

THE FORGOTTEN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF RIVER ROAD

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As one drives northwest on River Road from Washington, DC, passing residential communities along the way, one comes upon a busy section of commerce which includes gas stations, self-storage companies, a tall radio tower and more in Bethesda, Maryland. The Capital Crescent Trail passes overhead. This area of commercial activity in the Westbard section of Bethesda was, however, once home to a small but vibrant community of African American families.

After the Civil War, these people, some of whom had been the chattel of nearby white landowners, established their homes only a mile from the District of Columbia border along what was commonly known as "the river road". A community by definition is a group of people sharing one or more things in common. An examination of the roots of this community through land deeds, oral accounts, maps, wills and other primary documents uncovers networks of family, work, faith and support that bound the residents to each other and to the site as well as linked them to other African American communities nearby. This article traces the origins of this River Road community and how it developed and flourished after the turn of the twentieth century and then, with intensified commercial development in the 1950s and 1960s, dwindled until only the "Little Church on the Hill" and the mystery of the community's cemetery remain.

Early Landowners along River Road

The history of the African American community in the Westbard River Road area of Bethesda is closely intertwined with that of the white families who settled the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These included the Shoemaker, Ray, Posey, Loughborough and Counselman families who lived and worked along what was for centuries known as "the river road" (henceforth called by its modern name River Road).

In 1713, James Stoddert and Thomas Addison received a land grant for a tract called Friendship containing 3,124 acres. In current map terms, Stoddert's portion extended north from what is now Fessenden Street in northwestern DC into Montgomery County, and it spanned River Road and Wisconsin Avenue as far as the current Edgemoor Lane of Bethesda, Maryland. To pay the "quit rent" for the patent or land grant, the Friendship tract was subdivided for sale. Economics and land practices at the time favored large landholders.

Tobacco was *the* cash crop in pre-revolutionary times when it could be used to pay quit rents for land. In fact, 18th century land leases in Maryland and Virginia were often written in terms of tobacco tonnage to be provided each year as payment. As a result, tobacco was grown constantly, even though it was resource-intensive to grow and wore out the land because it was a heavy feeder of soil nutrients. River Road, which dated back to the Seneca trail of Indian times, was a major thoroughfare for bringing tobacco to the Port of Georgetown. It was called a "rolling road" because tobacco hogsheads could be rolled from up-county in Maryland to High Street (now known as Wisconsin Avenue) and thence generally downhill to port for export to Europe.¹

In 1810 the population of Montgomery County reached a high of 19,816, of which 38.7% was from African origin (this total included 677 free blacks, 8,249 slaves, and 12,103 whites). During the first half of the century most of the population was engaged in agriculture. After the Chesapeake & Ohio

Canal company began construction in 1828, however, population trends reflected the large number of indentured Irish laborers needed to build the canal. During this period the constant planting of tobacco without any crop rotation degraded the soil. In 1819 tobacco prices plummeted and Maryland tobacco farmers began to desert their land for fresh fields in North Carolina, Kentucky and other states. By 1840, the total population of the county had dropped by more than 22% to 15,456 (1,313 free blacks, 5,377 slaves, and 8,766 whites) and land prices had dropped significantly as well.²

Three of the area's large landowners moved from Pennsylvania to the new capital during this time period. In 1832, Samuel Shoemaker, a Quaker of German extraction, purchased 102 acres of land at a good price in the southern part of the county. He brought his large family of eight sons and two daughters from Pennsylvania with the intention of renewing the land and growing fresh fruits and vegetables for the nearby population of Washington. In an oral interview recorded at the Chevy Chase Historical Society, his great-great-granddaughter Lillian Shoemaker Brown said

The way I heard it was that he came to Washington because he had read in the newspaper that the city of Washington was growing so fast and there wasn't enough food for the people. And he had farmed up in Pennsylvania. "Well, that's for me. I'm going down and I'll have those people fed."³

Truck farming did not require the intensive labor called for by tobacco farming and many Quakers did not have slaves. Eventually, most of Samuel Shoemaker's sons purchased land nearby and established their own farms. In 1839 son Isaac Shoemaker purchased a tract of 140 acres between River Road and the Rockville Pike, then called High Street, to Georgetown, and in 1842 another son Charles Shoemaker purchased a farm near the future site of Fort Simmons. The proximity of these farms to River Road allowed them to easily supply the growing city of Washington with fresh food. The Rockville Turnpike, completed in 1828, linked Rockville to Georgetown; Tennallytown and its link to River Road was a major midpoint intersection. In 1846 Isaac Shoemaker sold ten acres of his land along the turnpike to Hilleary Ball, who built a house and blacksmith shop and serviced the horses on the local stage lines between Georgetown and Rockville. Additional land sales to Aquila Eld and Cyrus Eli Perry brought Isaac's farm to a manageable size to be farmed with his sons and hired help.⁴

John Counselman owned a plantation of 444 acres, inherited from his father Samuel, a veteran of the War of 1812 who brought the family from Bucks County, Pennsylvania to Montgomery County, Maryland by 1838. To the east lived his brother Charles Counselman, whose estate straddled the District and Montgomery County lines. To the northwest lived his brother William Counselman with their sister Rachel. John Counselman's plantation faced River Road from the northeast and extended northward from the Little Falls Branch as far as the land which is now occupied by the Kenwood Country Club.⁵

Smaller landowners Benjamin and James Ray were grandsons of Captain John Ray, Jr., who served in Maryland troops during the Revolutionary War and whose family had settled in the area before the war. In 1850, brothers James & Benjamin Ray purchased seventeen acres of land facing River Road at a tax auction. Their land shared its northern boundary with six acres of land owned by their widowed

sister-in-law Elizabeth Jane (Loveless) Ray (also known as Matilda Jane), wife of their deceased brother William Ray.⁶

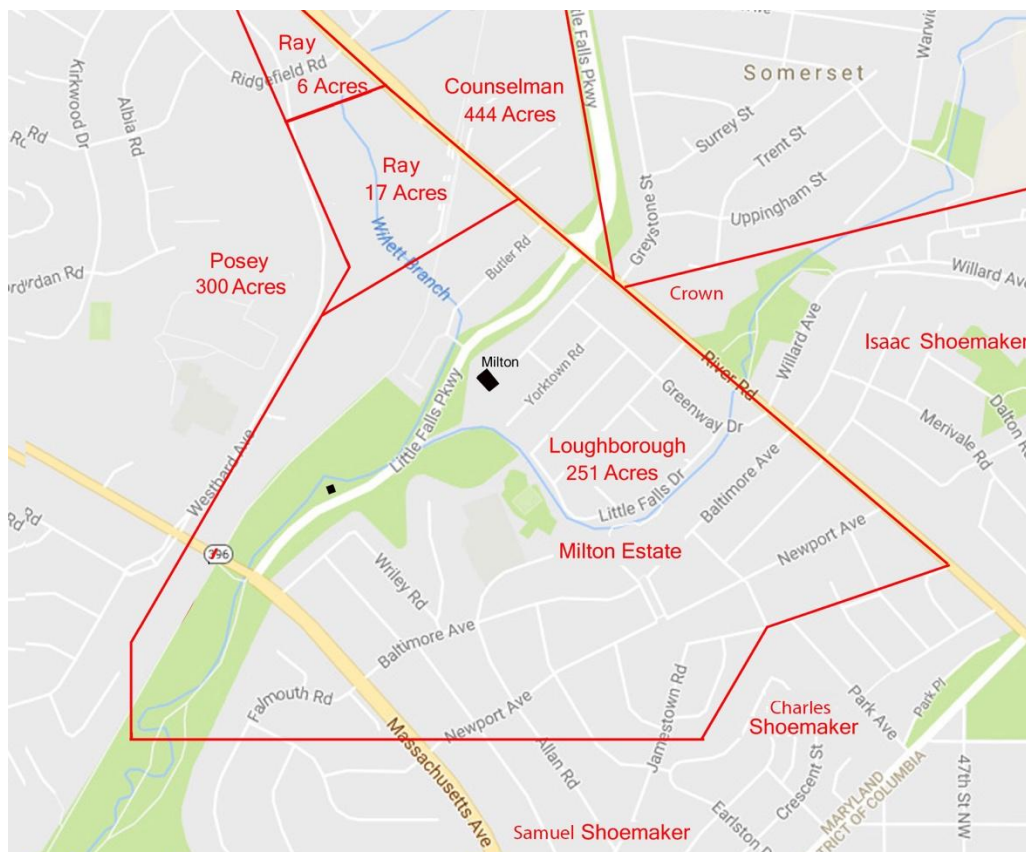


Figure 1: 1850 Plantations and farms superimposed on current area map of Bethesda and Chevy Chase, Maryland. Courtesy, Paul Rispin.

Just south of the Ray brothers' seventeen acres was the 251-acre estate called Milton, owned by Nathan Loughborough. Loughborough was the first Comptroller of the Treasury and came to Washington with the US government when the capital moved from Philadelphia to Washington in 1800. He was president of the Washington Turnpike Company which built the Rockville Turnpike, and in nearby Washington County of the District of Columbia he established a tobacco plantation called Grassland upon what is now the site of American University. By 1838 he had assembled land for another plantation just to the west of River Road and north of the District of Columbia line, where he later moved upon his second marriage to widow Harriet Dunlop Thomas. It was bounded to the south by a stream, now in a culvert under Keokuk Street, and it extended north past the Little Falls Branch just past the current location of Butler Road. Using granite quarried from his land, he built a mansion, still standing, which incorporated a seventeenth century Indian trading post. The working end of the Milton estate was along River Road thus the east entrance of the mansion would have been the service entrance in 1850. Nathan Loughborough also built a grain mill at the northern boundary of his land on the Little Falls Branch.⁷

In 1837, Peter D. Posey bought his large 300-acre plantation called "Springfield" from the heirs of Samuel C. Busey. The Poseys were an extended family of English planters who had settled originally in St. Mary's and Charles counties in Maryland. The Springfield plantation shared part of its eastern boundary with the Ray family property.⁸

As can be seen in Figure 1, by 1850, there were three large plantations totaling almost one thousand acres along River Road, as well as several large farms such as the Shoemaker and Ray properties, most with extensive footage along River Road. Slaves provided the majority of the plantation labor. Because of the poor tobacco market, by the mid-nineteenth century, plantations were slowly being converted to wheat, which could be grown with fewer slaves and also allowed the land to be renewed. Nonetheless, on the eve of the Civil War, data from the 1860 Slave Schedule for Maryland show that John Counselman and then Widow Harriet Loughborough each owned seven slaves while Peter Posey owned twelve slaves.⁹

The African American Community of River Road: Beginnings

After the war, without slave labor large farms and plantations could not be maintained. The Ray brothers and John Counselman began to sell some of their acreage. James Henry Loughborough, Nathan Loughborough's grandson through his son Hamilton, had obtained Milton¹⁰ and in 1869 began to sell off some of this property.

Throughout Montgomery County small settlements of newly freed blacks sprang up on the fringes of farms and plantations. Clarke notes that much of the land owned by the African Americans was low in value because it was either "marshy, wooded or poor soil unfit for farming. Blacks took this uncultivated soil and made it produce enough food for their families." The southern triangle of Counselman's land and the Rays' seventeen acres which the River Road African Americans would purchase, as well as the northern portion of Milton, had the poor topography Clarke describes. In addition to being hilly, it was prone to flooding from springs in the area as well as the Little Falls Branch and a stream which would eventually be called the Willett Branch.¹¹

at the request of Jane Rivers the following Deed was recorded the 3^d day of August 1870. To wit;

This Deed made this third day of August, in the year Eighteen hundred and seventy, by Benjamin Ray and James Ray, of Montgomery County, in the State of Maryland Witnesses, That for and in Consideration of the sum of One Hundred dollars, the said Benjamin Ray and James Ray, do grant unto Jane Rivers (Colo) of the County and State aforesaid, all that piece or parcel of land situate and lying in the aforesaid County and adjoining the lands of William Warren Mary Jackson and a lot of land known as Trauers Gray's Lot, contained within the notes & bounds, Courses & distances following, to wit;

Figure 2: Jane Rivers land deed, circa 1870. Courtesy, Maryland State Archives.

In late 1869 two African Americans Francis Gray and John Hall jointly purchased six acres of land in the tract called “Friendship” from James Ray. The land lay between River Road and Peter Posey’s estate to the west. By 1873 six more African-American families, some related, had purchased land in this area. Jane Rivers, Henry Jackson, Nelson Warren and William Warren bought additional 2- or 3-acre lots from the Ray brothers in 1870, 1872 and 1873 respectively; their lots were positioned south of the land purchased by Hall and Gray. As seen in Figure 2, Jane Rivers was actually noted as “colored” on her 1870 land deed. On the east side of River Road, landowner and former slaveowner John Counselman sold 2-acre lots to Nelson Wood in 1872 and John Burley In 1873. The 1879 Hopkins Atlas map in Figure 3 shows the new African American landowners, settled at the junction of the Counselman, Loughborough and Posey plantations.¹²

Not all land was sold to African Americans. In 1873 Thomas Ward purchased land from Loughborough in the southeast corner of Milton estate. The following year Jehu Willett, a blacksmith, and his wife Edith Shoemaker Willett purchased land from Widow Ray which included the Spinning Wheel Inn and Tavern. The 1879 Hopkins map in Figure 3 identifies a blacksmith shop with two black squares and the abbreviations BS, Sh. near a stream on the Willett property. Polish immigrant and Library of Congress librarian Louis C. Solyam purchased the former Crown property opposite the Milton estate in 1875. He named the property Atalfa. Prussian immigrant Jacob Wilbert joined the area in 1877 when he purchased 25 acres abutting the Burley property from John Counselman.¹³



Figure 3: Hopkins Atlas of fifteen miles around Washington, including the county of Montgomery, Maryland, circa 1878. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

The Jackson family history shows some of the difficulties facing historians in tracing former slave families. Genealogical research identifies Henry Jackson in the 1870 census as JOHN Henry Jackson, living in the River Road community with his wife Waytoga (said to be a Muscogee Indian) and five children. However, by 1880 Waytoga was a widow living in Georgetown with her seven children and godfather John Godfrey from the River Road area, the latter also noted previously in the 1870 Census. The 1880 census simultaneously indicates a Henry Jackson living with wife Mary and niece Martha in the River Road community. Genealogical research identifies this Jackson as ROBERT Henry Jackson. The land acquired by Robert Henry Jackson is, in fact, referred to as “Mary Jackson land” in various deeds.

In addition to these new landowners, early census data indicate free African Americans in the area who were *not* property owners. One such family was the Botts family. This African American family lived opposite the Loughborough estate on River Road on the Atalfa property of Louis Solyam. In the 1870 census a young African American named William Botts, his wife and two daughters lived next to Solyam. In 1880, William, his son William Jr., and sixty-three year-old patriarch Pascal, or Pasco, Botts lived at the site. Next door Pascal’s 25-year-old daughter-in-law Cora Botts lived with the Solyam family as a domestic servant. (She was married to William’s brother Jeremiah.) Figure 4 exhibits a rare 1895 photo of the Botts home, taken by Herbert Solyam, son of Louis Solyam.



**Figure 4: The Pascal Botts cabin on the Solyam estate Atalfa, circa 1895.
Photograph by Herbert Solyam, courtesy Stephen Lane.**

Histories recount the existence of slave cabins in this area, again perhaps because the land would have been deemed undesirable for agriculture. In her memoirs, Margaret Cabell Brown Loughborough wrote that the slaves of the Milton Estate, which was located just south of the Ray brothers' land, "were given land on the edge of the property." One oral historian remembered old-timer William Brown, second husband to Mary Hall, as "older than Henry Jackson. He lived in a slave house up there across from Jacob Wilbert." The Botts residence, located on low lying land next to the Little Falls Stream, might also have been a former slave cabin. Its structure closely resembles the documented slave cabin of the No Gain plantation in Chevy Chase, MD.¹⁴

Some of these new African American landowners may have been former slaves. Poor, ambiguous or non-existent records make tracing former slaves difficult. However, in 1862 in the District of Columbia, and in 1867 in Montgomery County, Maryland, former slave owners provided lists of their chattel, hoping to receive compensation. The District owners did receive compensation; the Montgomery County owners did not. These lists offer some bits of information. For example, owner B. T. Hodges, who owned properties both in Montgomery County and in Washington County of the District of

Columbia filed a claim for a slave named John Burley, age 25; the 1870 census lists a John Burley in the River Road area, age 28. Likewise, slave owner Louisa Vinson of Montgomery County filed a claim in 1867 for compensation for a slave named Henry Jackson, age 30, in 1867. In the 1870 census a Henry Jackson is 32 and living near John Counselman. Another possible former slave is John Hall. In 1862, Mrs. Lucy Walker of Washington County in the District of Columbia filed a claim for John Hall, a male slave of 33. Hall had previously been listed as Walker's property in the 1855 DC tax assessment document.¹⁵

The Nelson Wood family *can* be traced to some extent. According to census data Nelson Wood was a blacksmith; in 1870, he lived next to Richard Ball, son of Hilleary Ball, a blacksmith with a shop along the Rockville Turnpike. It seems likely that Nelson Wood was employed in the Balls' blacksmith shop. Perhaps after moving to the River Road community in 1872, Nelson Wood worked at the blacksmith shop located next to the Willett business, the Spinning Wheel Inn and Tavern. A 1941 *Bethesda Journal* article about local women noted that Mary Ann Wood, the wife of this Nelson Wood and mother to five Wood offspring, had been a slave of John Counselman, and when young had been loaned out to Charles Shoemaker for work.

*Mary Ann was a slave owned by the Councilman family who lived on a farm which is now the site of Kenwood. At the end of the Civil War, Mary Ann was freed and the Councilman family gave her a piece of land on River Road. She worked for [Mrs. Charles Shoemaker] from the time she was a young girl until she was too old to work.*¹⁶

Trying to delineate Mary Ann's lineage is difficult, and in fact, Mary Ann's slave name may have been Lucinda Martin. Why? First, the 1850 Census shows a young female slave (born 1838) living with Charles Shoemaker. Secondly, Lucinda Martin was a young slave inherited in 1856 from Samuel Counselman by his granddaughter Lucy A. M. Counselman of DC, so Mary Ann/Lucinda WAS owned by the Counselman family. In the 1862 DC Compensation documents Lucy Counselman identifies this Lucinda Martin (born in 1838) for remuneration. Third, in his 1867 remuneration list for Montgomery County John Counselman lists at least five slaves surnamed Martin. Fourth, the 1860 Census shows a FREE older African American couple surnamed Martin living with the John Counselman family and several children, still enslaved. Moreover, marriage records cite the marriage of *Lucinda Martin* to Nelson Wood in the District of Columbia in 1865. Finally, the U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Index for son Frank Wood cites parents as Nelson Wood and Mary Martin. However, post-Civil War census entries indicate that Mary Ann cited her year of birth as 1845 or 1848, making this analysis inconsistent, unless census or self-reporting was wrong or that she was another Counselman slave, born in 1845. Nevertheless, it seems that in 1872 Mary Ann returned to the area where she was born with her new husband Nelson.

In the years between 1870 and 1900, both large and small landowners of the area were devoted to agriculture. Census occupations for community men indicated farm laborer or laborer for the most part, with some notable exceptions such as Nelson Wood the blacksmith. And census data indicate that many of the younger Warrens of the large extended Warren clan worked on the C&O Canal. The canal was 185 miles long and would operate until 1924, conveying wheat and red sandstone from Seneca and coal from Alleghany County mines. Late in life one resident of River Road recalled working

the barges as a child, loading lime from Antietam in wheel barrels onto a canal barge, saying “(ya had to) put a rag over your nose... The lime dust take the skin off a ya” and then waiting with the barge for delivery at different locks.¹⁷

Having little in the way of a social safety net to help in times of death and calamity, unsurprisingly widows in the community remarried, a practical solution for retaining land and providing care for children. Among the families who experienced family shocks early on were Jane Rivers’, Francis Gray’s, and John Hall’s families. By 1880 widow Jane Rivers had married new husband William Brooks; widow Charlotte Gray had adopted son Armstead Harris of Virginia; and widow Mary Hall had married William H. Brown. Remarriage was common; widow Waytoga Jackson and widower John Burley married late in life in 1907. It is possible that Burley’s first wife Mary was Waytoga’s sister, as his children by her were also said to be part Native American.¹⁸

The death of community founders in the late 1890s initiated the process of land subdivision among heirs. In addition, subdivision of some properties was the only way the African American community could grow to meet expanding employment opportunities. Charlotte Gray in her 1897 will bequeathed “land and house adjoining Peter Posey down as far as the branch” to her grandson Frank Dodson and her “house and land lying between the river road and said branch” to her adopted son William Armstead Jones. Jane Rivers Brooks initially wrote her will in 1892 and bequeathed to her husband William sole and exclusive use of her bedroom and furniture during his natural life, and to her son George her real estate and to her daughter Martha a dollar with the memorable line, “My reason for making this distinction is that my son has been a comfort whereas Martha has been a source of trouble to me.” (After her husband died, an 1897 attachment to the will bequeathed the bedroom and furniture to son George.) Similarly, Nelson Warren, Jr. died in 1903 and left his land to his wife Eliza for her life, and upon her death to six of their children; the seventh child, Susan Robinson, only received a dollar. Neighbor and friend William H. Brown, one of the few literate residents of the community, executed the will.¹⁹

As families grew and expanded with the addition of newcomers, new opportunities for work also arose as the new century approached. From 1900 until World War II, the pillars of faith, education, and support held the community together until school desegregation and commercial development at mid-century begin to fray its fabric.

Work and Leisure in the New Century

Starting in 1890 the prospect of new modes of transportation influenced a gradual shift in the community from an agrarian economy to an industrial one. First, James Henry Loughborough, southwestern neighbor to the community, promoted construction of the Georgetown Branch of the B & O Railroad Company called the Metropolitan Southern Railroad. 1890 Right-of-Way deeds between the railroad and landowners Loughborough, Nelson Warren, William Warren, and others show land surveys for the proposed railroad. Construction of the railway began in 1892 and enhanced the commercial value of land in the area. The Metropolitan Southern rail line was finally completed in 1910 and carried coal and building materials between Georgetown, DC and Chevy Chase and Bethesda, Maryland until 1985. (This 11-mile old rail bed became the Capital Crescent Trail in 1996 and is now

one of the most popular hiker-biker trails in the United States.) Second, the Georgetown and Tenallytown Railway Company built a trolley line up Wisconsin Ave. from 32nd and M Streets to the District of Columbia boundary line. By 1900 trolley service was extended to Rockville by the Washington and Rockville Electric Railway Company (later the Washington Railway and Electric Company) until it ended in 1923. These trolley lines brought new job opportunities to River Road community residents between 1900 and 1930. The trolley lines also opened this formerly agricultural area to white families leaving the city of Washington to populate the new suburbs of Somerset (1899), Friendship Heights (1901) and American University Park in Montgomery County (1899). Third, the Glen Echo Electric Railroad opened in 1891 and reached Cabin John in 1900. Its original road bed passed through Loughborough and Solyam land north along what is now Willard Avenue in Friendship Heights and then it was moved north to Somerset. It shared a terminal at Wisconsin and Willard Avenues with the Georgetown-Rockville system.²⁰



Figure 5: Trolley Car No. 145 of the Washington Railway and Electric Co. ran on Wisconsin Avenue until 1923. Courtesy, Archives of the DC Trolley Museum.

One new employer was located next to the Jackson property on the site of the old Loughborough quarry. In 1878 James Henry Loughborough leased rights to quarry granite on the Milton Estate property to Robert K. Johnson, bringing much needed income to the strapped Milton Estate to help it recover from the effects of the Civil War. In 1916 Allen E. Walker bought the old Loughborough quarry and he and his partners established the Bethesda Blue Granite Company. Local African American men

quarried granite for use as headstones and building materials, using the adjacent railroad and access road to River Road to transport the stone. The 1931 Klinge real estate map still shows the quarry symbol in the area, although by that time the quarry was filled with water and no longer functioning.

Another major employer to the community was the US Department of Agriculture's Experimental Station of Animal Husbandry, also known as the Veterinary Experimental Station, located just north of the community. (See Figure 6.) Driven out by complaints from its location on the National Mall in 1897, the Bureau of Animal Husbandry had a twofold purpose: to maintain the health of domestic animal husbandry by testing breeds for increased stamina and health and to defend against disease. At least six River Road community members worked at the local Experimental Station from 1910 to 1930 before it once again became a victim of a growing local population leery of animal diseases. In 1937, the USDA station moved to Beltsville, Maryland, and today it continues its mission there. Today, all that remains of the former 50+ acre experimental farm and its many buildings is the Renaissance Revival brick-and-stone building, now the recreational center for Norwood Park in Bethesda, which formerly housed the laboratories and administrative offices of the Bureau.



Figure 6: 1904 Baist map of the vicinity of Washington D.C. showing B&O Railroad, Glen Echo Electric and Washington Railway trolley lines and USDA Experimental Station north of River Road. Courtesy, Library of Congress

New employment opportunities not only brought jobs to the African American community, they also brought newcomers. Men married into existing families and worked with the new employers in the

area; their wives found employment as domestics or laundresses for the growing local white communities.

One example of new blood in the community was the Clipper family. After their parents' deaths in 1903 and 1907, three brothers named Isaac, William and Cleveland Clipper moved to the River Road community. William Clipper married Blanche Warren, daughter of longtime resident Nelson Warren, Jr. in 1907. Isaac Clipper was a hostler, or driver, for the US Naval Observatory. William Clipper and his brother Cleveland Clipper worked at the USDA Experimental Station. According to Cleveland's nephew and William Clipper's son Cleveland Clipper, it was a good steady job with occasional free meat or milk. Late in life, in a 1977 interview in the *Washington Post*, William Clipper boasted he had once broken in a couple of zebras and driven them up Wisconsin Avenue "in triumph."²¹

The Clippers came from a storied background, well-recorded by prolific and accurate family oral histories. Their father John "Jack" Clipper grew up a slave in Hanover, Virginia. After being freed by Union troops after a nearby battle, Jack stayed to assist the quartermaster before boarding a boat at Aquia Creek for Baltimore. From there he made his way south, eventually finding work as a stonecutter at the Seneca Stone Quarry. Figure 7 shows Jack Clipper second from right with other Seneca stonecutters in 1890. (The ruins of the stone cutting mill can be seen today at the end of Tschiffley Mill Road near Riley's Lock Road in Potomac, next to the C&O Canal.) Jack Clipper married Martha Johnson from Big Pines near Potomac and together they had thirteen children. The US Register of Civil, Military and Naval Service records shows that in 1895 Jack was watchman at Seneca Quarry while his three older sons Boise, John Jr. and George W. were stonecutters. Younger sons William, Cleveland and Isaac Clipper migrated to the River Road community after their parents' deaths. The Clipper brothers would become active members of the River Road community and today Clipper Lane off River Road marks the location where the three brothers bought land from Jacob Wilbert in the early twentieth century and settled alongside each other.²²



Figure 7: Jack Clipper is shown second from right with other Seneca Quarry stonecutters circa 1890. Courtesy, Shirley Shields.

In 1923 Allen E. Walker bought more Loughborough property southwest of the rail bed and his company the Washington Accessories Fuel Company built a large storage facility for gasoline for the growing car and truck market of the Washington area. In 1926 the George E. Fuller Stone Plant established its stone fabrication factory next to the railway bed on the east side of River Road. Community men worked as watchmen and cut the imported Indiana limestone used to build the U.S. Supreme Court Building and the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

On the grassy loading zone next to the Fuller plant, the River Road community had a baseball field and supported the River Road Lions, their neighborhood team during the late 20s and early 30s. The team travelled to play other local teams. Young Cleveland Clipper recollected,

We went all up in there, to Olney, Maryland, and Mt. Zion. They had a diamond up there like they had at the Griffith Stadium almost, with a scoreboard in the outfield. We played down in Georgetown, 37th and Prospect, and way out on 61st Street at Huntsville.

Each team would put up some money for the winning team to take the pot. Much to the chagrin of player Gerald Hatton, he couldn't play for his DC high school's team "because he had been pro." ²³

The Pinkney Hatton family moved to the community after 1920 from DC, where they were members of the First Baptist Church, one of the oldest black Baptist churches in Georgetown. (In 2012 the church's garden was dedicated to Gerald Hatton and his wife Etta.) Originally from South Carolina, Pinkney

Hatton, Sr. was first a driver at the US Naval Observatory like Isaac Clipper, and later drove for Piggly Wiggly and A & P markets. With the help of his brother-in-law he built the River Road community's first four-bedroom, two-story Sears Roebuck four-square home. In back of the house he parked an ever-increasing fleet of first trucks, then cabs. An enterprising man, he represented the new middle class of African Americans rising in the 1920s and 1930s. Like the Clippers, he supported the church and the baseball team in many ways, including providing transportation to the baseball team's games. Young Cleveland Clipper recalled the community spirit: "We used to have lawn parties, cooking pigs' feet and potato salad, (out) on the diamond" and that Hatton, William Clipper and a few other men would contribute money toward the money "pot" for games.²⁴

With the onset of the depression of 1929, some residents started selling their land to white realtors and land speculators. In 1929 William and Julia Hall, heirs to John Hall, sold their portion of land to John Beiber, a resident of the nearby Somerset community, yet debt led to bank trusteeship and to another speculator's purchase when Scott B. Appleby bought the land at auction. In 1939 investor Martin McInerney purchased former Nelson Warren land; in the same year, the Rev. William A. Jones and wife sold the last of the land inherited from Charlotte Gray to outsiders Bertrand and Christie Acker. The latter sale created friction with their neighbors the Rivers family, the local cemetery owner White's Tabernacle No. 39, and the River Road Colored School, as the Ackers fenced off and blocked access to the outlet road used by those properties. A 1940 agreement resolved the issue.²⁵

As the country slowly recovered from the Depression and moved toward World War II, the African American community began to contract. More lodgers rented living space in the community, partly due to their inability to buy property in the restricted covenant communities nearby, and long-time residents began to move away to either the District of Columbia or up-county. The 1930 and 1940 census entries show some River Road residents living in the Scotland community in Potomac. Importantly, employment opportunities also shifted. The transformation from a heavy- to a service-industry did not necessarily translate into new jobs for the local community. The George Fuller Stone Plant shuttered its plant in 1944, but in 1942 the Briggs Filtration (also known as the Briggs Clarifier Company) and Gardner Labs were already growing steadily on the site of the former baseball field. These companies contributed to the war effort through their defense-related contracts, winning awards in the process, but census data indicate that they employed few, if any, of the local African American residents. In fact, some residents, like the younger Cleveland Clipper, were enlisted themselves and far from home.²⁶

In 1952, most of Nelson Wood's two-acre property was surveyed for sale and later purchased for construction of Little Falls Parkway. By 1954 change was definitely in the air. Hot Shoppes, which later branded itself Marriott, bought the old Fuller Stone Plant and undertook renovations to create new headquarters. (The building is now the home of the Washington Episcopal School in Bethesda.) Other small businesses gradually sprouted along River Road to serve the growing suburban communities bordering River Road. These businesses included gas stations, the notorious Sugar Bowl beer joint, auto body shops, Talbert's Ice & Beverage, the DGS Grocery, furniture repair shops and garden shops. In 1956 the former Posey plantation was developed into the Westwood Shopping Center and Western Junior High School was built. In 1958 local area real estate investor William Carrigan bought the former River Road Colored School property from the Montgomery County Board

of Education; this was followed by Carrigan's buying sweep of the remaining small lots surrounding the school.

Finally, in 1961 and 1963 the last of the original African American family land holdings were sold to outsiders to the community bent on development. Margaret A. Wood, educator and granddaughter of former slave Mary Ann Wood, finally relinquished the last piece of Wood property, which included a small family cemetery, to Martin T. McCarthy for the construction of the Kenwood Condominiums, which now stands at the corner of Little Falls Parkway and River Road. And in 1963 the remaining heirs of the original Jane Rivers property sold out to developer Llazlo Tauber, who began development of Westwood Shopping Center over the next few years.

A Community of Faith

"Remember: The church is the alpha and omega of the black community." Clarke notes that after the Civil War, leaders began to emerge among the free African American population and the church was the first institution to be established in their communities; soon after came the establishment of schools, benevolent societies and other institutions.²⁷

The River Road community was upheld by the pillar of faith. This faith evolved through local networks involving the community itself, its ties to Tenleytown, and later ties with Bethesda and the Scotland community in Potomac. Records and oral histories describe several ministers as well as lay people living there.

Caroline Loughborough, born in 1892 on Milton Estate, provided an early reference to a community of Christians in the River Road enclave. In her 1931 book of poems *Fragments* she reminisced about a local old blind preacher:

"The Old Blind Minister lived in "My Maryland" just a few years ago. He held outdoor services every Sunday afternoon in summer and on warm days in winter...

He was a dignified old man, very neatly dressed in a pair of Marse Henry's pants, a frock coat of Mr. Hamilton's, and a stiff white vest of Uncle Ally's. His shirt was one his step-daughter had bought for him and kept white and stiff with her own hands.

He is dead now but his good work lives on in the upright lives of his people.²⁸

Caroline was recalling events from her childhood after the turn of the century. The references to the minister's hand-me-down clothing from her father James Henry ("Marse Henry"), her grandfather Hamilton, and her paternal uncle Alexander ("Uncle Ally") Loughborough would indicate that the minister likely lived on or near the Milton Estate.

There was a network among the African Americans of the District, their churches, and outreach to the suburbs. This church expansion in turn led to the establishment of schools, cemeteries, benevolent societies and the like in those new communities.

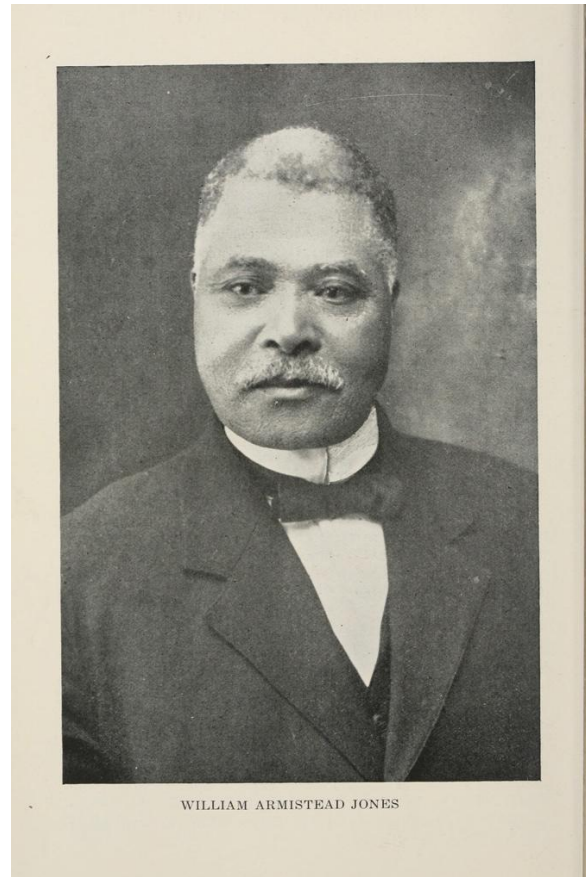
With the huge influx of freed slaves into the District of Columbia during the Civil War, new African American churches were established and often the first recourse for newcomers in their search for

family and friends separated by war. Examples of these churches include the First Baptist Church in Georgetown, organized by former slave the Rev. Sandy Alexander in 1862, and the Vermont Avenue Baptist Church, initially known as the Fifth Baptist Church, established by the Rev. John H. Brooks in 1866. Brooks, a blacksmith and shoemaker by training and Union army driver, first led services in private homes before settling in a small wooden structure in the poor area near Rock Creek known as "Hell's Bottom". Under his ministry, the name purportedly became "Heaven's Isles."²⁹

After the Civil War Tenleytown, also known as Reno City then, grew as the former site of Fort Reno was subdivided for sale. As its mixed population grew, African American churches in the city established missions or sister churches for the growing Tenleytown community. These new churches included Rock Creek Baptist Church, established in 1872 by the Vermont Avenue Baptist Church; St. George's Episcopal Church, established 1899 by St. Alban's Episcopal Church; and Mt. Asbury (eventually St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church) established in 1888. Soon after the founding of these churches the creation of the Jesse Reno Colored School (1903), a cemetery (1880s), and a Moses Hall followed.

³⁰

In 1875 the Reverend Charles Champ, originally from the Vermont Avenue Baptist Church, led the Rock Creek Baptist Church (hereafter known as RCBC) as its second pastor. According to church history, during Rev. Champ's ministry he baptized a young man who would later step in his shoes and take the helm of RCBC. In August 1902, at the age of 41, *William Armstead Jones*, the adopted son of Charlotte Grey of the River Road community, was installed as the third minister of the church and, in his own words, "baptized, married, christened and buried (the) church" for 47 years until his death in 1948.³¹ How did this adopted son journey to this point, serving not only his own community along River Road but doubling RCBC's membership until the church became known not only in Washington but in Virginia and Maryland too?



[Figure 8: William Armstead Jones circa 1922. Courtesy *The History of the American Negro*, Washington, DC edition]

William Armstead Jones' life was a miraculous journey indeed. According to one 1922 biography he remembered little of his ancestry other than his mother's name Sarah (Harris) Jones and that he was born in the Isle of Wight, Virginia, in August 1861. As a toddler he was part of an infamous attempt by President Lincoln to colonize part of Haiti with freed slaves. The attempt started ill when 435 former slaves sailed on April 14, 1863 on the *Ocean Ranger* for L'Ile à Vache, Haiti and were immediately cheated out of their US currency by the colony's director while still onboard. Circumstances went from bad to worse and within a year, on March 20, 1864, the *Marcia Day* returned the survivors to Alexandria, VA, docking secretly on the Potomac River at night. The biography further states that he was brought to Washington when he was eleven where he worked and went to school. Somehow he met and lived with Charlotte Gray on River Road, for he joined Rock Creek Baptist Church in 1873 when it was quite new in Tenleytown. It was said, "Even as a boy he was an earnest Christian and was active in the work of the church and Sunday School, so his friends were not surprised when he was called to preach."³²

It is possible that prior to 1903, River Road church activities were centered on William Armstead Jones' property, inherited from Charlotte Gray. On August 23, 1900 the *Evening Star* described him as the minister of Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery County. This may have been the name of a house church on his inherited land on River Road. And was the old blind preacher of River Road an early inspiration to William Armstead Jones while he lived on River Road with Charlotte Gray?

Additional connections between RCBC and the River Road community were also noted in newspaper announcements of the day. For example, Rev. Jones officiated the marriage between Blanche Warren, daughter of Nelson Warren, Jr., and William Clipper in 1907. RCBC was also the site of funeral services for local residents George Jackson in 1917 and Cora Botts in 1935. The death notice for Cora Botts further specified she was buried in the Moses Cemetery, Friendship, MD. It is possible that Rev. Jones also presided over the burial of Nelson Warren, Jr. in 1903 as the DC death record indicates burial in Montgomery County, Maryland. Finally, Andrew Wood, brother to Frank Wood and son of Nelson and Mary Ann Wood, may have been the A. Wood described as superintendent of RCBC's Sunday School in 1905.³³

In 1930, the United States Congress passed the Cramton Bill to establish a national military park at Fort Reno. The growing desirability of this area for more upscale homes and neighborhoods was also recognized when the Park and Planning Commission set aside a large area for clearance and acquired all of the former Fort Reno tract over the next decade or so, displacing neighborhood homes and the three black churches. In 1945, with the neighborhood cleared of its many homes, the congregation of RCBC finally sold its property for \$15,000 (the basic cost of the land) and moved to a new location at 24th and H St., NW. As former River Road resident Cleveland Clipper recalled, "*(W)hen they built Alice Deal [at Fort Reno], they moved our church to make room for the road.*"³⁴

River Road community ties to RCBC began to fade in the 1930s as a new generation felt less tied to it and the changes in Tenleytown led to RCBC's eventual move. A new church filled the vacuum: Macedonia Baptist Church. Parishioners of the Macedonia Baptist Church date its founding in 1920 "in the upstairs room at the home of Deacon Henry Thomas... (the) group was led by the Reverend Will Mason." These early church meetings took place in Scotland, Maryland where both Rev. Mason and Deacon Thomas lived.³⁵

In 1928 the Reverend William A. Mason purchased property for the church on Elm Street near Arlington Road in Miller's Additions (Miller's Flats), an early Bethesda subdivision which ran between Wisconsin Avenue and Arlington Road along Bethesda Avenue. The 1931 Klinge real estate map shows a chapel at that location on a long narrow lot. The chapel was close to the railroad and several coal and building materials businesses where African Americans were employed, many recruited by Charles Miller from North Carolina. The Miller's flats location would also have been a trolley ride away from the River Road community where Cleveland Clipper, the son of William Clipper, lived. Clipper recollected:

*That's where that church got started, too. Will Mason used to be up there in Miller's Flats, built a church right there on Bethesda Avenue. It was a house church, but they raised the roof and put a steeple on. Deacon Thomas lived in Scotland, used to come down there. It was there for some time. I used to go up there.*³⁶

At this time, lay ministers within the community were also active. The senior Cleveland Clipper, who purchased land along River Road in 1908, was known to have visited the Civilian Conservation Corps camps as a volunteer preacher in the 1930s. And Richard Christian, one of the River Road Lions

pitchers, grew up to be a preacher according to Cleveland Clipper. *"(Richard's) a preacher now. I showed him how to throw a curve ball and I taught him in Sunday School, too."*³⁷

Macedonia Baptist Church (MBC) later moved to River Road from Miller's Flats. In 1936, the Rev. William A. Jones and his wife sold Bessie Hatton, a River Road resident, 0.71 acre of land southwest of River Road. The land was contiguous with the White's Tabernacle No. 39 cemetery lot. In 1937, one sixth of an acre (or 7,117.17 square feet) within this property was deeded to MBC. Bernice Dove, related to Rev. Mason through her mother Maude Mason, confirmed that MBC was originally located in the community near the Tabernacle cemetery (where Talbert's Ice & Beverage is now located) before moving across the street. She also recalled that all MBC church members were baptized up in Seneca Creek near the old quarry and that there were strong ties between the River Road community and the Gibson Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cabin John.³⁸

After a series of land transactions, the entire plot of 0.71 acres was sold on April 2, 1945 to community outsiders Ruth and Bertrand Acker.³⁹ Among those listed on the deed of sale were the Reverend William Mason as pastor and Deacons Henry Thomas (who had been deacon of the church on Bethesda Avenue), Harvey Matthews and William Clipper.

Nearly coincident with the April 2, 1945 sale, William Clipper's house was conveyed on April 6, 1945 to MBC through the Rev. William and Amanda Mason. That home had been built in 1912 on land purchased from Jacob Wilbert in 1910 and it fronted River Road. In 1931, William Clipper's property was foreclosed with three mortgages and auctioned. Cleveland Clipper recalled that his father owed at least \$1600.⁴⁰

*(His relative) Cash Parker's wife came with some money; she mortgaged her property and got that property.... This was 1931 - people said they couldn't see how he lost it working every day. Cash Parker's wife bought it to keep Bill Smith from buying it. The family that lived there in 1941, the Thomases, were members of the church.*⁴¹

Subsequently, under Reverend Mason's leadership, Macedonia parishioners recollected that the Clipper home was renovated in order to serve its congregation as a church. Cleveland Clipper remembered: *We lived in it, all they did was finished digging the cellar out. Oliver Clement dug the church basement. Poppa had dug out half of that and threw it out the windows and filled the yard.*⁴²



Figure 9: Macedonia Baptist Church still stands at 5119 River Road in Bethesda. Photograph by Amy Rispin, 2016.

The Macedonia Baptist Church, known as the “Little Church on the Hill,” still stands on the corner of River Road and Clipper Lane as a lasting reminder of the River Road African American community it served.

Education: Foundation for a Better Future

In their seminal piece *The History of Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland: 1872-1961*, Clarke and Brown spoke of the value of education to African Americans of the county.

“Colored people... possessed deep faith in the power of education to bring about change in their status and in the quality of their personal lives. They felt education was key to many of the encumbrances that bound them.”⁴³

After founding their churches, most African American communities then established schools and other institutions. For example, in Tenleytown churches and an African American cemetery were established during the period 1872-1899 and the Jesse Reno Colored School was established in 1903; in Cabin John the Gibson Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church and its cemetery were founded in 1872 and a school established in 1880.⁴⁴ Similarly education was a fundamental pillar of the River Road community.

As early as 1867, African Americans had acquired land to build schools for their children. In 1872 the Maryland General Assembly appropriated \$50,000 to support “colored” schools and stipulated that \$532.05 would be paid quarterly to Montgomery County. The Montgomery County Board of Education then decided there would be one school per election district and in 1880 the Cabin John Colored School was established in the seventh district, which also contained Bethesda and the River Road area.⁴⁵

On River Road, there are a few discrepancies as to when a school was actually established. Before 1880, only a few adults in the River Road community could read or write, including William Brooks, husband of Jane Rivers, and William H. Brown, husband of Mary Hall. Clarke and Brown give 1912 as the year when the county formally established a school on River Road, yet they also note that at the end of the decade of the 1880s a delegation of River Road patrons proposed to the Board of Education to furnish a school *and* that the board agreed to pay for teacher salary and incidentals. Oral history and census data give some support to this earlier school date. Cleveland Clipper spoke of an old “slave school” on the Loughborough property and said that his Aunt Stella (Estelle Warren Harris), born in 1884, went to school there as a child. She would have been about five years old in 1889 or 1890. In addition, according to the 1900 Census three Rivers children ages twelve through fifteen were “at school”. Cleveland Clipper further noted that in 1912 the Board of Education paid River Road resident Frank Wood, son of former slave Mary Ann Wood, for use of his home as a school and the county provided a teacher and supplies.⁴⁶

In 1925, after decades of repeated requests from the River Road community for a school building, the Montgomery County Board of Education purchased 1.85 acres of land at a cut-rate when it bought property that had been seized from Edward Warren for nonpayment of a loan (the land had been inherited from William Warren and held by bank trustees). Following the practice of African American communities of providing land for schools, Cleveland Clipper, Sr. and the Turner, Burns, Brooks and Harris families filed quit claims for land adjacent to Warren's property. These quit claims amounted to donations of additional small land holdings to the county board of education. According to the Fisk University's Rosenwald Foundation website, the River Road community contributed \$500 in funds and the county \$4580 in land, while the Foundation contributed \$900 to build a school for the River Road community. In 1925 the Board of Education designated Cleveland Clipper as trustee of the River Road Colored School. During the 1925/1926 year a new three teacher/two-room school building was constructed on the site.⁴⁷



Figure 10: The River Road Colored School. Courtesy, Montgomery County Historical Society.

Many Maryland students who lived near the District of Columbia often found a way to enroll in the superior schools of the District of Columbia to further their education; for African American students, it was a means to learn beyond the early years initially provided by Montgomery County. In 1904 the Montgomery County Board of Education had passed an order effectively limiting the education of black children to fifth grade; by 1939 the River Road Colored School included years six and seven.⁴⁸ Members of the River Road community, like young Cleveland Clipper and Gerald Hatton, went to DC schools and did so using addresses of family or friends across the border. As Gerald Hatton of the community recounted, after completing seventh grade locally in about 1932 at the River Road Colored School,

*“DC schools, even segregated, were better quality than the system in Maryland. And it was easier than going to Rockville...We walked to Wisconsin and Western and had three-cent tickets for the streetcar...Francis Junior High School in Georgetown was new at that time [built in 1927]. We had chemical labs, (and) science; I learned to type in the 8th grade. We walked Willard Avenue at night to get home from school. I skipped grades at River Road and went to Howard at 16.”*⁴⁹

In 1948, the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) used the River Road school as a summer recreation center, thus allowing teachers to have a summer income and utilizing the community space.⁵⁰ The Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 brought to an end separate schools for colored and white students. The following year the Board of Education closed

the River Road Colored School and the African American children of the community walked or were bused to integrated schools.

Locally, Margaret A. Wood, granddaughter of Mary Ann Wood, the former Counselman slave, and the youngest daughter of Frank Wood, in whose home the early 1912 River Road Colored School was possibly housed, attended Montgomery County's first colored high school which was established in 1927 in Rockville. She was one of nine students in the first graduating class of 1931.⁵¹ Upon graduation she taught at the Brickyard Colored School near Potomac, Maryland, the Cabin John Colored School, and finally the River Road school. In September 1955 Ms. Wood was among the first black teachers to be assigned to the Clara Barton Elementary School after desegregation in the county.

Support for the Living and the Dead

The last pillar of a community is the web of support available to it in times of need. As noted earlier, the early founding families adopted or remarried as means to keep land and families intact when hardship struck. After the Civil War, African American secret or benevolent societies arose as an informal insurance system for those otherwise discriminated against by national insurance companies. The number of these societies in African American communities increased rapidly in the late 19th century; their members derived benefits when in hardship as well as experienced status and position in their communities through their membership. In Georgetown, historians Lesko and others observed the interconnectedness in that thriving African American community between its churches and their social, fraternal and benevolent organizations.⁵² W. E. B. Dubois specifically noted

*Their real function is to provide a fund for relief in case of sickness and for funeral expenses. The burden which would otherwise fall on one person or family, is, by small regular contributions, made to fall on the group. This business feature is then made attractive by a ritual, ceremonies, officers, often a regalia, and various social features.*⁵³

One such benevolent society that arose in Tenleytown was White's Tabernacle No. 39, a local branch of the Ancient United Order of the Brothers and Sisters, Sons and Daughters of Moses. The lodge is mentioned in *Evening Star* newspapers in the 1890s. Its formal District incorporation document of August 1910 noted the lodge's purpose "to mutually benefit the members, care for the sick, bury the dead, and otherwise aid members of the society who may be in need or distress."⁵⁴ Trustees were Lorenzo Harris, Robert Dorsey, John A. Morton, Charles H. Brown, John L. Hyson, Allen Lewis and Jeremiah Botts. News items, building permits, old tickets and oral history help piece together a picture of an organization that provided its members with both social activities and assistance.

The Rock Creek Baptist Church, the hall behind it, the Fort Reno Colored School, and further northeast an African American graveyard were all a short distance of each other. (See Figure X) From 1899 to 1921 recorded city permits for repair of the social hall located at 3810 Dennison Street show a progression of ownership for the hall, from the Amos (Hill) Lodge to the Masonic Hall Association to the Brothers and Sisters of Moses #39. In fact, brothers Andrew A. Wood and William Daniel Wood of the River Road community and Rev. William A. Jones as chaplain were all involved in the James H. Hill

Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons (FAAM) at the turn of the century. Former Reno City residents remembered the social club of the Brothers and Sisters of Moses Lodge as memorable: “White and black residents recalled hearing singing and dancing coming from the lodge on Saturday nights.”⁵⁵

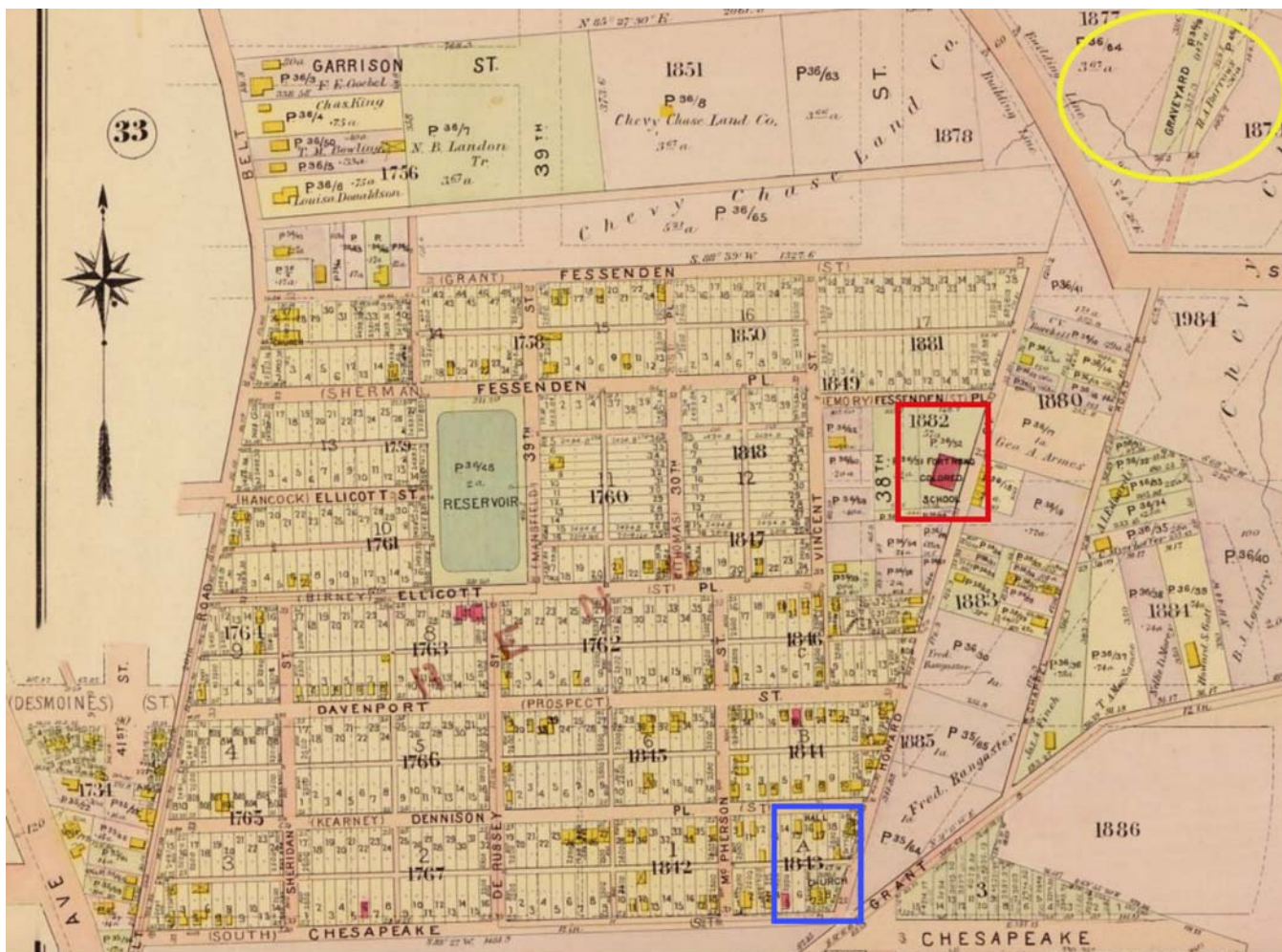


Figure 12: 1907 Baist map of Tenleytown with Rock Creek Baptist Church, Moses Hall, Colored School & Graveyard indicated. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

Jones discovered more about the social aspect of the Order of Moses in her research on another Moses Lodge in the Gibson Grove community in Cabin John, Maryland, just down the way from the River Road community. This was the Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 lodge, led and organized by Elijah Harris, the elder brother of River Road community member Peter Harris, husband to Estelle Warren. According to Jones’ research and interviews with community descendants, in particular with Sadie Harris, all the heads of the community’s families belonged to the order. The Moses Hall, a two-level building located next to the Gibson Grove A. M. E. Church, hosted lodge meetings twice a month on Wednesday evenings and, like its counterpart lodge in Tenleytown, hosted “all the social events, dances and dinners.” More importantly, Sadie Harris’s memories provide insight into an organization that was secretive. There were juvenile, male adult, and female adult divisions of the organization. Sadie as a child *was initiated into the organization in DC*. Each Morningstar Tabernacle member paid a

portion of dues when he attended meeting so that members were afforded the privilege of being buried in the Moses Cemetery of that lodge.⁵⁶ It is possible that Sadie was initiated in Tenleytown at the Moses Hall there.

As can be seen in the 1907 Baist map of Tenleytown in Figure 12, the graveyard was located not far from RCBC and the Moses Hall behind it. The cemetery was linked to White's Tabernacle No. 39 in a number of ways and appeared to serve the organization's goal of "bury the dead." First, trustee Robert Dorsey is named in District city directories during the 1880s as being sexton, or caretaker, for the cemetery. Second, trustee Lorenzo Harris is also associated with the lodge in delinquent tax lists printed in newspapers of 1896. Third, and most importantly, White's Tabernacle No. 39 held the deed to the cemetery land. The cemetery had many names according to Paul Sluby, but the 1900 funeral announcement for RCBC's former pastor Reverend Champ called it the "Moses Cemetery". The burial ground was established in 1881 and Sluby cites a RCBC report saying 147 burials occurred there between 1883-1910. In 1910, the lodge sold the graveyard (on the lot called Chappells Vacancy) to the Chevy Chase Land Company for the development of 37th Street between Reno Road and Connecticut Avenue. (This street is now known as Chevy Chase Parkway.)⁵⁷

Recent research by Torrey and Green on the descendants of George Pointer in Washington County, DC point to additional ties between the Tabernacle trustees. Lorenzo Harris was maternal uncle to John A. Morton, and neighbors to Morton included trustees John L. Hyson and Robert Dorsey off Broad Branch Road.⁵⁸

In order to remove bodies from Tenleytown and reinter them elsewhere, White's Tabernacle No. 39 in 1911 purchased land along River Road. Deed records indicate that Frank and Katie Dodson, heirs to founder Charlotte Gray's land, sold the land to the lodge. The property labelled White's Tabernacle No. 39 can be seen in the 1917 Klinge real estate map in Figure 13. In other parts of Montgomery County African American societies were also purchasing land for cemetery use. For example, in 1917 the Eureka Tabernacle #29 of the Order of Galilean Fishermen purchased land to create Lincoln Park Cemetery in Rockville. Soon after the 1911 Tabernacle purchase in Maryland, the *Montgomery Press* noted "a petition was received [by County Commissioners] from James H. Loughborough and others protesting against the establishing of a cemetery on River Road near Bethesda for colored persons from the District of Columbia".⁵⁹



Figure 13: 1917 Klingle map of River Road with highlighted Tabernacle cemetery lot and other property owners. Courtesy, Montgomery County Historical Society.

Reinterment of the Tenleytown cemetery was problematic as DC law forbade digging up or moving bodies. In 1914 the *Washington Post* reported

There have been no interments there since July, 1910. Though the owners of the cemetery desire to transfer the bodies to a new location in Maryland, the laws of the District make this impossible without a special act of Congress. Since this cemetery is a cemetery of an established fraternal order, there would seem to be no objection to allowing the removal of the remains of those members who have been buried in the District to such other cemetery as may

be established by the order, even though that cemetery be beyond the confines of the District of Columbia.”⁶⁰

Congress finally permitted removal of the cemetery with Public Law 112 in 1921. Presumably, White’s Tabernacle removed the bodies and reinterred them in the River Road Moses Cemetery in short order. Unfortunately, despite a review of DC reinternment permits and contacts with funeral homes, no records of the movement of the bodies have been located to date.

Following rural burial practices before 1920, many families buried their dead locally in family plots on personal property. As can be seen in Figure 14, deed and map research has identified at least six family burial plots, both white and African American, in a one-mile radius around the River Road Community, of which only one is officially recognized by Montgomery County. These burial plots include those of the families of Samuel Shoemaker, Isaac Shoemaker, Jacob Wilbert, Nelson Wood, Louis Solyam and Samuel Busey. In addition, evidence points to the existence of a community graveyard located on the west bank of the Willett Branch which *predates* the purchase of the land by White’s Tabernacle No. 39 in 1911. Wills of founding River Road community members Nelson Warren, Sr., William Warren, Charlotte Gray, and Jane Rivers Brooks, all of whom lived on the west side of River Road, cite deaths between 1887 and 1910. And the DC death record for Nelson Warren, Sr. cites his burial in *Montgomery County, Maryland*. It is likely that these burials took place locally at this graveyard near River Road, echoing the practices of those surrounding them.⁶¹

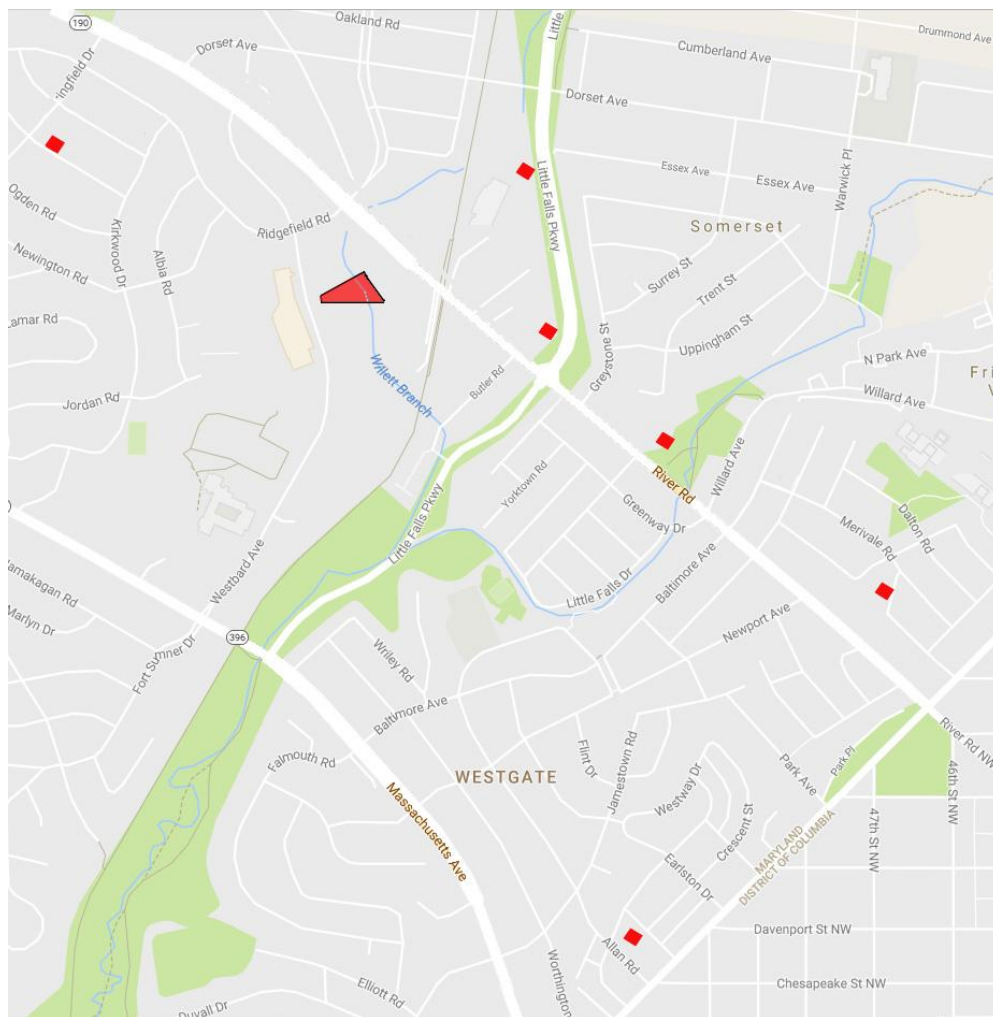


Figure 14: This map identifies the Moses Cemetery and small family burial plots located within a one-mile radius of the River Road community site. Only one is currently listed on the Montgomery County, Maryland Cemeteries Inventory list. Courtesy, Paul Rispin.

At the River Road Moses Cemetery maintained by White's Tabernacle No. 39, death notices between 1910 and 1935 indicated new burials. In particular, the 1935 death notice for Cora Botts suggests a network between the lodge, Rock Creek Baptist Church and the River Road community. First, Botts' death notice mentions funeral officiate Rev. William Armstead Jones and Rock Creek Baptist Church. It also indicates her familial relationship to nephew Cassius Parker of the River Road community. Third, the notice explicitly mentions Cora's deceased husband Jeremiah (Jerry) Botts, a White's Tabernacle trustee named in the 1910 incorporation document, and invites all Tabernacle members to attend the ceremony. Finally, we know from census and deed records that Cora Botts not only was a former River Road community resident from 1880, but that she also bought a home near Dorsey Lane and River Road in 1922 and resided there until her death. Another funeral announcement for Tabernacle trustee Charles H. Brown, who died 1912, indicates burial in the Moses Cemetery, Friendship, as well.⁶²

Oral history further corroborates the existence of the River Road Moses Cemetery. Gravestones were observed in the cemetery as late as the 1950s by Harvey Matthews, who grew up on River Road and

attended the River Road Colored School. He recounts playing among the gravestones as a child in the 1950s and even sledded down the cemetery hill. In his interviews with William Offutt, Cleveland Clipper also described the existence of a cemetery along the Willett Branch that belonged to the Moses Lodge and the use of Outlet Road for funerals.⁶³

A Mystery Remains

Development pressures along River Road and on the other side of the Willett Branch in Westwood in the late 1950s led to the demise, disturbance and possible desecration of the River Road Moses Cemetery.

In 1957 the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission obtained a right-of-way through the cemetery land to straighten and harden the Willett Branch. Trustees for White's Tabernacle No. 39 sold the cemetery land in 1958 to Dr. Leo Furr, a nephew of area real estate investor William Carrigan. Furr subsequently transferred ownership of the property to his uncle Carrigan.⁶⁴ Are these deeds correct? Where is Furr/Carrigan transfer? What happened to the graves of the River Road Moses Cemetery?

To the west of the cemetery land Laszlo Tauber and his associates developed the Westwood Shopping Center and Westbard Avenue in the late 1950s. An aerial photograph from 1963 shows the extent of development and suggests that fill was placed on the east side of Westbard Avenue to build a parking lot. The same photo also suggests that fill was placed on top of portions of the cemetery land. Cleveland Clipper's oral account supports this assessment: *"When they dug them hills out to make Westover, they dumped all that dirt in there."*⁶⁵

As part of Tauber's construction of Westwood Towers, located at 5401 Westbard Avenue, he and his associates began leasing the cemetery land on the west side of the Willett Branch from William Carrigan (and later the International Eye Foundation) in 1967. Tauber ultimately purchased the land outright in 1988. Carrigan had previously given that portion of the cemetery on the east side of the Willett Branch to the Catholic Medical Missionaries in 1968.⁶⁶

Both Sluby and Offutt state that graves from the River Road Moses Cemetery were moved to other locations such as the Lincoln Park Cemetery or another cemetery west of Rockville, Maryland near Route 28, but to date these moves have not been confirmed by state or county records, funeral home records or cemetery records.

Events during the construction of the Westwood Towers suggest that at least some remains were never removed from the River Road Moses Cemetery. Eyewitnesses recounted grisly events in a recent *Washington Post* article. Tim Bonds, whose father operated a gas station near the Moses Cemetery location, recalled that during the excavation of Westwood Towers "When they found a body, they'd blow a whistle and they'd shut the job down" and that "the men (talked) about human remains being pushed back under the dirt, down a steep slope toward a storm sewer, so excavation could resume more quickly." The article further noted that in an interview between Montgomery County Park historians and Arnold d'Epagnier, the son of the architect of Westwood Towers, d'Epagnier remembered "riding a pickup truck with his father and a family priest, 'taking burlap bags with bones'

from the construction site to Howard Chapel, a historically black cemetery in rural northern Montgomery.”⁶⁷ D’Epagnier later retracted his statement.

Conclusion

The history of the River Road African American community parallels the history of many African American communities. After the Civil War, families and friends purchased marginal land and established a working community built on the pillars of faith, education and support. In time, demands for this land brought outsider speculation and perhaps other opportunities and the community moved on. Today, Macedonia Baptist Church is the only tangible reminder of this forgotten community. The mystery of what happened to the graves of the River Road Moses Cemetery remains as well, and in the wake of new area development challenges it is imperative that the mystery be solved and respect given to those who occupied this land in both life and death.

¹ Judith Beck Helm, *Tenleytown, DC: Country Village to City Neighborhood* (Washington: Tennally Press; 2000), 9-10.

² Elizabeth Kytte, *Home on the Canal* (Cabin John: Seven Locks Press; 1983); Richard K. MacMaster and Ray Elden Hiebert, *A Grateful Remembrance: the Story of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1776- 1996* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Government; 1976), p. 113-117.

³ Lillian S. Brown, interview with Mary Anne Touhey and Marjorie Zapruder, Chevy Chase Historical Society, 1990.

⁴ Deed, Smith to S. Shoemaker, Nov. 20, 1832, Book BS 5, p. 379, Land Records, 1838-1839, MSA CE 148-35, Montgomery County Circuit Court, Rockville, MD; Deed, Smith to C. Shoemaker, Dec. 15, 1841, Book BS 10, p. 587, Land Records, 1839-1842, MSA CE 148-36; Deed, Smith to I. Shoemaker, Sept. 24, 1839, Book BS 9, p. 533, Land Records, 1838-1839, MSA CE 148-35; Deed, I. Shoemaker to H. Ball, Dec. 1, 1846, Book STS 2, p. 306, Land Records, 1846-1847, MSA CE 148-40; Deed, I. Shoemaker to A. Eld, July 19, 1854, Book JGH 3, p. 320, Land Records, 1853-1854, MSA CE 63-3; Deed, I. Shoemaker to C. E. Perry, Nov. 27, 1854, Book JGH 4, p. 111, Land Records, 1854-1855, MSA CE 63-4.

⁵ Will of Samuel Counselman, June 20, 1849, Will Book WTR 2: 324, Register of Wills, Rockville, MD.

⁶ Deed, Chappell to Ray, Jan. 29, 1850, Book STS 4, p. 371, Land Records, 1849-1850, MSA CE 148-42; Deed, B. to B. and J. Ray, July 24, 1857, Book JGH 3, p. 322; 1853-1854, MSA CE 63-3.

⁷ Deed, Busey and Brook to Loughborough; June 9, 1820, Book V, p. 170, Land Records, 1819-1822, MSA CE 148-23; Deed, Valdeneer to Loughborough; Jan. 29, 1822, Book V, p. 600, Land Records, 1819-1822, MSA CE 148-23; Deed, Smith to Loughborough, Mar. 7, 1839, Book BS 9, p.304, Land Records, 1838-1839, MSA CE 148-35; Loughborough, Margaret, “Nathan Loughborough,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, vol. 24 (1922).

⁸ Deed, Trustee to Posey, Nov. 20, 1837, Book BS 8, p. 483, Land Records, 1836-1838, MSA CE 148-34.

⁹ MacMaster and Hiebert, *Grateful*, 125-126.

¹⁰ Deed, Trustee to J. H. Loughborough, Jan. 7, 1869, Book EBP 6, p. 63, Land Records, 1868-1869, MSA CE 63-16.

¹¹ Nina Clarke, “Black History in Montgomery County,” in *Excerpts from The Flower of the Forest – Black Genealogical Journal*, 134. (Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, MD)

¹² Deed, J. Ray to Gray and Hall, Nov. 16, 1869, Book EBP 7, p. 422, Land Records, 1869-1870, MSA CE 63-17; Deed, Rays to Rivers, Aug. 3, 1870, Book EBP 7, p. 444, Land Records, 1869-1870, MSA CE 63-17; Deed, Rays to Jackson, Aug. 3, 1870, Book EBP 7, p. 443, Land Records, 1869-1870, MSA CE 63-17; Deed, Rays to W. Warren, Jan. 14, 1873, Book EBP 10, p. 275, Land Records, 1872-1873, MSA CE 63-20; Deed, Rays to N. Warren, Oct. 7, 1873, Book EBP 11, p. 242, Land Records, 1873-1874, MSA CE 63-21; Deed, Counselman to Burley, Nov. 5, 1872, Book EBP 10, p. 165, Land Records, 1872-1873, MSA CE 63-20; Deed, Counselman to Wood, Nov. 4, 1873, Book EBP 11, p. 282, Land Records, 1873-1874, MSA CE 63-21.

¹³ Deed, Loughborough to Ward, Dec. 23, 1873, Book EBP 10, p. 248, Land Records, 1872-1873, MSA CE 63-20; Deed, Ray to Willett, Sept. 29, 1874, Book EBP 12, p. 382, Land Records, 1874-1874, MSA CE 63-22; Deed, Crown to Solyam, Feb. 1, 1875, Book EBP 13, p. 123, Land Records, 1874-1875, MSA CE 63-23; Deed, Counselman to Wilbert, Oct. 9, 1877, Book EBP 17, p. 128, Land Records, 1877-1878, MSA CE 63-27.

¹⁴ James Johnston, *The Recollections of Margaret Cabell Brown Loughborough; A Southern Woman's Memories of Richmond, VA, and Washington, DC in the Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2010) 23; Offutt, *Bethesda*, 247; Martin Leibenluft, "A Survey of Slave Quarters in Montgomery County, Maryland," unpublished thesis, 2004; Judith Helm Robinson, photo of "No Gain Cabin," 1988, Item no. 1988.08.07, Chevy Chase Historical Society.

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<http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/enslaved-persons-in-washington-county-tax-assessments.pdf>.

¹⁶ Mrs. J. Reed Bradley. "Vignettes of County Women," *Bethesda Journal*, August 22, 1941.

¹⁷ Offutt, *Bethesda*, 22; MacMaster and Hiebert, *Grateful*, 102-103; William Clipper, interview with Ed Wesley of the National Park Service, 1967, Box 6 Folder 28, Thomas Hahn Chesapeake and Ohio Canal collection, Special Collections Research Center, the George Washington University.

¹⁸ Offutt, *Bethesda*, 246.

¹⁹ Will of Charlotte Gray, October 18, 1886, Will Book RWC 15: 138, Register of Wills, Rockville, MD; Will of Jane Brooks, Oct. 22, 1897, Orphans Court Will Book GCD 12:154; Will of Nelson Warren, Sr., November 13, 1900, Will Book HCA 8: 498.

²⁰ MacMaster and Heibert, *Grateful*, 219-224; Offutt, *Bethesda*, 78-79, 88, 101, 148-149.

²¹ Michael Kernan, "Clippers Along the C&O Canal," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1977.

²² Deed, Wilbert to W. Clipper, Mar. 23, 1910, Book JLB 212, p. 159, Land Records, 1910-1910, MSA CE 63-170; Deed, Wilbert to C. Clipper, Sept. 19, 1910, Book 216, p. 3, Land Records, 1910-1911, MSA CE 63-174; Deed, Wilbert to I. Clipper, July 25, 1911, Book 222, p. 328, Land Records, 1911-1911, MSA CE 63-180.

²³ Offutt, *Bethesda*, 248.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 249.

²⁵ Deed, Hall to Bieber, Oct. 31, 1929, Book 494, p. 18, Land Records, 1929-1929, MSA CE 63-452; Deed, Bieber to Trustees, Mar. 17, 1930, Book 399, p. 370, Land Records, 1926-1932, MSA CE 63-357; Deed, Quit Claim, Jan. 28, 1937, Book 654, p. 136, Land Records, 1937-1937, MSA CE 63-612; Deed, Ebaugh to McInerney, July 24, 1939, Book 740, p. 347, Land Records, 1939-1939, MSA 63-698; Deed, Jones to Acker, Apr. 22, 1940, Book 776, p. 69, Land Records, 1940-1940, MSA CE 63-734; Deed, Right of Way, June 3, 1940, Book 780, p. 190, Land Records, 1940-1940, MSA CE 63-738.

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- ²⁹ A. W. Pegues. *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Company, 1892, Appendix 13) * There are two pages 13 in this book, in main body and in the appendix.
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