



# Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

## Fall 2024 Contents

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## PRINCE WILLIAM

Historic Preservation

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## Conscripts at Bristoe Station

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Shaara wrote in *Killer Angels of the Army of the Potomac* on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg: it was the “last of the great volunteer armies, for the draft is beginning that summer in the North.” When that same Union army fought at Bristoe Station on October 14, 1863, it was a mixture of volunteers and conscripts.

The Confederate States of America resorted to conscription in April 1862. Such measures were not enacted by the United States until March 1863 when Congress passed the Enrollment Act. The new law stipulated that if districts did not meet their quotas by July, the Federal government would fill those quotas through a draft.

In the wake of the Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, several riots against the draft occurred in various Northern cities. Part of what made the law unpopular was the provision that if a man paid \$300, he could be exempted from military service. By example, a laborer in New York made an average of 74 cents a day. The largest and most infamous of these disturbances took place in New York City in mid-July. Union soldiers fresh from the Gettysburg battlefield helped quell the uprising.

By the time of the Bristoe Station Campaign, conscripts were beginning to appear in the Army of the Potomac's ranks. Most of the newly arrived draftees



National Archives

Col. James Mallon

meshed well with the volunteer veterans, but in Alexander Webb's 2nd Corps division, “the conduct of some few required on [Webb's] part that measures should be taken to prevent misconduct and desertion.” Colonel James Mallon, a brigade commander in Webb's division, appealed for help to deal with the new soldiers: “the conscripts recently sent to the Regiment [42nd New York Infantry] [are] suffering from want of [a] good drill master.”

During the Battle of Bristoe Station, conscripts filled the ranks of much of the 19th and 20th Massachusetts and 42nd New York infantry regiments, among others. These three regiments were brigaded together under the command of Colonel Mallon.

Confederate troops charged the Union position behind the railroad embankment of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Mallon's 42nd New York held the part of the line where the Brentsville Road, today's Bristow Road (Route 619), crossed the railroad, thus depriving the Empire Staters of the embankment's protection. Charging Confederates temporarily broke the line and scattered the New Yorkers. James Mallon leapt into this deteriorating situation to rally his soldiers when a Confederate bullet struck him in the upper body; he died within the hour. Mallon's death was not for naught. Within minutes of the enemy breakthrough, the 42nd New York sealed the breach.

Farther to Mallon's left, the 1st Delaware Infantry had 123 draftees in its ranks. As the Delaware soldiers charged toward the cover of the railroad embankment, one new soldier yelled to his comrades, "Gentlemen, they say substitutes won't fight, but come on and we will show you!"

Despite this being their first battle, the Army of the Potomac's draftees acquitted themselves well. Alexander Webb praised their efforts and relaxed his



HP Staff

*Drawing a number during the draft*

previous disciplinary measures against them. Mallon's successor, Ansel Wass of the 19th Massachusetts, praised their conduct as "all that could be desired, and they showed themselves worthy to rank with the veterans of [their] regiments."

Nationally, newspapers applauded the conscripts. "I am here compelled to say a word of truth for the conscripts," one correspondent told his readers. "Gen. Webb, who had a large number in his division, speaks of them in terms of wonder and admiration. They stood in their places and fought. No more can

be said of the bravest modern warrior. They did more. They cursed—but it was because they could not load and fire as rapidly as our veterans."

Bristoe Station marked a new era for the Army of the Potomac and the United States Army. No longer did jubilant volunteers or men with pockets full of bounty money make up the ranks entirely. The "last of the great volunteer armies" was now an army of both volunteers and conscripts.

Kevin Pawlak

Site Manager, Bristoe Station Battlefield and Ben Lomond Historic Site

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— Historic Preservation

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# Image Spotlight

## 1977 Williams Ordinary Archaeological Dig

Until October of 2023 when they were donated to the Office of Historic Preservation, these images were held in the collection in the Lee Lansing Research Library at the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries, Virginia. The photographs depict a 1977 archaeological dig at Williams Ordinary. While intriguing, these images elicit more questions than answers. No report was ever filed, and only a small fraction of the artifacts collected accompany the photographs. One image shows individuals at a table with dozens of glass fragments, mostly pieces of wine bottles, yet the data from this collection is missing.

We do know where they decided to dig. The majority of the 1977 excavations took place behind the building where a cement patio currently sits. According to former Division Manager Brendon Hanafin the dig was a high school project, and although staff made efforts to track down the teacher, they were unable to find more information.

Luckily, these photographs can still offer insight into some of the findings from this archaeological dig, and in the years since two more excavations have taken place at Williams Ordinary. In 2008 the Prince William Historic Preservation Division prepared for the construction of

an extension porch and access ramp on the rear of the building. Staff conducted a small-scale survey, excavating ten shovel test pits (STPs) to explore the area impacted by construction. In 2009, thanks to a Certified Local Government grant, Thunderbird Archaeology conducted a Phase 1 archaeological investigation, digging 30-foot interval STPs in most areas. A comprehensive report and collection of artifacts from the 2009 archaeological investigation are retained by the Office of Historic Preservation.

Lauren Maloy  
Historic Communities Coordinator, Office of Historic Preservation



HP staff

Four trenches, roughly 2 feet deep, with 9 archaeologists in them.



HP staff

Two archaeologists in a trench with uncovered brick foundation.



HP staff

Students sorting and cleaning wine bottle fragments recovered from rear of Stagecoach Inn.

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# History Corner

## The Little White Schoolhouse at Brentsville

I remember my father-in-law reminiscing about his time going to a one-room schoolhouse. This was in North Dakota during the 1930s. I hadn't realized that children were still going to one-room schools at that time. One-room schools were common since the 1700s but were used in rural areas as late as the 1940s. Did you know that there is a one-room schoolhouse that still stands in Brentsville?

Brentsville, Virginia has a one-room schoolhouse built in 1928. Classes started in 1929 and continued until 1944. During this time, Virginia schools were segregated, so white children attended the Brentsville school, while African American children attended a school just outside of town. Unlike today, one teacher instructed students in grades one through five in subjects such as math, history, science, and geography. Teachers at the Brentsville School were paid on average \$60-\$80 monthly for eight months and lived locally with a town resident. Room and board was about a quarter of the salary at about \$25 a month. Student teachers were not trained in one-room schools, so there was a learning curve for all. Typically, they went from group to group to teach the different grade levels. Most of the teachers were women and while some were married, many others were young, unmarried, and often in



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*Exterior of the Brentsville Schoolhouse.*

their first years of teaching.

These teachers, including Miss Lucy Mae Motley, Mrs. Margaret Chaplin, Miss Dorothy Woodhouse, and Miss Mary Senseny were jacks of all trades within the school. They were janitors, nurses, and superintendents, all in addition to their teaching duties and so they often enlisted the students to help with the classroom. One lucky volunteer student kept the fire stoked in the stove and giant windows

facing west helped bring in the heat, as well. One student, James "Cookie" Wolfe, was paid to bring wood for the stove. The school did not have electricity, so oil lamps were used to light the way. At the Brentsville Schoolhouse, a piano in the room and bookcases were used to help hold the oil lamps.

I'm sure the children then, as well as now, couldn't wait for recess. It's a different experience now compared to what it was

then. At the Brentsville Schoolhouse, there was a 15-minute break morning and afternoon and one hour for lunch. The students went out back behind the school for games, boxing, and baseball. Using the resources the students had, they used an interesting marker for first and third base. First base was where the girls' outhouse was located. Third base was the location for the boys' outhouse. While it is noted in oral histories that boxing was a popular pastime during recess, it was not appreciated by teachers as the boys would get very angry while boxing. During one match, they fought so fiercely that she thought a feud was about to erupt and it was later banned. The younger children played circle games, jump rope, and kick ball. In the beginning of the school year, one first-year teacher didn't realize she needed to be outside with the kids during recess. After fights continued to break out, she realized that she had to be out there with them. She had been using recess time to work individually with students.

In 1929 after the school closed, students were bused to centralized schools in Nokesville and the building was used for a variety of purposes, including a community center, private residence, arcade and office, before becoming a museum and gift shop.

As you can see, education in the United States has improved tremendously over the years. Education is now required for students categorized by age from kindergarten to 12th grade and classrooms are divided by grade level based on age. Normally there is one teacher per grade, and possibly an aide to help. Schools are all inclusive and teachers aim to educate all children and



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*Interior of the Brentsville Schoolhouse.*

give them a very well-rounded education. The school buildings are much larger and are built for several grade levels. They also have all the modern utilities and facilities and upgraded playgrounds. Teachers are required to have a college education and are no longer in charge of multiple jobs. Schools have many types of hired employees including a superintendent, principal, nurse, counselors, office staff,

lunchroom workers, janitors, bus drivers and other employees based on what else might be needed. Subjects are much more well-rounded from the arts to the sciences, plus all the basics in addition to extra curriculums including home education, wood-working, physical education, and more.

Mike Burnett  
Site Interpreter  
Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre

# Preservation Corner

## Researching a Family Treasure

Most people hate their textbooks. Some hate what they represent: long hours of studying with no respite. Others simply hate how expensive they are. Textbooks are the first books to get donated or trashed when one decides to clean out their library. Yet, anything can become a family keepsake. The textbook pictured here is extraordinary in that way. It once belonged to the Davis family – a remarkable, but elusive family who once lived in Prince William County. Very little remains of the Davis family’s physical possessions and even less is publicly preserved for posterity. *Venable’s Practical Arithmetic*, a math textbook, is one of the latest additions to the office’s collection, having been verified as belonging to both Robert H. Davis and Herbert A. Davis of the Davis family. During my summer 2024 internship, I was tasked with identifying whether or not the “R.H. Davis” noted on the title page was indeed associated with the Davis family in Prince William County.

The Davis family is most immediately connected to the Davis-Beard House in Bristow, Virginia. The land on which the property sits was purchased by the Davis family in 1856 with some buildings already on the land – one of which was a house. During the Civil War, Prince William County experienced extremely destructive battles between Union and Confederate



*Cover of the textbook with the stamp barely visible.*

forces causing many families to flee to safer counties across the Mason-Dixon line into the North or further South. The Davis family was no exception. They fled to Maryland during the war, only returning in 1865 when the fighting was officially over. However, the house that was already standing on the property was destroyed, likely during the Battle of Bristoe Station in 1863. Having returned to the farm, the Davis family rebuilt the house which still stands by the railroad tracks today, although it has undergone alterations multiple times throughout its life. The house was sold in 1961, having been in the family’s possession for 106 years. Now, it is known as the White Elephant Antique shop positioned

just outside of the Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park.

The family itself has an interesting history. Thomas K. Davis was the father of Robert H. Davis and Herbert A. Davis. He was also a Unionist – someone who believed that the secession of the Southern states was a mistake and that they should remain in the Union. These were very unusual beliefs for a Southerner to hold at the time. Consequently, most of Davis’s neighbors viewed him with scorn and suspicion. He was later persecuted for these beliefs, fleeing Virginia and living the rest of his life in Washington, D.C. Robert H. Davis inherited the Davis-Beard House and surrounding farm from his father. He expanded the house to include

a storefront, running a general store, a hardware store, and a lumber company out of the same building. The local post office was later also included in the many businesses Robert H. Davis ran out of his home. One of Robert H. Davis's sons – Harry P. Davis – went on to serve the community in a new way as the mayor of Manassas for forty-two years while the other siblings maintained the family businesses or pursued other occupations.

To start the process of investigating the “R.H. Davis” inside the textbook, I first started by recording any and all physical observations of the book. I flipped through all the pages, reviewing the front and back covers intently, and noted all observations. On the title page, there was a signature reading “Robert H. Davis, November 18th, 1872”. Stamped on the front and back covers of the book was “Robert H. Davis, Bristoe, Virginia” and slightly below that “Prince William County”. On the second page of the notes section, “H.A. Davis” was written in different handwriting when compared to the first signature; “Herbert A. Davis” was signed on the third page of the same section in the same handwriting as the second page. I had two full names signed in two different handwriting styles along with a date and location. The next step I took was to look through the cemetery records and census records to confirm a family relation.

There are two websites that were invaluable for my research: “Find-A-Grave” and “FamilySearch”. “Find-A-Grave” was useful when it came to determining a birth date for both Robert H. Davis and Herbert A. Davis. I started with Robert H. Davis, and I was able to successfully confirm that there was a “Robert H. Davis” born to Thomas K. Davis in 1859.

		Mellens Mellis	11 Mo 18				
		Bryant George	11 Mo 18				
		Wertzard Elias	11 Mo 28				
110	110	Builer John	13 Mo 60				Farmer
		Builer Caroline	13 Fe 43	Wife			Keeping House
		" Anna	13 Fe 7	Daughter			
111	111	O'Donnell Hermann	11 Mo 70				Rail Road
		" Janet	11 Mo 60	Wife			Keeping House
112	112	Roberson Lewis	11 Mo 68				Farmer
		" Nellie	11 Fe 64	Wife			Keeping House
		" John	13 Mo 32	Son			
		" Mike	13 Mo 8	Grand Son			
		" Lucy	13 Fe 6	"			
		" Anna	13 Fe 3	"			
113	113	Davis Thomas	11 Mo 61				Merchant
		" Martha	11 Fe 48	Wife			
		" Robt H	11 Mo 21	Son			Merchant
		" Melbourn	11 Mo 18	"			
		" Hubert A	11 Mo 11	"			
		" Ernest D	11 Fe 7	Daughter			

1880 census record used in research process with the Davis family listed at the very bottom.

Using the same website, I was also able to confirm that a “Herbert A. Davis” born to Thomas K. Davis in 1869. Using these birth dates, I went through the 1860 and 1880 census records to get a second set of records that confirm this familial connection as well as connect the location stamped on the book to both Davis brothers. “FamilySearch” allows users to freely access high-quality scans of census records which is where I was able to piece together the household and the location. The 1860 census for the Brentsville District records a “Robert H. Davis” as one-year-old in the household of Thomas K. Davis. The 1880 census for the Brentsville District records a “Robert H. Davis” as 21-years-old and a “Herbert A. Davis” as 11-years-old in the household of Thomas K. Davis. Bristow would have been in the Brentsville District for all legal matters, including the recording of the census. Therefore, I felt confident in confirming that

Venable’s Practical Arithmetic belonged to the Davis family – specifically to Robert H. Davis and later Herbert A. Davis.

Ultimately, it was quite fun for me to research this textbook. It was very rewarding getting to piece together a story based upon limited clues. The obvious clues like the names recorded both on the outside and inside of the book were very helpful in giving me direction, but I did have to do some sleuthing to find supporting documentation that confirmed that this book was certainly owned by a Davis within Prince William County, and not one of the many other Davis family members spread across Virginia. It is still amusing to me that a textbook – something seemingly universally hated by all – survived to be preserved and regarded as an invaluable piece of history.

Grace Kostrzebski  
Office of Historic Preservation Summer  
2024 Intern



- Rob Orrison & Paige Gibbons Backus will be presenting at the National Parks & Recreation Association Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia in October about Historic Preservation Organizations within Parks & Recreation.

- The Department of Historic Preservation has an intern for the fall. His name is David Meece. He will be working at Bristoe Station Battlefield. David is currently pursuing



*David Meece*

his Master's degree in History from Liberty University and he is on course to graduate in the spring of 2025. Prior to his graduate studies, David spent time as an educator before he turned his attention to active military service. In April 2022 he retired after nearly 34-years of military service. He enjoys reading history, listening to bluegrass music, and traveling (RV) with his family. David lives in Bristow with his wife and seven children.

- Virginia joins the rest of the nation in the commemoration of the semiquincentennial anniversary of the creation of the United States. As the most populous colony, Virginia played in outsized role in the foundation of our country. Included in Virginia's American Revolutionary story is Prince William County and the role it's citizens

and residents played. In anticipation of 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation is working on fundraising the creation of special interpretative and reflective open space museum at Williams Ordinary that highlights the important

role all Prince Williamites played for our Independence. If you are interested in donating, please donate here: [preservepw.org/corporate-and-foundation-donations](https://preservepw.org/corporate-and-foundation-donations).



Dan Goldstein  
Historic Interpreter  
Rippon Lodge Historic Site

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#### NOVEMBER

##### ROAD TO VICTORY AT RIPPON LODGE

All ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
11/2 | 11a-3p | Sat | Free

##### FALL HARVEST TOURS OF THE HAISLIP-HALL HOUSE

Ages 6+ | Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre  
11/9 | 11a-12p | Sat | \$5  
11/9 | 2-3p | Sat | \$5

##### POTOMAC PEOPLE INDIGENOUS TRIBES OF EASTERN PRINCE WILLIAM

All ages | Neabsco Creek Boardwalk  
11/16 | 9:30-10:30a | Sat | \$5 | 380001

##### COOK AN OLD TIME THANKSGIVING MEAL WORKSHOP

Ages 8+ | Ben Lomond Historic Site  
11/23 | 11a-3p | Sat | \$20

#### DECEMBER

##### HOLIDAYS THROUGH THE AGES AT RIPPON LODGE

All ages | Rippon Lodge Historic Site  
12/6-12/30 | 10a-3p | F, Sat, Sun, M | \$5

##### HISTORIC HOLIDAY CONCERT

All ages | Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre  
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