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Potomac News

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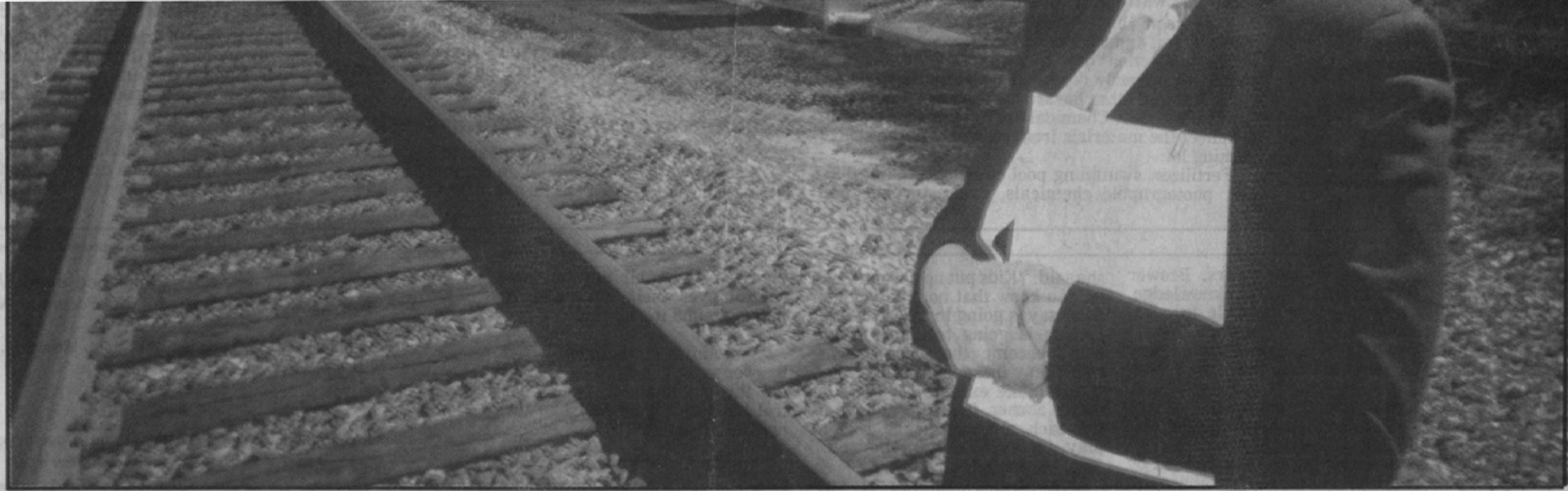
WESTERN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

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PROFILES



Janet Townsend, Prince William County archaeologist, stands on the tracks at Bristow, the site of the Civil War Battle of Bristoe Station. *By Ron Sinfeit—Potomac News*



Janet Townsend, Prince William County archaeologist, stands on the tracks at Bristow, the site of the Civil War Battle of Bristoe Station.

By Ron Siefert—Potomac News

County's forgotten battle recalled; historic district status sought for Bristow

By ELLEN MITCHELL
of the Potomac News

The 1.8-square-mile area, known then as Bristoe Station, was the site of the third and last Civil War battle fought in Prince William County.

It followed the Battle of Second Manassas by 14 months, and many historians agree the Bristoe Station battle was a precursor of events that would occur during the last years of the war.

Aside from a few post-Civil War buildings clustered where the railroad tracks cross Va. 619, Bristow remains much as it was 125 years ago.

Trains continue to carry freight and supplies as they traverse the low rolling hills and land remains mostly in agricultural use.

The soldiers who camped there throughout the war buried their dead and moved on to fight in other battles. Many were killed seven months later when the two armies

met again at the Wilderness in Spotsylvania County. A small, unmarked and unplatted cemetery contains the graves of men from the 10th Alabama which was camped in the area early in the war.

A ceremony to commemorate what has come to be called Prince William's forgotten battle is set Saturday at the Brentsville Historic District, a few miles down Bristow Road from the site of the fighting.

Author William Henderson and historian Michael Miller will present two slide lectures, at 1 and 3 p.m. Miller is curator of the U.S. Marine Corps Museum.

Henderson, a professor of history at Richard Bland College, will autograph his book, "The Road to Bristoe Station," published in 1987.

The commemoration is sponsored by the Friends of the Manassas Museum Inc., Manassas National Battlefield Park and the Prince William County Historical

Commission.

The Brentsville Historic District can be reached by taking Va. 234 from Manassas toward Dumfries. Approximately 3 miles outside Manassas take a right turn on Brentsville Road. Follow Brentsville Road to its intersection with Va. 619.

The Brentsville Courthouse, part of the historic district, was the fourth courthouse in Prince William County.

The battlefield site can be reached by traveling south on Va. 28 from Manassas for 3 miles and then east on Va. 619 for a mile. Va. 619, also called Bristow Road crosses the railroad at Bristow. The battle area stretched from Broad Run near Manassas Airport to Kettle Run about two miles south of Va. 619. The land is all privately held.

Prince William County has nominated the 1,162-acre Bristow Battlefield site to the National



Bristoe Station site has been nominated to National Register of Historic Places.

Register of Historic Places, said Janet Townsend, county archaeologist.

The actual placement of the property on the National Register is some months down the road, Ms. Townsend said. First the state will review the application, and property owners will vote on whether or not they wish to be included in a historic district. Fifty-one percent

of property owners must approve the designation before Bristow is named to the National Register.

Since there are no buildings on the site that predate the Civil War, there will be no restrictions placed on what use the property can be put to if it is placed on the National Register, Ms. Townsend said.

None of the existing houses or structures in the district is known

to have been standing at the time of the war, Ms. Townsend said. According to one report, there was a small building used as a hotel in August 1962, she said. There are also references in documents to surrounding houses and farms and an Irish hut, not too far from the railroad tracks.

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It is likely that some of the houses that predate 1900 were built upon the foundations of homes that stood prior to and in the early years of the war, Ms. Townsend said.

Bristow is threatened by encroaching development, which is progressing south along Bristow Road, Ms. Townsend said. The area of the district south of Nokesville Road, east of Bristow Road and north of the railroad easement is already zoned light industrial. The small triangle of land between Kettle Run, Aden Road and Nokesville Road is zoned heavy industrial. The remainder of the district, about two-thirds of the land area, is zoned agricultural.

Historians believe that the Battle of Bristoe Station was a significant Civil War battle. Over 100,000 Union and Confederate soldiers, more troops than were involved in the Battle of First Manassas, participated in the Bristoe campaign, Ms. Townsend said.

Gen. A. P. Hill commanded the Confederate army at the Battle of Bristoe, Ms. Townsend wrote in the application for placement on the Historic Register. In a four-hour period, 2,000 Confederate and Union soldiers were killed or wounded.

Neither army could claim victory at Bristoe and neither would concede defeat. Militarily, the battle was inconclusive as are the opinions of historians writing about it, Ms. Townsend wrote.

While Gen. Robert E. Lee remained in command of the Bristoe Station area for a few days after the fighting, he was eventually pushed south by advancing Union soldiers. The losses in men and guns were devastating to the South. Thirty-three of the 27th North Carolina's 36 officers were killed, wounded or captured, William Henderson wrote in his book on the battle.

Many men hid in ruined buildings near the railroad and surrendered when the two Confederate brigades retreated. Scores of enlisted men and officers hugged the ground in front of the Union lines and surrendered when they had the opportunity. Confederate Gen. A.P. Hill lost 1,378 men. In contrast