

Historians move to enshrine 23,000 acres of northern Fauquier

Area north of The Plains could join national historic register

By Kipp Hanley

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Much of the breathtaking landscape north of The Plains may soon become part of the National Register of Historic Places thanks to the efforts of Warrenton resident Cheryl Hanback Shepherd.

An architectural historian, Shepherd and colleague Ruth Barnish were tasked by the Goose Creek Association of Middleburg to document the historic value of a 23,116-acre piece of land stretching from The Plains nearly up to Middleburg.

The area of northeastern Fauquier County is called the Little River Rural Historic District, which straddles the Broad Run/Little Georgetown Rural Historic District and the Cromwell's Run Rural Historic District.

For Shepherd, researching the agricultural estates, which include homes and stone walls built in the 18th century, was a long and arduous journey.

However, the nearly four-year process was an intriguing one as it involved researching members of her own family.

Her grandfather William Hanback built many of the early 20th-century homes on properties like the gorgeous Whitewood Farm just north of The Plains.

Hanback's sons — including her father — worked on many area properties including the one owned by the Mars family of candy bar fame. As a child, Shepherd would open the door to candy deliveries from the Mars family each year for the holidays.

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FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/RAN

This stretch of land, north of The Plains, is part of a 23,116-acre expanse considered for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Nov. 7 public hearing set for historic land

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"My grandfather was very shy, he never talked about it," Shepherd said of her ancestor's

influence on the area. "I got interested after he was gone."

Overall, there are nearly 500 properties in the survey including four properties already on the

National Register of Historic Places: Burrland Farm Historic District, Boxwood, Waverly and Green Pastures/Ardarra.

The district also includes a stone shell of an 18th century country store that sold whiskey from a nearby distillery owned by Minor Winn, a prominent Fauquier landowner in the 1700s.

Part of the structure, which is near Winn's still standing 1807 Greystone estate, sits just off Rock Hill Mill Road next to Little River.

And it's not just the houses that make up the historic value of the Little River Rural Historic District, said Shepherd. The viewsheds and the way structures were built also add to the historic character of the district, said Shepherd.

Several of the farms have gorgeous views of the Blue Ridge mountains to their west. Many of the historic homes and barns that

dot the landscape were also built on the side of the hills, taking into account the natural topography of the land.

Banked barns, as they were called, were popular in 19th century America.

The next step in approving the historic district is a public hearing hosted by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The hearing is scheduled for Nov. 7 at 7 p.m. at the Warren Green Building in Warrenton.

Virginia Delegate Michael Webert, R-18th, who runs Locust Hill Farm inside the historic district, hopes to attend the meeting and is happy to see the land being recognized.

"I think it's great to preserve our heritage," Webert said of the potential designation. "In order to know where we want to go, we have to understand our past as well."