



Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

Fall 2025 Contents

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PRINCE WILLIAM

Historic Preservation

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Historic Preservation

NEWSLETTER STAFF

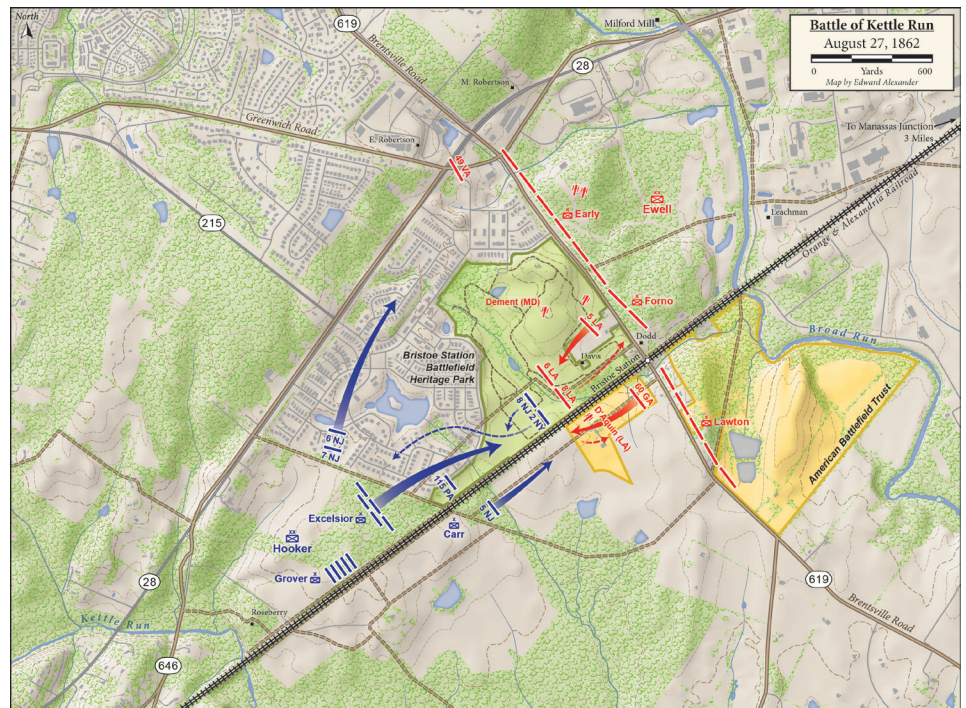
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Bristoe Station Battlefiled Heritage Park Adds Historic Battlefield Acreage



Battle of Kettle Run, August 27, 1862

On August 14, 2025, Prince William County acquired 22 acres of land to be incorporated into Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park. The new park tract is on the opposite side of the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the historic path of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, from the current park. This land is in the core area of both battlefields: the August 27, 1862, Battle of Kettle Run and the October 14, 1863, Battle of Bristoe Station.

During the Battle of Kettle Run, soldiers from the 60th Georgia Infantry advanced across these 22 acres to take position on the south side of the railroad tracks. Two guns of the Louisiana Guard

Artillery supported them.

From the cover of the embankment, Major Thomas Berry's Georgians poured a devastating fire into the ranks of the Excelsior Brigade on the other side of the railroad. Some of those New York units suffered nearly 50 percent losses.

Then, suddenly, the Georgians began receiving fire on their left from the 5th New Jersey Infantry. The New Jerseyans' fire began to take its toll. Nine Georgians were killed, while 42 were wounded.

One of the Georgians wounded in the action was the 16-year-old color bearer, Private Llewellyn Nobles. A bullet struck him in "the right side near the

small of the back coming out on [the] left side near the spine badly injuring the spine.” Nobles recovered from this serious wound well enough to return to his regiment early in 1863. He was later captured at Gettysburg. His Kettle Run wound plagued him for the rest of his life, but it did not affect his longevity. He died in 1919 at the age of 73.

When Nobles fell, the colors of the 60th Georgia became a precious battlefield trophy up for grabs. A brief melee ensued over possession of the flag when a New Jersey soldier grabbed it first before the Georgians rallied and reclaimed their lost banner.

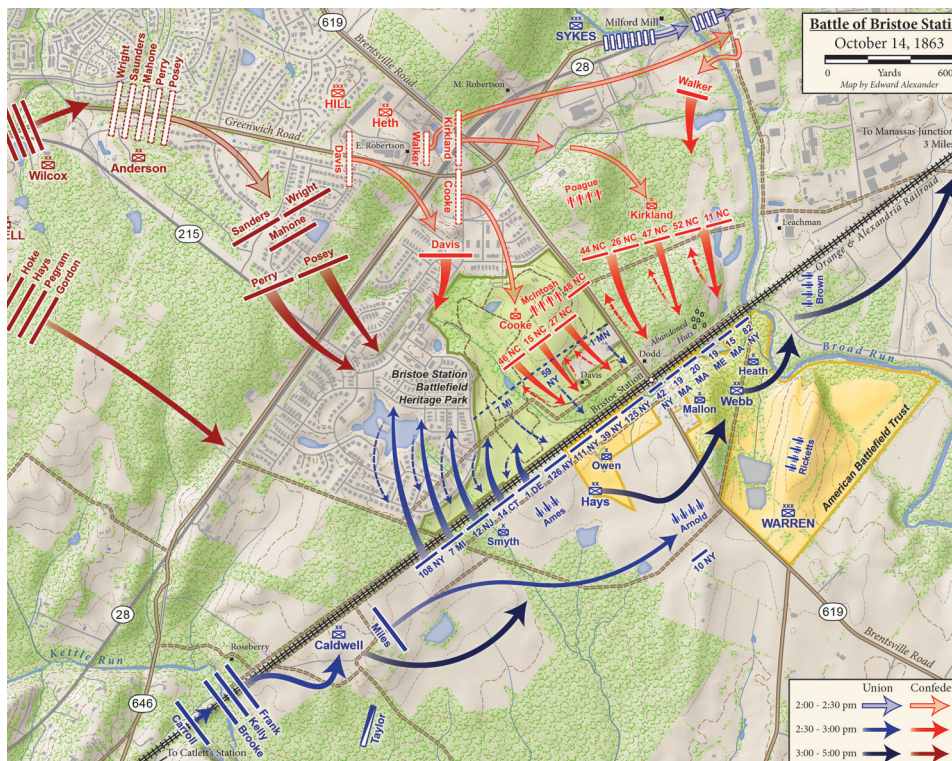
Fourteen months later, the armies returned to Bristoe Station. This time, Confederate troops attacked from the north-west through the original section of Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park. About 200 yards from the tracks, they stopped and opened fire on Union artillery posted on the hills around the newest piece of the park.

New Yorkers under Colonel Joshua Owen received orders to change their formation from a column and face left to form a battle line before dashing under fire for the cover of the railroad.



BATTLE OF BRISTOW, OCT. 14th, 1863.
THIRD BRIGADE, 3d DIV., 2d CORPS.
Seizing the Railroad Cut.

Owen's Brigade charging toward the railroad across the land recently added to Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park



Battle of Bristoe Station, October 14, 1863

One of Owen's men wrote, "of all the showers of bullets that I ever passed through, this was the worst. Gettysburgh [sic] wasn't a circumstance for bullets. The distance from where we started for the track was about thirty rods, across a plain, with no shelter. Here we suffered severely."

The men made it to the cover of the railroad embankment but at a heavy cost. In their charge, roughly 80 New Yorkers were

killed or wounded. This number was more than 25 percent of all Union losses in the battle. This new tract of land is the bloodiest part of the Bristoe Station battlefield for the Union army.

After the initial Confederate attack was bloodily repulsed by the Union infantry and artil-

lery behind the railroad, more Confederates reached the field, threatening to overwhelm the smaller Union force. A buildup of Union artillery (22 guns) on and adjacent to these 22 acres helped prevent another Confederate attack. At nightfall, the Union troops quietly continued on from Bristoe Station to the safety of their lines at Centreville.

Today, many of the terrain features that soldiers fought across and wrote about still exist on this newest addition to Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park. Currently, the new property is being restored to its wartime appearance. Plans include adding the property to a driving tour of Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park, where visitors will be able to walk trails on the battlefield interspersed with interpretive wayside markers.

Stay tuned for more information and updates.

Kevin Pawlak
Site Manager
Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park



Image Spotlight

Prince William County's "Newest" Historic Homes: The Ned Distiller House & Ashe House

In December 2024, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors allocated funding to purchase two properties in the Brentsville Magisterial District for historic preservation. The properties, known as the Ned Distiller House (circa 1810) and the adjoining Ashe Property (circa 1800), span approximately one acre and are located within the Buckland Historic Overlay District.

Ned Distiller was a freed African American and a skilled worker who took his name from the Buckland Distillery. According to historic records, beginning in 1814, Ned Distiller was taxed as the owner of town Lot 13 in Buckland, on which he built a house five years later. This makes the home a rare example of a historic structure linked to a free African American owning property in the first half of the 19th century. The Ashe House also contains a historically significant structure that was built around 1800 with later additions.

Since acquiring the historic buildings, they have been cleaned out, stabilized to prevent further deterioration and vegetation removed around the buildings. The next steps in preservation are to conduct research and compile a historic structures report. This will help staff determine what is original and the next steps needed to preserve the structures and eventual open them to the public as a part of the Buckland Historic Center.

For more information about the future Buckland Historic Center and these two historic buildings, please visit www.pwcva.gov/departments/historic-preservation/buckland-historic-center.

Paige Gibbons Backus

Site Manager
Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre



Ned Distiller House Exterior, Spring 2025

Ned Distiller House, Interior, Spring 2025



Ashe House, Exterior, Winter 2024

Ashe House, Interior, Spring 2025





History Corner

Two Yachts for Admiral Black

The *Aviza* and the *Valkyrie* were two ships that Richard Blackburn Black had commissioned for personal use. The architect for the *Aviza* was renowned naval historian and architect, William A. Baker, while the builder was James Richardson. But what about the *Valkyrie*? Why did the Admiral want these two specific vessels?

Launched in Cambridge, MD in 1960, the *Aviza* was owned and enjoyed by the Black family for many years. This vessel was a recreation of a shallop, a type of small sailing craft that cruised along the Potomac and even Neabsco Creek throughout colonial times. Captain John Smith sailed along the waters near Rippon Lodge Historic Site in a shallop back in 1600. Captain Smith's shallop carried 15 men, was probably about 30 feet long and 8 feet wide. The *Aviza* was 26 feet and 10 inches long, its beam (width) was 8 feet and 2 inches, and the draft was 3 feet 4 inches.

Shallops from the colonial era were versatile, shallow-draft boats used for coastal trade, fishing, and as ship tenders. The term "shallop" covered various designs, from simple open rowboats to larger, two-masted, gaff-rigged vessels. Some were built ruggedly to withstand rough use, while others were lightly framed for speed. Shallops could either be rowed with oars or sailed with one or two masts. The ships had shallow hulls,



Aviza

Courtesy MIT Museum, William Baker Collection.

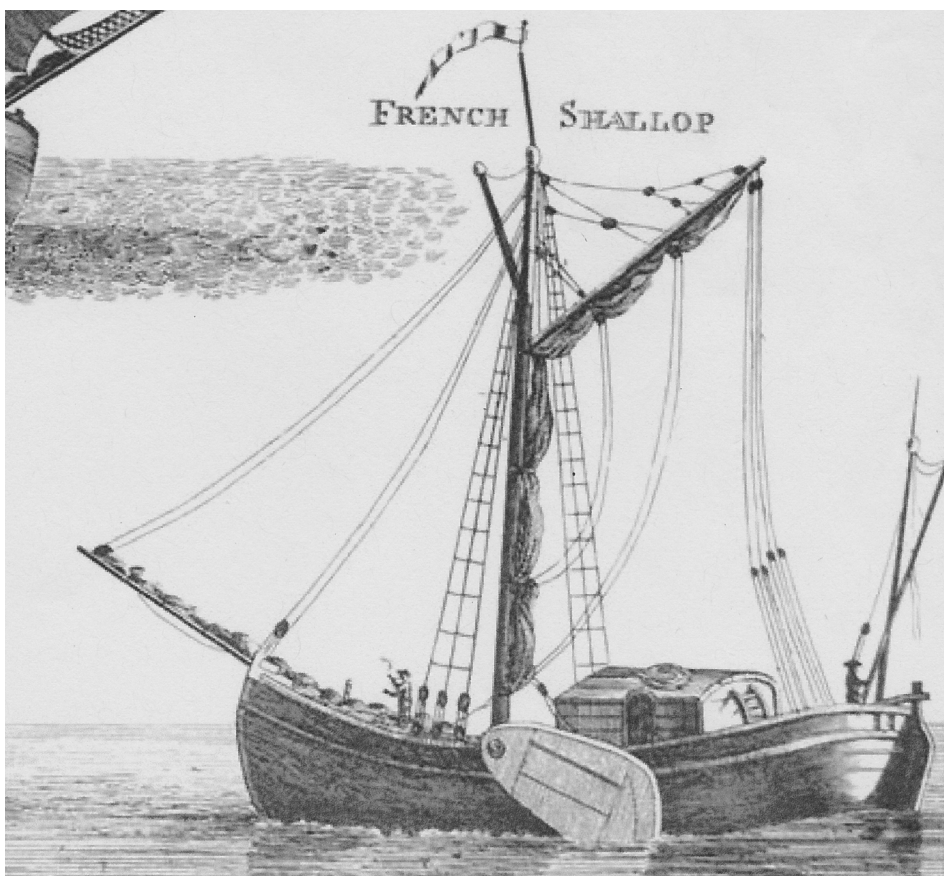
which allowed the boat to navigate coastal waters, inland waterways, and up narrow creeks where larger vessels could not go.

Admiral Black deeded the *Aviza*

to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, who in turn sold the vessel to a private owner in the 1980s. From there, where the *Aviza* may sail remains a mystery.



Valkyrie Halifax Canada
Courtesy of Global News, Canada.



French-Shallop
Courtesy of Professor Emeritus David Hill, School of Fine Art,
History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, 2016.

But not as much as the Blacks second vessel, the *Valkyrie*.

Admiral Black had sailed on a very important vessel in his earlier years for Admiral Byrd, known as the *Bear*, a retrofitted brigantine-rigged former whaler and revenue cutter, on his first voyage to Antarctica. The *Valkyrie* was constructed in Benton Grey's Yard in Sambro head, Canada. While the *Aviza* was a fair size vessel, this new ship was even bigger at 46 feet long.

According to *Confessions of a Boat Builder* by James Douglas Rosborough, for the *Valkyrie's* building, Richard had "...acquired oak removed from the U.S.S *Constitution* during a recent re-fitting and had used the historic material to fashion gun carriages for small cannon to be used on the *Valkyrie*. He had located an actual signal gun from a castle in Italy, using it as a foundry pattern for the one inch bore bronze cannons." The author continued to say the build was a year-long task that the Admiral visited often. He wanted the ship to as authentic as possible to the colonial period.

Richard's wife, *Aviza* christened the ship at the launch in 1969, and it was sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the Pirate's Cove Marina in Galesville, MD, with the crew consisting of the many "builders, her riggers, myself, and Dick(Richard's nickname), who was jauntily attired in his best yachting togs." The voyage was covered by CBS News.

Unfortunately, we have not confirmed where the *Valkyrie* went after Admiral Black's death. The shipbuilder, James Rosborough passed in April 2020 due to COVID-19 complications. Hopefully both the *Valkyrie* and the *Aviza* are still being enjoyed and sailed on the seas somewhere.

Jessica Maria Alicea
Site Manager, Rippon Lodge Historic Site

Preservation Corner

Purcell Family Cemetery

Scout projects are an important part of our local historic preservation efforts. Some have built or improved trails, others have installed benches, or recreated a 19th century chicken coop. Recently, Logan Jakob, of Troop 924B, completed a new fence around the Purcell family plot in Brentsville to enclose the graves of James, Catharine, and Lucien Purcell. James and Lucien died in 1867, followed by Catharine in 1869.

The Purcells were very prominent residents in Brentsville, having lived in the area before the town was even created. For many years, James and Catharine ran the Brentsville Tavern, an archaeological ruin today. Lucien was a Civil War veteran, having



Scout Logan Jakob

served in Company A, 49th Virginia Infantry, mustered into service in town. Their graves lie behind the site office today but were part of the family property at the time.

At some point, their gravestones were removed and the original locations lost. Purcell descendants several years ago donated money for a ground penetrating radar survey to try

and relocate the grave shafts. Logan, consulting with OHP staff, calculated the size, acquired the materials, and constructed a new fence to enclose the Purcell gravestones.

Over three days in September, volunteers dug, cut, and built a fence to enclose the tomb-

stones, which can now be seen by park visitors. Great work by Logan and Troop 924B! OHP is now seeking a grant to conserve tombstones and re-right them, allowing us to better tell the story of this prominent Brentsville family. Preservation is always a work in progress.

John McDonald

Site Interpreter

Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre



Register Today For Our Upcoming Programs

Advanced tickets may be purchased online at: www.pwcparks.info/hptickets
www.pwcparks.org/HistoricPrograms

OCTOBER

The Funeral of Col. Thomas Blackburn at Rippon Lodge

Bristoe Station Luminary

162nd Anniversary of the Battle of Bristoe Station

Spirits of Brentsville

Road To Victory at Rippon Lodge

Ben Lomond Campfire Ghost Stories

NOVEMBER

History Through the Senses: A Special Education Day at Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre

Potomac People: Indigenous Tribes of Eastern Prince William

Prince William Lecture Series: Vigilante Justice in Prince William County by Kate Bitely

Cook an Old Time Thanksgiving Meal Workshop

DECEMBER

Gingerbread House Contest

Holidays through the Ages at Rippon Lodge

Historic Holiday Concert at Brentsville





OHP News



Staff News

David and Brenda Born attended and graduated from the Northern Lights Santa Academy in Atlanta, Georgia in August. Among the topics studied were storytelling, marketing, hair and beard care, working with agents, improvisation, basic American Sign Language, making visits to Special Needs Children, using props during visits, craft ideas, and more. David and Brenda paid

for the school themselves as well as travel expenses and have volunteered to assist the school with education of the history of Santa and Mrs. Claus in the United

States, and crafting in future gatherings of the academy. David and Brenda currently portray Santa and Mrs. Claus professionally at historic sites such as Ruckersville and Strausburg Emporium, Historic Belle Grove in Middletown, Historic Blenheim in Fairfax County, as well as private and public visits to homes, restaurants, and was invited this year to wear the Coca-Cola Santa uniform as was worn in the 1940's and visit



Dave Born as Civil War Santa

Brentsville Courthouse Historic Centre.

Dave Born
Site Interpreter
Ben Lomond Historic Site

Foundation Update

The Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation is coordinating the fundraising drive for the Prince William County Revolutionary War Memorial at Williams Ordinary. This project aims to construct a memorial to Prince William County residents that fought or lived during the American Revolutionary period (1775-1783). We acknowledge this founding time of our nation impacted all people of Prince William, with no regard to gender, race, free, enslaved or economic status.

This founding generation was pivotal in establishing the freedoms we have today and the community we call home. The memorial will provide a lasting tribute and will include interpretive panels to expand on the stories of Prince William County during the American Revolution.

Prince William County has memorials to the Civil War, World War I, World War II and all other modern wars. The Revolutionary War Memorial will commemorate the founding generation, educate people

today of their sacrifice and serve as a local tourist attraction. The memorial will be part of the Prince William County Revolutionary War Trail, a new trail linking sites with Revolutionary War history for the upcoming 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution. Thus far, the Foundation has raised nearly \$50,000 for this project. To learn more or donate today please visit www.preservepw.org.

Bill Backus
Curator/Preservationist
Office of Historic Preservation



Take a Sip of History:
Ghost Stories of Prince William County
Oct. 1
6:30–8 p.m.
FREE
Donations Welcome

Prince William County has a diverse and dramatic history since its creation in 1731. In those nearly 300 years, many unusual and tragic events have happened, and it is said that spirits of the unquiet dead still linger at the places they knew in life. Grab a pint and kick off the spooky season with a night of local ghost stories from throughout Prince William County's history.


This is a free joint program between Water's End Brewery and Prince William Historic Preservation; it will take place at the Lake Ridge location at Water's End Brewery.

Historic Prince William is an event sponsor for Take a Sip of History programs.

PRINCE WILLIAM
 Historic Preservation



Water's End Brewery 12425
 Dillingham Square
 Lake Ridge, VA 22192

Take a Sip of History:
Legends of Prince William County
Oct. 23
6:30–8 p.m.
FREE
Donations Welcome

Prince William County's past is filled with larger-than-life characters, mysterious tales, and legendary events that shaped the region we know today. From forgotten folk heroes to enduring local myths and tales, come explore the legends of Prince William County.


Enjoy a cold pint and hear fascinating—and sometimes unbelievable—stories from Prince William County's rich and storied history.

This is a joint program between Eavesdrop Brewery, Prince William Historic Preservation, and Historic Prince William. Program is free and no pre-registration is necessary. Questions? Call 703-792-1731.

PRINCE WILLIAM
 Historic Preservation



www.pwcva.gov/history HistoricPreservation@pwcgov.org
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