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## THE SOLAR HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

THE OLDEST RESIDENTIAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD IN BRISTOL,  
VIRGINIA: <http://solarhill.tripod.com>



*A phenomenon known as The Baily's Beads was first photographed during the Aug. 7, 1869 eclipse after which Solar Hill is named. The effect is caused by the photosphere shining through lunar valleys, creating the appearance of a rope of beads around the moon.*

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### SOLAR HILL

**A. Marker: Johnson & Cumberland Monument designed by Peter Lawrie & dedicated to historian Bud Phillips**

Solar Hill was the first major residential expansion of Bristol/Goodson. Originally the hill was part of the vast James King plantation and was largely covered by upland pastures.

In 1859 it was sold to Joseph Johnston who sold it to the town for residential development in 1871.

An auction was held on July 5, 1871 to sell lots and development began immediately thereafter. Solar Hill was named after an observatory built to view the great solar eclipse of Aug. 7, 1869.

The homes built here were constructed by prominent local families. It soon became and long remained the most elite residential neighborhood in Bristol, VA.

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## EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**B. Marker: 700 Cumberland Street**

Emmanuel Episcopal Church was organized on January 26, 1862 with 16 charter members. Rev. Mowbray served as the first priest. For the first few years services were held in other local churches.

The first building which housed the new church was erected in 1868-69 on the southeast corner of Moore and Cumberland streets. The present building was erected in 1920-21 of native gray limestone in the Gothic style. It is a replica of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century church at Sulgrave Manor in Northampton, England, an ancestral home of George Washington.

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### KING/LANCASTER/ MCCOY/MITCHELL HOUSE

**C. Marker: 54 King Street**

This house was built as the grand seat of Rev James King's vast plantation, first known as Sapling Grove and later Mountain View.

Two rooms of the original house built in 1816-17 remain in the present structure. The King family lived here from 1817-53.

Andrew Jackson frequented the house and was escorted to Washington for his inauguration by William King. The Sapling Grove post office operated here from 1839-53.

The house was a stopping point for stage coaches from 1839-56. Mountain View High School (later Sullins College) began here in 1869. Changes to the house were made by John J. Lancaster in 1881, H. E. McCoy in 1892 and Joseph D. Mitchell in 1903. Bristol's Margaret Mitchell, who was born here in 1901 and lived here for 99 of her 102 years, left the house to King College of Bristol, TN.

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### SOLAR OBSERVATORY

**D. Marker: 116 Solar Street**

Along with several locations in eastern America this hill was chosen as an observation point from which astronomers sent from Washington, D.C. could view the great solar eclipse of Aug. 7, 1869. For this reason the area, which had been known as Lancaster's Hill after Thomas C. Lancaster purchased it, soon became known as Solar Hill. Brick from the pillars of the observation platform were used in the foundation of the first house built at the corner of Solar and Cumberland streets.

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### SOLAR STREET

**E. Marker: 127 Solar Street**

Solar Street was named after an observation platform was erected here to view the great solar eclipse of Aug. 7, 1869. The platform was located near the south end of the present street.

In 1871 the street was laid out and development began at what is now

the corner of Solar and Sycamore streets. In time Solar Street became known as one of the most elite residential streets in the city.

## **SOLAR HILL MARKER #2**

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### **F. Marker: 908 Sycamore Street**

Solar Hill was the first major residential expansion of Bristol/Goodson. It was named after an observatory was built to view the great solar eclipse of Aug. 7, 1869. An auction was held on July 5, 1871 to sell lots and development began immediately thereafter. Solar Hill soon became and long remained the most elite section of Bristol, VA/TN.

## **OAK STREET**

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### **G. Marker: 222 Oak Street**

Oak Street was named after a large grove of oak trees through which it passed. When the largest was felled in 1902 a fortune in gold coins was found in its hollow core. For a time Oak was known as Fortune Street in popular usage. In time the original name prevailed and so remains today.

## **SCOTT STREET/ SERVANT'S ROW**

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### **H. Marker: 245 Solar Street**

Scott Street is an extension of an older Bristol, VA street named for General Winfield Scott. While the original structures no longer remain, at one time there were modest houses along its south side and

extending a short distance down King's Alley (Old Stagecoach Road) which became known as Servant's Row. Here lived many persons who served in the larger homes and gardens of their Solar Hill neighbors.

## **JOHNSON STREET**

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### **I. Marker: 214 Johnson Street**

Johnson (originally named Johnston) Street was the first street to be laid out on Solar Hill in 1871. It was named for Joseph Johnston of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who sold the land for development. The name evolved into Johnson Street through common usage.

## **KING'S ALLEY/ SYCAMORE STREET**

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### **J. Marker: King's Alley & Sycamore**

King's Alley and King Street were originally part of the Abingdon-Blountville division of the Old Stagecoach Road which was used from 1839-56. At one time four stagecoach runs per day were made. Andrew Johnson was injured here when a hornet flew into the stagecoach, causing passengers to flee and spooking the horses.

Sycamore Street started as a trail leading from a huge sycamore tree that stood at the crossing of Beaver Creek and the Old Stagecoach Road. This trail was made into a street in 1871 when Solar Hill was surveyed. It was once renamed Terry Street in honor of Mayor John F. Terry but soon reverted to its original name.

## **HOW SOLAR HILL GOT ITS NAME**

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"It seems that somewhere between 1860 and 1871, a tract of land was subdivided into lots; but sales proved to be slow. Sometime during the period immediately prior to 1871, there occurred an eclipse of the sun and the eclipse was nearly total in Bristol. A party of astronomers was sent to Bristol to make an observation. They chose the highest available point in town and in order to properly orient their telescope, they established a meridian -that is a true north and south line - along the top of Solar Hill, and placed markers or monuments at each end as reference points for the instruments. All this activity undoubtedly drew many interested spectators as well as others who were just plain curious. It was decided to hold an auction for the sale of the lots and the Reverend David Sullins acted as the auctioneer. He received his choice of two lots for his services. Many of the visitors recognized the commanding view from these lots and sales picked up. It is said that when the big day arrived and the moon began to creep across the face of the sun, the Reverend Sullins threw his hat into the air and shouted, "Hallelujah!" at the top of his voice. Incidentally, this Reverend David Sullins was the founder of Sullins College. Thus, from this observation of a solar eclipse, the name Solar Hill was applied to the hill and Solar Street to the street running along the top of the hill."

*Clarence Baker Kearfott, from 'Blue John Remembers'*

