

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name The Brill Octagon House
other names/site number HM-0407

2. Location

street & number Capon Springs Road and Mellwee Road not for publication
city or town Capon Springs vicinity
state West Virginia code WV county Hampshire code 027 zip code 26823

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Susan M Pierce Deputy SHPO 2/22/2016
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. 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

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID-19TH CENTURY: Octagon Mode

foundation: STONE

walls: WOOD: Weatherboard

roof: METAL

other: WOOD

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

See continuation sheets.

Narrative Description

See continuation sheets.

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

Ca. 1890

Significant Dates

Ca. 1890

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Period of Significance (justification)

See continuation sheets.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

See continuation sheets.

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

See continuation sheets.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

See continuation sheets.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

See continuation sheets.

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

See continuation sheets.

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 # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): HM-0407

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.729
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17</u> Zone	<u>716839</u> Easting	<u>4334885</u> Northing	3	_____ Zone	_____ Easting	_____ Northing
2	_____ Zone	_____ Easting	_____ Northing	4	_____ Zone	_____ Easting	_____ Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

See continuation sheets.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

See continuation sheets.

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property

Hampshire County, WV
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janie-Rice Brother, Senior Architectural Historian
organization Kentucky Archaeological Survey date September 2015
street & number 1020A Export Street telephone _____
city or town Lexington State KY zip code 40506
e-mail _____

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

See continuation sheets.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 7 Page 1

Description

Summary Paragraph

The Brill Octagon House is located in the community of Capon Springs in Hampshire County, West Virginia. This crossroads community is located at the intersection of Capon Springs Road (County Route 16), McIlwee Road, and Back Creek Road. The Brill House sits on a fairly flat grassy parcel, almost directly across from Back Creek Road. Capon Springs Run is located southwest of the house. There are two evergreen trees located at the front of the parcel, along Capon Springs Road, and some scattered evergreens to the rear of the house. There are no outbuildings. The nominated area consists of the entire legal parcel, approximately 1.729 acres with one contributing feature, the house.

Exterior

The Brill Octagon House dates to circa 1890. From the exterior, it looks like a two-story, frame octagonal dwelling, but is actually a cruciform shaped building, with two-story triangular porches joining the arms of the cross (Photos 1-2). The standing seam metal roof of the house, comprised of many hipped sections, converges at a central stone chimneystack.

The porches have plain wooden balustrades (with squared balusters) and squared wooden supports. Overall, the house has very little in the way of stylistic notation. In its plainness, the Brill House almost recalls the subdued and restrained Greek Revival buildings at Capon Springs Resort. It is not known whether the Brill House originally had any late-19th architectural ornamentation or not. The triangular porches would be the natural place for any stylistic elements, such as turned and chamfered porch supports, spindlework, and brackets (Photo 6). Photographs of the house prior to its purchase by the current owners do not show any late-19th century ornamentation.

Clad in weatherboards, the house rests on a continuous stone foundation and has only a crawl space (Photo 8). It has corner boards, a wide cornice board, and a sill board. Given its unusual form, there is no "main façade" but the main entry faces north – and toward the crossroads, the store, and school (Photo 2). It is not known if this was the main entry originally, but given that it faces the main road, that seems probable. The Brill Octagon House, then, presented its façade to the community of Capon Springs, though there were originally six entry doors on the first floor. Two of those doors, on the north and east, were converted into one-over double hung windows in the 20th century. All of the entry doors have screen doors, a combination of metal and wooden doors. The entry doors are all a mixture of half-panel, half-sash, some with a full light in the upper panel, and others with simulated multi-lights in the upper panel. The original window openings, on the projecting ends of the cruciform, are six-over-six double-hung wooden sash (Photo 7). The 2008 West Virginia Historic Property Inventory form states that these are replacement sash windows.

The brick chimney projecting from the center of the roof has a stone base. The porch on the south corner of the house has been partially closed in to form a storage area for yard tools (Photo 5).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 7 Page 2

The second story is a mirror image of the second, with the exception of only one door per porch, rather than six. Windows are six-over-six double-hung sash.

Interior

The floor plan of the Brill Octagon House consists of a stair hall, a large central room divided by the chimneystack, and a room identical to the stair hall on the opposite side.

The main (north) entry door leads into the side-passage stair hall. The walls are clad in original horizontal wood sheathing, while the staircase wall is paneled. The open staircase is a simple, stock, late-19th century design, with turned spindles, with a slender cannonball newel post (Photo 9). The upstairs balustrade is much plainer, with squared balusters (Photo 14). The hardwood floor in the stair hall, and the stairs themselves, are covered with carpet. Interior doors feature four, horizontal inset panels (Photo 10).

The central room now serves as kitchen, dining, and living room. The chimney stack, now exposed stone, was originally plastered (Photos 11-13). There are firebox openings on both sides of the first story stack, but there are only stove flues on the second story. The original mantle and any trimwork are no longer extant.

The walls in the central room are a combination of original wood horizontal cladding and modern drywall. The living room side has wood horizontal sheathing, while the kitchen area has drywall (Photo 13). The hardwood floors are original.

The east side of the central room has been divided into two areas: a mudroom/utility room and a full bathroom.

The second story walls are all clad in drywall. The central room has been divided into two bedrooms, with closets installed on one side of the chimney stack. The east room has been divided into a small bedroom and another bathroom.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 3

Statement of Significance

The Brill Octagon House meets National Register Criterion C, embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type and period of architecture: domestic architecture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in rural Hampshire County. Specifically, the house conveys, on the exterior, the attributes of a form of building most popular in the Northeast and Midwest in the mid-19th century – the octagon. But this appearance, accomplished by four recessed porches around the dwelling, is an illusion, and the house plans itself is that of a cruciform shape, with a more traditional (though still not common for the area) side-passage plan. Nonetheless, the Brill Octagon House has cemented its place in community history as an octagon, and it is within that context its significance is examined.

In order to understand the local significance of the Brill House, it is necessary to examine the context of architecture in Hampshire County during the 19th century, as well as the influences upon the house's construction: the mid-19th century octagon house trend, and the development of the nearby resort of Capon Springs.

Historic Background of Hampshire County, 1750-1890

Hampshire County, located in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle, was created by the Virginia General Assembly from parts of Frederick and Augusta Counties in 1754. At that time the county encompassed some 2,800 square miles, which would later be whittled down to form all or parts of five additional counties.¹ At that time, it was the western frontier of Virginia, and the route to the Ohio River Valley.

The county seat of Romney was incorporated in 1762, and it holds the title of West Virginia's oldest city along with Shepherdstown. The first post office in Hampshire County was established in Romney in 1796. Located in the lower valley of the South Branch of the Potomac River, the town benefitted from the being along the route of Northwestern Turnpike (today's Route 50). As early as 1786, a state road had been completed from Winchester to Romney, but the Northwestern Turnpike was of great benefit to the town and county.

Chartered by the General Assembly of Virginia in 1827, the Northwestern Turnpike was conceived as a rival transportation route to the National Road. It linked Winchester to Parkersburg, and became one of the most important east-west roads in the state. The Baltimore & Ohio and the Northwestern Virginia railroads ran parallel to the Northwestern Turnpike.²

The Civil War was a fractious time in Hampshire County. Two years into the conflict, West Virginia became the nation's 35th state. The westernmost section of Hampshire County was largely pro-Union (in 1866 that

¹ Ted Olson. "Hampshire County." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 31 May 2013. Web. 20 September 2015.

² Philip Sturm. "Northwestern Virginia Turnpike." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 21 October 2010. Web. 20 September 2015.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 4

portion would become Mineral County), but the remainder of the county included many Confederate sympathizers. The divided loyalties of residents, and the all-important railroad meant that clashes occurred frequently in the county.³ During the Civil War, the town of Romney changed hands 56 times.⁴ The county's population in 1870 was 7,643 residents.

After the Civil War, new architectural styles began to filter into the landscape of Hampshire County. The railroad helped spread these styles and forms, as well as transport factory-made architectural elements. The popular romantic styles of the mid-to-late 19th century, including the Italianate and Gothic Revival, flourished with the advent of balloon framing, as did later influential styles such as the Queen Anne.

Hampshire County grew slowly after the Civil War, with a population of 10,366 in 1880 and in the 1890 census, some 11,419 residents. Farming was the chief occupation; in 1890, there were 1,365 farms in the county, with an average farm size of 250 acres.⁵

Hampshire County today covers around 644 square miles, and has a population of around 23,000 people. The economy remains focused on agriculture, logging and wood products, as well as tourism.⁶ One mainstay tourist attraction in the county, Capon Springs, played no small part in the construction of the Brill Octagon House.

Resort Culture: Capon Springs

Perhaps one of the most critical factors in the construction of the Brill Octagon House is its proximity and relationship to the adjacent resort of Capon Springs. The mineral spring from which the resort derives its names was "discovered" in the Euro-American period by Henry Frye, in the late 1760s. Frye purportedly built a cabin near the springs, believing his wife's health improved due to its waters, and frequented the area for many years. The area around the springs became known as Frye's Springs.⁷

Joseph Watson purchased the springs in the late 1780s, and became the first of its many promoters. Located at the base of Great North Mountain, the springs were one of many across the south believed to possess medicinal and healing qualities. Due to poor overland routes, visitors would stay for months seeking the health benefits of the springs.

Following Watson's death, the state of Virginia purchased the property, and in December 1787, 20 acres around the springs was laid off in lots and streets, and christened as the "Town of Watson." The town had 38

³ Olson, "Hampshire County."

⁴ Ted Olson. "Romney." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 12 November 2012. Web. 20 September 2015.

⁵ Historical Census Browser. Retrieved August 2015, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

⁶ Olson, "Hampshire County."

⁷ Maral Kalbian/Julie Vosmik. "Capon Springs." *Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places*, 1993. Copy on file at the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office. Section 7, page 1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 5

one-half acre lots and five streets: Water, Bath, Hill, High, and Mountain Streets. A Board of Trustees was appointed to govern the fledgling settlement, and the lots auctioned off with the stipulation that a dwelling house 16 feet square with a stone or brick chimney be erected.⁸

In 1830, the General Assembly authorized an act to fund the construction of a road from “the springs to the east side of Big Mountain and from there to connect with the Wardensville Road, which was the main route between Winchester and the springs.”⁹ This infrastructure improvement would dramatically improve the economic status of the resort as well as that of the surrounding community.

The crossroads community of Capon Springs is unincorporated, but has persisted as a rural crossroads since before the first post office was established in 1841. Located about two miles northwest of the springs and resort, it contains a handful of buildings at the juncture of the three roads (Capon Springs Road, McIlwee Road, and Back Creek Road) and scattered dwellings along those roads. In addition to the Brill House, there is the former Willow Run School (HM-0405), circa 1894, and the former two-story frame store (HM-0404), built around 1880.

By 1833 the springs boasted “17 to 18 houses erected without regard to regularity and a boarding establishment capable for accommodating 50 to 60 visitors which is kept in excellent style.” During the 1850s, a major building campaign commenced, with the State of Virginia financing construction of the Baths (now the Pavilion and President’s Cottage) and the Reservoir (now the Recreation Hall). These brick buildings are built in a subdued Greek Revival style, with fluted trim, corner blocks, denticulation, and a portico with Tuscan columns.¹⁰

The debts incurred during the construction boom of the 1850s forced the resort to close before the Civil War. Following the war, improved economic conditions, new ownership, and the extension of a branch line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad all acted to spur the success of the resort. Promotional materials for the railroad hailed Capon Spring’s proximity – 15 miles – and that the resort was accessible by carriage from the Capon Road railroad station. The new owner, a former Confederate captain named William H. Sale, built additional structures and overhauled existing buildings.¹¹

This wave of construction and investment enriched the nearby crossroads community as well. It appears that during the last two decades of the 19th century, the resort prospered (even as that tide began to change) and the village of Capon Springs grew as well. In addition to the Brill House, two other buildings at the crossroads date from this period of growth at the springs.

⁸ Kalbian/Vosmik, Section 8, page 18.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kalbian/Vosmik.

¹¹ Ibid, Section 8, page 20.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 6

While the growth and development of the resort at Capon Springs encouraged development of the surrounding area, none of the structures at the resort bear the slightest resemblance to the Brill Octagon House. However, local history recounts a connection between its builder, Elias Brill, and the resort.

Elias E. Brill was born between 1856 and 1858, according to census records, and was the son of Samuel and Martha Brill. The census records place him in Capon Spring, and in the 1880 census, he was 21 years old and still living in his parent's household. His occupation was listed as farm laborer.¹² Around five years later, he married Gertrude F. Anderson, and their only child, a daughter, was born the following year (1886). Elias Brill died in 1896. His daughter, Della Brill, married a Bland, and the house stayed in the family until 1975. The house was not occupied again until its purchase by the current owner in 1991.¹³

In the March 14, 1889 edition of the *Hampshire Review*, an Elias Brill was cited as helping to put up a "new ceiling in the new portico of the Hotel at Capon Springs."¹⁴ It is not certain that this is the same Elias Brill, however, as the one who owned and likely built the octagonal house considered in this nomination. There is another Elias Brill, some ten years younger, in the Hampshire County census records. It seems likely, though, that the Elias Brill who built the octagon house was involved or worked at Capon Springs, given the family lore surrounding construction of the house.

According to Edith Brill, the wife of Elias E. Brill's grandson, the house was built by Elias Brill under the guidance of an architect who was a guest at Capon Springs.¹⁵ During the renovation of the house in the early 1990s, a board was uncovered from within the walls with "January 1890" written on it.¹⁶

On November 7, 1889, John M. and Belle M. Waddle sold four acres to Elias Brill, for \$150.00.¹⁷ The deed noted that this was "tract of land on which Elias Brill now resides" so it is possible there was some type of improvement on the parcel already, but it is not known if that improvement included the octagon house. It is not likely that the octagon house existed at the time of the sale, for the price would have been higher.

The wealthy guests at the resort may have helped guide Elias Brill's plans for his new home, but why such a curious form?

The Rise of the Octagon

The octagon in mid-19th century America is a curious cross between a style and a type, but its main proponent intended to not reshape the built environment so much as improve the life of the common man.

¹² United States Census Returns, Retrieved September 2015 from www.ancestry.com.

¹³ Personal papers of Jonathan Bellingham, current property owner.

¹⁴ Debbie Boyce. *Capon Notes*. (Self-published by Xlibris Corporation, 2007), 85.

¹⁵ Personal papers of Jonathan Bellingham, current property owner. In addition to the scant amount of information unearthed about Brill in primary sources, there is little documentation about when the house was actually built.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Jonathan Bellingham, current property owner

¹⁷ Hampshire County Deed Book 66, page 297.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 7

Orson S. Fowler, phrenologist and tireless promoter, is most closely linked with the development of the octagon house in America, though its origins stretch back to religious structures constructed by the Greeks and Romans. Leonardo da Vinci espoused that the octagon was the idea form for a church, and throughout the Renaissance it was often used in religious structures or ecclesiastical elements.

William Kent, in his *Designs of Indio Jones*, used the form, and it was fairly popular in England for garden buildings, baths, and religious structures. The form remained almost solely the province of ancillary structures, and typically had no partition of the interior.

Dutch settlers in New York brought the octagon form with them from Holland, and the earliest documented use of the form was an octagonal Dutch trading post built in 1683. Although it was chiefly used for church buildings, nearly 20 houses were built between 1680 and 1750 in the Hudson River Valley.¹⁸

Outside of New York, the octagon made appearances in several colonies, but the form remained “confined to a small segment of the population and was not publicly adopted on a large scale.”¹⁹ Williamsburg had an octagonal powder house, and churches continued to be built using the shape. Thomas Jefferson included the form in over 50 proposals, and built his retreat in Bedford County (Poplar Forest) using the shape. America’s first professional architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, designed an octagon church in New Orleans in 1814.

One of the most interesting (and practical) applications of the octagon form in building was the construction of octagonal tollhouses on the National Road in the 1830s. In 1831, the Pennsylvania legislature authorized the construction of six tollhouses, “choosing the form so that the tollkeeper would have a clear view of the road in both directions.”²⁰ One of the tollhouses was located at Frostburg, Maryland. It is not known whether this tollhouse is still extant.

Although the octagon form was known by the mid-19th century, and other architectural pattern books featured occasional octagonal designs, Orson Fowler, through his continual efforts to improve the life of the common man, brought the octagon house to the people. Fowler’s main concern was to enclose the most interior space for the least amount of money, and the octagon house was the “perfect solution...a house, beautiful by the form itself, that focuses on economy and function.”²¹

Fowler strongly recommended a central stair hall which would eliminate “drafty hallways and the need to pass through them and additional doors.”²² One of his early plans, however, did feature a side stairhall, and that plan most closely resembles the Brill House (Supplemental Image 1). Another of Fowler’s key beliefs

¹⁸ Rebecca Lawin McCarley. “The Octagon House in American Culture: The Influence of Orson S. Fowler in the Midwest.” (Master’s Thesis, Ball State University, 2001), 49.

¹⁹ Ibid, 55.

²⁰ Ibid, 57.

²¹ Ibid, 24.

²² Ibid, 27.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 8

was the inclusion of porches all around the house to enjoy and view the surrounding countryside. The belief in the positive effect of a rural life inspired many writers and designers of his day.

The exact numbers of octagonal houses built in the United States has been as source of debate since the 19th century. Across the country, the “octagon house was built primarily from the late 1840s through the 1860s, though the greatest concentration of building was during the 1850s.”²³ In addition to the chronological specification, octagon houses clustered in certain geographical areas, including New York (Fowler’s home), the Northeast, the Midwest, and California.²⁴ Journals and promoters of the form proclaimed construction numbers in the thousands in the 19th century. In the 1880s, Orson Fowler himself took the trend to Colorado, leasing 5,000 acres for five years in the hope of building a colony of fruit growers that would live according to his philosophies on health and other social issues – and in octagonal buildings. Fowler filed a town plat under the name of Fowler Town and Development.²⁵ The idea, alas, did not move forward.

By the late 1870s, the octagon form moved into American agriculture, and was “regarded with much favor by many intelligent agriculturists.”²⁶ As Fowler had extolled, the octagon form made good use of building materials and interior wall space. The Kuykendall Polygonal Barn, located in Hampshire County, was a 15-sided polygonal barn built in 1906. According to the nomination, the “octagon shape, popular in the late 19th century, gave way to a true circular shape after the turn of the century, as advancing technical knowledge provided the basis for the necessary construction techniques.”²⁷

The octagon form was not widespread in West Virginia. A non-profit educational website, entitled “A Website Inventory of Older Octagonal, Hexagon and Round Houses” lists five octagonal buildings in the state of West Virginia.²⁸ In addition to the Brill House, there is a house in Berkeley County, two octagonal school houses (one in Jefferson County, and the other in Brooke County), and in Ritchie County, a house that looks to be a T-shape or cruciform shape (with a gable roof system) that once had triangular porches. An additional known octagonal building from the late-19th/early 20th century time period is Alberts Chapel in Calhoun County, West Virginia. The frame church dates to 1903.

The Significance of the Brill House within its Local Context

²³ Ibid, 64.

²⁴ Cultural geographers tend to define the Midwest as Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and the eastern halves of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. In the master’s thesis by Rebecca Lawin McCarley, the Midwest was narrowed to include just Ohio, Michigan, Indian, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

²⁵ McCarley, 45.

²⁶ Ibid, 77.

²⁷ Ralph Pederson and Margo Stafford. Kuykendall Polygonal Barn. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. 1984. Copy on file at the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office. Section 8, page 1.

²⁸ Robert Kline, A Website Inventory of Older Octagon, Hexagon, and Round Houses, http://www.octagon.bobanna.com/main_page.html, 2002, 2010. Accessed September 2015.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 8 Page 9

The reasons behind the choice of this hybrid cruciform/octagonal plan are unknown, but several interesting factors emerge. The property's proximity to Capon Springs Resort, and Elias Brill's work at the resort, could well have exposed Brill to visitors and tourists familiar with the type. Given that the octagon form was typically spread by former residents moving south, it could well be that a guest at the springs recommended the form to Elias Brill, for its economy of space and materials.

Obviously what was built is not a true octagon. Although Orson Fowler claimed the octagon eliminated drafty hallways and dark corners, partition of the interior into useful, desirable spaces is difficult, and the chief complaint among people in the 1860s was about the division of rooms on the interior. Was this what led Elias Brill to construct a house with the appearance of an octagon, but with interior spaces more conducive to room division?

The cruciform plan, while not exactly common in domestic architecture, has been used in church plans for centuries in Europe. And when one examines the interior plan of the Brill House, it is laid out in what is often perceived as a more urban plan – the side-passage house.

According to some secondary sources, the cruciform plan was prevalent in colonial Maryland and Virginia. The plan was described as the entry through a door in the “two-story extension in the transverse direction of the cross; at the rear of this extension was an enclosed porch on the ground floor containing a small, steep stair leading to a room above.”²⁹ This plan essentially functions a single pile, central passage house with a projecting porch at either end of the hall.

In 18th-century Virginia, the cruciform shape developed as the new vernacular for church architecture. Fifteen brick churches were built in the 1730s following the cruciform shape, adopted less for its religious overtones, perhaps, than allowing “congregants a clear view of the pulpit and of the gentry in the front pews.”³⁰ Domestic examples include the famous Bacon's Castle in Surrey, Virginia, and other vernacular dwellings like the house cited as an octagon in Ritchie County. But the most compelling element of the form and design of the Brill House is its elaborate roof system that, along with the triangular porches, convincingly presents the illusion of an octagonal house.

Fowler strongly believed that the octagon house should have a “full porch around every story” and the Brill House almost accomplishes this with its triangular porches on all four sides. The ingenious roof construction, which stretches over the recessed porches, coming to the center where the chimney rose, furthers the illusion of an octagon – and one could almost see the chimney as a cupola, a design element often featured in Fowler's plans.

²⁹ Harris, 85.

³⁰ Anthony S. Parrent. *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 213.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Though the reasons for the plan and appearance of the Brill House will likely never be known, a myriad of hypotheses can be constructed as explanation. Nonetheless, the house is a unique piece of workmanship and design in its rural setting. The Brill House is a locally significant domestic design, little changed on the exterior since its construction in 1890.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 11

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 12

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 10 Page 13

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property boundary extends from the front of the domestic yard bordering Capon Springs Road (County Route 16), west to the border with McIlwee Road, and south to Capon Springs Run, and on the east by the property line. The property is a 1.729-acre parcel (parcel ID 02-34-56-3).

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The property proposed for inclusion on the National Register by the current nomination includes the 1.729-acre parcel (parcel ID 02-34-56-3) associated with the Brill Octagon House. The proposed boundaries provide an appropriate setting for understanding the significance of the design and construction of this house within its historic context in Hampshire County and maintains the same domestic yard as during the Period of Significance. The boundary includes the domestic yard and maintains the historic setting in which the contributing feature was constructed.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

The Brill Octagon House
Name of Property
Hampshire County, WV
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photos Page 14

PHOTOS

All photos: **The Brill Octagon House, HM-0407**
Hampshire County, West Virginia
Janie-Rice Brother, Photographer
2015
CD at the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office

Photo 1. The Brill House, from Back Creek Road, showing main entryway. Facing southeast.

Photo 2. The Brill House, main entryway, showing north and west elevations, facing southeast.

Photo 3. The Brill House, facing east, showing main entryway on left, rear entryway on right.

Photo 4. The Brill House, facing northeast, showing rear entryway, west and south elevations.

Photo 5. The Brill House, facing north, showing southeast side porch that has been enclosed to act as a yard tool storage area.

Photo 6. The Brill House, northeast entryway, facing southwest.

Photo 7. The Brill House, detail of first-floor window, facing east.

Photo 8. The Brill House, detail of foundation, sill board and corner board.

Photo 9. The Brill House, interior of stair hall, facing north.

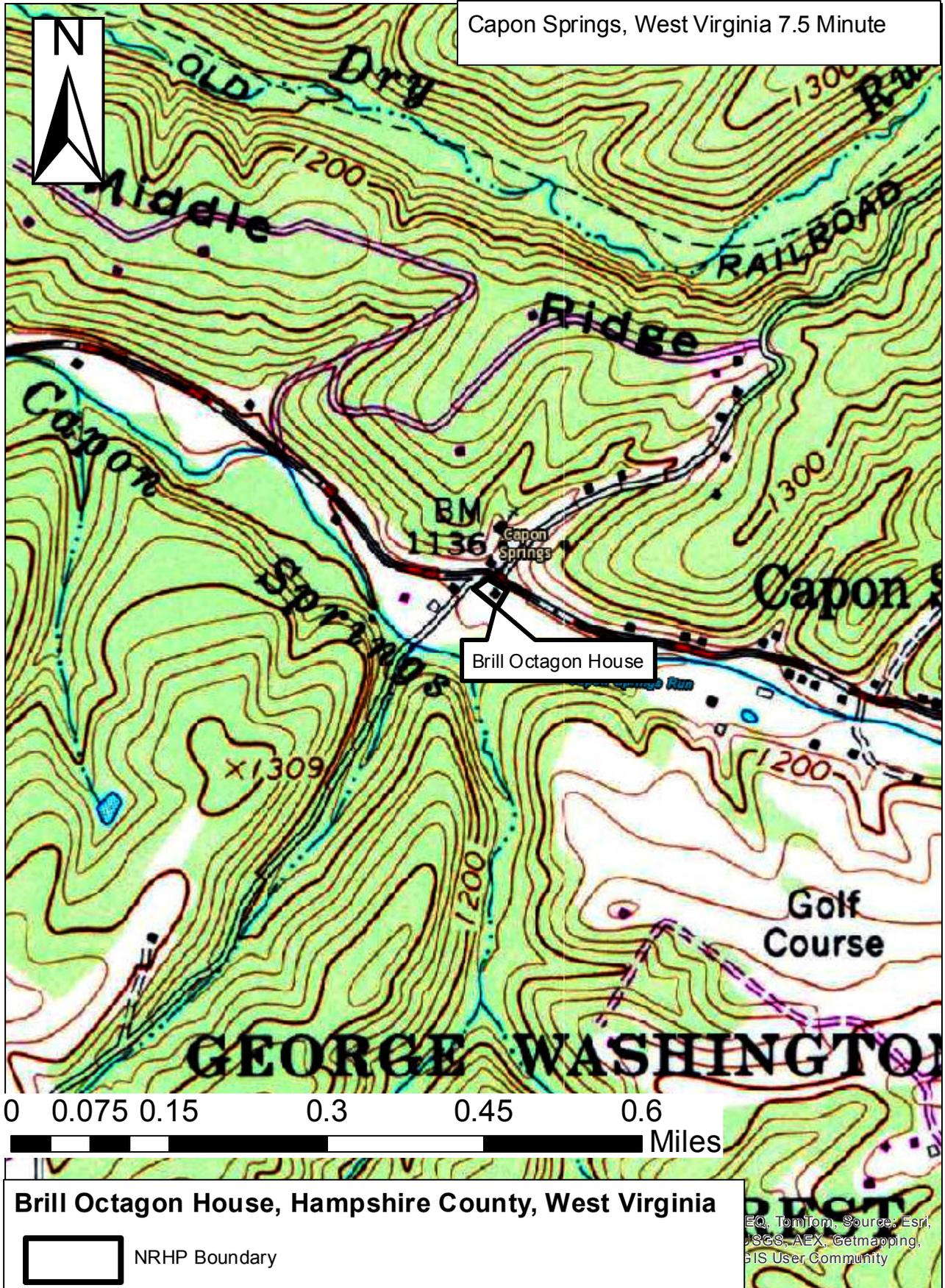
Photo 10. The Brill House, interior door, facing south.

Photo 11. The Brill House, interior of central room, facing north, showing central chimneystack.

Photo 12. The Brill House, interior of central room, standing in kitchen area, facing south.

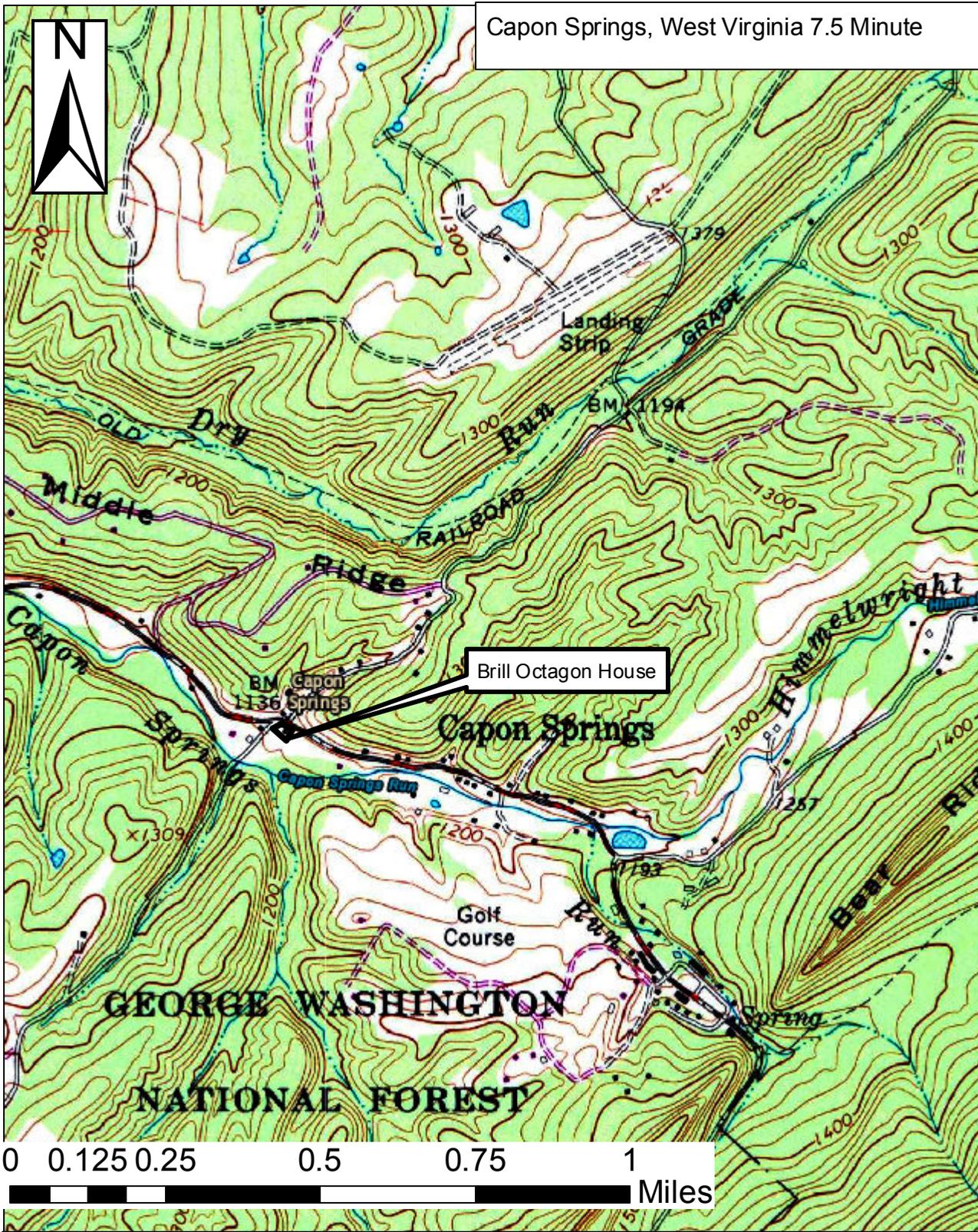
Photo 13. The Brill House, interior of central room, standing in kitchen area, facing south.

Photo 14. The Brill House, second story stair balustrade.



NAD 27
 -78.491118 39.137668 Decimal Degrees (Center point of house)

Capon Springs, West Virginia 7.5 Minute



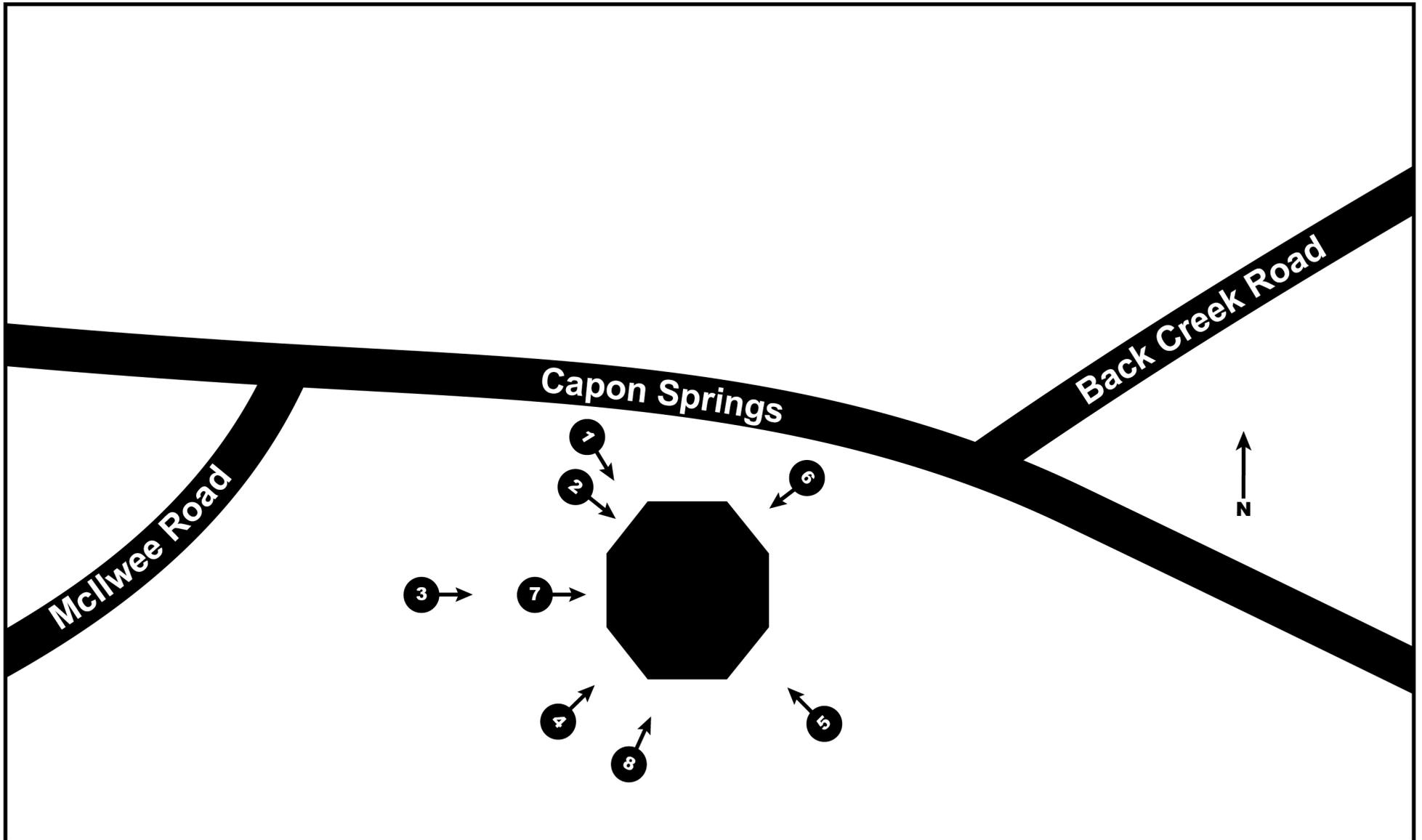
Brill Octagon House



Brill Octagon House, Hampshire County, West Virginia

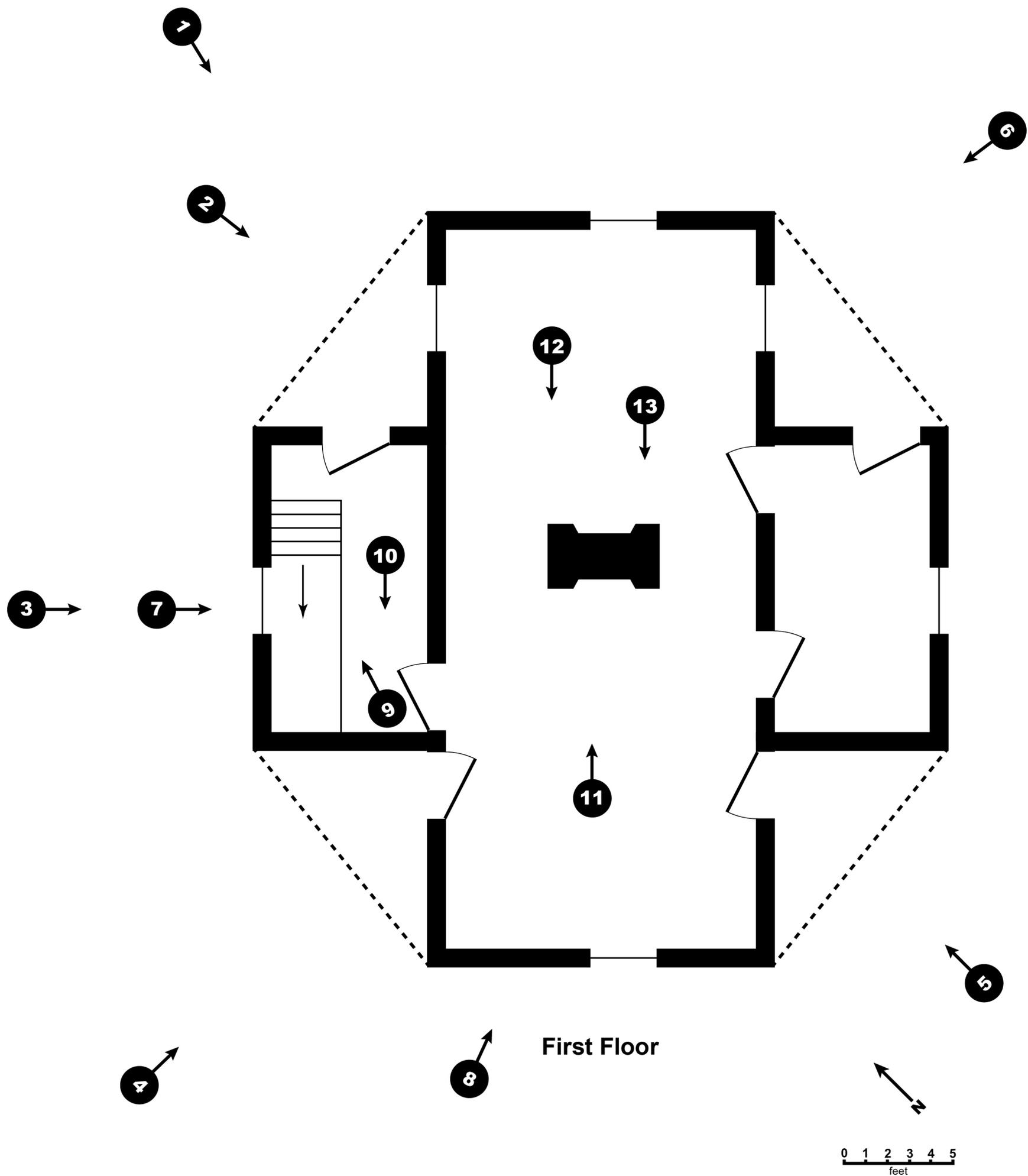


NAD 27
-78.491118 39.137668 Decimal Degrees (Center point of house)



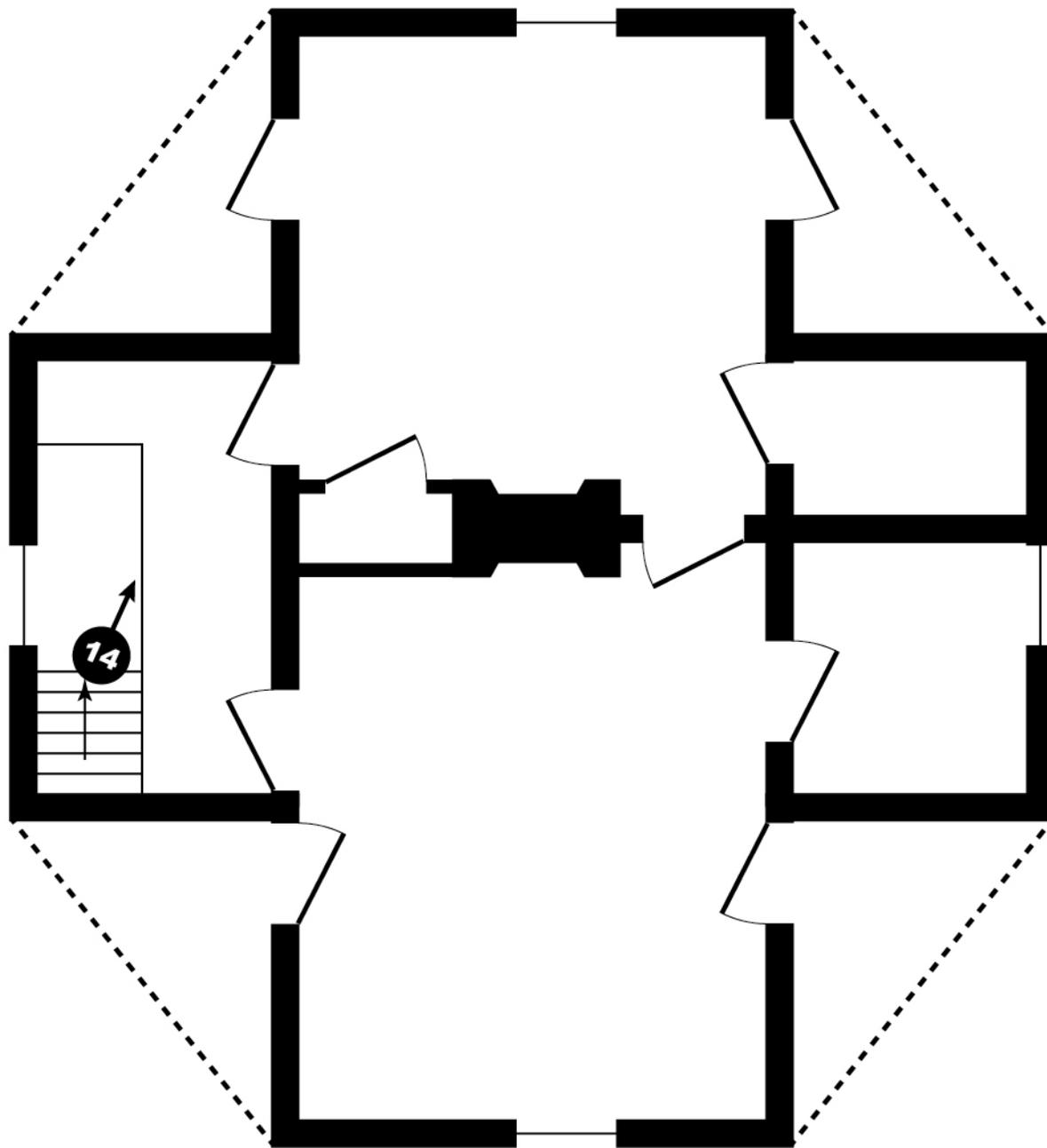
The Brill Octagon House

Capon Springs, Hampshire County, West Virginia
Site Plan and Photo Locations



The Brill Octagon House

Capon Springs, Hampshire County, West Virginia
 Floor Plan and Photo Locations



Second Floor





Photo 1: The Brill House, from Back Creek Road



Photo 2: The Brill House, main entryway



Photo 3: The Brill House, main entryway on left, rear entryway on right



Photo 4: The Brill House, showing rear entryway



Photo 5: The Brill House, southeast side porch that has been enclosed to act as a yard tool storage shed



Photo 6: The Brill House, northeast entryway



Photo 7: The Brill House, detail of first floor window



Photo 8: The Brill House, detail of foundation



Photo 9: The Brill House, interior stair hall



Photo 10: The Brill House, interior door



Photo 11: The Brill House, interior of central room



Photo 12: The Brill House, interior of central room



Photo 13: The Brill House, interior of central room



Photo 14: The Brill House, second story stair balustrade