

# 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). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Avenel  
other names/site number Burwell, William M., House, DHR File No. 141-01

### 2. Location

street & number 413 Avenel Avenue N/A  not for publication  
city, town Bedford N/A  vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Bedford code 515 zip code 24523  
(Independent City)

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>    </u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>    </u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 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.  
Heidi C. Miller 12-23-91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single dwelling  
Secondary structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Work in progress**7. Description**Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)Federal  
Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
walls Brick  
roof Asphalt  
other Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**Summary Description**

Avenel, built around 1836, is a generously proportioned two-story brick dwelling located on a rise that once overlooked the town of Liberty. The house is now surrounded by a turn-of-the-century residential neighborhood in the City of Bedford. Avenel is imposing in scale, plan, and detailing for vernacular architecture in rural central Virginia during the first half of the nineteenth century. A comparatively articulate blend of Greek Revival and Federal styling, the main house is extraordinary for its high degree of architectural integrity. Three frame dependent buildings which have survived and the ruins of a brick kitchen building provide evidence of the complex of interdependent buildings that made up a residential property in the nineteenth century.

**Setting**

Avenel is located on a rise north of the center of the community now called Bedford. When the house was built around 1836, Avenel's site was rural, though it was only a short distance from the denser grid pattern of developed and developing lots that formed the town of Liberty. Subsequent expansion of Liberty from a one-street county seat during the first half of the nineteenth century into a town of 2,000 by the turn of the century resulted in the development of residential neighborhoods on the land that once comprised Avenel's farmland. Consequently, the generously proportioned plantation seat now occupies a three-acre lot on a tree-lined street of single-family frame homes. Oriented southward, the front elevation faces a circular drive and a small yard while the east side of the house faces the street that was cut through the property close to the house.

**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)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1835 - 1900

Significant Dates

1835

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.

**Statement of Significance**

Avenel, the home of William M. Burwell, is important for its interpretation of classical architectural ideas in Piedmont Virginia during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. An articulate blend of both Federal and Greek Revival idioms, the house exemplifies how skilled local master-craftsmen, using pattern books and ingenuity, interpreted the high style architectural ideas of the period to produce sophisticated vernacular residences for the planter class of mid-nineteenth-century Piedmont Virginia. Avenel is an exceptional resource not only because of its sophistication and quality, but also because of its unusual degree of integrity, which extends even to details such as locks and glass.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

- Avenel Foundation, The. Photograph collection. Bedford, Va.
- Burwell, Letitia M. A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War. 2nd edition. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1895. Excerpted in Gereau, "Avenel Landscape."
- Campbell, T. Bowyer. "Our Gentle Hills." Unpublished manuscript, n.d. Bedford Historical Society. -Excerpted in Gereau, "Avenel Landscape."
- Gereau, Betty Lambeth. "Avenel Landscape." Unpublished manuscript developed for Landscape Architecture 517, University of Virginia, May 1981. The Avenel Foundation, Bedford, Va.
- Lahendro, Joseph Dye, (Architect). "Prospectus for the Preservation and Adaptive Reuse of Avenel, Bedford, Virginia." Unpublished report, 31 March 1986. The Avenel Foundation, Bedford, Va.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

The Avenel Foundation  
118 E. Main Street, Bedford, VA 24523

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 3.3 acres

UTM References

A 17 630700 4133160  
 Zone Easting Northing

C         

B           
 Zone Easting Northing

D         

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is described as the "Dwelling Lot" and "Lot 9" on the northwest side of Avenel Avenue (at 413 Avenel Avenue) in the City of Bedford, Virginia, as recorded in Bedford County Deed Book 91, p. 562. The enclosed map (scale 1" = 100') is a copy of the plat accompanying the deed as recorded. (The plat shows the location of the main house on the "Dwelling Lot.")

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the land at the core of the Avenel plantation that remains as the setting for the complex of extant buildings. Owing to subdivision of the plantation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the city expanded, the remainder of the plantation land was developed as a residential neighborhood. The large lot on which the buildings are situated provides adequate setting for the historic complex.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Lynn Beebe Lambeth and Betty Lambeth Gereau

organization The Avenel Foundation c/o Bolling Lambeth, Esq date November 7, 1991

street & number 118 East Main Street telephone 703-586-8621

city or town Bedford state Virginia zip code 24523

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Bedford, Virginia

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### Architectural Analysis

The Flemish-bond brick walls of the rectangular main house at Avenel stand upon a foundation of brick. The house is two stories high on a raised basement, and is surmounted by a hipped roof that now is sheathed with asphalt shingles. An interior end chimney serves the structure at the east side of the house, another on the west side, and two on the north side. (Another chimney appears to have been added near the northwest corner of the house.) The only projection beyond the dwelling's rectangular configuration is a one-story porch which extends across two bays of the front elevation, across the full length of the east side, and wraps around the corner to encompass one bay of the back or north elevation. This porch, which was built early in the twentieth century, provides connection between the two main entrances of the house. An early photograph indicates that prior to 1900 the main entrance on the front of the house was sheltered by a one-story columned porch that was three bays wide and one-bay deep, and that the east entrance was similarly sheltered. The present porch is built of wood, with a gently sloping, metal-sheathed roof that is supported by a series of Doric columns. The pattern of fenestration varies: the front elevation consists of three bays, while the rear or north elevation includes five bays, and the two sides feature four bays each.

The sophistication which distinguishes Avenel from the majority of its contemporaries is apparent on the exterior in the detailing and proportion of the decorative woodwork and in the variation of plan provided by the recessed loggia at the northwest corner of the house. All four elevations are ornamented by a series of recessed wood panels set between the windows of the first and second stories. The elaborate Doric cornice includes mutules and dentils. All windows are decorated by a flat lintel terminating in corner blocks. The shutters at the windows may be original. The two principal doorways, at the main entrance of the front elevation and at the secondary entrance on the east side, are unusual in their generous proportions. At each doorway the eight-panel door is set within a decorated enframingent of sidelights and transom which, like the windows, is surmounted by a flat lintel with corner blocks.

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Set within the rectangular configuration of the house is a recessed loggia, originally at both first- and second-story levels. The brick walls of the loggia, at least at the second-floor level, are laid in American bond. Although it has been somewhat altered by a partial enclosure, the loggia remains an architecturally articulate and sophisticated feature of the house. The loggia originally extended the length of a wide bay on the rear elevation, and the length of two wide bays on the west side. The brick walls of the ground floor themselves served as brick piers framing segmentally arched openings. Above, the second-story of the loggia was supported by pairs of solid wood Doric columns rising to the dwelling's entablature. The loggia has been partially enclosed on the first-floor level in order to create a kitchen and bathroom. That enclosure was accomplished by bricking in half of the north bay, thereby reducing the loggia's first-floor level to a mere passageway. The second-floor level of the loggia, however, is still intact except for an extrusion into the space to create a later bathroom.

Avenel's plan is one of its most distinguishing features. The house is traversed by a perpendicular pattern of entrance halls, both with stairs. The main axis consists of a central hall running south-north from the main or south door to the secondary axis, consisting of a hall, that extends the full width of the house from the east door across to the recessed loggia on the west side of the house. The main hall contains a formal three-run stair and can be closed off from the rear hall by a double door. The longer rear hall is also ample in proportion and highly detailed in its ornamental woodwork. It contains a substantial staircase that divides into two runs at the stair landing and provides direct access to the rooms on the back of the house and to the upper level of the loggia. The two stairwells are divided by a partition wall but share the natural light and ventilation from the south side of the house by means of a large-scale, interior, double-hung sash window at the level of the stair landings.

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On the first-floor level the main central hall divides the front part of the house into two amply proportioned formal rooms, the parlor and the dining room. The rear part of the house contains two additional rooms that open off the rear hallway, plus the space at the building's northwest corner that formerly comprised the lower level of the loggia. Upstairs, the two large bedrooms on the front of the house open off a wide central hall that formerly provided access to the open upper level of the south entrance porch. The ornamental doorway to that porch, with its sidelights and transom, remains. At the second-floor level of the house there is no access between the perpendicular hallways. There is, however, direct access from the west bedroom to the loggia, and there is access from the east bedroom to the rear hallway and from there to the northeast room. The space at the easternmost end of the rear hallway at the second-floor level may have been altered, though possibly not long after the building of the house. The space is separated from the hallway by a thin partition wall and divided into two closet areas for the two east bedrooms.

The plan suggests separation of the house into two halves-- the front and the back-- and yet both are nearly equal in the formality and proportion of spaces. Another instance of separation of space is the absence of any internal access between the basement and the main floor. The basement is accessible only from the exterior, from doorways on the north and west sides of the house. The basement level is unfinished and divided exclusively by bearing walls. There is no architectural evidence of use other than for rudimentary functions supportive of the lifestyle of the household above.

The rooms of the first- and second-floors are characterized by ample proportions and ornate decoration. Both stairwells are paneled and decorated with scrolled ornamentation. Doorways and windows throughout the first-floor are enframed by fluted surrounds marked by corner blocks. The most formal spaces, the parlor and the dining room, are noteworthy for their ornamental plaster ceilings. In the parlor the elaborate plasterwork includes a symmetrical pattern radiating from a central medallion, and along the perimeter there is a grapevine pattern.

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The windows of the two formal rooms are double-hung sash, with wood paneling beneath the windows as well as on the soffits of the window openings. The mantels of these formal rooms are the most detailed. The most elaborate is the Greek Revival mantel of black marble located in the parlor. The wood mantel in the dining room is supported by columns, while the ones in the rest of the house are decorated with fluted pilasters, fretwork corner pieces, and keystones. The wood mantels throughout the house are copied from Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter, as are the transoms and sidelights.

## Other Buildings and Features

Near the main house is the evidence of four dependencies that were once part of the complex of interdependent buildings at the heart of the Avenel plantation. A one-story, rectangular, brick kitchen building, situated just north of the main house, is now in ruins. An old photograph, apparently taken early in the twentieth century, shows that the brick walls were white at that time and covered by a gable roof.

Two frame buildings still stand in the same area near the northwest corner of the house. The hip-roofed, square building that is called the smokehouse is sheathed in beaded clapboards and appears to be original. The building stands just northwest of the main house, facing the site of the brick kitchen building. A lean-to addition, entered by a paneled door, is attached to the west or rear of this dependency. On the south side of the building is a square, one-story frame building with a shallow hipped roof. This structure may date from the turn of the century. At least at one point, it served as a hen house. Situated further west of this grouping is a one-and-a-half-story, gable-roofed, frame nineteenth-century barn. The south portion of the gable roof is extended downward to shelter a lean-to addition along the building's south side. The main portion of the barn is divided into four stalls.



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Recollections by a turn-of-the-century resident of Avenel indicate that at least at that time the property contained the kitchen building (then joined to the house by a covered walkway), an ice house, smokehouse, outhouse, cow barn, hen house, carriage house, greenhouse, and a shed for wood and coal. According to the same source the landscape late in the nineteenth century included lawns, gardens, hay lots, orchards, a cedar-lined entrance lane through the fore-lawn east of the house, and a brick path to the east or side entrance to the house. Beyond the formal garden, which consisted of six squares just west of the house, the grounds to the west included a western lane with a gate, a grape arbor, herb garden, forcing beds, a pet cemetery, and on the west side of the property a slave cemetery.

The west and east portions of the property-- containing the slave cemetery and the vineyard on the west, and the cedar-lined entrance lane through the fore-lawn on the east-- were separated or sold off between the 1860s and 1906. The small tract that remains may include sites of some of the other features listed above, possibly including the site of part of the formal garden and the lawn. A boxwood hedge that is present west of the main house may be a remnant of the old formal garden.

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## Historical Background

When in 1835 William M. Burwell (1809-1888) began construction of his new house on the outskirts of the town of Liberty, the community had been in existence for about fifty years and was still primarily a single-street county seat. Burwell had acquired the land through his marriage in 1831 to Frances Steptoe, daughter of James C. Steptoe, of Bedford County. After residing in Franklin County for a brief period, the Burwells returned to Liberty and are believed to have lived at a rented farmhouse nearby while the new house was being built. The master builder is believed to have been a Mr. Shumaker. Construction is thought to have begun by 1835 and completed by 1836. Recent examination of the structure revealed the words "John Dickinson July 3, 1837" inscribed on a rafter in the attic. No information is currently available about John Dickinson or the role he played at Avenel.

In terms of architectural craftsmanship Avenel has few contemporaries that compare. The nearby Three Otters is similar in styling, and the earlier Fancy Farm exhibits a high degree of technical sophistication in its woodwork. The use of Asher Benjamin's pattern book, The Practical House Carpenter (1830), is apparent at Three Otters and in a few buildings in neighboring Lynchburg. However, Avenel is distinguished among its contemporaries for its pretentious scale and its architectural sophistication, including the craftsmanship of its interior plaster and wood detailing.

The family that moved into Avenel consisted of William and Frances Burwell, plus Burwell's widowed mother-in-law, Mrs. James C. Steptoe, and her son, Edward Steptoe. The presence of this extended family may have been the reason for the unusual floor plan of the house. The division of the house into two distinct halves, each with large-scale, architecturally prominent entrances, hallways, and staircases, could accommodate two family units and provide a sense of separation between the two.

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William M. Burwell was the son of William A. Burwell, secretary to Thomas Jefferson and congressman from Franklin County. William M. Burwell was active in the political and social life of Bedford County before the Civil War. In 1838 he was elected representative from Bedford to the Virginia House of Delegates. During his service in the legislature he secured the charter to the first railroad in Piedmont Virginia, the Virginia and Tennessee. The second phase of construction of the railroad brought it through Bedford, cutting across the south side of Burwell's plantation. During the 1840s and 1850s Burwell wrote extensively, producing articles on internal improvements in Virginia for newspapers and magazines. In 1850 he was sent as an emissary from the United States Government to Mexico. After the Civil War he spent a period of time in New Orleans continuing to focus his attention on economic improvement.

William M. Burwell's prominence in the local political scene and both his and his wife's economic and social standing, expressed in the architectural scale and sophistication of his home, made Avenel inevitably a focal point in the community of Liberty. A memoir written by Burwell's daughter, Letitia, A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War (1907), provides information about the social history at Avenel during the 1840s and 1850s, both about the family's interaction with the community and about the internal social fabric of plantation owner and slaves. Letitia Burwell's unpublished journal of 1861-1862 is one of several sources that also provide insight into the social history at Avenel during the Civil War, when the militia drilled on Avenel's lawn and the local community adjusted to the impact of the war.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the property at Avenel underwent gradual change because of both the maturing of the Burwell family and the economic changes during the post-war period in Bedford County. Eight acres northwest of the main house, including the vineyard, were divided from the main tract for the Burwells' daughter, Kate Burwell Bowyer. Then, in 1883, Mrs. Burwell sold 10 1/4 acres on the south edge of the property to the Liberty Improvement Company, which subdivided the land into a grid and began building a residential neighborhood along newly created Bedford Avenue. This subdivision, and the further development of the Bowyer portion of the property, were only a part of the 1880s/1890s land boom experienced in the town of Liberty, which was renamed Bedford City during this period of entrepreneurial expansion.

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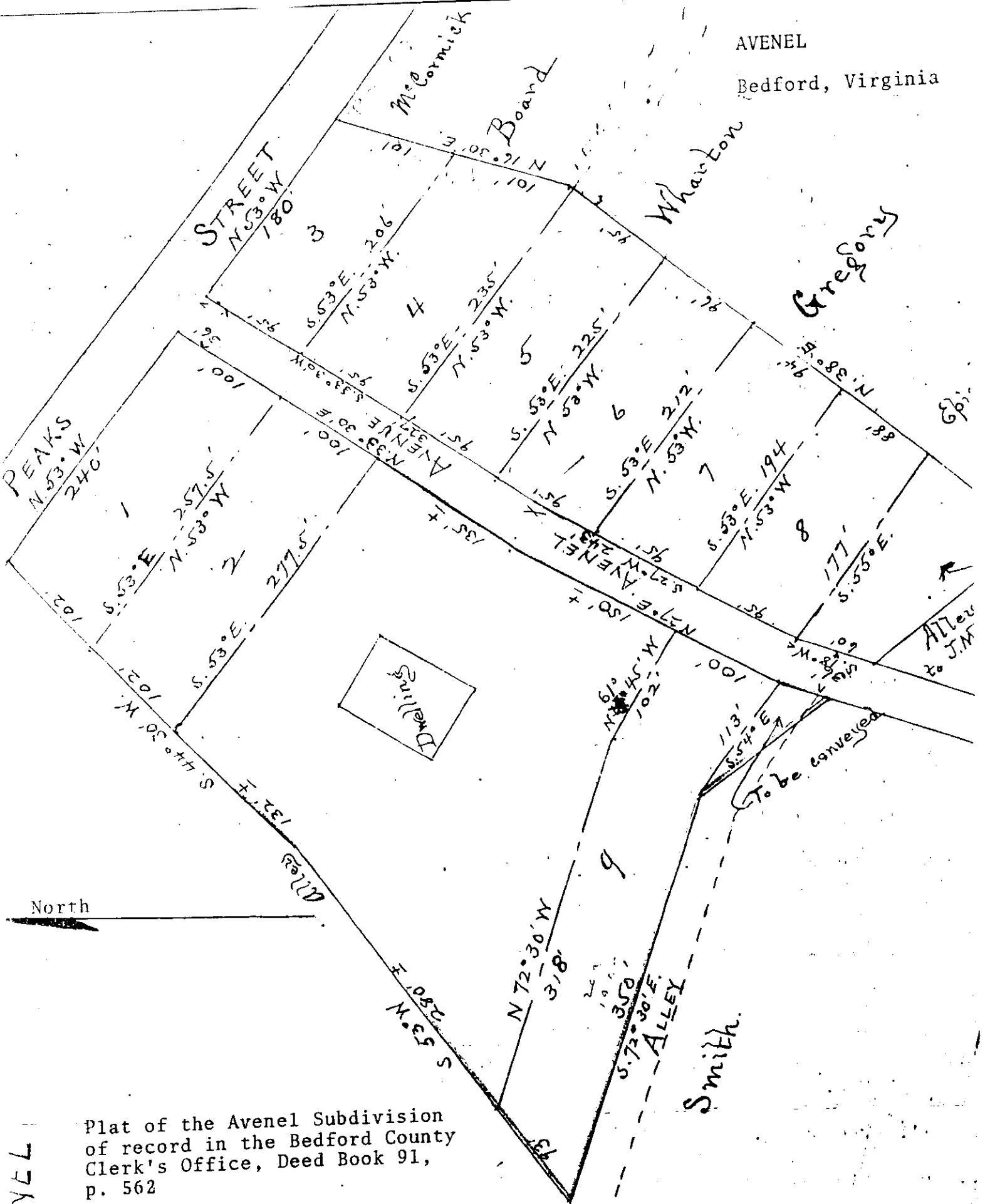
By 1899 Mrs. Burwell, who had outlived her husband, died. Avenel then became the property of her eldest daughter Letitia Burwell, who continued living there along with a relative Bowyer Campbell. At this stage, in spite of the encroachment of development on the northwest and south, most of the Avenel landscape was still intact, although the orchard and slave cemetery were no longer tended. The primary landscape activity at this period was Letitia Burwell's gardening.

With the death of Letitia Burwell in 1905, the Avenel plantation left the Burwell family. The property had been willed to Rosa Burwell Todd, her children, and Kate Burwell Bowyer's grandchildren. However, in the aftermath of a lawsuit the property was sold in 1906 at public auction. Although a comparatively large lot was left with the main house, it was large only in comparison with the pattern of small building lots that were laid out to accommodate expansion of the residential neighborhood that had developed as the town center expanded northward. The fore-lawn east of the main house was separated from the property by cutting through a new road, Avenel Avenue, and the western hayfields and orchard were separated by cutting another street through the property just west of the house. With the creation of Avenel Avenue, the main house, which faces south, was now situated with its east or side entrance facing the suburban street. Avenel's large lot provides an adequate setting for the buildings that remain at the core of the former plantation, though the proximity of the houses that surround it testify to the evolution in land use that characterized the post-Civil War economic history of Bedford City.

No longer a family plantation, Avenel was purchased in 1906 by the J. W. Ballard family, which owned the property until 1985. The current owner, the non-profit Avenel Foundation, is stabilizing the house and dependencies in preparation for preserving Avenel for public use.

AVENEL

Bedford, Virginia



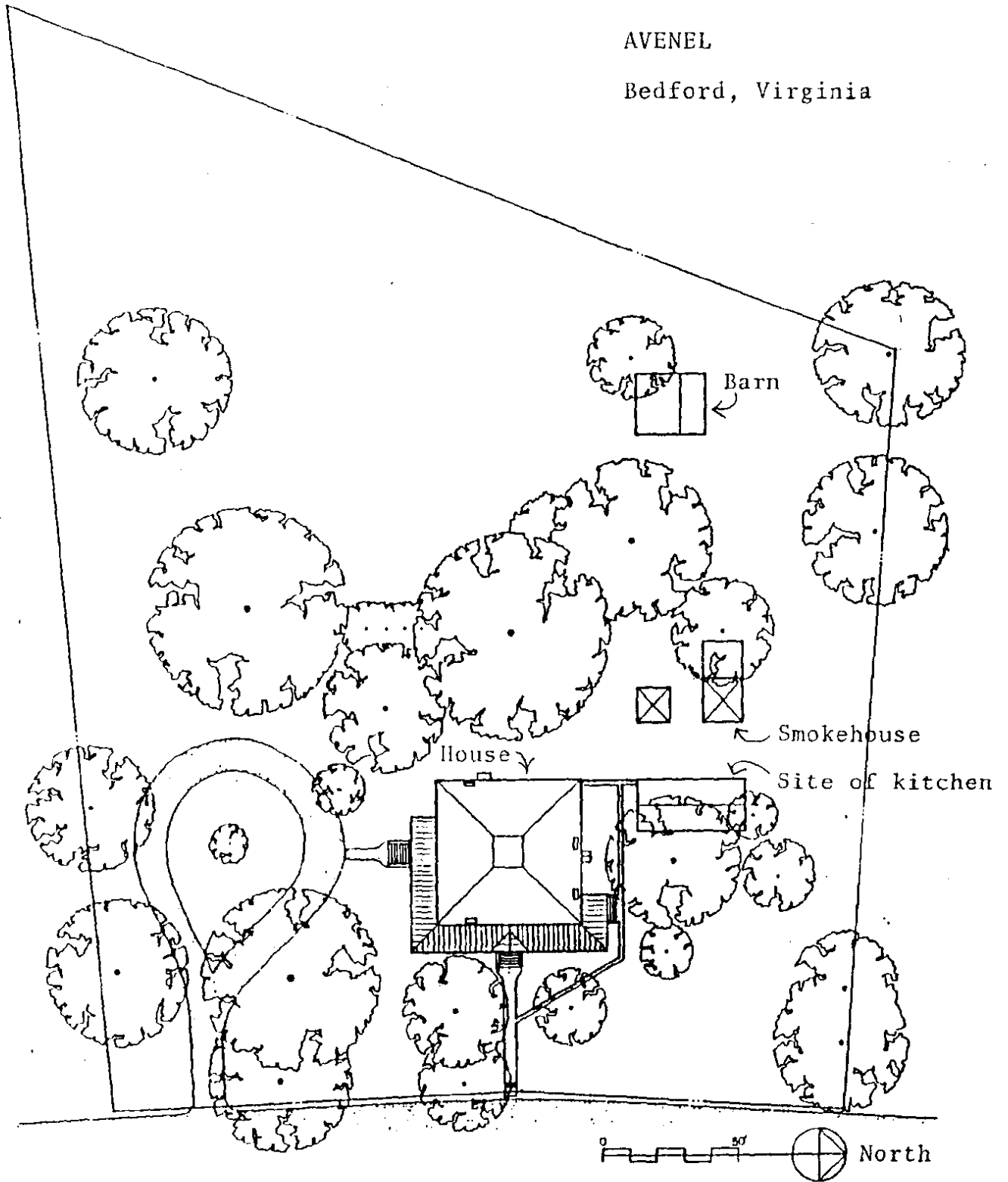
Plat of the Avenel Subdivision  
 of record in the Bedford County  
 Clerk's Office, Deed Book 91,  
 p. 562

scale 1" = 100'

AVENEL

AVENEL

Bedford, Virginia



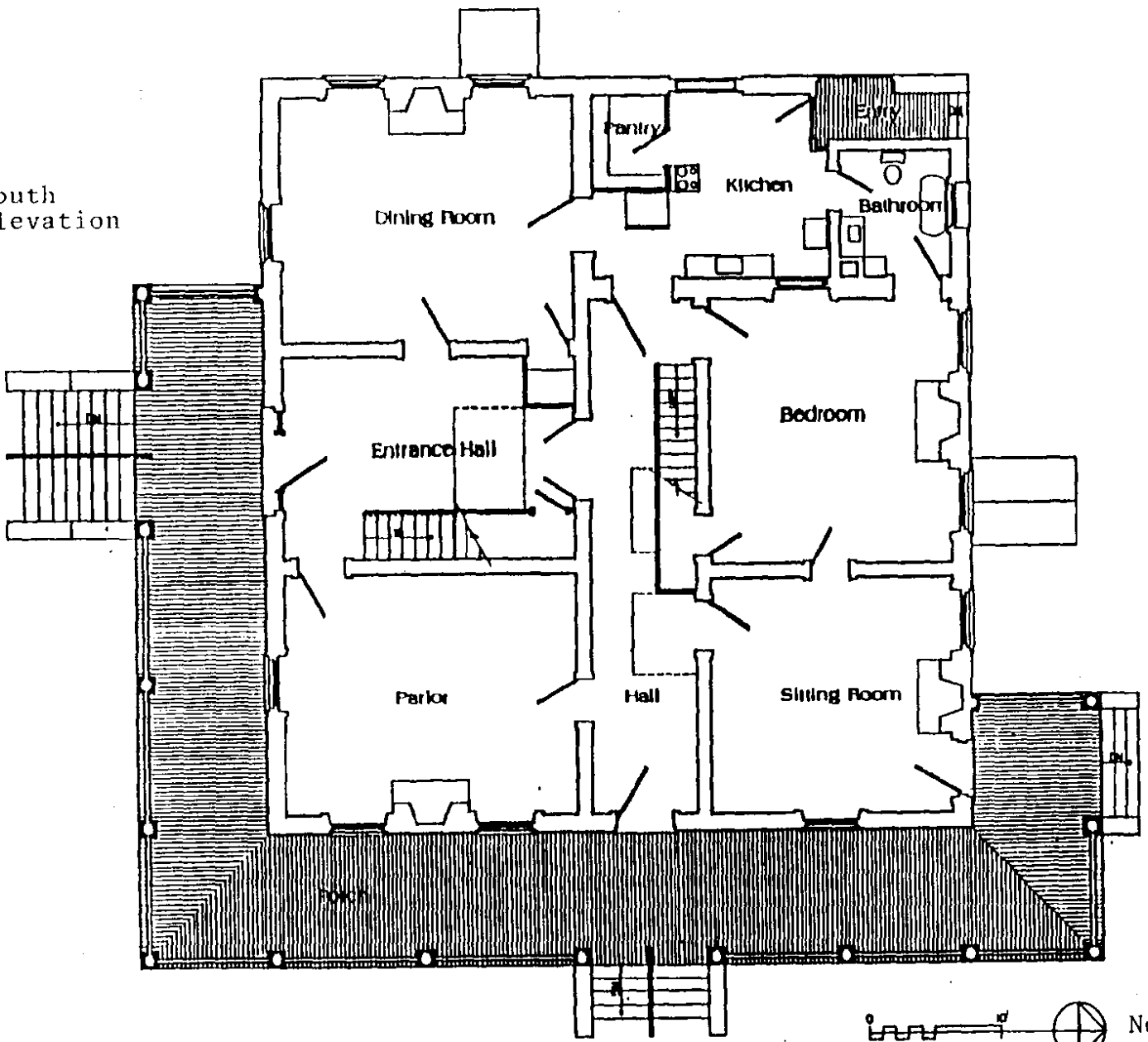
Existing

Site Plan

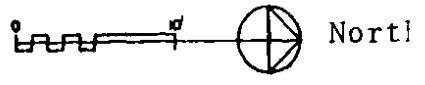
AVENEL

Bedford, Virginia

South  
Elevation



East  
Elevation



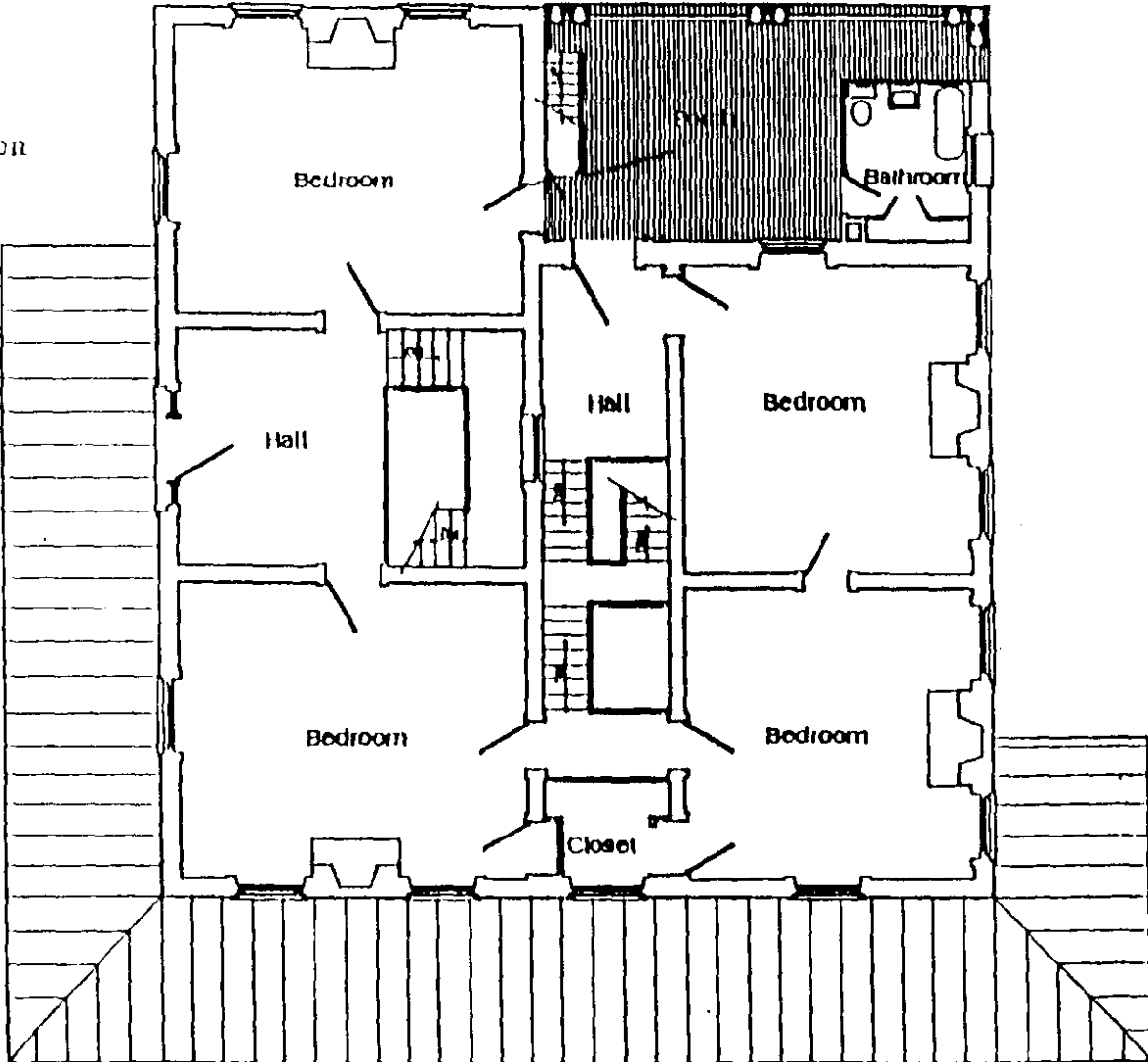
Existing

First Floor Plan

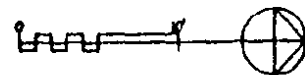
AVENEL

Bedford, Virginia

South  
Elevation



East  
Elevation



North

Existing

Second Floor Plan



## PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs are of:

### AVENEL

City of Bedford, Virginia

DHR File No. 141-01

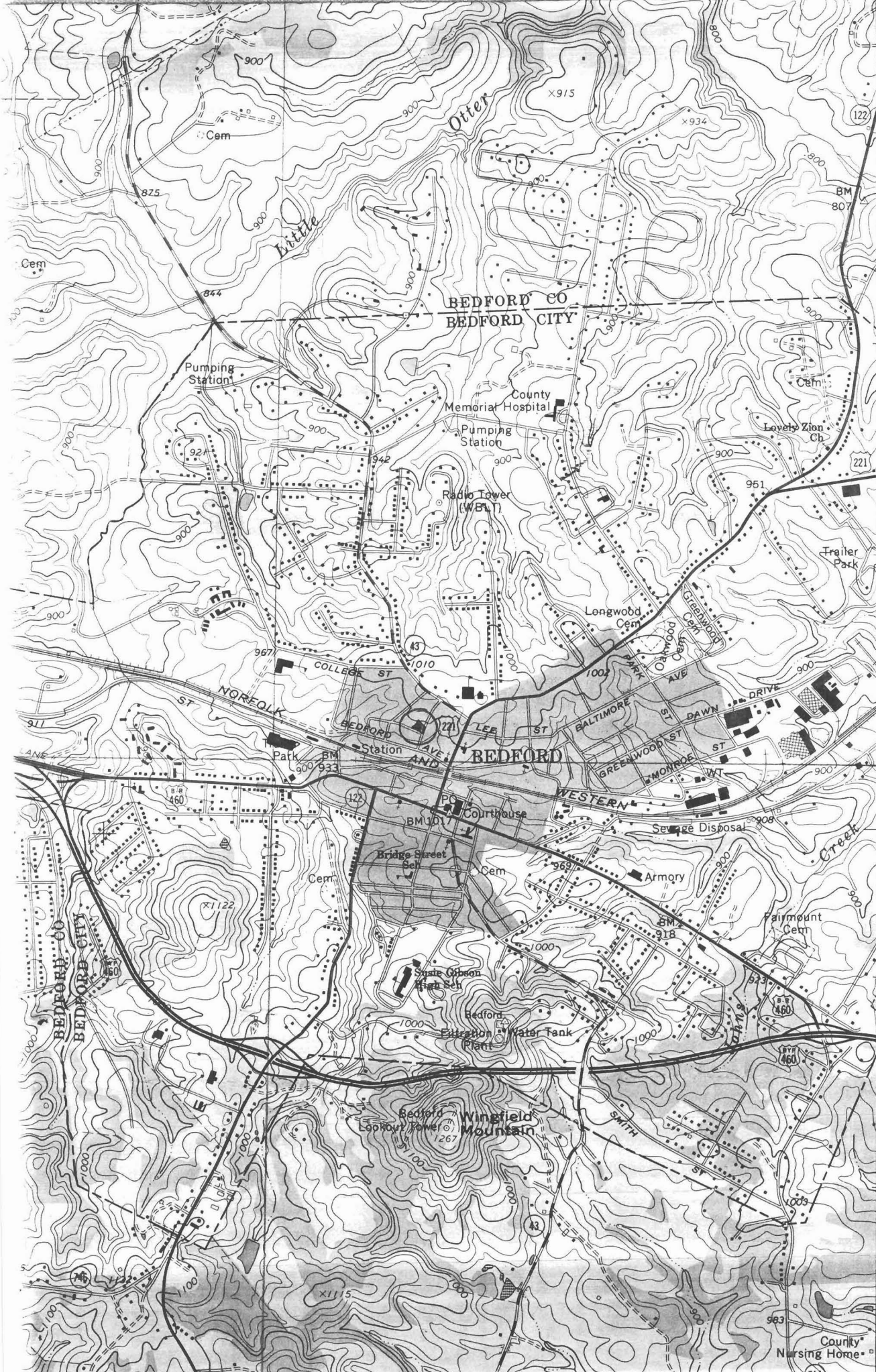
DATE: 1991

Photographer: Lynn A. Beebe

Negatives are filed at the Virginia State Library and Archives

Negative No. 10912

1. VIEW OF: South elevation of main house; view facing northwest  
PHOTO 1 of 8
2. VIEW OF: South and east elevations of main house; facing northwest  
PHOTO 2 of 8
3. VIEW OF: West and south elevations of main house; view facing northeast  
PHOTO 3 of 8
4. VIEW OF: West elevation of main house; view facing northeast  
PHOTO 4 of 8
5. VIEW OF: East elevation of main house; view facing southeast  
PHOTO 5 of 8
6. VIEW OF: Interior, main entrance hall; view facing north from the east entrance  
PHOTO 6 of 8
7. VIEW OF: Interior, southwest room, first floor, ceiling.  
PHOTO 7 of 8
8. VIEW OF: East and north elevations of original dependency, barn to the right and another dependency to the left; view facing southwest  
PHOTO 8 of 8



SEDALIA 10  
 4136  
 4135  
 4134  
 4133  
 20'  
 4131  
 NEW LONDON 13 MI.  
 (GOODE)  
 5158 IV SW

AVENEL  
 Bedford, Va.

UTM REFERENCE:  
 17 630700 4133160

BEDFORD, VA QUAD