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## County Drops Bid to Save Mount Atlas

By Lisa Rein  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Wednesday, May 31, 2000; Page V01

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After spending \$1.4 million to acquire Rippon Lodge in an effort to jump-start its historic preservation efforts, Prince William County has decided against saving Mount Atlas, a Colonial house north of Haymarket.

Instead, county planners will conduct an archaeological dig at the 10-acre site this summer, inviting volunteers to help unearth what could be historically significant artifacts.

"We want to get in and document what's there and study the grounds to see what they tell us," said Debrarae Karnes, a county planner who oversees historic preservation efforts. The first of eight Saturday digs is scheduled for this weekend.

Mount Atlas, built in 1795 on 20,000 acres, had remained in the same family from 1835 until this year, when the last of its six owners, Barton Padgett, died.

The 2 1/2-story frame house, set back 100 feet on a gravel road, has a three-story stone chimney. A distinctive, hand-painted mural in the living room was sold at auction last year. Padgett and his family had not lived in the house since the 1970s, when they built another one next to it.

As Padgett's health was failing last year, the conservator of his estate offered to donate the house to the county to restore it, provided it did not remain on the property on Mount Atlas Lane, Karnes said. The estate plans to put the property up for sale for development and thinks the land is worth more as an empty lot, she said.

The county's historical commission and local planners had high hopes to move the house, perhaps adding it to the complex of buildings, including the historic courthouse, the county is restoring in Brentsville. But Karnes said the move's cost was estimated at \$240,000. And that's before any repair work, a potentially expensive project. The house needs considerable work and its floors are collapsing, she said.

By contrast, the county bought Rippon Lodge, the former Woodbridge estate believed to be the oldest Potomac River plantation from Colonial times still standing, from a private owner last month in almost mint condition.

"The county originally saw [the opportunity to take over Mount Atlas] as

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a great opportunity because the house is very significant," Karnes said. "But it doesn't look like the county will pay to move it."

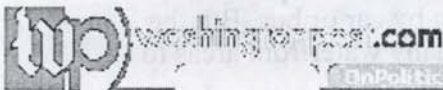
Before losing Mount Atlas to history, preservationists have decided to search for history in the soil around it. They've hired a professional archaeologist for \$10,000 to oversee dozens of volunteers who will be trained in excavation work. Among the artifacts they hope to find are a grave rumored to be that of a Native American and a kitchen and servants' quarters on the grounds.

Excavations have become more common in Prince William in recent years as the county asks developers building on property with potential historic value to conduct digs before bulldozing. Some surprising finds have resulted.

Archaeologists digging several years ago at the site of Kingsbrooke, a housing development on Linton Hall Road, discovered one of only two known sites for prehistoric horn fells, a mineral that could be made into weapons. And a developer clearing land for houses on the Cherry Hill Peninsula in Woodbridge recently uncovered the remains of a Colonial-era road.

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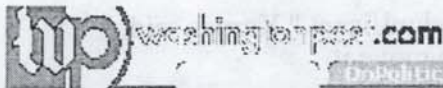
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## Study for VDOT Finds Barriers to Commuter Ferry

By Amy Joyce  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Wednesday, May 31, 2000; Page V03

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**High-speed ferry service on the Potomac River from Prince William County to Washington would be possible, a new study says, but would be fraught with potential problems.**

The feasibility study, conducted for the Virginia Department of Transportation, stated many reservations about such a service last month.

It was estimated that the ferry service would take about 45 minutes one way in travel time, without speed restrictions. It would provide six trips each way in the morning and afternoon, and cost \$4.40 each trip. Costs for the project were estimated to be \$9.7 million.

The Northern Virginia consulting firm that did the study, ATCS, found that to attract passengers, the ferry service would have to operate at a high speed and be competitive with commuting by car or bus. But the Potomac has speed restrictions on boats near many waterfront areas to keep their wakes down.

The study also found that:

- \* Previous attempts at high-speed passenger ferry service on the Potomac have not been successful, primarily because of cost.
- \* Ferry service would take ridership away from other forms of public transportation. It would not significantly reduce single-occupancy vehicle commuting, which was one of the original key selling points for the service.
- \* Precedent exists for the use of public funding in support of mass transit, including ferry service, but federal funds cannot be used for a service that competes with private boat operators.

Bill Kidd, who presented the study to the Transportation Planning Board, an arm of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, said three recommendations are feasible but only if a speed waiver is granted and a private operator can be found. The recommendations are:

- \* VDOT could facilitate and support implementation of high-speed passenger ferry service by a private operator.

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# Manassas Journal Messenger

## Quotable

*"You get a lot of personal satisfaction when you show up and you can help someone. It's their worse day, and it's very rewarding that you can help them resolve their crisis."*

**—Prince William County firefighter Brian Ferguson, at his graduation from the Public Safety Training Center on Thursday.**

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After spending \$1.4 million to acquire Rippon Lodge in an effort to jump-start the historic preservation effort, Prince William County has decided against saving the historic building.

Instead, county planners have decided to demolish the building and build a new structure on the site. "We want to get an end to the problem and build the grounds to what they tell us is the best use of the property," said a county planner who oversees historic preservation.

Plans for the new building are scheduled for this week.

Meanwhile, the historic building remains in the same family from 1935 until the year 2000, when it was sold to a developer.

The 1 1/2-story frame building, which was built in the 1930s, is a three-story stone structure. The living room was sold as a living room in the house since it was built as an empty lot, she said.

A developer is still waiting for the consent of his estate to demolish the house to the county to rebuild it, provided it did not remain on the property on Mount Airy Lane, Kanner said. The estate plans to put the property up for sale for development and think the land is worth more as an empty lot, she said.

The county's historical commission and local planners had high hopes to move the house, perhaps adding it to the complex of buildings, including the historic courthouse, the county is restoring in Quantico. But Kanner said the move cost was estimated at \$2.4 million. And that's before any plans work a potentially expensive project. The house needs considerable work and its floors are collapsing, she said.

By contrast, the county's historic preservation board, the town of Woodbridge, is believed to be the oldest historic structure in the area. The historic building will stand from a private owner for almost 100 years in almost the same condition.

The county originally saw the opportunity to take over Mount Airy as

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