



Gibson Grove Cemetery, Montgomery County

THE RIVER ROAD MOSES CEMETERY:

A Historic Preservation Evaluation

Report prepared for the River Road African American community descendants

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Management Summary

This report presents research on the River Road Moses Cemetery site in Bethesda, Maryland. It was prepared on behalf of the River Road African American descendant community. The following sections include a historic context divided into periods developed by the Maryland Historical Trust for the evaluation of historic properties. The historic context presents substantive archival and oral history research documenting the cemetery site, the community within which it is located, the fraternal organization that founded it, and its historical connections to Washington, D.C.

The historic context is used as a baseline to evaluate the property against the Montgomery County criteria for designation in the Master Plan for Historic Preservation and the National Register of Historic Places. This report finds that the River Road Moses Cemetery appears to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation under four criteria: for its associations with the development of Montgomery County and the region; because it exemplifies multiple aspects of Montgomery County's heritage; because it embodies distinctive characteristics typical of its historic property type; and, because it represents a distinguishable entity within a cultural landscape.

The River Road Moses Cemetery furthermore appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under three criteria. The site appears to be eligible for listing under Criterion A for its associations with African American and suburban history; Criterion C for its architectural and landscape qualities; and, Criterion D for its potential to yield significant new information in history. The property also appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property.

Location

The River Road Moses Cemetery is located in Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland (Figure 1). The historic property spans two separate tax parcels, P175 and P177, located between Westbard Avenue and River Road (Figure 2).

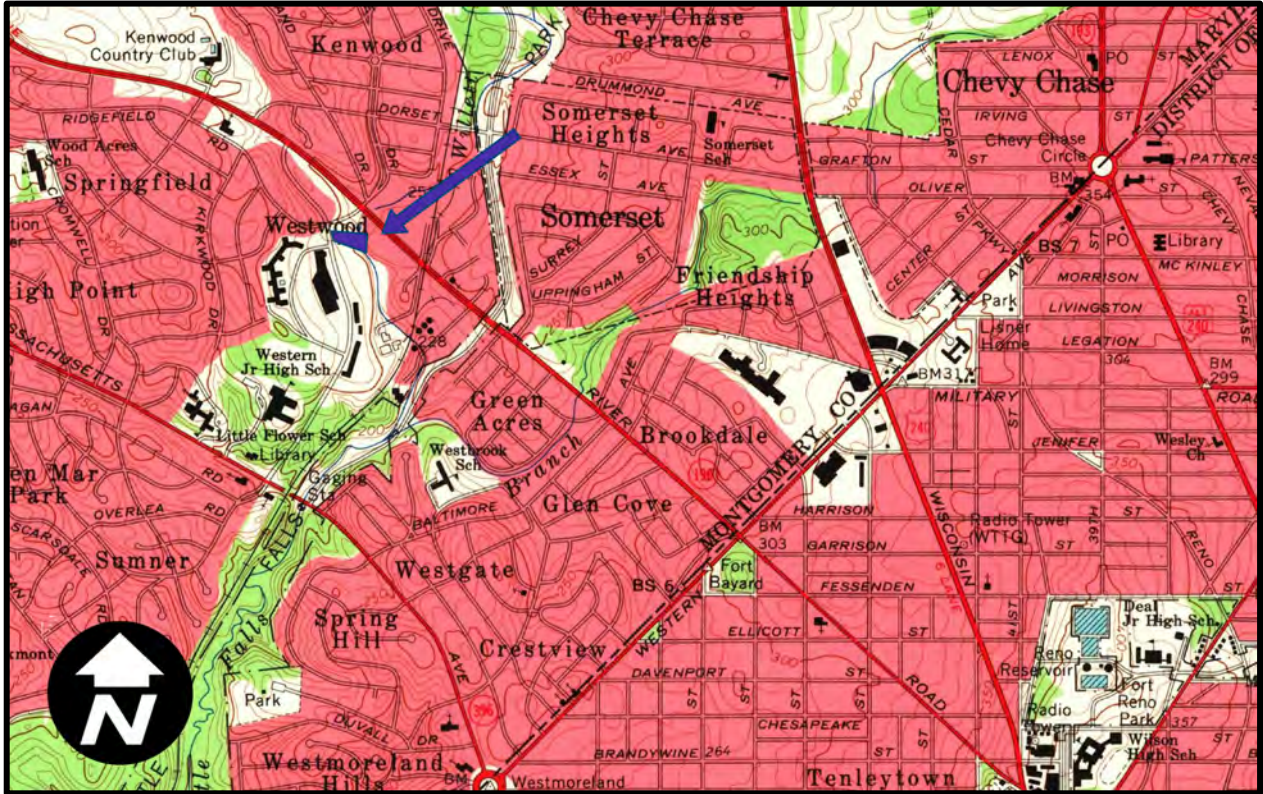


Figure 1. River Road Moses Cemetery location. USGS Washington West quadrangle.

Description

The Moses Cemetery was assimilated into suburban residential and industrial developments in the 1960s. A portion of the cemetery is buried beneath a surfaced parking lot (Parcel 175) and the remainder is located beneath a former surfaced parking/storage area associated with an adjacent business that was sold in 2017 and which is under construction (Parcel 177). The cemetery property is bisected by the channelized Willett Branch which flows through the property from the north to the south.



Figure 3. River Road Moses Cemetery (Parcel 175): Parking lot adjacent to Westbard Avenue. View to the north.



Figure 4. River Road Moses Cemetery (Parcel 175): Parking lot adjacent to Housing Opportunities Commission building, view to the north.



Figure 5. River Road Moses Cemetery (Parcel 175): Bridge across Willett Branch, view to the north.



Figure 6. River Road Moses Cemetery: Parcel 177 under construction, view to the north.

Historic Context

Introduction

The River Road Moses Cemetery is a twentieth century site in a cultural landscape that began taking shape in the nineteenth century. Free and formerly enslaved African Americans established an unincorporated hamlet along an important transportation corridor linking rural Montgomery County to urban Washington, D.C. Simply known by its residents as “River Road,” it was one of several dozen similar communities established throughout Montgomery County and in neighboring Washington during Reconstruction and the remainder of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, complex kinship, economic, and institutional networks had formed linking the people and institutions in these communities which comprised the Washington area’s earliest suburbs.¹ As twentieth century suburbanization encroached and Jim Crow seized control of commercial and public spaces, communities like River Road became the only places where African Americans could buy and rent property, become entrepreneurs, and enjoy public spaces unencumbered by segregation.

Yet River Road itself was both a product of segregation imposed by whites and a space of independent agency by the Blacks who lived there. As America sorted itself out into separate and unequal spaces after the United States Supreme Court in 1896 decided *Plessy v. Ferguson*, African Americans increasingly found their worlds shrinking as their white neighbors sought to

¹ Anneli Moucka Levy, “Washington, D.C. and the Growth of Its Early Suburbs: 1860-1920” (Thesis, University of Maryland, 1980), 135–37, University of Maryland Libraries.

establish a white spatial imaginary: spaces free from people of color.² These spaces became restricted residential subdivisions, stores and restaurants that wouldn't serve African Americans, parks where African Americans were excluded, separate school systems, public transportation that forced African Americans into separate train cars and towards the back of the bus, and cemeteries where even the dead were segregated by skin color.³

To achieve the white spatial imaginary and to accommodate increasing numbers of white residents, white real estate speculators working in concert with white government officials — in Montgomery County (sometimes they were one and the same) and elsewhere — frequently displaced African Americans from homes they had rented and used coercive tactics to wrest others from property they owned. As the number of restricted residential subdivisions grew, the region's African Americans found themselves increasingly concentrated into areas unencumbered by racial restrictive covenants.⁴ By the mid-twentieth century, these communities included hamlets with such names as Lyttonsville, Tobytown, Ken-Gar, and Scotland. In mostly rural Montgomery County, small urban neighborhoods like Rockville's Lincoln Park and Haiti also formed. These communities became part of a Black spatial imaginary: spaces bound by mutual cooperation in which the residents converted segregation into congregation.⁵

Though they were established on the margins of white society, these places and spaces ultimately became resilient and proud communities. Pushed by segregation and compelled by a strong sense of independent agency, the residents in these communities founded their own schools, businesses, and the social infrastructure necessary to sustain the community and support its residents through good times and bad. Key institutions in these communities besides schools included churches and benevolent organizations that cared for the sick, buried the dead, and provided economic support to their members.

As residential options dwindled in the twentieth century and greater numbers of African Americans could live only in Montgomery County's historically Black communities, these areas became rural ghettos that lacked running water, sewerage, and paved streets. Single-family homes became tenements and apartment buildings. And, as property values increased because of Montgomery County's proximity to the nation's capital and available land became scarce, county leaders exacerbated the environmental racism baseline created by infrastructure inequality by zoning areas in African American communities for industrial uses and by placing nuisance facilities like county dumps and incinerators in places like Lyttonsville.⁶

² George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 25–70; Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

³ Angelika Kruger-Kahloula, "On the Wrong Side of the Fence: Racial Segregation in American Cemeteries," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O'Meally (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130–49.

⁴ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Kindle edition (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

⁵ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 51–69; Clyde Woods, "Sittin' On Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto, Ont.: Cambridge, Mass: Between the Lines; South End Press, 2007), 73.

⁶ Yale Rabin, "Expulsive Zoning: The Inequitable Legacy of Euclid," in *Zoning and the American Dream: Promises Still to Keep*, ed. Charles M. Haar and Jerold S. Kayden (Chicago, Ill: Planners Press, American Planning Association in association with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1989), 101–21.

Pressured by encroaching white suburbanization and industry, many rural African American communities began disintegrating like their urban counterparts and these rural ghettos experienced disinvestment and displacement. During the Cold War, Montgomery County embarked on a countywide initiative to remediate the poverty its leaders had created. After decades of requests from residents in African American communities for basic infrastructure, better schools, and more equitable treatment by county leaders, Montgomery County began urban renewal programs to make more land available to real estate speculators intent on building even more residential subdivisions, apartment communities, and strip malls.

Many of the African Americans who remained in the formerly rural spaces found themselves living in subsidized apartment communities: housing projects regulated by the Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission, the county's public housing authority. By the turn of the twenty-first century, many of segregation's legacies, including income inequality, pockets of poverty enveloped by white wealth, and unequal schools remain in Montgomery County as new immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia established communities.

As the vestiges of rural Montgomery County's distant past and suburban sprawl are retrofitted for higher and better uses, how history and historic preservation are produced in Montgomery County reproduce the Jim Crow separate and unequal doctrine by erasing and marginalizing African American history.⁷ Sites, buildings, objects, and structures with strong ties to Montgomery County's African American history frequently are omitted from historic preservation plans, are misinterpreted, or they are marginalized in ways that recall earlier residential patterns and public accommodations practices. It is part of a pattern found throughout the United States and Canada that is deeply embedded in historic preservation practice.⁸ Many of these sites, buildings, structures, and objects may be classified as sites of conscience: places that bear witness to segregation and racism.⁹

The River Road Moses Cemetery is a traditional cultural property that also is a site of conscience. It is a sacred space once enveloped by an African American community. That living community was displaced and the dead followed as developers destroyed the cemetery by haphazard disinterment and reburial. Archaeologists, planners, and the general public describe the dead buried in the Moses Cemetery as "burials"; in African American communities with strong syncretic traditions, people buried in cemeteries are considered "ancestors." Though the physical space where the Moses Cemetery was founded has been reconfigured, it remains in the

⁷ David S. Rotenstein, "Silver Spring, Maryland Has Whitewashed Its Past," *History News Network* (blog), October 15, 2016, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/163914>; David S. Rotenstein, "Producing and Contesting Invisibility in Silver Spring, Maryland," in *Demand the Impossible: Essays in History as Activism*, ed. Nathan Wuerthenberg and William Horne (Washington, D.C.: Westphalia Press, 2018), 89–111.

⁸ Angel David Nieves, "Memories of Africville: Urban Renewal, Reparations, and the Africadian Diaspora," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods (Toronto, Ont.: Cambridge, Mass: Between the Lines; South End Press, 2007), 82–96.

⁹ Christina Cameron, "World Heritage Sites of Conscience and Memory," in *World Heritage Sites and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Dieter Offenhäuser, Walther Ch. Zimmerli, and Marie-Theres Albert (Germany: German Commission for UNESCO, 2010), 112–19, https://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Bibliothek/world_heritage_and_cultural_diversity.pdf; Liz Ševčenko and Maggie Russell-Ciardi, "Foreword," *The Public Historian* 30, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 9–15, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2008.30.1.9>.

tradition from which is sprung an important part of an extended and dispersed kinship community. It furthermore is an integral connection among African Americans connected by kinship, church, and social organizational ties who have experienced serial displacement for more than a century in the District of Columbia and Montgomery County.

The historic context that follows constructs a narrative history of the River Road community and the fraternal organization that entered arrived with its dead. Chronologically, the context breaks down into five periods: Antebellum (to 1865); Reconstruction (1865-1877); Early Suburbanization (1880-1910); Automobile Suburbanization (1910-1960); and, Suburban Sprawl in the Civil Rights era (1960-present). Thematically, this context covers enslavement; Reconstruction community formation; segregation; and, displacement and gentrification. The Moses Cemetery site itself as a historic property is situated within this context as a Black space mutually formed by segregation and congregation in the District and Montgomery County and which was transformed into another type of historic property found throughout the United States, an African American cemetery that was disturbed and subsequently sealed beneath a parking lot.

Methodology

The material presented in this report derives from intensive documentary and oral history research. Repositories consulted include the Maryland State Archives, Montgomery County Archives, the Montgomery County Historical Society, The District of Columbia Archives, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives. Recorded interviews were conducted with current and former River Road residents as well as with residents of other Montgomery County communities with development histories similar to River Road's.

The Moses Cemetery is evaluated as a historic site pursuant to Montgomery County's historic preservation law.¹⁰ The National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation also are applied to the Moses Cemetery site to provide reviewers with the information required to provide a Determination of Eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property.¹¹

This report relies on previous research conducted by community historians and by historians and architectural historians attached to state and local government agencies. Historian Nina Honemond Clarke has exhaustively documented the history key African American institutions in Montgomery County: churches and schools.¹² In the late 1970s, the architectural historian George McDaniel conducted surveys in northwestern Montgomery County that became the basis

¹⁰ Montgomery County Code § 24A-3: Historic Resources Preservation, Criteria for designation of historic sites or districts.

¹¹ 36 CFR §60.4(d). Thomas F. King and Patricia Parker, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties," National Register Bulletin (Washington, D.C.: United States National Park Service, 1990).

¹² Nina Honemond Clarke and Lillian B Brown, *History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961* (New York: Vantage Press, 1978); Nina Honemond Clarke, *History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.*, 1st ed (New York: Vantage Press, 1983).

for later historic preservation work among the county’s African American communities.¹³ McDaniel’s work among residents in African American hamlets founded in northwest Montgomery County represents the earliest attempt at understanding the kinship networks that linked communities throughout Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. These networks and the institutions — churches, schools, and benevolent societies — they established are key to understanding River Road’s history and the Moses Cemetery.¹⁴

Macedonia Baptist Church is the sole surviving cultural institution from River Road’s African American community. In 2016, the church began an advocacy campaign to preserve and commemorate the River Road Moses Cemetery site. This campaign spurred Bethesda residents to interrogate their own history and to engage in history-based activism around the cemetery issue. Several substantive research products have resulted from these efforts, including detailed historical summaries submitted to Montgomery County planners and the publication in 2017 of an article about the community and the cemetery.¹⁵ Architectural historians in the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) also conducted extensive research on the community and the cemetery in the Montgomery County Planning Department’s efforts to update the sector plan for the area where the community and cemetery are located.¹⁶ Records from the M-NCPPC research were provided to attorneys representing the community and Macedonia Baptist Church. These include communications with other Montgomery County agencies; notes from archival research; and notes from informal interviews conducted by M-NCPPC staff with individuals associate with the community’s development history.

The oral histories used to prepare this report were conducted in accordance with standards established by the National Council on Public History and the Oral History Association. The interviews will be curated by the Macedonia Baptist Church. In addition to the intentional interviews, public statements given at activist events sponsored by the Macedonia Baptist Church and its allies also are used in this report. In these cases, recordings made by event participants, planners, and journalists were transcribed.

A number of members of the Macedonia Baptist Church and the River Road descendant community prefer to identify themselves as “African.”¹⁷ Race and racial identity are fraught

¹³ George McDaniel, “A Living Black Heritage: An Architectural and Social History of Blacks in Montgomery County, Maryland,” Report on file, Montgomery County Planning Department (Rockville, Md.: Sugarloaf Regional Trails, 1979); George W. McDaniel, “Black Historical Resources in Upper Western Montgomery County, Maryland” (Rockville, Md.: Sugarloaf Regional Trails, July 1979).

¹⁴ McDaniel, “A Living Black Heritage: An Architectural and Social History of Blacks in Montgomery County, Maryland,” 39.

¹⁵ David Kathan, L. Paige Whitley, and Amy Rispin, “History of the Westbard Cemetery” (Bethesda, Maryland: Little Falls Watershed Alliance, n.d.), https://www.lfwa.org/sites/default/files/attachments/westbard_cemetery_history_0.pdf; David Kathan, Amy Rispin, and L. Paige Whitley, “Tracing a Bethesda, Maryland, African American Community and Its Contested Cemetery,” *Washington History* 29, no. 2 (2017): 24–41.

¹⁶ Montgomery County Planning Department, “Westbard Sector Plan Appendix” (Silver Spring, Md.: Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission., Montgomery County Planning Department, April 2016).

¹⁷ Macedonia Baptist Church, “Bethesda African Cemetery Media Kit” (Bethesda, Maryland: Macedonia Baptist Church, November 2017).

concepts in the twenty-first century.¹⁸ Throughout this report “African American” and “Black” are used interchangeably to denote people of color who identify themselves with African ancestry. Though there are no simple solutions to reconciling the many perspectives on terminology, the usage in this report conforms to contemporary editorial standards in history and the social sciences. Though African ancestry is an important and essential part of the cultural identity of the people who lived in the River Road community and who buried their dead in the Moses Cemetery, it is by no means the sole cultural affiliation associated with people of color, free, enslaved, and formerly enslaved who lived in Montgomery County and the District of Columbia.¹⁹

The African American Cemetery

*It is a great consolation to the Negro that he will be buried with proper ceremonies and his grave properly marked — sociologist Howard Odum, 1910.*²⁰

There's just one last favor I'll ask of you / See that my grave is kept clean — B.B. King.

Religious beliefs, foodways, language, music, folktales, and the treatment of the dead comprise the core of cultural ties people of African descent in the Americas maintained with their ancestral homelands across the Atlantic. These *Africanisms* are among the many material and intangible cultures that distinguish African Americans from Native Americans and other newcomers to the western hemisphere.²¹ Funerary ceremonies and burial practices were among the cultural repertoires retained by Africans in the Americas and adapted to local conditions. The cemetery in traditional African American belief systems was an extension of the community and the dead buried there remained important parts of intricate kinship and social hierarchy systems.²²

Even the graves and surrounding dirt are incorporated into the social system, as studies conducted for New York City’s African Burial Ground demonstrate. The inanimate objects become infused with spirituality and power in cosmologies associated with the predominant West African cultures whose people were kidnapped, forcibly transported to the Americas, and

¹⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

¹⁹ George McDaniel in his oral history work among Montgomery County’s African American residents identified people with Native American ancestry.

²⁰ Howard Washington Odum, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro Race in Southern Towns, a Study in Race Traits, Tendencies and Prospects* (New York: Columbia University, 1910), 133.

²¹ Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South*, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); Joseph E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 1–5.

²² Roberta Hughes Wright, Wilbur B. Hughes, and Gina Renée Misiroglu, *Lay down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996).

enslaved. “Earth from the burial ground can hold the potency of the spirit realm and can be activated as *minkisi*,” wrote Andrea Frohne. “Such information offers an example of an African-based understanding of the fluidity between the living and the dead.”²³ *Minkisi* (also known as *nkisi*) are assemblages of powerful objects such as broken mirror fragments, nails, earth, and pieces of metal, believed to hold special healing powers among the Kongo and other African cultures. Earth from cemeteries is a particularly powerful spirit-embodiment substance, “considered at one with the spirit of a buried person.”²⁴ These objects typically were placed in bags, bundles, boxes, and other containers collectively known as *Minkisi*. “nowhere is Kongo-Angola influence on the New World more pronounced, more profound, than in black traditional cemeteries throughout the South of the United States,” observed Robert Farris Thompson.²⁵

Most of the scholarship on cemeteries belonging to people of African descent has focused on funerary rituals and burial practices.²⁶ These studies note such cultural landscape elements as swept grounds and broken glass, ceramic objects, and seashells left on graves by the living. The archaeologist Ross Jamieson noted, “The surface material planted above the grave appears to be the most enduring material marker of African influences in the New World.”²⁷ White observers early on recognized that Black cemeteries were very different from their own. One visitor to Alabama in 1908 described an African American cemetery in an article published first in *Home* magazine and later reprinted in *The Washington Post*:

In a little negro cemetery in Northern Alabama I found a grave boxed about with twelve-inch planks painted sky blue, and filled in with shells, bits of broken, highly colored glass, and glistening stones. Another was bordered around with soda-pop bottles, stuck neck downward in the ground²⁸

Few studies have sought to explore the relationships African American descendant communities form with ancestral burial grounds. The artifacts and cultural landscapes created in African American cemeteries are intended to help guide the dead. But what about the living? In Black America, there were many economic and social forces that acted to separate the living from their buried ancestors. Poverty made it difficult for cemeteries to have substantial permanent

²³ Andrea E. Frohne, *The African Burial Ground in New York City: Memory, Spirituality, and Space*, Kindle edition (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

²⁴ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, 1st ed (New York: Random House, 1983), 117–18.

²⁵ Thompson, 132.

²⁶ Chicora Foundation, Inc., *Grave Matters: The Preservation of African-American Cemeteries* (Columbia, S.C.: Chicora Foundation, Inc., 1996), <http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/Grave%20Matters%20-%20The%20Preservation%20of%20African%20American%20Cemeteries.pdf>; Veronica A. Davis, *Here I Lay My Burdens down: A History of the Black Cemeteries of Richmond, Virginia* (Richmond, Va: Dietz Press, 2003); Ross W. Jamieson, “Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices,” *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995): 39–58; Merrick Posnansky, “West Africanist Reflections on African-American Archaeology,” in *“I, Too, Am America”*: *Archaeological Studies of African-American Life*, ed. Theresa A. Singleton (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 33–34; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*; Robert Farris Thompson, “Bighearted Power: Kongo Presence in the Landscape and Art of Black America,” in *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*, ed. Grey Gundaker and Tynes Cowan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 37–64; Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*.

²⁷ Jamieson, “Material Culture and Social Death,” 50.

²⁸ “Southern Superstition: Some of the Pathetic Evidences of It Found in Negro Cemeteries,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1908.

boundaries and markers. And, the lack of economic resources made it difficult to provide perpetual care. Oftentimes, cemeteries, like African American living spaces, were relegated to the far margins of settled spaces and in lands deemed by whites to be of poor quality and little value. As a result, many African Americans early on found themselves separated from their burying grounds in remote, sometimes difficult to access spaces. “The others, far out in the country and on the islands, are generally in church yards or in the woods — no particular place,” wrote W.E.B. du Bois about African American benevolent organization cemeteries in Brunswick, Georgia. “Oft-times the undertaker can scarcely get to the place for the weeds. Nevertheless, if a person dies here in Brunswick, who lived once in the country or across the river, the body must be taken at all hazards to the old burying grounds, even if the place is thickly covered with weeds and can scarcely be found.”²⁹

African American graveyards are prominent in narrative traditions: songs, legends, and folktales.³⁰ For as long as descendants can remember them, Black cemeteries retain their power to connect the living with the ancestors. “Ancestors perform a significant role within the world of the living,” wrote Lynn Rainville in her study of African American cemeteries in Virginia.

The elders within the living community are expected to serve as mediators between the ancestors and the kin group. Ancestors are consulted at gravesites, where supplicants ask for help, forgiveness, approval, and information. The personification of the ‘ancestors’ goes hand in hand with a belief of the survival of the soul after death, a soul that migrates to the spirit world.³¹

It is indisputable that Black cemeteries are held in high esteem by descendants long after the graves lose all legibility in the landscape. That loss of legibility and forgetting — a form of erasure — fits within a larger narrative of race relations and the racialization of space in the United States. Though there are a few studies of visitation practices and decoration days in white cemeteries, there don’t appear to be corresponding ones for African American communities.³² This is surprising considering the strong historical associations in American history linking African Americans to the establishment of a national Memorial Day via Decoration Day traditions and the vital role that annual homecomings and reunions play in Black America.³³

²⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Economic Co-Operation among Negro Americans. Report of a Social Study Made by Atlanta University under the Patronage of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D. C.; Together with the Proceedings of the 12th Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May the 28th, 1907*, The Atlanta University Publications, no. 12 (Atlanta, Ga: The Atlanta university press, 1907), 131.

³⁰ Hughes Wright, Hughes, and Misiroglu, *Lay down Body*, 18–30.

³¹ Lynn Rainville, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 54.

³² Alan Jabbour, Philip E. Coyle, and Paul Webb, “North Shore Cemetery Decoration Project: Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Investigations for the Proposed North Shore Road, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, North Carolina,” Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Washington, D.C.: United States. National Park Service, Great Smoky Mountains National Park., November 2005).

³³ Renee McCoy, “African American Elders, Cultural Traditions, and the Family Reunion | American Society on Aging,” American Society on Aging, November 18, 2011, <http://www.asaging.org/blog/african-american-elders-cultural-traditions-and-family-reunion>; Nadia Orton, “On Memorial Day, Reflecting on African-American History | National Trust for Historic Preservation,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, May 26, 2017, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/on-memorial-day-reflecting-on-african-american-history>; William H. Wiggins and

A part of African American burial tradition, the River Road Moses Cemetery is type of vernacular historic property with a long and important history in the United States that includes not only its mortuary use but its conversion after abandonment into space used for parking and other uses unrelated to its original sacred function. The River Road Moses Cemetery was what geographers have called an “upland South cemetery,” a type distinguished by its setting, unplanned design, frugal grave markers, and small size.³⁴ Though no above-ground physical evidence of the River Road Moses Cemetery survives and no photographs illustrating the cemetery have survived, there are contemporaneous African American cemeteries in Montgomery County. In the nearby Gibson Grove Cemetery, which was used by a contemporaneous Moses order based in Cabin John, graves were marked by a combination of early concrete markers and later marble ones (Figure 7). Similar vernacular concrete markers, as well as wood tablets, stones, shrubbery, and even concrete blocks are evident in other Montgomery County African American cemeteries (Figure 8 - Figure 11).



Figure 7. Gibson Grove Cemetery: vernacular concrete marker.

Douglas DeNatale, eds., *Jubilation! African American Celebrations in the Southeast* (Columbia, S.C: McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, 1993).

³⁴ Donald Gregory Jeane, “The Traditional Upland South Cemetery,” *Landscape* 18, no. 2 (1969): 39–42; Donald Gregory Jeane, “The Upland South Cemetery: An American Type,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (1978): 895–903.



Figure 8. Concrete marker with painted epitaph, Ash Memorial Cemetery, Montgomery County.



Figure 9. Concrete markers, Lincoln Park Cemetery, Rockville.



Figure 10. Concrete block and temporary marker, Ash Memorial Cemetery, Montgomery County.

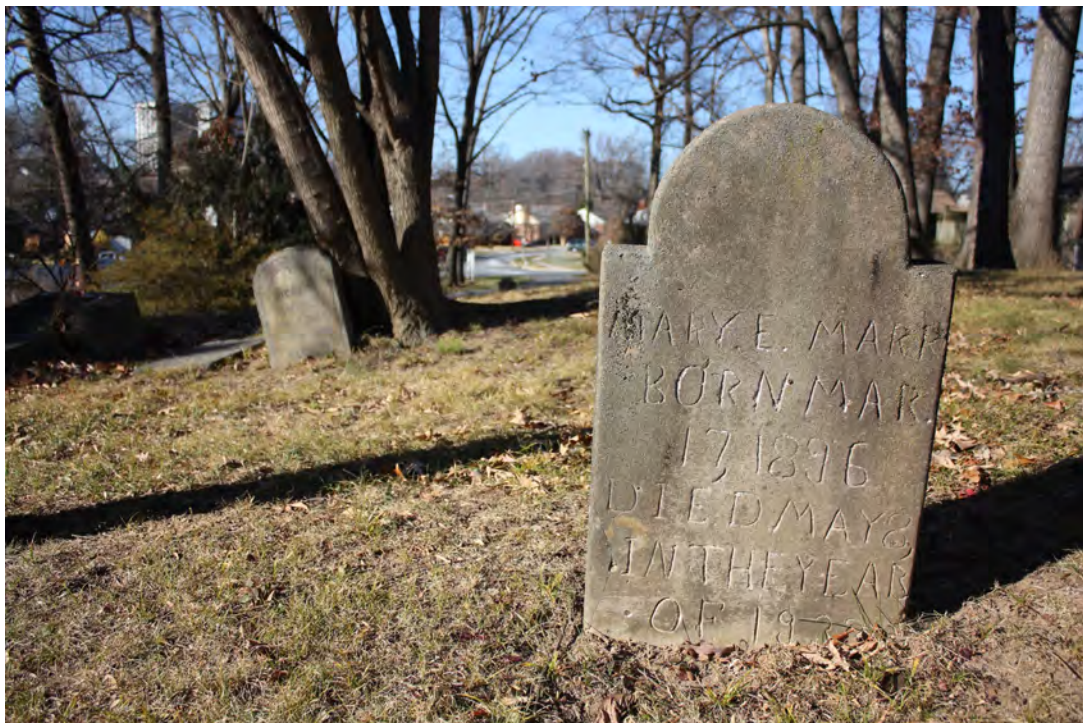


Figure 11. Concrete marker, former Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church, Wheaton.

Architectural historian Ruth Little has written extensively on North Carolina vernacular cemeteries. She observed that concrete grave markers became popular in the early twentieth century as a more permanent alternative for people who could not afford a marble tombstone.³⁵ The vernacular concrete markers are especially important with regard to the River Road Moses Cemetery. It is the type of grave marker that former River Road resident Harvey Matthews recalls most vividly.

Harvey Matthews in 2017 described how he recalled seeing the concrete grave markers made for people he knew, including family members, buried elsewhere in Montgomery County. “They would build a frame of a cross and pour concrete in it and then chisel the wood from around it and then use that base and that cross for grave markers. And a lot of them had that,” he explained. He then added,

They could make them in the yard. They could make them behind the house, the ones that did masonry work, they just went around and did this. Because either it was somebody’s relative or theirs like my cousin and them used to make them for like my grandfather. He’s buried in Lincoln Park, in the cemetery. And Harvey has that stone like I’m talking about that was made and it was make it, put it in a foundation, pour concrete in it, chisel the wood from around it, okay, that was a cross. Take it to the grave site, dig about a six-, eight-inch hole, set it down in there and take it — it wasn’t chisels back in those days; take something to scratch his name in there because my grandfather’s name — every once in a while, I used to go up in there and take paint or something and try to get the name to come back [rubs hands together as he describes]. But over the years, it’s just wear and tear.³⁶

Though no photos of graves are known to survive from the River Road Moses Cemetery, Matthews did confirm that the vernacular concrete markers found elsewhere in Montgomery County are the same type that existed in River Road. I showed him a picture of a Gibson Grove marker (see Figure 7) and he replied, “Yeah, yeah, like that. Back then, that’s basically what all of them looked like, just what you’ve got right there.”

The historical rural African American cemetery is distinct from all of its contemporary counterparts.³⁷ It reflects beliefs forged in the forced acculturation of Africans deported from their homelands and enslaved in the Americas as well as a socioeconomic status that left grieving family members and communities with little means for memorializing the dead. African American cemeteries also are a visceral reminder that white supremacy and segregation didn’t end at death. For much of American history, Black burial spaces remained separate from white ones.³⁸

³⁵ M. Ruth Little, “Afro-American Gravemakers in North Carolina,” *Markers* 6 (1989): 109–11; M. Ruth Little, *Sticks & Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers*, The Richard Hampton Jenrette Series in Architecture & the Decorative Arts (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 242.

³⁶ Harvey Matthews, interview December 12, 2017.

³⁷ Little, *Sticks & Stones*, 237.

³⁸ Kruger-Kahloula, “On the Wrong Side of the Fence: Racial Segregation in American Cemeteries”; Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 59; Lynn Rainville, “Protecting Our Shared Heritage in African-American Cemeteries,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 34, no. 2 (2009): 196–206.

A combination of factors tied to race and class contribute to the fragility of African American cemeteries.³⁹ By the last decades of the twentieth century, many cemeteries established by enslaved people of African descent and by their free descendants had become abandoned, forgotten, and were indiscriminately incorporated into the foundations of new buildings or were sealed beneath parking lots and roads. The erasure and forgetting process oftentimes began long before the last bodies were interred in the cemeteries. Maps produced in the past frequently reproduced racial bias in other parts of society. For instance, while such white institutions as churches and cemeteries were mapped historically, African American ones frequently were omitted or incorrectly and incompletely labeled. In considering cartography, it is important to understand not only what is mapped, but also what is unmapped,” wrote art historian Andrea Frohne. “Silenced, marginalized spaces can be erased from cartography when those in power control the production of representation to typically focus on spaces of dominance.”⁴⁰ None of the known historical maps produced in the twentieth century identified the River Road Moses Cemetery space as a cemetery (Figure 12-Figure 15). The treatment of African American cemeteries in contemporary society fully reproduces the racialized practices that kept African American segregated in life as well as in death.⁴¹

³⁹ Gertrude Fraser and Reginald Butler, “The Anatomy of a Disinterment: The Unmaking of Afro-American History,” in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, Critical Perspectives on the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 121–32; Little, *Sticks & Stones*; Rainville, “Protecting Our Shared Heritage in African-American Cemeteries”; Rainville, *Hidden History*.

⁴⁰ Frohne, *The African Burial Ground in New York City*.

⁴¹ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 59; Jennifer Young, “The Persistent Racism of America’s Cemeteries,” *Atlas Obscura* (blog), September 7, 2016, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-persistent-racism-of-americas-cemeteries>.

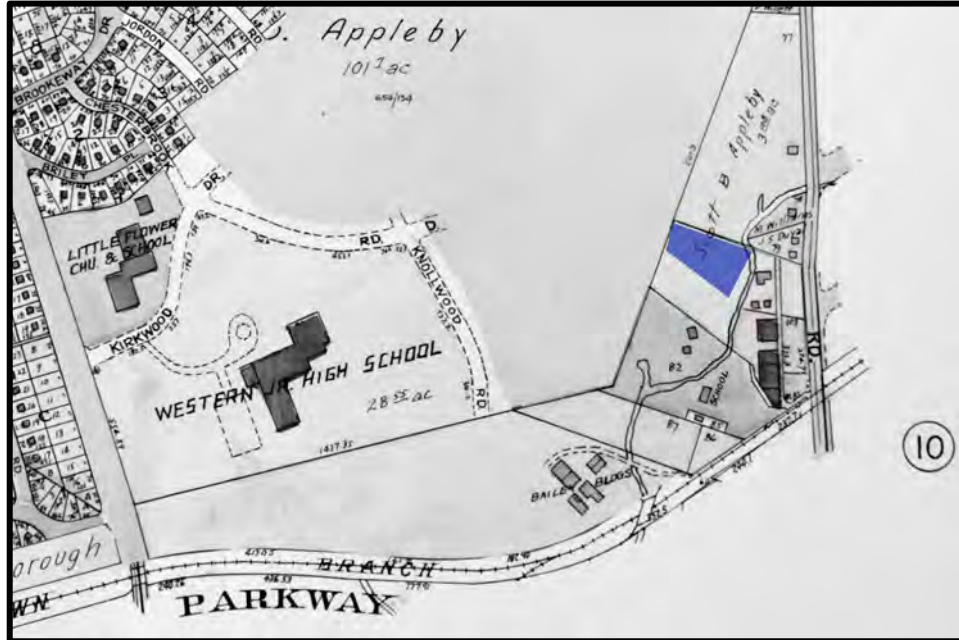


Figure 14. Moses Cemetery site, 1949 Montgomery County Real Estate Atlas.

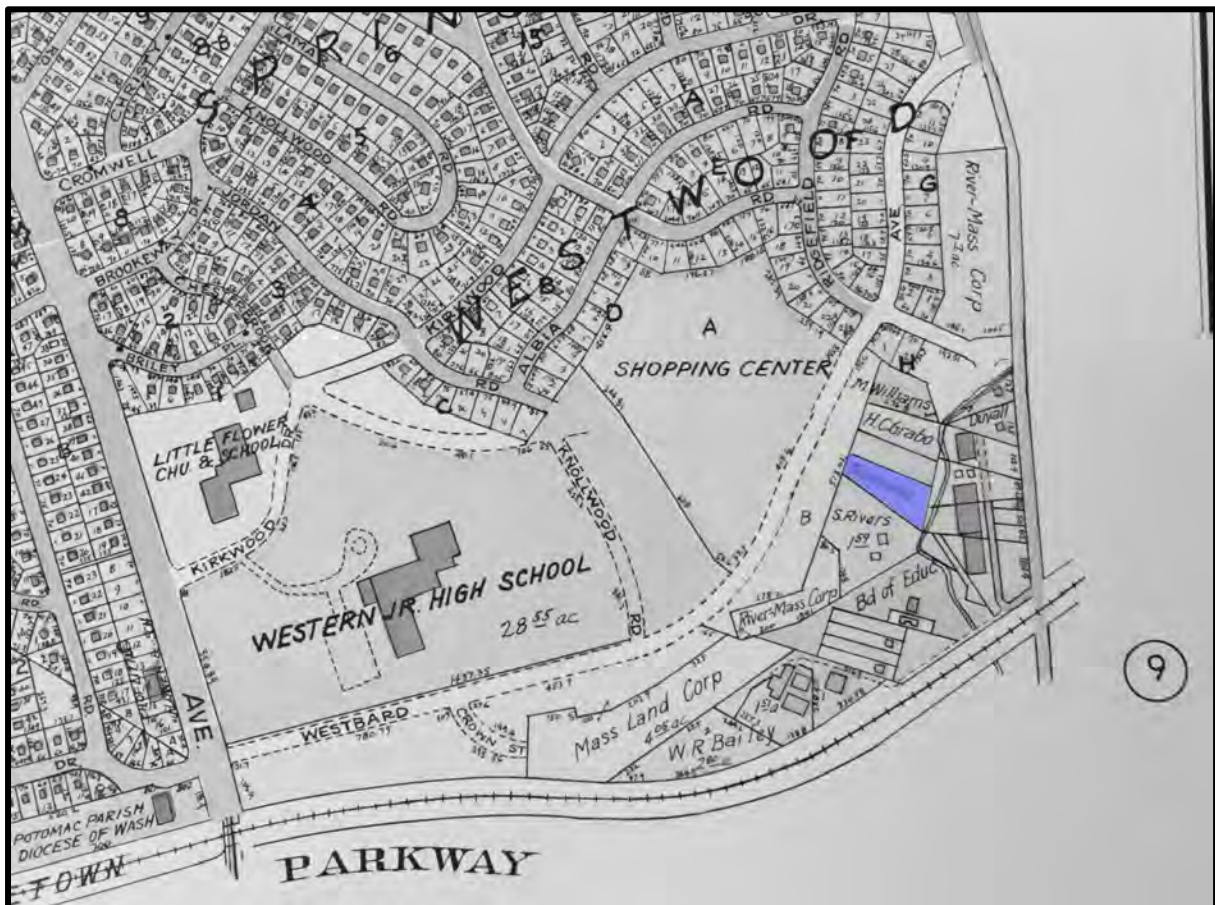


Figure 15. Moses Cemetery site, 1959 Montgomery County Real Estate Atlas.

Antebellum (to 1865)

For most of its early history, River Road and the space where the Moses Cemetery was established was a rural agricultural district. Originally part of Frederick County, Montgomery County was established in 1776. The area's colonial and antebellum history is more fully discussed elsewhere.⁴² From its earliest years of European colonization to the Civil War, the 507 square miles comprising Montgomery County was a mainly agricultural space that was part of the slaveholding South. Enslaved people comprised 32.3 percent of Montgomery County's population, one of the highest enslavement rates in the state of Maryland when the Civil War broke out in 1861.⁴³ The River Road Moses Cemetery and surrounding community's history as it relates to the cemetery's historical significance begins after the Civil War.

Reconstruction (1865-1877)

Two communities with antebellum agricultural roots emerged during Reconstruction on both sides of the D.C. and Maryland border. One was located in Washington and in the early twentieth century it was absorbed by Washington's Tenleytown and Chevy Chase neighborhoods. The other was located along River Road in Montgomery County. This section discusses the crystallization of African American suburban communities in those two spaces.

Reno and Northwest Washington

The River Road community had close ties to Northwest Washington throughout its history. Both communities began forming contemporaneously after the Civil War and there was considerable movement from Washington's Reno neighborhood to River Road. It was where White's Tabernacle No. 39 of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses (the benevolent organization that founded the cemetery) was founded.

Reno is one of the best documented early Washington subdivisions. In 1861, after the Civil War began, the federal government confiscated and occupied properties throughout the District of Columbia. These properties — farms, homesites, factories, and businesses — were converted into military facilities. Some were fortified and incorporated into a ring of defenses protecting the nation's capital. Others became hospitals and support facilities, including camps for formerly enslaved people escaping from behind Confederate lines. African Americans streamed into Washington and other places behind Union lines as refugees from slavery and to enlist in the United States army. These spaces became known as "contraband camps" because the formerly enslaved people occupying them had not yet been formally freed by legislation and the United

⁴² Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley, "Tracing a Bethesda, Maryland, African American Community and Its Contested Cemetery"; William Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two* (Bethesda, Maryland: Innovation Game, 1995).

⁴³ *Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States Complied from the Census of 1860* (Washington, D.C.: United States. Department of the Interior, Census Office, September 1861).

States needed some way to classify the thousands of people — men, women, and children — fleeing the South.

Contraband camps and freedmen camps appeared during the first months of the War. They typically were established adjacent to or near Union fortifications that afforded protection as well as access to enlistment and essential supplies. Though the camps provided badly needed refuge from enslavement, they quickly became overcrowded concentrations of poverty with insanitary conditions and insufficient shelter.⁴⁴ Like contemporary refugee camps, the contraband camps essentially became marginal slums.

Several contraband and freedmen camps emerged in Washington in proximity to forts. In 1861, the United States confiscated farmlands in the District's Northwest section also known as "Tennallytown" to build Fort Pennsylvania, named for the 119th Pennsylvania Volunteers military unit that built it. After the Battle of South Mountain (Maryland) in 1863, the fort's name was changed to Fort Reno to honor General Jesse Reno who was killed there.⁴⁵ The fort was abandoned after the war and the property was returned to its original owner, Giles Dyer. In 1869, two real estate speculators bought the property and they subdivided it into lots and called it the Fort Reno subdivision. African Americans who had occupied the contraband camp and who had lived in nearby unplanned and unincorporated free Black settlements began buying and renting property in the new subdivision. Within a generation, Reno had become a suburb with a substantial number of African Americans living among whites, a common use of space in the period between Reconstruction and the Jim Crow segregation that took hold around the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁶

To understand the cemetery's history and its ties to River Road, it is essential to begin in a small area in what is now the Chevy Chase section of Washington just east of Reno. In the last half of the nineteenth century, this area experienced fluid population movements between Northwest Washington and Montgomery County. Before it was absorbed by suburban encroachment, this part of rural Washington County before the Civil War had a small but significant population of free Blacks who were property owners, entrepreneurs, craftspersons, and wage workers in the District.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: a History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 61–74; Joel W. Shinault, "Camp Life of Contrabands and Freedmen, 1861-1865" (Thesis, Atlanta University, 1979), Robert W. Woodruff Library (ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library. Paper 3127).

⁴⁵ Judith Beck Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood* (Washington, D.C.: Tennally Press, 1981), 45–59.

⁴⁶ Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*.

⁴⁷ Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 58–64; Letitia W. Brown, "Residence Patterns of Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1800-1860," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 69/70 (1969): 66–79; Green, *The Secret City: a History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*; Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Barbara Boyle Torrey and Clara Myrick Green, "Free Black People of Washington County, D.C. George Pointer and His Descendants," *Washington History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 16–31.

Though the District's population experienced a shift as people moved away from the more rural parts of Washington County into the urbanized area, rural areas developed their own spatial identities and small communities emerged along the roads connecting Washington with its rural periphery. Later scholars have called these spaces "enclaves" or "isolated negro communities." These African American "pockets of rural communities," as architectural historian Anneli Levey called them in her 1980 University of Maryland master's thesis, were among Washington's earliest unplanned suburb.⁴⁸

These rural hamlets were clusters of homes and farmsteads with a small population of residents connected by kinship (consanguine, affinal, and fictive), church, and work ties.⁴⁹ Geographers who have studied these types of communities have found that they play an important role in the history of African American urban history as independent unincorporated rural communities and as the cores of urban neighborhoods.⁵⁰ In his study of post-bellum African American "urban clusters," John Kellogg observed, "Landowners who held land near the edge of town were quick to seize the opportunity for profit by dividing up their fields into small lots and selling them to poor Negro migrants."⁵¹ The pattern is consistent across North America: African Americans accumulate sufficient capital and then buy land which they then subdivide or which attracts other Blacks to settle in proximity.

This process created spaces where African Americans could forge mutual assistance networks, religious institutions, and find economic opportunities free from white surveillance and interference (as much as that was possible in a racialized nation).⁵² In Northwest Washington one such community emerged southeast of the intersection of Broad Branch Road and Rock Creek Ford Road. African American landownership in this area dates to at least 1813, the year that Joseph S. Belt sold nearly four acres to John Hutton. Belt and his family have a well-established biography in Washington history as a community builders: prominent elements in the region's landscape have Belt family names attached to them: Belt Road and The Joseph Belt Middle School; and, Chevy Chase derives its name from the Belt farm.⁵³ History, however, appears to have forgotten John Hutton. Legal papers filed in 1930 contain the most substantive information yet identified about the early landowner. "John Hutton was a negro who died intestate and

⁴⁸ Levy, "Washington, D.C. and the Growth of Its Early Suburbs: 1860-1920," 135.

⁴⁹ Glenn T. Trewartha, "The Unincorporated Hamlet: One Element of the American Settlement Fabric," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 33, no. 1 (1943): 32–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2560969>; Peter C. Smith and Karl B. Raitz, "Negro Hamlets and Agricultural Estates in Kentucky's Inner Bluegrass," *Geographical Review* 64, no. 2 (1974): 217–34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/213811>.

⁵⁰ Charles S. Aiken, "New Settlement Pattern of Rural Blacks in the American South," *Geographical Review* 75, no. 4 (1985): 383–404, <https://doi.org/10.2307/214408>; Walter Greason, *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013); John Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," *Geographical Review* 67, no. 3 (1977): 310–21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/213725>; John Kellogg, "The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865-1887," *The Journal of Southern History* 48, no. 1 (1982): 21–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2207295>.

⁵¹ Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," 312.

⁵² Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*; Woods, "Sittin' On Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography," 73–74.

⁵³ Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood*, 1–27; Elizabeth Jo Lampl, *Chevy Chase: A Home Suburb for the Nation's Capital* (Crownsville, Md: Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, 1998), 4.

without known issue,” wrote attorneys on behalf of a client seeking to quiet the title to Hutton’s former property.⁵⁴

Daphne Brooks was perhaps more historically invisible than Hutton. Brooks came to possess Hutton’s former property through means unrecoverable to District title researchers. “There was no statute of adoption in the District of Columbia and no title passed to Daphne Brooks by descent,” wrote the same attorneys in 1930. In 1836, Brooks sold Hutton’s 3-7/8 acres to John Hepburn (also spelled “Hebbern” and “Hebben” in various legal instruments). In the 1850s, Hepburn and his brother Thomas purchased additional adjacent tracts ultimately compiling a single parcel comprising approximately eight acres. This space is illustrated in District of Columbia maps published in the late 1850s and early 1860s (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Hepburn tract. A. Boschke, *Map of the Washington City*, 1857.

John Hepburn died in 1872. Up to that point, he had sold none of the parcels from the tract he began assembling in the 1830s. The will Hepburn prepared November 9, 1872, instructs his wife Eliza to sell parcels to several individuals who already may have been living in the tract renting from Hepburn: Ruth Ann Davis, William Briggs, Robert Dorsey, and Henry Smith.⁵⁵ The will also required Eliza to transfer one lot to Hepburn’s brother John and she retained the title to the

⁵⁴ Bill to Establish Title by Adverse Possession,” *Mary J. Edwards v. Richard White, et al.*, District of Columbia District Court, Equity Case No. 52197.

⁵⁵ U.S. Census, 1870.

remainder of the property. In April 1873, Eliza Hepburn commissioned a survey of the property and a portion of that survey was filed in the District of Columbia Surveyor's Office (Figure 17).⁵⁶

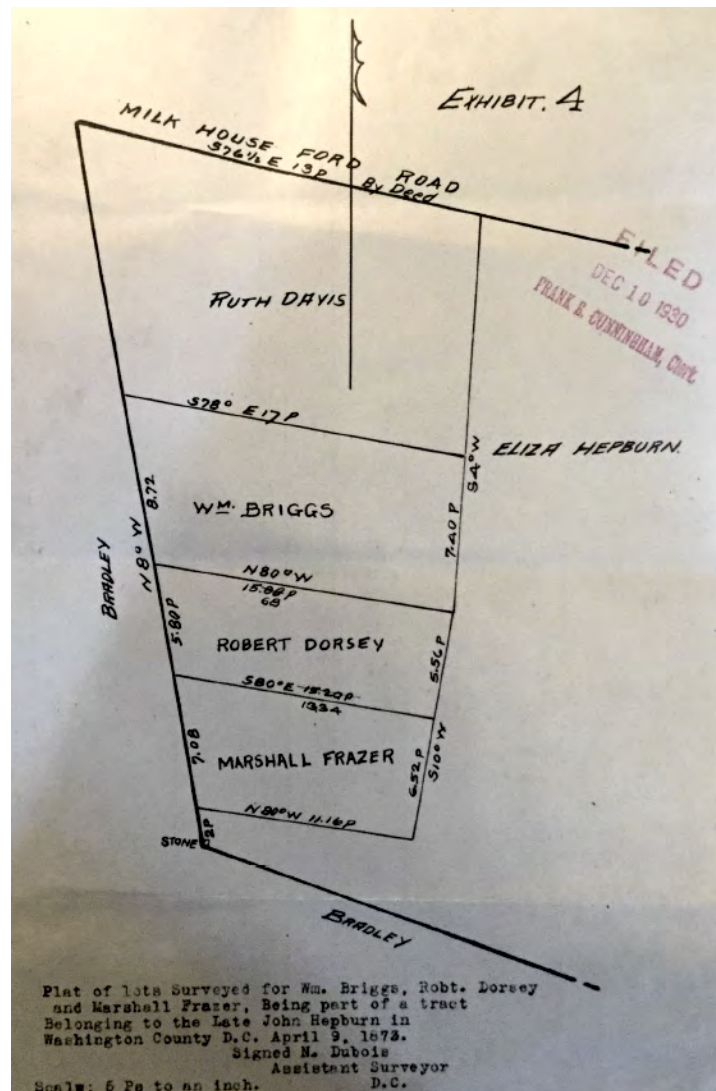


Figure 17. Hepburn tract, survey commissioned by Eliza Hepburn.
Exhibit 4, *Edwards v. White*.

Ultimately, by the 1890s Hepburn's tract had been divided into fourteen properties: thirteen homesites and one cemetery, all Black owned. Testimony by people who rented property in the tract during the early twentieth century revealed that the space was not named. An attorney for the landowner asked Edward H. Boose, a white man who had moved to 5632 Rock Creek Ford Road in 1903, if he knew the place by any particular name. "No sir, other than Rock Creek Ford Road," Boose answered.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ District of Columbia Surveyor's Office, Levy Court No. 2, Page 63.

⁵⁷ Testimony, *Edwards v. White* (Equity Case No. 52,197).

The cemetery was located immediately south of Rock Creek Ford Road (Figure 18). In later legal documents, it is described as the “graveyard parcel.” Originally part of the original 3 7/8 acres John Hutton bought in 1813, the small parcel appears in maps published in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1898, it was part of a 1.68-acre parcel sold to an individual named William Swinburn that had been seized in 1896 by the District of Columbia for delinquent taxes. None of the surviving legal instruments contain detailed descriptions for the property. The space, however, is described as a “burying ground” in the metes and bounds recorded for the adjacent parcel Eliza Hepburn in 1884 sold to Mary Ann Smith.⁵⁸

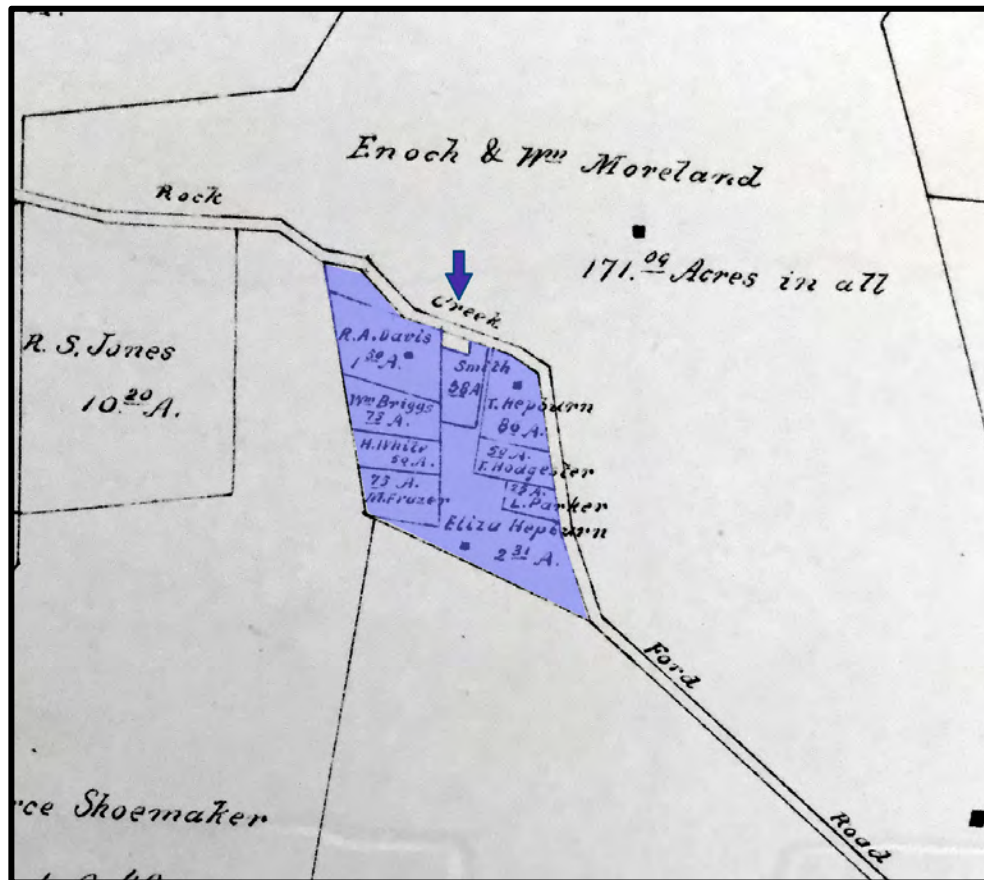


Figure 18. Hepburn tract, c. 1881. Arrow points to unshaded area where the Hepburn cemetery was located Carpenter, B. D. “Map of the Real Estate in the County of Washington, D.C. Outside of the Cities of Washington and Georgetown: From Actual Surveys.” Washington, D.C. B.D. Carpenter, 1881.

The graveyard parcel was a family cemetery owned and operated by Eliza Hepburn. The first known published reference to it appears in the 1885 Washington city directory. The entry identifies that cemetery as “Hebbons’ family” with Eliza Hebbons named as its proprietor.⁵⁹ The cemetery alternately was known as the “Hebron” cemetery; all published references to it place the cemetery on Broad Branch Road or near Tenleytown. Research by Washington cemetery historian Paul Sluby doesn’t mention the cemetery’s African American ownership or Black

⁵⁸ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 1080, folio 310.

⁵⁹ William H. Boyd, *Boyd’s Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Boyd, 1885), 951.

burials; he did note, however, that there were 26 white interments there in the 1890s.⁶⁰ By 1898, when Congress passed a law regulating cemeteries in the District of Columbia requiring cemetery owners to file plats with the District of Columbia Surveyor, letters sent to “The Proprietors of the Hebbons Cemetery, Broad Branch Road” were returned to the District government as undeliverable.⁶¹

There are no surviving records regarding who was buried in the Hepburn cemetery and over what period of time. When landowner W. Walton Edwards rented 2.5 acres in 1903 to Edward Boose, the cemetery was part of the parcel which included a six-room frame house, a barn, and a couple of sheds. Boose “did truck gardening” in the parcel, selling his vegetables at local markets. Attorneys for Edwards’ estate asked Boose in January 1932 if he recalled the cemetery at the site. Boose not only remembered the cemetery, but he also described fencing it. “I had a hard time putting the fence up on that knoll, but I don’t remember whether Mr. King, Mrs. Boose’s father, put one up before that or not; I have forgotten,” Boose testified.⁶² Boose’s wife’s family had rented the property earlier.

The testimony delivered in 1932 provides a rich description of the Hepburn tract’s cultural landscape and land use during the first quarter of the twentieth century. It and subsequent records, however, are silent about what happened to the bodies buried in the Hepburn cemetery. Washington attorney and real estate investor William Walton Edwards acquired all of the former Hepburn tracts between 1899 and 1920; he rented them out to tenants. Several, like the former Swinburn parcel, had been seized by the District of Columbia for delinquent taxes. Edwards died in 1927 and his family spent five years quieting the title to his Rock Creek Ford Road property to settle his estate. Edwards’ sons, Richard W. Edwards and Walton M. Edwards in 1940 sold the cemetery parcel and single-family homes subsequently were constructed there after the new owner subdivided it.⁶³

Selected Hepburn Tract Lot Sales			
Date	Grantor	Grantee	Details
n.d.	Eliza Hepburn	Thomas Hepburn	1.68 acres originally owned by John and Thomas Hepburn.
June 10, 1873	Eliza Hepburn	Robert Dorsey	Half-acre parcel; Dorsey was a sexton and White’s Tabernacle founding trustee.
Feb. 13, 1877	Robert Dorsey	Henry White	Half-acre parcel; White was White’s Tabernacle’s namesake and a founding trustee.
June 10, 1873	Eliza Hepburn	Ruth Ann Davis	Parcel; White’s Tabernacle founder John Hyson lived here with Davis, his mother-in-law, before buying land along Broad Branch Road.

⁶⁰ Paul E. Sluby, *Bury Me Deep: Burial Places Past and Present in and Nearby Washington, D.C.: A Historical Review and Reference Manual* ([Temple Hills, Md: P.E. Sluby], 2009), 91.

⁶¹ District of Columbia Surveyor’s Office.

⁶² Testimony, *Edwards v. White* (Equity Case No. 52,197).

⁶³ District of Columbia Land Records, Document No. 1940020010; District of Columbia Surveyor’s Office, Subdivisions Book 113, folio 21.

TABLE 1			
Selected Hepburn Tract Lot Sales			
Date	Grantor	Grantee	Details
June 12, 1878	Eliza Hepburn	William and Harriett Briggs	Three-quarter acre parcel
January 26, 1880	Eliza Hepburn	Letitia Parker	Quarter-acre acre parcel; Letitia Parker was White's Tabernacle member Cora Botts' mother.
--	Eliza Hepburn	Marshall Frazier	0.79-acre parcel
Sept. 14, 1883	Eliza Hepburn	Horace and Sallie Powell	Half-acre parcel
Nov. 4, 1882	Eliza Hepburn	Mary and Stephen Taylor	24/100 acre lot
May 8, 1884	Eliza Hepburn	Mary Ann Smith	58/100 acre south of cemetery parcel
Bold indicates a direct or indirect association with White's Tabernacle.			

Within a decade, Eliza Hepburn had fulfilled her late husband's wishes and sold the lots to the people indicated in his will and to other African Americans. Many of the people who bought parcels from Hepburn were founding or early members of White's Tabernacle No. 39. Thomas Hepburn received a lot in the tract's northeast portion via his brother's will; no deed was recorded documenting the transfer. The first recorded sales were to Robert Dorsey and Ruth Ann Davis, both of whom appear to have already been living in the tract.

Robert L. Dorsey was another White's Tabernacle founder. A common name in the Washington metropolitan area, Dorsey was part of a large family that was widely dispersed throughout the District and Montgomery County. Through intermarriage and church ties, Robert Dorsey could claim kinship to such Montgomery County communities as Scotland, Rockville, and others. Dorsey's history before 1870 remains elusive and little documentary evidence survives documenting his life. Census schedules and city directories identify him variably as a laborer and carpenter, yet he also appears in District government records as a "registered undertaker" and as a sexton associated with the "Christian Cemetery," a name that Reno's Moses Cemetery also was known by.⁶⁴

In 1876, Robert and Laura Dorsey paid \$245 cash for a one-acre lot in Broad Branch Road; they lived there until selling the property in 1914. Dorsey in 1877 sold his lot in the Hepburn tract to Henry White, White's Tabernacle's likely namesake. White was born in North Carolina c. 1847. By 1870, White was living in Northwest Washington with his wife, Clara, in a rented home. His nearby neighbors, according to the U.S. Census, were John and Eliza Hepburn, William Botts, Marshall Frazier, and the Davis family, all African Americans.⁶⁵

Like many African Americans of the period, the Whites left few documentary traces. Census schedules simply identified him as a "laborer," yet he was able to accumulate sufficient capital to buy land and he held a leadership position in a prominent benevolent organization. There is some evidence that White's wife's maiden name might have been Brown, a relative (sister?) of another White's Tabernacle founder, Charles H. Brown.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Sluby, *Bury Me Deep*.

⁶⁵ U.S. Census, 1870.

⁶⁶ William White death certificate, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Digitized and posted at ancestry.com.

Henry White died in 1895. His heirs by then appear to have mostly moved away from the family homestead, some of them to Allegheny City (annexed in 1907 by Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). In 1897, the District of Columbia seized the property for delinquent taxes and W. Walton Edwards bought it in 1899. Yet, it appears that White's heirs were unaware of the tax sale because they executed two deeds transferring title to the property in 1900 and 1905.⁶⁷

Another sale mandated by John Hepburn's will was to Ruth Ann Davis. She appears to have been married to Benjamin Davis prior to Hepburn's death and the family was living in the Hepburn tract. Davis received the title to her property the same day that Robert Dorsey did: June 10, 1873. Like White and Dorsey, Davis left few clues to her life in Washington. Testimony in several lawsuits involving her land, however, does offer some insights.

According to twentieth century court papers, Ruth Ann Davis and her husband were enslaved by the Bradley family, early landholders in what is now Chevy Chase. A Bradley descendant in the 1930s asserted that he had a financial interest in the Davis property in litigation to quiet its title: "Ruth Ann Davis and her husband, William Davis, entered the service of respondent's grandfather some time between the years 1830 and 1840," wrote S. Duncan Bradley in 1930. "And this respondent's interest in this cause is more largely due to the fact that the parties hereto are descendants of old family servants than to a desire to profit financially."⁶⁸

Ruth Ann (born c. 1826) and William Davis had at least six children. William was born in the District and died around the turn of the twentieth century; Ruth Ann was born in Maryland and died between 1910 and 1920.⁶⁹ Ruth Ann Davis is significant in this narrative for two reasons. The first reason is that she was an early African American landowner in the hamlet that formed in and around the Hepburn tract. The second reason is that her daughter, Anna, married White's Tabernacle founder John L. Hyson.

Because the Davis property became the subject of two lengthy lawsuits to quiet its title, there is substantially more information about the family than for other contemporaneous African American families. At some point near the turn of the twentieth century, Ruth Ann Davis moved away from Rock Creek Ford Road, perhaps to live with her son as she aged. Her surviving children moved elsewhere in the District; to Maryland; and farther away to New Jersey and Delaware. Instead of selling the property or transferring it to a family member, she rented it out.

According to a brief filed in 1944 in District of Columbia District Court, "Ruth Davis apparently did not live on the property but rented the house and land to various tenants for a period of some thirty years prior to 1915."⁷⁰ By the 1930s, the property had accumulated substantial unpaid tax bills and Ruth Ann Davis' five surviving heirs could not agree on a way to dispose of the property.

⁶⁷ Bill of Complaint and exhibits 5 and 6, *Edwards v. White* (Equity Case No. 52197).

⁶⁸ Answer to Rule to Show Cause, *Georgie Davis Massey et al. v. John L. Hyson, et al.*, (D.C. Equity Case No. 44606).

⁶⁹ The 1910 U.S. Census recorded Ruth Ann Davis as a widow living with her son, William, in Bethesda in 1910.

⁷⁰ "Brief filed in Reply to one on Behalf of Exceptants," *Massey et al. v. Hyson et al.* (D.C. Equity Case No. 44606).

The proceedings to quiet the title stretched out for more than a decade and they shed light into the ways African American landowners lost their property and wealth. “The parties to this partition suit, poor colored people, claimed to own a parcel of vacant, unimproved, and unenclosed land to which they had no record title,” reads the introduction to one legal brief. The Davis family didn’t provide funds for tax payments to a trustee who attempted to sell the property in the 1930s and as a result, “tax deeds and tax liens accumulated.” The Davis family’s ownership claims were diminished by the fact that they had essentially abandoned the property decades earlier. Language in the court documents reveal how white Washingtonians viewed the Davis family. “The property was unimproved, unenclosed, vacant land and the only evidence of adverse possession was that a colored shanty and garden had existed on the property from about 1875 to 1915,” reads one 1944 brief. “These facts had to be proved by testimony of possibly unreliable colored witnesses.” By 1943, the white parties to the case had decided that “no more money was to be wasted on stenographic reports of the oral presentation.” That “oral presentation” likely contained valuable information on the Davis family ownership starting in Reconstruction and spanning more than half a century.

There is no surviving evidence that Ruth Ann Davis was affiliated with White’s Tabernacle or any other Moses order. Yet, her extended family sued her daughter Anna’s husband John L. Hyson for taking too long in disposing of her estate and losing it for taxes owed. John L. Hyson (1850-1937) was born in Maryland or the District of Columbia and first appears in historical records in the 1870 census. He and his brother, Aloysius, were identified as “servants” living in the household of a Montgomery County Presbyterian minister.

John Hyson married Anna J. Davis in c. 1872 and in 1877 he paid \$200 cash for a lot on the east side of Broad Branch Road, a short distance from the Ruth Ann Davis homesite. He was 27 years old. Hyson was one of four brothers, three of whom were among the first African American landowners in rural hamlets on both sides of the District of Columbia’s border with Maryland: The Pines (near Rock Creek Park in Washington) and Wheaton Lane in Montgomery County. According to a Hyson family genealogy, the family arrived in the Washington area before the Civil War. Originally from Jamaica, the Washington branch of the family had lived in Virginia during the first part of the nineteenth century.⁷¹

After moving to the District from Maryland, John Hyson joined the Rock Creek Baptist Church congregation; later became one of the trustees for the church which was established in 1872. Hyson owned the southernmost lot of several owned by African Americans since the 1850s. His neighbors to the north included Robert Dorsey, who had moved from the Hepburn tract in 1876, and members of the extended Harris family, whose ancestors include George Pointer, a formerly enslaved man who worked as an engineer along the C&O Canal. Pointer’s free granddaughter, Mary Ann Plummer Harris, and her husband Thomas, in the 1850s were among the first people to buy parcels from George Milburn, a free African American who worked in the building trades. Over the next several decades, the Harris property was divided among descendants, including Lorenzo Harris and Mary Harris Moten, who was married to Albert Moten (or Morton).

⁷¹ Arlette P. Nickens, “The Hyson/Bowie Family of Montgomery County, Maryland” (Report prepared for the Hyson family. Original in the possession of Doris Hyson Washington., 2003).

Curiously, in her Tenleytown history, Judith Helm identified a “Will Moten of Broad Branch Road” as a “black undertaker for Reno.”⁷²

The surviving historical record offers few insights into who John Hyson was. Census takers and city directory surveyors simply identified him as a “laborer.” Other historical records detail the life of a man who bought his land free from recorded debt and who was active in his community. His one brush with exposure beyond his family and associates was as a witness to the 1893 murder of a white neighbor.⁷³ Several of descendants of Hyson’s nephews interviewed in 2018 didn’t remember any of the family discussing him, Reno, or the Broad Branch Road community.⁷⁴

The Broad Branch Road and Hepburn tract households (Figure 19) were established in proximity to the Fort Reno subdivision. The residents in this more rural space appear to have had strong institutional ties to Reno as early as c. 1870 when the agricultural hamlet was forming. Henry White, John Hyson, Robert Dorsey, Lorenzo Harris, and Albert Moten were five of the seven original White’s Tabernacle trustees (see below for a more complete discussion of White’s Tabernacle’s history). The small discontinuous hamlet bounded by Broad Branch Road on the west and Rock Creek Ford Road on the east persisted until the 1920s. Whites began moving into the Hepburn tract in the 1890s after most of the Black owners had lost their land because of delinquent taxes.

⁷² Torrey and Green, “Free Black People of Washington County, D.C. George Pointer and His Descendants”; Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood*, 127.

⁷³ “The Broad Branch Road Murder: Testimony of Various Witnesses on the Killing of Matthews Last September,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1894.

⁷⁴ Interview with Doris Hyson Washington, Dorothy Hyson Washington, and Nancy Hyson Johnson, May 1, 2018.

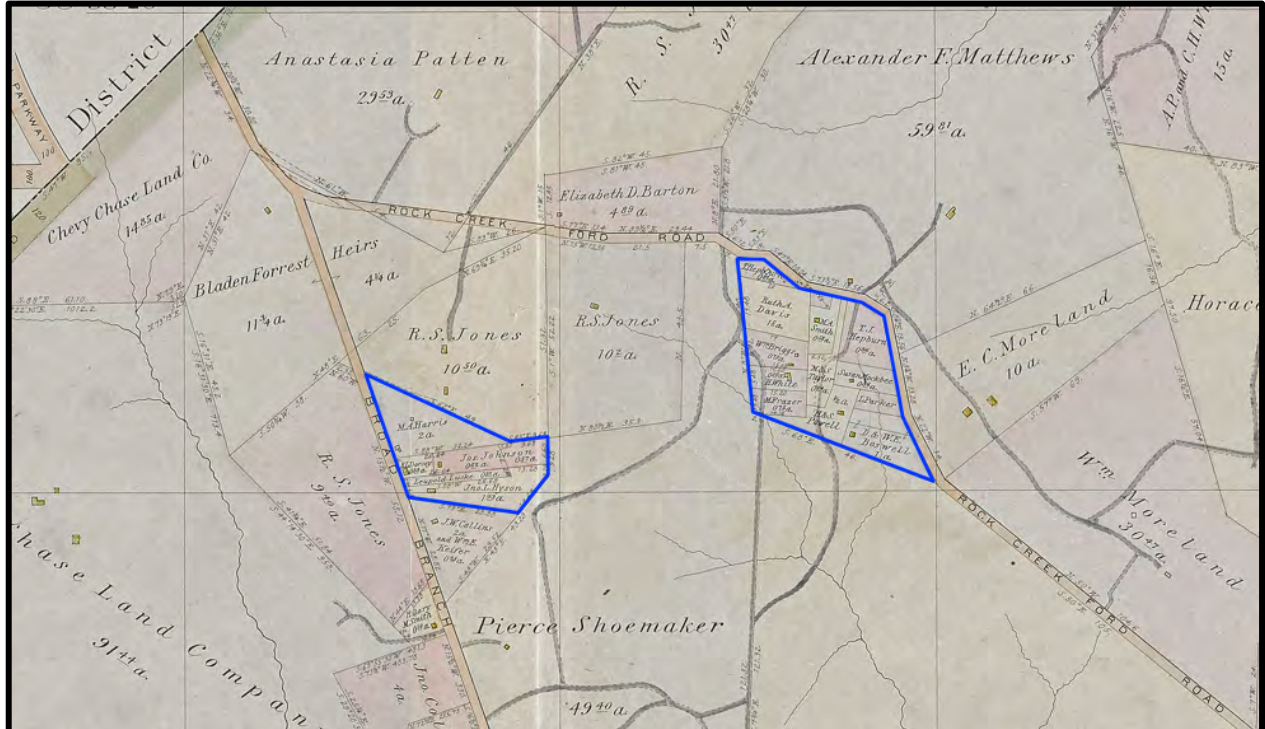


Figure 19. Black-owned properties, c. 1894 in Broad Branch Road and Rock Creek Ford Road.

The Black homesites along Broad Branch Road remained in African American hands until the 1920s when suburban encroachment began displacing African Americans from Reno. This displacement that involved condemnations by the U.S. government of homes, churches, and businesses to convert the subdivision into parklands and schools for a growing population of white suburbanites. The creation of Fort Reno Park and the construction of Alice Deal Middle School followed years of efforts by whites to remove African Americans from the space adjacent to the increasingly valuable Chevy Chase residential subdivisions.

White real estate speculators, many of them affiliated with the various firms involved in developing Chevy Chase, conspired with District leaders and Congress to displace African Americans in and around Reno. Harold E. Doyle (1875-1943) was an executive in the Thomas J. Fisher & Company real estate firm. The Pennsylvania native began his career at 17 working as a clerk in the firm. In the 1920s he became the company's vice president and general manager.⁷⁵ Since the early twentieth century, the Fisher Company had been the principal firm involved with the Chevy Chase Land Company, oftentimes via straw buyers, acquiring individual parcels and consolidating them for subdivision and sale in the Chevy Chase subdivisions in the District and Maryland.⁷⁶

Doyle individually and his company played important roles in the disintegration of Reno and displacement of African Americans in Northwest Washington generally and in the specific cases

⁷⁵ "Harold Doyle, Realty Man, Is Dead at 67," *The Washington Post*, January 23, 1943.

⁷⁶ Judith Beck Helm, "Chevy Chase: A Bold Idea, A Comprehensive Plan," in *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation's Capital*, ed. Kathryn Schneider Smith, 2nd ed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 299; Lampl, *Chevy Chase*, 127.

of Broad Branch Road and Rock Creek Ford Road. Doyle testified in the cases cited above challenging African American interests in the properties and he was held up as an expert in real estate practices and valuation. Yet, if there is any direct link to urban legends speculating that there is a nefarious conspiracy, “The Plan,” to displace African Americans in the District and convert Black land and wealth into white wealth, it lies in the ample written record Doyle produced.⁷⁷

After Congress failed to pass bills facilitating the condemnation of Reno, Doyle and his colleagues collaborated to facilitate the seizure of Black properties by the District’s planning agency, the National Capital Planning Commission.⁷⁸ “As you probably know I have had a great deal to do with the creating of Reno Park,” Doyle wrote in 1938 to the National Capital Park and Planning Commission’s director of planning, John Nolan. Doyle then wrote,

I personally and a number of my friends, many years ago, took over between two [and] three hundred lots in the section for the purpose of preventing further building for colored occupancy ... most of the vacant land has been bought — the portion more fully built upon and occupied by negroes still remains, including a school and, I believe, two churches⁷⁹

Doyle then wrote to Nolen that he had a plan to displace the remaining African American residents and their institutions: declare the space a “slum clearance” area. “The colored folks in the neighborhood would, I am sure, scatter.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ David S. Rotenstein, “The Plan: Folklore, History, and Washington’s Sublime Urban Legend” (Conference on D.C. History, Washington, D.C., 2017).

⁷⁸ Neil P. Heyden, “The Fort Reno Community: The Conversion and Its Causes” (Unpublished paper, April 1981), Rock Creek Park records, National Park Service; *Acquirement of Reno Subdivision in D.C. Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Sixty-Ninth Congress, First Session, on June 2, 1926.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926).

⁷⁹ Letter, Harold E. Doyle to John Nolen, July 10, 1938. National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Land Acquisition Records, Land Acquisition Case Files, 1924-1961. The agency’s name was changed in the 1930s, from the National Capital Planning Commission to the National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*



Figure 20. *The Washington Post*, June 2, 1928.

Anna Hyson died in 1918. Her funeral was held in the Broad Branch Road home and she may have been buried in the Moses Cemetery in River Road; no records have been recovered documenting where she was interred. John Hyson sold his Broad Branch Road property in 1924 and he moved to Westminister Street NW to live with his daughter Laura Sampson and her family. In April 1929, the White's Tabernacle trustees passed a resolution naming new trustees and Hyson relinquished his interest in White's Tabernacle by way of a trust deed filed in July 1929 District of Columbia land records.⁸¹ John Hyson died in his daughter's home December 30, 1937. His funeral was held at Rock Creek Baptist Church and he was buried in the Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Suitland, Maryland.⁸² One of his brothers and his daughter and her husband are buried in the same lot; the graves are unmarked. It is the final and ultimate erasure.

Hyson's neighbor to the north, Mary Moten (Figure 20), resisted efforts to sell the land her family had owned since the 1850s. "Mary Moten now owns a bit of property at 5803 Broad

⁸¹ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 6674, folio 437.

⁸² Death notice, *Washington Sunday Star*, January 2, 1938.

Branch Road which has been spoken for by the government for school property,” reported one Washington newspaper in 1926. “The purchase price has not been delivered as test, but the government has an option on the ground. The property has belonged to her father since before the civil war [sic.]”⁸³ Moten ultimately sold the property in August 1928 to the United States for \$6,862.50.⁸⁴ Located north of the site where the District built the Lafayette Elementary School in 1931, the former Harris, Moten, Dorsey, and Hyson property was converted into what is now known as the Lafayette Recreation Center. The *Washington Post* reported in 1931, “The lot has a house with colored occupants upon it, it was explained and the price was consequently somewhat higher than that paid for the school, which is to be for white pupils.”⁸⁵ The completion of the elementary school and adjacent park marked the end of the African American hamlet.

The River Road Community

The River Road community was one of several dozen hamlets and urban neighborhoods that African Americans established in Northwest Washington and Montgomery County. Starting in the years before the Civil War, free persons of color were able to accumulate sufficient wealth and purchase land from whites willing to sell it to them. These transactions were complicated and the details surrounding many of them have not been preserved. After the District of Columbia was created in 1790, the boundary separating the two jurisdictions remained highly permeable with Colonial plantations straddling the arbitrarily drawn line. Large early American landholders included members of the Johnson, Loughborough, Shoemaker, Ray, and Counselman families.

These large landholding families sold property to free African Americans and people formerly enslaved on their plantations. A common pattern involved a single African American who bought a parcel from one of these white families. Subsequent African American property owners followed, buying parcels carved from the original buyer’s land or from one of the white owners. This is what happened in Lyttonsville near Silver Spring when Samuel Lytton (c. 1830-1893), a free person of colored employed by Francis Preston Blair, in 1853 bought about four acres from white landowner Leonard Johnson. By the 1860 census, Lytton had established his own household in the five-acre tract; three years later, during the Civil War, Lytton registered for the newly enacted federal draft. The entry identified Lytton as a “colored” farmer who was married.

The vicinity around what became Lyttonsville remained sparsely settled and mostly agricultural until c. 1890 when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad constructed a freight line connecting the Metropolitan Branch line (completed 1873) with Georgetown in Washington. Lytton, then in his sixties, was one of several landowners who contested the railroad’s acquisition of right-of-way through his property.⁸⁶ Rebuffing the railroad’s overtures may be seen as Lytton’s resistance to the appropriation of his hard-earned property. In the decade after the railroad came through

⁸³ Unattributed newspaper clipping attached to a June 2, 1926 letter. The letter incorrectly attributes the clipping to the Washington Post. Digital image in the collections of Tanya Hardy.

⁸⁴ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 6190, folio 478.

⁸⁵ “District to Pay \$7,500 For Lot at New School,” *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1931.

⁸⁶ Metropolitan Southern Rail Road Co. v. Samuel Lytten and Phyllis Lytten his wife, May 23, 1891. Maryland State Archives.

Lytton's property, other Blacks moved in — one who bought part of Lytton's farm and others as renters. By the turn of the twentieth century, the rural hamlet had a church, stores, and several homes. After Lytton died and the property was subdivided in the early twentieth century the small community became known as "Lyttonsville." By the mid-twentieth century, Lyttonsville had become one of the best known African American hamlets in Montgomery County.

In the area that became the River Road Community, African Americans began buying property from white landowners in 1869. The earliest recorded purchase occurred in 1869 when James Ray sold six acres west (south) of River Road to John Hall and Francis (Frank) and Charlotte Gray. The Grays and Harris paid \$350 cash and they borrowed another \$250 from Ray.⁸⁷ The following year, the Rays sold additional tracts African Americans, including two acres to Jane Rivers and two acres to Henry Jackson.⁸⁸ In 1872 William Warren bought three acres and Nelson Warren bought another three the next year.⁸⁹

On the opposite side of River Road, in 1872 the Counselman family began selling parcels to African Americans. John Burley bought two acres in 1872 and Nelson Wood bought two acres in 1873.⁹⁰ Burley's early history remains opaque, but he did have network ties to the Reno community. He was identified as a White's Tabernacle trustee in the 1885 deed for the organization's Reno lodge hall (see below). The Black families who moved to River Road quickly coalesced into a community of land owners and renters. By 1880, the U.S. Census recorded as many as 20 African American households in the vicinity of River Road.⁹¹ The historical census has limited utility in fleshing out the economic lives of African Americans — most men are simply identified as "laborer" or "farm laborer" and the women are shown as "keeping house." Yet, in and around River Road, some men were identified as canal workers. Only two African American River Road residents were identified as specialized craftspersons in 1880: Nelson Wood (blacksmith) and William Botts (shoemaker). There is no surviving evidence documenting any African American business enterprises or social institutions in River Road during the Reconstruction period.

Also during this period, other new residents appeared in River Road. One was Louis C. Solyom (1836-1913), a wealthy and educated Polish immigrant, who in 1875 bought eight acres. Solyom, according to family oral history was a mercenary who arrived in the United States in 1861 to fight with Union army.⁹² Solyom served for less than two years before being injured and discharged. One account suggests that during the war, Solyom's sympathies drifted to the Confederate side. Already committed to service with the Union, Solyom apparently waited until

⁸⁷ Deed, November 16, 1869, recorded in Montgomery County Land Records Liber EBP 7, folio 22; mortgage recorded at Liber EBP 7, folio 23. Though the deed only identifies Hall and Francis Gray as the buyers, Charlotte Gray, Francis's wife and heir, signed the mortgage.

⁸⁸ Jackson, Liber EBP 7, folio 443; Rivers, Liber EBP 7, folio 444.

⁸⁹ William Warren Liber EBP 10, folio 275; Nelson Warren, Liber EBP 11, folio 242.

⁹⁰ Burley, Liber EBP 10, folio 165; Wood, Liber EBP 11, folio 282.

⁹¹ Though the 1880 census schedule only shows the county and district, known African American and white landowners were used to define the approximate range covering River Road.

⁹² Steven Lane, Interview, interview by David Rotenstein, December 4, 2017.

after the war to ally himself with ideals embraced by the Confederacy. “He made peace with his conscience by marrying a Southerner,” wrote one newspaper in 1943.⁹³

Solyom moved to Bethesda where he apparently rented a home for his first years in the community. After the war, Solyom went to work as a linguist at the Library of Congress and in 1882 he began receiving a monthly pension of \$4.25 for his military service. According to newspaper accounts, Solyom was a skilled linguist who specialized in Asian languages in addition to his native Polish and Hungarian.⁹⁴ At his home in River Road, Solyom employed African Americans in his household and to work on the grounds. He and his family lived in a substantial wood-frame house in an estate that he named for his family: Antalfa.⁹⁵ “That means Anthony’s Woods. Fa is woods in Hungarian and it is the name of the town in Hungary, Szentantalfa, and the Szentantalfa being Saint Anthony’s Woods,” explained Solyom’s great-grandson, Steven Lane. “That’s my middle name, by the way, Solyom De Antalfa — and somebody way back when was a robber baron back then. Solyom means falcon. So Solyom De Antalfa means falcon of Anthony’s Woods.”



Figure 21. House believed to be where Pascal Botts lived on the Solyom property.
Photo courtesy of Steve Lane.

⁹³ “Daughter Visiting Ex-Premier of France and Mme. Chautemps. Senora Guirola Back from Guatemala; Neighboring Estate of Refugee Historic,” *Washington Evening Star*, n.d.

⁹⁴ “Library Is Popular. Every Member of The Force a College Man,” *Daily Press*, July 20, 1910; “Funeral of L.C. Solyom.: Old Congressional Library Employee Buried on His Maryland Farm.,” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1913.

⁹⁵ Solyom’s full legal name was Louis C. Solyom de Antalfa. Translated into English, Antalfa means “Anthony’s Woods.” Sometime in the nineteenth century, the family shortened the name to Solyom. “Daughter Visiting Ex-Premier of France.”

Solyom's Antalfa estate included gardens and the family cemetery. "Louis Solyom's old home was torn down several years ago and his once-lively flower garden is now overgrown with spice bush and honeysuckle," the *Washington Evening Star* reported in 1943.⁹⁶ Steven Lane recalls playing in the family's property when he was a child in the 1940s. "Just a few hundred feet from the old house was Louis Solyom's garden and when I was small, you could still see the marks of the plow there," he recalled in a December 2017 interview.

Antalfa was located south of where River Road's African American community developed yet both spaces shared a common history distinguished by race. Solyom was wealthy enough to have multiple African Americans living on his estate. The U.S. Census identified several in his household in 1880 and 1900 and his heirs have a photo taken in 1895 that shows an African American couple seated in front of a log tenant house (Figure 21). The photo is captioned, "Pascal's house, Antalfa, Mont. Co. Md." Subsequent researchers believe that the people pictured are members of the Botts family, former tenants and Solyom employees who later owned land in the River Road community.⁹⁷

Other white residents in River Road during Reconstruction included families whose antebellum plantations relied on enslaved people of African descent for labor. Bethesda historian William Offutt observed that during the Civil War many Washington residents with Southern "sympathies" left the District for Bethesda and joined established families whose loyalties lay with the Confederacy.⁹⁸ After the war, Nathan Loughborough's grandson returned to the family's Milton plantation with his new wife, Margaret, a Richmond resident he met while serving in the Confederate army.

The Loughborough family's embrace of the Lost Cause is evident in later historical accounts and in the memoirs left by Margaret Cabell Loughborough. Two passages from her works underscore the family's commitment to segregation and white supremacy. In one, Margaret recounts a trip to Baltimore in 1868. "For several years after the war a negro could only ride on the street cars in Baltimore when accompanied by a white person, as a servant," she wrote. "I had with me a girl, an old slave, as a nurse to my two little children."⁹⁹ Margaret Loughborough complained that she had to watch her own children while her African American "nurse" went to visit family elsewhere in Baltimore.

The second passage from Margaret Loughborough's memoirs, when read in the twenty-first century, is more jarring. In it, Loughborough described the period in 1865 after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination:

The papers were blasphemous, they compared Lincoln's death on Good Friday with our Saviors [sic.], if anything Lincolns [sic.] was the more glorious in their eyes. All morning [sic.] and black was exhausted in Washington. My husband had

⁹⁶ "Daughter Visiting Ex-Premier of France."

⁹⁷ Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley, "Tracing a Bethesda, Maryland, African American Community and Its Contested Cemetery," 28–30.

⁹⁸ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 34.

⁹⁹ Margaret Cabell Brown Loughborough, *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), 89.

an aunt a very witty woman. She was one of the most ardent Confederates I ever knew. She was on her way to Trinity Church, Georgetown, when a coal black negro woman she knew approached her asking if she could give her (the negro) a black dress, as she wanted to go in mourning for Marse Lincoln. My aunt advised her to take off her clothes and she wouldn't need black.¹⁰⁰

Such were the people who owned the majority of the land in and around River Road during Reconstruction.

The Moses Order

The Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Sisters and Brothers and Sisters of Moses was a national benevolent organization founded in the Philadelphia suburbs in 1867.¹⁰¹ It was one of many similar charitable organizations, oftentimes called secret societies, that became integral institutions in African American communities. These organizations first appeared in the United States before the Civil War as free Blacks established Prince Hall Masons and Grand United Order of Odd Fellows lodges. After the Civil War, these organizations and others spread from northern cities into the South giving African Americans agency and ownership over their own institutions. Black benevolent organizations provided African Americans a safety net and economic security. They provided burial and health insurance and were vehicles for accumulating wealth and social capital.¹⁰²

Several benevolent society organizational models emerged in the nineteenth century. There were small local orders that were not affiliated with national organizations. There also were individuals in cities and rural communities that formed subordinate orders that paid dues and followed rules established by the national organizations. Both models gave Blacks opportunities for self-help, power, and wealth. Small monthly dues paid by many members in a community helped defray the costs for funerals and burials. Sick members could rely on assistance during convalescence. With members who possessed organizing and entrepreneurial skills, these organizations became effective vehicles in the struggle for civil rights. Fraternal organizations also channeled civic participation and racial uplift by organizing participation in such celebrations as Emancipation Day parades. They also instituted educational programs in their lodges, teaching members such things as clerical skills.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Loughborough, 91.

¹⁰¹ The organization will be abbreviated throughout this report as the "Moses Order".

¹⁰² Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1–20; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment: Report of an Investigation under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Third Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 25-26, 1898*, Atlanta University Publications, no. 3 (Atlanta, Ga: Atlanta university press, 1898); Du Bois, *Economic Co-Operation among Negro Americans. Report of a Social Study Made by Atlanta University under the Patronage of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D. C.; Together with the Proceedings of the 12th Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, on Tuesday, May the 28th, 1907*.

¹⁰³ Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*.

Scholars have written extensively about the ways African American benevolent organizations emulated their white counterparts. These include ritual structures and naming patterns. Yet, there were several significant factors that distinguished the Black organizations. One was the frequent use of names drawn from biblical figures. Another was the prominent and equal leadership positions that women held in these organizations. Women played important roles in these organizations in part because of the positions they held in Black society: as key connections in kinship networks, as vital members in Black churches, and as the principal breadwinners in families hamstrung by male unemployment, imprisonment, and absence.¹⁰⁴

Peter Paul Brown (c. 1822-1882) was living in Philadelphia and working as a physician in the 1860s when he conceived the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses. Brown was a Maryland native who spent time in the West Indies as a sailor and student.¹⁰⁵ According to sworn testimony Brown gave in 1872, he had a medical diploma from the Botanic College of the West Indies.¹⁰⁶ He was testifying in a Pennsylvania legislature investigation into fraudulent medical credentials.

The 1872 testimony, combined with census schedules, city directories, and newspaper articles provide a narrow window into Brown's early life. Several historical newspapers reporting on the Moses Order noted that Brown was a "sailor" and that his mandate for founding the Moses Order originated in the West Indies. Evidence for the latter has not been recovered but the 1850 U.S. Census for Baltimore has a Peter Brown, age 28, living in the Seamen's Home Boarding House.¹⁰⁷

Brown received what he described in the 1872 investigation as informal medical training in Baltimore. "I was in the American College there under Prof. Donborough," he testified. "I got employment there as a janitor." Brown said that he worked there for seven years and that the professor took an interest in him: "He said if I would take good notice and learn I would gain instruction."¹⁰⁸ Brown was unable to produce any diploma or certificate showing his credentials; he claimed that they had burned in a fire two weeks before the hearing.

Philadelphia city directories show Brown living and practicing medicine first on South 13th Street until 1872 and afterwards at 1210 Bainbridge Street. As soon as Brown moved to the Bainbridge Street location, it became a hub of African American social and political life in Philadelphia's Fourth Ward. The property served as his medical office, residence, and a social

¹⁰⁴ See Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, 77–81.

¹⁰⁵ Historical accounts of the Moses Order note that Brown was a "sailor" when he conceived the organization. "Progress in Education. Widely Known Secret Society," *The Afro-American*, February 13, 1909.

¹⁰⁶ "The Sale of Medical Diplomas," *The American Journal of Homeopathic Materia Medica and Record of Medical Science*, March 1, 1872, 286; Pennsylvania Legislature, "Journal of the Select Committee of the Senate, Appointed to Investigate Into the Facts Concerning the Alleged Corrupt Issuing of Medical Diplomas by Medical Colleges Existing Under the Laws of This Commonwealth," in *Miscellaneous Documents Read in the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania During the Term Commenced at Harrisburg, January 2, 1872* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1872), 1266.

¹⁰⁷ The census enumerator was inconsistent in identifying the race for the boarding house residents. No race was given for Brown's entry.

¹⁰⁸ Pennsylvania Legislature, "Journal of the Select Committee of the Senate, Appointed to Investigate Into the Facts Concerning the Alleged Corrupt Issuing of Medical Diplomas by Medical Colleges Existing Under the Laws of This Commonwealth," 1266.

hall where Republican Party meetings and other events were held. In August 1872, a Fourth Ward Republican club advertised a meeting at 1210 Bainbridge inviting all ward residents to attend. Peter P. Brown was listed as the group's vice president and a member of its committee.¹⁰⁹ One newspaper article published in 1877 described a "Fourth Ward Colored Men's Club" meeting there in "Brown's Hall."¹¹⁰

No newspaper reports or other contemporaneous records survive memorializing the moment and circumstances surrounding the founding of the Moses Order. The first tabernacle was established in 1867 in Norristown, Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia's suburban Montgomery County. Brown's intent to create a national organization called The Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses is evident in his January 1872 registration of a "chart" with the Library of Congress.¹¹¹ The "chart," as subsequent testimony revealed, contained no organizational description, intent, or anything else except for the words, "Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses."¹¹²

By the mid 1870s, the Moses Order had spread to other Mid-Atlantic states, including Maryland and the District of Columbia. In October 1877, for instance, "Business of great importance was transacted" in a meeting held in Baltimore's Samaritan Temple over which Peter Brown presided. Leaders and members from "various Tabernacles and Temple Houses" attended.¹¹³ In Washington, there already were several other local African American benevolent organizations that had been active since before the Civil War. These organizations, like the Free Young Men's Benevolent Association, are best known in Washington for their associations with the Underground Railroad and as burial societies.¹¹⁴ Founded in 1838, the Free Young Men's Benevolent Association after the Civil War changed its name to the Colored Union Benevolent Association. In 1849, the group had accumulated sufficient funds to buy land for a cemetery near Rock Creek in Northwest Washington. The Mt. Pleasant Plains Cemetery buried Black Washingtonians until 1890 when it was closed, "due to neighborhood development pressures, including the establishment of the National Zoo."¹¹⁵

The organization that came to be known as White's Tabernacle No. 39 was founded in Washington in 1870; it was one of several tabernacles founded in Washington between c. 1870 and 1900. We know that because White's Tabernacle's founders declared it in 1877: "We solemnly declare that ... we have been organized under the Ancient United Order Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses ... ever since 1870."¹¹⁶ Among its earliest trustees were men and women living in Northwest Washington who were a mix of Maryland and District natives as well as newcomers from North Carolina and Virginia. Reconstructing the history of Black fraternal organizations like the Moses Order, however, is fraught on the local level as well

¹⁰⁹ Political classified advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 23, 1872.

¹¹⁰ "Labor Men Swarming. More Big Meetings in Philadelphia," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, October 10, 1877.

¹¹¹ Library of Congress copyright registration no. 776 filed February 23, 1872.

¹¹² Appellant's Brief, Peter P. Brown v. Ancient United Order, et al.

¹¹³ Special Notice, *The National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), October 26, 1877.

¹¹⁴ Mary Belcher, "Mt. Pleasant Plains Cemetery at Walter Pierce Park," National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Nomination Form (Washington, D.C.: United States National Park Service, 2015), 6–7.

¹¹⁵ Belcher, 8.

¹¹⁶ *Washington Evening Star*, July 16, 1877.

as nationally. Much of the source material is secondary and it is full of errors and omissions.¹¹⁷ Lawsuits and other legal records, however, are clear and unimpeachable sources. The earliest Moses activity in Washington resulted in producing just such a record.

On March 30, 1876 Henry Jackson, Henry White, John Tidball, James E. Talbert, Fanny Tidball, Silas Chapman, Elizabeth Jackson, Mary Jane White, John Washington, William Finney, and Catharine Gibbs filed papers in the District of Columbia to form a benevolent association called the Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters, and Brothers and Sisters of Moses of the United States and the World at Large.¹¹⁸ According to the charter that the District granted, the organization was formed to, “Care for the sick of its members, and the burial of the dead; to educate the children, and comfort and protect the widows of such of its members, as die, during their membership.”¹¹⁹

The next year, in November 1877, national Moses Order founder Peter Brown sued the individuals identified as the board of directors in the new Washington corporation calling itself the Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters, and Brothers and Sisters of Moses of the United States and the World at Large. The friction appears to have materialized as early as the summer of 1877 when Henry Jackson, Elizabeth Jackson, Silas Chatman (or Chapman), Mary Jane White, Henry White, and William Finney bought advertising space in the *Washington Evening Star*: “We solemnly declare that we will not support the incorporation got out under the direction of Fanny Tidball.”¹²⁰

Brown’s complaint alleged that the new Washington corporation infringed upon his 1872 copyright, diminishing the national Moses Order’s brand and injuring him financially. Brown asserted that his copyright made him the sole proprietor to approve the formation of subordinate orders “in various sections of the country.” Brown demanded that the Washington order incorporated in 1876 immediately cease using the name:

Unless the defendant is restrained in the use of said name, title and description, and from otherwise interfering with the plaintiff and the said association and the subordinate divisions thereof, created by him as aforesaid ... the defendant will do him and them incalculable and irremediable injury.¹²¹

Litigation was common among benevolent organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The proprietors of African American organizations that had names similar to white fraternal groups routinely found themselves defending themselves in civil and criminal courts. African American organizations also sued splinter groups to assert legitimacy, protect their brands, and reinforce control over existing memberships.¹²² Many national orders, however, were organized and incorporated under state incorporation laws.¹²³ Since Brown only registered

¹¹⁷ Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 219.

¹¹⁸ John Talbert was married to Fanny Tidball’s daughter.

¹¹⁹ District of Columbia Incorporation file no. 414, March 30, 1876.

¹²⁰ *Washington Evening Star*, July 16, 1877.

¹²¹ Bill of Complaint, Peter P. Brown v. Ancient United Order, et al.

¹²² Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 139–40.

¹²³ Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz, 139–40.

a copyright and no accompanying text such as bylaws, a constitution, etc., all he had claim to under the law was the words in the copyright filed with the Library of Congress.

The defendants in the case replied to Brown's complaint on November 22, 1877. The demurrer dictated by James Hicks, Grand Master of the Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters and Brothers and Sisters of Moses of the United States and the World at Large, asserted that Brown's complaint had no merit, The District court agreed and Brown lost his case. He appealed in 1879 and he lost that case, too. Brown was prepared to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. He filed the appropriate bond and the move was reported in Washington newspapers, but the appeal was never filed.¹²⁴

As the case was working its way through the courts, Brown took steps in March of 1878 to beef up his copyright claim by filing three additional documents with the Library of Congress: "Constitution and Bylaws of the A.U.O.S. & D.B. & S. of Moses to Govern Subordinate Tabernacles and Temple Houses Working Under the Jurisdiction of the R.W.G.E. of the A.U.O.S. & D.B. & S. of Moses of the United States of America and the World at Large"; "Regulations for Conducting Business and Confirming Degrees Together with the Form of Initiation of the A.U.O. of B. & S. of M."; and, "Constitution of the G.E. and A.U.O.B.S.M. with By-Law for Governing the Subordinate Tabernacles and Grand Temple's House."¹²⁵

Though Brown was unsuccessful in the courts, the legal challenge did force him to change the way he managed the national organization. Except for the brief legal notices published in the Washington Star, very little appears to have been written about the case. One Philadelphia newspaper did write about the case in a racialized and dismissive article about Brown and his prominence in the city's Republican Party. The *Philadelphia Times* reported in July 1880:

So saying, "Doctor" Peter Brown, author of the constitution and by-laws of an alleged organization of colored folks, called by "Dr." Brown and his manual the "Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses" Mr. Brown is thoroughly "stalwart" in his Republicanism and wields considerable influence over his race in the Fourth Ward—a fact due partly to his advanced years and respectability and in a large degree to his having through an amanuensis and political friends in Washington, who attended to the copyrighting, launched upon his admiring fellow citizens the wonderfully composed manual of the "A.U.O. of S. and D., B. and S. of M. of the United States and the World at Large."¹²⁶

Peter Brown died in 1882 in Philadelphia. Before his death, however, the Moses organization had developed a strong presence in Baltimore despite Brown's continued residence in Pennsylvania. By 1879, for example, there were 1,600 Moses Order members in 11 Baltimore

¹²⁴ Supreme Court of the District of Columbia Docket Book, Case No. 5892; Washington Evening Star, October 16, 1879.

¹²⁵ Copyright registrations 3370, 3371, and 3372, United States Copyright Office, Library of Congress. The abbreviations used in the registration besides the organization's name include R.W.G.E. for Right Worthy Grand Encampment and G.E. for Grand Encampment.

¹²⁶ "Colored Republicans," *The Times* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), July 20, 1880.

tabernacles.¹²⁷ Nationally, there were tabernacles throughout the eastern United States and into the Midwest, with an Illinois corporate charter issued in 1879 to a Chicago-based subordinate order.¹²⁸

Over the next several decades, the national organization that he founded, which grew to thousands of members, held memorial services to commemorate his accomplishments. Nationally, the organization's leadership passed to Baltimore's Solomon Bond. Under Bond, there continued to be large annual conventions drawing members from around the nation to Baltimore, Washington, and New York City. After Bond died in the early 1930s, the organization proposed erecting a monument in his honor in Baltimore's historic African American graveyard, Mount Auburn Cemetery; the monument, however, was never realized.¹²⁹

The growth of the Moses Order in Washington and the Maryland suburbs mirrored the national expansion. The tabernacles organized under such names as the Ancient United Order of the Sons and Daughters, and Brothers and Sisters of Moses of the United States and the World at Large (March 1876); Grand Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers [and] Sisters of Moses in the U.S. of America and the World at Large (March 1876); the Right Worthy Supreme Grand Council No. One of the G.A.O.B. and S. of Moses (1887); the United Right Worthy Supreme Grand Order of Moses, Temple House No. 1 of the United States and the World at Large (1889); the Right Worthy National Supreme Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Independent Order of the Sons and Daughters and Brothers and Sisters of Moses in the United States and of America and the World at Large (1892); and, the Early Rose Tabernacle No. 67 of the Ancient Independent Order of Moses in the District of Columbia (1915).¹³⁰

The group that split from the Tidballs included several of the White's Tabernacle original seven trustees. They all appear to have lived in Reno and the Broad Branch Road-Rock Creek Ford Road area. No documentation survives describing where White's Tabernacle first met and what its activities were beyond burying the dead. Its focus on burials is evident in the order's first recorded action as an independent entity. In August 1880, its seven trustees bought property from John E. Chappell less than half a mile northeast of Rock Creek Baptist Church. Henry White, Charles Taylor, Henry Brown, Albert Moten, John Hyson, and Robert Dorsey paid one hundred dollars for half an acre in the southwest corner of Chappell's large farm.¹³¹ The small parcel included an easement for a small right-of-way which carried an existing road through Chappell's remaining property.

Though historians documenting Washington cemeteries believe that the Chappell family previously had used the site as a graveyard, the deed conveying the land to White's Tabernacle doesn't mention an existing cemetery. One authoritative source on cemetery history in the District of Columbia suggests that this might have been the Chappell family cemetery, yet it seems unlikely considering how rigidly segregated Washington's spaces were well into the

¹²⁷ Baltimore Sun, February 17, 1879.

¹²⁸ Chicago Tribune, April 24, 1879.

¹²⁹ "Moses Order Plans Monument to Bond," Baltimore *Afro-American*, October 31, 1936.

¹³⁰ District of Columbia Incorporation records, "old act corporations." Records on file, District of Columbia Archives.

¹³¹ District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds, Liber 953, folio 498, John E. Chappell to Henry White, et al, August 20, 1880.

twentieth century. It does not seem that the Chappell family would sell its ancestral burial grounds to an African American group which had plans to bury people alongside the earlier white graves. Tenleytown historian Judith Beck Helm offers some potential insights into the Chappell family's views on race. About Dr. John W. Chappell, Helm wrote: "Dr. Chappell did not have Negro patients."¹³²

Five years after buying the cemetery tract, White's Tabernacle bought land in Reno behind Rock Creek Baptist Church. Lorenzo Harris, Charles Taylor, and John Burley acting as trustees for the "Ancient United Order Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses White's Tabernacle Number (39) Thirty-Nine D.C." paid Marcia Patch \$50 for two lots.¹³³ White's Tabernacle built a two-story wood lodge hall on the property straddling the line separating the two lots it purchased. Building permits obtained from the District government between c. 1899 and 1921 describe the building as twenty feet wide and fifty feet deep with two meeting rooms.¹³⁴ Architecturally, the lodge hall appears to have remained constant for its entire history. In 1941, federal appraisers described it as a 5,000-square-foot "two-story church meeting hall" worth about \$2,600.¹³⁵ The Reno neighborhood history project conducted in the 1970s collected oral histories recounting memories of classes being held in the lodge hall as well as social activities. No photos or other detailed descriptions appear to have survived.

The Moses lodges supported their activities by collecting dues from members and from selling burial plots. The lodges held regular meetings and conducted them in accordance with the rules first issued by Peter Brown in the 1870s. Some insights into local Moses Order organizations may be gleaned from oral histories and a remarkable minute book maintained by the Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 lodge affiliated with the nearby Gibson Grove A.M.E. Zion Church. Many of this lodge's members lived in Scotland and Cabin John, along Seven Locks Road and on nearby farms. The minute book, which covers a decade between 1904 and 1914, is archived in the Montgomery County Historical Society. Archaeologist Alexandra Jones conducted oral histories among the Gibson Grove descendant community for her 1997 University of California at Berkeley doctoral dissertation.

The Gibson Grove lodge hall hosted meetings twice monthly as well as dinners and dances.¹³⁶ In the early twentieth century, the lodge also rented its facilities out to other groups, according to the Morningstar minute book. Members paid their monthly dues and meeting attendance was rigidly enforced. Only the ill with medical excuses were permitted to miss meetings; absentees otherwise were assessed monetary penalties. The Morningstar minute book describes meeting rituals that began with liturgical speeches and hymns. Reports on burial activities and visitations

¹³² Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood*, 125.

¹³³ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 1155, folio 336.

¹³⁴ Building permit notes, The Reno Neighborhood Project Records, 1977. Special Collections, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

¹³⁵ Record Group 328, Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Land Acquisition Records, Land Acquisition Case Files. National Archives and Records Administration.

¹³⁶ Alexandra Jones, "Gibson Grove A.M.E. Zion Church Gone But Not Forgotten: The Archaeology of an African American Church" (Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 52–53, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8z67f3ns>.

to the sick were given, as were reports on recruiting and revenues. Recruiting and ties to District of Columbia lodges also were recorded.¹³⁷

In her dissertation, Jones asserted that all of the people living in Gibson Grove were members of the Moses lodge. The membership rosters in the surviving minute book do in-fact contain a large number of names, but it is unlikely that every resident was a dues-paying member. Though the benevolent organizations did in-fact play important roles in rural and urban Black communities, they were not universally respected and revered by the people who lived in those communities.¹³⁸

Nonetheless, the Moses Order and its counterparts were functional parts of African American communities. They provided vital economic and social support services, despite the costs. Former residents of Montgomery County's Wheaton Lane recall family members who belonged to the Morningstar Lodge that met in the basement of Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church. "I remember grandmother belonging to a lodge," recalled Rev. Ella Redfield, a former Lyttonsville resident whose family had lived in Wheaton Lane. "So what they did was somebody got sick, they'd give them a card with a couple of dollars in it."¹³⁹ Her friends Doris Hyson Johnson, Nancy Hyson Johnson, and Dorothy Hyson Washington all remembered the meetings in the church and the \$100 survivors got when a family member died.

Nancy Hyson Johnson and Dorothy Hyson Washington still have their mothers' lodge books. They recalled the small amounts paid each month — fifteen cents — and the dues collector who came around every month just like the other bill collectors. "The lodge dues was almost as bad as Mr. Phelps, I mean what was that man's name, the insurance man," Nancy Hyson Johnson asked Ella Redfield in a May 2018 interview.

By the mid-twentieth century, there were fraternal lodges, some with cemeteries, located in many of Montgomery County's African American communities. Besides Gibson Grove, there were Moses lodges in Emory Grove (Lodge of Moses No. 74) and Norbeck (Mackall Tabernacle No. 69). Besides the Moses Order, Rockville had an Odd Fellows lodge and by 1908 there was a Star of Bethlehem lodge in Lyttonsville.

White's Tabernacle remained in Reno throughout its history and its final years are discussed below. Meanwhile, as noted earlier, other tabernacles emerged in the District. The order founded in the 1870s by the Tidballs and Talberts remained active in Washington well into the twentieth century. The last real estate transaction involving surviving members of the lodge which in its last years was known as the Mount Carmel Lodge No. 42 occurred in 1954 when it sold its land in Northwest Washington.¹⁴⁰ Nationally, the Moses Order appears to have quietly disappeared during the 1950s as its surviving members aged and died.

¹³⁷ Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 minute book, Montgomery County Historical Society Special Collections.

¹³⁸ "Lodges vs. Negro Progress," *The National Republican*, March 6, 1886.

¹³⁹ Ella Redfield Interview, May 1, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 10146, folio 496.

Early Suburbanization (1880-1910)

River Road in the decades bracketing the turn of the twentieth century continued developing into a cohesive African American community. Its ties to Reno intensified as people in both communities moved fluidly across the District line. There was tremendous mobility in this period, whether it was movement within individual neighborhoods or from one community to another. Some of this was captured in depositions taken in the 1930s litigation over the Hepburn tract along Rock Creek Ford Road. Sarah Briggs described living in several lots within the tract during the time that she lived there around the turn of the twentieth century. Briggs had lived in the tract with her mother. After she was married in 1900, she moved into another house on a different parcel in the tract; finally, she moved into another parcel that she was renting at the time of the lawsuit.¹⁴¹

Another example of this mobility comes from interviews done by Howard University sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and his students. Residents living in Northwest Washington described how the communities were established after the Civil War. They also described tremendous pressures to sell their land to developers and to the federal government. These sales precipitated substantial population movements as people relocated their homes and struggled to maintain church and other ties to earlier communities.¹⁴²

Population movements from neighboring Washington into the River Road area continued after Reconstruction. So too did the movement of people from other parts of Montgomery County into what was crystallizing as a distinct African American community. In this period Black land ownership increased in River Road and there were sufficient people living there to warrant opening a school for African American children. Like other Southern states, Maryland's schools were segregated after the Civil War. In 1872, Montgomery County began providing schools for the county's African American residents. Schools were located in communities where free Blacks and formerly enslaved people concentrated during Reconstruction. Residents in these rural hamlets typically petitioned the county to open a school by offering land and building. By the end of the 1880s, River Road residents were lobbying for a "colored school."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Sarah A. Briggs deposition, *Edwards v. White*, Case No. 52197.

¹⁴² E. Franklin Frazier Papers, Box 131-111, Folder 20, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

¹⁴³ Clarke and Brown, *History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961*.



Figure 22. River Road Rosenwald Fund school. Photo in the collections of the Montgomery County Historical Society.

River Road didn't get its school until 1912. Within seven years, residents were back before county officials asking for better facilities.¹⁴⁴ It took another decade for the improvements to arrive. In 1925, one of fifteen Montgomery County Rosenwald schools was completed on the south side of River Road (Figure 22). It occupied a two-acre tract and cost \$5,980: \$500 in contributions from the African American community; \$900 from the Rosenwald Fund; and, \$4,580 from Montgomery County coffers.¹⁴⁵

Another consequential event occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century. William Armistead Jones (1861-) was adopted by Charlotte Gray, the widow of early River Road African American landowner Francis (Frank) Gray (see above). In her 1886 will, Charlotte Gray bequeathed her land to two beneficiaries. Grandson Frank Dodson (also spelled "Dotson") received a house and land in the northern portion of Gray's property while Jones got Gray's house and the land divided by the Willett Branch all the way to River Road.¹⁴⁶ Gray died in 1887.

Jones' presence in River Road is important. According to one biography, he had been worshipping at Rock Creek Baptist Church since 1873. In 1902, after the church's pastor died,

¹⁴⁴ Clarke and Brown, 26-27.

¹⁴⁵ River Road, Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MTU5NQ==&school_county=montgomery&school_state=MD&button=Search&o=0.

¹⁴⁶ Montgomery County Will Book RWC 15, folio 138.

Jones was installed as the Reno community church's new leader.¹⁴⁷ As a religious and community leader, Jones ultimately was entrusted with presiding over many funerals of River Road and Reno residents. He also helped to settle the estates of his neighbors and congregation. And, in 1913 he was appointed a trustee of White's Tabernacle No. 39.¹⁴⁸

Automobile Suburbanization (1910-1960)

This period reflects the time during which the River Road Moses Cemetery achieved its historical significance. As streetcar suburbs gave way to automobile suburbs in the early twentieth century, the demand for housing increased. In Northwest Washington, the Chevy Chase Land Company continued to expand its footprint up to the District line and into Maryland. As the company's racially-restricted subdivisions filled in, spaces available for African Americans to live, work, worship, and play contracted. By 1910, residential subdivisions platted by the Land Company were pressing in on all sides of the cemetery White's Tabernacle established in 1880. A real estate atlas map in the collections of the Library of Congress underscores how out of place the cemetery was by 1894: an individual had circled the site in ink, presumably prior to donating the atlas volume to the library (Figure 23).

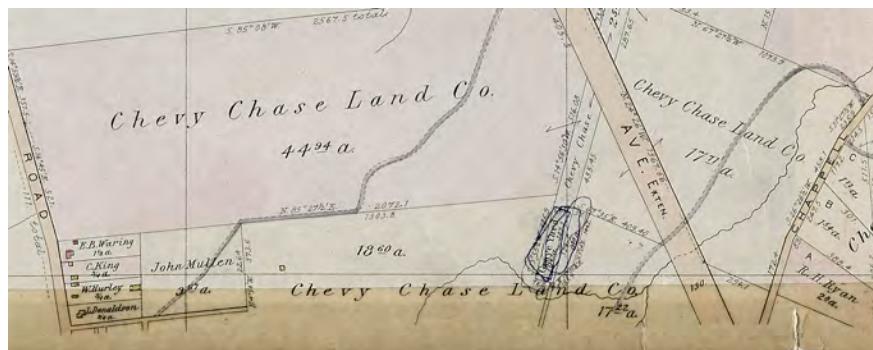


Figure 23. First White's Tabernacle Moses Cemetery location, Northwest Washington. Library of Congress atlas plate showing location circled in the original. 1894 Baist Atlas.

No records appear to have survived regarding the Moses Order's responses to suburban encroachment or to the District of Columbia's highway plan released in 1893 that shows a new 37th Street NW cutting through the heart of the organization's cemetery.¹⁴⁹ In fact, the new highway plan was highlighted the President of the District of Columbia's Board of Commissioners in communications about the cemetery to chairs of Senate House committees on the District of Columbia. "The greater part of the area covered by this cemetery lies within the lines of 37th Street west, as established by the official street extension plan," wrote Oliver Peck Newman in February 1916. "This fact, it is believed, has interfered with the making of

¹⁴⁷ A.B. Caldwell, *History of the American Negro. Washington, D.C. Edition*, vol. VI (Atlanta, Ga.: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Company, 1922), 125–26.

¹⁴⁸ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 3789, folio 320.

¹⁴⁹ "An Act to Provide a Permanent System of Highways in That Part of the District of Columbia Lying Outside of Cities," 27 Stat. 532 (1893), <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/52nd-congress/session-2/c52s2ch197.pdf>; *Highway Extension Plan of the District of Columbia* (Washington: The Office, 1897).

interments of recent years and is likely to continue to interfere. The cemetery is, therefore, simply abandoned.”¹⁵⁰

The River Road Moses Cemetery

By the summer of 1910, however, it was clear that the Moses Order would need a new place to bury its dead. The last burial took place July 25, 1910. In the late summer of 1910, White’s Tabernacle made several consequential moves towards closing the Tenleytown cemetery. The first occurred August 6, 1910 when the tabernacle’s trustees voted to sell the property to William L. Miller, a real estate agent who purchased property on behalf of the Chevy Chase Land Company.

The following month, on August 15, 1910, the tabernacle voted to secure a corporate charter from the District of Columbia to do business as a “benevolent and charitable organization” under the name, “White’s Tabernacle No. 39 of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brethren and Sisters of Moses.” The trustees at this time were Charles H. Brown, John L. Hyson, Robert Dorsey, Jeremiah Botts, and John A. Morton.¹⁵¹

There do not appear to be any records surviving that document how White’s Tabernacle went about searching for a new cemetery site. The River Road community might have been an easy choice because of the significant ties that the residents living in Reno had with the people just across the state line in Montgomery County. A few months after selling its original cemetery site and receiving its District of Columbia corporate charter, the tabernacle’s trustees settled on a small parcel in Montgomery County’s River Road community near the home owned by Rock Creek Baptist Church’s pastor, Rev. William Armistead Jones, and the River Road “Colored School.”

There is circumstantial evidence recovered by local historians that the tract White’s Tabernacle bought might have been used as a community cemetery by River Road’s African American residents. This evidence includes River Road residents’ death certificates and Civil War pension files that simply identify “River Road” as a burial site. L. Paige Whitely suggests that the signed affidavit filed by a witness in William H.H. Brown’s widow’s application for her late husband’s Civil War pension provides compelling evidence of an earlier cemetery at the site.¹⁵² Brown’s family’s property abutted the parcel that White’s Tabernacle eventually bought (see Figure 24). Brown, according to Susan Warren, had lived “on River Road, near District Line, Mont. Co., Md.” for several decades prior to his death. Brown “lived with his first and second wife on River Road ... in the same home in which [Brown] himself died.”¹⁵³ The affidavit continues, “The affiant further avers that she attended the funeral of the said deceased soldier as well as that of

¹⁵⁰ Letter to John Walter Smith, Chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia, United States Senate, February 1, 1916. Office of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, Letters Sent from October 8, 1815 to February 21, 1916. Volume 96, 218834 to 220858. National Archives and Records Administration.

¹⁵¹ District of Columbia Incorporations, Liber 27, folio 434, recorded September 29, 1910. D.C. Archives.

¹⁵² L. Paige Whitely to David S. Rotenstein, “Re: Burial Table (First Reply),” September 2, 2018; L. Paige Whitely to David S. Rotenstein, “Re: Burial Table (Second Reply),” September 2, 2018.

¹⁵³ Affidavit of Susan Warren, November 5, 1921. Application of Rachel E. Brown, widow, William Brown, 30th U.S. Col. Infy., Civil War Pension Files, National Archives and Records Administration.

his two former wives; that said first wife was buried in the same plot with the soldier at River Road.”

On January 23, 1911, White’s Tabernacle bought 1.04 acres from Frank and Katie Dotson. The deed filed in Montgomery County land records shows that the order paid \$10 for the property and there is no record of a corresponding mortgage. The purchase and intent to use the property as a cemetery touched off an immediate response from neighboring white property owners. Led by James H. Loughborough, a former Confederate army officer whose family owned substantial antebellum plantations that relied on enslaved labor, these landowners petitioned Montgomery County leaders to block the proposed “cemetery ... for colored persons from the District of Columbia.”¹⁵⁴ The cemetery site (and William Brown’s homesite) is illustrated but not labeled in a plat map published shortly before the sale (Figure 24).

¹⁵⁴ Montgomery Press, January 20, 1911. There is no record of the communications preserved in Montgomery County Board of Commissioners records on file in the Maryland State Archives.

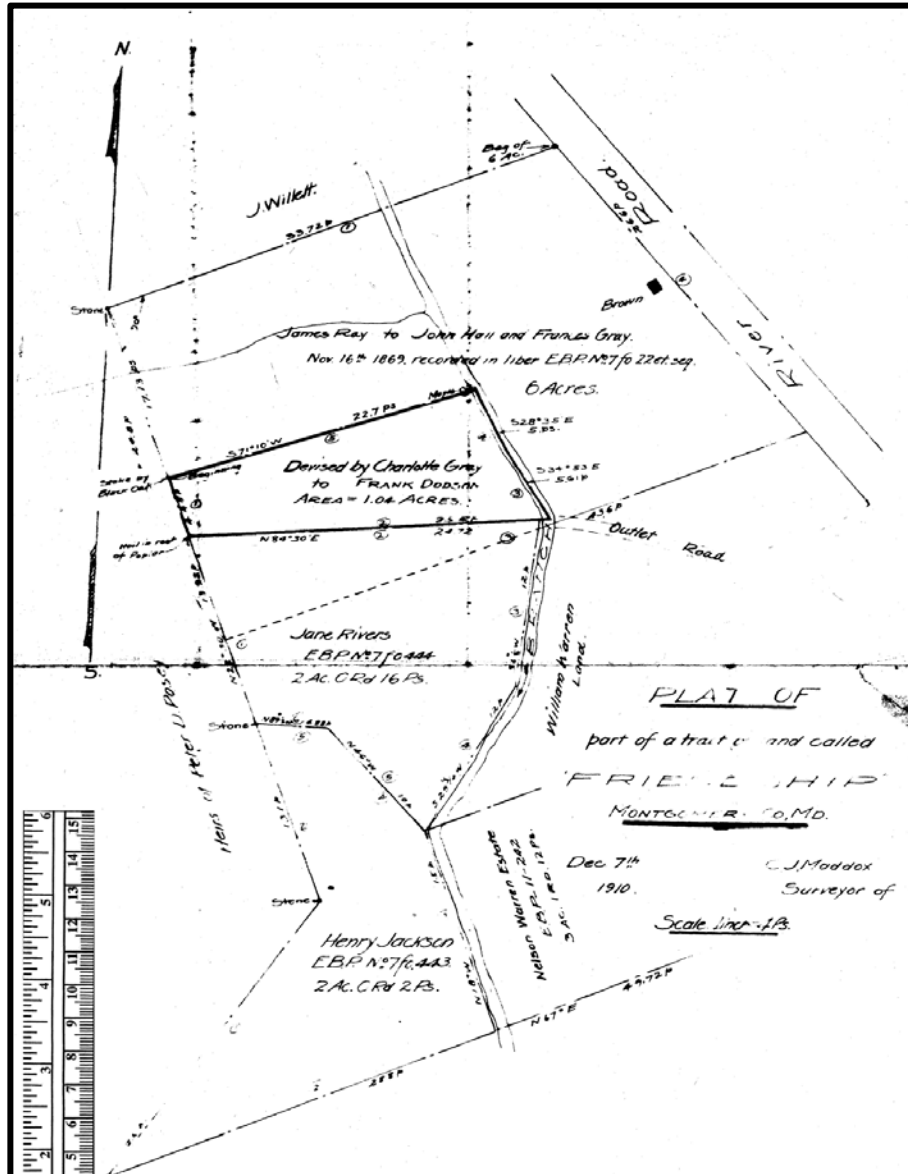


Figure 24. Montgomery County Land Records, plat showing the parcel that White's Tabernacle bought the next year for its cemetery.

The earliest known burial in the River Road cemetery was in June 1912 and another one occurred three months later, in September 1912. The 1912 internments speak to the regional character of the network served by White's Tabernacle and its cemetery. These burials and Montgomery County tax records comprise definitive evidence that the burials began in the parcel shortly after the Moses order bought it. Though White's Tabernacle paid no taxes on the property, the county recorded its value: "used as grave yard."¹⁵⁵

As White's Tabernacle was starting to bury people in the River Road cemetery, the organization was moving forward in the District of Columbia seeking to disinter the 192 people known to

¹⁵⁵ Montgomery County Assessment Book, Seventh Election District, 1910 to, p. 158. Maryland State Archives.

have been buried in its original cemetery. At the time, the U.S. Congress had jurisdiction over all municipal legislation in the District and existing law prohibited exhumations without prior notification of next of kin or other legally recognized representatives.

The *Washington Evening Star* reported in August 1914 that the District's Board of Commissioners had reviewed the White's Tabernacle request to disinter the bodies and recommended forwarding the request to Congress for legislation to facilitate the move. On January 12, 1915, legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate to formally close the cemetery and permit White's Tabernacle to remove the bodies buried there.¹⁵⁶ The District's commissioners asked Congress to approve the act and explained why it was necessary, noting the potential nuisances created by abandoned cemeteries and appealing to the legislators to make an exception to existing law because of the Moses Order's circumstances. "In the present instance it would be difficult, if not impossible, to locate the nearest relatives of many of the persons whose remains are buried in this cemetery," wrote Board of Commissioners President Newman in February 1915 to Congress. "And their legal representatives, if they ever had any, have long since settled their accounts and lost their official status. For these reasons an act of Congress seems necessary in order to permit the removal of the remains that are now buried in this ground."¹⁵⁷

The 1915 bill authorized White's Tabernacle to "remove all the bodies now buried in" the Tenleytown cemetery and "to transfer and reinter the same in some other suitable cemetery or cemeteries selected by the board of the officers of White's Tabernacle." The bill also carried explicit instructions for how the disinterment and reburials were to occur:

Each monument, tombstone, or marker, marking any grave or graves in said described burial ground in which such body or bodies are to be interred, and shall be then placed in position as soon as can be done without danger of settling.¹⁵⁸

What on its surface appeared to be a simple legislative fix for an emotional and complicated matter took six years to pass Congress and be enacted. As bills to permit relocating the cemetery languished in the legislature, suburban development in Northwest Washington continued. In August 1921, Senator Key Pittman (D-Nevada) reintroduced the bill first read five years earlier. "That is a bill that I inherited from the late Senator Newlands," Pittman said after the bill was read August 15, 1921. "There is an abandoned cemetery in the District for colored people which has not been used since 1910. The association are very anxious to have permission to remove the bodies and reinter them in another cemetery."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ "An Act Prohibiting the Interment of the Body of Any Person in the Cemetery Known as the Cemetery of the White's Tabernacle Numbered Thirty-Nine of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brethren and Sisters of Moses, in the District of Columbia," H.R. 13226 (1915).

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Oliver P. Newman to Sen. John Walter Smith, Chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia, February 2, 1915. Legislative Archives, National Archives and Records Administration.

¹⁵⁸ An Act Prohibiting the interment of the body of any person in the cemetery known as the Cemetery of the White's Tabernacle Numbered Thirty-Nine of the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brethren and Sisters of Moses, in the District of Columbia.

¹⁵⁹ Congressional Record-Senate, August 15, 1921, p. 5004.

Over in the House of Representatives, Representative Benjamin K. Focht (D-Pennsylvania) told the House after the bill was read:

This measure provides for the removal of bodies now interred in a cemetery in the northwestern part of the city about which there is growing residential and commercial congestion. It seems desirable to remove these bodies without the District, which is to be done by this colored secret society at their expense.¹⁶⁰

The bill was approved December 16, 1921 and became law.¹⁶¹ Though Washington newspapers provided limited coverage of the legislation since it was first proposed in 1914, there were no subsequent reports on whether the graves in the Tenleytown cemetery were actually excavated and the markers and bodies relocated according to the provisions in the new law.¹⁶² Former residents of Reno who were interviewed in a community oral history project during the 1970s recalled the Tenleytown cemetery but no accounts of any disinterments appear to have been recorded.



Figure 25. Former Moses Cemetery site, Chevy Chase Parkway, Washington, D.C., November 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Congressional Record-House, December 12, 1921, p. 257.

¹⁶¹ 42 Stat. 348, Pub. L. No. 67-112.

¹⁶² “Would Open Up Graves: District Board Favors Removal of Bodies From Cemetery in City. Commissioners Approve Bill Providing for Elimination of Burying Ground of White’s Tabernacle.,” *The Washington Post*, August 2, 1914; “Passes D.C. 7 Bills: House Acts on Measures of Deep Interest to Residents Here,” *The Washington Post*, January 12, 1915, 7; “District in Congress: Senate,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1916; “\$1,000 Fine and Jail in Bad Check Bill,” *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1921.

All of the details regarding the transactions involving the Tenleytown cemetery may never be known. One of the remaining unanswered questions is why the Chevy Chase Land Company would be interested in buying the small parcel knowing that most of it would end up being taken by the District government to build 37th Street. Another significant question relates to what happened to the property in the interval between passage of the 1921 law waiving the District's existing procedures for relocating graves and the construction of what became Chevy Chase Parkway (Figure 25). And perhaps the biggest question of all is: what happened to the 192 graves that were put there between 1881 and 1910?

The abandonment of the original Moses Cemetery in Washington foreshadowed the ultimate demise of White's Tabernacle. The legal instruments filed between 1910 and 1915 provide some insights into what happened to some of the original trustees. For example, one deed filed in the District of Columbia memorialized the election in November 1913 of John Hyson and Rev. William A. Jones as trustees to replace Lorenzo Harris who had moved to Buffalo, New York, and Charles Taylor, who had died.¹⁶³ Changes in White's Tabernacle's governance are captured in subsequent instruments as the trustees and later property buyers sought to quiet land titles. Though the federal government began acquiring land in Reno in the 1920s, officials didn't get around to buying the properties where Rock Creek Baptist Church and the White's Tabernacle lodge were located until the 1940s.

Rock Creek Baptist Church sold its land to the United States in 1943. The congregation subsequently moved to several different sites within the District before moving in 2016 to Prince George's County, Maryland.¹⁶⁴ White's Tabernacle in 1944 sold its last piece of Washington property to the U.S. government after three years of negotiations. After being notified that the government was going to acquire the lodge site, White's Tabernacle initially offered to sell it for \$4,000; the National Capital Park and Planning Commission declined the offer and a contract ultimately was signed to sell it for \$2,600.

Surviving trustee William Jackson conducted the negotiations with the NCPPC. Because the the White Tabernacle trustees never transferred title to their property to the corporation formed in 1910, the agency had a difficult time clarifying the legal owners. "We have examined carefully the instrument conveying lots 16 and 17 in Square 1843 to William Jackson, Edward Frazier, and George Shelton, as trustees," wrote the NCPPC to Jackson in 1942. The letter continued,

We note that the powers and duties of the said Trustees, if any, were not described by this or any other instrument of record. We also note that the Trusteeship provides for no authority to sell and convey the said lots. We doubt whether we

¹⁶³ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber3789, folio 320. The available historical record does not explain why Hyson, who was an original White's Tabernacle trustee in the 1870s and who listed in the 1910 District incorporation as a trustee, had to be elected in 1913.

¹⁶⁴ Hamil Harris, "D.C. Church Makes Long-Awaited Move, But Leaves City || The Washington Informer," *The Washington Informer*, January 4, 2017, <http://washingtoninformer.com/d-c-church-makes-long-awaited-move-but-leaves-city/>; Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood*; "D.C. Churches Find Promised Land in Md.," *The Washington Afro-American*, January 4, 2017, 202–3, <https://www.afro.com/gentrification-pushes-d-c-churches-find-promised-land-md/>.

would have authority to accept a Deed executed by the surviving Trustee for the conveyance of this property to the United States.¹⁶⁵

The letter to Jackson laid out several alternatives: hire an attorney to “straighten out the title” to the property; enter into a friendly condemnation proceeding with an agreement to sell the land for \$2,600; or, attempt to locate the heirs of Marcia Patch, the woman who sold White’s Tabernacle the property in 1885 and who was the last clear owner. Jackson selected to allow the government to condemn the property in exchange for \$2,600. That appears to have been the last official act by White’s Tabernacle in the District of Columbia. Jackson, in the negotiations, was identified as the sole surviving trustee. It is presumed that Edward Frazier and George Shelton had died sometime after they were named trustees in 1929.

By the 1950s, all above-ground physical evidence of the cemetery appears to have been erased. Like its counterparts in communities throughout the United States, as people were displaced or moved voluntarily and descendants died, the River Road Moses Cemetery. Since it had no fence and there was no perpetual care, secondary vegetation quickly overtook the one-acre tract — like its predecessor in Northwest Washington. The access road leading from River Road was still legible in the 1940s and it provided children like Harvey Matthews access to space that they appropriated as a playground. The road’s outlet was where the McDonalds currently is located in River Road. “It was a dirt road,” recalled Matthews. “That’s where you started at. You entered there and you went on up the dirt road, across the wooden bridge, and on up the dirt gravel road and the cemetery was like to your right.”¹⁶⁶ That road is illustrated in plat map filed with Montgomery County just before White’s Tabernacle purchased its property (see Figure 24).

“The cemetery was open,” said Matthews. He described the cemetery’s landscape as he remembered it: “Just rough shrubbery, like patches of grass. There wasn’t no — didn’t look like the White House lawn or nothing. You know, just patches of grass and dirt. Dirt and mud.” And, he said, it wasn’t well-kept. “It was a shabby little place. It wasn’t kept like Lincoln Park is kept now but, you know, I guess they did the best they could who was coming in there. I guess most of the peoples coming in were like unknown people, people that had no money.”

The last surviving White’s Tabernacle officers sold the abandoned cemetery in 1958 to Leo O. Furr, a physician and real estate speculator.¹⁶⁷ Furr paid \$10 cash for the parcel and no mortgage was recorded. Since Furr’s business records have not been located, the transaction’s terms are not known, i.e., the full sale price and any private contracts that could have been executed among Furr and White’s Tabernacle regarding the treatment of the graves within the parcel. Executing the sale on behalf of White’s Tabernacle were Worthy Superior William Jackson (c. 1881-1963) and financial secretary Lewis Edward Williams. Also appearing in the deed were White’s Tabernacle recording secretary Mildred H. Stitt and treasurer Gertrude D. Jackson (1887-1966), the worthy superior’s wife.

¹⁶⁵ Letter, April 9, 1942. Record Group 328, Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Land Acquisition Records, Land Acquisition Case Files, 1924-1961.

¹⁶⁶ Harvey Matthews, Interview, December 12, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 3707, folio 507.

home was one block directly north of White's Tabernacle's hall in Dennison Street and it's possible that the Greene family could have heard services and events originating not only in the hall but also being held in Rock Creek Baptist Church.

Gertrude in 1912 married Hugh L. Denman (1887-1925). He was a Texas native who moved to Washington in the first decade of the twentieth century. His first home in Washington appears to have been at 3929 Donaldson Place NW in Reno. There he owned a two-story frame home into which Gertrude moved after the couple was married. Denman's first job in Washington might have been as a grocer but by World War I he was working in the Government Printing Office as a skilled laborer. Denman also was a Methodist minister and he was affiliated with the Mount Asbury (St. Mark) Methodist Episcopal Church, which he served as a trustee. St. Mark's, established in 1888, was located in Belt Road and it was the second-oldest African American congregation in Reno.¹⁷⁰ Hugh Denman died in 1925. His funeral was held at Ebenezer M.E. Church and he was buried in Payne's Cemetery. His obituary published in the Washington Star noted that he was a member of the Ionic Lodge No. 1028 of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows; there is no surviving evidence that Hugh Denman belonged to a Moses tabernacle.¹⁷¹

The case file for her father's Reno property demonstrates that Gertrude Jackson was a sophisticated negotiator when it came to real estate transactions. She vigorously defended her surviving family's financial interest in the property and its market value and she repeatedly pressed government officials to conclude the transaction. In February 1941, Jackson wrote to the Interior Department, "Dear Sir, Will you kindly inform us when we can expect a settlement for the property of the late Fred Green." She followed up that letter in June: "We are writing to ask when the settlement for the property of Fred Green 3812 Davenport Street N.W. will be made?" Jackson then added, "We have an investment in some property we would like to make, provided we get the money some time soon."¹⁷²

It is unlikely based on Jackson's dealings with the federal government that she and the other surviving White's Tabernacle leaders would have settled for \$10 for the cemetery property. And, since no further documentation survives, it is unclear whether Furr secured financing to buy the cemetery site and whether there were any agreements made regarding relocating the graves. The timing of the inception of development activities at the site which coincide with the period after William and Gertrude Jackson died leaves many questions unanswered.

Furr held onto the cemetery property for five years; in 1963 he sold the property to his uncle, William Carrigan.¹⁷³ A series of subsequent deeds and contracts suggest that Furr retained an ownership interest in the property through at least 1967. That year, Furr and Carrigan executed a lease with developer Laszlo Tauber for a portion of the former White's Tabernacle property. In 1968, Furr ceded control over the assets to Carrigan in a contract giving the latter the power to

¹⁷⁰ Helm, *Tenleytown, D.C., Country Village into City Neighborhood*, 90–91. Information on Denman is derived from U.S. Census schedules (1900, 1910, 1920), digitized Washington city directories, and his 1917 World War I Draft registration available via Ancestry.com. Denman's affiliation with St. Marks is noted in District of Columbia land records, e.g. Liber 4609, folio 382, Trustees of Mt. Asbury to Scott and Denman (December 6, 1921).

¹⁷¹ Hugh L. Denman obituary, *Washington Evening Star*, September 4, 1925.

¹⁷² Square 1844, Lot 19. Record Group 328, Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, Land Acquisition Records, Land Acquisition Case Files, 1924-1961. National Archives and Records Administration.

¹⁷³ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 3722, folio 25.

sell or lease “the pieces of property known as Tabernacle No. 39 deeded to Leo O. Furr and Yvonne E. Furr.”¹⁷⁴ Also within this period, Carrigan sold the northernmost portion of the White’s Tabernacle property.¹⁷⁵

Laszlo Tauber (1915-2002) was an eastern European Holocaust survivor who came to the United States after World War II. The Hungarian native practiced medicine under Nazi occupation in Budapest’s Jewish Ghetto. During the war, Tauber was credited with saving many fellow Jews via medical treatment and by providing them with forged identity papers to avoid Nazi deportation. Narrowly escaping Nazi capture, Tauber eventually trained in neurosurgery in Sweden before emigrating to the United States in 1947 and moving to Washington where he resumed practicing medicine. In the 1950s, Tauber began investing in real estate. His portfolio and wealth grew in the 1960s and 1970s as he developed garden apartments, office buildings, and other commercial properties, some of which he leased to the federal General Services Administration (GSA). Tauber’s other investments included majority ownership of Alexandria, Virginia’s Jefferson Memorial Hospital.¹⁷⁶

The Washington Post described Tauber as wealthy but remarkably frugal in his 2002 obituary. “A man of vivid idiosyncrasies, dispensing money with an open hand while shopping for shirts in discount store basements, stooping to scoop up the odd paper clip, and zealously pursuing all the profit his no-frills office buildings could provide,” the paper wrote.¹⁷⁷ At his death, Tauber was a billionaire, one of the Washington metropolitan area’s wealthiest residents whose philanthropic contributions included a \$15 million scholarship for the descendants of World War II veterans; a scholarship honoring Raoul Wallenberg; and major financial gifts to several universities and Jewish charities.

Tauber built the Westwood Shopping Center and in 1968 he completed construction of the highrise Westwood Towers: a mixed-use project with offices on the lower floors and luxury apartments above. The Westwood property was Tauber’s first lucrative GSA lease. Tauber, via his corporate entity, Westwood Ventures, leased the former White’s Tabernacle property where he constructed a parking lot. Based on contemporary cartography, the Westwood Towers building extends across the former White’s Tabernacle property line into the cemetery area.

Records collected by M-NCPPC researchers indicate that county inspectors visited the vicinity in the early 1960s and noted substantial grading activities in the former White’s Tabernacle parcel adjacent to what became Westwood Towers.¹⁷⁸ The survey was undertaken as the Montgomery County Planning Commission was evaluating a proposal to rezone the property. Hearings held in 1968 before the Montgomery County Board of Appeals documented the property’s existing conditions at the time as parking use was debated.¹⁷⁹ The presence of graves or a cemetery was

¹⁷⁴ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 3707, folio 507.

¹⁷⁵ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 3820, folio 724.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Lewis, “Laszlo Tauber Dies at 87; A Patron in War and Peace,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2002; “A Real Estate Success Story,” *The Washington Post*, August 11, 1978.

¹⁷⁷ Martin Weil, “Surgeon, Builder Laszlo Tauber Dies,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Technical Staff Report, Between River Road and Westbard Avenue, north of Ridgefield Road, June 25, 1963. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, June 25, 1963. Zoning Application No. C-979.

¹⁷⁹ Montgomery County Board of Appeals Case No. 2347, Petition of Laszlo N. Tauber, Trustee.

not an issue in the 1960s proceedings. A March 1968 property appraisal report included in the Board of Appeals case file described the property at the time:

The site is the 24,000 sq. ft. westerly portion of the Leo O. Furr Property which contains a total of 1.04 acres. The easterly boundary of the Site is adjacent to the westerly boundary of the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission storm drainage right-of-way. The site is irregular in shape and has no frontage on any street or thoroughfare and is “back land.” The terrain is hilly to steep and falls to the east to the drainage area which accommodates a stream known as Willets or Little Falls Branch.¹⁸⁰

According to later accounts, however, people who worked on construction projects in the former White’s Tabernacle property and individuals who lived and worked nearby witnessed graves being disturbed. But the cemetery’s desecration may have begun earlier, with the construction of the Westbard Shopping Center. “When they dug them hills out to make Westover [Westbard], they dumped all that dirt in there,” Cleveland Clipper told William Offutt in 1992.¹⁸¹ Clipper also told Offutt that he believed that some of the remains were disinterred and relocated to a Rockville cemetery, yet researchers have not been able to locate any county or cemetery records documenting this.¹⁸²

Montgomery County Planning Department historians conducted informal telephone interviews with several individuals in 2015 and 2016 during the agency’s work on the Westbard Sector Plan. These interviews included accounts of construction workers halting work each time an alarm bell sounded signaling that human remains had been encountered.¹⁸³

In 2015 a pair of Montgomery County Parks Department historians visited with Arnold d’Epagnier, a son of Washington architect John d’Epagnier. The elder d’Epagnier designed Tauber’s Westwood Towers and the younger d’Epagnier told the historians about workers encountering human remains during construction.¹⁸⁴

These anecdotes are the only known accounts attached to the former White’s Tabernacle property after 1958. There are no reliable accounts regarding the total number of bodies buried in the cemetery nor are there any reliable accounts detailing what happened to the graves after

¹⁸⁰ Adolph C. Rohland and Associates, Inc. letter report to Robert L. Burchett, March 5, 1968. Montgomery County Zoning Variance No. 2346.

¹⁸¹ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 245.

¹⁸² Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley, “Tracing a Bethesda, Maryland, African American Community and Its Contested Cemetery.”

¹⁸³ Sandra Youla, “Cemetery Indicators for Parks Department—River Road African American Cemetery in the Westbard Sector Plan Area,” Memorandum, September 13, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ The Montgomery County Parks historians interviewed d’Epagnier in December 2015. They did not record the interview nor did they take notes during the conversation. According to records provided to Macedonia Baptist Church collected during discovery in litigation over the Westbard Sector Plan, the historians were not prepared to conduct the interview and it was not performed in accordance with prevailing professional standards in oral history. “Neither came with paper or pens and/or a recording device, as they were not there to interview Mr. D’Epagnier,” according to a summary in the files. “Joey Lampl and Jamie Kuhns [M-NCPPC historians] left his house and recorded on paper what they both remembered from this conversation. These notes were not taken while the conversation occurred.”

White’s Tabernacle sold the property in 1958. Local historians using online databases and the names of known River Road residents consulted probate records and death certificates filed in the Montgomery County Register of Wills Office and in the Maryland State Archives. This research, combined with research done to prepare this report yielded a pool of 19 known and suspected burials. These individuals are discussed below.

After the White’s Tabernacle property was divided into two separate parcels (P175 and P177), in the 1960s, the easternmost portion (P177) became part of a commercial property where its owners parked trucks and stored objects. The current parcel was assembled from several tracts consolidated by William Carrigan in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1996, Carrigan sold the property to the Galway Group, Inc.; in 2016, Bethesda Self Storage Partners LLC purchased the parcel.¹⁸⁵

Laszlo Tauber, his heirs, and corporate successors continued to own the western parcel (P175) until 2013 when the property, along with several neighboring parcels including the Westwood Shopping Center were sold to Equity One (Westwood II) LLC. In 2018, the Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission purchased the parcels comprising Tauber’s Westwood Towers building and adjacent parking lots, including Parcel P175.

Moses Cemetery Interments

I had a brother and uncle buried there — Cleveland Clipper, 1992.

TABLE 2			
People Known/Believed Buried in River Road Moses Cemetery			
Year	Name	Death/Burial Date	Source
1912	Jeremiah Botts	June 1912	B
1912	Charles H. Brown	September 1912	A,B
1912	Mary Jackson	January 1912	A
1915	John Burley	August 1915	A
1916	Jeremiah Graves	November 1916	A
1917	George Jackson	October 1917	A
1921	William H. Brown	October 1921	A
1925	John H. Thomas	February 1925	B
1925	John Thomas	February 1925	B
1926	Waytoga Jackson Burley	August 1926	A,B
1926	George Turley	October 1926	B
1926	George Frye	May 1926	B
1927	Emma Gray	June 1927	B
1928	Sarah J. Brown	August 1928	B

¹⁸⁵ Carrigan’s consolidations are more fully described in Montgomery County Land Records Liber 13592, folio 646; Liber 53770, folio 466.

TABLE 2			
People Known/Believed Buried in River Road Moses Cemetery			
Year	Name	Death/Burial Date	Source
1928	Sarah Jane Greene (Green)	September 1928	B
1929	Charles R. Brown	February 1929	A
1929	Lucy Harper	February 1929	B
1930	Lydia Burgin	March 1930	B
1935	Cora Botts	February 1935	A,B
Key: A-Death Certificate B-Death Notice BOLD -Moses Cemetery named in source. L. Paige Whitley contributed source material to create this table. Whitley’s research has identified several individuals who were River Road residents whose deaths antedate White’s Tabernacle’s purchase of the land in 1911 and whose death records simply indicate that they were buried in “River Road” or “Bethesda.” Though it is possible they were buried at the site, there is no cartographic or other evidence to support that the parcel was used as a cemetery prior to White’s Tabernacle’s purchase.			

Jeremiah and Cora Botts

Only a small number of burials in the River Road Moses Cemetery were reported in Washington newspapers. Of the seven people identified through newspaper death notices, the first (1912) and last (1935) were a married couple who spent much of their lives in Washington’s Reno community. Cora Parker (1863-1935) married Jeremiah “Jerry” Botts (1850-1912) in Washington in sometime after the Civil War; both were Virginia natives. Her mother, Letitia Parker, in 1880 bought a parcel from Eliza Hepburn. In 1897, the District of Columbia seized the quarter-acre property for delinquent taxes.¹⁸⁶

Very little documentary evidence has survived that can shed light on the Botts family. There are conflicting dates for their marriage (the 1900 census indicates that they were married in 1887 and a District of Columbia marriage record cited in Ancestry.com has a Jerry Botts marrying Cora Parker in 1873). Other conflicting historical information includes an 1880 census schedule that shows Cora Botts as a servant living with the Solyom family in River Road.¹⁸⁷

The most conclusive information available for Cora and Jeremiah Botts appears around the turn of the twentieth century. By then, the couple were living in a small frame house on the south side of Grant Street in the Reno subdivision. Jeremiah appeared in several published sources: Washington city directories capture his residence in Reno and reports listing District and federal employees identify him as a janitor in Washington schools.¹⁸⁸ The most detailed published information on Jeremiah Botts comes from newspaper articles published in 1903 following his arrest in Reno. According to articles published in the *Washington Post* and *Evening Star*, Jeremiah was arrested under a new District law that attached higher penalties for breaking and

¹⁸⁶ Edwards v. White (Equity Case No. 52197).

¹⁸⁷ Her name is spelled “Corra Botts” in the census schedule.

¹⁸⁸ These documents have been digitized and are archived on Ancestry.com.

entering a house at night. The “house” Botts allegedly burgled was a henhouse on Grant Road belonging to George Sharp, a white property owner. Sharp told police that Botts had stolen five chickens. The newspapers reported that Botts was a janitor in “one of the colored schools” who “lives in the Reno subdivision” and that he was a “church member.” The judge hearing the case fined Jeremiah \$20 and sentenced him to two months in jail.¹⁸⁹

The next time that Jeremiah Botts appears in the documentary record it was in 1910 when he made his mark as a trustee on the White’s Tabernacle corporate charter filed with the District government. Botts appears to have become a Moses trustee after the order’s acquisition of the Washington cemetery lot in 1880 and its lodge property in 1885 in Reno. He and Cora lived a short two-block walk from the original cemetery site and their home was about a third of a mile from the lodge hall and Rock Creek Baptist Church. Two years after White’s Tabernacle received its corporate charter, Jeremiah Botts died at his home on Grant Street. The death notice published in the *Washington Evening Star* announced that Rev. William Armistead Jones officiated at the funeral held at Rock Creek Baptist Church and that Botts was buried at “Moses Cemetery, Friendship Heights, Md.”¹⁹⁰

Cora Botts remained in Washington for a decade after her husband died. At least two people interviewed in the 1970s for the Reno Community Oral History project recalled Cora. A transcribed exchange between Eddie Dixon and August Moore, who were interviewed August 2, 1977, at Rock Creek Baptist Church captured the pair discussing early residents and Cora Botts was one of the many early residents who Moore conceded, “They’re all gone.”¹⁹¹

Instead of moving to another part of Washington like many of Reno’s African American residents, many of them displaced by the federal government, Cora Botts moved to River Road and sold her Tenleytown home in Grant Street (now Fessenden Street).¹⁹² It was a natural decision: many of her blood kin and husband’s kin already lived there and she had lived there as a young woman. In January 1922, Cora paid \$200 cash for a 10,000-square-foot lot on the east side of River Road, on the north side of what is now known as Dorsey Lane and abutting the Somerset Heights subdivision.¹⁹³ Cora’s lot was the last in a ten-lot unrecorded subdivision called “Friendship.” Six months later, Cora’s nephew Cassius Parker and his wife Eliza moved from Washington to the small Friendship subdivision when they bought lots six and seven.¹⁹⁴

Cora Botts was 59 years old when she moved to River Road. She didn’t appear in the 1930 census and no evidence beyond Montgomery County land records and her will, prepared in 1931, appears to have survived. In her will, Cora wrote that she lived “near River Road.” She left her home to Cassius and Eliza Parker and small amounts of money to her nephews and nieces (ten

¹⁸⁹ “Admitted He Stole Chickens,” *Washington Evening Star*, 1903 January 19; “School Janitor a Prisoner.: Jeremiah Botts Arrested for Robbing a Tennallytown Henroost,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1903.

¹⁹⁰ Jeremiah Botts death notice, *Washington Evening Star*, June 28, 1912.

¹⁹¹ Interview at Rock Creek Baptist Church, Folder 7, The Reno Neighborhood Project Records, 1977. MS 483, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

¹⁹² District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 4841, folio 304.

¹⁹³ Liber 312, folio 291.

¹⁹⁴ Liber 318, folio 280.

dollars each); she also left ten dollars to her great-nephew Harrison Parker and her great-niece, Aline Parker Dorsey. Dorsey's three children received five dollars each.¹⁹⁵

Cora Botts died in her home Tuesday February 5, 1935. Reverend William A. Jones presided over her funeral at Rock Creek Baptist Church and she was buried in the River Road Moses Cemetery.¹⁹⁶ Cassius Parker remained in River Road until the 1950s. His wife, Eliza, died in 1933 and he remarried. In 1945, Cassius and his second wife sold Cora's homesite to George E. Chinn (1914-1989) and Novella Viola Chinn, an African American couple from Northwest Washington who had married three years prior; the Chinns paid \$1,000 for the property.¹⁹⁷ By the 1950s, George Chinn was working as a laborer for the Montgomery County Roads Department and Cora Botts' former home had a formal address: 5528 Dorsey Lane.¹⁹⁸ The Chinn marriage disintegrated in the 1960s and they sold the Dorsey Lane property in 1964 to William C. and Jean C. Miller for \$18,000.¹⁹⁹ William Miller died in 1978 and Jean died in 2008. In 2014, after the Miller estate was settled, title to the property was transferred to their heirs, who continue to own the property, which is assessed at \$1,233,933.²⁰⁰

Nearly a century after Cora bought the Dorsey Lane lot, the property remains a distinct legal Montgomery County parcel. Like much of the other Black-owned and occupied properties in River Road, the property was converted to industrial use. A metal-clad warehouse currently occupies 5528 Dorsey Lane. Back in the former Reno subdivision, the Botts's homesite in Grant Street was demolished when the federal government converted the Reno subdivision into parklands and school sites for the growing white suburbs. Cora sold the property in 1923 to Charles A. Jones, a real estate speculator who during the 1920s assembled large blocks of properties in Reno which he then sold to the U.S. government. In 1931, Jones sold the former Botts property to the United States for \$1,446.38.²⁰¹

The Botts and Parker family stories are typical of River Road's residents. Cora and Jeremiah Botts's extended kin included members of the Clipper and Dorsey families. Clustered in the small space on either side of Dorsey Lane, their numbers and prominence even confused other residents. Jean Smith Seagears recalled the people who lived near her father's bar. "There was the Dorseys and then there was Miss Suzie Matthews. And there was another house right there

¹⁹⁵ Cora Botts Will. Montgomery County Register of Wills, Will Book HGC 5, page 490.

¹⁹⁶ Cora Botts death notice, *Washington Evening Star*, February 6, 1935. The death notice indicates that Cora died Monday February 4; her will, which was stored in her executor's office safe after it was executed in 1931, was recorded February 12, 1935 and it records her death as February 5, 1935. Cora might have died at night and her body might not have been discovered until the following day, hence the discrepancy in death dates.

¹⁹⁷ Liber 968, folio 139.

¹⁹⁸ R.L. Polk & Co., *Polk's Silver Spring, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Kensington, Takoma Park and Wheaton (Montgomery County) City Directory* (Richmond, Va.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1948), 156.

¹⁹⁹ Deed recorded at Liber 3186, folio 124 and mortgage recorded at Liber 3186, folio 125.

²⁰⁰ Liber 49645, folio 47; Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation.

²⁰¹ District of Columbia Land Records, Liber 4841, folio 304 (Botts to Jones); Liber 6532, folio 275 (Jones to United States). The 1923 transaction from Botts to Jones was a sale for \$10 and no mortgage appears to have been recorded so it is unclear how much Cora Botts actually received in the transaction. Jones and his first wife, Marie, were active in D.C. real estate for much of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1933, Jones was appointed to head the District's Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) bureau. This was the same entity that originated the practice of redlining. "Home Loan Office Manager for Capital Assumes Duties," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1933; "Charles A. Jones Dies; Former HOLC Official," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1958.

across from, I'm trying to visualize — the Parkers. The Parkers,” she recalled in 2018. “After I asked about the Cassius Parker family, she explained,

They were the Dorsey family. Cassius [Parker] was the Dorsey — see, Cassius [Parker], I mean I'm sorry, Cassius Dorsey, James Dorsey, Eliza Dorsey, and they had another sister. I can't remember what was her name. Charity! They were Dorseys and Mr. James Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, they called him, that was their father because their mother died and he married another lady.²⁰²

Seagears recalled the Parkers' home in Dorsey Lane, but it's unclear whether she was referring to the home Cassius and Eliza lived in since 1922 or the one that Cassius and his second wife inherited from Cora Botts. “The Parkers lived way down here. The Parkers lived there. They had a big house, I mean a huge house. That's the Parkers' house,” Seagears said.



Figure 27. Former Cora Botts homesite, Dorsey Lane.

Charles H. Brown

A death notice published in the *Washington Evening Star* reported that Cabin John resident and founding White's Tabernacle trustee Charles H. Brown had died at age 71 and that he would be buried at the “Moses Cemetery, Friendship, Md.” following a funeral at Rock Creek Baptist Church.²⁰³ Brown was a Virginia native and in 1885 he bought four acres in Montgomery County in a community then known as Carderock, north of the C&O Canal and Potomac River. Brown lived there with his first wife, Christina (whom he married in Washington in 1857). After

²⁰² Jean Smith Seagears Interview, May 5, 2018. During our conversation Seagears repeatedly referred to Cassius Parker as “Cassius Clay”; the confusion may be due to her brother's professional boxing career and Seagears having the name Cassius Clay fixed in her mind.

²⁰³ *Washington Evening Star*, September 11, 1912. The Loughborough family's segregationist leanings were fully revealed in family memoirs published by James Loughborough's wife. Loughborough, *The Recollections of Margaret Cabell Brown Loughborough*.

she died in the 1890s, U.S. Census records show Brown living on the property with his adopted daughter, Lena. In 1911, Brown married another Cabin John resident, Emma Jones, in Washington.

Brown's will, drafted in 1905, split his real estate among Lena and her half-brother, Charles H. Brown Jr. The will directed that his land be halved, with Lena receiving the portion with Brown's house and an outbuilding; Lena also inherited all of the home's furniture. Rev. William A. Jones witnessed Brown's will.²⁰⁴ Brown's modest estate included the Seven Locks Road property; \$53 in household goods that went to Brown's son; and, farming implements worth \$43.75. Emma Jones Brown received \$75 in items, including a dining table and five chairs; kitchenware, bedroom furniture; a horse and six chickens; plows and wagons; and, about 20 bushels of potatoes and 200 pounds of meat. Brown left no cash assets and his heirs had to mortgage the property to pay his debts.²⁰⁵

Lena lived on the property on and off until 1941. Her half-brother Charles, in 1927, was involuntarily committed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital after being diagnosed schizophrenic and declared criminally insane by a District of Columbia court.²⁰⁶ Lena worked as a domestic in private homes and in the Cabin John Bridge Hotel. Not wanting to live alone in Seven Locks Road, Lena rented the property out at various times, sometimes staying there with the tenant.

In a remarkable turn of events, Lena Brown's story was preserved due to Rev. Jones' failure to pay Montgomery County taxes on the property in the 1930s. Montgomery County in 1937 seized the property and two years later sold it for the back taxes (\$31.13) to Lilly C. Stone, a wealthy quarry owner and a founder of the Montgomery County Historical Society. Brown sued Stone in Montgomery County court in 1940 to recover the four acres that were worth four thousand dollars. The case was resolved in the summer of 1941 but by that time the U.S. government was moving forward with plans to build housing for defense workers in Cabin John.

The government needed to house workers for the nearby David Taylor Model Basin, which opened in 1939 and other facilities. The plan was to build 100 homes for white employees and another 20 for African Americans. The white homes were constructed in a subdivision the government called Cabin John Gardens. The African American homes were slated for Brown's property in a subdivision called Seven Locks Terrace.²⁰⁷ Brown came to terms with the government and sold the property for \$4,500. After the sale was concluded, the government hired contractors to begin construction on the new subdivision. According to a front-page story in the *Baltimore Afro American*, though, the contractors didn't wait for Brown to move out of her home and they burned it down with Brown's belongings still in it.²⁰⁸

The new subdivision was managed by the United States Public Housing Administration. During the war, it housed defense workers. After the war, the homes were rented to veterans. Under the

²⁰⁴ Montgomery County Register of Wills, Will Book H.C.A. 14, folio 137.

²⁰⁵ Montgomery County Register of Wills, Administration Book H.C.A. 13, folio 304; Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 233, folio 402, \$200 mortgage from the Hyattsville Building Association of Hyattsville, Maryland, to "Lena Brown, unmarried, Charles R. Brown and Lenora Brown, his wife, and Emma Jones Brown, widow."

²⁰⁶ District of Columbia Lunacy Docket, Lunacy No. 11773, June 24, 1927.

²⁰⁷ Montgomery County Land Records, Plat No. 2070.

²⁰⁸ "Contractors Raze Home as Elderly Woman Looks On," *Afro-American; Baltimore, Md.*, October 18, 1941.

Lanham Act, which required the government to sell its surplus war housing, the homes were sold to individuals, some of whom had been renters in the subdivision. Seven Locks Terrace had just one one-way horseshoe-shaped street named Carver Road connecting to Seven Locks Road. Its residents after the war included members of the White family, longtime residents whose family had ties going back decades to the Gibson Grove Moses Order and Gibson Grove A.M.E. Church. Several of the homes were bought by members of the extended White family.



Figure 28. *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 18, 1941.

Lena Brown didn't stay away from her father's property for long. One of the people who lived in one of the government houses was a friend: Annie Bell.²⁰⁹ According to a history of Cabin John, Lena moved in with her friend and lived in the home at 12 Carver Road until the mid-1970s. Lena Brown died in Rockville in 1980 at the age of 108. She had become Cabin John's oldest living resident.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Annie Bell lived in the home with her first husband, Charles W. Darden. She remained in the home after her divorce and marriage to a second husband. At the time she died, she was known as Annie B. Hughes.

²¹⁰ Elizabeth Kytle, *Time Was: A Cabin John Memory Book: Interviews with 18 Old-Timers* (Cabin John, Md: Cabin John Citizens' Association, 1976), 1-3.



*Figure 29. Lena Brown. Photo published in Time was:
a Cabin John memory book: interviews with 18 old-timers (1976).*

Macedonia Baptist Church

Macedonia Baptist Church was established in 1920 (Figure 30). The church began as mission associated with Rockville's Mount Calvary Baptist Church and its first meetings were held in founding members' homes.²¹¹ The new church's first pastor was Rev. William Mason (1880-1948). Mason's family has a long history in Montgomery County, especially in the African American community of Scotland located along Seven Locks Road south of Rockville. In 1886, Noah Mason acquired nine acres and Augustus Mason acquired six acres along the east side of Seven Locks Road. The transactions were executed to settle a substantial estate with conflicting heirs.²¹² Over the course of the twentieth century, the Mason family played significant roles in

²¹¹ Macedonia Baptist Church, *Macedonia Baptist Church 1920-2011: A History of the Little Church on the Hill* (Bethesda, Maryland: Macedonia Baptist Church, 2011), 2; Clarke, *History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.*, 140-41.

²¹² Montgomery County Equity Case No. 313, Evan A. Jones, et al. v. Emily H. Jones and Nannie Eugenia Jones; Montgomery County Land Records, Liber JA 3, folios 490 and 492.

Montgomery County history, especially in the 1960s and 1970s when the county was poised to dismantle the Scotland community under the auspices of its Community Renewal Program.²¹³



Figure 30. Macedonia Baptist Church, November 2017.

William A. Mason was Augustus Mason's son. In the early twentieth century, William appears to have been married to a woman named Mary. By the time Mason assumed his ministerial duties with Macedonia Baptist Church, he may have been widowed or divorced. The 1930 U.S. Census shows Mason living as a boarder in Rockville's Lincoln Park neighborhood; his occupation was listed as "Baptist Minister." In the mid-1930s Mason appears to have married Rockville resident Amanda Prather (1898-1979) and the couple moved to the Mason family's Seven Locks Road property, then owned by Geneva Mason.²¹⁴

²¹³ Scotland was one of 65 "Problem Areas" Montgomery County leaders identified in the 1960s. "The Community Renewal Program is a method to identify, measure and evaluate, the total need for renewal action in the community to eliminate blight and prevent future deterioration," City Planning Associates and Montgomery County (Md.), eds., *Montgomery County Community Renewal Program, Maryland, R-39 (CR): Final Report* ([Falls Church, VA? The Associates, 1969), 1.

²¹⁴ U.S. Census, 1930 and 1940 population schedules; *Atlas of Montgomery County, Maryland, from Official Plans and Records and Actual Surveys* (Lansdale, 1948).

The Seven Locks Road property, though well removed from Reno and from River Road, appears to have figured in Reno residents' efforts to find cemetery land outside of the District of Columbia. In 1900, Reno resident Rosa Botts Campbell purchased five acres along Seven Locks Road in the parcel north of the Masons' land. Campbell is identified in legal instruments as a trustee acting on behalf of the "Tribe of Old Folks Willing Workers Club Number 1 of Reno." Though the deeds clearly identify the entity as a District of Columbia corporation, there are no records of such an entity incorporated in the District of Columbia. Campbell held the property, for which she received a \$100 mortgage, until December 1911 when she sold it to Lewis Burley.²¹⁵

Campbell was born Rosa Botts in Centreville, Virginia, in 1885. She married Isaac Campbell in Washington in 1885. Her father, William Botts, appears to have been related to White's Tabernacle trustee Jeremiah Botts. Rosa lived in Northwest Washington in the first quarter of the twentieth century and she owned property in the Reno subdivision, some of which was condemned in 1929 to build the Alice Deal Middle School.²¹⁶ Campbell's ties to the Botts family and Reno, coupled with the timing of the 1900 purchase and 1911 sale, suggest that Campbell may have been scouting cemetery sites in Montgomery County as suburban encroachment squeezed African Americans living in Northwest Washington.

Working as a Baptist minister didn't pay the bills in Mason's family. The 1940 census identified Mason as the manager of a trash hauling business. Longtime Bethesda residents told local historian William Offutt that they recalled Mason. One person quipped that the Baptist minister was trusted on their properties, "You never worried when he went down in the basement to get your trash."²¹⁷

In 1928, Mason acquired a lot in what is now downtown Bethesda on the south side of Elm Street, west of today's Wisconsin Avenue. "That's where that church got started," wrote William Offutt. "Will Mason used to be up there in Miller's Flats, built a church ... It was a house Church, but they raised the roof and put a steeple on."²¹⁸ Mason never transferred the title to the property to Macedonia's trustees and he sold the lot in 1945.

Around the same time that Mason moved back to Seven Locks Road, Macedonia Baptist Church bought its first real estate in River Road. In May 1937, the church bought seven tenths of an acre that was originally part of William A. Jones' property. The small parcel was bounded by the Moses Cemetery on the south and River Road on the north. The church remained in that location until 1945 when it bought a small parcel at the intersection of River Road and Clipper Lane.

The new location on the other side of River Road was south of the B&O Railroad and in the core of the River Road community. According to a summary of Macedonia Baptist Church's history, the organization's early records were lost in 1946 in a fire and the reasons for the move have

²¹⁵ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber TD 9, folio 398; Liber 224, folio 370.

²¹⁶ District of Columbia marriage index, Ancestry.com; U.S. Census population schedule, 1900; Condemnation of lots notice, *Washington Evening Star*, April 29, 1929.

²¹⁷ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 320.

²¹⁸ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 462, folio 218; Offutt, 288–89. The Elm Avenue lot is identified in legal instruments as Lot 117 in Miller's Addition to Bethesda. According to existing land records, that was an unrecorded plat.

been forgotten by the descendant community and contemporary church leaders.²¹⁹ The new location where the church has remained had been purchased in 1943 by William E. Smith, owner of the nearby Sugar Bowl beer garden. Two years later, Smith sold the property to Mason for \$1,700; one day later, Mason transferred the title to Macedonia Baptist Church.²²⁰

Macedonia's congregation converted a one-story rectangular wood-frame dwelling into a church building with a sanctuary on the main floor and a basement social hall. While the building was being converted, the congregation worshipped at a sister church, First Baptist of nearby Ken-Gar. The cooperative relationship reinforced the network forged among communities in the DC-MD Black Borderlands. In subsequent years, Macedonia, the Ken-Gar Church, Lyttonsville's Pilgrim Baptist Church, Lee's Memorial A.M.E (Ken-Gar), and Allen Chapel A.M.E. formed the United Singing Convention of Montgomery County.²²¹ Founded in 1953, this group continues to meet in the member churches every fifth Sunday.

“One of the ministers would preach and each one of the churches would sing two selections, close out the service and go home,” explained Harvey Matthews. “And the next month, it would come to Macedonia. And when you come to your church, you bring a banner in here and hang it up with those five churches on it. Called the Singing Convention.”

Residents in other Montgomery County African American hamlets recalled the trips to Macedonia. “We used to go over there when my mom and them was living in their early days. They used to go over there to the singing convention,” said Nancy Hyson Johnson, a former Wheaton Lane resident and a relative of White's Tabernacle founder John Hyson. Johnson and much of her family belonged to Allen Chapel A.M.E., a church founded near Wheaton just after Reconstruction.²²²

Pastor Ella Redfield also attended Allen Chapel. Her extended family had lived in Wheaton Lane and Lyttonsville since the turn of the twentieth century. “That place is still the same,” Redfield said of Macedonia. Her mother was a singing convention member who would go to Bethesda every fifth Sunday.²²³

Macedonia Baptist Church is the last surviving African American institution in River Road. Its aging members recalled the church's history for a book published in 2011. The book noted milestones in the church's history and how they related to local, regional, and national events, from wars to the civil rights movement: “For well over 100 years ... there have been African

²¹⁹ Clarke, *History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.*, 140.

²²⁰ Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 963, folio 422 (Smith to Mason); Liber 963, folio 427 (Mason to Macedonia). Mason obtained the mortgage (Liber 963, folio 425) on behalf of the church from Walter Perry, Dr. Benjamin Perry's brother and business partner. The Perrys wielded significant power in Montgomery County politics and there is anecdotal evidence that they supported some of Smith's activities that were inconsistent with Montgomery County law, e.g., bootlegging and numbers gambling. Walter Perry was a Bethesda storekeeper who had a reputation for antagonizing his society-conscious peers, Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 317.

²²¹ Clarke, *History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.*, 27–28, 140–41; Macedonia Baptist Church, *Macedonia Baptist Church 1920-2011: A History of the Little Church on the Hill*, 86–87.

²²² Nancy Hyson Johnson interview with David Rotenstein, May 1, 2018.

²²³ Ella Redfield is the pastor of New Creation Baptist Church. After being ordained, Redfield bought the Allen Chapel property after the A.M.E. church moved farther out in Montgomery County.

Americans in the River Road community. We know that many were members of the Macedonia congregation since 1920.”²²⁴

Social and Economic Life in River Road

In the early twentieth century, River Road transitioned from an agricultural community into a Washington suburb defined by its proximity to the capital city. River Road provided automobile access into the District and new streetcar lines filled the gap for those without cars. Streetcar lines that opened around the turn of the twentieth century opened the area up to additional suburbanization.

River Road’s Black residents found work in nearby quarries and construction, along the C&O Canal, and in government jobs. The women living in River Road initially worked as domestic servants in white households — living in and living out²²⁵ — and by taking in laundry. Later in the twentieth century, River Road’s women found work in Bethesda restaurants and in a growing number of small retail establishments that sprouted along River Road. Some of River Road’s men had sufficient capital to become entrepreneurs and they operated businesses out of their homes.²²⁶ As white country clubs opened nearby, many young men found work as caddies and groundskeepers. And, River Road supported a colorful and thriving informal economy with liquor sales, numbers gambling, scavenging, and off-the-books jobs that helped the residents make ends meet in Jim Crow Montgomery County. Unlike River Road’s white residents like the Loughboroughs, none of the community’s African American residents wrote memoirs or left known written accounts of life in the community. To understand their lives, the written record created by whites and interviews with people who only experienced the community as children offer the only available sources.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century River Road community mirrored other Montgomery County African American hamlets. Though the residential subdivisions developed on its margins got utility infrastructure (water, sewerage, gas, electricity, paved streets), River Road experienced the same environmental racism as Lyttonsville, Wheaton Lane, Tobytown, and Scotland. Former resident Harvey Matthews, who grew up in River Road in the early 1950s, recalls that his family had water because his family’s home was located next to the racially restricted Kenwood subdivision. “White folks lived in there so you know they had running water,” Matthews said in 2017.

Some Black River Road families had wells; others relied on area springs for fresh water. “The Clippers, most of these houses back here were springs and wells, that’s how they got their water,” Matthews explained. Frank Lancaster, a contemporary of Matthews also recalled growing up without water at first. Sometime before his family moved into Washington in the

²²⁴ Macedonia Baptist Church, *Macedonia Baptist Church 1920-2011: A History of the Little Church on the Hill*, 6.

²²⁵ See Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living in, Living out: African American Domesticity in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

²²⁶ Felicia Bridget George, “Numbers And Neighborhoods: Seeking And Selling The American Dream In Detroit One Bet At A Time” (Dissertation, Wayne State University, 2015); LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City’s Underground Economy*, The New Black Studies Series (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016); Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

1950s, he recalled having an outdoors privy and no running water or electricity. “Everything at first was all oil lamps, you know. A well. It took a while to get all that in, but eventually it came about but didn’t have it from the get-go. No,” Lancaster recalled in early 2018.

The Lancasters lived in the southern portion of the 5100 block of River Avenue and the Matthews family lived in the 5200 block. Both families have ties in Bethesda going back to the early twentieth century. Their memories are among the few sources for primary accounts of African American life in River Road. Harvey Matthews and Frank Lancaster grew up believing that their parents owned the properties where they lived.

Frank Lancaster said, “As far as I know of, they owned the property.” And Matthews said, “My grandfather, you know, he owned the land and whatnot and that was that, pretty much. They owned that property.” Matthews’ maternal grandfather, James Christian, lived in River Road before his parents, Milton and Grace moved onto the land near the B&O Railroad tracks. Real estate atlases published in the mid-twentieth century name individuals other than the Christian or Matthews families as the landowners; Montgomery County land records covering the time Matthews lived in River Road also identify others as the land’s owners.

“I thought Pop owned that property. I mean that’s the way I was — me being a kid and whatnot, I didn’t — all I had was a place to sleep and whatever, played with the dogs and horses and chickens,” Matthews replied when I asked about the discrepancies between his memories and the official records. “I always thought that Pop had owned that and I know that he moved in D.C., way long before we left there.”

Matthews passionately tells people who ask about River Road’s history how African American families lost their homes. “So we lived pretty good until it came time for the developers to start beating the people out of their homes,” Matthews said. He described white realtors and developers using alcohol to trick African Americans into giving up their land:

Man, you see the white man come and got Ollie all high and got him drunk and got him to sign the papers. You know, Mr. Ollie didn’t have no education, man he just told him to put an X on the paper and he’d take care of the rest of his life ... That’s the way it basically went down. My grandfather wasn’t old enough to know what the transaction when he sold the property or how much we got for the property and whatnot.

The points where memories conflict with legal land records may be reconciled by understanding twentieth century real estate practices. It is likely that families in River Road and elsewhere in Montgomery County who believed that they owned their land were victimized by a scam called land-installment contracts or simply contract sales. In this system prospective Black homebuyers unable to get conventional mortgages and excluded from many areas by redlining entered rent-to-own agreements. These predatory agreements inflated the property values forcing African Americans to pay for properties that whites could buy for substantially less. African Americans

caught up in this system were vulnerable to evictions for any reason and they had few legal alternatives.²²⁷

Racialized land use policies that relied on racially restrictive deed covenants and redlining concentrated poverty in communities like River Road. Racially restrictive deed covenants were used in Montgomery County since at least 1905 when southern Virginia real estate speculator Robert H. Easley began attaching them to properties in his Silver Spring subdivisions. Easley had consolidated 67 acres of formerly agricultural land to create his first subdivision simply described as a “Map of Building Sites for Sale at Silver Spring.” Easley’s deeds prohibited buyers from subsequently selling or renting the properties to anyone of “African descent.”²²⁸

Other real estate speculators and developers quickly followed Easley’s lead. These included some of Montgomery County’s most prominent white citizens: E. Brooke Lee, Sam Eig, and the Gudelsky family. By the 1920s, racially restricted residential subdivisions had spread throughout the county. In Bethesda, these included the Kenwood subdivision created in 1928 immediately north of the River Road community. Restrictive covenants in Kenwood bound buyers to never sell, rent, or otherwise allow to occupy the properties “any person or persons other than those of the Caucasian race.”²²⁹

To the south of the River Road community, the W.C. and A.N. Miller firms had bought up substantial amounts of formerly agricultural land to convert into residential subdivisions in Northwest Washington and neighboring Montgomery County. W.C. and A.N. Miller gained national attention as one of the most discriminatory real estate entities relying on racially restrictive deed covenants long after the United States Supreme Court in 1948 ruled the instruments unenforceable in the landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* case. Unlike most Washington area real estate firms, however, Miller’s racial and ethnic exclusion was all-encompassing. Their deed covenants and contracts typically included this language:

No part of the land hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by, or sold, demised, transferred, conveyed unto, or in trust for, leased, or rented, or given, to negroes, or person or persons of negro blood or extraction, or to any persons of the Semitic race, blood, or origin, which racial description shall be deemed to include Armenians, Jews, Hebrews, Persians and Syrians, except that this paragraph shall not be held to exclude partial occupancy of the premises by domestic servants ...²³⁰

²²⁷ James Alan McPherson, “‘In My Father’s House There Are Many Mansions, and I’m Going to Get Me Some of Them Too!’ The Story of the Contract Buyers League,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1972; Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 99–101; Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 96–99.

²²⁸ Montgomery County Land Records, Plat No. 54 recorded January 23, 1904; a typical Easley deed was filed in Liber 182, folio 113. The deed was executed April 20, 1905 for a lot in the subdivision recorded in the 1904.

²²⁹ A typical Kenwood deed was filed in Liber 458, folio 377 of the Montgomery County land records (May 1, 1928).

²³⁰ Typical Miller deed covenant recorded in an instrument for a property in the firm’s Sumner subdivision near River Road executed June 11, 1947. Montgomery County Land Records, Liber 1082, folio 245.

By the 1950s and the emergence of a national civil rights movement, the Miller firm's practices were publicly exposed after it tried to secure urban renewal contracts in Washington. Wealthy residents in the District's Spring Valley neighborhood mounted a vigorous resistance that included B'nai Brith's Anti-Defamation League and then-vice-president Richard Nixon who claimed that he unwittingly signed an exclusive Miller contract.²³¹

In 1959, the Miller firm and Kenwood were singled out in testimony before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. "In suburban Montgomery County, Md., Jews are barred from Sunner, developed and controlled by W.C. and A.N. Miller," Eugene Sugarman testified on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League. "In the Kenwood Section, a 'gentleman's agreement' exists which prevents Jews from acquiring property."²³²

"When I was a kid, I thought there was no other major builder in Montgomery County but W.C. Miller," said Harvey Matthews in a 2018 interview. Not only did the Miller firms discriminate against potential homebuyers, according to Matthews they also extended that discrimination to their hiring practices:

And I know back during those times, W.C. Miller, to me, my personal opinion about it, because he didn't hire blacks to do any of his painting or any of his home remodeling or building his homes while he was building his homes. It was very scarce that you seen a black man in his workforce. And I learned, listening to older folks, older than me at the time, that W.C. Miller was a real prejudiced guy. He was prejudiced towards blacks.

Many of River Road's residents understood and expected the housing discrimination. Miller's hiring practices, though, compared to other Montgomery County builders, was puzzling. "We couldn't afford any of his homes or nothing like that," Matthews explained. "But every once in a while we thought that we could do some of his labor work and that was rare because he didn't maintain a black workforce or blacks in his workforce back during that time."

Not all River Road residents were poor. Offutt's Bethesda history recounts the stories of two middle-class entrepreneurial residents, Pinkney Hatton and William E. Smith. Both men lived on the north side of the 5100 block of River Road, south of the B&O Railroad tracks. Hatton was in transportation, hauling for a supermarket chain and running a taxi business.²³³ His son told William Offutt about the family's mail-order catalog home: a two-story four-square with a coal furnace and a basement where bootleggers stored liquor. Like their neighbors, the Hattons had no water and sewerage and they drew water from a well. Harvey Matthews recalled that Pinkney Hatton made regular trips into West Virginia. Hatton returned with "tomatoes and all the greens and everything back and everybody would cook their dinners for chicken and church would have service and dinners and everything else."

²³¹ Jean White, "3 Prominent Residents Of Spring Valley Balked Over Racial Covenants," *The Washington Post*, February 2, 1957.

²³² United States Commission on Civil Rights Civil Rights, "Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Housing" (1959), 411, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001345608>.

²³³ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 247.

Offutt's history offers a racialized view into River Road's informal economy. Like most urban and rural African American communities, River Road had a vibrant informal economy. There were bootleggers, numbers men and women, and others who made their living off the books. These enterprises were not officially recognized and they frequently operated in conflict with established laws. The informal economy played a critical role in Black communities where access to banking, entertainment, employment, and essential services was constrained by structural racism. Former River Road resident Frank Lancaster eloquently explained how things worked in Montgomery County's African American communities. "We had what we called the four pillars in the neighborhood," Lancaster said in early 2018.

The four pillars of the neighborhood was: schoolteachers, doctor, preacher, and the numbers man. Because [the] numbers man, a lot of people need money for something, especially those that was running and wasn't buying, you know, ones paying the notes. Or, was buying and was paying house notes — you know, was running short, the numbers man would take care of it. He was like a banker to a certain degree.²³⁴

Though much of the informal economy was hidden and left few traces, one African American business in River Road bridged the gap separating licit and illicit activities. That business was entrepreneur William E. Smith's Sugar Bowl beer garden. Offutt presented Smith's establishment as a caricature of Black life, a place run by a bootlegger, gambler, and someone who facilitated "sex parties." Offutt had interviewed Cleveland Clipper and Pinkney Hatton, both of whom highlighted the more salacious aspects of Smith's business, and he relied on press accounts documenting efforts by white neighbors to shut the Sugar Bowl.²³⁵

William E. Smith (1899-1947) was a Frederick County native. His daughter believes that Smith was born near Ijamsville and moved to Montgomery County as a driver for Dr. Benjamin Perry (1881-1943), who moved Bethesda in 1919.²³⁶ In the early 1930s, Smith married Mary C. Crockett (1913-). Jean Smith Seagars recalled that her parents were living in Bethesda when her older brother was born in 1931. "I heard my parents talk about it. They had a little store in Bethesda, somewhere near Howard Road, up in that area," Seagars said in 2018.²³⁷ Seagars was born in 1933 in Washington's Freedman's Hospital and the first home that she remembers was in River Road.

Smith in 1929 bought a .691-acre parcel, formerly part of John Burley's land, north of River Road and in 1940 he subdivided it into house lots.²³⁸ He also bought a small lot near the B&O Railroad where he opened his Sugar Bowl restaurant and bar on the first floor of an existing home; his family used the second story as their living quarters. Jean Smith Seagers still remembers the building:

²³⁴ Frank Lancaster, Interview, March 6, 2018.

²³⁵ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 249.

²³⁶ Janet Davis, "Dr. Benjamin C. Perry House," Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form (Crownsville, Md.: Maryland Historical Trust, 1993), <https://mht.maryland.gov/secure/medusa/PDF/Frederick/F-7-35.pdf>; Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 249.

²³⁷ Jean Smith Seagars, Interview, May 18, 2018.

²³⁸ Montgomery County Land Records, Plat No. 1294.

It was storefront. It had windows on each side, the windows that came out, you know they bulged out, and the door in the middle. And it was, you go inside and was like opening — it was very large, opening. He had a jukebox sitting in the middle like, in the middle of the back of the store ...

We lived upstairs over the top so I guess the establishment, the business, was downstairs and the living quarters was upstairs. We had three bedrooms on the front, dining room, a kitchen, and on the side was another bedroom. And we had — the porch ran, it was like alongside the home, you know.

And then we had the backyard where the outhouse was and it used to be a chain. That was for the establishment. But we had an indoor potty and we had running water in the home and gas and all like that and I guess because of the restaurant downstairs, we were able to be fortunate enough to have a gas stove and running water. But we didn't have inside toilet; we had bathroom, but it was the potty room because we would have to empty the potty — my mother would see that it was emptied every morning.

Seagers remembers her childhood growing up in the home over the bar. She walked to school at the River Road Colored School and the family attended Macedonia Baptist Church in its first location on the south side of River Road. "I remember it was like a little steeple. I think it was only one room and Miss Mary used to come and pick us up to take us to church, the lady who used to be the Sunday school teacher," she said. "Most all the children in the neighborhood, she would gather them and make sure they come to church on Sundays."

The Sugar Bowl sold beer by the bottle and food. "Potato salad, chitlins, pigs feet, fried fish, pork chops," Seagers recalled. The entire family chipped in to work behind the bar and in the dining room. Smith made enough money to employ a cook and a waitress; Seagers remembers that her mother also had a maid. "Her name was Miss Bea Wade," Seagers said.

The Smiths lived relatively comfortably compared to many of their neighbors who had to draw water from wells and who relied on coal and wood stoves for heating and cooking. Even at an early age (she moved away from River Road when she was ten years old), Seagers knew her family had more than their neighbors. "I wouldn't consider my father being wealthy," she said. "I didn't think he was wealthy or rich. I just thought he had a business. ... some of them had big homes but you know I would not say they were rich. I don't know, they might be saying they're wealthy, but he was well-off, you know."

As Clipper implied in his interview with Offutt half a century after the Sugar Bowl closed, Smith's establishment served more than beer and food. In some respects, as someone tied into local numbers gambling and other off-the-books enterprises, Smith was a sort of informal banker in the community. "My father was a short man with a good heart and a lot of people used to come there and borrow money from him," Seagers explained. "They'd have tabs there, [pay] it when they got paid, whatever. They'd come and pay their bills because I used to have to write them in the records that we kept."

Smith opened the Sugar Bowl just as more racially restricted residential subdivisions were encroaching on River Road and at the same time new businesses were opening in the increasingly industrial corridor. Smith's success plus the gambling, alcohol, and other activities that reportedly took place there likely didn't set well with his white neighbors.²³⁹ Washington newspapers reported in 1939 and 1943 that Smith faced steep opposition from nearby residents each time his license came before the Montgomery County Liquor Control Board.²⁴⁰ The Washington Star reported in April 1943 that a "large number of residents" filled a hearing room with about 100 people to oppose Smith's license. Complaints had been filed by the Kenwood Citizens' Association and the Green Acres Citizens' Association alleging disruptive behavior. The owners of the Briggs Clarifier Company, a plant located just off River Road, alleged that Smith was letting workers get drunk during lunch breaks; they made sure to let folks know that the company was a "war industry."²⁴¹

The complaints paid off. At the end of April 1943, the *Washington Star* reported that Smith's license renewal had been denied. "Action of the board is said to have been based on complaints."²⁴² The family had to move after Smith lost his license. "He lost his liquor license. I think that the white people might have had something to do with it," his daughter said. "I don't remember. Vaguely I remember my parents talking about it but I don't remember all the details about what because we never asked. We didn't want to move, but we had to move."

By the end of 1943, Smith bought another bar, this time on North Capitol Street in the District. Shortly after buying the place, he got a permit to repair the floors and booths already in place.²⁴³ He called his new establishment the Little Sugar Bowl. Smith died not too long after the move and his wife ran the bar for a little while before selling it. A succession of owners followed and the words "Sugar Bowl" remained in the business name until the mid-1960s.

As for the other River Road real estate Smith bought in 1929, he and his wife sold the remaining parcels in the 1940s. The subdivision retained its name until 1963 when it was consolidated with additional parcels to facilitate the construction of the Kenwood highrise apartments.

William Smith and Pinkney Hatton represented River Road's entrepreneurial middle class. Most of the community's residents had to rely on a combination of on- and off-the-books jobs to make ends meet. Published histories, tax records, and census schedules provide a narrow and incomplete view into River Road's economic life. While it is true that the nearby quarries and in early years, the canal, provided year-round and seasonal work, much of the community's income came from other sources. There was work in federal facilities, like the Navy's David Taylor Model Basin in Cabin John, and in such local government agencies as the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). Harvey Matthews' father Milton, for example, worked as a sanitation engineer for the WSSC. He also made money other ways. "My father trained hunting dogs for the white people in the area and he trained beagle hounds to hunt rabbits," Harvey

²³⁹ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 575.

²⁴⁰ "Maryland Grants Beer Licenses," *Washington Evening Star*, May 21, 1939; "Beer License Renewal Opposed in Bethesda," *Washington Evening Star*, April 1943.

²⁴¹ "Beer License Renewal Opposed in Bethesda."

²⁴² "Sugar Bowl Beer License Denied by Liquor Board," *Washington Evening Star*, April 27, 1943.

²⁴³ *Washington Star*, November 27, 1943.

Matthews recalled. “He trained coon dogs to hunt coons at night, when they hunted at night. And some of the dogs stayed in a kennel in the back of our house where we kept the dogs and the owners used to bring the food from like the Giant.”

In the early twentieth century, country clubs began appearing in the Washington suburbs. Though these institutions didn’t admit African Americans as members or players, Blacks could find gainful employment in them at all stages of their lives. Lewis Kinslow was 87 years old when I asked him about life in Cabin John. The African American man had lived in the community for 75 years. His first income came from collecting balls at the Burning Tree Country Club. As Kinslow got older, he began working as a caddy. After a stint in the military, he returned to caddying. After Burning Tree began admitting African Americans to play, Kinslow began playing there. When I spoke with him in the summer of 2018, his memory was failing and his daughter had to fill in a lot of details. She pointed to a living room wall lined with golfing trophies and another with photos of her father posing with such notables as President George W. Bush. At one point in our conversation, she went into another room and returned with a coffee table book published by the club titled, *The Honor Caddies of Burning Tree*. Her father’s picture was one of several on its cover.

Harvey Matthews recalls making his first money running errands for neighbors and doing odd jobs at Talbert’s Ice and Beverage store. He recalled that he could make thirty-five cents an hour separating bottles and fetching ice for customers. His mother also worked there and his father drove a truck part-time for the business. “The only thing I did other than that was caddy,” Matthews said in 2017. “That was my main income, was caddying.” That’s what Matthews did as a young man before his family moved from River Road in the late 1950s.

Frank Lancaster’s story is a lot like his friend, Harvey Matthews’. At first, he made pocket change collecting bottles. “Until we got old enough to go to the Kenwood and start caddying. That’s where I learned golf, by caddying at Kenwood,” Lancaster said. “I caddied for quite a few celebrities out there at Kenwood back in the day.” Lancaster attributes his broad shoulders to hefting as many as three golf bags at a time while he worked there, frequently hitchhiking up River Road to get to the club.

Like many of his contemporaries, including Lewis Kinslow and the men of other Montgomery County communities like Lyttonsville and Wheaton Lane, Matthews took advantage of the many country clubs in the region. “I caddied at Kenwood. Of all places, I could caddy there but I couldn’t play golf there but I could caddy there. Burning Tree and Congressional,” he explained.

Though during Jim Crow and for many years after, Montgomery County’s African American residents couldn’t join or play in the county’s many country clubs, the white golf world created an important social and economic network that has been documented elsewhere.²⁴⁴ William

²⁴⁴ Karen Crouse, “Treasure of Golf’s Sad Past, Black Caddies Vanish in Era of Riches,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2012, sec. Golf, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/sports/golf/from-a-symbol-of-segregation-to-a-victim-of-golfs-success.html>; Ken Denlinger, “Congressional Caddies: The Missing Links,” *Washington Post*, June 11, 1997, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/sports/1997/06/11/congressional-caddies-the-missing-links/7d959f95-0db4-4620-b2b0-4c19af2de943/>; Wornie Reed, “The Black Golf Caddy: A Victim of Labor Market Discrimination,” *Challenge* 14, no. 1 (July 6, 2016), <http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/challenge/vol14/iss1/5>.

Smith's Sugar Bowl added a new dimension to the economic role golf played in River Road. With Kenwood just up the road, the Sugar Bowl was just about the only nearby establishment catering to African Americans. "People used to come out there to caddy and they would stop in the club and sometimes they would come back and bring their wives and girlfriends, whatever, bring back because that was a hot spot and they used to come back," recalled Jean Smith Seagears.

The Sugar Bowl also catered to crowds coming to River Road Sunday afternoons for baseball games. Baseball, like churches, offered Montgomery County's African American residents opportunities for networking, recreation, and even finding a spouse. River Road's baseball team, the River Road Lions, played in a field next to the B&O Railroad tracks.²⁴⁵ "It was a big baseball diamond," Seagears remembers. "That's where everybody gathered and after, everybody'd come to my father's restaurant and party and dance and drink and celebrate."

People who lived in Lyttonsville and Wheaton Lane fondly recall the chances to go to River Road for the baseball games. Former Wheaton Lane resident Nancy Hyson Johnson remembered being punished for going over to River Road as a teenager. "We didn't have no business over there," she said. When I asked why she and her friends kept going over to River Road, she explained, "The men, I mean the boys."

The men who grew up in River Road remember the Wheaton Lane girls. "I dated some girls down there and played ball over there," recalls Harvey Matthews.

I used to run behind my older brother all the time. He'd always take me to all those spots, especially where the little beer taverns was and stuff whatnot. So that's where I hung out. You know, the girls would be at the beer taverns. Then I played ball so they'd be at the ballgames and stuff.

Summertime camp meetings also created spaces for networking and socialization. Emory Grove was where many Montgomery County Blacks went. According to Harvey Matthews, "We pretty much ran the camp meeting. Between this church, Gibson Grove, and Scotland, and Mount Calvary in Rockville." There was good food and good music, says Matthews:

That was a big thing back when you was kids, nine, ten years old. Going to the camp meeting. You go down to the camp meeting, have big church celebration, it'd be maybe about thirty or forty booths, all kinds of chicken and potato salad they were selling, you know, getting all your cakes and homemade buns and rolls and all that kind of stuff.

We had some specialized cooks in here, in Macedonia. Yeah. Miss Susie Jane lived down the street. Man, she'd make a homemade roll that melted in your mouth. And they could cook some greens and fry some chicken and make some potato salad. Homemade pies and cakes.

²⁴⁵ Offutt, *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area through World War Two*, 249.

Such was the Black spatial imaginary in River Road. It was a tight-knit, multi-faceted community focused on cooperation and the social networks first established immediately after the end of the Civil War. The episodes in the 1930s and 1940s such as the displacement of families, the possible forced relocation of Macedonia Baptist Church, and the white community's efforts to close the Sugar Bowl foreshadowed the community's ultimate collapse in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The River Road Community: Disruption and Disintegration

Damn, there's no longer a Black community. — Ralph Wooden,
River Road resident, 2017.

The Moses Cemetery occupied a sort of liminal space in the River Road Community. It was physically located in the community, yet it remained a space closely affiliated with a Washington organization. Though River Road residents were buried in the cemetery, the cemetery wasn't fully a part of the River Road community despite the fact that the River Road community enveloped it. Essentially, it wasn't fully River Road and it wasn't fully Reno. It was betwixt and between. Though the cemetery space was owned by Washington residents, its fate was fully bound up with changes in the River Road community.

By the time the surviving White's Tabernacle trustees sold the cemetery, the community was feeling the full effects of white, anti-black suburbanization and expulsive zoning. Harvey Matthews' family moved to Washington in late 1958 or 1959. By then, real estate developers and Montgomery County infrastructure construction like the Little Falls Parkway were making it difficult for the remaining Black residents. Matthews recalls seeing friends like the Lancasters move. "They left way early because that's where all the developers started down there," Matthews said. "When they started cutting Little Falls in there, that squeezed everybody either out — and most everybody went in D.C. and they just started coming this way. He added, "And all them people just left. They didn't regroup here anymore. They left for like Poolesville, Towntown, Rockville, and stuff like that."

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, new suburban development encroached upon the former African American community. The Westbard shopping center broke ground during this period; Marriott Corporation opened a facility along the railroad tracks; Briggs Filtration Company expanded; and, broadcasting towers towered over the community. In 1962, Montgomery County officials testified about segregation in the county before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. "The tendency which now exists toward increasing segregation is likely to continue," George and Eunice Grier told the Commission.²⁴⁶

An exhibit submitted in evidence, "Attitudes of White Residents of Suburban Washington, D.C., Toward Open Occupancy of Housing" by Joseph H. Flynn, reported:

The general area in which the survey was conducted was in the western Bethesda area of Montgomery County, Md. It is bounded by the Potomac River, Western

²⁴⁶ "Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Housing in Washington" (1962), 32–33.

Avenue, River Road, and Goldsboro Road. Figure 1 contains a map indicating the location of the seven neighborhoods included in the survey.

There are no Negroes living in the immediate neighborhoods that were canvassed. One Negro family has children attending Brookmont Elementary School. Several Negro children attend Western Suburban Junior High School. There are no Negro children in Little Flower Catholic School. Several Negro families who lived in the area have been bought out by builders in recent years. Nearby, there is a pocket of Negro homes at River Road and the B. & O. tracks. Further out at Cabin John, there is a low-cost housing community for Negroes, and along Seven Locks Road, for example, there are a number of farms still owned by Negroes. The adjacent areas in the District of Columbia, American University Park, and Spring Valley, are exclusively white.²⁴⁷

By the end of the decade, as Montgomery County was mapping out its Community Renewal Program (urban renewal), virtually all of River Road's "problem housing" had disappeared, along with the people who lived there: "The Landy Lane Program Area is primarily an industrial and commercial sector in Lower Montgomery County. The few deficient residential units have been eliminated." The 1969 report also described the existing landscape at the time, a space filled with "obsolete and unsightly commercial and industrial" buildings.²⁴⁸

Macedonia Baptist Church's 2011 history book recounts some of the community's disintegration. "The last of the old River Road community moved from the area when Sister Ella Watkins sold her home and property in 1976 or 1977."²⁴⁹ That single sentence fails to capture the gradual erosion and erasure that the community experienced during the two previous decades.

Ralph Wooden was born in 1953 and he has lived in the stretch of River Road south of the African American community his entire life. Wooden is a white man and a descendant of Louis Solyom. His first memories of the African American community begin around age ten. "There was a much smaller Black community," he recalled in 2017. "It was still there and it was still kind of an industrial area but between there and Little Falls Parkway was houses. And I think some of them were houses that had been subdivided so they were more like boarding houses."

Wooden remembers some of his older family members calling the African American community "Crow Hill." Though he says that no one in his generation ever called the community by that name, "I'm sure it was called Crow Hill because they had Black people living there, like crows." It's a toponym that appears in Offutt's 1995 Bethesda history and an epithet that still stings Harvey Matthews. He remembers that it's what most whites called his community, though he admits that much of what he's learned about the slur comes from recent historical research. "Well this is where Black people lived at and they considered us as being crows. That's pretty much where it came from," Matthews said. Even as recently as 2017 a local magazine

²⁴⁷ Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. *Housing in Washington*, 363.

²⁴⁸ "Community Renewal Program. Montgomery County, Maryland,," August 1971, 111, Montgomery County Archive.

²⁴⁹ Macedonia Baptist Church, *Macedonia Baptist Church 1920-2011: A History of the Little Church on the Hill*, 6.

uncritically wrote that “Crow Hill” was one of the community’s official names in a racially insensitive article that also described River Road as a “colony.”²⁵⁰

Ralph Wooden didn’t grow up with crows as neighbors but he did have friends among the few remaining African American families in River Road. It was a very poor community, he recalls. Wooden recalls one classmate at Somerset Elementary School in particular, a boy named Barry. The two were in the same homeroom. After Wooden finished his paper route, he and Barry would hang out. “I’m not positive about this but I may have been the only one from our class who ever went to his house. And I don’t know how much opportunity he had to play with other kids from his class in school,” Wooden said. “I don’t remember ever any other white person of my age being in that neighborhood, you know, playing with those kids.”

In the fall of 1965, Wooden and Barry left the Somerset school for junior high. For a while, Barry would walk with Wooden and other children along the railroad tracks to get to school and then Barry was gone. By the ninth grade, the remaining African American homes were gone, replaced by the new 18-story Kenwood apartment building.²⁵¹ Wooden associates the Kenwood’s appearance with the disappearance of the African American community:

I remember in ninth grade, there was a giant apartment house there and there was a girl — I think she was a ninth grader; same age as us who sometimes would walk along the same railroad tracks and up the same hill to Western who lived in the apartment building that was in the neighborhood that had been the black community. So in just that amount of time, Barry’s home disappeared and the Black person who walked with us was replaced by a white person who walked with us.

Within a generation of William Smith being run out of River Road, all evidence of the community except for Macedonia Baptist Church had been erased. When massive civil rights demonstrations erupted in the summer of 1960 at the nearby Glen Echo amusement park, River Road was already in its death throes. The campaign to desegregate the park’s swimming pools swept up African American and white activists from throughout the Washington region. Rick Anderson, a white man whose family lived between River Road and Massachusetts Avenue, remembers how people in his neighborhood along Cromwell Road barricaded roads to prevent protesters from entering. “I remember, in our neighborhood, this sort of panic thing,” Anderson said in 2018. “A lot of African Americans came walking up Massachusetts Avenue there headed towards Glen Echo and there were many in our community that had put their cars across the road leading out of our community to quote-unquote ‘protect us’.”

²⁵⁰ Steve Roberts, “Uncovering the ‘Lost Colony’ in Bethesda,” *Bethesda Magazine*, 2017, <http://www.bethesdamagazine.com/Bethesda-Magazine/May-June-2017/Uncovering-the-Lost-Colony-in-Bethesda/>. “Crow Hill” was one of several pejorative names whites attached to African American communities in Montgomery County and neighboring Washington. For decades, whites referred to Lyttonsville as “Monkey Hollow” and a Rockville Black neighborhood was called “Monkey Run.” In Washington, in the late nineteenth century whites called one early African American neighborhood in the city’s Northwest “Crow Hill.”

²⁵¹ Construction on the Kenwood began in the summer of 1966. “The Kenwood--,” *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1966.

Nineteen fifty-eight, two years before the Glen Echo protests, though, was a consequential year in the River Road community's history. That year, large-scale suburban redevelopment began as the Westbard Shopping Center was built and as new high-rise apartments were proposed in contentious proceedings before Montgomery County development review authorities.²⁵² "Westbard" is a relatively recent rebranding of the area once considered part of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase planning area; after it was proposed in the late 1970s, the Westbard Sector Plan became Montgomery County's first enacted sector plan.²⁵³

Montgomery County planners in 1982 summarized the area's development history by focusing on its industrial and commercial uses. The African American residential community and its history were invisible to planners. "The Westbard area was already substantially developed by 1928 when the first zoning maps were drawn for Montgomery County," planners wrote in 1982. "The Plan recognizes the original and continuing character of Westbard as commercial/industrial and seeks to reinforce this character."²⁵⁴ Former resident Rick Anderson in a 2018 interview underscored the erasure: "The only reference to that area was Westbard. They were going to build apartments and gas stations and the bowling alley. And all I remember that ever being called was Westbard, which paid no homage to the Black community that was existing there at the time."

The Displacement Throughline

The Moses Cemetery's history exposes several consequential and related episodes of African American displacement. The first occurred in 1910 as the District of Columbia and white residential subdivisions encroached on the original cemetery location. In that episode, the cemetery and its Black bodies were declared obsolete and abandoned as White's Tabernacle moved its burial operations outside the District into Montgomery County.

The second displacement episode took place in the 1920s as pressure mounted on African Americans to leave the Reno subdivision and nearby spaces like Broad Branch Road. In this displacement episode, the federal government condemned lands for Fort Reno Park and the reservation along Broad Branch Road that became Lafayette Elementary School and the Lafayette Recreation Center and park.

All of the properties once owned and occupied by Reno residents who ended up moving to River Road or who were affiliated with White's Tabernacle ultimately were acquired by the federal government. From Cora and Jeremiah Botts' former homesite in Fessenden Street to Fred

²⁵² "Tall Building Is Under Way In Bethesda," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1964; G.O. Herndon, "County Acts to Bar Apartment Zoning," *Washington Evening Star*, December 31, 1958; "Giant Food Set to Open 9th 'Super,'" *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1959; Thomas R. Kendrick, "Montgomery Grants New High Rise Zone," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 1962; Thomas W. Lippman, "Court Curbs High-Rise Zone Rules," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1966.

²⁵³ Montgomery County Planning Department, "Westbard Sector Plan" (Silver Spring, Md.: Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission., Montgomery County Planning Department, September 1982); Montgomery County Planning Department, "Westbard Sector Plan" (Silver Spring, Md.: Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission., Montgomery County Planning Department, December 2015).

²⁵⁴ Montgomery County Planning Department, "Westbard Sector Plan," September 1982, 32.

Greene's former home in the closed portion of Davenport Street and the nearby Moses Lodge and Rock Creek Baptist Church sites, all material traces of these people were erased over a very short span of time in the first half of the twentieth century. In the years bracketing the turn of the twenty-first century, nothing remained of the Reno community except a few fire plug sentinels in Fort Reno Park (Figure 31). People living in 21st century Chevy Chase in July told District park officials that they were surprised and somewhat embarrassed to learn that their community once was a vibrant African American community.²⁵⁵



Figure 31. Fort Reno Park, fire hydrant in the vicinity of the former 3812 Davenport Street.

In River Road, the displacement pressures exerted on the Washington residents manifested themselves in the 1930s and 1940s as racially restricted residential subdivisions encroached on the community and as light industrial development increased in the corridor. At the same time, in nearby Cabin John, Charles Brown's descendants were being pushed off the four acres he bought in 1885. Montgomery County's rebranding of the River Road community (Westbard) combined with the marginalization and erasure of African American history may be seen as sort of cultural displacement, an extension of the physical displacement that occurred decades earlier.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Lafayette Recreation Center Modernization Project public meeting, July 11, 2018, Chevy Chase Community Center.

²⁵⁶ For social and cultural displacement, see Japonica Brown-Saracino, "Social Preservationists and the Quest for Authentic Community," *City & Community* 3, no. 2 (2004): 135–156, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1535-6841.2004.00073.x>; M. Chernoff, "Social Displacement in a Renovating Neighborhood's Commercial District:

Significance Evaluation

The Moses Cemetery site is evaluated for its eligibility for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation and for its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation

The River Road Moses Cemetery appears to meet four criteria for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation. It meets two criteria for historical and cultural significance and two criteria for architectural significance (see Table 1). Montgomery County’s historic preservation ordinance only requires properties meet one of the nine criteria for designation. This section evaluates the Moses Cemetery against all nine.

Table 3		
Moses Cemetery Site: Montgomery County Historic Preservation Designation Criteria		
§ 24A-3(b)(1)	<i>Historical and cultural significance</i>	This Evaluation
a	Has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state or nation;	YES
b	Is the site of a significant historic event;	no
c	Is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society; or	no
d	Exemplifies the cultural economic, social, political or historic heritage of the county and its communities.	YES
§ 24A-3(b)(2)	<i>Architectural and design significance</i>	
a	Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;	YES
b	Represents the work of a master;	no
c	Possesses high artistic values;	no
d	Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or	YES

Atlanta,” in *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*, ed. Shirley Bradway Laska and Daphne Spain, Pergamon Policy Studies on Urban Affairs (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 204–19; Richard E. Ocejo, “The Early Gentrifier: Weaving a Nostalgia Narrative on the Lower East Side,” *City & Community* 10, no. 3 (2011): 285–310, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2011.01372.x>.

e	Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.	<i>no</i>
Montgomery County Code § 24A-3: Historic Resources Preservation, Criteria for designation of historic sites or districts.		

§ 24A-3(b)(1)(a): Has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county, state or nation

The River Road Moses Cemetery *is eligible* for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation under this criterion because of its associations with the nationally significant Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses and the Washington tabernacle that spurred important organizational changes to the parent organization in the 1870s. Fraternal organizations like the Moses Order were important institutions in small African American communities like Reno and River Road. The cemetery was the most visible and important property owned by these organizations which frequently were called “burial societies.”

The River Road Moses Cemetery site is one of only two legible surviving properties associated with the former River Road community (the other property is the Macedonia Baptist Church at 5119 River Road). River Road was one of more than four dozen African American hamlets and urban neighborhoods that emerged in Montgomery County during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these communities like Lyttonsville, Tobytown, Scotland disintegrated because of racialized land use practices that facilitated displacement via discriminatory housing patterns, expulsive zoning, and urban renewal. Within the past decade, gentrification has contributed to the displacement of remaining African American residents and to the erasure of the built environment that characterized the Black experience in Montgomery County from Reconstruction through the Cold War.

§ 24A-3(b)(1)(b): Is the site of a significant historic event

There is no evidence that any events significant in local, regional or national history occurred within the Moses Cemetery when it was used as a graveyard or in its subsequent use as a parking lot and mixed-use suburban property. The River Road Moses Cemetery *does not* appear to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation under this criterion.

§ 24A-3(b)(1)(c): Is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society

The River Road Moses Cemetery *does not* appear to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation under this criterion. There is no surviving evidence that the individuals who founded and subsequently inherited the trusteeship

to White's Tabernacle influenced society beyond the Reno and River Road communities. Though the tabernacle's founders played a consequential role in the 1870s in determining the direction of the Moses Order's parent organization, there is no available evidence that their participation in the litigation in Washington had any effects beyond the Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses.

§ 24A-3(b)(1)(d): Exemplifies the cultural economic, social, political or historic heritage of the county and its communities

The River Road Moses Cemetery *is eligible* for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation because it exemplifies Montgomery County's African American heritage. The Moses Order selected the River Road site because it was an established African American hamlet with strong economic and social ties to the Reno community in neighboring Washington. River Road was one of several communities linked together in Washington's Black Borderlands, a network of communities and people on both sides of the District-Montgomery County border that originated during Reconstruction. Suburbanization and displacement pushed the Moses Order out of its original cemetery site in Northwest Washington in a well-established historical pattern that is a significant part of Montgomery County and Washington's histories.

The conversion of the cemetery into a surface parking lot in the 1960s continued the pattern begun in Washington earlier in the century with the original cemetery's displacement and its subsequent sealing beneath Chevy Chase Parkway. The parking lot itself is among the nearly 8,000 acres of surface parking lots developed in Montgomery County during the twentieth century in a pattern inextricably tied to the development of dispersed residential subdivisions and the commercial complexes developed to serve them.²⁵⁷ Surface parking lots designed and constructed in the second half of the twentieth century are character-defining features of Montgomery County's cultural landscape. They played integral roles in the county's economic and social development and in the development and growth of individual communities like River Road and the space it subsequently was rebranded, Westbard. "The urban fabric of the Plan is characterized by the wide open spaces of large surface parking lots," wrote Montgomery County planners in the 2015 Westbard Sector Plan.²⁵⁸

§ 24A-3(b)(2)(a): Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction

The River Road Moses Cemetery *is eligible* for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation because it is a Blacktop Burial Ground: a vernacular type of

²⁵⁷ Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D. C., 1930-1941," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51, no. 1 (March 1992): 5-34; Montgomery County Planning Department, "Zoning Discovery" (Silver Spring, Md: Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission., Montgomery County Planning Department, January 2009); Montgomery County Planning Department, "Reducing Our Footprint. 2009-2011 Growth Policy" (Silver Spring, Md: Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission., Montgomery County Planning Department, 2009), http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/research/growth_policy/growth_policy09/documents/reducingourfootprints7-31.pdf.

²⁵⁸ Montgomery County Planning Department, "Westbard Sector Plan," December 2015, 45.

historic property that combines an earlier, disturbed African American cemetery with a twentieth century parking lot covering its surface. The cultural contexts that contributed to the widespread conversion of Black burial spaces into surface parking lots are found throughout North America: a pattern of racial bias that rendered the African American experience in spaces like River Road invisible and therefore easily converted into new uses, especially parking lots.²⁵⁹ The Moses Cemetery conforms to the pattern established at similar sites in Baltimore, Maryland; Richmond, Virginia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Bolton, Mississippi; and, Athens, Georgia.²⁶⁰

§ 24A-3(b)(2)(b): Represents the work of a master

The River Road Moses Cemetery *does not* appear to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan under this criterion. There is no surviving evidence that the original vernacular cemetery site, which is no longer legible, was designed by an individual. The surface parking lot that comprises much of the site was designed by an architectural firm and there is no surviving evidence that its design originated with a “master.”²⁶¹

§ 24A-3(b)(2)(c): Possesses high artistic value

The River Road Moses Cemetery *does not* appear to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan under this criterion. Though Montgomery County’s Historic Preservation Ordinance does not provide guidance for evaluating properties under this criterion, the county’s historic preservation program generally follows the criteria established for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service describes “high artistic values” as the concept applies to historic properties: “A property is eligible for its high artistic values if it so fully articulates a particular concept of design that it expresses an aesthetic ideal.”²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Mai-Linh K. Hong, “‘Get Your Asphalt Off My Ancestors!’: Reclaiming Richmond’s African Burial Ground,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 13, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 81–103, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872113490271>.

²⁶⁰ Michael L. Blakey, “Institute for Historical Biology (IHB) Review of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) Validation and Assessment Report on the Burial Ground for Negroes, Richmond, Virginia by C. M. Stephenson, 25 June 2008.” (Williamsburg, Va.: Institute for Historical Biology of the College of William and Mary, September 20, 2008), https://www.wm.edu/as/programs/ihb/ihbreports/DHR_Report.pdf; Hong, “‘Get Your Asphalt Off My Ancestors!’”; Alan Huffman, “Graveyards Destroyed for Mississippi Industrial Project – Alan Huffman,” August 5, 2016, <http://alanhuffman.com/graveyards-destroyed-for-mississippi-industrial-project/>; Jeffrey Ruggles, “The Burial Ground: An Early African-American Site in Richmond, Virginia” (Unpublished paper, 2009), <https://www.scribd.com/document/42051809/Burial-Ground-Ruggles-12-09>; Lee Shearer, “Bodies Being Removed from UGA’s Baldwin Hall Parking Lot Aren’t First to Be Moved from Site,” *Athens Banner*, January 8, 2016, <http://www.onlineathens.com/article/20160108/NEWS/301089986>; Christina Tkacik, “Rediscovering the African American Graveyard beneath a Baltimore Shopping Center,” *Washington Post*, March 21, 2018, sec. Local, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/rediscovering-the-african-american-graveyard-beneath-a-baltimore-shopping-center/2018/03/21/ca78545e-2c5d-11e8-8ad6-fbc50284fce8_story.html.

²⁶¹ A master is a figure of generally recognized greatness in a field, a known craftsman of consummate skill, or an anonymous craftsman whose work is distinguishable from others by its characteristic style and quality. The property must express a particular phase in the development of the master's career, an aspect of his or her work, or a particular idea or theme in his or her craft. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin 15 (Washington, D.C.: United States. National Park Service, 1997), 18.

²⁶² *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, 20.

The site was first developed as a vernacular cemetery and there are no above-ground physical elements from that phase in its history that survive. As a site associated with automobile suburbanization, the surfaced parking area that comprises most of the property is a common cultural landscape found throughout Montgomery County and North America designed and constructed for its functionality, not its aesthetic properties.

§ 24A-3(b)(2)(d): Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

The River Road Moses Cemetery *is eligible* for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation because the parking lot constructed in the 1960s is an element in a larger, historically significant cultural landscape defined by large surface parking lots attached to suburban commercial shopping centers and office buildings. Though individually, Montgomery County's late twentieth century parking lots may lack distinction (compared to earlier parking lots associated with individual properties such as park and shop shopping centers and garden apartment communities), cumulatively they comprise an important and character-defining engineering element in the county's built environment. As Montgomery County planners and the County Council were revising the county's zoning law between 2009 and 2014, the widespread spatial distribution of surface parking lots and their combined acreage (c. 8,000 acres) played an important role in developing new zoning and land use standards for the county.

§ 24A-3(b)(2)(e): Represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape

The Moses Cemetery *does not* appear to be eligible for designation in the Montgomery County Master Plan under this criterion. There is no available evidence that the parking lot where the Moses Cemetery site is located ever served as a community focal point or was ever recognized for its visual qualities, except in a negative sense. Much of the rhetoric around retrofitting suburbs and creating more environmentally sustainable communities turns on eliminating surface parking lots because they are perceived as ugly liabilities.²⁶³

National Register of Historic Places

The Moses Cemetery site appears to meet three criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Criterion A

This criterion is similar to the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation's first criterion, association with patterns in history. The River Road Moses Cemetery appears to be *eligible* for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under this criterion because of its associations with the nationally significant Ancient United Order of Sons and Daughters, Brothers and Sisters of Moses and the Washington tabernacle that spurred important organizational changes to the parent organization in the 1870s. Fraternal organizations like the

²⁶³ Montgomery County Planning Department, "Westbard Sector Plan Appendix," 52–53.

Moses Order were important institutions in small African American communities like Reno and River Road. The cemetery was the most visible and important property owned by these organizations which frequently were called “burial societies.”

The River Road Moses Cemetery site is one of only two legible surviving properties associated with the former River Road community (the other property is the Macedonia Baptist Church at 5119 River Road). River Road was one of more than four dozen African American hamlets and urban neighborhoods that emerged in Montgomery County during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these communities like Lyttonsville, Tobytown, and Scotland disintegrated because of racialized land use practices that facilitated displacement via discriminatory housing patterns, expulsive zoning, and urban renewal. Within the past decade, gentrification has contributed to the displacement of remaining African American residents and to the erasure of the built environment that characterized the Black experience in Montgomery County from Reconstruction through the Cold War.

The River Road Moses Cemetery furthermore appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with suburbanization. See the discussion above under the significance statement for the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation, §24A-3(b)(1)(d).

Criterion B

The River Road Moses Cemetery does not appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register under this criterion. The property was no associated with significant individuals or events in history.

Criterion C

The River Road Moses Cemetery appears to be *eligible* for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because it is a Blacktop Burial Ground: a vernacular type of historic property that combines an earlier, disturbed African American cemetery with a twentieth century parking lot covering its surface. Surface parking lots and parking decks have long been recognized in historic preservation as contributing elements to historic properties.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Surface parking lots were determined contributing and character-defining elements in two Montgomery County properties determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the Flower Theater and Shopping Center and the Silver Spring Shopping Center. In nearby Washington, the surface parking lot associated with the Park and Shop in the District’s Cleveland Park neighborhood was determined to be a contributing character defining feature as was the parking lot in the National Register-listed Cary Street Park and Shop Center. See David S. Rotenstein, “Blacktop History: The Case for Preserving Parking Lots,” *History@Work | National Council on Public History* (blog), June 4, 2014, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/blacktop-history/>.

Criterion D

The River Road Moses Cemetery appears to be *eligible* for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its potential to yield significant new information in history. Though there exists an undefined archaeological component to the property buried beneath a parking lot and covered by fill, guidance for evaluating historic properties as traditional cultural properties expands the potential for this criterion beyond archaeological research. According to Thomas F. King and Patricia Parker, these are properties that have “the potential to yield, important information through ethnographic, archeological, sociological, folkloric, or other studies.”²⁶⁵

Many properties determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are associated with Native American people and sites. Some notable exceptions, however, include Latino communities in New Mexico, Greek sponge diving culture in Florida, and the sites along the North Shore Road in the Great Smoky Mountains.²⁶⁶ They reflect a community’s cultural practices and they are associated with living communities.

Evaluating a property such as the River Road Moses Cemetery as a traditional cultural property is difficult because of the emphasis placed on spatial ties and a continued association of people with the property under consideration. Previous research and evaluations of traditional cultural properties don’t appear to contemplate displacement as a factor in the historical and ethnographic development of a site. There is substantial ethnographic, psychological, and historical literature on place attachment and the impacts of displacement and disruption to established communities.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ King and Parker, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties,” 14.

²⁶⁶ Tina Bucavalas and Carl Shiver, “Tarpon Springs Greektown Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2014; Jabbour, Coyle, and Webb, “North Shore Cemetery Decoration Project: Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Investigations for the Proposed North Shore Road, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, North Carolina”; Frances Levine and Thomas Merlan, “Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties in Non-Indian Communities,” *CRM* 16, no. Special Issue (1993): 55–59, 64.

²⁶⁷ *Place Attachment*, Human Behavior and Environment, v. 12 (New York: Plenum Press, 1992); Barbara B. Brown and Douglas D. Perkins, “Disruptions in Place Attachment,” in *Place Attachment*, Human Behavior and Environment, v. 12 (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 279–304; David Burley et al., “Loss, Attachment, and Place: A Case Study of Grand Isle, Louisiana,” *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, Summer 2005, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/053/burley.shtml>; Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do about It*, 1st ed (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2004); Elgin L. Klugh, “Alternative Landscapes and ‘Rootlessness’ in a Suburban Community,” *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 2, no. 2 (2012): 23–33; Carol B. Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).



Figure 32. Former River Road resident Harvey Matthews (left) helps with food during a potluck held in Macedonia Baptist Church's basement social hall held on the Martin Luther King holiday, January 15, 2018.



Figure 33. Rev. Lennox Yearwood reads the names of River Road ancestors as Rev. Walter Fauntroy pours water in a libation ceremony at the River Road Moses Cemetery site, November 12, 2017.

As the research to prepare this report illustrates, there are tremendous opportunities to learn more about the River Road community and the River Road Moses Cemetery because of the activism undertaken by the descendant community and Macedonia Baptist Church. The activism that has included public rallies, potluck dinners, and community forums has exposed the cemetery's existence widely throughout the Washington metropolitan region.

Apart from the efforts to reconnect members of the dispersed River Road descendant community, the descendants of George Pointer and the extended Harris and Moten family also have used the African American homecoming and reunion traditions. After research was done on the family's longtime homesites along Broad Branch Road in Washington, descendants began holding reunions in the space seized by the United States government to create the park that today is known as the Lafayette Recreation Center.²⁶⁸

This exposure through media reports and public outreach efforts, in turn, has brought members of the dispersed descendant community together. At one of the rallies convened by Macedonia Baptist Church in November 2017, a diminutive woman spoke to a crowd gathered at the cemetery site. "My name is Nanette Hunter but my maiden name was Parker. I'm the twice-great-niece of Cora Botts," the woman proclaimed. Her ancestors, Jeremiah Botts and Cora Botts were buried in the Moses Cemetery in 1912 and 1935, respectively. "I'm just overcome and empowered and just so proud of my ancestors and just so proud of all of you for the fight that you've taken on on their behalf."²⁶⁹

Hunter's family narrative tradition hadn't included anything about the River Road community or the River Road Moses Cemetery. She first learned about it when local historians contacted her.

Frank Lancaster, a former River Road resident who was interviewed for this report, similarly found his way back to the site. He has remained friends with Harvey Matthews, another former River Road resident. They too spoke at the November 2017 rally. "You cannot tell me about River Road, because it was a Black community," Matthews said that day. "And I have a brother [Frank Lancaster] here that just walked up was born and raised here with me and these are things that we did here. It was loving people, happy families here."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Torrey and Green, "Free Black People of Washington County, D.C. George Pointer and His Descendants."

²⁶⁹ Nanette Hunter, November 12, 2017.

²⁷⁰ Harvey Matthews, November 12, 2017.



Figure 34. River Road Moses Cemetery rally sign. Macedonia Baptist Church, November 12, 2017.



Figure 35. Nanette Hunter (center) and Harvey Matthews (right), River Road Moses Cemetery Rally, November 12, 2017.

Reunions and homecomings are important parts of African American traditional culture.²⁷¹ The events sponsored by the River Road descendant community and Macedonia Baptist Church provide the essential connective tissue in time and space to the River Road Moses Cemetery.²⁷² These events and people converging on the River Road Moses Cemetery site and the new information about the community's forgotten history are what qualify the River Road Moses Cemetery for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D.

The River Road Moses Cemetery meets the National Register of Historic Places definition of a traditional cultural property because it is associated with the "cultural practices and beliefs of a living community: the dispersed African American descendant community with roots in domestic, religious, and funerary spaces first created during Reconstruction. Despite decades of serial displacement imposed by gentrification, slum clearance, and urban renewal, the descendants of Reno and River Road have used traditional African American culture to retain church, family, and other social connections.

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²⁷¹ Wiggins and DeNatale, *Jubilation! African American Celebrations in the Southeast*.

²⁷² Roberts, "Uncovering the 'Lost Colony' in Bethesda"; Bethany Rodgers, "Historic Bethesda Church To Rally Against Potential Disruption of African-American Burial Ground," *Bethesda Beat* (blog), February 9, 2017, <http://www.bethesdamagazine.com/Bethesda-Beat/2017/Historic-Bethesda-Church-To-Rally-Against-Potential-Disruption-of-African-American-Burial-Ground/>; Rodgers, Bethany, "County Council Hopefuls Voice Support for Memorializing Historic Westbard Cemetery Site," *Bethesda Beat* (blog), May 3, 2018, <http://www.bethesdamagazine.com/Bethesda-Beat/2018/County-Council-Hopefuls-Voice-Support-for-Memorializing-Historic-Westbard-Cemetery-Site/>; Bill Turque, "New Bethesda Project Stirs up Old Ghosts," *The Washington Post*; *Washington, D.C.*, February 24, 2017, sec. A-SECTION; Bill Turque, "'Battlefield of Memory': Asphalt Where a Black Cemetery Is Said to Have Stood: Proposal to Build Town Center in Bethesda's Westbard Neighborhood Has Triggered Painful Questions about Old Graves and What Happened to Them.," *The Washington Post* (Online); *Washington, D.C.*, February 23, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com.dclibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1871408802/abstract/766A8E5D28D84743PQ/3>; Bill Turque, "Tensions Escalate between Montgomery and Church over Possible Black Cemetery: Macedonia Baptist Church Members Call for Planning Board to Defer Action," *The Washington Post* (Online); *Washington, D.C.*, February 16, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com.dclibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1868948655/citation/290813F3309249A2PQ/6>.

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