade and three-bay side walls. The front entrance, which has double doors with two molded panels per door, also has a three-light transom topped by a molded cornice on brackets. The windows to each side of the entrance and along the side walls, with two-over-two sash, also have hoods consisting of a molded cornice on brackets. Wooden louvered blinds flank the windows. Five-and-one-half-inch lap weatherboards clad the walls. There are also cornerboards, and a molded cornice, a plain wide frieze, and gable returns. A frame, gable-roofed belfry with corner brackets stands on the roof. On the interior, the original features are largely intact.

The domestic architecture of Brentsville represents three time periods. There are three houses still standing from the early 1820s, and one contributing house is a 1940s Bungalow style dwelling; however, the majority of the dwellings date from the late nineteenth century.

The three 1820s houses are in varying states of repair. The White House (VDHR 76-31) is in good condition, retaining much of its integrity. It was built across the road from the courthouse on lot nine of square four of the original Brentsville plat. The White House is a Virginia Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register. This Federal style house is a two-story, four-bay dwelling with double end chimneys and a gable roof. The exterior brick walls are laid in Flemish bond on the facade and five-course American bond on the sides and rear. They have been covered with stucco that has been scored to resemble stone. The house has a central hall and a double-pile floor plan. The interior retains much of its fine Federal woodwork as well as its original staircase.

Situated on the lot west of the White House lot is the Bauder House (VDHR 76-247). This early nineteenth-century, two-story frame building is in ruins and is soon to be demolished.

The other remaining house from the early nineteenth century is the Nelson House (VDHR 76-273). This frame, gable-roofed, two-story, three-bay residence has a side-passage plan. It is constructed on a high stone foundation that contains the original kitchen. Locally quarried red sandstone rubble was used in this foundation as well as in the exterior end chimney. The later porch on the north facade has a hipped roof supported by square posts. The weatherboard siding of the house and its two rear additions are presently covered with bricktex. It is the only

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(VDHR 76-338), which was built in the early 1940s. It is a one-and-one-half-story, three-bay structure with a composition shingle roof. The roof of the main structure extends over the front porch, where it is supported by square posts. A frame gambrel-roofed barn with side shed additions, a chicken coop, and a small vacant frame cottage are situated on the north side of the property.

Several other houses in the Brentsville district have important collections of frame outbuildings. The dwelling at 12224 Bristow Road (VDHR 76-338), a two-bay vernacular frame house from 1890-1920 with a two-story bay on the east end, has behind it a washhouse, a small barn, and a hen house, along with a workshop and a garage. Frame outbuildings at the Bradshaw House include a smokehouse, a servant's house, and a chicken coop. All have been remodeled for new uses.

Brentsville's historical resources are threatened by the continuous development that is rapidly spreading throughout Prince William County. This new growth may also put pressure on the County to widen Bristow Road which bisects the proposed district. Several houses, various outbuildings, and the Brentsville Union Church are also threatened by neglect. Because of the district's small size and the interdependence of the public buildings and residences that reflect Brentsville's history as a county seat, any further loss of buildings in the proposed district would be extremely detrimental to its integrity.

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Brentsville dwelling with a side-passage plan. The Nelson House is similar to Hazelwood (VDHR 76-294), a property located near the neighboring village of Aden.

Within the proposed historic district of Brentsville, there exist seven houses from the turn of the century. All of these dwellings are of vernacular design and three are I-houses. The residence located at 12216 Bristow Road (VDHR 76-338) is a good example of this domestic type. It is a two-story, three-bay frame structure with a cross-gabled roof. The cross gable has fishscale shingles and a diamond pane window. Extending the full width of the north facade is a porch with a recently added Chippendale style balustrade. The porch roof is supported by Doric columns. There are several rear ells and rear side porches have been enclosed over the years.

Two other frame, gable-roofed, three-bay I-houses are located on Barbee Street: Clover Springs Farm is located at 12350 Barbee Street (VDHR 76-338); and the Bradshaw House is across the street even though its address is 12248 Bristow Road (VDHR 76-338). Both dwellings are two story and have one-story full length front porches with sawn decorative details. These three-bay frame I-houses with front porches are seen throughout Prince William County and were one of the most common designs for local domestic architecture at the turn of the century.

A small vernacular dwelling is located at 12220 Bristow Road (VDHR 76-338). This vacant one-story, gable-roofed cottage has three bays and a standing seam metal roof. The building and its rear addition are covered with bricktex. The property used to be in the same ownership as 12216 Bristow Road.

An interesting vernacular structure is located at the corner of Bristow Road and Barbee Street (12232 Bristow Road [VDHR 76-338]). Part of the first floor of this building was used as a store in the early twentieth century, but now it is a residence. This gable-roofed house is a two-story, three-bay structure with six-over-six sash windows, two front entrances, and a one-story side wing. Scrolled brackets can be seen along the eaves of the wraparound porch that retains its original stone floor. Across Barbee Street is another frame dwelling that was used as a store in the early twentieth century. This heavily remodeled structure at 12240 Bristow Road (VDHR 76-338) has two storefronts in its facade and several rear additions.

A Brentsville house of a later date is the frame Bungalow located at 12309 Bristow Road

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* DESIGNATES NONCONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

Bristow Road

12000 Block

Brentsville Historic District
076-0338

12214 Bristow Rd Nelson Hse

76-273: Residence; ca. 1820-1850; wood frame on raised stone basement; 2-story; 3 bay; stone in chimney is locally-quarried red sandstone; walls and ceiling of a second floor room are covered with beaded tongue-and-groove boards; only side-passage plan in Brentsville. Residence of Edwin Nelson, clerk of Prince William County Court from 1887 to 1911.

✓ 12216 Bristow Rd

76-338-1: Residence; 1880-1920; wood frame; 2-story; 3 bay; symmetrical; central gable with shingles and diamond-shaped window; heavily remodeled; vernacular I-house; *noncontributing gable-roofed garage.

✓ 12220 Bristow Rd

76-338-2: Residence; 1870-1920; wood frame with a stone foundation; 1-story; 3 bay; asymmetrical; batten door; vacant; vernacular cottage.

✓ 12224 Bristow Rd

76-338-5: Residence; 1890-1920; wood frame; 2-story; 2 bay; symmetrical; vernacular; contributing washhouse, garage, small barn, workshop and chicken coop.

10-338-
A 12228 Bristow Rd

*Residence; ca. 1970; noncontributing ranch-style house with *noncontributing garage.

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12231 Bristow Rd

76-295: Brentsville Union Church; ca. 1875; wood frame on a stone foundation; frame gable-roofed belfry; front and side windows have bracketed hoods; one of the more interesting late 19th-century churches in Prince William County.

✓ 12232 Bristow Rd

76-338-7: Residence; 1870-1900; wood frame; 2-story; 8 bay; asymmetrical; porch has a stone floor; 2 front entrances; used as a store in early 20th century; vernacular.

16-338-3 12235 Bristow Rd site

Site of original tavern square in Brentsville; no buildings currently on property; contributing site.

12239 Bristow Rd Old Schoolhouse

76-278: Prince William County Park Authority storage building; ca. 1910; wood frame; 1-story; deep eaves; ceiling is pressed tin; originally the community schoolhouse.

12239 Bristow Rd PW Co. Courthouse

76-21: Leased by the Prince William County Historical Commission; originally the fourth courthouse of Prince William County; 1822; brick; 2-story; Federal style; fanlight over main entrance with a semicircular brick arch; designed by William Claytor of Orange Co.; on the National Register of Historic Places.

✓ 12240 Bristow Rd

76-338-10: Residence; ca. 1890-1920; wood frame with red sandstone foundation; 2-story; 5 bay; asymmetrical; heavily remodeled; vernacular; use as a store in the early twentieth century.

✓ 12248 Bristow Rd

76-338-8: Residence; ca. 1890-1910; wood frame with red sandstone foundation; 2-story; 3 bay; colored glass transom; vernacular I-house; contributing remodeled smokehouse, servant's house, chicken coop.

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12249 Bristow Rd *Jail*

76-231: Prince William County Park Authority Ranger offices; ca. 1820; brick; 2-story; center hall plan; originally the jail for the courthouse; exterior walls are two feet thick; on the National Register of Historic Places.

12304 Bristow Rd *Bauder Hse*

76-247: House is in ruins; originally a 2-story residence; ca. 1820-1840; wood frame with a stone foundation; residence of Ezra Bauder who conducted the Brentsville Seminary, a private academy in 1870s; to be demolished; contributing site.

12305 Bristow Rd

*Church; ca. 1950-1970; cinder block construction; noncontributing.

12309 Bristow Rd

76-338-12: Residence; ca. 1940-1945; wood frame; 1 1/2-story; 3 bay; symmetrical; bungalow; contributing frame barn, chicken coop and small vacant house.

12320 Bristow Rd

76-31: Residence; ca. 1822; stucco over brick; 2-story; symmetrical; house has several Federal-style mantels; this house was built at the time the county seat was moved from Dumfries to Brentsville; Federal; historic name is the White House; built by widow of John Williams, clerk of Prince William County Court from 1795 to 1813; on the National Register of Historic Places.

Barbee Street

12000 Block

12244 Barbee Street

76-25: Hatcher's Memorial Baptist Church; built as St. James Episcopal Church; 1847, 1964 addition; locally-quarried red sandstone; 1-story; thick walls with pilasters; one of the earliest surviving churches in Prince William County; used as a hospital and barracks during the Civil War; Greek Revival style.

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✓ 12350 Barbee Street

76-338-9: Residence; ca. 1890-1920; frame with red sandstone foundation; 2-story; 3 bay; vernacular I-house; *noncontributing gable-roofed frame garage.

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TAX MAP REF. NO.	SURVEY NUMBER AND ADDRESS	OWNER'S NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS
066-01-000-0032	76-273 12214 BRISTOW RD	NELSON EDDY AND ROBERTA L. NESTOR 12214 BRISTOW ROAD NOKESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22123
066-01-000-0033	76-338 12216 BRISTOW RD	RALPH A. AND SARA S. KNIERIEM 12216 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0038	76-338 12218 BRISTOW RD (lot)	RALPH A. AND SARA S. KNIERIEM 12216 BRISTOW RD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0036	76-338 12220 BRISTOW RD	JOHN P. AND MAUREEN PATINA P.O. BOX 81 GORDONSVILLE, VIRGINIA 22942
066-01-000-0039	76-338 12224 BRISTOW RD	A.V. AND GLADYS L. EANES 12224 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0037	76-338 12228 BRISTOW RD	CHRISTOPHER J. MANSFIELD AND L.T. BROWN 12228 BRISTOW RD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0060	76-295 12231 BRISTOW RD	BRENTSVILLE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH 12231 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22111
066-01-000-0041	76-338 12232 BRISTOW RD	HATCHERS MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, TRUSTEES 12232 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22111
066-01-000-0059	12235 BRISTOW RD (lot)	WILLIAM H. BREEDEN ESTATE 8913 LONGSTREET DRIVE MANASSAS, VIRGINIA 22110
066-01-000-0058	76-21 12239 BRISTOW RD	PRINCE WILLIAM CO. PARK AUTHORITY 12239 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013

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066-01-000-0058	76-278 12239 BRISTOW RD	PRINCE WILLIAM CO. PARK AUTHORITY 12239 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0042	76-338 12240 BRISTOW RD	JOHN F. AND HAZEL MAY WOLFE 12240 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0045	76-338 12248 BRISTOW RD	RICHARD J. AND HELEN T. WARD 12248 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0057	76-231 12249 BRISTOW RD	PRINCE WILLIAM CO. PARK AUTHORITY 12249 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0047	76-247 12304 BRISTOW RD	AGNES G. WEBSTER AND BETTY A. MACHEN 12320 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0052	76-338 12305 BRISTOW RD	BRENTSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 12305 BRISTOW RD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0055	76-338 12309 BRISTOW RD	BRENTSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, TRUSTEES 12305 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0048	76-31 12320 BRISTOW RD	AGNES G. WEBSTER AND BETTY A. MACHEN 12320 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0040	12236 BARBEE ST (lot)	HATCHERS MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, TRUSTEES 12232 BRISTOW ROAD BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-01-000-0043	76-25 12244 BARBEE ST	HATCHERS MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH 12244 BARBEE STREET BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013
066-03-016-0057, 58,59,60,62,63	76-338 12350 BARBEE ST	MICHEAL R. AND BARBARA E. JANAY 12350 BARBEE STREET BRISTOW, VIRGINIA 22013

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Brentsville was established in 1822 as a planned new community for the site of Prince William County's fourth courthouse. The brick neoclassical courthouse remained in continual use until the county seat was moved to Manassas in 1893. It is the oldest surviving such structure in the county. Several of Prince William County's early churches and residences remain in the village as significant examples of local antebellum architecture. Interspersed with these dwellings are various late nineteenth-century frame residences, typical of domestic life of the period. Growth slowed after the court moved, and the result is a relatively intact rural village of Prince William County.

Historical Background

Prince William County was settled rapidly after 1722 when local Indian settlements were moved west of the Blue Ridge Mountains under treaty arrangements. In 1730, the General Assembly formed a new county with boundaries encompassing what later became Loudoun, Fairfax, Fauquier, Arlington, and Prince William counties. The new county was named Prince William in honor of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland and the youngest son of King George II of England.¹

Because of shifting population growth in different areas of the county and changing boundaries, Prince William County has had five courthouses. The first was built in 1731 on the south side of the creek at the ferry landing on George Mason II's land, which was later known as Wood-bridge. The courthouse remained there until 1742.²

When the population grew in the area that later became Fauquier County, the courthouse was moved to a site on the land of Philemon Waters. His land was located on Cedar Run just south of the Brent Town Grant area.³

By 1750, Dumfries was the only port in the county and population greatly increased in this area of commerce.⁴ Because of this new growing center, the courthouse was moved to Dumfries in

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1759 and remained in that location for fifty-seven years. However, as early as 1779, Dumfries was already inconvenient to three-fourths of the population of Prince William County.⁵ A petition was sent to the General Assembly requesting that the courthouse be moved to an area more convenient to the majority of the county residents.

Others sent petitions in 1780 in favor of keeping the county courthouse in Dumfries. This faction reminded the legislature that the courthouse was built in Dumfries because it was the only trading port in the county. Furthermore, the county had, just twenty years earlier, paid for the building of this courthouse and prison. Another argument for retaining the courthouse in Dumfries was that the citizens of the county were already paying high taxes to support the Revolutionary War and could not be taxed further. These arguments were compelling, and the courthouse stayed in Dumfries for another forty years.

However, during the Revolutionary War many merchants began to move out of Dumfries. Quantico Creek was beginning to fill up with silt, causing many ships to use the neighboring port of Alexandria. The Dumfries economy during this era was based largely on tobacco trade, but after the Revolutionary War grain began to replace tobacco as the main crop.⁶ This agricultural change further hurt business in Dumfries, and its days as a prosperous trading community were numbered. By 1820 county justices decided that Brentsville was a more convenient location for the courthouse.

This new county seat was officially created by the General Assembly in 1822. Fifty acres of land were laid out for the town and trustees were appointed to manage the town's business. Seventy lots were platted with three acres reserved for a public square and three more acres for a tavern site.⁷ Courthouse construction had begun in 1820 and was completed in 1822.

Brentsville is located on land that was originally part of the 30,000 acre Brent Town Tract that was granted by James II, the last Catholic king of England, in 1687 to George Brent, Nicholas Hayward, Robert Bristow, and Richard Foote to be used as a religious sanctuary.⁸ That same year, Nicholas Gayward wrote the guidelines for the town.

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“ . . . and the town that they have begun to build, called Brenton, make the following propositions for the encouragement of persons who plan to emigrate into that country and there make a permanent establishment, that is to say to the first to present themselves they will sell, for the sum of ten pounds sterling cash, at four ecus to the pound sterling, 100 acres of land near enough to the town to build a house upon it. Under this offer, the purchasers and their heirs will become proprietors of the said land in perpetuity, subject only to a quit rent of four shillings sterling per annum.

Such persons may be assured that the said land is healthy, good, and fertile, producing all sorts of grains grown in Europe, such as wheat, rye, oats, etc.; vines and all sorts of fruit, and that the water is excellent.

At the price above mentioned, the proprietors will give the preference of choice of the situations of farm and house in the order of application, but only on condition that the purchasers shall emigrate to become residents. It is the expectation of the proprietors in the future to make another and a higher price for general sale of said lands.”⁹

This prospectus was circulated in England and France as well as in the colonies in order to encourage families to move to Brent Town. Some Huguenots from France and Roman Catholics from Maryland were attracted to the new settlement. However, very little became of this religious venture, largely because more enticing notices were distributed from other areas such as the Carolinas. Eventually the land was divided among the men who received the land grant in 1687.¹⁰

The present Brentsville is located on the 7,500-acre portion that went to Robert Bristow (1643-1707). This portion of the Brentsville tract was passed down to another Robert Bristow, an Englishman and loyalist, who died in England in 1776.¹¹ Under an act passed during the Revolution, the Commonwealth took the property of English subjects. Robert Bristow's land was confiscated by the state in 1779. The tract was finally divided into 100-acre lots and sold at an auction and the proceeds used for educational purposes.

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The town of Brentsville was established on fifty acres of the original Bristow tract, two years after the courthouse was built. By this time the land of the Bristow tract was in poor condition, because the Commonwealth had rented the land "ravaged of all its timber and for the most part 'ploughed down to the barren' by an unmerciful course of cultivation, under a numerous tenantry."¹² Nevertheless, it was believed that with proper care, a thriving town could exist there and in 1820, construction was started on the county's fourth courthouse.

The Prince William County Courthouse at Brentsville was described as a ". . . red brick structure in Flemish bond within a thin circle of trees. From its gabled roof, which turns a gable-end to the front, stands up a small octagonal domed cupola, centered over the entrance, and, at each corner, a meager chimney-top."¹³ Designed by William Claytor of Orange County, whose name is inscribed on a plaque in the front gable, it was originally a one-room building. On the interior, a rail and gate were used to divide the court from the spectators.¹⁴ At about the same time that the courthouse was constructed, a jail was built on adjoining land. It has a stone tablet in its gable naming James Drisco Masson as the builder. Both facilities were constructed on a three-acre public square platted when the town of Brentsville was established in 1822.

The trustees of the courthouse were: John Macrae, John Gibson, Gerald Alexander, William S. Alexander, Richard Davis, Sr., John Mills, Charles Hunton, John Leachman, John Fox, William French, Benjamin Johnson, John Hooe, and James Foster.¹⁵

An article written in a local gazette in 1835 stated that:

"Brentsville was located around the . . . new court house in 1822, at which time it was completed and the court removed from Dumfries . . . The Courthouse, clerk's office [site of the present school building], and jail are handsomely situated on the main street, in a public square of three acres. Besides them, the village contains 19 dwelling houses, 3 miscellaneous stores, 2 handsome taverns, built of brick and stuccoed, 1 house of entertainment, 1 house of worship, free for all denominations, a bible society, a Sunday school, a temperance and tract society . . . There is in the vicinity a common school in which the rudiments of English education are taught . . . Population 130 persons, of whom 3 are attorneys and 3 regular physicians. . . ."¹⁶

Mrs. (Captain) Lucian Davis, who lived in Brentsville from 1836 until 1895 remembered that

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the courthouse lot had a very deep well that was beautifully covered. It was surrounded with an ornamental fence that had a stile entrance at the front and also at the side opposite the jail. Originally the side entrance connected to the three-acre square containing the Old White Tavern, which was run by a Jim Davis.¹⁷

One of the original houses built in Brentsville is called the White House. It was built in 1822 across from the courthouse by Jane Williams, the widow of John Williams. He was the clerk of the Prince William County Court at Dumfries from 1795 until his death in 1813. Following his death Jane Williams qualified and acted as clerk through her brother, Philip D. Dawe.¹⁸ She served until 1832 when her brother died. At this time her son John Williams III became the clerk and moved into the White House.

In 1854, Philip D. Lipscomb, Jane Williams's grandson, became clerk. Other county clerks at Brentsville included: Mordacai B. Sinclair (1865-1869); John C. Poor (1869-1870); Little C. Osmann (1870-1871); Lucian A. Davis (1871-1887); and Edwin Nelson (1887-1911).¹⁹

At one time the White House was used for a school. Ezra Bauder turned it into a co-educational academy, known as Brentsville Seminary, in 1879. He taught engineering and college preparatory courses there and lived in the frame cottage next door that supposedly was built in 1822 as the house of John Williams's mother.²⁰ In 1845 an academy was incorporated in Brentsville with Eppa Hunton as one of the trustees.²¹ The frame public schoolhouse next to the courthouse was constructed in the early twentieth century.

Other descriptions of Brentsville in the late nineteenth century mention the small store and post office that were located in buildings on the corner of Barbee Street and Bristow Road (12240 Bristow Road). French Jackson Davis ran both until he died in 1895 and his widow became the post-mistress. She remained in that position until the early twentieth century when a rural route was established throughout the county.²² The post office slowly deteriorated and was eventually demolished. By 1926 the store had closed and another one opened on the opposite side of Barbee Street (12232 Bristow Road).²³

The residents of Brentsville were from a variety of religious denominations including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal. In 1822, the Episcopalians built a chapel in Brentsville

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which was replaced in 1847 with St. James Church. This second structure was built with locally-quarried red sandstone. Today this church is known as Hatcher's Memorial Baptist Church, and it is one of the oldest churches in continual use in Prince William County.²⁴

Another early church built in Brentsville is the Brentsville Union (or Pentecostal) Church which was built around 1875.²⁵ This church is situated on the corner of the three-acre lot originally set aside for the tavern. In 1871, George M. Goodwin sold this lot to the trustees of Union Church to be used by various denominations including "the Congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church south, the Presbyterian Episcopalian, the New and both branches of the old school Baptist Churches, worshipping at Brentsville." Original trustees included Aylett Nicol, Austin B. Weedon, A. M. Herschey, James F. Clarke, J. B. Reid, and George W. Saxsmith.²⁶

In 1850-51, the Virginia State Constitutional Convention provided that local justices should be chosen by popular vote. When the plan went into effect eight election districts were set up in Prince William County, and Brentsville was one of them.²⁷ The next year the Manassas Gap Railroad and the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, which ran through the county, were opened. Neither of these railroads ran near Brentsville; nevertheless, the village continued to grow. By 1861, a description of Brentsville included "forty houses, fifteen taverns and inns, a brown stone Episcopal church, a small brick courthouse and a jail."²⁸

While Brentsville did not see any major battles during the Civil War, nearby Union troops did enter the town and cause some destruction. They set up camp in nearby Bristow and sent a squad to Brentsville for materials to construct a hospital and headquarters. They took bricks from the courthouse and the clerk's office. One member of the squad wrote that the clerk had left behind the county papers and records, and that four of the rooms were two feet deep with documents, many of which were subsequently destroyed.²⁹

At the Virginia Constitutional Convention in 1867, townships, including Brentsville, became magisterial districts.³⁰ During this post-Civil War period the growth of the railroad began to contribute to the growth of the neighboring town of Manassas. The Alexandria and Washington Railroad had extended its line southward, while the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad had extended northward, creating a continuous route between Richmond and Washing-

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ton.

Manassas's expanded economy included sumac leaves, which were used for tanning and dyeing leather. A special warehouse was constructed for this local industry.³¹ By 1872 Manassas was an incorporated town and its residents requested that the county courthouse be moved there. A referendum was defeated by several wealthy citizens with considerable political influence who lived in Brentsville, and wanted the courthouse to remain there. In 1888, a similar vote was also turned down. However, in 1892, a new referendum passed, and the county courthouse moved to Manassas when a new structure was erected there in the following year.³²

New uses were found for the Brentsville Courthouse and Jail after the county seat was moved to Manassas in 1893. The courthouse was used for a local school until 1913. After the school moved, the structure began to deteriorate raising concern among local residents that the building would be torn down. The concerned residents organized and raised \$600 and convinced the Board of Supervisors to provide additional funds for the repair of the courthouse.³³ The building was then used as a community house for the area.

From the late 1930s to 1979, the Prince William Courthouse was used as a community center.³⁴ In 1974, the Prince William County Park Authority obtained the property and established a historical recreational area in Brentsville behind the building. The Park Authority uses the jail for offices and the school building for storage. The courthouse has been leased to the Prince William County Historical Commission and is under study for future uses.

While several new dwellings have been erected in and around Brentsville in the past decades, most of the village's structures date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the courts moved to Manassas, growth in Brentsville slowed. Several early structures have been lost to demolition and neglect over the years; nevertheless, Brentsville retains its turn-of-the-century village appearance. Its distinctive historic character will be increasingly threatened in future years by the pressures of the continued rapid growth of Prince William County.

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¹Tommy S. Burton, "Courthouses of Prince William County," Virginia Cavalcade (Summer 1978) p. 34.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 36.

⁵Ibid., p. 37.

⁶Ibid., p. 41.

⁷Easy Smith, "Brentsville: Its People and Places," Manuscript, n.d., p. 1.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 2.

¹²Burton "Courthouses of Prince William County," p. 44.

¹³Smith "Brentsville: Its People and Places," p. 4.

¹⁴Interview with Anne Keys, Brentsville, Virginia, 7 June 1989.

¹⁵Smith "Brentsville: Its People and Places," p. 4.

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¹⁶John Martin, in local Gazetteer, 1835, cited by Easy Smith, "Brentsville: It's People and Places," p. 1.

¹⁷Author Unknown, Brentsville, Virginia (Manassas, Virginia Planning Department, Historic Survey Files), Manuscript, n.d.

¹⁸Jackson R. Ratcliff, This Was Prince William (Leesburg, Virginia: Potomac Press, 1978), p. 75.

¹⁹Smith "Brentsville: Its People and Places," p. 4.

²⁰Ratcliff This Was Prince William, p. 75.

²¹The Bethlehem Good Housekeeping Club, Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places (Richmond, Virginia: Whittet and Shepperson, 1976), p. 62.

²²Author Unknown, Brentsville, Virginia.

²³Interview with Anne Keys.

²⁴Prince William Company Historical Commission, Prince William: A Past to Preserve (privately printed, 1982), p.87.

²⁵Frances Jones, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey Form for Brentsville Union Church, File No. 76-295, p.1.

²⁶Tommye Burton "Courthouses of Prince William County," p.42.

²⁷Ibid., p.41.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Captain Joseph Keith Newell, Our Annals of the 10th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, in the Rebellion (Springfield, Massachusetts: C.A. Nichols & Co., 1875), p. 235.

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³⁰Burton "Courthouses of Prince William County," p. 41.

³¹Ibid., p. 45.

³²Ibid.

³³Ratcliffe This Was Prince William, p. 38.

³⁴Prince William Company Historical Commission, Prince William: A Past to Preserve,
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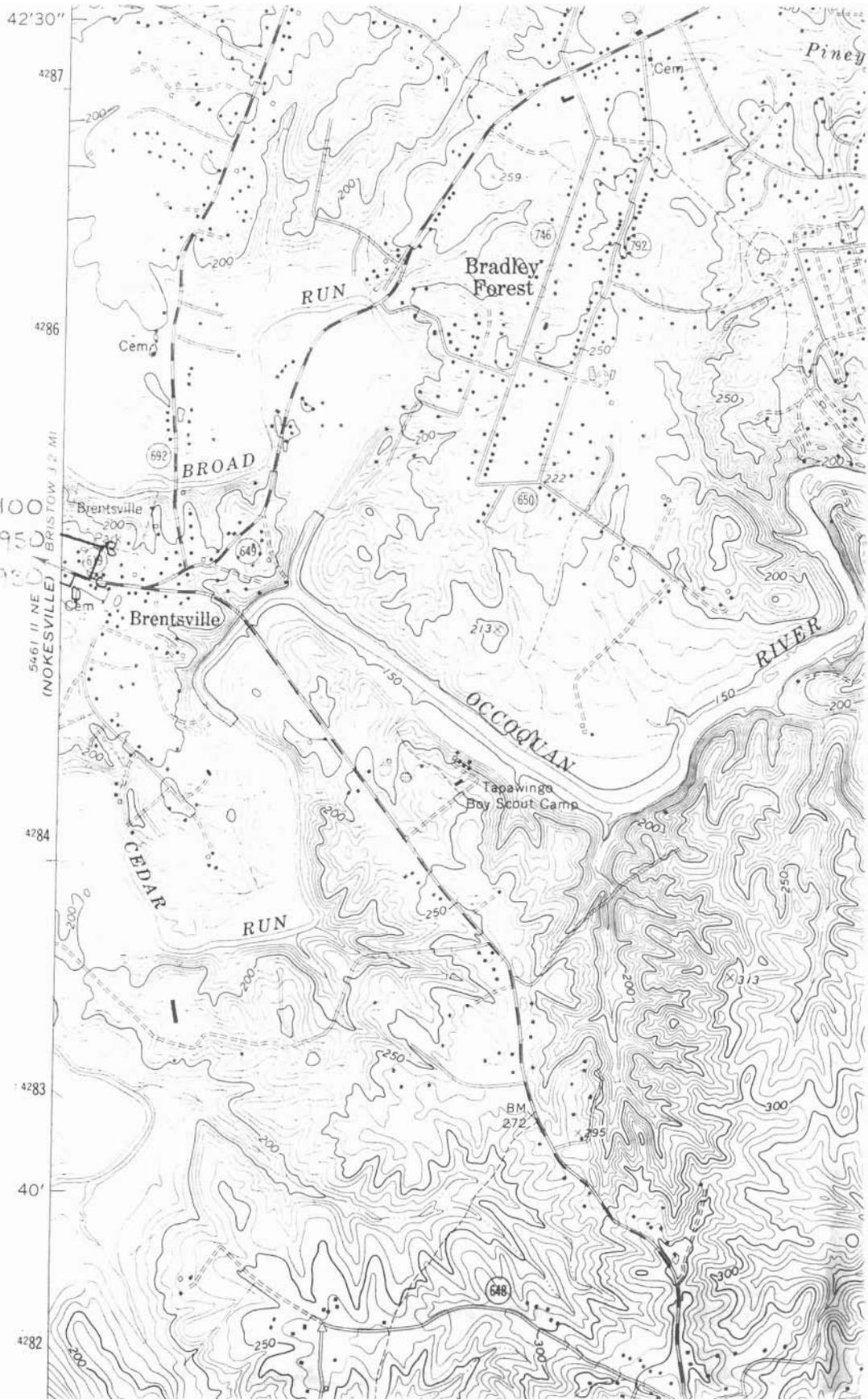
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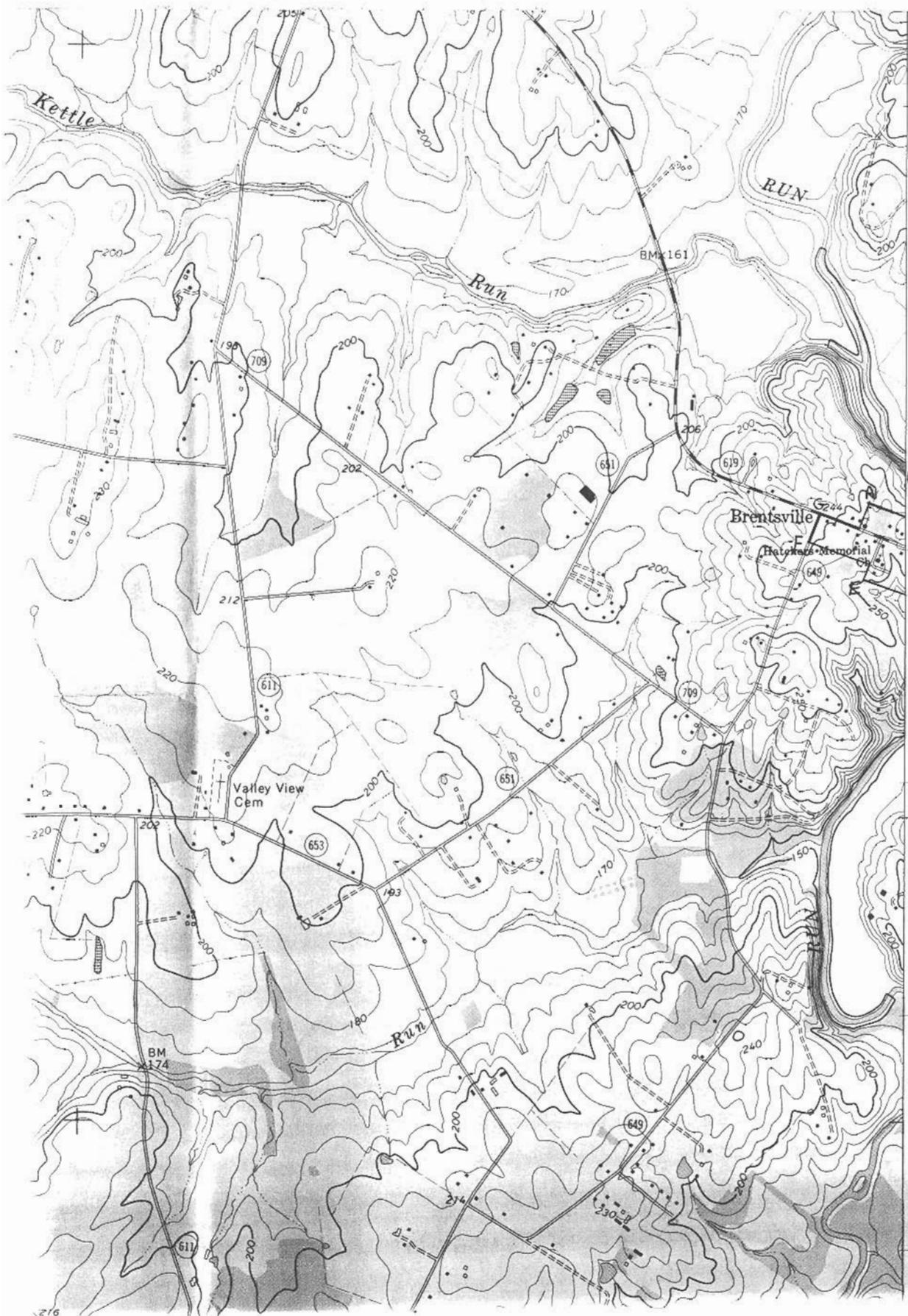
Mrs. Agnes Webster, Brentsville.

Mrs. Anne Keys, Brentsville.

Mrs. Sue Knieriem, Brentsville.

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