

# BEFORE INCORPORATION

In 1763, William Diggs bought 4,483 acres that included what is, in the present day, the western part of Bladensburg, nearly all of Takoma Park, Rock Creek Cemetery, Brentwood, Mount Rainier, Colmar Manor, and Cottage City.



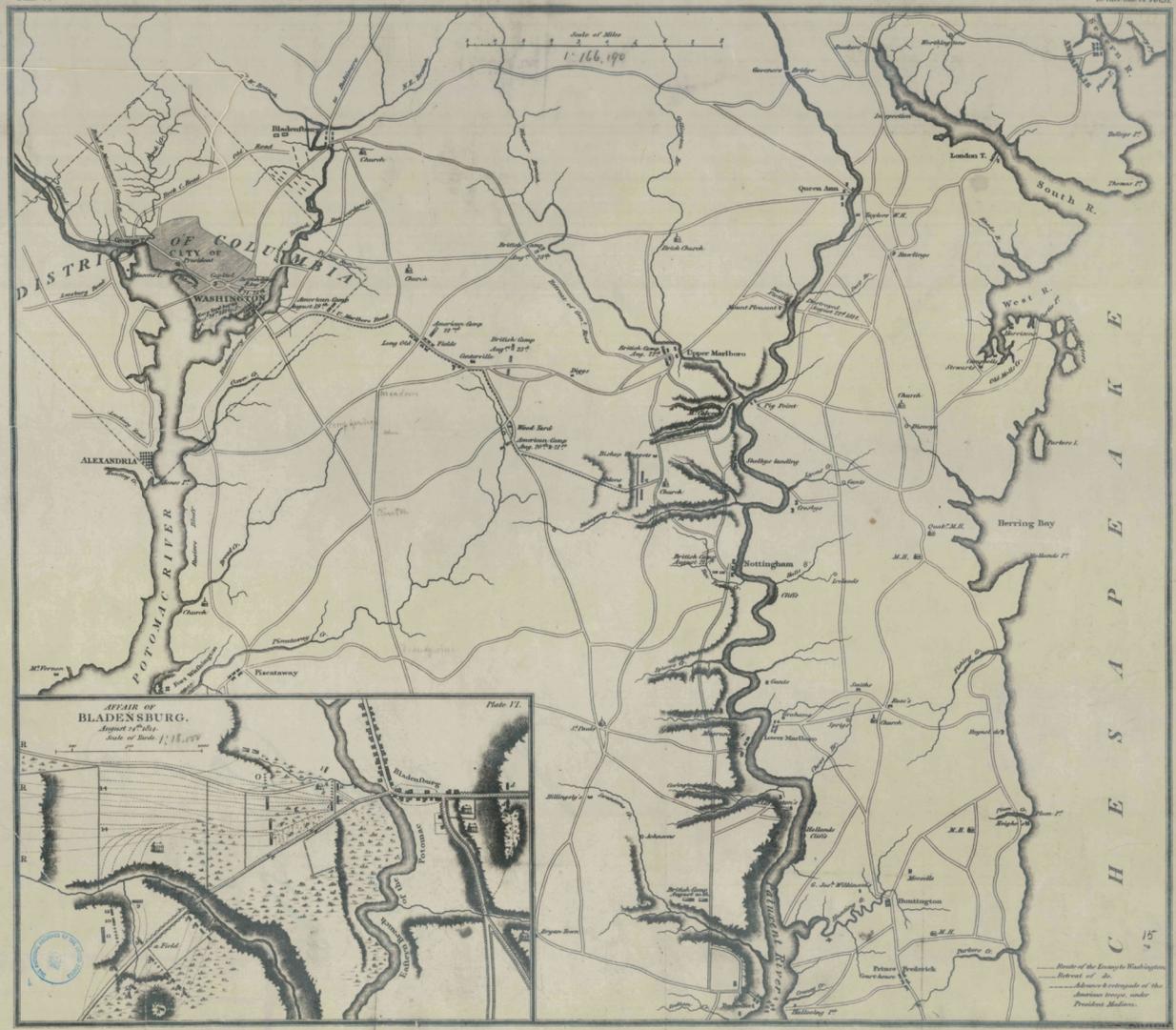
Source: M-NCPPC

**1696 land patents overlaid on a 20<sup>th</sup> Century map of the area. The “Scotland” patent (center on D.C. line) covers much of the present Mount Rainier.**

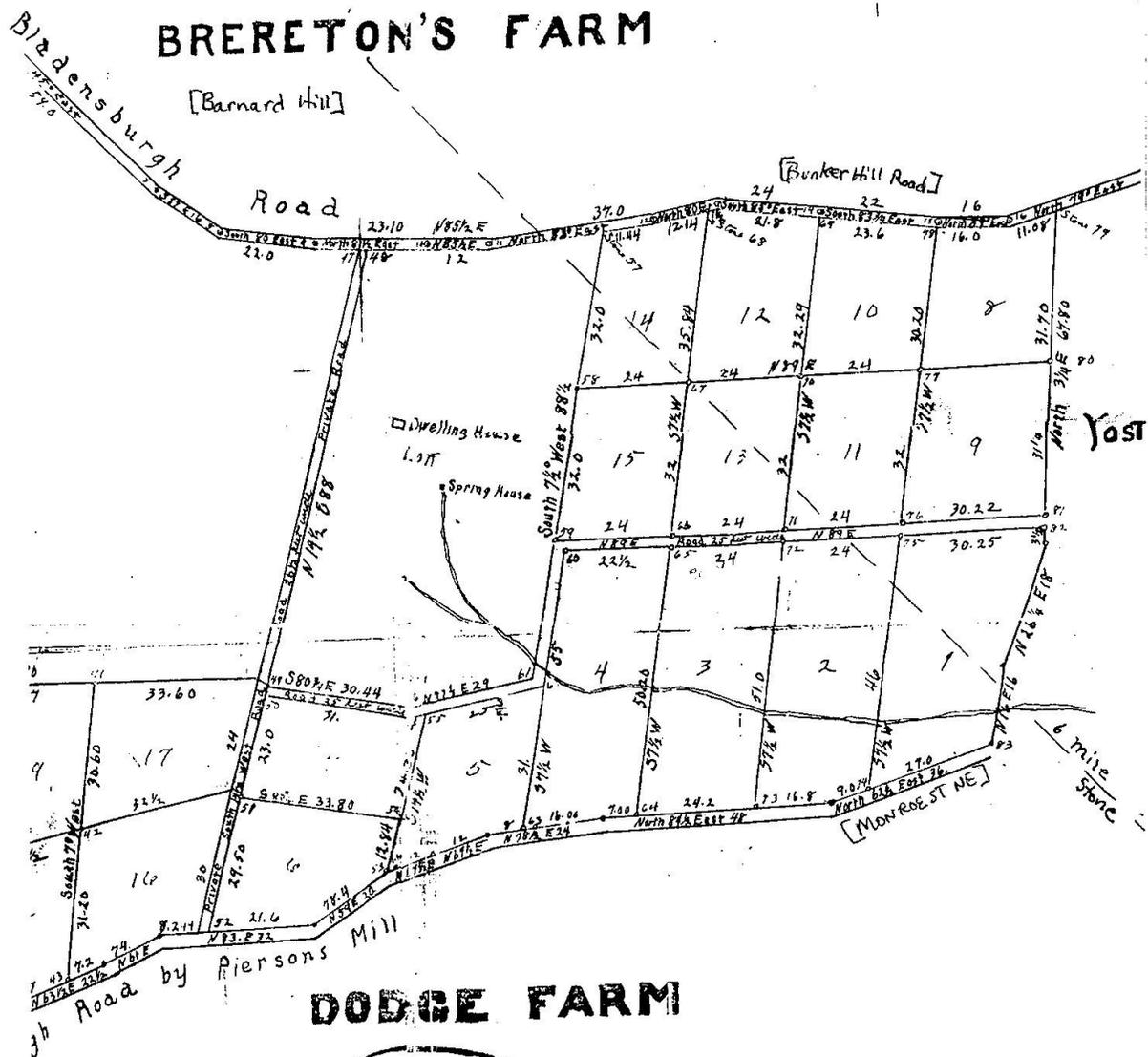
In the early 1800s, the locale of present-day Mount Rainier was included in several large estates, called patents. In mid-century, the Mount Rainier area was included in the Bladensburg District. Bladensburg was a busy river port on the Potomac’s Eastern Branch (the Anacostia) before the harbor filled with silt from eroded fields upstream. Bunker Hill Road connected Bladensburg with Georgetown.

Bladensburg Road also existed at that time and was the route that the British took into Washington in 1814 after fighting the American forces in the area that is now Fort Lincoln Cemetery.

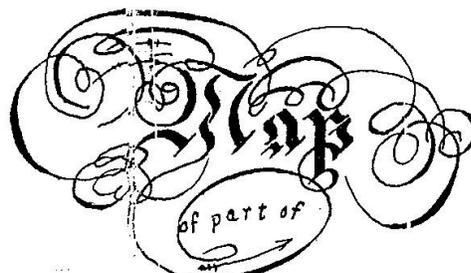
Plate 17. Map of Maj. Gen. Ross's route, with the British Column, from Benedict, on the Patuxent River, to the City of Washington, August 1814. D. Rowlett, Philad.



**War of 1812**  
**Gen. Ross's Route from Patuxent River to Bladensburg, August 1814**  
 Present-day Mount Rainier would be just off the left-side edge of the inset. The "Field" in the lower left quadrant of the inset is about where Fort Lincoln Cemetery exists today.



**DODGE FARM**



**GRANBY**

SUBDIVIDED INTO LOTS

*As Surveyed for John B. Hubbey Esq*  
*in August 1854*

In this 1854 plat of the Dodge Farm/Granby, Bunker Hill Road runs along the top and today's Monroe Street along the bottom. The diagonal dashed line is the D.C. boundary. The area inside Maryland below Bunker Hill Road covers today's 3800 blocks of 30th to 33rd Streets. Note the "Yost" property on the right edge. Today, 34th Street runs approximately along the boundary between the Yost property and the Dodge Farm subdivision. The "mile stone" on the right edge is at the corner of 34th (Monroe on the DC side) and Eastern Avenue. The stream indicated just above the milestone likely is the location of Otis Street today as it descends from Rhode Island Avenue.

In 1835, the Washington Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad crossed Prince George's County and this would one day become Mount Rainier's southern boundary. This is one of the oldest rail routes in the United States. The coming of the railroad brought greater interest in the lands near it with access to Washington D.C.—even in those early days, just as today, easy transit access to Washington was an attractive feature for homebuyers.

In 1844, Benedict Yost, a blacksmith, purchased 120 acres north of the railroad, and his home was near the corner of Bunker Hill Road and present-day 35<sup>th</sup> Street. (see Dodge Farm map on prior page).

The Bladensburg District maintained an agrarian character until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### ANNA AND THOMAS CLEMSON

In 1853, Thomas and Anna Clemson purchased 100 acres that had been part of the Chillum Castle Manor estate. Clemson, son-in-law of statesman John C. Calhoun, had been stationed as a diplomat in Belgium prior to that time. The family residence was called “The Home” and is believed to have stood near the present-day Baptist Church at the area's highest point between 31<sup>st</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Streets. The letters of Clemson leave no doubt that the house existed prior to his purchase of the estate, but he notes that it was small and would require additions. Clemson also noted in an 1853 letter that the house was surrounded by a fine grove of trees. A *Washington Post* article in the 1890s described the long-abandoned Clemson home as follows: “The house is on a high hill and is surrounded by several acres of the largest forest trees in this section and was, and is today, one of the most beautiful places around Washington despite the rack and ruin the place is in.” The *Post* article attributes the existence of the large trees to the fact that during the Civil War “Gen. Scott placed a guard over the property for the protection of the family, and the care that the soldier's took is testified today by the giant oaks that are now there.” According to the article, all other large trees in the area were cut down. (WP 11/20/1890)

In 2009, an ancient diseased oak was removed from the highest point in Mount Rainier. The owners counted over 150 rings—thus making it likely that oak was one of those standing around the Clemson mansion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Other large old oaks stand in that vicinity.

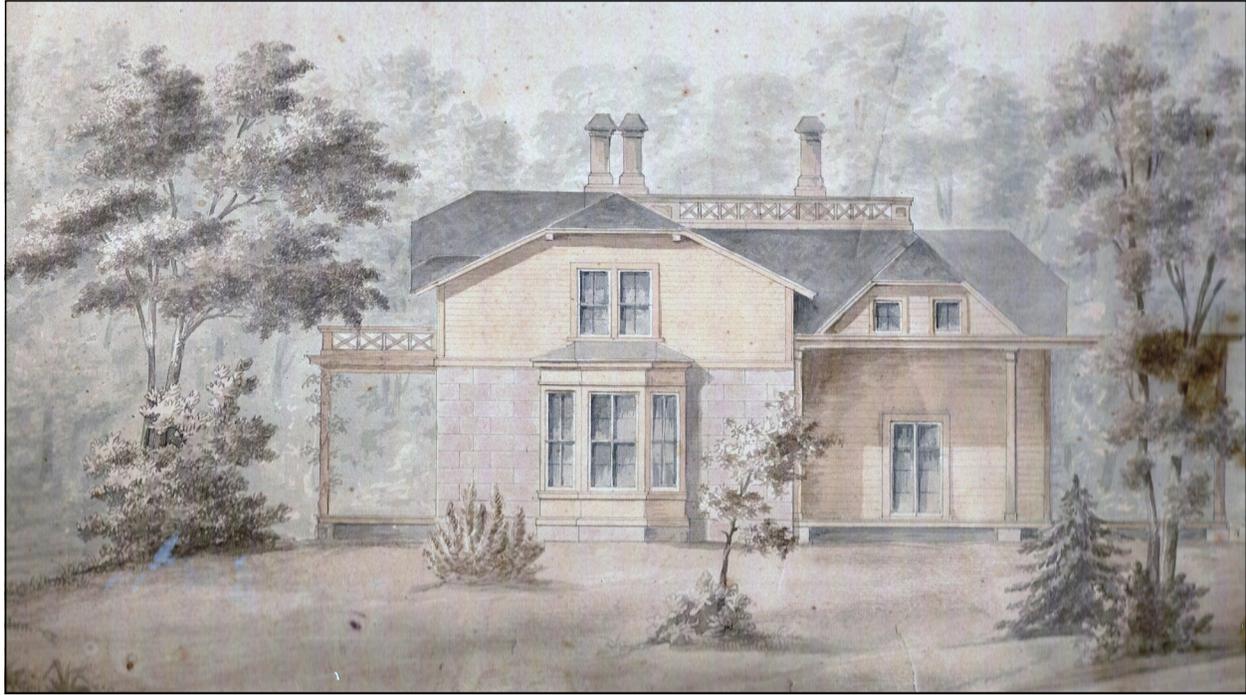
The letters of Floride Clemson and her mother, Anna, provide a window into that time period (see Sources at chapter's end). The Clemsons socialized with the Calverts at Riversdale and the Brookes in northeast Washington (the Brooks mansion still stands next to the Brookland metro station and faces a remnant section of Bunker Hill Road). Besides the Clemson's home, the letters describe the construction of a brick and concrete octagon-shaped house for the tenant farmer. The octagon house form was popular at



Photo by Bryan Knedler

**One of the grand old oaks on Bunker Hill Road shades a bus stop at Barnard Hill Park**

the time and concrete was coming into use. The octagon house is gone, but from descriptions in the letters, it stood on the north side of Bunker Hill Road near the “big gully” (which may have



**Anna and Thomas Clemson's house, "The Home," which stood near today's Shepherd Street between 31st and 32nd Streets. Watercolor (circa 1856) from the collection at Fort Hill: Home of John C. Calhoun & Thomas G. Clemson, Clemson University.**

been either today's 31<sup>st</sup> or 32nd Street).

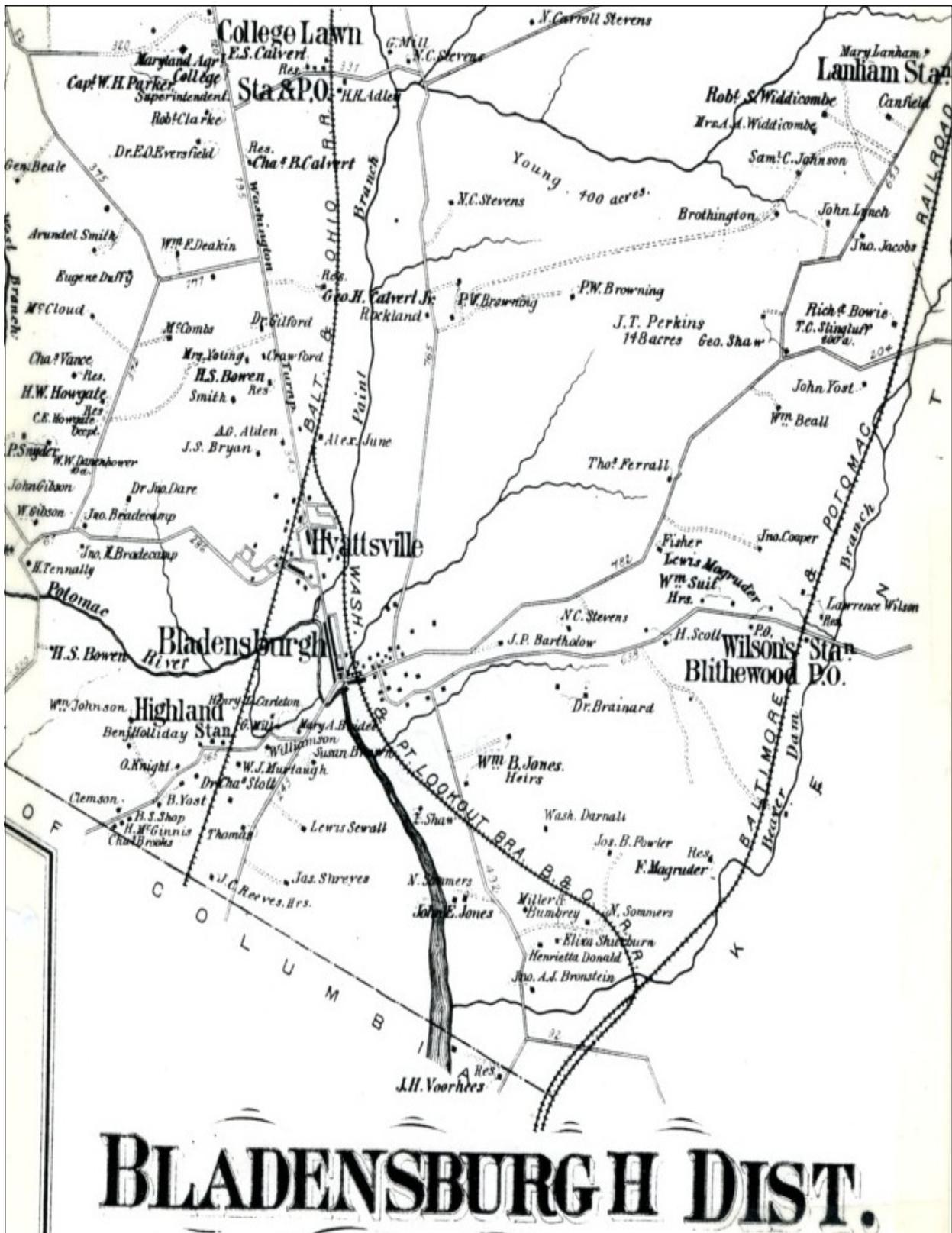
After the Civil War, the Clemsons returned to the South Carolina estate of John C. Calhoun which Anna had inherited after her mother's death. According to the 2009 biography of Thomas Clemson, he “had helped establish the Maryland Agricultural College and was one of [its] most vocal proponents.” That college was built on land donated by his friend, Charles Benedict Calvert, who provided land for it near his Riversdale mansion in the 1850s (see 1878 Hopkins map). And so, it is assumed that Clemson's decision to leave his property to the state of South Carolina for the purpose of establishing Clemson Agricultural College was influenced by his Maryland years. The proceeds from the sale of the Clemson farm in Maryland helped support the new school in South Carolina.

## EARLY SUBDIVISIONS

In 1891, Estcourt and Elizabeth Sawyer purchased the Clemson farm and recorded a plat of “Mt. Rainier.” According to local lore that has never been substantiated, the surveyors of the plat were from the Seattle area and named the subdivision after its famous mountain. Neither of the Sawyers had any known connection to Seattle. However, in the 1890s, efforts were being made in Congress to establish Mount Rainier National Park (achieved in 1899) and the railroad companies were encouraging people to visit the mountain. This might have put the idea into someone's head. And, perhaps coincidentally, the Native American name of Mount Rainier is Tahoma or Tacoma, and our northerly neighbor city of Takoma Park was incorporated in 1890.

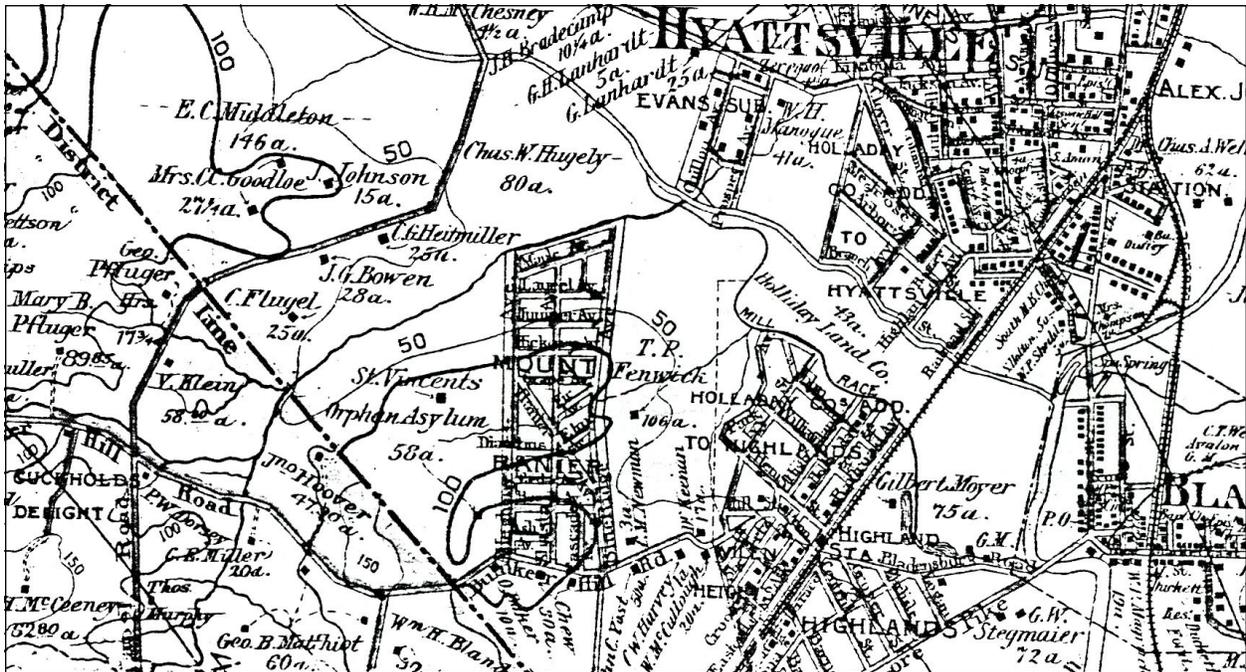


1861 Martinet Map (U.S. Route 1 and Rts. 201, 208, 410, and 450 overlay). The large “B” and Crawford property are within the confines of present-day Mount Rainier.



On the 1878 Hopkins map, the B & O Railroad slices through the middle of the map. The Yost and Clemson properties are noted along Bunker Hill Road which crosses into Maryland near the left edge (just right of the word "OF." The "Potomac River" that runs into Bladensburg is the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia which once was called the Eastern Branch of the Potomac. College Lawn (top of page) is now College Park.

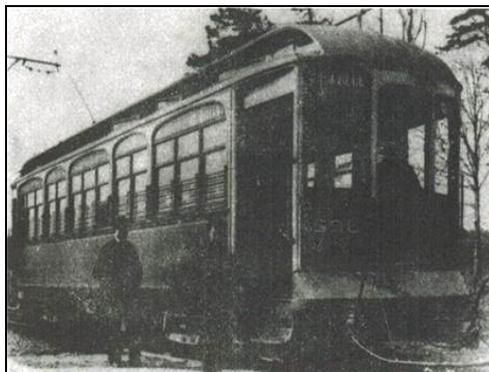
The Griffith M. Hopkins map of 1894 (below) is the first known instance in which the area is designated as Mount Rainier. The Sawyers laid out streets and planted trees, but they built no houses and sold no lots.



1894 Hopkins map. The street grid does not correspond to today's street locations because the actual streets were built later by other developers. The stream in the map's middle is likely the creek that runs along Arundel Road. Queens Chapel Road is just north of that creek and crosses the D.C. line.

### STREET CARS ARRIVE

In 1899, the Rhode Island Avenue streetcar line of the City and Suburban Railroad Company reached Hyattsville. The District Line Station was located at what is now 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Rhode Island Avenue, which was a muddy tract along side the streetcar line.



Type of streetcars that served Mount Rainier in its early days

In 1903, the Mount Rainier Company purchased the old Clemson farm from Sawyer. This date marks the beginning of the first successful attempt to build a town. Earlier attempts on nearby tracts, one called Wilen and another Granby (see map), had failed. In 1903, the Mount Rainier Company graded streets, planted trees, laid a boardwalk on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, and built an office and two houses. During 1904, a concrete sidewalk was laid on 34<sup>th</sup> north of Rainier Avenue, on Bunker Hill Road, and on Ash Street (now Shepherd). Several houses were built, and the swamp at the northern end of the tract was drained (probably the area along Arundel Road).



**Klein's Bakery in 1905**

Source: Otto Gerhart



**Klein's is behind the new facade—2010  
The original hip roof is visible.**

Even in the early days, the area was noted for its high ground and “fine old shade trees.” About 15 houses stood in the vicinity in the 1890s with a population of 50 people.

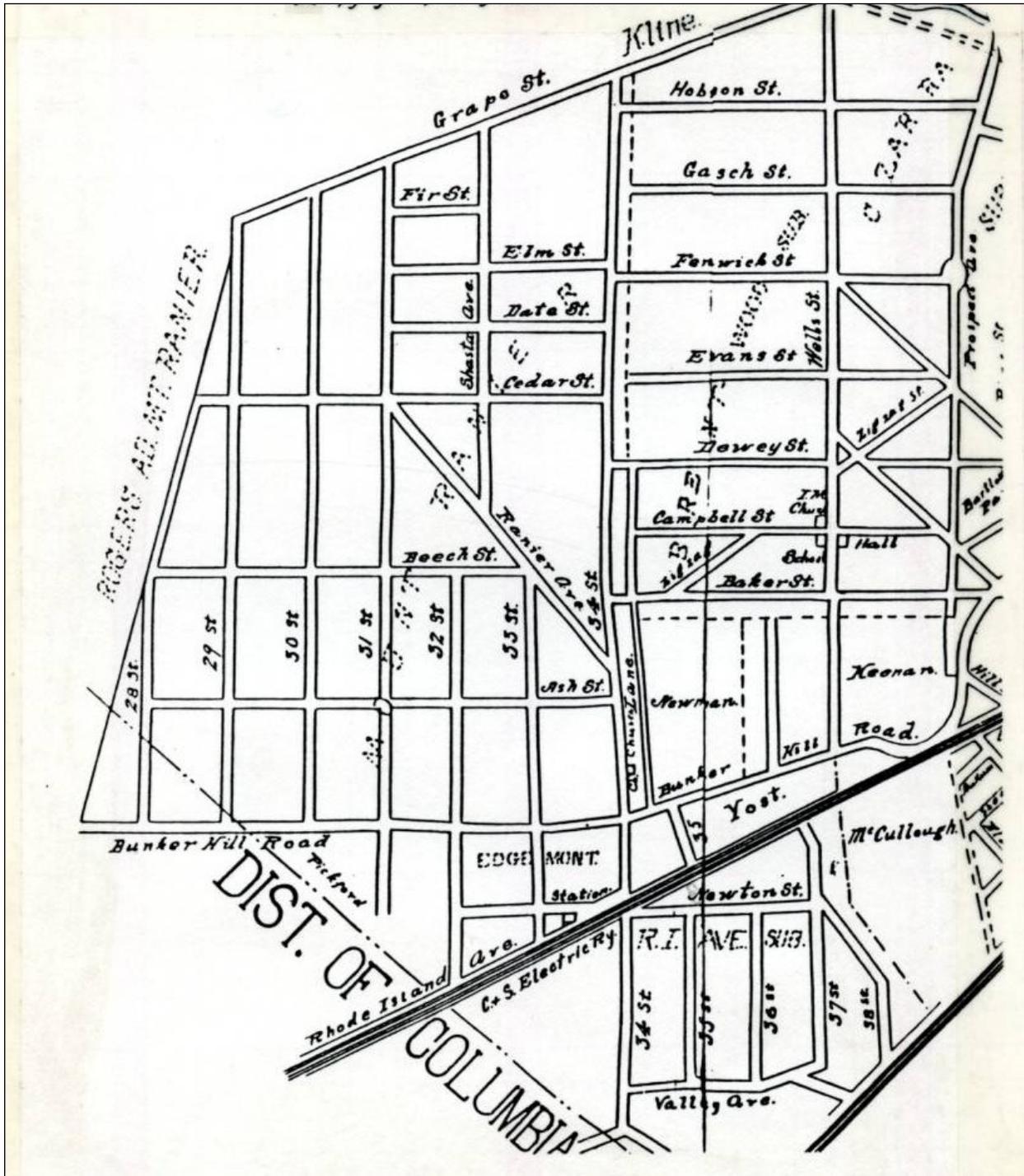
Several other adjacent farms were acquired by developers and these were the tracts incorporated together in 1910 as the town of Mount Rainier. See the 1900 map (next page). For instance,

Granby (see map) was an estate mostly located in the District of Columbia but with a small portion on the Maryland side of the boundary (these estates were created before that area of Northeast D.C. was carved out of Prince George's County). Part of the estate would become developed at the turn of the century as Edgemont (roughly the area between Bunker Hill Road and Rhode Island Avenue near the D.C. line). In the 1860s, John Hoover purchased part of the Granby property. Part of Hoover Road still exists between Monroe Street NE and Rhode Island Avenue NE. In 1889 he sold the Maryland portion of his land to the Sisters of Charity of Emmitsburg for their St. Vincent's Orphanage (see 1894 Hopkins map). The land was probably used as a farm to support that orphanage located elsewhere. On the D.C. side, they operated St. Joseph's Orphanage which still stands on Eastern Avenue (though no longer used for that purpose it remained an orphanage at least into the 1950s).



**Former orphanage just outside the city on Eastern Avenue**

In 1904, J. Harris Rogers (an inventor from Hyattsville) and James C. Rogers began developing land in the area. Their Rogers Addition to Mount Rainier plat was north of Bunker Hill Road just



1900 Wallace A. Bartlett map shows locations of subdivisions and old street names. The north/south streets, with the exception of Shasta Avenue (now 32nd Street between Arundel and Rainier) continued the D.C. numbering system. The east/west streets, however, had a botanical theme in alphabetical sequence—Ash (now Shepherd), Beech (Taylor), Cedar (Upshur), Date (Varnum), Elm (Webster), Fir (Windom), and Grape (Arundel). These names were changed in 1940 to match the District of Columbia naming system. Also, today's Perry Street was first called Newton; Otis Street was Valley Avenue originally.

TER.  
 DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.  
 DISTRICT OF MARYLAND.  
 DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA.  
 DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA.

...in view of the fact that the...  
 ...is one of the few...  
 ...that offers...  
 ...advantage. Much activity has been...

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## MARYLAND, MY MARYLAND

"Just over the line" the residents think that Marylanders can discount the poor features that attend the District.

We can build cheaper, we have no taxes to get, no imposture to stand off.

We get the advantage of the expensive improvements you poor fellows pay for, and which Uncle Sam ought to pay for.

We can vote. We can at least make our money count. It is not ours a year. Tax is the District never can.

The accompanying map shows a tract two miles wide by six miles long, extending from the White House, Washington, into Maryland, the electric line from the White House being northeast.

It will be seen that Mt. Ranier and Brentwood are barely four miles from the business center of Washington, and Hyattsville is barely five miles from each center. Much of the territory of the District of Columbia is farther from the center of the District than is Brentwood.

By the City and Suburban Electric Road, the fare is one ticket or five cents to the District of Columbia Line, and five cents beyond that line to Hyattsville, (beyond Hyattsville). Cars every fifteen minutes, and often during busy hours, morning and evening.

The B. & O. Railway runs twenty trains per day which stop at Hyattsville, and which stop at intermediate points between the new Union Station, Washington, to Brentwood, Md., in just four miles.

Hyattsville, Md., has a bank, two newspapers, six churches, a large new school of 40 pupils, and some twenty business houses doing in all commodities required for a village of 100 people. It has its own water works, and is about to put in an electric lighting plant.

The Holiday Company has lots in Hyattsville, 20 feet by 20 or 25 feet, at \$20 to \$25.

Brentwood and Mt. Ranier, bordering the District of Columbia, have together a population exceeding 60. There is a school of 20 pupils, two churches, some eight or ten stores, and the usual business accessories of a new and growing town. The growth of the settlement is shown by the fact that more than 40 houses were built in 1905, more than 10 in 1906, and it is believed 100 houses will be started in 1907.

Lots in the Holiday Company's tract, along the electric road, in Brentwood, are usually 40 by 25 feet. Some are much larger. Prices range from \$20 to \$25, according to location. All the streets are graded, and most streets have shade trees 8 to 12 years old.

A few lots remain in the Brentwood Company's tract. These are 20 feet front by 20 or 25 deep, and sell for \$20 to \$25.

Mt. Ranier overlooks the country for miles, and at the houses built is but 20 feet from the District Line Station of the City and Suburban Electric Railway. Concrete sidewalks are laid along some of the streets, which are being rapidly improved.

Real estate promotion in the *Washington Times*, May 6, 1906

Inquire of  
 WALLACK A. BARTLETT,  
 1000 15th Street, N.W., WASHINGTON,  
 or Bunker Hill Road, Brentwood.

west of the Mount Rainier Company's holdings (the old Clemson farm; see 1900 map). In 1907, James C. Rogers purchased part of the Edgemont properties and renamed them Roger's Second Addition. Two small parcels were still in the Rogers family ownership in 2002 when the city accepted them as a gift (the small plot in the southwest corner at Perry and 31st, officially became Edgemont Park and the small ravine on Eastern Avenue between Bunker Hill and Shepherd was named in the resolution as Rogers Park).



Source: Teresa Wilcox

**The Village Post Office opened in 1903  
Rachel R. Bengel, Postmaster**

In 1905, another group of developers bought the Yost property lying southeast of the streetcar line and the block lying between 34th and 35th Streets northwest of the railroad (roughly the area of the Methodist Church and City Hall). It was platted as the "Rhode Island Avenue Addition to Mount Rainier" (see 1900 map).

A detailed account of the various land transactions can be found in the *Mount Rainier Historic District National Register Nomination* (M-NCPPC, 1990).



Source: Inventory of Historic Sites

**Thomas W. Smith Farmhouse, 3426 Newton Street, a county historic site (circa 1900). It's the oldest surviving structure representing the rural character of pre-subdivision Mount Rainier. Rives rail station was nearby.**

## OTHER EVENTS AND FACTS

1903

- Edgar BonDurant donated a lot for the 34th Street Chapel (later converted to a house at 4029 34th St.).

1908

- First St. James Church (Catholic) built at 36th and Bunker Hill Road.

1909

- First meeting of St. John's Chapel (Episcopal) held in Star-Potts Hall.

1914

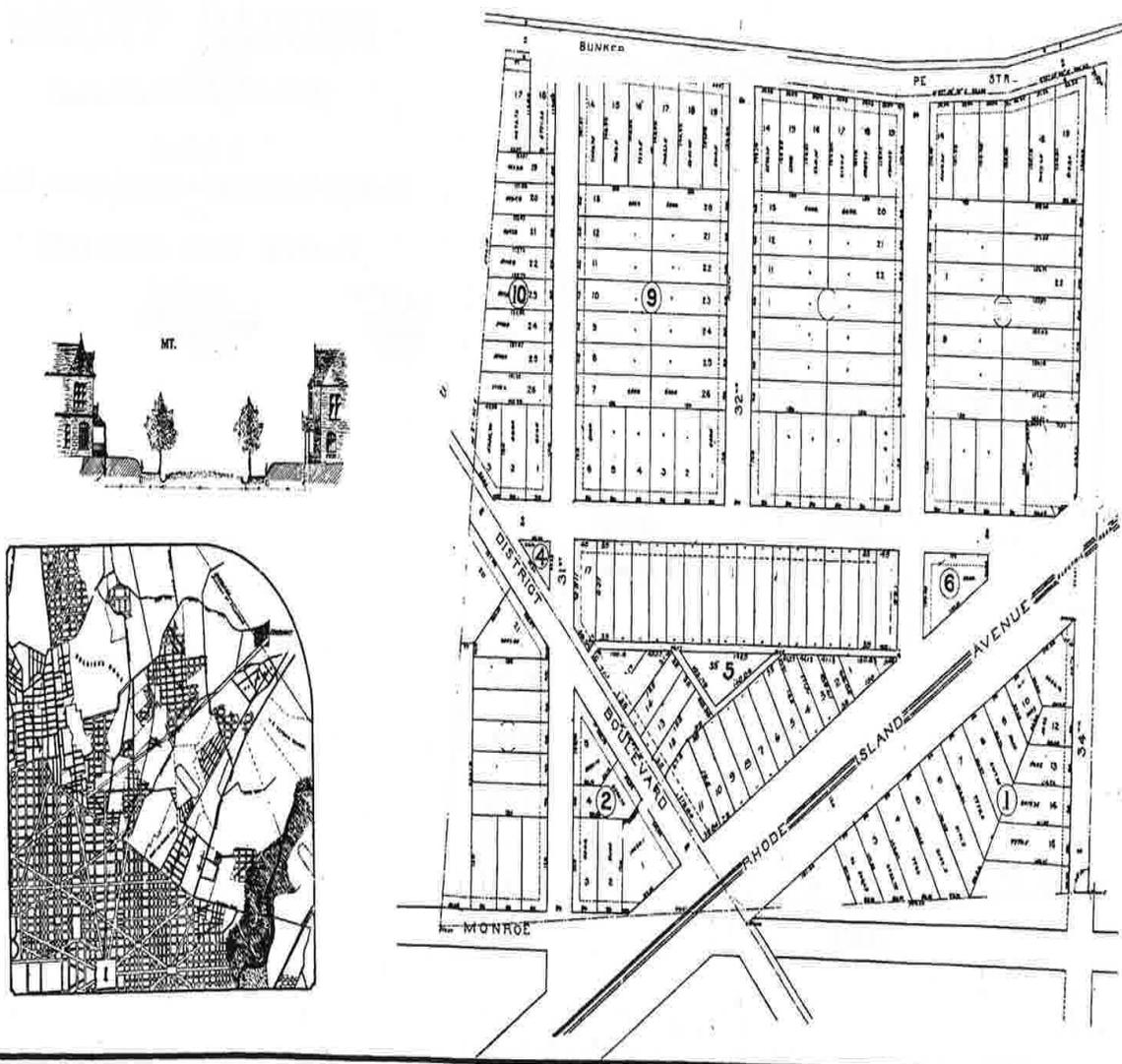
- Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, Chapter 156 organized. The IOOF later had a temple in the 3300 block of Bunker Hill Road.
- New ordinance prohibits discharge of firearms within the town. (WP 1/21/1914)

## SOURCES

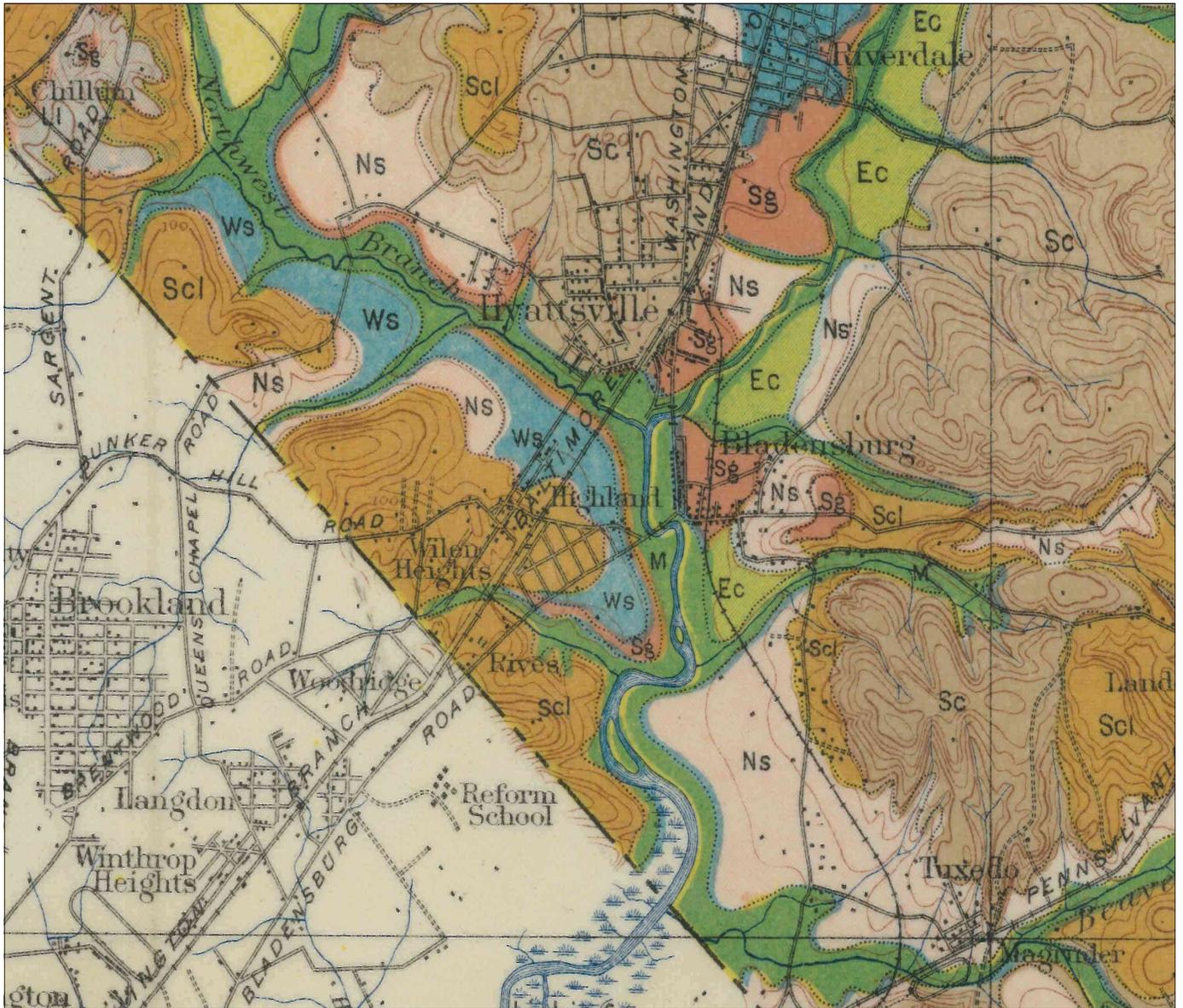
- *Fort Hill: Home of John C. Calhoun & Thomas G. Clemson*, Clemson University.

city.

- *Mount Rainier Historic District National Register Nomination* (Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1990).
- *A Rebel Came Home* (diary of Floride Clemson), Charles M. McGee, Jr. and Ernest M. Lander, Jr., editors. Univ. of S.C. Press, 1961.
- *Letters of Anna Calhoun Clemson 1833-1873*. Dissertation of Julia Wright Sublette. Florida State University, 1993.
- *Thomas Green Clemson*. Alma Bennett, editor. Clemson University, 2009.
- "Clemson Bequest." *Wash. Post*. 11/20/1890.



**Roger's Second Addition to Mount Rainier, 1907 plat. Bunker Hill Road is at the top of the plat and the intersection of present-day Rhode Island Avenue, Eastern Avenue, and Otis Street is at the bottom.**



**1901 USDA Soils Map**  
**“Wilen Heights” is indicated on site of today’s Mount Rainier.**



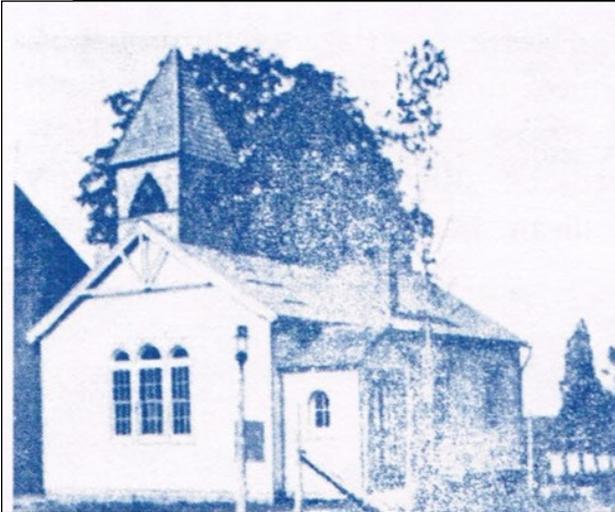
*sometime between 1901-1909*  
**St. James Catholic Church ca. 1901 to 1909**



Norman Vening

*The white building (left center) was known as the 34th Street Chapel (Christian Church). Today, 34th Street runs between the two buildings. Photo dated 1904.*

**The 34th St. Chapel was converted into the house at 4029 34th St. (below). The house opposite it still stands at 4022 34th St. (front of house at bottom of page). Today's 34th St. runs between the two buildings. The photo may have been taken from area around today's 33rd and Shepherd? Photo dated 1904**



**4022 34th Street in 2010.**