



Historic Perspectives

Preservation of Prince William County's Historic Resources

Fall 2026 Contents

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PRINCE WILLIAM

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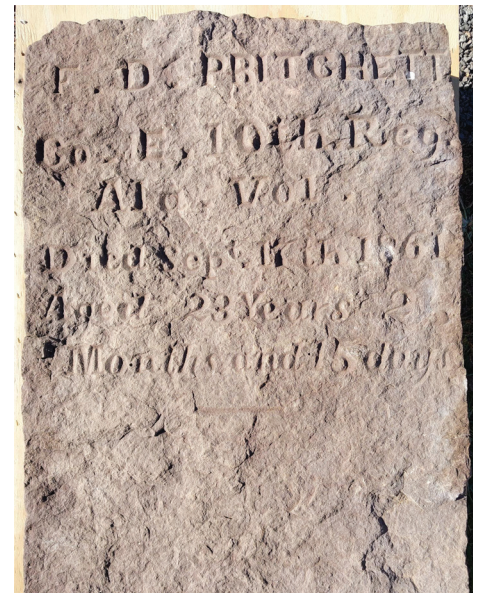


Missing Bristoe Station Headstones Return to Battlefield

Visitors to the 10th Alabama Cemetery at Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park will find little that resembles a traditional cemetery. The ground is not green and manicured, there are few headstones, and those that do stand bear no inscriptions. Instead, shallow pits arranged in rows denote where the remains of approximately 100 men from the central and northeast sections of Alabama lie, 600 miles away from home.

The 10th Alabama Infantry arrived at Bristoe Station in early August 1861 and stayed for just under two months. The soldiers of the regiment dubbed their new home Camp Jones, named for the fallen colonel of the 4th Alabama Infantry at First Manassas, Colonel Egbert Jones.

While they drilled and performed other camp functions (cleaning, cooking, reading, writing, and otherwise entertaining themselves), an unknown enemy lingered in their camp: disease. Many soldiers lived in less populated rural areas before the war and soldier life with so many other people was still new for these men. Now, with thousands of soldiers from five states inhabiting Bristoe Station, soldiers were exposed to highly infectious measles, dysentery, typhoid, consumption, and more that crippled the regiment. Less than half the members attended one drill in August; the rest were sick.



F. Dillard Prichett Headstone, OHP

Though the regiment did not participate in any battles at this time, the martial beating of a drum in a funeral procession and the crack of muskets over an open grave pierced the otherwise still air. Thoughts of death worried many Alabamans. Lieutenant George Whatley told his wife, "I find so many deaths in the army that I am sometimes sad lest, peradventure, my lot might be to die on the bloody field, I however, much prefer that, to lingering death of camp disease."

Initially, cedar headboards identified the occupant of each grave. By 1883, a visitor to the burial ground recounted, "Many of the boards are gone and some had no name while others had been worn too indistinct to read."

Twenty-six years later, a visiting veteran of the regiment,

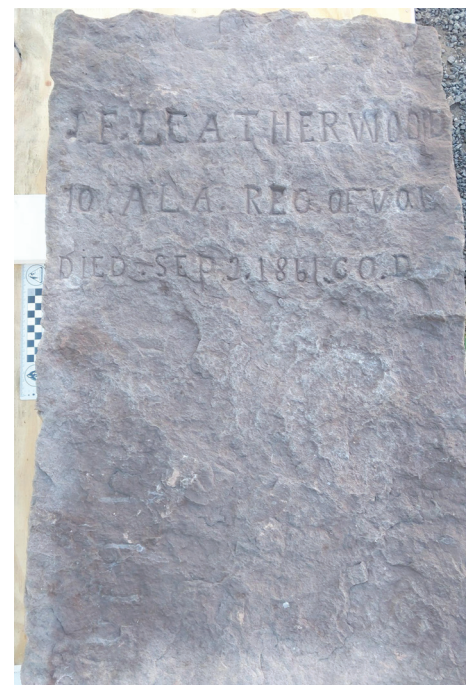
James Coleman, said, "The cedar posts that were placed there as a directory of each grave were so badly obliterated that I was unable to make out the names." Coleman called on his fellow Alabamans to "contribute something in their memory by erecting a monument in their honor." A regimental monument never went up at Bristoe Station, but it is possible that individual families commissioned stone markers to withstand the weather and mark their loved ones' graves for decades to come.

Ultimately, four chiseled stone markers stood over the graves of privates Thomas A. Barr, Jesse Franklin Leatherwood, Jesse Frank Nabors, and F. Dillard Pritchett. The origin of these markers is

unknown, but they likely came after the cedar markers rotted away and vanished. In the later 20th century, as development surrounded the Bristoe Station battlefield, the family who owned the cemetery at the time removed these headstones to prevent vandalism or theft. In November 2025, the family returned these incredible artifacts to Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park, where they will eventually be displayed for visitors to see. Currently, they are in storage as plans are made about how to properly present them in the park.

Kevin Pawlak

Site Manager, Ben Lomond Historic Site and Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park



Jesse Franklin Leatherwood Headstone, OHP



Moving 10th AL Headstones, OHP

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Image Spotlight

Dendrochronology at Buckland Historic Center

Earlier this summer, researchers conducted a dendrochronology survey at the Ned Distiller House at Buckland Historic Center. Dendrochronology, commonly known as tree-ring dating, is the scientific process of analyzing annual growth rings in wood to determine absolute dates and reconstruct environmental history. Trees in temperate and seasonal regions produce one distinct ring each year, composed of light-colored “earlywood” formed during rapid spring growth and darker “latewood” created as the growing season slows. Researchers take full cross-sections from historic wooden structures, usually in areas that are not typically repaired. The preferred sample locations are from joists or roof



Ned Distiller House, August 2026, OHP

beams. Once collected, the individual cell structures and ring boundaries of these core samples are examined under a high-powered microscope.

The core analytical phase relies on a technique called cross-dating. Because climate factors like rainfall and temperature affect growth, trees in the same region develop matching patterns of wide rings during favorable years, and narrow rings during dry or harsh years. Scientists measure these ring-width patterns and match the distinctive sequences of younger samples with overlapping

sequences from older trees. By compiling ring patterns from living trees, historic buildings, and ancient subfossil wood, dendrochronologists build continuous, master chronologies that stretch back thousands of years. This allows them to pinpoint the calendar year a specific ring was formed, providing precise dates for archaeological sites, historical wooden artifacts, and past climate events. We will get and share the final report this winter.

Bill Backus
Preservationist/Curator



Taking a sample from the Ned Distiller House, May 2026, OHP

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Preservation Happenings

Prince William County's Tombstone Repository

Nestled behind James J. McCoart Administration Building is Prince William County's only cemetery that contains no human remains. Technically speaking, it's not a cemetery at all. The Prince William County Tombstone Repository currently contains 18 headstones of individuals with no associated burials.

In the 1980s, the Prince William County Historical Commission noted that there was no storage area for historic headstones without clear provenance. Two individuals on the Historical Commission at the time, Leslie Land-Fravel and Janie MacDonald, spearheaded the creation of the repository. They noted a long-standing need for a repository, and worked with then-County Executive Bob Noe, as well as the Board of County Supervisors, to establish a protected site for the stones. The effort took years, but the tombstone repository was finally established at the county complex and dedicated in 1988. The collection began as a couple of headstones, and at one time ballooned to over 30 individual markers.

But why would headstones ever be separated from the graves they marked? Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon occurrence. Some of the repository's headstones are illegible, and if moved from their original locations, usually impossible to return them. Others were intentionally stolen or vandalized, and the

Property record for the stolen headstone of Blanche Irene Warring (1924-1934), recovered in 1987. Warring's headstone is still in the Tombstone Repository, RELIC

records for the repository include police reports about these stolen stones. In some cases, when the headstones were initially lost, the family replaced them and didn't want the original headstone back. Many localities deal with similar situations; however, these artifacts are typically stored in police evidence rooms or held by other historic organizations. Prince William County's solution to this problem is unique and remains an example for other counties of how to store and care for these homeless headstones.

There are reunion stories, including that of the headstone of William C. Hershey (1842-1902). Thanks to the research and work of Bill Olson of Historic Prince William (now the Prince William County Historical Society), the stone was returned to Hershey's gravesite at Greenwood Presbyterian Church in 2013. Researchers made the match when they discovered a "William Hershey"

noted in Ron Turner's surveys of Greenwood Cemetery in 1994 and 2001.

Other stories are more complicated. In 2006, a man named Tuffy Hicks discovered a headstone for Martha Nash King (1850-1908) in a soil pile in Stafford County. Researchers confirmed through an obituary that Nash was buried in a cemetery in Dumfries, but that cemetery no longer exists, and the burials were moved to different locations in the 1950s. Don Wilson (1943 - 2023) of the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center (RELIC) traced the history of the former cemetery and the King family in Dumfries. While Martha V. (Nash) King is noted on a family footstone in Glenwood Cemetery in Washington, D.C., the original headstone remains at the tombstone repository.

Some of the mysteries of the repository may never be solved. The inscriptions have faded over

time, and no amount of research will connect them to their original sites. And sometimes, as is the case with Martha Nash King, even legible headstones remain. A 1990 Journal Messenger article about the repository described the case of Susan A. Strathmann (1860–1924). Strathmann’s stone, which lived for a time in Leslie Land-Fravel’s backyard, is still in the repository. According to the article, “no other documents have been found to give any information about her.” While this may have been the case in the late 1980s, the ease of online genealogical research in the 21st century has made many of these records more accessible. These records indicate that Strathmann has a marker in Prospect Hill Cemetery in Washington, D.C., and it’s possible that the family did not want the original marker returned. As the Tombstone Repository nears its 50th anniversary, renewed research efforts will be focused on cataloging the remaining headstones, consolidating records, and potentially identifying descendants.

Although the repository is open to the public, it’s difficult to find, and is utilized occasionally by county employees. The Journal Messenger article quoted Sharon Pandak, County Attorney at the time, who noted that “it’s quite pleasant, actually,” stating that she only discovered the repository when she took a break one weekend. The tombstone repository is a quiet, park-like space dedicated to the remembrance of these individuals. It has been many years since a headstone has been added to its collection, but the space is there should the need arise again.

Many thanks to Ron Turner (local historian) and Emma Dietrich (Cemetery Preservation Coordinator) for their assistance



Prince William County Tombstone Repository, 2026, OHP

with research and primary documents for this article. To get the full list of tombstones in the repository and/or to assist with genealogical research associ-

ated with the headstones, please contact Emma at edietrich@pwcgov.org.

Lauren Maloy
Historic Communities Coordinator

Fall Programs

Myths and Legends of Rippon Lodge
163rd Anniversary of the Battle of Bristoe Station
Bristoe Station Luminary
Ghost Hunters Showing
Ghost Tour of Brentsville Courthouse
Road To Victory at Rippon Lodge
Ben Lomond Campfire Ghost Stories
Drinks of the Revolution
Revolution on the Road Bus Tour
1950s True Crime Prince William
Potomac People: Indigenous Tribes of Eastern Prince William
Cook an Old Time Thanksgiving Meal Workshop
Gingerbread Houses at Rippon Lodge
Holidays through the Ages at Rippon Lodge
Historic Holiday Concert at Brentsville

Children under six free.

Please note: Advanced tickets for Historic Preservation programs can be purchased online at pwcgov.org/hptickets.
(A ticket is required for anyone over age two.)



The History of the Rollins Farm

The recently acquired Rollins property at Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park has a history that expands beyond the Civil War years and includes an example of a postwar house that helps tell the story of Bristoe Station after 1863.

On August 12, 2025, Prince William County acquired the 22-acre Rollins Farm on the south side of the Norfolk-Southern Railroad at Bristoe Station. Union troops held the ground here during the Battle of Bristoe Station on October 14, 1863.

The Rollins farmhouse that stands on the property is a quintessential late 19th-century Virginia farmhouse in the upright and wing design. This form originated in the mid-1800s to represent a two-story upright or temple with a single-story wing. By the latter half of the 19th century, farmhouses across Virginia took on the two-story wing for practical purposes of having more space – just as we see at the Rollins farmhouse.

The proportions of the house are roughly 540 square feet per floor with a 6 ½ foot deep front sitting porch that spans the 20-foot south wall of the wing. One clue to the house's upright and wing design is the intersection of the two rooflines: the roof of the wing always intersects the upright below the peak of the upright roofline. This detail is often omitted by modern builders who build the two rooflines on the same plane.



Modern Buildings on Rollins Tract, OHP

The previous owner of the farm related that the farmhouse sits on an even older house foundation. The older house was built in the 1880s. When the current house was built, the old house was dragged into the field several yards north of the foundation and used as a barn.

While the current approach to the house is from the south, the original front entrance was on the north wall. A two-story octagonal addition that sits over a foundation that served as the original front porch along the north wall. The house used to be entered from the north because a railroad easement crossed near where the historic corncrib sits on the Bristoe Station Battlefield today. In 1922, when the Norfolk-Southern Railroad added roughly three feet to the height of the original 1852 railroad bed, the easement was eliminated. This is when the front of the house changed to the south and the driveway to the Rollins farmhouse became the only access. This will be the future driveway for visitors to access some of the



Union lines at Bristoe Station Battlefield and part of the Kettle Run battlefield.

The Rollins family farms were central to the story of Bristoe Station for most of the 20th century. When the Great Depression hit, the Rollins family bought as much land as they could afford from a local land baron. The Rollins' farm, gas station, post-WWII Army Corps of Engineer ponds, and silos defined the rural landscape of the village of Bristow for nearly 100 years. In 2000, Centex Homes purchased 340 acres from the Rollins family, 140 acres of which became Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park.

Future visitors to the newest section of the park will take the Rollins farm driveway past the positions of the Union 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery, Battery A, to a small parking area with interpretive signs and walking trails. The property will be restored to its appearance in 1863 during the Battle of Bristoe Station.

Lance Russell
Historic Interpreter, Bristoe Station
Battlefield Heritage Park



Metal Detecting Archeology Workshop Participants, OHP

Interpreter David Born and his wife Brenda attended the Northern Lights Santa Academy in August in Atlanta, Georgia along with 165 other Santas, Mrs. Clauses, and Elves. They received their Associate Reindeer Degree.



Interpreter Nathan McDonald visited the NS Savannah in August, the only American nuclear-powered commercial vessel. This historic site was the winner of the 2025 Maryland Preservation Award for Outstanding Stewardship and will hopefully soon become a regular museum ship open to the public!

Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park Manager Kevin Pawlak and approximately 40 archaeologists participated in the Advanced Metal Detecting for the Archaeologist (AMDA) workshop at Bristoe Station Battlefield Heri-

tage Park from June 26-28. This class provides current archaeologists with hands-on experience in the best practices of metal detecting. The class searched for Civil War artifacts near a possible artillery position in the park.

Foundation Update

This summer, the Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation successfully completed another project. In time for the celebration for the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation, the Foundation helped lead the effort to create a memorial in Prince William County for the "Revolutionary Generation." Located at Williams Ordinary in Dumfries, Virginia the new Prince William County Revolutionary War Memorial honors the county's role in the American Revolution, featuring interpretive markers and a simple obelisk honoring Prince William County's citizens between the years of 1774-1788. The memorial is part of a larger effort to revitalize Williams Ordinary into a cultural center and museum for the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.



Revolutionary War Memorial in Dumfries, VA, OHP