

Brentsville Neighbors
April 2008

***That Other Building in Brentsville:
The Hall Cabin?
Part Two – The Rest of the Story...***

Last month's article questioned the designation of the log structure now at Brentsville as the "Hall Cabin." Our research in preparation for the restoration work uncovered some interesting answers. We can say with confidence that the answer is both yes and no!

Since its relocation to Brentsville in 2000, the log building once owned by John Hall has been called the Hall Cabin. This is a common mistake that is made by most people when referring to this type of structure. Our building is a large, two-story, moderately sized house that would have been cheaply and easily built. Frame houses were more expensive and less common. In the early 19th century, most Americans lived in one-story houses that were half the size of our log house. Contrary to common preception, most log houses in the eastern United States were covered with siding. This protected the building from the elements and gave the impression of a more fashionable frame house. Log cabins were usually temporary consisting of only one floor and were far less architecturally significant.

We know that the house was used as a kitchen and storage building for a modern addition. This information and much more has been told to us by Mrs. Hazel Martino, a former resident. She has been essential in helping us put the pieces of the puzzle together.

Now that we have determined that our building is not a log cabin, but a log house, who built this house and when? To answer these questions, we have to look at all avenues of evidence.

Physical Evidence

There are several clues in our building that tell us the history of its construction. Though many changes and additions have

occurred over the past 150 plus years, much of the original fabric of the building remains. Looking at this fabric can give us an approximation of the time of construction. One main original component of the building is the logs themselves. We can see that they were shaped from felled tress with a broad axe. The broad axe was used to "square" or "hew" a log in a precise manner, not haphazardly. This hand hewn method was used throughout the early 19th century before mills were prevalent.

Another piece of evidence is the nails used in the original woodwork. Most of these are cut nails which began to be used in 1800. Looking at the head of the nail also tells us more about the date. Our nails are very flat, indicating they were stamped not hammered out. Stamped cut nails become prevalent after 1820.

Finally, most of the rafters for the second floor are original to the building. Looking at these boards closely, you can easily identify the cut marks. By matching the cut marks with the saw technology being used in the 19th century, we have another clue to help us date the construction of the building. The cut marks on the rafters are fine and at a slight angle. These marks indicate that a pit saw was used to cut these boards. This practice was very common from the 1600's to 1860. After 1850, saw mills began to pop up in many locations, thus it became cheaper to take your lumber to the mill to be cut. Using these physical clues, we can determine that our log house was probably built between 1820 and 1860.

Documentary Evidence

County records can be a helpful source of information when tracing property ownership. Aerial photographs and historical

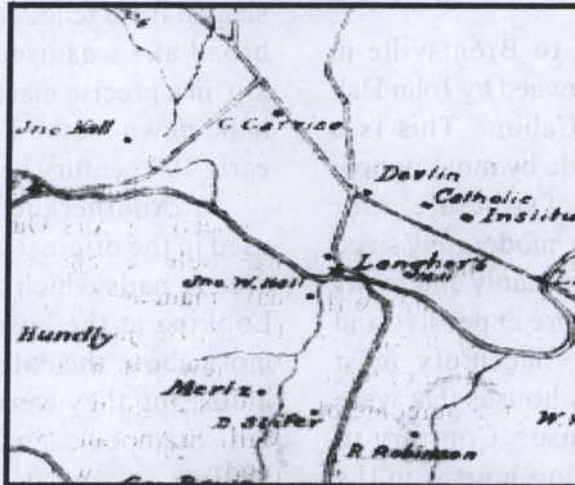
(Continued from page 2)

maps help determine the original location of our building. By using the County Mapper on Prince William County's website, you can determine the address or parcel number of all properties located in the County. With this information, you can do a reverse deed search at the County Archives located at the Bull Run Library or at the Judicial Center. Other sources are court cases and wills. A deed search can help you identify who owned the property, but not necessarily when a building was built on that property. Our "cabin" was located in the Dumbarton section of the Braemar Development. With the research experience of Prince William County's Virginiana Librarian, Don Wilson, the deed search identified a chain of ownership from 1837. Samuel Haislip owned the property and deeded

it to John Hall in 1885. John Hall married Samuel Haislip's daughter, Sofia, in 1874 and it seems that John Hall acquired the "cabin" through her family. This information refutes the belief that John Hall's father built the "cabin" in the early 19th century.

So, now that we know the property was in the Haislip family, when was our "cabin" built? By knowing the owner of the property, we can go through the tax records and try to identify when the property was upgraded significantly, indicating construction of a building. When looking at the tax records for Samuel Haislip and this property, we can determine that between 1850 and 1853, the property saw a large increase in value. The value of this land (197 ½ acres) in 1850 was \$740. By 1853, this same land was valued at \$1769, indicating a large improvement, i.e.

a house. It is with certainty that we can say our log house was built by Samuel Haislip, on his 197 ½ acre farm between the years 1850-1853. So, to answer our question, is this the Hall Cabin, we can answer that for one, it is not considered a log cabin, but rather a log house. Furthermore, though John Hall did own the building at one time, its original owner was Samuel Haislip, the father-in law of John Hall and he built the house around 1853.



A hand drawn map showing Hall Property

What's Next?

The next step in creating a historically accurate space is to furnish the building. Using tax records of farms the same size as this one; we can determine what may have been in the house in the 1850s. Common furniture, tools and implements will be added over time which will all be reproduction allowing the

building to be an interactive learning space for the public. This summer the Historic Preservation Division will undertake a more scientific process of dating several of our buildings. This process, called Dendrochronology, dates the tree rings in the timber of buildings to determine a 10 year window of construction. Feel free to contact the site if you are interested in learning more or to help us with this exciting project, now called the Haislip-Hall Farm!

Thank you to Don Wilson, Becky Cumins, Justin Patton, Mrs. Hazel Martino and Morgan Breeden. Without their help and research the true story of this building never would have been known.



Joe and Ora Keys



Left - David Eanes and Earl Parker work on a fence to protect the garden from deer

WHERE WILD THINGS LIVE



Bloodroot

Sanguinaria canadensis Linne
(See page 6)



Aerial Map of Hall Home location



A magnified view of the circle in the map to the left