History of the Westbard Cemetery

By David Kathan, L. Paige Whitley and Amy Rispin Little Falls Watershed Alliance

An African American cemetery existed on parcels P175 and P177 in the Westbard sector. This cemetery was located along the banks of the Willett Branch, behind Talbert's and next to Westwood Towers. Development of the area, particularly the Westwood Towers, removed all vestiges of the cemetery in the 1950s and 1960s. Historical documentation of any movement of graves into and out of the cemetery (which will be termed the "Westbard Cemetery") do not exist. Based on a combination of historical research, review of land records, genealogical analysis, and oral history, it is highly likely that the cemetery was used and human remains were not removed from the site during development.

The key historical facts associated with the Westbard Cemetery are:

- A family or community graveyard may have been located on the site prior to 1900, associated with one or more African American families that bought land along River Road after the Civil War. Wills of founding families show deaths starting 1887 through 1915. We think these burials took place locally at this cemetery. (Nelson Warren, Sr.; William Warren; Charlotte Gray; William H. Brown; etc.)
- Starting in 1880, the White's Tabernacle No. 39 lodge of the Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses operated a graveyard near Tenleytown called the Moses Cemetery. White's Tabernacle No. 39 was a fraternal society that supported the local, primarily African American Fort Reno community, and was probably connected with the Rock Creek Baptist church. [Exhibit A] In his book, *Bury Me Deep*, Paul Sluby states that the graveyard was also sometimes known as either Rock Creek Baptist Cemetery or Christian of Tenley Cemetery. [Paul Sluby, p. 71]
- Chevy Chase Land purchased the graveyard in 1910 in order to build Chevy Chase Parkway. At least 192 burials had occurred at the cemetery between 1880 and 1910. [Exhibit B]
- White's Tabernacle No. 39 incorporated itself in 1910 in the District of Columbia. It's incorporation document indicates that the "purpose of the society is 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." [DC Archives. Record of Incorporation, 9 September 1910, Liber 27, Folio 434.] It is likely that this incorporation was done in preparation for purchasing land.
- White's Tabernacle No. 39 purchased land in 1911 along River Road in order to move the graveyard. Deed records indicate that Frank and Katie Dotson (sometimes spelled Dodson) sold the land to White's Tabernacle No. 39. Frank Dotson was the grandson of Charlotte Gray. [Exhibit C] The Gray family owned land along River Road where Talbert's and McDonalds are currently located. By that time, William Armstead Jones

the adopted son of Charlotte Gray, had grown up in the River Road community and became the minister of Rock Creek Baptist Church [Rock Creek Baptist Church 109th anniversary pamphlet Nov. 8, 1981]

- Local landowners in the Westbard sector were aware of the Dotson sale and, led by James Loughborough, objected to the creation of White's Tabernacle No. 39 Westbard area cemetery. A petition to the Montgomery County commissioners protesting the move was filed two days after the sale on January 20, 1911. [Exhibit D]
- As reported in a 1914 Washington Evening Star article "Under existing law, bodies of persons dead of certain communicable diseases may not be interred, nor are graves permitted to be opened expect through application of the nearest relatives or legal representatives of the deceased. For this reason, an act of Congress is required to permit the abandonment of the 37th street cemetery and the removal of bodies interred there."
 [Exhibit E] After several years of failed attempts, Congress passed Public Law 112 in 1921 to allow removal. Unfortunately, no records of the reinternment of the 192 burials at the Tenleytown Moses Cemetery exist.
- Death notices for members of the River Road African American community indicate burials at the Westbard cemetery (also known as Moses Cemetery) between 1910 and 1935. The death notice for Cora Botts mentions both Rev. Jones and Rock Creek Baptist Church and her deceased husband Jeremiah (Jerry) Botts, a former Tabernacle trustee as indicated in the Tabernacle's incorporation document. [Exhibit F] This provides another indication of the active use of the cemetery by White's Tabernacle after the 1921 movement of remains.
- An Edgemoor resident recalled that the Macedonia Baptist Church moved to River Road from what is now Bethesda Row in the 1930s. (Offutt, page 320). In 1936, William Armstead Jones and his wife sold 0.71 acre of land southwest of River Road and contiguous with the Westbard cemetery to Bessie Hatton. In 1937 1/6 of an acre or 7,117.17 square feet within this property was conveyed to the Macedonia Baptist Church.
- White's Tabernacle No. 39 sold the Westbard cemetery land to Leo Furr in 1958. [Exhibit G] After several additional deed transfers, Leo Furr and William Carrigan leased, then sold the cemetery land to Laszlo Tauber and associates in 1969 so they could build Westwood Towers.
- No records of reinternments from the Westbard Cemetery have been found at other likely African American cemeteries in Montgomery County (e.g., Lincoln Park Cemetery in Rockville), in Snowden Funeral Home records, or in records at the State's Attorney's office.
- During excavation for Westwood Towers, human remains were uncovered by bulldozers. As reported at a Sunrise Meeting during the Charrette portion of the Westbard Sector Plan process, an eyewitness reported that, after stopping work 12 times, other remains were moved to adjacent land in the parcel.

http://robertdyer.blogspot.com/2017/02/bethesda-church-supporters-to-protest.html

Oral history supports this documented history and the existence of a cemetery on the property:

- William Offutt's *Bethesda: A Social History*, includes oral history from Cleveland Clipper, a long-time resident of the River Road community [Offutt, p. 243-251]. Cleveland describes the existence of a cemetery along the Willett Branch and the use of Outlet Rd. for funerals. Cleveland also suggests that the cemetery was covered by fill during the creation of the Westwood Shopping Center and Westbard Avenue.
- Harvey Mathews, who grew up on land near where the Whole Foods shopping center now sits, remembers playing hide-and-seek and sledding among the gravestones in the Westbard cemetery.
- A long-time business owner in the Westbard sector referred to the area behind Talbert's as a "pauper's cemetery."

A comparison of aerial photos for the period between 1957 and 1970 [Exhibits H, I, and J] shows how development affected the Westbard cemetery parcels.

- The 1957 photo shows the land just prior to the development of the Westwood Shopping Center and associated buildings. The land appears wooded.
- The 1963 photo dramatically indicates the extent of development of the area between 1957 and 1963. Willett Branch no longer forms the boundary of the cemetery land, and now bifurcates the parcel. The straightened and channeled Willett Branch is clearly visible. A large parking lot now exists along the east side of Westbard Avenue, which suggests that fill was used to flatten the area, including parts of the Westbard cemetery land. The lack of pavement on the cemetery land demarks its extent.
- The 1970 photo was taken after the Westwood Towers was built. The photo shows that the corner of Westwood Towers, a driveway, and parking lots sit on cemetery land.

EXHIBIT A – Fort Reno Environs (1907)



EXHIBIT B – White's Tabernacle #39 Tenleytown Cemetery Sale (1910)

Paper: Evening Star, published as The Evening Star.; Date: 10-29-1910; Page: 9; Location: Washington (DC), District of Columbia. This entire product and/or portions thereof are copyrighted by NewcBark and/or the American Antiquarian Society 2004.

HIGHLIGHTS: MI White's Ta	bemacle" find	
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EXHIBIT C -- White's Tabernacle 1911 Purchase

Given under my hand and Notarial seal this 18th day of January A. D. 1911.

	•••	Albert D.	Smith	1	
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Notary Public		. article and the			
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EXAMINED At the request of White's Taberna cle Number 39 of the Ancient United Order of Mailed & Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses the following deed was recorded Januar ohn 9. Monton 23rd. A. D. 1911 at 2.33 o'clock P. M. to wit:-

Have Mid. THIS DEED made this 10th day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand H, 1911 nine hundred and eleven by and between Frank Dotson and Katie Dotson, his wife, of the District of Columbia, parties of the first part and White's Tabernacle Number 39 of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses, a corporation under and by virtue of the Law s of the District of Columbia, party of the second part.

WITNESSETH, That in consideration of Ten Dollars current money, thereceipt of which is hereby acknowledged the said parties of the first part do grant and convey unt the said White's Tabernacle Number 39 of the Ancient United Order of Sons And Daughters Brothers and sisters of Moses, a Corporation, party of the second part, its successors or assigns, in fee simple, all that piece or parcel of land or ground situate lying and being in Bethesda District in the County of Montgomery in the State of Maryland, being part if the same land which was conveyed by Benjamin Ray to Francès Gray and John Hall by deed recorded August 5th. 1870 in Liber E. B. P. No. 7 at folio 442 one of the Land Records of Montgomery County, Maryland, and being the same land which the said Frank Dodson became seized under and by virtue of the Will of Charlotte Gray, deceased, the said Charlotte Gray being the Widow and only heir at law of the said Frances Gray deceas ed, who died intestate, said will being **p**nobated December 20th 1887 in will Book R. W. C. No. 15 at folio 138 in the office of the Register of Wills for Montgomery County Maryland, being described as follows; according to a survey made by Charles J.

Maddox, Surveyor, of Montgomery County, Maryland, December 7th. 1910, a plat of said survey being attached hereto and made a part of this deed.

Beginning for the same at a stake by a large Black Oak tree and on the east side thereof, it being at the end of 17.13 perches on the 2nd. line of a conveyance made the 16th day of November 1869 from James Ray to John Hall and Frances Gray for a p art of said Tract called "Friendship" containing six acres of land and of record in Liber E. B. P. No. 7, folio 22 et seq., one of the Land Records of Montgomery County, and running thence with said second line South twenty two degrees, thirty minutes East, 4.45 perches to a nail in the root of a targe Tulip PopMar tree and on the south side thereof, it being also at the end of the first line of a conveyance made the 3rd day of August by Benjamin and James Ray to Jane Rivers for two acres and sixteen square perches of land and of record in Liber E. B. P. No. 7, folio 444, and running thence with the 2nd line of said Conveyance North eighty four degrees, thirty minutes East, twenty-five and five tenths perches to a point in the middle of the Branch and thence bounding upsaid said branch in the middle thereof North thirty four degrees, fifty three minutes West 5.61 perches, North twenty eight degrees, thirty five minutes West 5 perches, then with a line of Mary Brown's land south seventyone degrees, ten minutes West 22.7 perches to the place of beginning, containing 1.04 acres of land.

TOGETHER with the buildings and improvements thereupon, erected, made or being; and all and every, the rights, alleys ways, waters, privileges, appurtenances and advantages to the same belonging or in any wise appertaining.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said piece or parcel of ground and premises above described or mentioned, and hereby intended to be conveyed, together with the rights, privileges appurtenances, and advantages thereto belonging or appertaining unto and to the only proper use, benefit and behoof forever of the said White's tabernacle Number 39 of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses, its successors and assigns.

AND the said parties of the first part covenant that they will warrant specially the property hereby conveyed; that they are seized of the Land Hereby conveyed; that they have a right to convey said land, and the said party of the second part shall quietly enjoy said land, that they have done no act to encumber said land and that they will execute such further assurances of said land as may be requisite.

Witness their hands and seals.

Test:

Printed 08/17/2016.

Date available 06/08/2015.

CE63 176.

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View Kattie Dotson (SEAL)

V 9% Frank Dotson (SEAL)

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Levin S. Frey

District of Columbia, SS:

I hereby certify that on this 11day of January 1911, before the subscriber a Notary Public in and for said District personally appeared Frank Dotson and Kattie Dotson his wife, and did each acknowledge the aforegoing deed to be their respective act.

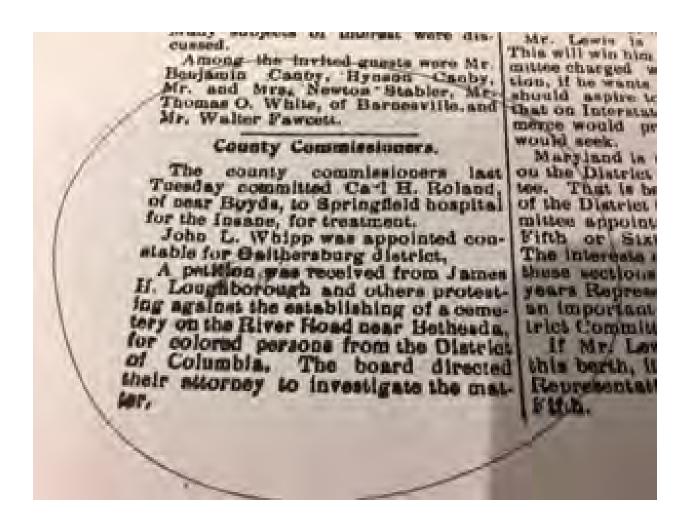
In testimony whereof I have affixed my official

L. S. Frey Notary Public seal this 11th day of January A. D. 1911

L. S. Frey

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT (Land Records) JLB 218, p. 0027, Notary Public, D. C. District of Columbia 6

EXHIBIT D – 1911 Loughborough Objections to Movement of Tabernacle #39 Cemetery

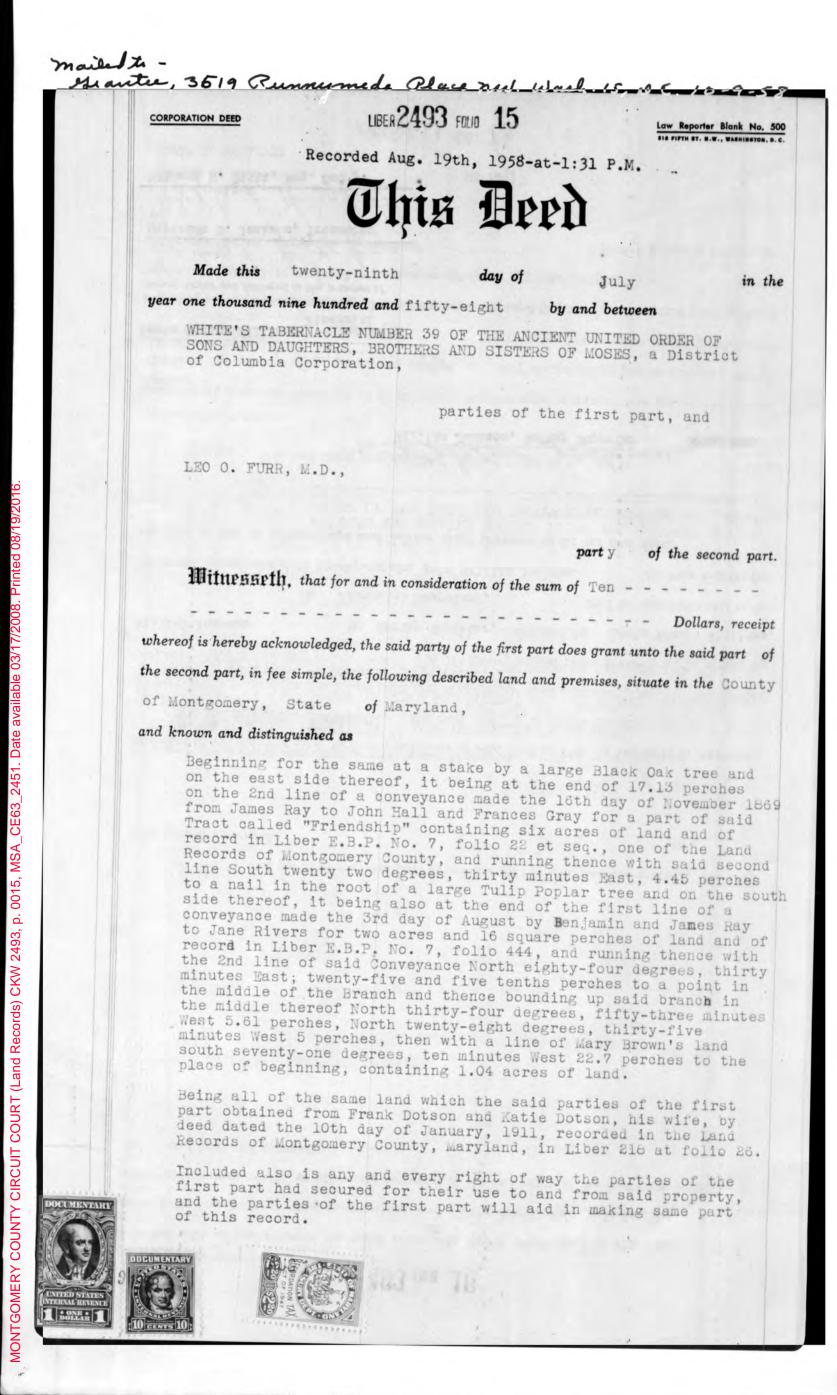


Source: Montgomery Press. January 20, 1911. p. 3.

EXHIBIT E – 1914 Washington Evening Star Article on Tabernacle #39 Cemetery

Paper; Evening Star, published as The Evening Star,: Date: 08-01-1914; Page: 5: Location; Washington (DC), District of Colu This entire product and/or portions thereof are copyrighted by NewsBank and/or the American Antiovarian Society 2004 P0000 HIGHLIGHTS: MI White's Tabernacle find clienticals are of such a maynes that they form a sort of crud is the water after the patient tas initial. This could the VARE S. glief JUHA A. With police processed blog method working a bulletite of Social and Economic Intelli-John G. and Emina 2 from the group, which arouted "Assurprice, relating to applications, and makes a values of alous 520 pages. A Liberty Unitedin is published by the institute weakly, and contains a fast of additions Dante W. and Hattle . Chavies and four F. . What L and Olive W. 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EXHIBIT F -- White's Tabernacle 1958 Sale



LIBER 2493 FOLIO 16

together with all and singular the ways, easements, rights, privileges and appurtenances to the same belonging or in anywise appertaining, and all the estate, right, title, interest, and claim, either at law or in equity, or otherwise however, of the said party of the first part, of, in, to, or out of said land and premises.

And the said party of the first part covenants that it will warrant specially the property hereby conveyed,

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and that it will execute such further assurances of said land as may be requisite or necessary. In Testimony Whereof, the said WHITE'S TABERNACLE NUMBER 39 OF THE ANCIENT UNITED ORDER OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS hath on the OF MOSES, a District of Columbia corporation, , A. D. 1968, caused these presents to be signed by 29th day of July its Worthy Superior, attested by Lewis Edward Williams, William Jackson and its corporate seal to be its Financial Secretary, hereunto affixed; and doth hereby appoint said William Jackson its true and lawful attorney in fact to acknowledge and deliver these presents as its act and deed. WHITE'S TABERNACLE NUMBER 39 OF THE ANCIENT UNITED ORDER OF THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MOSES Olliam Jackson, Worthy Superior By Jill **President** Attest: isEduard Mains CUL. Lewis Edward Williams, Secretary. Financial Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of -Gertrude D. Jackson, Treasurer heppy A Mildred H. Stitt, Rec. Sec'y. the soil late, late, laberate line bar 18682493 mm 15

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	of Barbara E. and Catherine R. Bohan-	
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	neral home "10 Wilson blud Clanendon	Pebruary 5, 1935, a
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Tous Citics,	Catholic Church, Clarendon, Va., Friday,	vived by two daugh
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		at 2 o'clock. Inter
Weather Rainfall 8 a.m. to 8 a. 8 a.m. to 8 a. 9 a.st nich 12 flichest yesterday	BOTTS, CORA. On Monday, February 4.	Cemetery, Prince W
	1935, at her residence. River rd., Be-	
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n to 8 a. est night	the late Jerry Botts and devoted aunt	Wednesday, Februa
dat Et a	of Cassius, William and Bernard Parker,	residence, 1635 3r
4 8 8 .	Mrs. Agnes Masterson and Mrs. Daisy	WILLIAMS. She le
	Carrington. Remains resting at the	loss a mother. Mrs
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	February 7. at 1 p.m., from the Rock	Helen. Catherine. A
90 Cloude	Creek Baptist Church, Rev. W. A. Jones,	Williams: two brot
8 38 Cloudy	pastor. Interment Moses' Cemetery.	Gilbert Williams, a
¥ 14 Minn	BOTTS, CORA. All members of the A. U.	relatives and friend
	Order of Moses are requested to attend	at the Malvan &
	the funeral of Mrs. CORA BOTTS. at	New Jersey ave. an
2 14 0.34 Cloudy	Rock Creek Baptist Church, Tenleytown.	of funeral later.
0 40 Clear	Thursday, February 7, 1935, at 1 p.m.	
0 16 0.01 Snow	Visiting tabernacles are invited.	WOLF, HARRY C. O
0 0, Clear		4. 1935. at his resi
4 4 0.08 Snow	G. V. DENMONE, Rec. Secs.	road n.w., HARRY
10 42 Clear		of Bertha Kennedy
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4 8 Clear	February 6, 1035, at his residence, 1701	vin F. Queen. Fu
2 6 0.10 Clear	Park rd. n.w., WALLACE A. BROWN.	residence on Thurs
1) 4º Clear	beloved son of Ernest and Bertha Cole-	0.30 om Reguler

Source: Washington Evening Star. February 6, 1935. p. 9.

EXHIBIT H – 1957 Aerial Photo of Westbard Sector

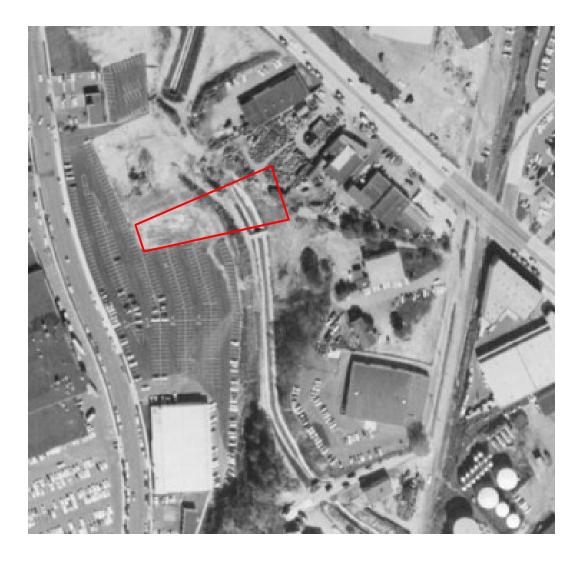
Red Border Indicates Westbard Cemetery Land



Source: www.historicaerials.com

EXHIBIT I – 1963 Aerial Photo of Westbard Sector

Red Border Indicates Westbard Cemetery Land



Source: www.historicaerials.com

EXHIBIT J – 1970 Aerial Photo of Westbard Sector

Red Border Indicates Westbard Cemetery Land



Source: www.historicaerials.com