

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

historic name Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign other names/site number

2. Location

street & number East State Street city, town Bristol state Tennessee code TN county Sullivan code TN 163 zip code 37620

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public, building/site/structure/object, and counts for contributing/noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE: Street furniture/object

LANDSCAPE: Street furniture/object

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

N/A

foundation N/Awalls N/Aroof N/Aother Steel

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The most identifiable landmark of the twin cities of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia is the large electric slogan sign erected over the state line on State Street, at Second and Washington Streets.

The Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign is constructed of structural steel, is sixty by thirty-five feet and weighs two and one-half tons. The sign contains letters from seven feet to three feet in height and was originally illuminated by 834 incandescent lamps. The first line of the sign contained the word BRISTOL. Below was a star, the words VA - TENN and PUSH !. . . THAT'S BRISTOL. The letters of the last line flashed and arrows pointed to Virginia and Tennessee.

The slogan sign was originally erected on June 28, 1910, on top of the Virginia-Tennessee Hardware Company building located on Third and State Streets, in Bristol, Tennessee. The steel frame for the slogan sign was completed on July 1st and on July 2nd all of the letters on the sign were hung. The completed slogan sign was lighted for the first time on July 4, 1910 during a presentation ceremony by the Bristol Gas & Electric Company to both cities.

In 1913, the owners of the hardware store requested that the slogan sign be removed from the top of their building because it was causing damage to the structure. After two years of discussion in both towns, the Greenwood Advertising Company of Knoxville removed the sign in January of 1915 from the Interstate Hardware Company (formerly the Virginia-Tennessee Hardware Company) building for \$500. They also made repairs and relocated the sign at the location the two governments agreed upon at East State Street at Washington and Second Street. The slogan sign was remodeled to allow it to be placed on poles. It is not known as to what extent the sign was reconstructed, as the sign's wording and size remained the same. The remodeled sign was erected over State Street in April 1915. The base of the sign was twenty-five feet above the street, making the top of the sign fifty-three feet above street level.

In 1917, the slogan sign began to have trouble keeping several light bulbs lighted. Workmen installed new green and red lights on the center of the sign, but several white ones refused to light. Dissatisfaction over the slogan arose once again, stemming from bad publicity from burned out

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

OTHER: City Boosterism

1910-1938

1910, 1915,
1921

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign is nominated to the National Register under criterion A for its significance to the greater Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee area. The Bristol Slogan Sign is an important object remaining from the period of early twentieth century city boosterism, and the beginning of electrically lighted signs in the area.

The history of the cities of Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee began with the coming of the railroad. The Norfolk & Western Railroad was completed to the state line of Virginia and Tennessee in 1856 and the East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia Railroad in 1858. The City of Bristol, Tennessee was chartered February 22, 1856. The Virginia side was incorporated in the same year, March 5, under the name of Goodson (or Goodsonville). On January 7, 1890, the town council of Goodson, Virginia voted to change the name of the town to Bristol. Bristol was the only railroad center between Lynchburg, Virginia and Knoxville, Tennessee. By 1891 two other railroads went through the towns, the South Atlantic & Ohio and the Bristol, Elizabethton & N. C.

The greater Bristol area had an electric light plant in 1891, by 1904 the gas and electric service was furnished by the Bristol Gas and Electric Company. In 1910 the Bristol Gas and Electric Company was sold to Dougherty and Company of New York. Dougherty and Company were the owners of the Knoxville Electric Company other similar properties throughout the country. Henry L. Dougherty, head of the company offered the the twin cities the gift of a large electric slogan sign, similar to one in Montgomery, Alabama. The new sign was to be illuminated by incandescent lights and advertise Bristol, all the cities needed to provide was a slogan. The slogan for the sign, "Push! . . . That's Bristol," was coined by Charles M. Brown, president of the Bristol Board of Trade. Brown's slogan was meant to reflected the town's growing pains.

The thirty-five foot by sixty foot slogan sign arrived in Bristol on a special railroad car in June, 1910 and reportedly cost \$1,100. The Bristol Slogan Sign was originally erected on top of Virginia-Tennessee Hardware

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

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Bristol, TN-VA 206SW

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries for the Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign include the sign and its footings.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign are sufficient to protect its historic significance.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Shelley Ireson Edwards, Researcher and Elizabeth A. Straw, Hist. Pres. Specialist

organization Bristol Historical Assoc., T.H.C. date April 2, 1988

street & number P.O. Box 216 701 Broadway telephone (703)669-6839(615)742-6722

city or town Bristol Nashville state TN zip code 37219-5237

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.



Signature of certifying official

8/5/88

Date

Director, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks
State or Federal agency and bureau

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lights, usually with combinations of "Pu..! . . . That's Bristol" or "..sh!. . . That's Bristol." In 1921, a new Slogan Campaign was announced and on April 30, 1921, a new slogan, "Bristol. . . A Good Place to Live" was adopted. The new slogan replaced the old slogan on the bottom line of the sign with little modification to the original sign. The new wording increased the number of light bulbs to 1,332. The exact date that the new slogan was placed on the sign had not been determined.

The slogan sign apparently had only minimal maintenance for several years; primarily the replacement of lightbulbs and the painting of the steel frame. In 1969, a major campaign was started to remove the Bristol Slogan Sign citing deterioration and rusting of the angle joints, however, no action was taken. In the 1970s, the sign was repainted and in 1982, talk about removing the sign resurfaced. As a result a "Save Our Sign" Campaign started resulting in the refurbishing of the slogan sign including new angle irons, bolts and aluminum support poles. The sign was repainted and a new synchronizer installed to create the flashing lights and arrows.

The Bristol Virginia-Tennessee Slogan Sign remains standing in its 1915 location and retains its original appearance. Only minor alterations have occurred to the original sixty foot by thirty-five foot structural steel sign.

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Company building located on Third and State Streets, in Bristol, Tennessee. The sign was located directly across from the Bristol (Virginia) Railroad Station (NR 11/28/80). "The mammoth slogan sign . . . was formally presented to the City and accepted by the two mayors, Monday evening at 9 o'clock. . . ." on July 4, 1910. "It was a glorious day in Bristol. . . the turning on of the thousand lights in the magnificent new sign, which was witnessed by thousands." The slogan sign was turned on by Mayor Rice of Bristol, Virginia and Mayor Gammon of Bristol, Tennessee made the speech of acceptance. The July 6, 1910 editorial of the Bristol Herald Courier stated:

The turning on of the big electric slogan sign, donated to the city by the Bristol Gas and Electric Company, was the feature in which Bristolians were most interested. There are only two or three other such signs in the country, we believe, and perhaps only one other in the south. This sign is located at a point near the depot, where it will catch the attention and win the admiration of passengers on all trains. It is an immense sign, attractive in design, and can be seen many miles away at night.

In 1913, the owners of the hardware store requested that the sign be removed from the top of their building because it was causing damage to the structure. After two years of discussion by both town governments, the Greenwood Advertising Company of Knoxville was hired in 1915 to remove the sign from the Interstate Hardware Company building, make repairs and relocate the sign over State Street at Washington and Second Street. The company was paid \$500 for the repairs and relocation. Each city agreed to cover half of the cost. The sign had to be remodeled to allow it to be placed on poles, to what extent the sign was reconstructed is unknown, as the sign's wording and size remained the same. The remodeled sign was erected over State Street in April 1915. The base of the sign stood twenty-five feet above the street, making the top of the sign fifty-three feet above street level.

In a letter dated January 12, 1915, from Sam Vance, General Manager of the Bristol Gas & Electric Company, Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia to Mr. S. G. Keller, Commissioner, Bristol, Tennessee. Vance stated that the company would "continue to maintain and light. . ." the slogan sign at its ". . . new location the same as in the past during the life of the present White Way contract without any charges to the city." The company reserved

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". . .the right of assurance from both cities that the sign will be erected satisfactorily in all its parts, and in a substantial and safe manner, and to be erected under the supervision of one or more engineers. . ."

At the time the sign was placed over State Street, it was suggested that the wording of the Slogan: "Push! . . . That's Bristol" be changed. However, no changes were made at that time. In April, 1921 W. A. Hiddleston, General Manager of the Bristol Gas and Electric Company, proposed that a slogan change be made in the sign donated and maintained by his company during a speech at the Bristol Advertising Club. The Bristol Advertising Club offered a \$10 prize for the "most appropriate slogan, and the one which will immediately replace 'Push! That's Bristol.'" It took approximately one month for the Advertising Club to come up with a new slogan for the sign. The Bristol Herald Courier announced the winner of the contest on April 30, 1921. The best slogan submitted was "Bristol. . . A Good Place To Live." The slogan was coined by James T. Cecil, president of the Interstate Hardware and Supply Company of Bristol, president of the Country Club Land Company, vice-president of the Bristol Country Club, director of the Rotary Club of Bristol, director of the Dominion National Bank, director of the Chamber of Commerce, director of the King's Mountain Memorial Hospital, and treasurer of the United War Work Campaign fund. Cecil was ineligible for the ten dollar prize.

Both the electric slogan sign and the slogan itself had a great impact on Bristol. After the slogan sign was erected, several other electrically lighted signs and street lights began to appear in the twin cities. On October 27, 1911, the Bristol Herald Courier reported that when the Dougherty and Company entered Bristol, there was not a single electric sign in the city and was now one of the best lighted city of its size in the south with scores of electric signs and midnight window lighting contributing to the city's great white ways." Other elaborate electric signs in the area during the same period included the Goodwyn Coal and Ice Company sign with flashing words "Phone 547," and the name of the company in large letters and a border that had a creeping or running effect. This sign contained more than 500 lamps; (200 red and 300 white).

In addition to the electrically lighted advertising signs in the city there were electric arches located over the streets forming what was known as the "White Way." The Bristol, Virginia minute books mention that the Bristol Gas & Electric Company proposed that a "Welcome" sign be located at Front Street and Fourth Street and at the location of Cumberland Street and Front Street a "Hydro Electric Power" sign. The company agreed to purchase and erect 13 arches (each arch to have 20-40 watt tungsten lamps) and the two

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signs to be maintained and operated during the life of the "White Way" contract.

Signs imitating the Bristol Slogan Sign began appearing in other cities in the United States. On October 26, 1910, the Bristol Herald Courier reported "Bristol, Pennsylvania, imitates Busy Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee." Bristol, Pennsylvania constructed a sign similar to the Bristol Slogan Sign. The wording on the Bristol, Pennsylvania sign was "Don't Forget Bristol," however, the sign was not electrically lighted. In 1913 the newspaper reported that E. B. Chisholm, superintendent of the electric light company, of Cupcio, Mississippi wrote to Bristol officials seeking information about the "Big Electric Exhibit" especially Bristol's attractive electric slogan sign. The letter tells of a recent visit to Bristol by the mayor of Cupcio and states the executive was deeply impressed with the Bristol sign. Chisholm was apparently anxious for full information since the Mississippi municipality wanted similar evidences of push and prosperity.

The 1921 slogan. "Bristol. . . A Good Place to Live," put new life into advertising the City of Bristol. Letterheads on stationery soon carried the new slogan and the Bristol Chamber of Commerce immediately started to use the new slogan to advertise the town. Dr. W. E. Martin, president of Sullins College, in a speech delivered to the Bristol Advertising Club a declared that the "art of boosting should be taught in the schools." Dr. Martin admonished businessmen to boost their wares, their line of business, their city, and the various organizations and institutions of their city. "The man who doesn't believe that our new slogan, 'Bristol, a Good Place To Live,' is not true in every respect, is not a good citizen,"

The Bristol Slogan Sign appears to have stood for several years with little attention paid to it other than an occasional photograph and minimal maintenance, but in 1969, The Greater Bristol Area Chamber of Commerce recommended that the sign be torn down for the safety of the citizens of the City. The sign, according to their resolutions, "has become hazardous, not only to the persons who maintain it, but also to the public at large, and especially to traffic passing beneath said sign, due to the deterioration and rusting of the joints of the angle steel. It would appear that it would be necessary to either make extensive repairs to said sign or replace the same." The sign was not removed and the only maintenance appears to have been a paint job during the 1970s.

In 1982 an effort to remove the sign started once again, and as a result editorials in The Bristol Herald Courier called for a 'Save Our Sign' campaign, while many citizens spoke out against the Chamber's action. The

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Save Our Sign Fundraising Committee, a Community Involvement Project of radio station WFHG and the Bristol Jaycees, with tremendous publicity by the Bristol Herald Courier, launched a successful campaign which raised enough money to have the sign restored to safety. New angle irons, bolts and support poles were added to stabilize the sign and a new synchronizer was added to allow the lights to blink once again. The Bristol Virginia - Tennessee Slogan Sign remains standing in the location it has had for over seventy years as a reminder of City Boosterism and the advent of electrically lighted advertising signs.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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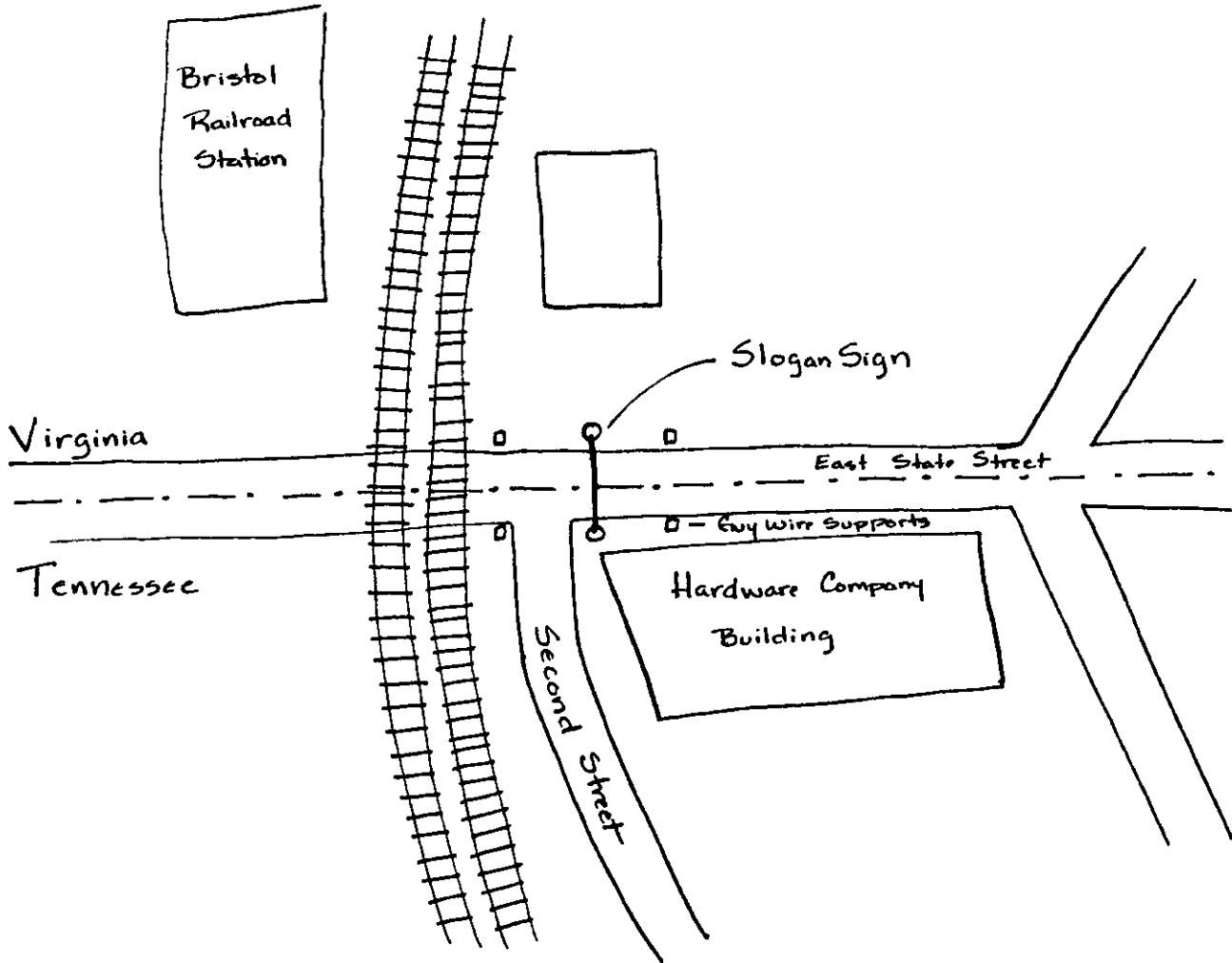
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Site Map



No Scale

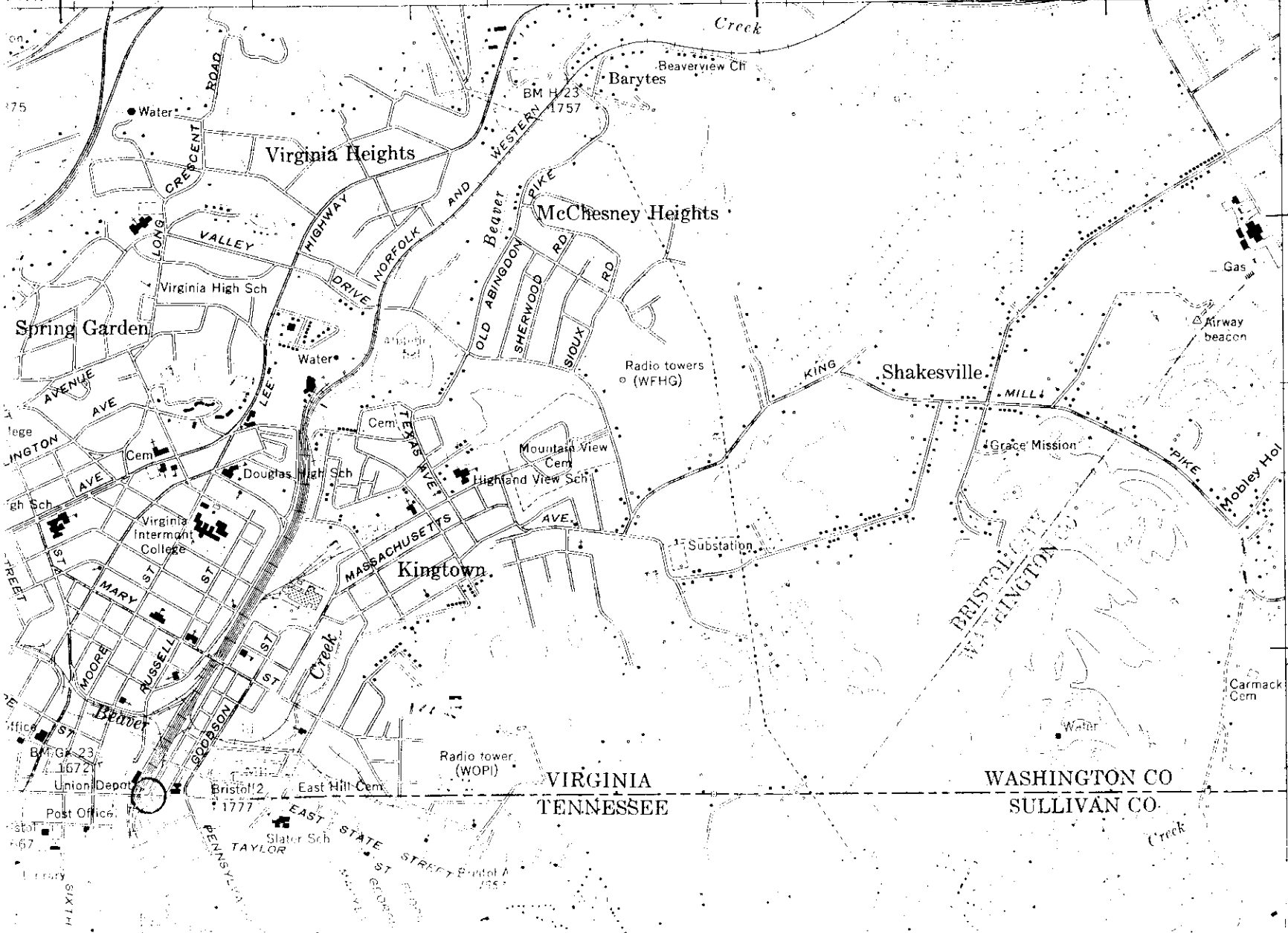
TATES
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BRISTOL QUADRANGLE
TENNESSEE-VIRGINIA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

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Bristol VA-TN
Slater Sch
East State Street
Bristol, Ind City Bristol, VA
Bristol, Sullivan Co., TN
16/39 12/1/400500

VIRGINIA
TENNESSEE

WASHINGTON CO
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