CATLETT VILLAGE

FAUQUIER COUNTY, VIRGINIA

EXISTING PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1: 1937 Aerial of Village of Catlett and Surrounding area, excerpted from Aerial 120, 39.

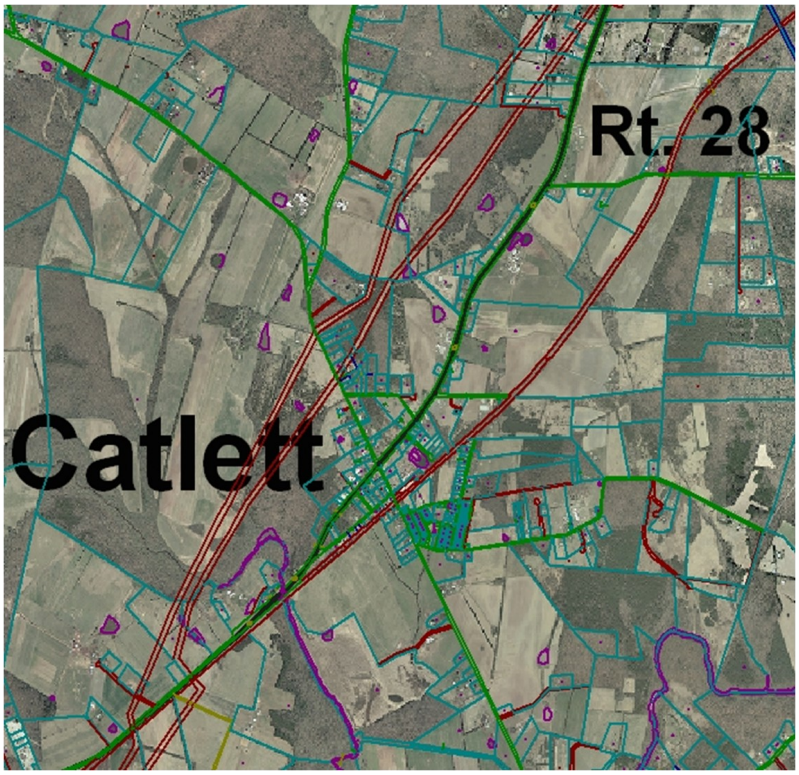


Figure 2: 2006 Aerial of Catlett with 2010 Parcel Lines.

Prologue

The following document is comprised of an objective mathematical evaluation of the Catlett community's existing pattern of development and an analysis of the town's architectural history. The measurements of the community's lots sizes, and the size, height, and placement of the buildings on the lots, together with a study of the transportation layout and building forms and styles, unveil Catlett's unique physical layout in the Virginia Piedmont. This existing condition evaluation can be used to guide new development that is compatible with the existing village. This document provides a summary of Catlett's physical characteristics provided in Attachment A, as follows:

1. Catlett has a wide variety of lot sizes and shapes.

2. Buildings are set back at variable distances from the street and from surrounding buildings.

3. Catlett lots and buildings are located along a system of narrow axial streets and the railroad. There are smaller grid systems within this framework.

4. Catlett has a wide variety of buildings with different forms, materials, heights, and architectural styles. There are many different building materials used throughout the village.

5. Yards and gardens dominate as shown in Figure 7. Main residential structures cover less than 18 % of lot area, with the majority of the homes covering less than 7 % of the lot area.

6. Approximately 79% of the residential addresses have separate garages and outbuildings that are randomly placed on the lots to accommodate additional storage needs.

Figure 3: A low building to lot ratio is predominant within Catlett.

7. Commercial buildings are varied in shapes materials, and layout and are generally clustered at the intersection of the railroad and Elk Run Road. (See Figure 34).

8. Historically, the rate of growth has averaged less than 15 units per decade.

9. Catlett's historical economy and some of its current economy is directly connected to the surrounding farmlands and environmental resources. (Appendix C provides a brief history of this economic relationship).

Figure 4: The Trenis Department Store represents Catlett's economic rebound after the Civil War.

Figure 5: The Trenis family farm south of Catlett on Elk Run Road.

Table of Contents

i……..……..Prologue / Overview

ii……..…..……Table of Contents

iii……...…. Bird's Eye View of Catlett

1……...Lot Sizes and Shapes

2. ……..Building Setbacks

3…….Transportation Layout

4……..Building Forms and Styles
(See Appendix B for more information on Architectural Styles)

5……Lot Coverage

6…..…….……..Outbuildings

7…….…….Commercial Buildings and Layout

8. ……...Growth Rate

9……..Rural/Town Economy
(See Appendix C for more information on local agricultural history)

Appendices:

A. Spreadsheet of Catlett Measurements

B. Catlett's Architectural History

C. Catlett's Rural History

D. Catlett during the Civil War

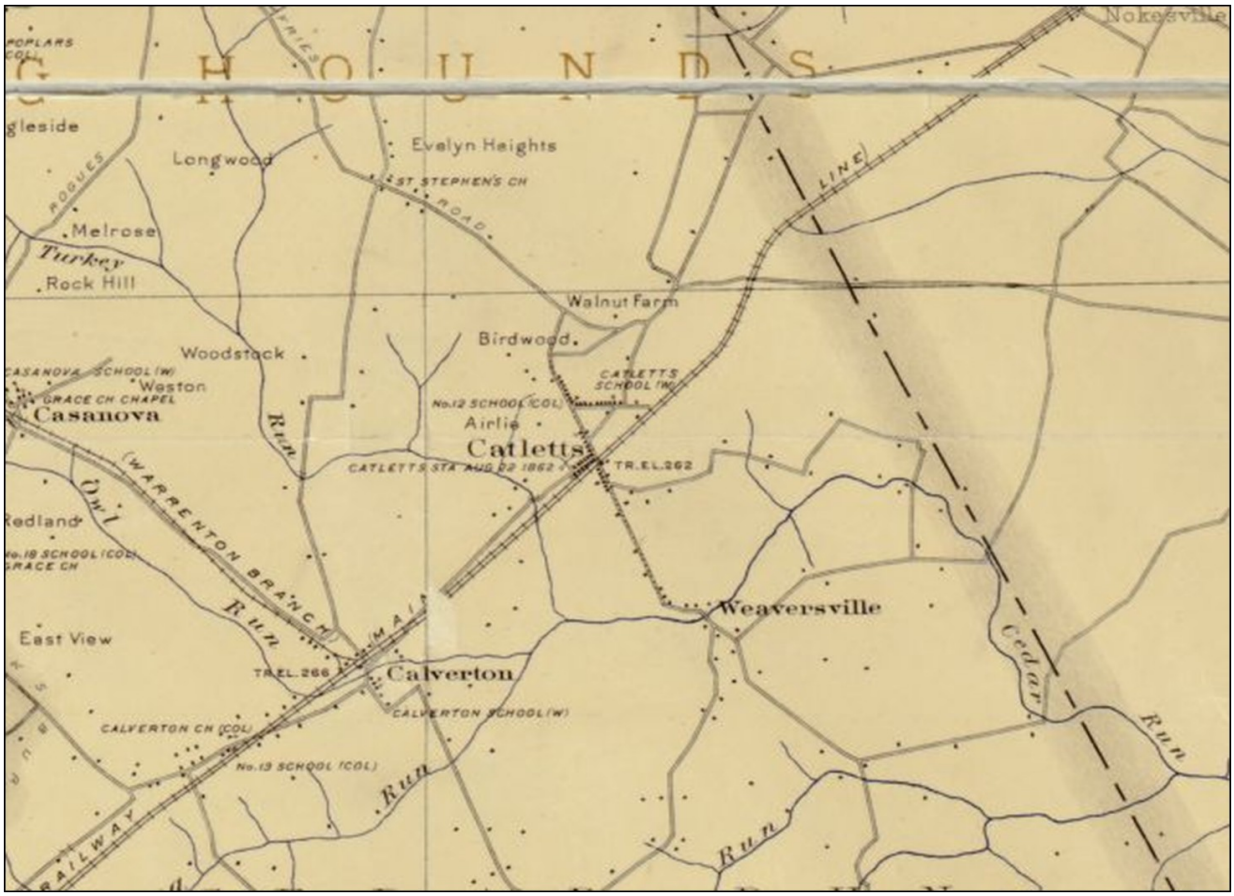


Figure 6: 1914 Chamber of Commerce Map of Fauquier County (excerpt showing Catlett area).

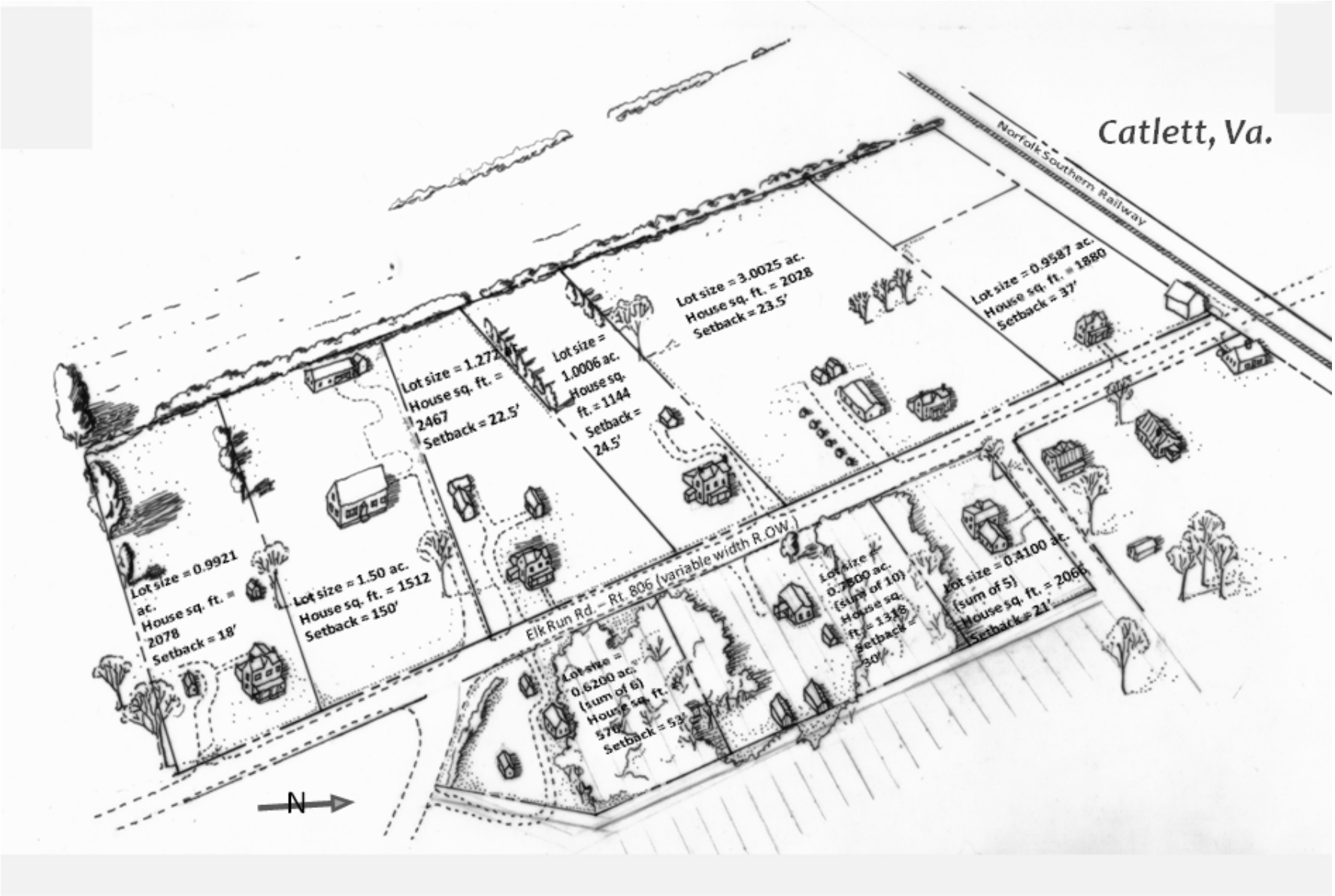


Figure 7: This bird's eye view sketch of Elk Run Road illustrates Catlett's exiting scale of development, with varied lot sizes, set-backs, varied building size and placement, and low lot coverage ratios.

1. Catlett has a wide variety of lot sizes and shapes.

Catlett lots range in size from 1/10 of an acre up to 7 acres as itemized in Attachment A and shown in Figure 9 below. Varied residential and commercial lot sizes are also evident outside the core historic area. Rectangular 30 to 200-acre farm lots wrap the edges of the town's outlying lots.

The circa 1915 Burgess subdivision south of the railroad with one-tenth-acre lots was never realized as planned. Instead, property owners built a house on several connecting lots. Figure 7 on Page 4 illustrates this phenomenon.

In contrast, the circa 1940 Trenis subdivision on Prospect Avenue was developed with small one-story Post World War II cottages on lots averaging approximately 1/3 of an acre. However, the scale of the community was not substantially changed since these lots were almost entirely developed with one-story homes. (See Figure 10). Further, the Trenis subdivision comprises only 8 % of the entire land area of the community.

Figure 8: Parcel Map of Catlett (2010). The historic core is outlined in red and comprises approximately 118 acres.

Figure 10: Prospect Avenue looking northeast.

Figure 11: 9262 Elk Run Road is a 2024 sq. ft. house on a 3-acre lot with mature trees and three outbuildings.

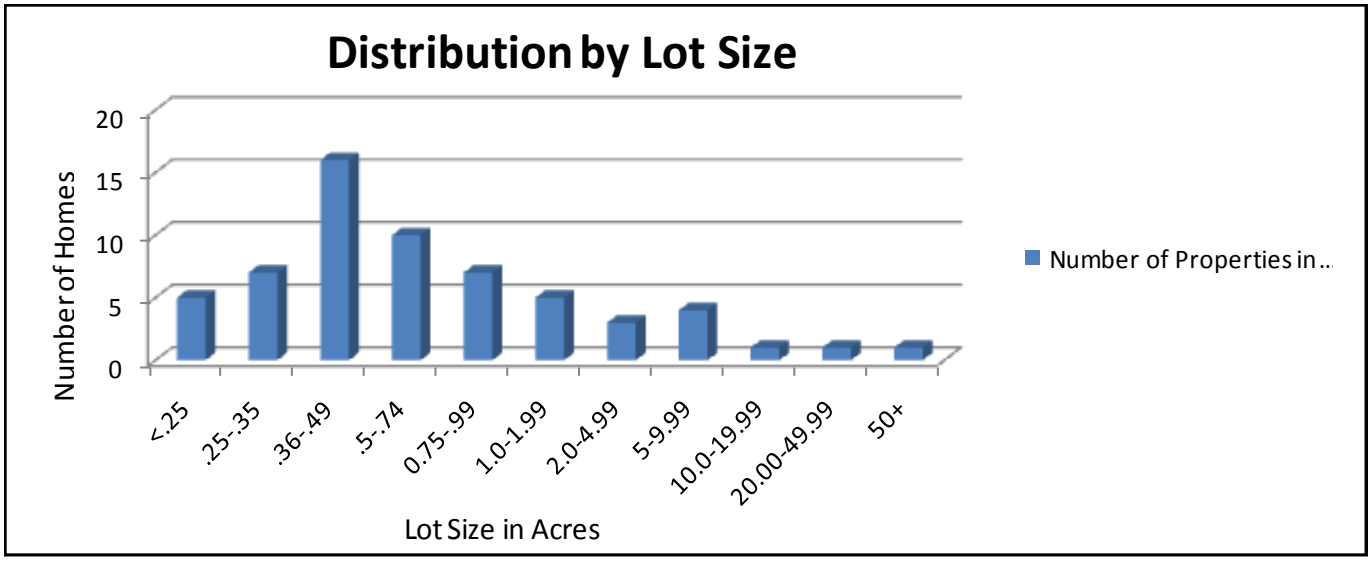


Figure 9: Distribution of Lot Sizes, represents the wide range of lots found in Catlett. Historic Catlett contains approximately 15 lots between .36 and .49 acres, 10-15 lots less than .35 acres, and over 20 lots larger than a 1/2 an acre.

2. Buildings are set back at variable distances from the street and from surrounding buildings.

The overall Catlett community can be characterized as having varied building setbacks as evidenced in the figures in Attachment A. Setbacks on Tenerife Road are 20, 27, 27, 39, 50, 58, and 68 feet. Setbacks on Elk Run Road range from 0 feet up to 153 feet, with the majority of setbacks falling between 20 and 50 feet. The buildings on Catlett Road have setbacks of 7, 16, 16, 26, 39, 61, 61, 71, and 71 feet.

Prospect Avenue presents the most uniform street setbacks with the majority of the homes set back between 10 to 25 feet, although they range from 9 to 101 feet. Setbacks on buildings outside the historic core are equally varied and ringed with farms utilizing building setbacks 50 to 100 or more feet from the closest road, as is customary with most farm properties in rural Virginia.

Figure 13: This is a sketch of the west side of Prospect Avenue, looking north. The setbacks on these 15,000 square foot properties fall within the range of 14-25 feet.

Figure 12: Elk Run Road exhibits the village streetscape created by random setbacks and low building to lot area ratios.

Figure 14: This photograph looks northwest toward the railroad crossing at Elk Run /Dumfries Road.

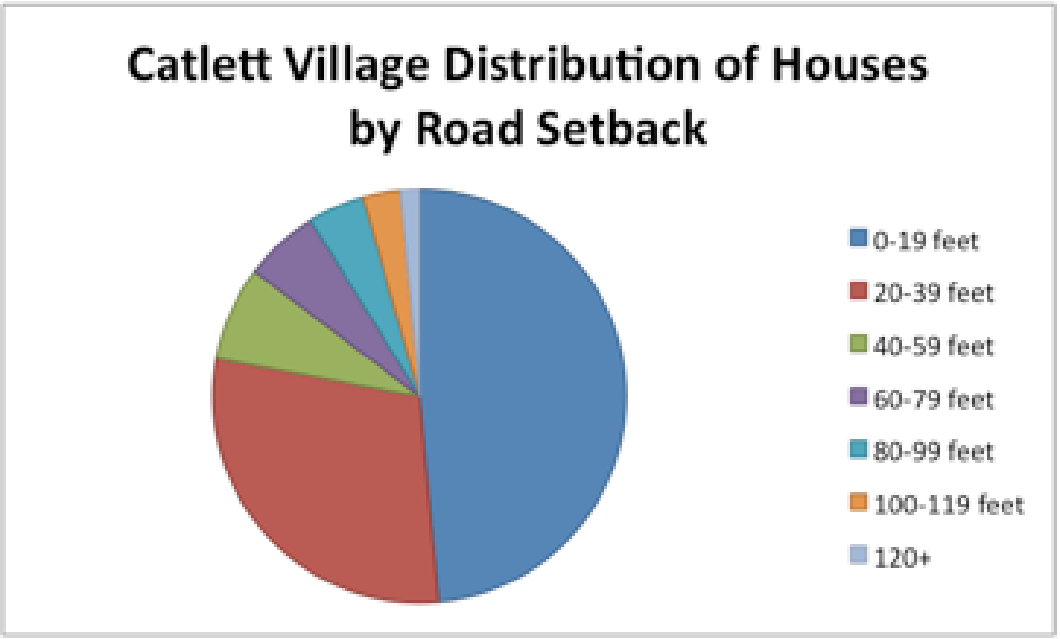


Figure 16:

This Chart illustrates the wide range of main house setbacks within the Village of Catlett. Note the large distribution of setbacks greater than 70 feet.

Figure 16: Looking south towards Bealeton from the juncture of Elk Run/ Dumfries Road and the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

3. Catlett lots and buildings are located along a system of narrow axial streets and the railroad. There are some smaller grid systems within this framework.

Catlett formed in 1852 at the juncture of the railroad and the 18th century rolling road called Dumfries/Elk Run Road. Railroad authorities chose to locate a station at Catlett because Cedar Run provided a necessary water supply for railroad operations.

A square grid system developed within core area of the town's larger network of criss-crossing axial roads.

Figure 17: Catlett's existing lot lines and streets.

4. Catlett has a wide variety of buildings. The buildings have different forms, materials, heights, and architectural styles. There are many different building materials used throughout the village.

There is no one dominant architectural style or form in Catlett. As evidenced in the inventory of styles and forms in Appendix B derived from the National Register Nomination, the community has embraced a wide range of housing styles and shapes throughout its history. Residential structures outside the historic core area also have varied shapes and styles.

Some of the home were built consciously at the time of construction in a distinct architectural style, like the Craftsman Bungalows or the Italianate homes on Old Catlett Road. (See Figures 18 and 19). However, as shown in Figure 20, more frequently houses grew organically; they started as rectangles or squares and rear and side additions and porches were added over time. Catlett contains almost equal numbers of one-story and two-story residential buildings. (See Figure 22). Like many homeowners across the country, Catlett owners often altered the porch trim with new designs when they

Figure 18: A 1-1/2 story Craftsman Bungalow, 9243 Prospect Avenue with a tin roof.

Figure 19: Italianate House at 3236 Old Catlett Road, circa 1876.

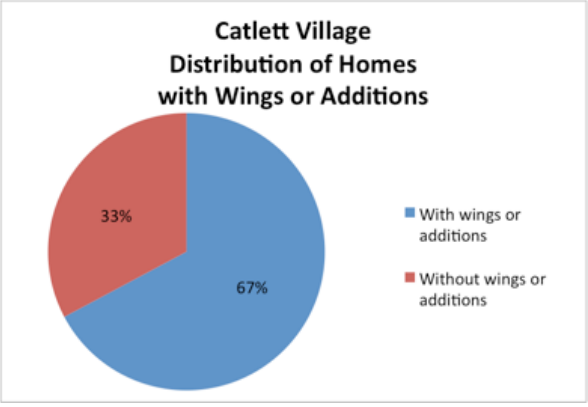


Figure 20 charts homes with wings or additions, showing that the majority of Catlett homes have been expanded over the years.

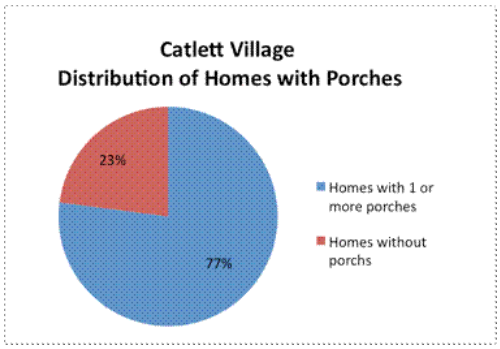


Figure 21 shows the prevalence of porches in Catlett.

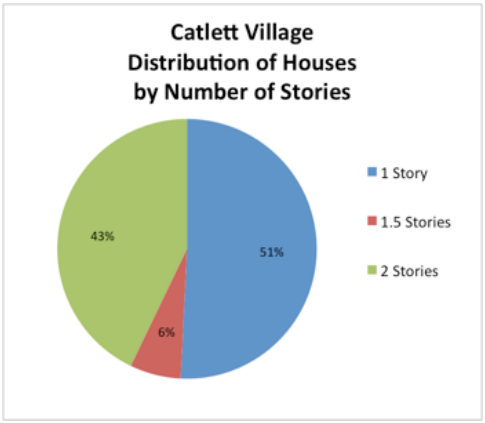


Figure 22 shows the relatively even distribution of one and two-story homes.

Most of the residential buildings are frame construction with original frame siding , or replacement vinyl siding overtop the original siding. The roof materials vary from tin to asphalt shingle.

5. The main residential structures cover less than 18 percent of the lots, with the majority of the homes covering less than 7 percent of their lot.

The low ratio of building footprint to lot area ratio is a key defining feature in the community. These low ratios are evidenced in Figure 23 and 24, photographs of homes with substantial yards and gardens that comprise some of the largest town lots. The lot coverage ratios were tallied by dividing the lot area by the size of the footprint of the main residential structure. The addition of outbuilding footprints would nominally increase this lot coverage ratio.

Figure 23: 9299 Dumfries Road has a house located on a 5-acre lot, and has four outbuildings.

Figure 24: 9181 Prospect Avenue, c. 1855, sits on a 28 acre lot.

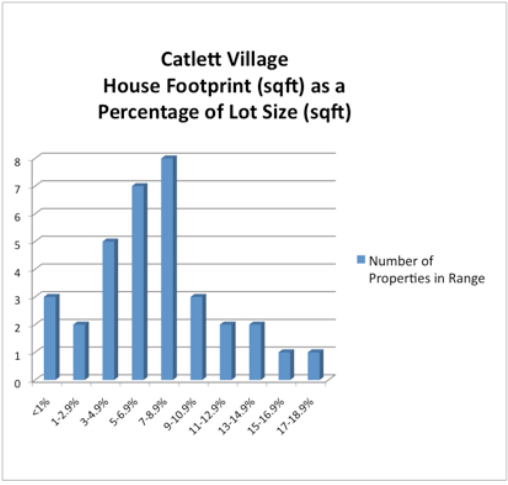


Figure 25: This graphic shows the lot coverage ratios for the main residential structures in Catlett.

6. **Approximately 79% of the residential addresses have separate garages and outbuildings which are randomly placed on the lots to accommodate additional storage needs.**

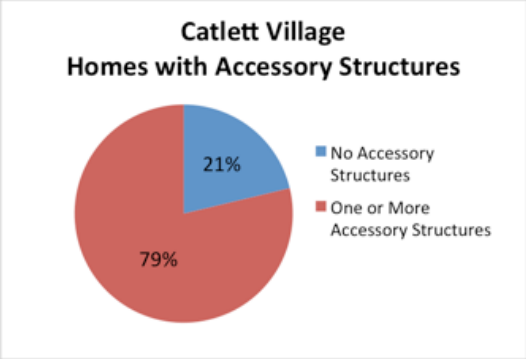


Figure 26: Most Catlett properties have at least one outbuilding, normally set to the rear of the main house.

Catlett contains a variety of outbuildings, some of which were built as farm outbuildings, several of which are in disrepair, and others built to store cars and lawnmowers. The use of outbuildings for storage results in smaller residential structures and more outdoor space than is typically found in modern subdivisions.

Figure 27 presents a view of outbuildings on the edge of town.

Figures 28 - 30 are images of other outbuilding types, including a bell tower that is now a pagoda, old farm outbuildings, and a creamery turned into a garage.

7. Commercial buildings are varied in shapes materials, and layout and are generally clustered at the intersection of the railroad and Elk Run Road.

Catlett's commercial structures have a unique array of shapes and coverings. The town features a wood frame tin-clad store (Ensor's Store, Figure 31), and a circa 1866 rectangular brick and stucco department store with Italianate bracketing at the eaves (Figure 33). Catlett also retains a circa 1926 commercial building covered with terra-cotta block that can be found on silos throughout the Piedmont (Figure 34).

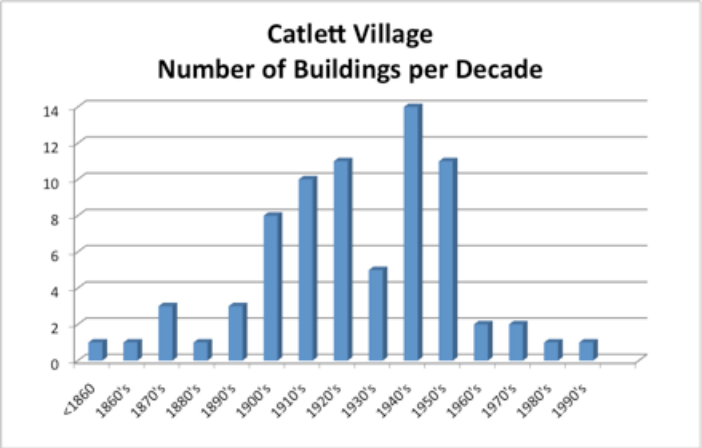
Figure 31: Ensors Store, 3231 Old Catlett Road, is clad in pressed tin in a brick pattern and has a standing-seam metal roof.

Figure 32: This two-story warehouse adjacent to the railroad tracks along Elk Run Road is sheathed in pressed metal which simulates stone.

Figure 33: This detail view of the 1866 Trenis department store shows the Italianate cornice brackets. The building exemplifies local prosperity returning to Catlett after the Civil War.

Figure 34: This structure at 3224 Elk Run Road is an early 20th century store which was later utilized as the Catlett Post Office. This building is clad in terra-cotta tiles.

8. The historical rate of growth has totaled less than 15 units per decade.



Catlett's existing pattern of development represents relatively slow incremental growth over approximately 150 years. The 118-acre historic core area contains 76 commercial and residential properties within a 800 -acre service district area with a total of 139 residential properties and 17 commercial properties. Approximately eight of the 76 surviving historic buildings were constructed prior to 1900. The town experienced more rapid growth beginning in 1900. Development peaked during the post-World War II housing boom in the 1940s with the construction of 14 new residences. Development slowed considerably in the last 25 years as a result of more stringent public health requirements for septic systems.

Figures 36 and 37 are images of housing constructed during the peak period of residential development in Catlett during the 1940s and 1950s.

9. Catlett's historical economy and some of its current economy is directly connected to the surrounding farmlands and environmental resources.

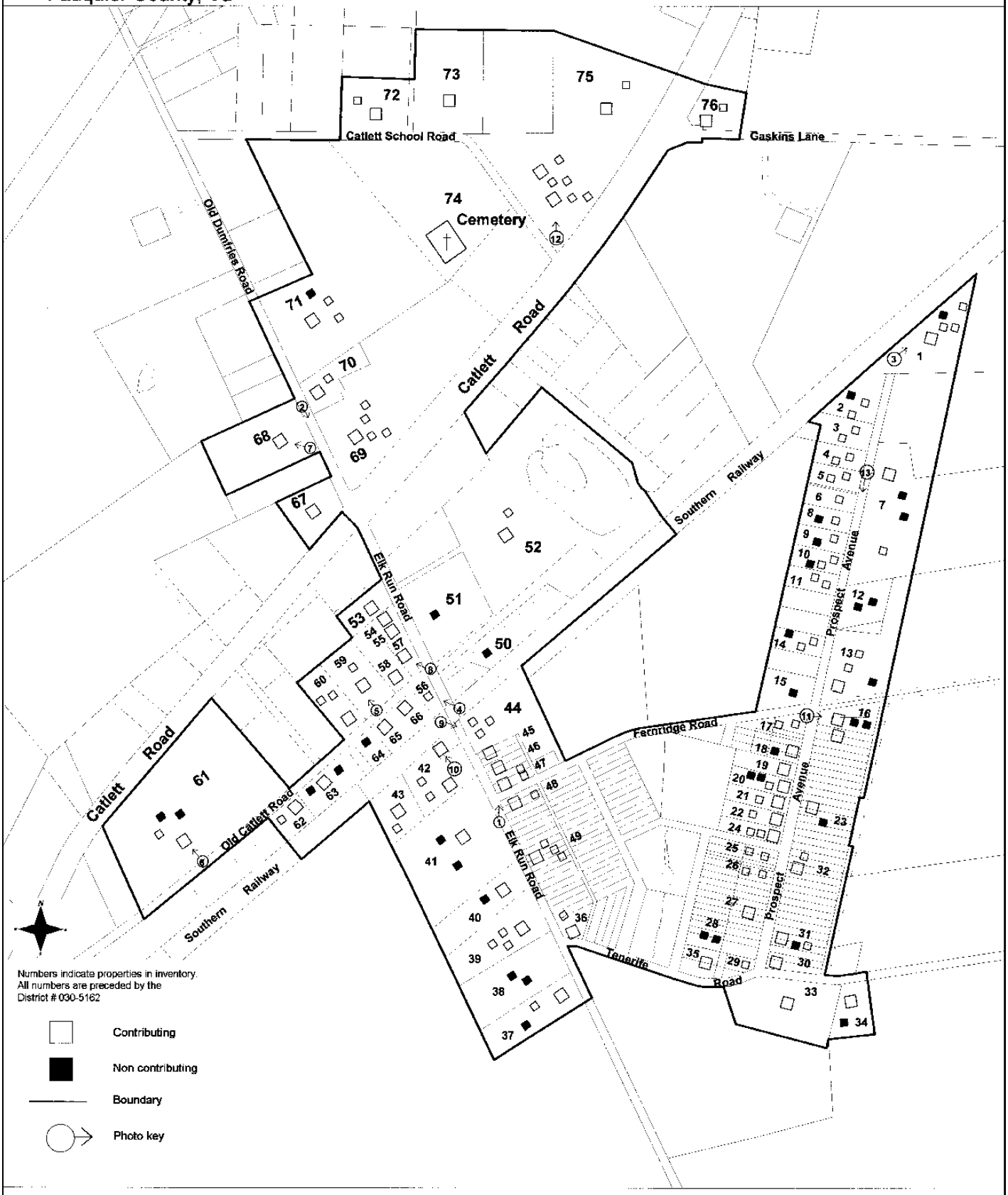
Appendix C: *Catlett's Rural History*, provides a discussion of the symbiotic relationship between the Catlett area's rural environmental resources and the development of the town. Although this relationship has weakened over time due to mass production and changing shopping patterns, the Wilson's Meat Co. has survived. Wilson's meat products are raised at the circa 1850 Wilson Cattle Company farmstead on the western edge of Catlett's boundaries. The patronage of local farmland goods in Fauquier County aids in the protection of its farmlands.

Figure 38: This one story commercial building was built as a slaughter house and meat market circa 1930, and still houses the Wilson Meat Company.

Figure 39: Dairy farms have always played a large role in the Catlett's economy.

Catlett Historic District
Fauquier County, Va

DHR # 030-5162



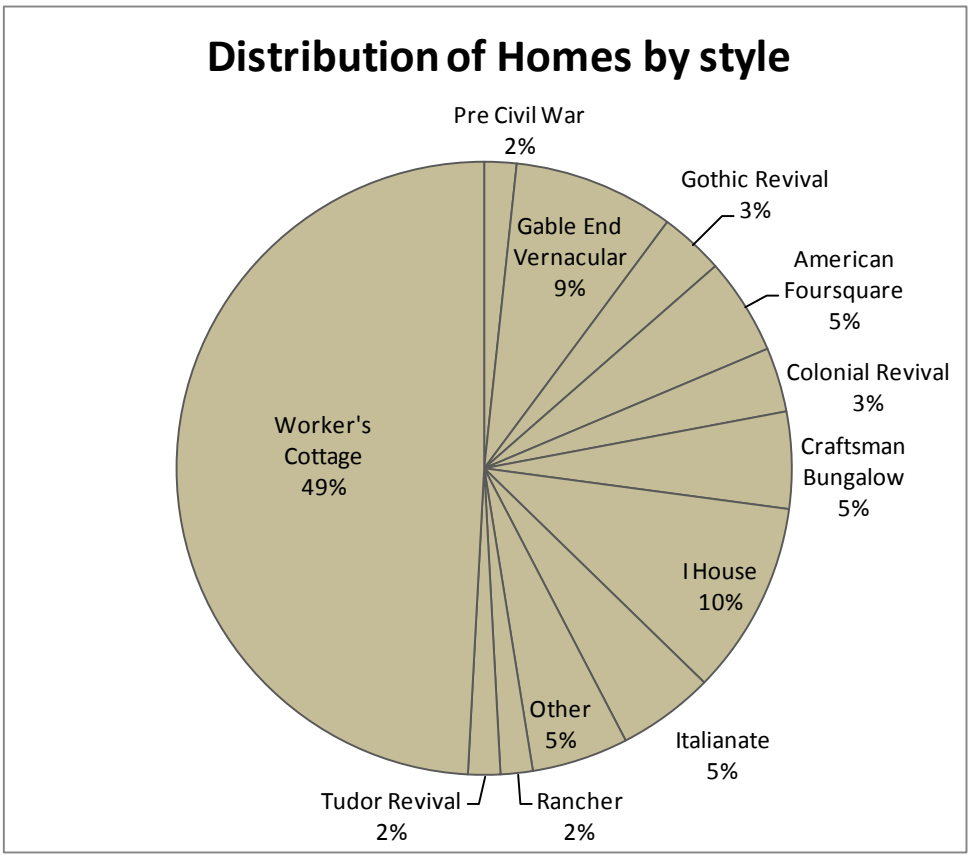
Scale : 1 Inch = 200 Feet.

Date: August 2007

Appendix B: Building Styles and Forms

Catlett's growth pattern includes the periodic introduction of new buildings in a wide variety of styles reflective of the local economy and popular architectural trends. The small worker's cottage is the most prevalent Catlett Architectural Style.

The following inventory of architectural styles and building shapes indicates that Catlett has embraced new housing styles and shapes throughout its history. New units and subdivisions have blended into the community because they were built in the same scale as the existing community. Although lot sizes were smaller in the Trenis subdivision than those present in the community before 1930, the Trenis homes cover less than 20 % of the lot and they are one or one and 1/2 stories in size. Most of the community's larger two story homes are on lots larger than acres.



Workman's Cottages: Are all different although they are the same general form and size.

There are many different architectural styles and building forms in Catlett.

Measured growth over time contributes to eclectic character.

A. Pre-Civil War (Before 1861)

As railroads began to crisscross Virginia in the 1850s, small towns were often established along their corridors at convenient rail stops at, or near, crossroads and accessible to nearby farmsteads. In the case of Catlett, it appears that no village existed at this location before the railroad was completed through here in 1852. The town became the first stop coming from the north for the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in Fauquier County after leaving adjacent Prince William County. Best described as a rural economic and social center, Catlett offered a post office, school, several stores and churches, as well as numerous dwellings.

The Civil War destroyed most of the pre-civil war structures in Catlett.

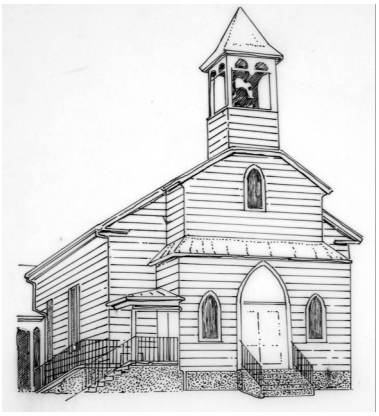
Architectural Style: *Other*

The rear section of this house is the oldest, dating to circa 1855, and appears to be of log construction. The architectural evidence suggests that it was a 1 1/2-story building with an exterior-end stone chimney with a brick stack. The front 2-story, 3-bay, hall-parlor-plan frame portion was added circa 1900. In 1915, a rear 2-story ell was added that incorporated the original log cabin.—*#030-5162-0001, National Register of Historic Places, Catlett*

B. Post Civil War (1865-1899)

None of the rail-related buildings that stood in Catlett during the Civil War survived, but Catlett made a quick recovery. The third oldest extant building in the village, the Trenis Store at 9240 Elk Run Road, dates from circa 1866. The 1870 census reveals a thriving commercial presence, with Edwin B. Trenis and James M. Catlett listed as "merchants", one man listed as a "wood cutter," several as and "clerks in store," substantiating that lumbering was a local activity as well as mercantile operations. Two wheelwrights, several blacksmiths, and a coach maker are identified, indicating that Catlett was a small but significant transportation center where such services would be required.

Reconstruction money became available as recompense for war's destruction. The presence of the railroad resulted in prosperous Catlett merchants.



The primary institutional building in the Catlett Historic District built in the period following the Civil War was Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church at 9280 Old Dumfries Road.

Architectural Style: *Gothic Revival*

A mid-19th century architectural style in which highly decorative woodwork and Gothic motifs were applied to otherwise simple homes or churches in America, usually designed and constructed by carpenters and builders; often asymmetric in plan. The Catlett examples of Gothic Revival are timber frame buildings which utilize Gothic elements in a restrained manner.

Common characteristics are:

- A façade that promotes vertical emphasis
- A steeply pitched roof or gabled roof, often with a gable at the center of the façade or with intersecting gables
- Pointed arch windows and doors

This well-preserved Italianate house was constructed circa 1876 as the home of the Trenis family, who ran the store across the street. *-#030-5162-0059, National Register of Historic Places, Catlett*

Architectural Style: *Italianate*

Italianate styles were derived from the architecture of Italian villas. Architects used the style between the 1860s and 1890s for a wide variety of building types, from houses and small apartment buildings, to institutional structures. The Catlett Italianate homes all seem to be the work of one builder, Harlan P. Waite, who lived and worked in Catlett between 1870 and 1900.

Common characteristics are:

- Two story, with boxy proportions
- Round-arched panels on front door, or a round-arched transom over the front door
- Standing-seam metal roof with overhanging eaves
- Interior chimneys
- Bracketed cornice and/or paneled bracketed wood frieze

Architectural Style: *Other*

One of the oldest dwellings in the immediate area, the home and office of Dr. Stephen Harnsberger was constructed in 1897. The two-story, three-bay, gable-roofed frame dwelling features an off-center front gable and only two bays on the second floor. Dr. Harnsberger lived in the house and the east parlor was his office—a fact that is reflected in the floor plan of the house, which includes an additional entrance to that room from the main hall. *#030-5162-0034, National Register of Historic Places, Catlett*

Mechanization of farming equipment led to a prosperous Golden Age of Farming.

C. Golden Age of Farming (1900-1929)

The depressions that marked American society in the late nineteenth century greatly affected farmers. By the twentieth century, however, crop prices began to rise. In fact, the first two decades of the twentieth century are viewed today as a "golden age" for American agriculture. With more money in their pockets, farmers purchased tractors and other machinery, making their farms more productive and efficient. The turn of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of a new field of study—agricultural science—that focused on improving rural life.

Architectural Style: *I-House*

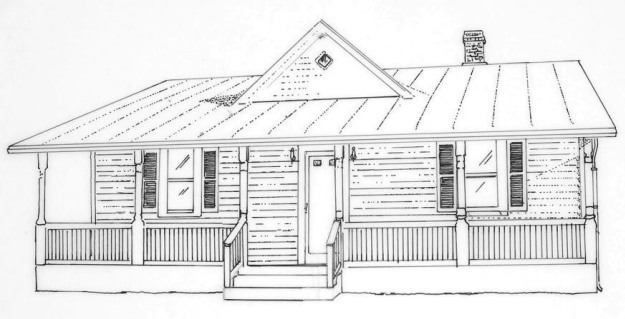
"I" Houses are more of a type than a style of home and they are found all across the United States. Nearly all of the Catlett "I" houses were built in 1910.

Common characteristics are:

- Two story rectangular box
- Side-facing gable roof with central-front projecting gable
- Standing-seam metal roof with overhanging eaves
- Central chimney
- Symmetrical façade
- Full width porch
- Simple detailing

Craftsman Bungalow (1890-1925)

Inspired by the work of two California brothers, Charles and Henry Greene who worked together from 1893 to 1914. Their intricately detailed buildings were given extensive publicity in a broad array of magazines familiarizing the rest of the nation with the style. Many pattern books appeared, some offering completely pre-cut packages of lumber and detailed assembly instructions, leading to the one story Craftsman house quickly becoming the most popular and fashionable smaller house in the country. One-story vernacular examples are often simply called bungalows or the Bungaloid style. - from *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia & Lee McAlester. New York: Alfred A. Knofp, 1994, p. 454.



Architectural Style: *Craftsman Bungalow*

Craftsman Bungalows became popular in the early 1900s. Second stories are placed under the slope of the main roof in order to maintain the single story appearance and dormers are used to admit light. Bungalow designs typically have a horizontal emphasis and are covered with a wide, projecting gable or hip roofs. Open front porches whose roofs are supported by heavy piers are a hallmark of the style. The Catlett Craftsman Bungalow houses were built between 1915 and 1925.

Common characteristics are:

- One or one-and-a-half stories
- Horizontal proportions
- Integral front porch wood walls and decorative detailing, including porch railings and exposed rafters
- Interior chimneys
- Multiple gable roofs (some with cross-gabled dormers or a central front gable projecting through the roof), most using standing-seam metal

American Four Square (1900-1920)

Also called the Prairie Box, 1900-1920. This sub-type of the Prairie style has a hipped roof, is symmetrical and has a front entry. It is the earliest Prairie form developed and the most common vernacular form. This style originated in Chicago. Vernacular versions were spread widely by pattern books and popular magazines. Most were built between 1905 and 1915. The style quickly faded from fashion after WWI. -from *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia & Lee McAlester. New York: Alfred A. Knofp, 1994.

Architectural Style: *American Foursquare*

American Foursquare homes are prized for their ease of construction, practicality, and roomy interior. The American Foursquare is not actually an architectural style but rather a type. The typical Catlett Foursquare has a rear two story wing attached.

Common characteristics are:

- Cubic shape
- Hipped roof, usually with gabled dormers
- Standing-seam metal roof with overhanging eaves
- Interior brick chimneys
- Broad front porch, which wraps around one or two sides
- Little use of ornament
- Wide variety of materials, including wood, brick, and stucco

Sears Kit Houses (1908-1940)

Sears Catalog Homes were ready-to-assemble houses sold through mail order by Sears Roebuck and Company. Shipped via railroad box-cars, these kits included all the materials needed to build a house. Sears Catalog Homes proved to be both affordable and of substantial construction. One of Sears's biggest selling models was the common bungalow. In Catlett, two bungalows appear to be Sears models built circa 1915:
9259 Elk Run Road (#47 in historic district), which closely resembles the Westly model, and
9263 Elk Run Road (#48 in historic district), which resembles the Carlin model.

The Westly

The Carlin

The Catlett Historic District, with its resources from 1855 to 1958, exemplifies a remarkably varied microcosm of a rural small town American community, with dwellings and commercial buildings from all decades and portraying all styles, reflective of the varied economic status of its residents.

Vernacular Forms

Architectural historians have come to realize that only a small portion of older homes represent an architectural "high-style." Such buildings account for only a small percentage of old homes, while most house styles lie outside the normal categories and are collectively termed "vernacular" buildings. Vernacular examples are ones that were built during the same time period as their more stylistically sophisticated counterparts, but which are simpler and less complex. Local builders would use a few of the characteristic "high-style" design elements to achieve a similar, but more modest appearance. Vernacular house styles also adapted to such regional variations as the local landscape, available building materials, and the skills of local craftsmen or builders. More often than not vernacular buildings represent a local builder's interpretation of whatever style was popular at the moment. In Catlett, two building booms – one in 1910, and another following World War II, produced several vernacular house forms.

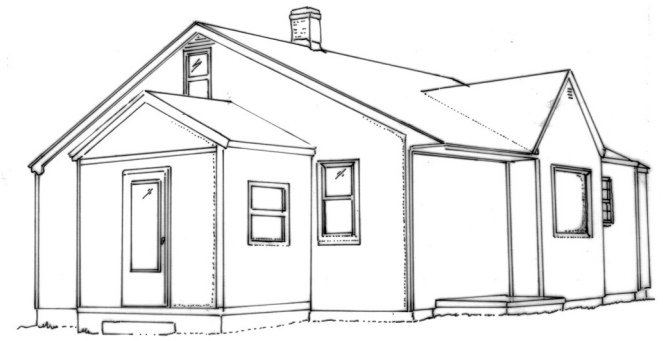
Architectural Style:

Vernacular Central-Front Gable

The Catlett Central-Front Gable form appeared during the building boom of 1910, on larger, two story residences built to accommodate the large families of that era. These homes were along the older streets, chiefly Old Catlett Road, Catlett School Road, and Elk Run Road, and housed the wealthier professionals of Catlett. As the name implies, the distinguishing feature is a center gable that extends from the wall on the façade, sometimes called a dormer wall. This gable is generally smaller or narrower than the primary roof gable. The roof is a side gable roof but may be a cross gable roof if the façade center gable extends to the roof ridge. This form is similar to the "I" house, but lacks the second story window beneath the front gable, and other symmetric details.

Vernacular Forms, continued

Architectural Style:
Vernacular Front Gable

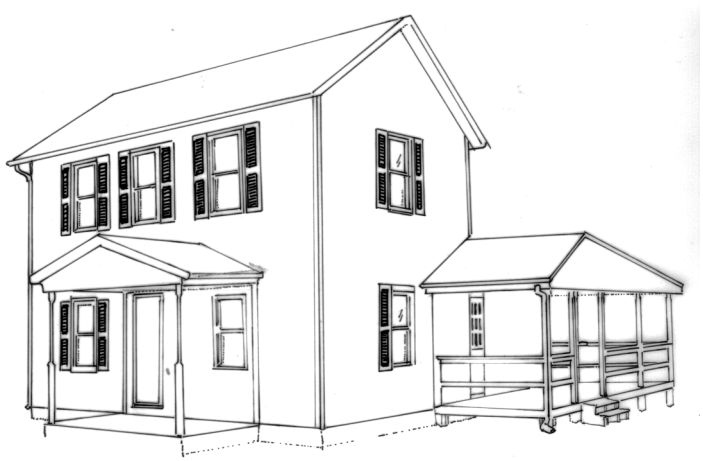


The Front Gable form is predominately found on small to medium-sized residences which have a rectangular plan and a simple gable roof, with the major façade of the building being that which is terminated vertically by the front-facing gable end. The front-facing principal façades are typically symmetrical and some have small entry porches or an uncovered stoop. Ornamentation is generally minimal, consisting of such details as turned porch posts or decorative shingles, and all have simply detailed sills and windows. Earlier examples are usually narrow in width and in proportion and have steeply pitched roofs; later versions are broader with more gently sloped roofs. The front gable form is usually a wood frame structure sided with clapboard. Most of the Catlett examples were built between 1910 and 1940.

Common characteristics are:

- One to two story dwelling with simple gable roof spanning the façade's width
- Symmetrical front porch or entryway
- Standing-seam metal roof with overhanging eaves
- Simple ornamentation
- Paired attic windows

Architectural Style:
Vernacular Side Gable



This is a common residential form whose characteristic features consist of rectangular plans and, usually, a gently pitched gable roof. The major façade is placed on the long wall with gable ends being placed perpendicular to the street. Window openings are typically regularly spaced. A front porch, often having small brackets or turned posts, is frequently the only embellishment and these porches usually have shed, flat, or slightly hipped roofs. Most of the Catlett examples follow a hall-parlor-plan form.

Common characteristics are:

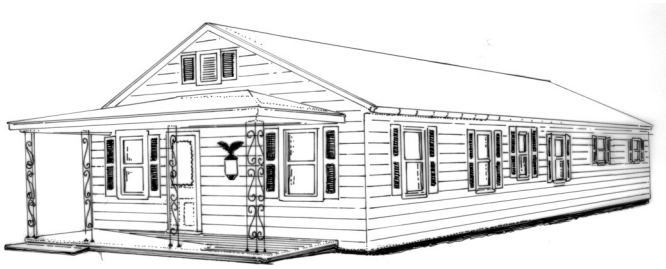
- Side-facing gable roof
- Two story frame dwelling
- Standing-seam metal roof with overhanging eaves
- Hall-parlor-plan
- One story front porch

The village of Catlett retains a high level of integrity with the streetscapes and plan remaining intact and with few intrusions, recalling its century-long prosperity as a thriving railroad community and commercial center for the eastern portion of the county. –*National Register*

D. WWII and Post-WWII (1940-1960)

Following World War II, railway passenger travel declined, but Southern Railroad continued service to Catlett, and freight travel thrived. Men were needed to work on Catlett farms, to labor in the local timber industry, and to work on railroad maintenance. Catlett saw an influx of new residents from all parts of the country, and a sizable number from Ireland.

The Trenis family owned a parcel of land in the southeast portion of the historic district, which likely was associated with their large agricultural holdings dating to the 19th century. It was subdivided into small lots occupied by modest houses. Twenty-four houses were built on these parcels along the west side of Prospect Avenue between 1940 and 1958. Throughout the village, in-fill homes were being built, and they were modest in size, in keeping with post-war housing trends.



Architectural Style: *Worker's Cottage*

This is a common, "vernacular" residential style that was built in working-class neighborhoods. Most in Catlett housed the influx of workers from the railroad and the thriving lumber, dairy, and mercantile businesses.

Common characteristics are:

- One story
- Rectangular floor plan
- Front-facing gable roof
- Interior chimney flue
- Front porch, often using decorative metal supports and/or railings

Architectural Style: *Cape Cod*

Cape Cod homes are small in scale and low to the ground, typically one story high with an attic, often with dormers added to bring in light. One element that sets the Cape Cod apart is its roof line. A Cape Cod roof typically has an eight-inch to twelve-inch pitch for draining purposes and a small overhang to reduce potential wind damage.

Common characteristics are:

- Symmetrical appearance with front entry centered
- Steep roof with side gables
- Small roof overhang
- One or one-and-a-half stories
- Wood frame with lap siding
- Gabled dormers
- Multi-paned, double-hung windows
- Shutters
- Simple exterior ornamentation

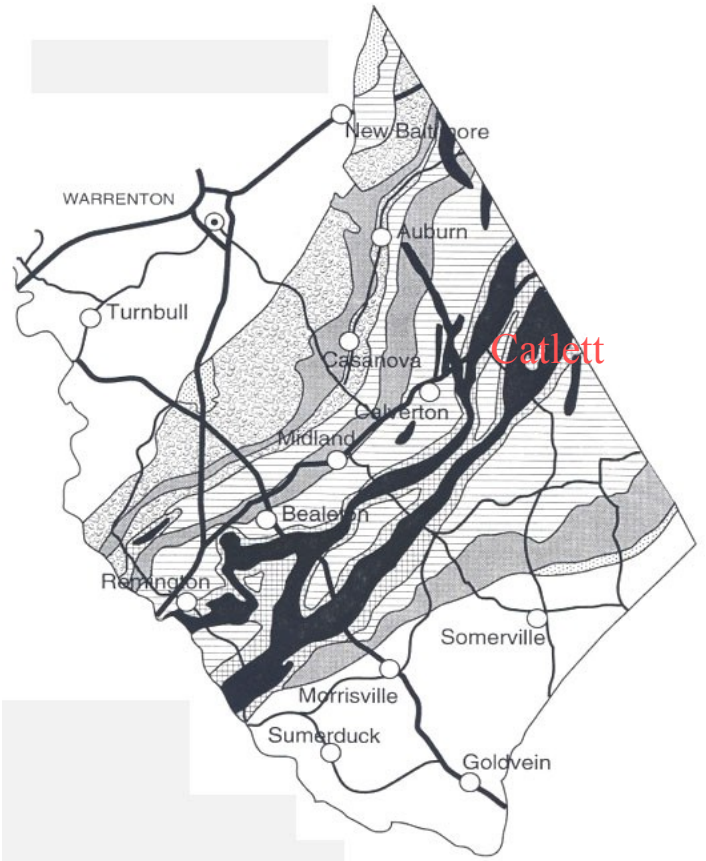
Architectural Style: *Ranch*

The typical ranch style home is a single, often rambling, story with either a hipped or gabled roof. Shape ranged from an unadorned box to various L- or U-shaped configurations. New distinctive features found homes of the 1950s and 60s included attached garages, sliding glass doors, and huge picture windows.

Catlett, Virginia: *Rural Land Uses in the Past & Present*

Catlett is ideally suited for agriculture due to the circumstances of its geology, topography, soils and climate, and history has borne out this conclusion.

Geologically, Catlett is in the "Culpeper Basin," a Triassic/Jurassic rift valley formed by plate tectonic activity over 200 million years ago. Over time the basin valley filled with sediments and then was gradually shaped by the erosive process of wind and water into gently undulating hills. Its soils are sediments derived from diabase (volcanic) rock, and are rich in iron and calcium. The climate is agreeable. Catlett's average precipitation in January is 2.37 inches, and in June 1.69 inches, and the temperatures are generally mild, with an average 34 degrees in January and 78 degrees in July. Historically, this combination of terrain and climate has always been the most sought after for agriculture.



Geology of Fauquier County: Culpeper Basin
Black area = Diabase and granophyres
Cross-hatched = Thermally metamorphosed rocks

At the turn of the last century, Catlett was known as "the country," easily accessible by rail from the city. The railroad established a symbiotic relationship with the landowners, enabling farm goods, visitors, and commuters, daily travel to and from Washington. Catlett prospered from the relationship.

For people fleeing the August heat in Washington, respite could be found in Catlett. Mrs. William T. Gaskins advertised in the July 28, 1907 *Washington Post* for summer boarders at her Green View Farm, noting its "fine breeze," and her "good fare" along with directions "by Southern Railway." Mrs. Gaskins charged but $4.50 per week for adults. Similarly, "J.S.D." of Variety Grove Farm in Catlett, made this notice in May 1908: "large house, porches, cool, shady lawn; horses and buggies; good fare; terms reasonable." In 1911, Evelyn Heights advertised her farm thus: "Country Property for Rent During July and August; a charming country place; dwelling of 11 rooms, a modern bath; completely furnished; use of several cows, horse and surrey; large garden planted; will furnish abundance of vegetables; located near railroad. Rent, $100 per month."

Dairy farms and horse farms are a longstanding tradition in Catlett. Dairy farmers shipped milk and butter via rail, making use of the dairy house which still stands near the railroad tracks. When the Milk Producers Association was formed in 1924, Catlett's farmers joined. Later, in 1941, the Northern Virginia Artificial Breeding Cooperative was instituted for selective breeding of Jersey, Guernsey and Holstein Friesian dairy breeds, under the direction of Catlett farmer Harry J. Wilson. The area attracted more farmers, including the Mennonites, who arrived shortly after World War II. An article on the Catlett Mennonites (*Wash. Post*, July 8, 1957) stated "they are farmers or carpenters, who work hard from sunup to sundown, raise bountiful crops and fine cattle and horses."

Among horsemen, Catlett has long been known to produce fine horses and outstanding rid-

ers. A 1930 *Washington Post* article about the popular annual Manassas Horse Show noted "included among the many entries are some of the finest horses in this section of the country, from the stables of J.W. Taylor of Catlett." The 1940s newspapers contained many articles about the superb horsemanship of two sisters from Catlett, Elizabeth and Nancy Marsh, who dominated the junior hunting divisions. The most decorated Catlett horsewoman hails from more recent times. Hilary Scheer earned the American Horse Show Association's National Championship in 1983 by winning 70 first and second place ribbons and taking 25 championships at 31 shows. Catlett's horse industry continues to flourish as local horses and riders compete in horse shows and ride with the hunts.

Catlett's rural lands also support game bird preserves. Dr. John W. Trenis raised ringneck pheasants for the table and for sport-shooting during the 1950s and '60s. The practice has been continued by Valerie Bowman, who is one of perhaps two dozen authorized breeders of chukar partridge in Virginia, and by Sporty's Shooting Preserve, a 275-acre property "with access to other properties to provide a wide variety of terrain, cover and agricultural crops" for game.

Chukar partridge

The Fauquier County Farm Product and Services Directory lists for Catlett: three dairy farms, two horse farms (in addition to the many privately-owned horses), five farms specializing in field crops, seven in hay, one hog farm, four poultry farms, four goat farms, and numerous specialty farms dealing in everything from blueberries to lavender, sod to mushrooms.

Essayist Barry Lopez, who often writes about the relationship between the physical landscape and human culture, said "Traces of human presence in the land, like maps, organize undifferentiated space in certain ways, and the effect, especially in open country, is soothing." From aerial photographs of Catlett, one sees natural dividing lines formed by streams and runs, traditional dividing lines created by the old roads and railroad tracks, and man-made lines indicated by hedgerows bounding farms and their internal divisions of pasture, field crop, and forest. Catlett's rural nature and traditions have thrived in this setting. ■

Aerial View of Catlett, Virginia, showing roads and the railroad, Turkey Run, forests, pastures, and fields in crops.

A Short Civil War History of Catlett, Virginia

The rural village of Catlett is situated nine miles southeast of Warrenton at the intersection of Catlett Road (Route 28), Elk Run Road, Old Dumfries Road, and the old Orange and Alexandria Railroad (now the Norfolk Southern).

In a county as agriculturally rich as Fauquier, being able to ship farm products to distant markets by rail rather than by wagon was critical to the economic prosperity of the region. As railroads began to crisscross Virginia in the 1850s, small towns were often established along their corridors at convenient rail stops at, or near, crossroads and accessible to nearby farmsteads. In the case of Catlett, it appears that no village existed at this location before the railroad was completed through here in 1852. The town became the first stop coming from the north for the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in Fauquier County after leaving adjacent Prince William County. Best described as a rural economic and social center, Catlett offered a post office, school, several stores and churches, as well as numerous dwellings.

Civil War maps illustrate the strategic importance of Catlett Station/ Catlett's appears on no less than a half dozen Civil War maps in the official Civil War Atlas. The bridge across Cedar Run was of primary importance and it became J.E.B. Stuart's target in August, 1862.. Writing in 2003, Civil War historian Clint Johnson provides the most succinct description of Stuart's raid on Catlett's Station. On August 17, 1862, Stuart's aide, Norman Fitzhugh, was captured with a copy of the cavalry's orders to sweep behind Union general John Pope to trap his army between the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers. The Confederates had to cancel that plan…Lee was now anxious to find some other way to attack Pope's force before the army of George McClellan could link with it.

Stuart proposed that he lead a raid in the same general directions that he would have taken if the orders hadn't been captured. He specifically targeted Catlett's Station, where he would burn the bridge of the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, which spanned Cedar Run… Stuart hoped he could at least slow down any attempt to reinforce his (Pope's) army. Lee… readily agreed.

On August 22, Stuart started with 1500 men from Orange Court House… As night came, so did a violent thunderstorm that hampered Stuart's men's ability to see where they were going. By lucky chance, they stumbled across a black laborer who…offered to lead the force into Catlett's Station… Stuart's men swept into Catlett's Station and captured the entire camp. Much to their surprise, it turned out to be the headquarters camp of Pope himself…Among the loot captured was Pope's dress uniform and $500,000 for Pope's September payroll.

However, in addition to capturing the depot and destroying Union supplies, Stuart's men did retrieve some of Pope's papers that were helpful to Lee, specifically because there was mention of the number of troops that Pope had – 45,000 – something that Lee had not known before. It also confirmed for Lee that Pope did not intend to attack until McClellan arrived, intelligence that allowed Lee to make the first move. A. Civil War Trails marker erected on the west side of Elk Run Road south of the railroad tracks explains these events. ■

Map of Popes [sic] campaign in northern Virginia, August 1862.
Sneden, Robert Knox, 1832-1918.
Library of Congress, American Memory