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No Longer Lost at Sea: Black Community Building in the Virginia Tidewater, 1865 to the post-1954 Era

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No Longer Lost at Sea:
Black Community Building
In the Virginia Tidewater, 1865 to the post-1954 Era

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APPROVAL PAGE


This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy




Hollis Earl Pruitt


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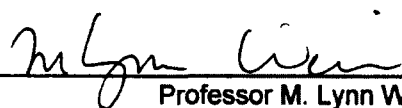
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ABSTRACT PAGE

...the early people of Gloucester County were English gentlemen and ladies... Many of these fine old families continued wealthy for generations, until about seventy years ago, when a terrible war, known as the War between the States,... deprived them and their present day descendents of their property and wealth, as well as their Negro slaves who were freed at the time of this war.(Gray 66)

All across the post-Civil War South, the newly freed African Diaspora struggled to find ways to maintain their families and to develop communities. Having been systematically denied education, property ownership, political participation and participation in both the social and economic life of the society built largely upon their labor and hardships, and those of their ancestors, for most of the "Freedmen," the first fruits of Liberty were uncertainty and impoverishment. This study will examine how blacks in Gloucester County responded to the challenges of freedom in different ways and through institutions. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Gloucester County, Virginia, was home to a large population of enslaved Africans and a number of free blacks and free mulattoes. In the aftermath of the War, these groups formed a number of vibrant and, initially, highly successful communities. The collective and individual agencies that led to creation of social, economic, religious and educational institutions as infrastructure for community development will be explored. The study will utilize an interdisciplinary approach to the creation and evolution of churches, schools and cemeteries to trace the impact of such institutions within the history of blacks in the County. Sources will include legal documents, census data, church histories, literary texts, newspaper articles, oral histories, photos and site examinations.

Currently, beyond documents largely generated by the heirs of the Planter Class, there are only minimal records or studies pertaining to the socio-cultural processes that guided the formation of Gloucester County's African American communities. The enslaved communities had few institutions through which to stamp their identities upon the region they occupied, in which they labored and died. Dead slaves were buried with little ceremony and no markers. Hence, in areas like Gloucester County, where colonial churches, and their elaborate and ornate cemeteries, commemorate the slave owning community, and where restored plantation "Big Houses" are placed on the "National Register of Historic Sites," or hidden from scrutiny by private ownership, little marks the antebellum presence of the African Diaspora. Thus, the long march of time has eroded the histories of the institutions and individuals that were the chief agents for the growth of Gloucester's African American communities, but did not obliterate them.

This research will focus on a small segment of the African American Diaspora as it moves to establish and stabilize itself in the aftermath of the American Civil War. Thus, by the very nature of Diasporas, it is study of the confluences of agency and accommodation, cooperation and resistance, and of perseverance as well as change and as elements of an overarching survival strategy. Gloucester County's African American communities established churches, cemeteries, domestic burial fields and schools. These institutions and sites became and, in many instances, remain sources of documentary, literary, historical and material evidence of the former richness and continuing importance of Gloucester County' African American past.

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The materials and data required to complete a study such as this are not situated conveniently in libraries and academic archives. Much of it exists in living memories, in family documents, local publications and local records. Thus, in planning and conducting this research, I benefited from the insight and guidance of many local sources and respondents to whom I am profoundly indebted.

I am especially indebted to the late Deacon John Perrin, who helped me to better understand the complex and rich nature of the history of Gloucester County’s black community and the need for research such as I attempted to undertake. I am also thankful for the guidance of numerous others: the late Elder Hollis Corbin Sr., Elder Charlie and Mrs. Miriam Carter, Barbara Howard, Reverend William Foxwell, Mary Smith-Gordon, Dr. John Bluford III, Hamilton Williams, and Bernard Robins. Robin M. Fisher and Christy L. Gabler of the Gloucester County Circuit Court Clerk’s Office Records Room provided invaluable assistance in my search for deeds and other records. While I cannot list everyone who encouraged and assisted me over the course of this project, I must acknowledge Elsa Verbyla, Editor of the *Gloucester-Mathews Gazette-Journal*, for her tireless assistance in finding or identifying sources that brought greater clarity and more humanity into elements of the research.

Finally, I have no words for the appreciation and love I have for family, friends and colleagues who not only tolerated but supported me as, at times, interviews, books, records and sites became the central focuses of my time and attention. I am particularly grateful for my wife, Lynn, and my youngest daughter, Shanzia, for remaining good-natured and loving as I turned the spaces of our home into an unmapped, cluttered wilderness of books, papers, and notes.

Introduction:

“... the nation may forget; it may shut its eyes to the past and frown upon any who may do otherwise, but the colored people of this country are bound to keep fresh a memory of the past till justice shall be done them in the present”:
Frederick Douglass, April 16, 1888.

In 1860 Gloucester County had a total population of 10,956. 703 free blacks and 5,736 enslaved Africans made up 59% of the county’s population. In 1950, blacks made only 31% of the County population (*Historical Census Browser*). However, numbers alone do not tell a community’s story.

This thesis explores the transitions made by the formerly enslaved and historically free black population of Gloucester County from the conclusion of the Civil War to the post-*Brown versus Topeka* era. Though census data from 1860 indicates that the enslaved and Free People of Color population constituted 59% of the total population of the County, minimal physical evidence of their presence and history in the County exists.

The only widely known narrative relating to history of this large and diverse group is *The Honey-pod Tree*, the 1958 autobiography of Thomas Calhoun Walker: born a slave, a Hampton Institute graduate, protégée of Booker T. Washington, and the County’s first black lawyer. However, *The Honey-pod Tree* was published in 1958, five years after Walker’s death and after the death of Florence L. Lattimore, to whom Walker narrated the text. Thus, for almost 150 years the history of the then majority of the County’s population has long been, and continues to be, dominated by and constrained within a single narrative published under circumstances which allowed no challenge to either the author or the editor/transcriber.

No Longer Lost at Sea endeavors to address the effective absence of black voices and the subsequent need to discover ways to recover and reconstruct historically relevant black alternative or counter- narratives in order broaden consideration and analysis of the more traditional versions of the County's narrative. The research seeks to discover and document the long overlooked or neglected histories of blacks, enslaved and historically free, in broader history of the County by examining the roles of churches, schools and cemeteries and burial fields as critical infrastructure of community development and establishment of group and individual identity.

"Tidewater Virginia", within which Gloucester County is located, figured prominently in both the history of America and in that of the African Diaspora in North America. The region was the "birthplace" of America: home to Jamestown, the site at which the first 20 Negroes were purchased in Virginia. This event, and its aftermath, has been widely commented on and studied. The Tidewater area of Virginia was a place of rivers: the James, the Potomac, and the York. These tidal flows dominated and shaped the history of an area stretching from Richmond to Washington, D.C. However, this history was also shaped by other rivers that flowed within Virginia's Tidewater region but never appeared on any maps of the area. These uncharted rivers flowed not with water but with the histories of the hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans who cleared the forests, planted the fields and built the stately antebellum plantations that still command the landscape. These "great" houses, preserved, restored, and consecrated, would become emblematic of Southern history. Yet, in most cases, their histories were both literally and figuratively sanitized: cleansed of any physical/ architectural evidence of the generations of

enslaved Africans from whose “unrequited toils” the nation’s early greatness grew. Despite the fact that from its infancy onward the survival of the Virginia colony, and later the state of Virginia, depended upon the sweat, muscle, skills, wisdom and lives and deaths of individuals with names such as Yaddo, Cuffey, Colly, Denbo, Cumbo, Coraja and Boose, most histories ignore such names, and those of their descendants (Walsh 26-34).

As was the case in other North American Colonial era locales, Gloucester’s historical records focused on English personalities. The earliest land patents in the area which would eventually be known as Gloucester County date from 1639 and settlement of the area began in 1644 (Gloucester County Virginia). During the 1600s and 1700s, the county was a center of agriculture. Tobacco was the principal crop. In order to satisfy the manpower needs of the county, Gloucester County landowners became active agents in the “forced migration” of millions of human souls: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The county’s economy was centralized around slave labor on plantations such as Fairfield, White Mash, Eagles Point, Little England, Sherwood, and Land’s End.

The influence of this region and its slave labor force within the formative years of the colony was such that it propelled Gloucester into the forefront of Virginia’s history. In *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, Edmund S. Morgan’s research indicates that by 1676 Gloucester was... “probably the richest county in Virginia” (265). According to *African Americans : A Concise History*, cooperation between free blacks, whites, enslaved blacks, and some indigenous peoples had flourished early in the history of Gloucester and other Tidewater areas:. Thus, Nathaniel Bacon’s 1677 Rebellion found fertile ground:

[That] Bacon also appealed to black slaves to join his rebellion indicates that poor white and poor black people still had a chance to unite against the master class [...] the uprising convinced the colony's elite to continuing to rely on white agricultural laborers who could become free and get guns was dangerous [...] Increasingly thereafter, white Americans perceived that both their freedom from class conflict and their prosperity rested on denying freedom to black Americans.

(Hine 56)

The transition away from the use of indentured servants, both black and white, took place swiftly. In, *Thomas Nelson of Yorktown:...*, Emory G. Evans indicates that in the early 1700, more than 1100 enslaved individuals were transported from Calabar, Angola, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Guinea to Virginia. Almost 9000 came into Virginia via York River harbors (7). Men like English emigrant John Perrin, who was awarded a large estate for transporting eight people into Tidewater Virginia, purchased enslaved Africans as labor for their expanding estates (Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources).

The county, with the increase in slave labor, also participated in Virginia's state economy as a source of cheap labor to be "hired-out" or purchased. In the late 1700s, Virginia's government not only purchased and employed slave laborers it compelled all others engaged in businesses related to public works to do so. The James River Company was quick to respond to the Governor's wish; in 1791, its directors wrote that:

-

Having been instructed to make the purchase of negroes for the use of the company & wishing to comply there with at a sale shortly to be made in the county of Gloster, we have to request of your Excellency & and the Hon'ble Board for a supply of money, or tobacco at the present value, as will enable [us] to make the purchase. (Takagi 14)

The number of slaves imported into the area to sustain its agricultural activities further reinforced this fact. By 1800, the majority of those who resided in Gloucester County were enslaved. Most of the enslaved population was involved in growing, processing, packaging and exporting tobacco. However, as tobacco was a crop that, un-rotated, quickly depleted the nutrient base of the soil Gloucester County and Virginia as a whole soon faced a two-fold crisis. On the one hand, the profitability of tobacco farming was in serious decline; on the other hand, the slaves imported to tend the tobacco now outnumbered whites in the state. The situation would come to a head in 1819.

As tobacco profits declined in the early 19th Century, Virginia slave owners sought other means to remain financially viable. One of the options was to sell their now surplus slaves into other regions. While tobacco declined, cotton and rice remained strong. Thus, Virginia slave owners began to supply the labor forces for other Southern states. This, of course, lowered the number of slaves on hand for labor in Virginia. As importation of slaves had been curtailed in 1807, many Virginia slave owners went into the breeding business:

... Virginia had come to live in large measure by the export of its burgeoning slave population. Rapidly acquiring a reputation of the 'Guinea of the Union,' Virginia annually exported large numbers of surplus slaves, some of them bred deliberately for that purpose, to the newer regions of the south, especially the cotton fields of Mississippi and Alabama. (Miller 240)

This interstate trafficking in human property was a second forced migration within the history of Africans in America. This shifting of population in response to the abovementioned economic factors that informed slavery, further complicated attempts by the enslaved to establish a sense of place, self, family or humanity:

...from 1810 to 1860, Virginia sold over three hundred thousand slaves to buyers outside the state—a diaspora comparable in scope to some of the great mass migrations in history... In 1800 the census showed that Virginia contained 4,109 fewer whites than blacks, but by 1810 the situation had dramatically reversed: whites outnumbered blacks by 128, 446 out of a population of almost a million. (Takagi 14)

The actual participation of state and local governments in this traffic was evidenced in documentation crafted by no less a hand than that of Thomas Jefferson: "In March 1820, Jefferson lamented that, as a result of the financial panic that swept the country in 1819, 'beyond the mountains we have good slaves selling for a

hundred dollars, good horses for five dollars, and the sheriffs generally the purchaser” (Miller 240).

The pattern of forced migration of large numbers of Africans within the framework of the slave economy was documented and is rather easily traced; however, the numbers alone fail to create a clear picture of the human tragedy imbedded in the slave/free dichotomy that was manifested earliest in the Tidewater area.

Census data allow for recreation of elements of the demography but, sadly, give little insight into the social/cultural and spiritual adaptations of the enslaved. Slave communities had few institutions through which to establish and enshrine their identities within the regions they occupied, in which they labored and died. They were under the domination of their owners and, at least in public display, under that of their owner’s God.

The enslaved were largely kept in illiteracy. Their only education took the form of being taught only those things that increased their worth and utility to their owners and the commercial market.

Finally, their value ended: dead slaves were buried with little, if any, ceremony and no markers. Hence, in areas such as Gloucester County where colonial churches, and their elaborate and ornate cemeteries commemorated the free whites, especially the slave-owning class, little marked the antebellum presence of the enslaved Africans.

More importantly, the physical evidence of the struggles and
accomplishments of the

“newly free” African American communities that began at the conclusion of the Civil War and spanned the following century was not carefully preserved. Many of the structures which figured prominently in the history of the communities, such as slave quarters and early school buildings, were destroyed or abandoned. Over time, their presence was further obscured by bulldozers, cement mixers, and other agents of “progress”.

However, beginning in the Post-War/Reconstruction period, the creation of African American cultural and social institutions such as churches, schools and cemeteries provided individuals, families, extended families and other social groupings, physical sites that allowed assertion of independent identities. Through these institutions emancipated former-slaves and historically free “people of color” undertook the laborious process of attempting to establish communities and the attendant infrastructures necessary for long-term success. They labored as heirs to generations of enslaved African victims of chattel slavery, and of free people of color who endured centuries of social, economic and political marginalization and deprivation. Though the passage of time would obscure much of the evidence of their struggles and hide many of their successes, the landscapes of Gloucester County would preserve remnants formed in the crucible which blended African and European cultures into a powerful, tenuous, often troubled modern reality. When the wind rustles among the trees of Gloucester County, it whispers of histories.

All across the post-Civil War South, formerly enslaved blacks and legally, and historically, marginalized free people of color, struggled to find ways to maintain their families and to develop communities. Having been systematically denied education, property ownership, political participation and participation in both the

social and economic life of the society built largely upon their labor and hardships, and those of their ancestors, for most of the “Freedmen,” the first fruits of Liberty were uncertainty and impoverishment. Though legally free, African Americans, in Gloucester County as in other parts of the American South, struggled against centuries of systematic dehumanization and marginalization. Separated in many instances by many miles, Gloucester County’s blacks responded to the challenges of freedom in very similar ways.

At the end of the Civil War, African Americans, the formerly enslaved and those who, though not enslaved, had never been truly free, stumbled into the light of “freedom” like the inmates of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” No longer Africans and yet not fully accepted as Americans, they occupied the dim edges of the light cast by “Liberty’s” torch. In the half-light of America, they began the arduous tasks associated with reestablishing kinships, building families and communities, and creating African American identities.

Though legally free, African Americans struggled against centuries of systematic dehumanization and marginalization. Land ownership was another vital factor in the broader goals of establishment of a community-based African American identity. Land ownership would provide a stable foundation upon which the Freedmen might develop vital community institutions such as churches. In the aftermath of the war, all across the American South these types of institutions emerged in very close proximity to the plantations upon which their congregants had been enslaved.

Like others throughout the American South, Gloucester’s formerly enslaved and historically free, but marginalized, blacks had to develop, support and maintain

infrastructures to sustain their transition into the post-Civil War-Reconstruction era and beyond. *No Longer Lost at Sea* examines the roles of churches, cemeteries and schools as instruments of community development from the Civil War to *Brown-v-Topeka*.

The passage of time eroded the histories of many institutions and individuals that were among chief agents for the growth of Gloucester's African American communities. Currently, beyond documents largely generated by the heirs of the Planter Class, there are only minimal records or studies pertaining to the socio-cultural processes that guided the formation of these African American communities.

In order to better understand processes that fostered the creation of Gloucester's black community, the histories of sites and institutions at which collective social, cultural, religious and political activities took place must be explored. Where available, data revealing how the impacts of internal dynamics such as divergent histories, competing political, cultural, economic and social ideologies influenced the trajectories of these communities must be taken into account.

No Longer Lost at Sea will examine these questions using evidence drawn from sources including documents, historical sites, oral histories, autobiographies and artifacts. The research will focus on the historical roles of locally-created cultural and social institutions, principally churches, schools and, lastly, cemeteries, in supporting and promoting the black struggle for a broader range of freedoms and a more fully developed sense of community. In researching these institutions other community leaders, beyond Thomas Calhoun Walker, and other historical narratives not found in *The Honey-pod Tree* will be identified and discussed.

Though rural, Gloucester County was not immune to the major currents that flowed throughout race relations in America from 1865 to 1954. Gloucester's post-Civil War environs were shaped by the complex interplay of accommodation and assimilation, by inter and intra-group cooperation and by contention between various elements of the black community and between blacks and whites along the battle lines of legalized white supremacy and black aspirations for independence and freedom from white control.

Chapter I of *No Longer Lost at Sea* will examine the creation of black churches in the county between 1865 and 1900, the most active period of such activities. All of these churches were Baptist in denomination, organization and governance. However, their unique ethnic character and the cultural differences, manifested in their ways of worship, marked them as Afro-Baptist (Raboteau X).

The creation of black churches in Gloucester involved a number of racial, economic, legal and social interactions. Some of Gloucester's black churches emerged directly, or indirectly, from white parent churches. Other black churches developed out of congregations which had met secretly until the abolition of slavery. Likewise, many of the area's churches were created by mixed congregations of formerly enslaved and historically free blacks. Other churches were created by, and to serve the needs of, individuals and families that had never been enslaved.

The establishment of churches also involved obtaining land upon which to consecrate sanctuaries. These transactions often required negotiations and cooperation between white land owners and blacks who sought land ownership. In other instances, blacks obtained land for churches from historically free blacks. All such transactions became matters of public record, whether they involved purchases

of land or land given to black congregations as gifts. Less well documented were instances in which black churches benefited from the support of prominent white pastors who helped to organize churches and helped guide and train black ministers.

Once organized, black churches became the civil and spiritual centers of the nascent black communities they served. The churches provided safe places for religious and social gathering. They provided locations for discussion of political and legal issues that involved congregants and their families. One of the most important alternate functions of the church was the promotion of literacy and education for Gloucester County blacks, an area in which black ministers often provided leadership and served as teachers.

Chapter II will focus on the evolution of black schools in Gloucester County and questions of how they functioned to meet a broad range of community needs and what types of social and political issues were associated with their activities. Many of the first black schools in Gloucester were loosely-organized classes that met in area churches. Local blacks, like others throughout the South, were eager and generous in their support of educational opportunities. As the post-Civil War black demand for better education grew, tensions developed between black hopes and the rigid strictures of white supremacy. While black public educational opportunities in Gloucester were restricted to the agriculturally-centered curriculum developed at Hampton Institute, Gloucester would become the home of one of the most advanced and diverse black private high school curricula in the Virginia Tidewater, and beyond: that of Cappahosic Academy. Extolled and supported by Frederick Douglass, Cappahosic, with its modern and impressive buildings and expansive campus, was the type of rural black school frowned upon by Booker T. Washington.

The tensions attendant upon educational issues led to the development of factions among the blacks themselves. As community produced and governed schools were replaced by the Tuskegee administered Rosenwald schools of the early 20th century, tensions and factionalism continued to grow among the County's black citizens. Whether these issues were factors in the decisions of many of Gloucester's black families leave seeking to provide their children better educational opportunities will be explored.

The establishment of agricultural and industrial education focused Rosenwald schools, which often offered seventh or eight grades of instruction and were typically under-funded, as alternatives to church affiliated and supported schools and the private campus at Cappahosic Academy became a flashpoint that galvanized elements of the widely spread black communities into the most cohesive and effective group action in their history. Through these organized actions Gloucester County became an early, and successful, NAACP battlefield in the quest to improve the educational opportunities for southern blacks which culminated in *Brown v. Topeka*.

Ironically, little effort was made locally to preserve the sites of the county's black schools. None of the one and two-room schools that constituted the majority of black schools were preserved. Not even the buildings of Cappahosic Academy received the serious attention of historians or preservationists. All of them now exist only in old photographs, documents and in the memories of a declining number of the generations that they once served.

Chapter III of *No longer at Sea* will focus upon black cemeteries and burial fields within the Gloucester County as sites of commemoration, assertion of identity and beliefs, and of memory. How the traditions of grave adornment, marking and

design changed as did the social and economic realities within the community changed will be addressed. Cemeteries also became areas of communal memory. The role of cemeteries in regular group events such as Home-Comings and Anniversaries, designed to both promote inter-group cohesion and create opportunities cooperation between various churches

In *Passed On*, Karla Holloway references Clifton Taulbert's *When We Were Colored* in order to explain of the roles of the African American Church. Taulbert explains that the church (and attendant cemetery) was "...more than an institution...[It] provided a framework for civic involvement, the backdrop for leadership, a safe place for social gatherings, where our babies were blessed, our families married and our dead respected" (151). Respect for the black dead had not been a focal point within the white-dominated cultural and social framework of slave ownership. While there may have been exceptions for enslaved individuals who served exceptionally well or were dear to their owners, the vast majority of the enslaved population of Gloucester County was buried in unmarked graves in slave cemeteries. Free blacks and mulattoes in the population, holding as a group significant lands, had the capacity to establish and maintain family burial areas. The control, or outright denial, of ceremonies or rituals associated with slave burials reinforced the power of the slave- owning class and at the same time disrupted, though it did not fully destroy, the cultural expressions of the enslaved. That the enslaved found ways (river stones, shrubs, shells, trees) to adorn or mark burial areas is generally accepted.

With the creation of black church cemeteries, West African elements of grave adornment blended with the adornment and marking patterns, practices, and traditions

of the broader Euro-Baptist Church. Through decisions such as site selection (usually, but not always near stands of trees and water), utilization of trees upon individual graves, directional orientation of both burial groups and individual graves, symbolic treatments upon graves, utilization of varied materials, applications and colors, black church cemeteries became enduring evidence of a complex inter-group matrix of Afro-Baptist cultural coding. While no claim can be made that the entirety of every burial field or every individual grave is culturally coded with distinctly African American signifiers, *No Longer Lost at Sea* will explore how Gloucester's black cemeteries provided opportunities for commemorations and cultural expressions that clearly evidenced West African influences.

As Vlach notes in *By the Work of Their Hands*, "Black burial grounds remain today the context for the practice of African-derived custom: grave sites carry various types of decoration that clearly represent an Afro-American approach to the other world" (7). Gloucester's black cemeteries and burial fields, whether public or private, are sites of interments that span from the very early days of Reconstruction to the present era. Active sites of both cultural persistence and change, each became a living museum in which the past and the present could stand intimately face to face.

Chapter IV will explore the persistence of African/Afro-Baptist derived patterns of belief, traditions, and aesthetics among Gloucester County blacks. The legacies of the past continue to intersect with and resonate within the challenges of everyday life in Gloucester's black community. This chapter will, through the lens of the life of Deacon John Perrin, the great-grandson of formerly enslaved individuals, examine the interplay of past and present in the development and frameworks of

understanding of black identity, sense of history, persistence of African derived religious/spiritual symbolism within the life of the community.

The names of many of Gloucester's black families, like John Perrin's, connect them with some of the earliest colonial families in the histories of the County and the nation. Simultaneously, the names link modern Gloucester County residents with the histories of the enslaved Africans whom those whose names they (modern black residents) now bear held as chattel.

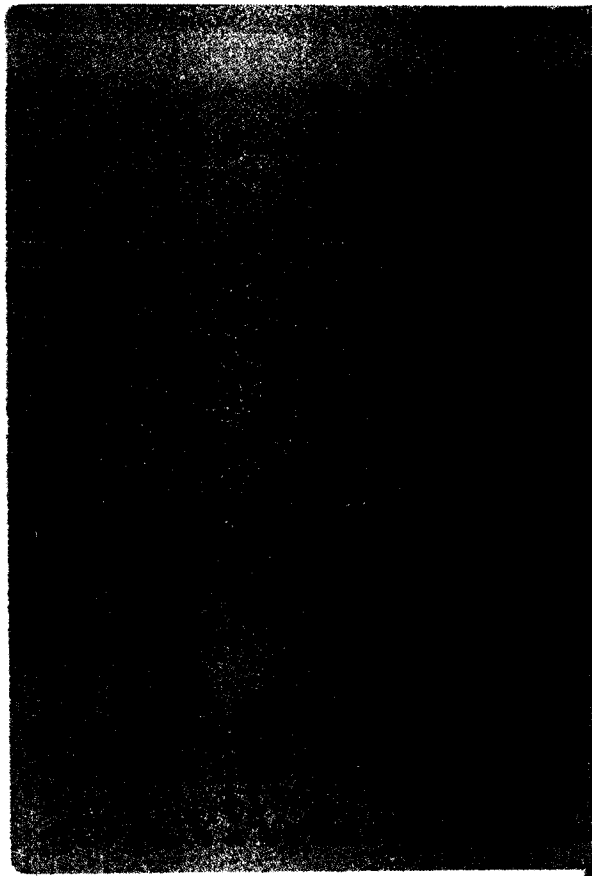
The chapter will trace the arc of the history of the name "John Perrin", and of other family and place names associated with it, as an example of the many intricate sub-texts that inform lives, senses of history, and memory in Gloucester County. As issues of identity and competing senses of history continue to resonate in American political, social, religious, economic and cultural life, better understandings of the complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered historical past remains a vital necessity in an increasingly more complex multi-ethnic world.

Chapter I

The Faith of Our Fathers:

Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grassplot, much overgrown with burdock, pig-weed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison.

(Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 46-7)



Gloucester Gazette Journal Archives

A tree was the central feature of the space that represented the black flower in Gloucester County, VA. Called the “Honey-pod tree,” it marked the site of the public selling and exchange of enslaved human beings. A prominent Gloucester black explained the significance of the site, “Near my home, and not far from the courthouse, stood the honey-pod tree that shaded the old slave auction block for many years before the Civil War” (Walker 318). Symbolically, economically, and socially, the “Honey - pod tree,” served as an altar to enslavement. Among the county’s enslaved population, numerous groups found other sites, other altars, to consecrate for markedly different purposes. While many in Gloucester’s enslaved population participated in the religious life of the mainstream community, others sought for and found other places of worship. While one tree in Gloucester marked the auction block, other trees, other natural altars, marked sites of the earliest independent religious activities organized and conducted by enslaved individuals and, as such, prefigure the flowering of the first bright flower of the African American community: the black church.

The post-Civil War African American churches of Gloucester County would become multi-faceted sites of community activity. They would serve as houses of worship, as schools, sites of celebration, mourning and commemoration. They would come out of “invisibility” into legal existence as results of covert activities instigated by the formerly enslaved, the joint agencies of the formerly enslaved and Free blacks and, also, through cooperation between the formerly enslaved and their former owners.

The evolution of Afro-Baptist religion/churches described in Albert J. Raboteu, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, remains a historical, social and cultural process that cannot be captured by maps, graphs, and chronologies (X). Exactly where, when, and how the enslaved Africans began to develop and share the common beliefs, values, styles, and understandings of religion that produced the “legally free” black churches of the American South cannot be precisely determined. Whether the foundations of the Black Church were forged in the bellies of slave ships, in segregated Colonial-American churches, or in common-life experiences associated with laboring in tobacco or cotton fields, the post-Civil War black Churches that were established in Gloucester County were the products of the African American agency in most, if not all, instances and the fusion of numerous West African and European-American beliefs and traditions. Many of the African traditions that marked these churches as uniquely Black or African American persisted beyond Emancipation (X).

The roles of religion and religious institutions in the development and growth of the enslaved population of Gloucester County, as in Virginia as a whole, were areas of contestation throughout colonial history. In 1660, seeking to promote and justify colonization of the New World, the English Crown sent instructions to the Council for Foreign Plantations urging the Council to view Christianizing the slaves and indigenous peoples as a duty. Subsequently, colonial governors, including Virginia’s Culpeper (1682), were instructed to “...Facilitate and encourage the Conversion of Negroes and Indians...”(Raboteau 97).

Many plantation owners were far more interested in the production of profits from the earthly labors of the enslaved than their preparation for some other-world

existence to come. Before the House of Burgess issued a 1667 decree that baptism would not alter a person's free or enslaved status, many slave-owners had feared that Christianity might lead to the loss of their property rights (Virginia Writer's... 107). In the closing years of the 17th century, as the rate of importation of enslaved Africans increased, the Journal of the House of Burgesses indicated that the question of religious conversion of the enslaved was addressed again:

A declaration of the House of Burgesses of Virginia in 1699 denies that religious progress is possible in the case of *imported* negroes, because of the "Gros Barbarity and rudeness of their Manners, the variety and Strangeness of their Language and the weakness and shallowness of their Minds. (Jernegan)

The early debates associated with the necessity or wisdom of converting the Negroes underscores the often overlooked reality that, though the ethnically-and tribally- diverse members of the African Diaspora came into the Americas as physically impoverished captives, they brought a wealth of African cultural patterns, beliefs, and life ways. "... The Africans who disembarked from slave ships entered the societies of the Americas as people bearing distinct cultures. They spoke a variety of African languages, practiced specific forms of African worship (including Islam and Christianity...)" (Lindsay 85

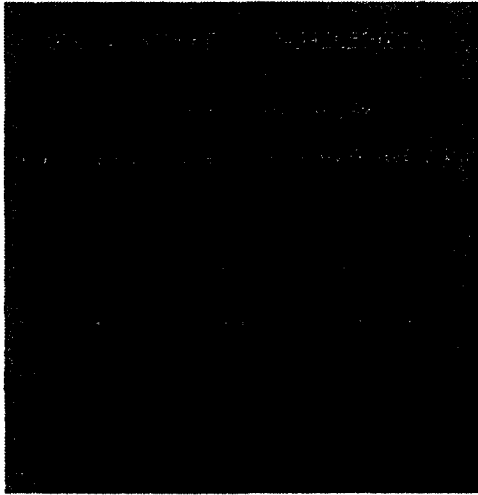
Despite the rulings of the House of Burgesses, many Virginia slave-owners continued the practice of "Christianizing" the members of their "slave families." The records of Abingdon Episcopal Church of Gloucester, which dates from the mid-1600s, contain data on the intersection of slavery and freedom:

...baptisms of slaves: from 1702 to 1714, belonging to "Mrs. Stubbs;" from 1714 to 1718, belonging to "Mrs. Susannah Stubbs ;" from 1723 to 1740, belonging to "Mr. John Stubbs;" from 1740 to 1747, belonging to "Capt. John Stubbs." Also, in 1747, slaves belonging to "Mr. John Stubbs, Jr." (Stubbs 14)

Abingdon Episcopal Church figured prominently in the early history of Gloucester County. "Thomas Jefferson spent many nights with his friend John Page, and both (George) Washington and Jefferson worshipped (often at the same service) at Abingdon Episcopal Church" ("County History").

According to the post-Civil War testimony of Mrs. Mary Jones, the enslaved population continued to participate in the religious life of the church. Mrs. Jones' mother belonged to the family of Thomas Nelson Page and she recalled their history "The Pages visited Abingdon Church and had a special pew for their slaves every Sunday. Page's slaves were allowed to worship in this Episcopal Church" (Perdue 187). Mrs. Jones also indicated that all the slaves on the Page plantation were taught to read. She notes that the only two books that the enslaved were allowed were the *Episcopal Catechism* and the *Bible* (187).

That Mrs. Jones used the term allowed accentuated the power relationship between owners and the enslaved. An 1862 catechism published in Raleigh, ... *To Be Taught Orally To Those Who Cannot Read; Designed Especially For The Instruction Of The Slaves In The Prot. Episcopal Church in The Cofederate States*, includes along with religious instructions, numerous reminders that the enslaved must be obedient to and respectful of Masters, Mistresses, and others (Episcopal 25-29).



While the enslaved did not participate in such services as equals, their participation enabled them to develop important cultural and social skills. Enslaved participants would over time developed understandings of Church doctrine, the order and manner of services and related rituals, and, in the case of the enslaved “Church family” of the Page’s, literacy. Spotswood Hunnicutt Jones notes that enslaved individuals were also baptized at Ware Episcopal which was also founded during the Colonial period: “Before emancipation, one of the responsibilities of the parish rector was to make certain the children of slaves were baptized [...]. These children were not confirmed in the church but there are listings for burials in the plantation graveyards” (158). While some of the enslaved population of Gloucester County were allowed to attend Episcopal services, and their plantation burials were recorded, they were far more active as both church members and as leaders in the Baptist Churches of the county.

The antebellum Baptist churches of Gloucester County, like those of other counties in the state, included enslaved and free blacks as church members and in

leadership roles. According to Ryland, in 1760 Dan River in Halifax (later Pittsylvania County) was constituted :

[...] with 74 members of whom eleven were Negroes. It was the first Separate Baptist Church in Virginia [...]. During the same time period in that part of Lunenburg (Mecklenburg), a group made up largely of the slaves of William Byrd III, was organized as a church. The breaking up of the Byrd estate scattered these 'bright and shining' Christians, into various regions of the state".

(39)

The rapid spread of evangelism and the perception of the Baptist faith as more egalitarian than other churches made the Baptist church very attractive to both free and enslaved blacks. As blacks became increasingly active in Baptist churches, black ministers, preachers and exhorters began to emerge.

Baptists documents recorded that, in 1792, the Roanoke Association purchased a negro named Simon in order to free him to preach the Gospel [...], and another negro, Jacob, "preached at Farnham in Richmond County" (155-56). One year earlier, in Williamsburg, a church of some 500 persons, "almost if not altogether people of colour" and led by Gowan Pamphlet asked to be recognized by the Dover Association (a James River district Baptist association). "Their first pastor had been Moses, 'a black man' who 'was often taken up and whipped for holding meetings'" Pamphlet's congregation was accepted by the Dover association in 1793 and Pamphlet served as a delegate to the Association until 1808 (157). The history of that congregation, as recorded by its members, was, as in later cases one of both resistance and cooperation:

The First Baptist Church of Williamsburg originated in the 1700s with a quest by courageous slaves and free black worshipers who simply wanted to worship their God in their own way. In their search, they left the church of the slave owners, Bruton Parish, where worship was restrained and segregated, and built the first brush arbor at Green Spring Plantation to gather secretly in song and prayer. Worshipers soon moved to a more convenient spot, Raccoon Chase, where Robert F. Coles, a compassionate white landowner in Williamsburg, inspired by the worshipers' stirring songs and soulful prayers, offered the use of his Carriage House on Nassau Street as a meeting place sometime in 1776. The Reverend Moses, an enslaved person, served as preacher to the worshipers until his passing in 1791. His prodigy, Rev. Gowan Pamphlet, returned to the community and led the congregation of the "African Baptist Church" until his death in 1810. (*First Baptist Church*)

Gloucester County also produced a "man of Colour" who served as a delegate to the Dover Association and as the Pastor of a major church in the 1700s. The name William Lemmon (Jr.) is listed upon the Tax List of Gloucester County in 1770 and 1782. Lemmon was identified on the Tax-lists as a free male residing in Petsworth Parish. Lemmon's taxable property was listed as two horses, six cattle and one Negro (Mason 98).

The name Lemmon, with a slightly different spelling, moves to the forefront of the history of the Baptist Churches of Gloucester County through Petsworth Baptist Church. The fact that the cultural/ethnic framework of Gloucester's religious institutions was not, initially, the product of a rigid black/white dichotomy is clearly evidenced in the life and history of William Lemon.

During the 1790s, Lemon, a black minister, was identified as having served as pastor to a predominately white church in Gloucester County (Morgan 430). In *Gloucester County*, Mary Waitt Gray identifies the congregation as that of Petsworth Baptist Church: "Robert Hudgins (the Founding Pastor) preached for this congregation until the time of his death. This left them *for a while* (Italics added) without a minister. In the meantime a colored man by the name of William Lemon acted as their preacher." Gray explains that, at the time, most of the county's blacks were enslaved and did not have churches of their own, but every white church had Negro members (113). Lemon was still serving at Petsworth's as the 18th century drew to a close. According to Sobel's *The World They Made Together*, "Black William Lemon, pastor at Gloucester Baptist (also known as Petsworth or Ware) in Gloucester County, between 1799 and 1801, led a revival at the church and represented its congregation at the 'white' Dover Association meetings in 1797, 1798 and 1801" (212).

While sources differ as to the length of time "Lemon" served as pastor of Petsworth, his status as Pastor of one of the most prominent "white" churches in Gloucester County was a matter of the congregants acknowledging and testifying to his personal and professional merits: "[...] the church members chose the Reverend Mr. William Lemon, described as 'not white in complexion though he had been

washed white in the layer of regeneration” [...] (*The Negro in Virginia* 115).

Lemon’s preaching is described as so “lively and affecting” that he remained at the head of the church until his death in the early 1800s (115). Lemon’s tenure as pastor of the most prominent white church in Gloucester occurred at a time when the majority of the population of the county was made up of enslaved individuals, who, like himself, “were not white in complexion.” His elevated status within the church community, while not unique in the broader contexts of Virginia’s Baptist Churches, highlighted the complex and, to some degree, fluid nature of racial/interracial interactions within the history of the county. There were no organized black churches during Lemon’s life-time, yet blacks were active in many of the county’s churches.

There were vast differences in the legal statuses of whites, free blacks and free mulattoes, yet, within the Baptist churches, legal status was not the controlling factor. This apparent egalitarianism was in large part responsible for the gravitation of many of the enslaved toward participation in Baptist churches, “... slaves found themselves taken as seriously as free black and white members. All people were the same in the sight of God. In the words of one preacher, ‘if slave they were Christ’s freemen- if free, as Christ’s slaves’” (Takagi 53). The total number of blacks, free or enslaved, who participated in the organized religious life of Gloucester County in the pre-Civil War period, was not documented. Given the limited number of organized churches in the county from 1790 to 1860, it is unlikely that more than a small fraction of the enslaved population participated. According to the University of Virginia *Historical Census Browser* which utilizes U.S. Census data, blacks averaged 53.7 % of the total population during those years (*Historical Census Browser*).

Black participation in Gloucester's churches radically changed in 1832.

In the aftermath of Nat Turner's Rebellion, the religious activities of free blacks and enslaved Africans were seriously constrained and leadership of religious and other activities by blacks were expressly banned. As explained by Joseph R. Washington, "Nat Turner was a Baptist exhorter and mystic who discovered in the Bible the way out of bondage [...] he began an assault upon whites by murdering those in the household of his master, then roamed the countryside killing whites" (*Black Religion* 203).

Spotswood Hunnicutt Jones describes the impact of Turner's revolt in Gloucester County. On the orders of the Governor, state militias, including Gloucester's, were activated and put on alert. The then owner of the Elmington estate, Thomas Smith Dabney, was commissioned by the Governor as "colonel of militia." Dabney, when required to be absent at night to patrol, summoned his enslaved Africans. They were told that in his absence the safety of his wife was in their hands. He warned them that if she came to the slightest harm, they would answer to him. His daughter recalled that the "servants were faithful..." (qtd. in Hunnicutt Jones 105).

Amid the fear and panic caused by Turner and his followers killing over 50 whites upon his interpretation of Biblical texts, religious activities among blacks, once thought to be a way of controlling the conduct of the enslaved, were reevaluated. Black-led religious activities were deemed to be so potentially dangerous that the Virginia General Assembly sought to curtail, if not end, them,

"Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that no slave, free negro or mulatto, whether he shall have been ordained or licensed, or

otherwise, shall hereafter undertake to preach, exhort or conduct, or hold any assembly or meeting, for religious or other purposes, either in the day time or at night;..." (*Supplement 246*).

The passage of this law did not end religious activities among Gloucester County's enslaved black population. The primary impact of the law was the disappearance from the organized churches of figures such as William Lemon. Blacks continued to participate in the area's churches, but under the leadership and supervision of whites. There is not extensive data on the participation and status of blacks in the county's churches during this period. Most of what can be gleaned comes from the histories of churches, such as Union Baptist Church, located in Lower Gloucester County, in an area known as Guinea:

On July 28 (1844), the following colored members were confirmed as deacons: Peter Cooper and Billy Dixon, belonging to Mrs. Shelly Page. Randolph Carter, belonging to Mr. I. Thurston's Estate. Ned Jackson, belonging to Mr. John Tabb. Sam Spriggs, belonging to Mr. Robt. Coke, Jr. Bell Farm. Billy Selden and Coleman Barnwell, belonging to Capt. Robins. Martin Cooper and Harry Hudgins, belonging to Mr. Colin Clark. Taylor, belonging to Brother Dodson's Estate. Thompson, belonging to Major W.R. Perrin. Lendon, belonging to W.M. Vaughn. John Cook, belonging to Capt. Sterling Rowe. James, belonging to Mr. Smith's Estate. Randolph, belonging to Mr. Llewellyn. John Harrison, belonging to Robt. Coke, Jr., Abingdon Farm. Davy Wyatt, belonging to Mrs. Shepherd, Sevren Hall. (Union Baptist 6-7)

Union Baptist's 1844 list of Deacons demonstrates the complexity of the enslaved population. Twelve of the 17 Deacons have first and last names, and their last names differ from those of their owners. Possession of "full" names suggests one's membership in a self-aware family grouping. At the same time, though all of the Deacons are apparently mature males, none is identified as "Mr." as are their varied owners. Black deacons also had to be approved by the white members of the congregation (6).

As was the custom under the state's 1832 Law, the Colored Deacons of Union Baptist were assisted by several white members who met with them when they gathered to deliberate issues pertaining to governing or disciplining Colored members. The portion of the congregation served directly by Colored Deacons constituted the majority of the membership of the church. In 1844, Union Baptist reported a membership of 338; of that number 200 were identified as Colored (7).

The legislature's attempts to control the religious life of free and enslaved blacks by silencing the voices of black exhorters and preachers may have, inadvertently, promoted an increase of the very type of religious conduct it sought to suppress. Silenced in the pulpits and sanctuaries of the man-made church, black preachers, and their followers reasserted their ways of faith down by the riverside and under the shelter of trees.

A number of the "independent" African American Churches that came into existence after the Civil War trace their histories back to brush/hush arbors. As Abrahams notes in *Singing the Master*, "Hush-arbor, also called brush arbor, meetings were congregations outdoors, at some remove from any habitation"(45-6).

The actual history of such ceremonies is impossible to chart. Elements of secret, Afrocentric ceremonies and religious beliefs likely arrived, in the form of conjurers and priest/priestess, with the earliest of slave-ships. The covert and, often, subversive nature of such rituals required both courage and stealth. Outdoor hush arbor meetings, meetings in houses and homes, even quiet reflections between fathers and sons, away from the other ears can be interwoven into a broader picture of development of the Black Church. The interplay, if not balance, between the Anglo-American and African belief systems and freedom and slavery was demonstrated by Frederick Douglass in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

Douglass recounted his encounters with two very important “religious” men from his youth in enslavement. Father Lawson and Sandy were both men of faith, yet quite dissimilar in their beliefs. The two were also enslaved.

As Huggins explains in *Slave and Citizen*, “Father” Lawson taught Douglass that his freedom would be obtained by his passion for it and reliance on God. Though forbidden to do so by his master, Douglass met with Lawson, often on Sundays, and the two worshipped together. Sandy, a Conjurer and Root-Doctor, advised Douglass in the privacy of his home and gave him an amulet against being beaten by “slave-breaker” Edward Covey (7-10). “Father” Lawson was Douglass’s guide on his journey to Christian spirituality. Sandy’s spiritual beliefs were forged of the African past of the enslaved and drew on powers rooted there. Perdue’s collection of ex-slave narratives, *Weevils in the Wheat*, recorded tales of root doctors and conjurers (221, 263,267). The presence of both men in Douglass’ life, as he struggled to establish and define his own religious beliefs, mirrors the complex and flexible nature of religion among antebellum black populations.

Douglass vividly describes his spiritual dilemmas relating to the violence of enslavement and the acquiescence of masters, pastors, and the enslaved in the face of oppression and violence:

“Here was a good place to pray; to pray for help for deliverance -- a prayer I had often made before. But how could I pray? Covey could pray -- Capt. Auld could pray -- I would fain pray; but doubts (arising partly from my own neglect of the means of grace, and partly from the sham religion which everywhere prevailed, cast in my mind a doubt upon all religion, [...] My religious views on the subject of resisting my master, had suffered a serious shock, by the savage persecution to which I had been subjected, and my hands were no longer tied by my religion.” (*My Bondage...* 235-41)

Taken as a group, “Father” Lawson, Douglass, and Sandy represented different generations of enslaved populations struggling to find or create meaningful religious lives. The three formed a trinity: a patient, loving and wise father; the hope of salvation (freedom) manifested in a “son;” and, lastly, the workings of an unexplainable and powerful spirit. In a narrative sense, Douglass’ treatment of his own spiritual struggle and his relationship with these two other enslaved individuals symbolized the struggles of the nascent African American Churches as they wrestled against the forces of white churches that sought to marginalize, dominate and control them, symbolized by Covey.

In the aftermath of the banning of unsupervised, black-led church services, the same desire for religious autonomy and for religious experiences that did not tie the hands of slaves, expressed in Douglass' 1855 autobiography, continued to animate the pre-Emancipation religious lives of many of the enslaved Africans and free blacks of Gloucester County. In his 2003 historical fiction, *The Known World*, Edward P. Jones drew directly upon the history of blacks in Gloucester, "Freed negroes might give slaves too many 'unnatural notions,' a delegate from Northampton County had noted before the act was passed, and, added another delegate from Gloucester, freed Negroes lacked 'the natural controls' put on a slave"(15). In fact, legislation that precluded independent black religious activities and slave gatherings were coupled with state and local ordinances that seriously curtailed the already limited freedoms of the free black and mulatto population of the county. One such act was the *Legislative Petition to Remove Free Negroes, January 13, 1836*:

The principle cause to be assigned for the insubordination existing, at present among the slave population is the residence of the Free people of colour, who not only add nothing to the effective labour of the County, but are dissolute in their morals, and by their example promote sedition and vice of every kind among the slaves. Their idleness [...] the liberty they enjoy of roving about at large through the County, gives them every opportunity of sowing the seeds of dissatisfaction among the slaves. (Smith, Thomas)

During the years immediately preceding Emancipation, both the enslaved and free black populations of Gloucester were more marginalized in terms of the religious activities than they were at the beginning of the 19th century. If they participated in organized, legal, worship services, they did so under the supervision and control of officials from the county's white churches. As in other areas of the state, many attended services under preachers hired by plantation owners. Others attended services under the watchful eyes of paid, white ministers whose messages were tailored to reinforce the power and control of their masters. Few members of either group, enslaved or free, were content with interpretations of faith that promised freedom and justice only after death. Denied equality in the Sacred World of the planter class and free whites, blacks and mulattoes, both enslaved and free, established Brush- Hush arbors and, eventually, churches, and created Sacred Worlds of their own.

Gloucester born former slave, Mr. Beverly Jones, recalled that during the Civil War, slaves were allowed to attend a service at a church near an area known as Sassafras Road. These services were only allowed under white supervision. The white preacher would preach first and then oversee the preaching of the black preacher. The white preacher was paid for his services. Mr. Jones indicated that many of the blacks that attended the white-supervised service knew the substance of the white pastor's sermon in advance. "[...] they knowed it by heart. Always took his text from Ephesians, the white preacher did. The part what said 'obey your master, be good servants'" (Perdue 182-83).

For some Gloucester County born blacks the call to be good servants took on meanings far beyond the subjugation and humiliation of enslavement.



Henry Jack

Born near Ware Neck in Gloucester County on July 11, 1828, John Henry (Jack) Yates was converted to Christianity in his youth through attendance at slave church gatherings. Yates, having been taught to read by his young master, would “steal away [...] at night and read his Bible by the light of a pine knot...” (Yates 4-10).

Yates visited neighboring plantations and, while careful not to offend “overseers,” held prayer meetings and brought the enslaved a hopeful message. He left Gloucester in 1863 and moved to Houston, Texas . After Emancipation, he became the Founding Minister of Houston’s first black Baptist Church, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church and helped to bring into existence Texas’ first Baptist College, Bishop Academy (McCullough). The unlicensed though tacitly-sanctioned activities of Yates, and others like him, is evidence that many within the enslaved community were not content with limited and controlled religious services offered by the ruling planter class and took initiatives, often covertly, to augment and deepen the religious lives of the enslaved communities.

Brush arbors, or hush (h)arbors, were reported in locations throughout the pre-Civil War/Civil War South. Though the actual form of the services and the mechanisms employed to assure their secrecy differ, the functions they served and the need that they satisfied were the same (Levine 41-42). It was in religious gatherings in the secrecy of slave quarters, private homes of free blacks, and under the shelter of trees that Gloucester blacks undertook to establish and maintain their relationship with the Sacred. In the woods and forests of Gloucester County, enslaved and free blacks laid the foundations of their post-Civil War churches. In the presence of “Living Altars” that evoked and represented both African and European American religious traditions, Gloucester’s blacks consecrated spaces which became entrances into their own sacred worlds. According to Deborah Gray White, “The slave’s sacred world, reflected in song, music and religion, and folk beliefs was another space African Americans created apart from the realm of the slave master [...] It prevented legal slavery from taking over the soul” (*Let My People...* 49). With the outbreak of the Civil War and the early occupation of Gloucester County by Union forces, the religious lives of county residents underwent profound changes.

Gloucester County was occupied by Union troops in May of 1862. According to *The World of Ware Parish*, many enslaved blacks took advantage of the arrival of the Federal troops. Some left to join the Union ranks; others “fled” when Federal troops arrested their masters. Others stayed with their “families” (Jones 134-35). The power of the slave owners was curtailed as Union forces destroyed properties, burned supplies, arrested leading men and confiscated properties. During the three years of Federal occupation, white church services were often held (as many black services were before occupation) in the privacy of homes. Congregants of many of the white

churches feared and distrusted the Union troops, “We were afraid to assemble ourselves together anywhere so there was no going to church [...] Father read the service at home every Sunday morning” (138-39). During the occupation of Gloucester County, the power of the slavery symbolized by the Honey-pod (honey locust) Tree that stood near Gloucester Courthouse began to wane and the power of the trees of brush arbors, which served as symbols of independent African American congregations began to grow stronger. As Sobel explains in *Trabelin’ On:* , “The Black’s emphasis on a particular spot for praying, a place that is a God-infused location, seems to be African in character. Spirit is found in particular trees or hidden places” (110).

To consecrate sacred spaces fully, it was necessary to be able to exert legal and social control over the sites. For the enslaved, such control of land was impossible. However, with the end of Civil War, and the subsequent economic, political, and social upheaval that swept through the South, the formerly-enslaved populations began to purchase lands upon which they had formerly existed as chattel-human property. The African Americans who remained in Gloucester County after the War were extremely active in obtaining real estate. Starting with William Lemmon, Gloucester County’s free black population had a long history of land ownership. *The Negro in Virginia* asserts that, in 1865, Gloucester County blacks were said to have owned 537 acres of land. The figure had grown to 2,300 acres by 1880 (*Virginia Writer’s Project* 247). A small, yet vital, portion of the land purchased, or obtained, after 1865 was property owned collectively by the newly-emerged African American or black Churches. Most initial church sites were small, commonly less than two acres.

The legal processes involved in obtaining lands to consecrate black religious sites, ways of worship, and community history cast many of the needs of the broader African -American community in stark relief. Land ownership involved finances, documentation, reading, and signatures. Having long been denied participation in the cash economy of the county and access to education, the majority of the county's newly-freed residents were at a disadvantage. However, from within the scattered communities that formed in the shadows of the plantation upon which they had for generations been born, toiled, and died as chattel, deacons, preachers, elders, trustees and other church leaders emerged to guide them. The spirit of events of the time was captured by Paul Laurence Dunbar in "An Ante-Bellum Sermon":

We is gathahed hyeah my brothahs,
In dis howlin' wildaness,
Fu to speak some words of comfo't
To each othah in distress.
An' we chooses fu' ouah subjie'
Dis—we'll 'splain it by an' by;
"An' de Lawd said, "Moses, Moses,'
An' de man said, "Hyeah am I."
(Dunbar Digital Collection)

Dunbar's poem invokes images of "Black Christianity" practiced in the "wildaness" of human bondage and of the secret "hush-arbor" meeting that rose in resistance to enslavers' interpretations of the faith. The poem, which also associates

the suffering and deliverance of the enslaved with that of the Hebrews, robes the experiences of the formerly-enslaved in righteousness and casts the former slaver-masters as Pharaohs. The exodus of most of the formerly enslaved population of Gloucester County was not one of migration out of the county but one of movement from bondage to freedom, from being owned to being able to own. The Hebrews sought the “Promise Lands.” Gloucester County’s newly-freed blacks sought the promise inherent in owning land and developing institutions to help the newly -freed slaves develop and stabilize their families and communities.

The deeds recorded with the County Clerk in the aftermath of the war provided a legal roadmap of the development of Gloucester’s organized black churches and the individuals whose agencies laid the foundations for individual churches. The record of deeds also, in some cases, marks the transition of brush-armor churches into more traditional houses of worship. This development, the “Invisible Institution” becoming not only visible but casting itself in a form that, eventually, closely mirrored that of the white churches, was a process of synthesis. Integrating the formerly enslaved and the historically free blacks into organized churches produced congregations that were as “mixed” as were the formerly mixed congregations of the enslaved and their masters. The historically free families, who had at least limited educational opportunities, formed a small, elite class within the Post-War community; however, the majority of most of the newly-formed black churches were created by individuals and families who were formerly enslaved:

Class differentiation in black church organization was a very significant factor. Church divisions were along class lines both in Petersburg and in Savannah where the second Colored (1802) was

composed of free blacks and the enslaved elite, while the Great Ogachee Church (1802) was the plantation slave church. In many cases, the distinction between slave and free-black congregations was very strict and was maintained by some even into the post-Civil War period (*Trabelin* 191).

This historically free/historically enslaved dichotomy would be an important factor in the establishment of independent black churches in Gloucester County.

In moving congregations into sanctuaries built by human hands and located upon land either purchased or given as gifts, many of the hush arbor churches were relocated on to lands removed from the sites that they themselves had consecrated. Likewise, once the black churches were landed and housed, the nature and form of their worship services and commemorations were adjusted to resemble, if not duplicate, those of white churches. In this process, the historically-free members of Gloucester's African American communities had the advantages of having possession of lands that could be gifted or easily purchased for church usages. The formerly-enslaved population which had utilized sites that held spiritual importance to them but belonged to others had to attempt to purchase land to serve as sites of worship. Despite the hardships that they faced, members of Gloucester's formerly-enslaved population were at the forefront in the drive to establish legally sites of organized black religious activities at or near such sites and lead their communities out of the shadow of the Honey-pod tree.

The Trustees of Ebenezer Church executed a deed on August 22, 1868, through which an acre of land was conveyed from Augustine W. Robins to the Trustees of the Poplars Church: Joseph Wesley Jackman, David Mathias and Samuel

Driver. The acre of land transferred by the deed was commonly referred to as “The Poplars” (Ebenezer). This transaction, in which members of Gloucester’s black and mulatto population symbolically subverted the power of the Honey-pod tree, was actually a late chapter in a history that began in the 1790s and involved William Lemon, the black pastor of Petsworth Baptist Church.

By the middle of the 1800s, the congregation of Petsworth Baptist Church had become predominantly black. The church was disbanded, and many of its members joined one of Petsworth’s “Daughter” churches, Ebenezer (192). Ebenezer, like many other Gloucester County churches, functioned as a “mixed” congregation until the post-Civil War era compelled and/or enabled the complete social separation of the black and white communities and the creation of independent black congregations and leadership cadres such as the Trustees of Poplars Church.

The 1860 Census listed the then 20- year -old Joseph W. Jackman and 30- year- old Samuel Driver. Jackman, listed as black, and Driver, listed as mulatto, were identified as oystermen. David Mathias was not listed in the 1860 Census, which listed only “free souls.” However, “Davy” Mathias, a 69-year-old “black” for whom no occupation was listed, was among those enumerated in the 1870 Census (Gloucester Census). This first officially documented unit of African American church governance in Gloucester County was “mixed,” comprised of two historically free individuals (mulatto and black) and a formerly- enslaved individual (black).

The deed for the location known as The Poplars documents not only the first instance of a post-Civil War African American congregation obtaining lands in Gloucester specifically for religious purposes; it also documented the transition of an African American congregation from a hush arbor to a more traditional man-made

church structure located upon the same site. This fusion of a “found” or naturally-created altar with a manufactured edifice containing within it a handcrafted altar is not so clearly evidenced anywhere else in the county.



The site called “The Poplars” was so named because of an unusual alignment of 7 tree trunks. The mature trunks, arrayed in close, linear order, actually rose from a common root structure, and thus, were actually a single tree. This unique formation of living trees served as the meeting place for a congregation made up of mostly formerly enslaved black and mulatto individuals. A Centennial Souvenir, published by the church in 1966, clearly indicated the sacred nature of the tree/trees in the church’s history, “After over a hundred years, God has kept these trees for us to look on with awe and wonder, acknowledging it as a sacred place” (In Memoriam). The church’s “*Centennial*” also lists 36 of its Founders by name. According to Census data, the majority of the 36 Founders were historically-enslaved individuals (not

listed as free in the 1860 Census of the county's population). That a largely formerly-enslaved, Christian population would establish and maintain as sacrosanct a relationship with a "found" altar in the form of a tree or grove suggests a complex sense of the sacred and a blending of European and West African systems of worship.

The Christian Bible contains many examples of sacred trees, the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Burning Bush, The Cedars of Lebanon, etc... These allusions to sacrosanct natural locations would have been well known and easily recognized allusions within Gloucester County's Afro-Christian communities. Less well known, and less easily recognized, would have been the symbolic and sacred functions of trees and shrubs in the belief systems of the West African people that were uprooted and relocated to the Tidewater area of Virginia during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Though the legal importation of slaves from Africa ended in the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War, the African traditions involving the oral transmission of history, culture, systems of belief, and folkways continued, suppressed but unabated.

Though precise determinations as to the first usages of individual sites are difficult, the existence of hush arbors as sites of worship among the enslaved African populations was extensively documented in the post-Civil War years. More recently, researchers began examination of the relationships between enslaved African hush arbors and Pre-Colonial West African religious practices, knowledge of which survived the disruptive effects of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, sheltered and hidden in plain sight, within the cultural literacy framework of West African oral traditions. Robert Farris Thompson addresses the issue in *Face of the Gods*:

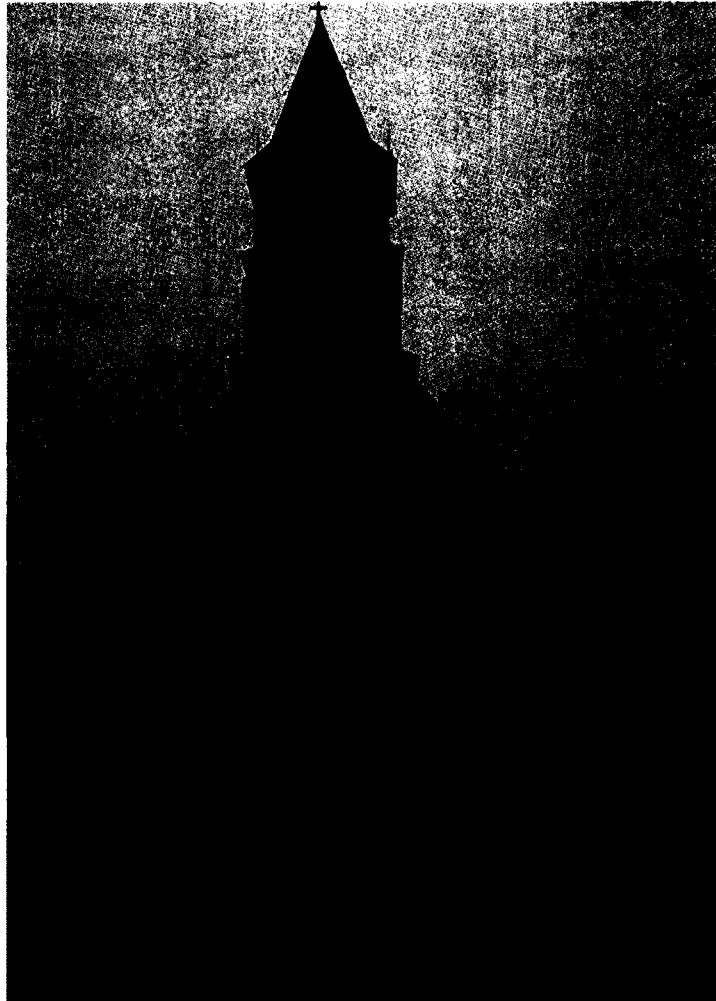
Bakongo consider trees sentinels of the spirit. An offshoot of this belief diffused through the black United States, constellating around New World trees...Here is the recollection of an ex-slave: 'I usually prayed behind a big beech tree, a little distance from the house, and often during the night When I would feel to pray, I would get up out of bed and go to this tree'. (81)

The persistence, within the enslaved populations of the New World, of the practice of imbuing trees, individually and in groups, with sacred and ritual importance was not an "invention" but a continuation of widespread, ancient and historically-documented West African systems of worship. "West Africans [...] have always worshipped in groves, and have regarded certain tall trees as loci of spiritual presence" (110). Cultural groups that regarded wooded areas as natural temples, or "found cathedrals," and stately trees as altars included Suriname Maroons, Akan, Mande, Fon, Bakongo and Yoruba (110).

The multiple trunks of the polar tree (trees) at the "Poplars" site symbolized two distinct types of found altars simultaneously. Viewed as multiple independent trunks, the trees constituted a sacred grove. When interpreted as a single entity from which "branches" protruded, the site became the locus of a "forked branch" altar whose elements aligned on a linear axis. Both types of altars were recognized in West African belief systems. The ritual significance of the site was magnified and enhanced by the in-dwelling presence of multiple, powerful spiritual forces and/or the presence of a single extremely powerful sacred force radiating multiple spiritual facets.

The use of trees as religious and ritual sites also enhanced the sacred nature of worship, celebration, and commemorative activities conducted there by adding elements of “time, growth and power”(Thompson, *Face* 65). As a guardian or sentinel, a tree protected and served as a witness for generations. The tree, as altar, allowed the re-interpretation of time, moving it beyond individual life-spans and extending it towards representation eternity. The continuing life of the tree, its growth, symbolized the continuing life and growth of those who acknowledged its sacrosanct nature through acts of consecration and their heirs: “Although the faces of those who first worshipped here have passed from view, a portion of the trees are still standing” (In Memoriam).

Along with West African corollaries, the Poplars site also had more traditional Judeo-Christian symbolisms. The seven interwoven trunks of the tree evoked powerful Hebrew symbolism: “And he said unto me: 'What seest thou?' And I said: 'I have seen, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; there are seven pipes, yea, seven, to the lamps, which are upon the top thereof;(Zechariah 4-2). The scripture is generally accepted as a description of a Menorah: One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith is the menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum used in the Temple (Jewish...). This in combination with the selection of the Hebrew name Zion for their church allowed to congregants to evoke the enslavement and eventual deliverance of the biblical Israelites. The fusion of two different systems of belief in through the symbolism of the trees enhanced its significance as an Afro-Baptist site.



Zion Poplars Baptist Church

During the pre-Civil War period, the hush arbor congregation that selected the trees of the “Poplars” site to establish their sanctuary would have been aware of another location of importance to the enslaved and free black communities of Gloucester County. The two sites were separated, by road, by miles; however, functionally and symbolically, they were worlds apart. The Zion Poplars

congregation gathered to worship within walking distance of the Honey-pod tree which marked the location of public slave auctions in the county. The single trunk of the Honey-pod tree had served as a symbol of the exploitation and disruption of the lives, labor, loyalty, and loves of the enslaved. Though it had a single trunk, the Honey-pod tree had, over time, several symbolic usages or meaning within the folklore and traditions of Gloucester County. These usages extended back into the Colonial Period and reflected, in different ways, the changing status of enslaved and free blacks in the county's history.

In her article, "Many Legends Surround Tree Which Once Stood In Middle Of Street," Charlotte Lanford discusses local beliefs or tales associated with the tree and its site. According to Lanford, in lore drawn from the Colonial Period, the Honey-pod tree was believed to be the site of the burial of the remains of important figures in the county's history, including those of Nathaniel Bacon (6). Bacon's 1676 rebellion had brought together an army of freemen, indentured servants and slaves. *Samuel Wiseman's Book of Record* explains that this cooperative alliance of individuals of different classes, ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses was a serious threat to the interest of wealthy landowners, their business associates and political allies. In the rebellion's aftermath, the use of indentured servants declined throughout the colony and the usage of enslaved African labor increased (Wiseman's 24). In other county tales, treasures of gold and silver were buried beneath the tree. In Civil War era lore, the Honey-pod tree was the location at which Union forces confined Confederate prisoners during the occupation of the county (Lanford 6).

The folk tale of treasure buried beneath the Honey-pod tree is attributed to "[...] very old Negroes." The tale involved an unknown individual, a steel coffin and

a pot of treasure (6). As a culturally active black folktale the story possibly contains metaphors and symbolisms drawn from lived experiences. Such tales often contained how the story-teller perceived life within his or her community. This Gloucester County tale, told by “very old Negroes” and about a tree that purportedly served as the local site for slave auctions, contained several interesting elements that, covertly redirected, could have formed a biting social critique: the loss of identity, seemingly eternal confinement in steel (iron) and the burial of treasure (individual hopes, aspirations, potentials, etc.); the treasures of the entombed human’s freedoms lost to enslavement’s burial. Only the enslaver, figuratively the “undertaker,” profited. However, the actual/literal meanings associated with the tale in the lives and minds of those who told them, remain unknown.

The Civil War era tale in which the Honey-pod tree figures prominently, features it being where leading citizens were held temporarily as prisoners: “taken as hostages and imprisoned in a fenced enclosure around the honey-pod tree...kept for several days and guarded by Federal bayonets” (6). This tale of the captivity of members of Gloucester’s elite as prisoners in the area of the Honey-pod tree brought the location full-circle in county lore. Whether the site was chosen for tactical or political reasons, the detention, however briefly, of former slave owners at the tree under which generations of enslaved Africans had been sold, bartered, and exchanged in payment of debts, marked the beginning of its transformation and reinterpretation among the county’s various ethnic groups. It is reasonable to believe that the irony of their holding Confederate prisoners there were not lost upon the Union troops.

In the years following the Union victory, Gloucester County’s black population established Emancipation Day celebrations. The Honey-pod tree, like the

far more famous “Emancipation Oak” located on the campus of Hampton Institute, was the central feature in these events. However, in both history and symbolism, the two trees and, therefore, the two celebrations were similar only on their surfaces. According to its “History”, the Emancipation Oak was the location where the Emancipation Proclamation was first read to the area’s black population and later the site of education for newly-freed men, women and their children (“History”). The symbolic resonance of the Emancipation Oak began with the ending of enslavement, and the tree was a logical choice for commemoration by Hampton’s newly-freed African Americans.

Gloucester’s Honey-pod tree was, on the other hand, far from logical as the location at which freedom from enslavement would be celebrated by the African Americans of the county. In fact, the holding of Emancipation Day ceremonies in the stark environs of the most compelling symbol of enslavement in the county was not a matter of choice, but a bitter necessity: “After the Civil War the Negroes would gather under this tree and hear the Proclamation read from the old auction block. This was because the use of the courthouse was denied them” (Walker 318). In forcing the African American population to gather in the area of the Honey-pod tree, county authorities kept the former enslavement, and on-going domination, of the black population on very public display: a yearly reminder that blacks, in the county and the wider South, still stood in the shadows of slavery. The Honey-pod tree served, locally, as a sign of the persistence of “White Supremacy” during the post-Civil War era, “The people of Gloucester of both races lived as quietly and normally during the Reconstruction as in any other politically disturbed period before or after [. . .] No

attempt was made to destroy white supremacy in the social or economic sphere of the community” (Jones, *World of...* 145).

In securing and maintaining the “Poplars” site as a religious property, Gloucester’s first formerly-enslaved congregation organized their religious lives around a natural counter-sign of the old auction block. Their successful fusion of natural altar and traditional Euro-Christian symbolism commemorated and consecrated the formerly unmarked persistence of West African, cultural practices and religious beliefs in Gloucester County’s African Diaspora. Though the hush arbors of the pre- Civil War to post-Civil War South were often characterized as primitive gatherings led by semi-literates, the selection of a tree altar site and the selection of the title “Zion” to consecrate the location reflected an appreciation and understanding of Christian theology far beyond these stereotypes:

“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61-3 KJ).

The Poplars Baptist Church drew worshippers from great distances, provided a model, and served as an inspiration for African Americans in other parts of Gloucester County. According to the history of Union Zion Baptist Church, Zion Poplars was its “mother”:

In 1867, a large number of people from Ware Neck, along with people from other areas of Gloucester worshiped in a revival meeting at Zion Poplars. Seventeen persons were converted and as a result of that meeting, they became the founders of Union Zion Baptist Church. (Union Zion)

The success of Zion Poplars was a vital step in promoting and fostering development of a uniquely “African-Baptist” religious tradition throughout the county’s black communities.

The “Poplars” site and the transaction through which the Trustees, on behalf of their congregants, obtained legal right to it also highlighted the complex and continuing nature of the relationships among the county’s formerly enslaved and former slave-owners. In the 1840 Gloucester Census, Augustine W. Robins is identified as the owner of 17 enslaved Africans. Robins’ name is also one of those listed on an 1836 “*Legislative Petition to Remove Free Negroes*” from the county.

Zion:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we
sat down, yea, we wept, when we
remembered Zion

We hanged our harps upon the
willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us

Away captive required of us a song;
And they that wasted us required of us mirth
Saying, sing us one of the
Songs of Zion. (Psalms 137, 1-3)

Within a year of the Poplars Church being established, on June 5th of 1869, John W. Leavitt, acting as a Special Commissioner for the County Court, filed a Deed in Trust in the County Clerks office placing land in trust for the First Colored Baptist Church of Gloucester County (Leavitt). The Leavitt family name figures prominently in an earlier Gloucester County historical document which addressed the status and conditions of blacks. Several members of the Leavitt family (William A. Leavitt, William, Jr. John L. Leavitt), were also signatories to the earlier 1836 “*Legislative Petition to Remove Free Negroes.*”

In filing the deed for the property known as “The Old Glebe Meeting House,” Leavitt listed the Trustees of The First Colored Baptist Church as James Carter, Johnson Smith, Miles Carter, William Brooks, Randall Carter and William Payne (186). None of the names of the Trustees for The First Colored Baptist Church were included in the 1860 Census of the county, which listed Free People of Color resident in the county. All their names were, however, contained in the 1870 census data. James Carter was listed as a thirty-eight –year-old farmer. Miles Carter was listed as a thirty-five- year-old farmer. Twenty-three -year -old William Brooks was also listed as a farmer. Randall Carter, forty-five, was listed as a sailor.

Thirty-five-year-old William Payne was also listed as a farmer. The Carters, Brooks and Payne were all listed in the Census data for Abingdon Parish. The 1870

Census data for Ware Parish lists Johns(t)on Smith, a fifty-nine-year-old mulatto, as a carpenter (Gloucester Census). The predominance of farmers among the Trustees reflects the rural nature of the county and the limited non-agricultural opportunities afforded most of the county's black population. With the exception of Smith, all the Trustees were identified by the Census enumerators as black.

These Trustees oversaw the purchase of a two-acre plot and a house situated upon the acreage for 280 dollars. Located close to the main North/South road in the county (Route 17), the Old Glebe Hill site was near several large antebellum plantations that had large enslaved populations, including White Marsh, Hickory Fork, Road View and Millwood. Abingdon Episcopal Church was the largest white church in the immediate area.

In August of 1870, another group of trustees obtained a deed for property to be used to establish a black church. Acting as Trustees for The Colored Baptist Church, they purchased, for 30 dollars, an acre of land from Richard.S. Folkes... "for the benefit of the Colored Baptists of Ware Neck" (Folkes). None of the names of the Trustees were listed in the 1860 Census data. Daniel Gardner, a fifty-five -year - old farmer, James Tyler, a sixty- year -old farm laborer, and Bailey Gardner, a fifty-two -year- old farmer, were enumerated in the 1870 Census (Gloucester Census). All the Trustees who were identified by name on the 1870 Deed were identified by the census-takers as black.

The property purchased by the Trustees was bordered on the North by lands owned by William Booth Taliferro (pronounced Tol-iver / Tar-liver). General W.B. Taliferro is among Gloucester County's most celebrated Confederate heroes. Among his many accolades is his service in command of Battery Wagner. Battery Wagner

defended the mouth of Charleston Harbor. Taliferro held Battery Wagner against determined Union attacks in July of 1863:

At the forefront of the Union assault was the 54th Massachusetts, the first black regiment recruited in the North. Its white commander, 26 year old Col. Robert G. Shaw, led the attack that carried his regiment onto the parapet of the fort, where he was killed by a bullet through the heart. The 600 soldiers of the 54th suffered 272 casualties.

(Taliferro)

Though it is not well know, even among the African American population of the county, the Gardner family of Ware Neck also produced a Civil War hero:

James Daniel Gardner, a.k.a. "Gardiner," I Company 36th Infantry Regiment United States Colored Troops (USCT) [...] Gloucester County Virginia's only Medal of Honor recipient Gardner was born September 16, 1839 at Ware Neck (Voices of Freedom). According to Spotswood Honeycutt Jones, the name Gardner was, like many African American family names in post- Civil War Gloucester, appropriated by run-away or freed blacks (Jones148).

As of 1857, the extended Taliferro family owned extensive holdings in Ware Neck. Taliferro family lands included plantations known as Glen Roy, Burgh Westra, Back Creek, Lowland Cottage, Erin, Avoca, Dunham Massie, Bellville, Bloomsbury, Mobjack and Ware Point (Montague 84). All the Trustees of the Colored Baptist Church (Ware Neck), and James D. Gardner, were, very likely, born enslaved near to, if not upon, a Taliferro-owned plantation.

Another small group of formerly-enslaved African American males obtained property upon which to build a church in May of 1873. Located farther north than any

other black church property obtained earlier, New Mount Zion Baptist Church would serve African Americans who lived in the upper section of Petsworth Parish. Acting on behalf of the Colored Baptist Church, Isaac Booker, Ralph Washington, Peyton Cooke, Albert Wyatt, James Merideth and Beverly Loudan obtained an acre of land on the main road between Woods Cross Roads and Pampa Road from William Hibble for 10 dollars (Hibble).

The trustees identified as the earliest leaders of this congregation were, likely, all members of the county's formerly-enslaved population. None of their names were listed in the 1860 census of the county; however, all their names appeared in the 1870 Census of Petsworth Parish. Isaac Booker was listed as a forty-two-year-old mulatto farm laborer. Albert Wyatt, also a mulatto, was also listed as a farm laborer. Fifty-year-old Peyton Cooke was listed as a black farmer. Ralph Washington, sixty-years-old, thirty-five-year-old James Merideth and forty-five-year-old Beverly Loudan were listed as black and farm laborers (Gloucester Census).

The names of these men, all born enslaved, all linked to the land through agricultural occupations, entered into the documentary history of the county through a business transaction with a member of a white family with a long history of slave ownership within the county. The 1840 Census indicated that the various members of the Hibble family possessed 42 enslaved Africans. A member of the family, George Hibble, was a signatory of the 1836 "*Legislative Petition to Remove Free Negroes.*" The Petition does not distinguish whether the signature is that of George Hibble Sr. or George Hibble, Jr. The elder George Hibble owned 6 enslaved Africans in the general time line. George Hibble, Jr., owned 17 (Gloucester Census).

The Zion Hill Colored Church's Trustees executed a deed for an acre of land in March of 1876 (Thurston). The Trustees paid a sum of eight dollars for the property. Jacob Baytop and Willis Tabb, two of the Trustees, were listed in the 1870 Census data for Ware Parish (District). The name of a third Trustee, James Burwell, appears on the deed but is not found in any of the Census data of the period. The 1870 Census data identified Jacob Baytop as a thirty-year-old laborer and Willis Tabb as a forty-eight-year-old farmer. Both men were categorized as black (Gloucester Census).

As with other deeds, in which blacks obtained properties for religious purposes during the post- War era, the Zion Hill deed brings together, as signatories, members of the formerly-enslaved populations and members of elite families which once held considerable numbers of enslaved Africans. The Zion Hill property was deeded to the Trustees by members of the Thurston, Heywood, and Robins families, which held some 40+ slaves between them in 1840 (Gloucester Census).

The small price required by the sellers of the land in order for the trustees to obtain legal title to the property moved the transaction out of the realm of " strictly business" transactions. The establishment of a minimal purchase price allowed the trustees and subsequent the Zion Hill congregation, to claim ownership in ways that receiving the land as a gift would have denied them. To purchase the land was to be more fully invested in the legal, social, religious and economic life of the county.

There is no mention of the "Mother" church in the 1876 deed filed with the County Clerk (Thurston). Yet, in "Zion Hill's 138th Anniversary History", the church

traced its birth to Ebenezer. In terms of historical/legal documentation, Zion Hill is a “cousin” to Bethel (3).

The history of “Bethel,” according to Petsworth’s history, actually began in another, older, white church: old Petsworth Baptist Church, “Upon dissolution of Old Petsworth in 1852, 185 members were transferred to Ebenezer Baptist Church, a daughter church, bringing their membership (to) 1,057 of whom only 57 were reported to be White” (Birkett19). If Birkett’s history and that recorded by Zion Hill were accurate on the facts attending the dissolution of “Old Petsworth,” the church was, indeed, the “Grand mother” of Zion Hill. Birkett’s research also mentioned another group of blacks once associated with Petsworth: “The Blacks who were not among those attending Ebenezer following the dissolution of old Petsworth Baptist Church reportedly met under tents for preaching (the exact type of shelter is not known) [...] It was July 1867 on the third Sunday that Bethel Baptist Church was organized” (19). This group would, before forming Bethel, form the congregation of a black church located in an area known as Sassafras Stage. The earliest mention of the existence of a church at Sassafras occurred in a post-Civil War oral history interview with a Gloucester born ex-slave, Beverly Jones:

On Sundays they would let us go to church up at Sassafras Stage, near Bethel, was the first church for niggers in these parts. Wasn’t no white church, niggers built it an’ they had a nigger preacher. ‘Couse they wouldn’t let us have no services lessen a white man was present. Most of the time the white preacher would preach, then he would set there listenin’ while the colored preacher preached. That was the law at that time (Perdue 183).

Jones' recollections of the existence of a black church building in the Sassafras Stage area were inconsistent with the documentary record of the era. In the documentary history of the county, Sassafras Stage was the general site of several brush arbor churches. In a chapter titled, "The Church Wakes Up," Walker wrote about his return to Gloucester after his graduation from Hampton Institute, and, specifically, addresses "Old Sassafras":

Our own church, known at the time as Sassafras Stage, was an unsightly, ramshackle place... We worked long hours and hard and before many weeks had passed, the broken-down old Sassafras Stage church had taken a new lease on life and was ready for use. Even its name was improved. It was called Bethel Baptist Church... (56-57)

Walker's account places the renaming of "Sassafras" after his return to the county. This would place the renaming of the church in the 1880s: "Walker studied under Booker T. Washington and received his degree on 16 June 1883" (U.S. Dept. of Interior).

The Sassafras Stage area and nearby Cappahosic being the reported home to a number of brush arbor congregations, suggests that the membership of the Sassafras Stage community of worshippers might have come from several different areas. The Sassafras Stage environs lay well within the region of the county long served by Old Petsworth Baptist, which was "church home" to an important black figure in the history of churches in the county. Members of the Sassafras Stage congregation might have carried within their memories attending services at Petsworth while it was under the leadership of William Lemmon, a black minister. Also, an individual bearing Lemmon's last name is central to the history of Bethel.

While the names of the majority of the organizers of the “old Sassafras Stage” church do not appear in the 1860 Census as free souls, there is an unusual exception. Though both church histories indicate that James Lemmon was an enslaved butler, this is complicated by Census data. The 1870 Census listed the name of James Lemmon 4 times. One of the individuals listed was 48 years old at the time and listed as Dumb? Idiot. A second was listed as being 18 at the time of the census, and it would seem was too young to have been the butler in question. The remaining individuals were 47 and 48 years of age. These ages were the most likely for the identities found in the 1860 Census: two black males bearing the name James Lemmon, ages 36 and 40, were listed in the 1860 Census and were, thus, free blacks.

The histories of both Bethel and Petsworth contain mention of James F. (Jimmy) Lemmon. In these histories, Lemmon is identified as the formerly enslaved butler of Dr. J. Catlett Stubbs. In the Petsworth history, Dr. Stubbs was reported to have given an acre of land to former slaves in order to provide a site for a church.

In the Bethel history, James F. Lemmon is also identified as one of the 16 organizers of the Sassafras Stage church (History of Bethel 1). In Petsworth’s history, a direct connection between James F. Lemmon and William Lemmon is suggested, though no clear relationship is established beyond the last names. In the histories of both churches, James Lemmon is reported to have been literate and to have served as the first Clerk of the newly-founded church. While both Histories indicate that the church was organized in 1867, there is variance in the name of the entity that was organized. Bethel’s history refers to the church organized at this time as the “Sassafras Stage” church. The Petsworth history indicates that the word “African”

was an element in the title of the church organized at that time, “Dr. L. (J) Catlett Stubbs gave the Blacks an acre of land [...] and 16 Blacks including Jimmy Lemon (James F.) the former butler slave, started the Black African Baptist Church, now Bethel” (Petsworth 20).

The documentary record of the church, which started as “Old Sassafras,” was complex from the outset. The transaction, in which the land for the church was given, did not involve creation of a deed. Nor was the name of Dr. J. Catlett Stubbs’ found in any of the census data of the period. According to “The Gloucester Hall of Fame” published in the December 2000 issue of *The Family Tree Searcher*, J. Cattlett Stubbs was a Gloucester County native: “John Catlett Stubbs was born about 1847 in Gloucester County, VA. He died in 1874” (16). Mention of J. Cattlett Stubbs is also made in Dr. William Carter Stubbs’, *The Descendants of John Stubbs of Cappahosic: Gloucester County Virginia, 1692*, “Dr. John Cattlett (Stubbs), of Baltimore, died in 1874. Educated at University of Virginia and graduated in Medicine at University of Maryland, and a promising young physician in Baltimore at the time of his death” (35). If the church was organized in 1867, Stubbs would have been roughly 20 years old at the time, which would make him seem an unlikely source for the land given to Bethel Baptist Church. According to the Petsworth history, there was, as late as 1989, no deed establishing legal ownership of the initial property occupied by Bethel. This apparent gift of land, or, more precisely, undocumented gift of the use of land, would have made the congregants who used the site legally dependent upon those who held title to the land.

The name Bethel, associated with a church property first occurred in an 1879 deed, five years after the death of J. Cattlett Stubbs, and a year before Walker left

Gloucester for Hampton Institute, for a parcel of land that is described as “adjoining the Bethel Church land...” (Stubbs). The 1879 deed was executed between William C. Stubbs and wife and Beverly Burwell, Harry Baytop, James Lemon and Braxton Drummond- Trustees of the “African Bethel Church.” Drummond was noted in the 1860 census as a twenty-six-year-old, free, mulatto oysterman. Baytop’s name first appears in the 1870 census of Ware Parish, in which he was described as a fifty-year-old, black bricklayer. Beverly Burwell was not listed in the census data. The presence of James Lemon, among the Trustees listed, establishes the link between the Sassafras congregation and the congregation identified in the deed as “African Bethel.”

The language of this deed reinforced some of the data found in both the Petsworth and Bethel historical accounts. More importantly, the language of the deed indicates that some, if not all, of the early members of Bethel’s congregation acknowledged and attempted to consecrate their uniquely African heritage in the act of naming their house of worship.

Despite its tenuous claim of land “ownership” and complicated and varying local historical narratives, Bethel prospered and, eventually, gave birth to “daughter” Churches: in 1876, Mount Gilead was formed in York County. In 1879, Smithfield was formed in Gloucester. Shepherdsville was formed in Gloucester in 1883. Also in Gloucester, Morning Glory was organized in 1887.

One of Bethel’s “daughters,” Shepherdsville Baptist, gained a unique reputation and notoriety within the lore of the local African American Communities. The church is described as having been founded by historically free mulattoes and not, in its early history, being welcoming of darker-skinned blacks. While seemingly

unique in Gloucester County, the complex relationships between fair-skinned and darker blacks during the post- Civil war era were widespread enough to make their way into the literature of the period. Charles W. Chestnutt addressed the issues in *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color-Line*, first published in 1899. In the title story one of Chestnutt's characters reflects:

"I have no race prejudice," he would say, "but we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Our fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one does n't "I have no race prejudice," he would say, "but we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Our fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one does n't want us yet, but may take us in time. The other would welcome us, but it would be for us a backward step. 'With malice towards none, with charity for all,' we must do the best we can for ourselves and those who are to follow us. Self-preservation is the first law of nature."

The founding of Shepherdsville was the result of efforts on the part of a small group of individuals who with rare exception would have been objects of the 1836 *Legislative Petition to Remove Free Negroes*. The majority of both the original congregation and the original Board of Trustees shared two realities: histories of freedom and mulatto ethnic identities.

Shepherdsville was organized by 12 original members, led by Addison Driver. The 1860 Census identified Addison Driver as a thirty-year-old-mulatto. The original 12 members of Shepherdsville contained five other members of Addison Driver's family. These included his wife, Elizabeth, and the couple's four children. Elizabeth Driver was identified in the 1880 census as a forty-seven-year-old, mulatto housekeeper. Of the six remaining original members, four, Lucy Wilson, John Kelley, Jack Howe and William Braxton were identified as black. Both Wilson and Kelley were enumerated in the 1860 census: Wilson was twenty-five-year-old at the time and no occupation was listed. Kelley was sixteen years old in 1860 and was identified as a laborer. William Braxton was identified by the 1870 census takers as being a fourteen-year-old black. John (Jack?) Howe was identified in 1870 Ware data, listed as a forty-year-old, black farmer. W.C. and Susan Ashley were also original members of Shepherdsville. No concrete identification of W.C. was found in the census data. However, Susan Ashley was identified in the 1880 census data for Ware District as a forty-seven-year-old, mulatto farm hand (Gloucester Census).

The first Board of Trustees of Shepherdsville was also dominated by members of the Driver family. The original Trustees were Addison Driver, Samuel Driver, Robert Driver and Cornelius Ashley (Driver). At the time of the 1860 census of Gloucester County, Robert A. Driver was listed as a nine-year-old mulatto child. Robert had a younger brother, Samuel, who was recorded as a three-year-old. The same Census listed the thirty-years-old Samuel Driver, associated with the founding of Zion Poplars. Cornelius Ashley was listed in the 1880 Ware District data as being a ten-years-old mulatto (Gloucester Census).

The Trustees of Shepherdsville executed a deed on July 8th of 1886 whereby they obtained an acre of land for use as a church site. According to a November 6, 1966 document celebrating the 82nd Anniversary of Shepherdsville, the land for the church was “given” to the congregants by a person “who at the time was not a Christian”(Shepherdsville 1). The transaction was recorded in a deed which indicated that the Trustees agreed to pay a sum of ten dollars for the land in question and that the couple from whom the land was being purchased found the sum acceptable. The land was purchased from Lemuel and Fannie (Frances) Driver, both listed in the 1860 census as free mulattoes. Lemuel and Addison Driver were brothers (Gloucester Census).

The complicated nature of the relationships between black churches and between black churches and their white “mother” institutions was dictated by the complex cultural and ethnic relationships that evolved within the terrible intimacies of chattel slavery and post-War Emancipation. Though marginalized, the enslaved were allowed the “privilege” of participating in religious services in mixed churches prior to the conclusion of the conflict. This paternalistic and controlling relationship was a fundamental and profound articulation of the supremacy of whites over blacks, whether enslaved or free.

After Emancipation, the expanded and redesigned legal and social barriers of post- Civil War White Supremacy demanded the complete segregation of the social realities of blacks and whites throughout the South. In Gloucester County, “mixed” congregations did not vanish; they were redefined. post-War mixed congregations were no longer made up of free and enslaved, or of blacks and whites. After the Civil War, mixed congregations were comprised of formerly enslaved and historically free

people of color and of mulattoes and blacks. The birth of Gloucester's independent black churches was a direct consequence of the rigid crystallization of the doctrine of White Supremacy in every aspect of county life, including worship services.

Black communities responded to the changes by creating their own religious institutions. These newly- formed congregations reacted to issues associated with their individual and group histories differently. Many emerging black churches distanced themselves from, or minimized, their post-Civil War histories and their historical relationships within the congregations of white churches as quickly as possible. Some, such as Gloucester's First Morning Star Baptist Church, responded differently.

In 1885, the Board of Trustees of First Morning Star Baptist Church paid 12 dollars and 50 cent for a half-acre tract of land upon which to build a sanctuary (Cooke, Robert). In the years following the Civil War, the members of First Morning Star had, according to oral histories, met in homes and brush arbors and held "baptizing" in the near-by waters of the York River. The land which the trustees purchased was located within one-half mile of an older, "white" church that had been, for decades, the church home to many if not all of the congregants and their families.

According to its church history, Union Baptist Church dates from the late 1770s. Like most churches in Gloucester County, Union was for much of its history a mixed congregation of free and enslaved individuals, black and white. Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, blacks constituted the majority of the church's membership, "The report of the church to the association for the year 1844 was sixty-eight baptized, 37 white, 31 colored, making a total membership of 138 white and 200 colored, a total of 338" (Union 7). In the same year, a number of black members

were selected to serve as Deacons for the colored membership of the church. Listed in the church records by name and by owners, as discussed earlier, these individuals exercised power among the colored members under the supervision of “several” white members and their decisions were submitted to the broader membership of the church for confirmation (10). Belonging to different individuals and scattered estates, these individuals represented enslaved “communities” that were integral parts of the Union Baptist Church community. The relationship between the enslaved members of Union Baptist and their white counterparts continued during, and persisted well beyond, the conclusion of the Civil War.

Upon the sudden decline of the power of their masters, some Gloucester County blacks had left the county, while others had taken shelter in the protection of Union encampments. Black congregants of Union Baptist not only remained in the region; they maintained, as freedmen, their relationship with their mother church.

The Union occupation of Gloucester County disrupted all areas of life for the white residents of the county. Local leaders were arrested; properties were raided and, in some cases, confiscated. Church properties became Union stables, and white church services were considered to be too dangerous to continue in public fashion. Though located in an isolated area of Lower-Gloucester County known as “Guinea,” Union Baptist did not escape wartime disruption. According to local historian L. Roane Hunt’s “Spiritual Revival in the 26 Virginia Infantry,” the church’s pastor, William Edward Wiatt, enlisted in the 26th Virginia Regiment in 1861 and served throughout the war. He returned to his post as Union’s Pastor in 1865 (Hunt).

The first post-Civil War service at Union took place in June of 1865. At that first meeting, “Elder W.T. Hawkins consulted Brethren J.W. Minor, Robert Howard,

R.S. Heywood and B.F. Heywood in reference to the colored members having the church to hold worship in, and it was agreed that they should have it” (Union12).

The fact that black members continued to worship at a white church in the aftermath of the War and the legal abolition of slavery was, in terms of Gloucester County, unique to Guinea and Union Baptist. Three years would pass before the blacks of Union Baptist formed their own, separate congregation.

In a July 2010 document chronicling their history, First Morning Star evoked images of American patriotism and of American slavery, “Our founding fathers began their search for the truth and eternal salvation, during the time of their human bondage, by worshipping Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in the gallery of Union Baptist Church...”(First Morning Star 1). The language of the document made direct links between the modern congregation and the enslaved Africans that lived and worked in the area in which the church was founded and the American traditions of liberty and justice. By evoking the concept of “founding fathers,” the document highlights the connection between major American historical figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, both of whom have documented personal histories with Gloucester County.

The church history acknowledges its connection with its white mother church and its post-Civil War departure from the parent congregation: “Three years after the Civil War, on Saturday, July 11, 1868, Union Baptist Church, presented to their approximately 200 African American members, a ‘letter of dismissal’ and authorized them to organize a church of their own” (1). In the aftermath of the war, Baptist Associations all across Virginia, including the Rappahannock Association to which Union Baptist belonged, adopted policies of assisting and supporting any black

members who wished to establish their own churches. The support rendered by Baptist Associations included the licensing of black ministers, help in organizing institutions, selecting and obtaining lands and aid in erecting buildings (Ryland 304-05). The fact that the land on which First Morning Star's sanctuary was erected was in close proximity to Union Baptist was an early indication of continuing connections and cooperation between the two communities of worshippers despite political, legal, social and economic changes.

First Morning Star's 2010 history included a list that identified the "founding fathers" of the church by name. The names on the list were recorded in the documents of the History of Union Baptist. Those listed as founders of the church were the "colored deacons" selected by Union Baptist in 1844. The published names were not, however, identical. In Union's list, Mr. Smith's estate owned James, Randolph was the property of Mr. Llewellyn and Captain Sterling Rowe owned John Cook. In the First Morning Star history, James was the property of Mr. Llewellyn, Randolph was not listed at all, and John Cook was part of Mr. Smith's estate (1). The name of Captain Sterling Rowe was not listed in the First Morning Star history and, additionally, no connection is made between Rowe and John Cook. Yet, John Cook(e) was among the Trustees who eventually obtained the property upon which the church was built, and members of the Rowe family were major factors in the church's development.

The 1885 deed for First Morning Star listed the Trustees of the church as J.T. Tonkins, Robert Cooke, John Cooke, Sr., John Fleming and Charles B. Cooke (Cooke, Robert). The land was purchased from Robert Cooke and his wife Rachel. Much like Shepherdsville Baptist, and other black churches in the area, the Trustees

of First Morning were composed of interrelated individuals, and the land transaction through which their church site was obtained took place within an extended family.

John Fleming's name was not recorded in County census records. Charles Cooke was listed in the 1860 Census as a 20-year-old, free, mulatto laborer. James Tonkins was listed in the 1880 data as a twenty-nine-year-old Black. His occupation was recorded as that of teacher. In 1880 John Cook(e) was recorded as being a sixty-nine years old black farmer. Robert and Rachel Cook(e) were also noted in the 1880 data. Robert was described as a forty-nine years old black farmer, and Rachel was described as being forty-five years of age and a house wife (Gloucester Census).

Unlike the earlier historically free and predominately mulatto founders of Shepherdsville, the majority of First Morning Star's predominately black founders had to, first, make the difficult transition out of enslavement. In order to make this transition, the founders had to interact directly with the families by whom they were formerly owned, including the Rows.

At the time of the 1840 census, Capt. Sterling Rowe, a farmer, waterman, and merchant, was recorded as owning six slaves: Male slaves under 10- (2), 24 under 36- (1); and Female slaves under 10- (2), 24 under 36-(1) (Gloucester Census). The makeup of the small group of enslaved individuals is consistent with that of a family group. The John Cook described as "belonging" to Capt. Sterling Rowe in 1844 in Union's history was, logically, the adult male in the "family." The complex nature of parentage and often fluid and unstable nature of family structures and organization, due to the bartering and selling of the enslaved and the sexual vulnerability of enslaved females, has long made accurate tracking of family groups after Emancipation nearly impossible. Thus, the relationship between John Cook(e) and

other, subsequent, black members of the Cooke line in the Guinea area was never clearly documented. However, in the Guinea region, Post-Emancipation interactions between Cooke and the Rowe families were documented.

In August of 1874, the Gloucester County Clerk recorded an Indenture between “Rowe and Elizabeth his wife...and John W. Hobday, George W. Cooke and Robert Cooke Colored of the other part...” (Rowe). The parcel of land involved contained forty acres bordering the main road in Guinea and was valued at 460 dollars. The size of the parcel indicated the importance Gloucester County blacks attached to landownership. Also, the cooperation between a small group of area blacks to obtain a common goal was evidence of serious concern about, and efforts toward, community building and social and economic development. The property that John Hobday, George and Robert Cooke purchased was bordered “...on the East by the lands of Joel M. Rowe, on the South by the lands of Samuel Rowe and Benjamin Rowe and on the West by the lands of the said Edward H. Rowe...”(299-300). Joel M. Rowe was Capt. Sterling Rowe’s son and Edward H. Rowe’s cousin.

When, in 1885, the trustees of First Morning Star would enter into a Deed with Robert and Rachel Cook(e), the description of the boundaries of the property would, as in the case of the 1874 Deed, underscore the continuing connection between elements of the black community in Guinea and the Rowe family. The church site’s borders were recorded as being on the “on the North by the public road leading from E.H. Rowe’s to B.A. Rowe’s store[...] West by the lands of E.H. Rowe (Cooke, Robert). The boundaries of the 1885 Deed suggest that the property that George and Rachel Cooke sold to the Trustees had initially been a portion of the parcel initially purchased from Edward H. Rowe in 1874. At the time, more than 40

years had passed, and the “terrible intimacy” that had once existed between enslaved and enslaver was slowly being supplanted within the workings of two once co-joined houses of faith that continued to stand “intimately” close to one another.

The members of the two congregations continued to live and work in close proximity. Both communities utilized the area’s stores and mills. As black landownership increased, the legal and economic interconnectedness between blacks and whites deepened. Booker T. Washington addressed this increase in land ownership in *The Negro in the South*:

...the Negroes of Gloucester County, beginning about forty years ago in poverty, have reached the point where they now own and pay taxes upon one-sixth of the real estate in this county. This property is very largely in the shape of small farms, varying in size from ten to one hundred acres. A large proportion of the farms contain about ten acres. (69-70)

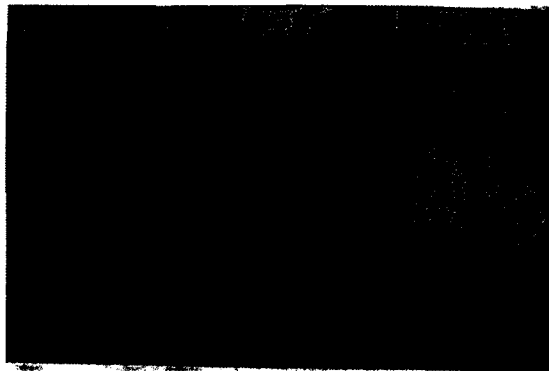
Dr. Washington also noted that, with the increase in land ownership, there were definite improvements in the living conditions of black families in the county became evident. As evidence, he pointed to the improved quality of black home within the county:

It is interesting to note the influence of this material growth upon the home life of the people. It is stated upon good authority that about twenty-five years ago at least three-fourths of the colored people lived in one-roomed cabins. Let a single illustration tell the story of the growth. In a school where there were thirty

pupils ten testified that they lived in houses containing six rooms, and only one said that he lived in a house containing but a single room. (70)

First Morning Star became the social, cultural and spiritual center of the lives of blacks in Guinea and nearby Bena. Despite the legal and political limitations placed on blacks during the era of “Jim Crowism” and the national rise of white supremacy, black efforts in community building continued, even thrived. First Morning Star would, eventually, obtain land for auxiliary buildings and supported the formation of a school.

Yet, despite the ravages of discrimination and segregation, First Morning Star and Union Baptist found ways to continue to acknowledge and attempt to negotiate the changing social and legal landscapes of their closely interwoven histories.



Eldridge Cook

(Courtesy of the Gazette- Journal)

In 1945, Eldridge Cook, a Bena/Guinea businessman, bought a 3.61 acre plot of land from James C. Cook and his wife, Bertha. Hannibal Rowe, a grand-nephew of Capt. Sterling Rowe, served as the Notary Public who certified the transaction (Williams).A 2010 newspaper article, “After 70 years, Cook’s Seafood in Gloucester

Shuts Down,” described Cook, a long-time First Morning Star congregant, as, “Grandson of slaves, [...] born Feb. 14, 1915” (Sabo).

In the early 1990s, a group of members from First Morning Star took a symbolic shovel of dirt from a site on a former plantation. The shovelful of earth was ceremonially reburied at the church and marked with a monument: a large, wooden cross. The monument commemorates James L. Tonkins, and unknown, unnamed individuals buried upon old plantation lands:

“Home At Last
In memory of loved ones
who were once buried in
Captain Tooter's Cemetery.” (Jordan)

The site from which the earth offering was taken is immediately south and east of the location of Union Baptist, on property once owned by Joel Madison Rowe. In the early 1880s, Rowe gave land to Union Baptist for use as a white burial field. The existence of the second, colored, burial field, on what was Rowe land during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, evidenced the on-going nature of religious and social interactions between the two separated houses of worship as they evolved into the modern era (Hamilton Williams). The inscription on the monument, of the words “Captain Tooter’s Cemetery,” identified the land as being among that of Joel Madison Rowe, Sterling Rowe’s son. Joel Madison Rowe was, and is, commonly referred to as “Tudor” Rowe (Williams).

The erection of the monument, a large wooden cross, created an altar, a ritual space marking where worlds begin and end. The built altar created by the congregation of First Morning Star contrasts with, but remains symbolically related to, the “found” altar at Zion Poplars. Both altars are external to the walled and roofed sanctuaries that they are related to. Each of the altars was, and is, wooden: living tree at Zion Poplar and milled wood at First Morning Star. Finally, both altars marked a space in which past, present, and future cohabitated.

Raboteau writes of enslaved African burials and their symbolism and interpretations, “For some the deceased had returned home to Guinea, for others to heaven, ‘where bondage is never known’” (230). The dual interpretations and the different symbolic systems and levels of meanings associated with burials and graves among the enslaved continued throughout Post-Emancipation history. The cemeteries at Zion Poplars and Morning Star provided enduring proofs within a wider historical process. Within the funerary and commemorative patterns of black families, communities and churches, there were numerous variations.

The “seven- in-one” tree at Zion Poplars was valued as a consecrated site during the period in which it served as a “hush arbor.” A natural altar, it consecrated the site on which it grew before any man-made, religiously-associated structures were erected there. However, the Poplar did not stand alone; there were other large and impressive trees on the site. Several of these trees were utilized over time as sites that received addition consecration by becoming home to individual or group burials within the developing cemetery. While few were as unique as the Poplar at Zion Poplars, most of the black churches, cemeteries and domestic burial fields within the

county were located in close proximity to impressive trees. First Morning Star's sanctuary and burial field/cemetery was an exception.

No evidence of large trees or stands of them survive within the site. The small burial field, located on the northern side of the sanctuary, is very uniform in its layout, much like a traditional Euro-American, or white, burial area. Some trees and shrubs were placed upon or in close proximity to graves, and a lane of trees formed a border for the row of burials on the southern border of the field. The traditional elements of black burial fields were not as prominent as in many of the other black cemeteries and burial fields created in the surrounding county. However, the burial area, commemorated by the placement of the wooden cross on church property, conforms to both Pre- (largely unmarked) and post-Emancipation black burial traditions.

In August of 2008, First Morning Star celebrated its "Homecoming." Into an otherwise standard Black Southern Baptist service, the Homecoming program incorporated elements of the African past of the church. The ceremony included elements of traditional Christian worship with West African attire and ritual. During the service, a minister, dressed in West African regalia, offered a prayer and "poured a libation" for the ancestors. Symbolically, the act of pouring libation consecrated those represented by the monument erected in the 1990s and also marked the continuation of elements of the indigenous West African belief systems of those Africans forcefully transported into Tidewater Virginia almost 400 years earlier.

The long-lasting and open relationship between the Afro-Baptist congregation of First Morning Star and that of its "white" mother church Union is unique among the churches of Gloucester County. The two congregations continue to share their

common faith and interwoven histories through a tradition of inter-church sharing. Members of First Morning Star and Union take part, from time to time, in services away from their ‘home’ church. In December of 2009, Union Baptist invited First Morning Star to join them in a service. The choir of First Morning Star provided music for the well attended evening service (Williams).

“They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.” Isaiah 44:4

As was the case throughout the post-Civil War south, the churches of Gloucester County were vital institutions for the cultural development of the area’s African American communities. The histories of these churches chronicle the multi-faceted world views and belief systems active within the County’s African American community and the interactions between the county’s black and white populations and their differing expressive systems.

African American, or black, religious practices, though clearly influenced by Euro-American practices, differed from those of their counterparts in numerous ways. Though the organization and governance of individual churches and the pattern, or structure, of ceremonies of worship had to be consistent with the by-laws and regulations of regional and state Baptist Associations, most black congregations incorporated West African and Afro-Baptist elements into their services. According to Robert L. Hall, black religious services, especially in rural Baptist churches such as those of Gloucester County, featured high states of emotional engagement during

services, frequently dancing and other physical demonstrations of ecstasy, speaking in tongues, and “‘Shouting,’ ‘getting happy’ or ‘getting the spirit’” (108-109).

Along with syncretism, the blending of differing beliefs, “creolization” was clearly a factor in the development of Gloucester’s black churches. “As many writers (Wolf 1982; Fagan 1988; Fausz 1988; Moure 1993) have discussed, when diverse cultures come in contact, they change each other (Mouer, 112).

In the Union Baptist cemetery, several individual and group burials of white congregation members and their families were adorned with markers, symbolism, and architectures normally associated with black burials: whitewashed capstone, trees and shrubs placed upon graves, etc.



This process of cultural interpenetration and, often, response or resistance to it, creates tensions within areas of the divergent cultures even as it, in other areas, it produces fusion. The development of independent black churches in Gloucester

County was impacted by cultural interplay between the black and white communities and by equally complex cultural interpretations within the black community, itself. The two-way nature of creolization was clearly evidenced in the cemetery of First Morning Star's Union Baptist.

In "Of the Faith of the Fathers," W.E. B. Du Bois describes an African American Revival Meeting:

The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence.

The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before.

(Souls of Black Folk 211)

The passion that Du Bois marked, and was moved by, was read differently by non-African American observers of African American services. Of the services he witnessed in St. Augustine and Jacksonville, Florida, G. W. Nichols wrote that he had seen "shocking mummeries, which belonged to the fetich worship of savage Central Africa and not to Christian America" (Hall, 107). In his writings Walker reflected that, after returning to his home in Gloucester from school at Hampton Institute:

I was shocked, upon my return, to find my people handing on to the children the same superstitions that I had heard in my own boyhood.

For instance, they were still explaining the many 'squalls' common in our part of the country by saying that the thunder was God shuffling his feet and the lightning was God winking his eyes. (53)

Walker's reaction was not unlike observations noted by Joseph B. Earnest, Jr. in his dissertation, *The Religious Development of The Negro in Virginia*, "After being in America nearly three hundred years the Negro is now thoroughly Christian in most particulars but still retains some of the heathenish ideas adapted to the new religion" (137). In the segregated age in which Earnest published his research, the "Negro," legally disenfranchised and marginalized, was often viewed not as being "American," though having been" in America nearly three hundred years...".

Likewise, in the case of Walker's observation about childhood superstitions, other cultural signifiers were possibly at work. The Hampton-educated Walker, steeped in the theology and social values of Hampton Institute's white missionary faculty, may have lost, never had, or willingly discarded the ability to read and value African cultural beliefs and practices. What to the Hampton-trained Walker was superstition could have been, to others in Gloucester's black community, part of an older, different, lore. In *Flash of the Spirit*, Shango is described as "[...] tempestuous mythic third king of the Yoruba, Shango is an Oyo deity. He is the thunder god, and his consort is the whirlwind, the goddess Oya, who is also the goddess of the Niger River" (84). Grey Gundaker's *Signs of Diaspora-Diaspora of Signs*, points out very powerful cross-fertilization between the imagery and symbolism in the New Testament Book of Revelation and African symbols. Among the images and symbols in the Christian text that are mirrored in African images or symbols, Gundaker lists, "The fiery, lightning step of Shango" (157).

Walker's narrative describes the state of the black ministers in Gloucester County in the early 1880s by comparing them with Hampton's founder, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Armstrong's successor, Dr. Hollis Frissell:

I remembered the deep impression these speakers had made upon me and contrasted them with those I had listened to at home- men who could neither read nor write. I was shocked to find how backward were my people [...] Soon some of the ministers started coming to me for advice about church affairs [...] next they sought instruction and advice even before they began to prepare their sermons for Sunday (Walker 56).

The one minister that Walker praised was Reverend John W. Boothe, the first pastor of “Bethel,” Walker’s church home. Boothe who, according to Walker, was ordained by a mixed council of ‘leading’ white ministers and “several” Negro ministers, was examined by a mixed council of Gloucester’s competent “Christian Leaders” over a decade before Walker left the county for Hampton. In fact, in the aftermath of the Civil War, Boothe read and studied scripture with one of the leading white ministers of the county, Confederate veteran, Reverend William Wiatt of Union Baptist:

...Elder Wiatt is included in the history of Bethel Baptist Church in Sassafras, Gloucester County, Virginia. John William Booth (1847 - 1923) was their first pastor. He was born enslaved, owned by William Jones, but he had been taught to read. In the early years of his pastorate, Elder Wiatt helped him with his religious education and they would study together (Hunt, “Spiritual Revival”).

When Walker returned to Gloucester County in 1883, Gloucester County was home to six major independent black churches and would spawn three more within

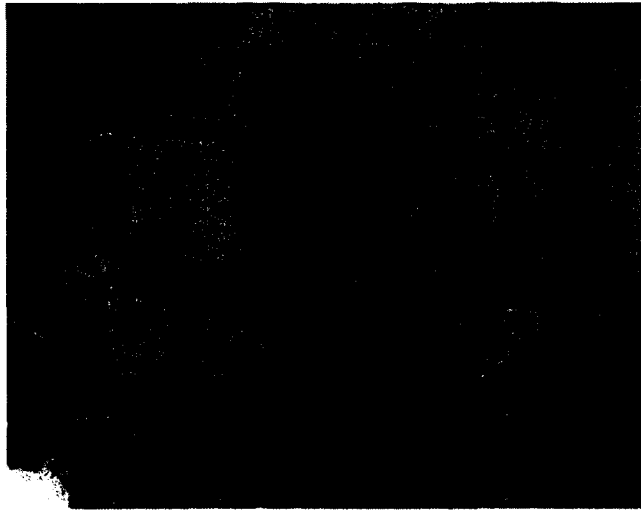
three years. The capacity of the black community to produce religious leadership, first demonstrated in the late 1700s by William Lemmon, had not waned in the post-Civil War era but had expanded and intensified. The highly emotional, verbally and physically expressive nature of worship in early independent Afro-Baptist congregations was, in many ways, quite different from services conducted in most white Baptist churches. Walker was not the only Gloucester notable to express displeasure with Negro religious traditions. In *Finding a Way Out*, Hampton-educated Robert Russa Moton, wrote of having attended an event featuring negro “plantation songs, the religious folk songs of the negro.” When asked by a school mate to explain his discomfort with the event, Moton indicated, “The only reply I could give was that they were Negro songs and that we had come to Hampton to learn something better ;...”(25-26). This tension between Afro-centric, experience-oriented, highly emotional “old-time” religion and the “something better” of Southern, industrial education would remain an area of contention in many facets of black community development throughout the south: Gloucester County would be no exception, and Gloucester’s black churches would remain at ground-zero in the struggle.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Gloucester County would be home to 14 black Baptist churches. In addition, the churches would have organized six chapters of The Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen, a religious fraternal order first established by Baltimore Methodists in 1856. “The Order maintained its own bank in Hampton, Va., operated a printing plant, and offered a life insurance and health benefit plan” (Painter). One of the central rules of the Order was that members could not use civil authorities to resolve disagreements and problems amongst themselves.

All disagreements had to be submitted to the Order for adjudication and resolution. To do otherwise carried the penalty of expulsion (*New York Times*: Aug. 5, 1877). The cooperation between the Methodist-created Galilean Fishermen and Gloucester's black Baptists lasted until the 1930s. The creation of an internal judicial system to control interpersonal and inter-group relations allowed blacks additional opportunities to exercise greater social and legal independence in the face of Jim Crow laws and segregation as the black churches struggled to function effectively as agents of community development and social growth as their communities faced increasing challenges in the secular world. Though their futures remained uncertain, Gloucester's black community had reshaped the county's cultural and social landscape.

Gloucester County's blacks had come far since most of them first began the journey from enslaved to free and from property to citizen. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois described the beginning of such journeys in *Souls of Black Folk*:

They came at night, when the flickering camp-fires shone like vast unsteady stars along the black horizon: old men and thin, with gray and tufted hair; women with frightened eyes, dragging whimpering hungry children; men and girls stalwart and gaunt,- a horde of starving vagabonds, helpless and pitiable in their dark distress. (55)



Slaves in Virginia in 1862

PHOTO: Library of Congress

Chapter II

Tree of Knowledge

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.,
“It shows a mighty lot of cheek
To study chemistry and Greek
When Mister Charlie needs a hand
To hoe the cotton on his land,
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,
Why stick your nose inside a book?”

“I don’t agree,” said W.E.B.,
“If I should have the drive to seek
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,
I’ll do it. Charles and Miss can look
Another place for hand or cook.
Some men rejoice in skill of hand,
And some in cultivating land,
But there are others who maintain
The right to cultivate the brain.”

“Booker T. and W.E.B.” Dudley Randall

But if a man is without education although with all his latent possibility attaching to him he is, as I have said but a pitiable object; a giant in body but a pigmy in intellect, and at best but half a man. Without education he lives within the narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope.

Frederick Douglass

Manassas, Virginia 1894

For Gloucester's white cultural and social elite, the 20th Century began with pride and excitement. In 1899, the county had become home to a widely-known and prominent Baptist evangelist and lecturer.

Thomas Dixon was born in the rural North Carolina Piedmont a year before the Civil War ended. Between 1902 and 1939 he published 22 novels, as well as numerous plays, screenplays, books of sermons, and miscellaneous nonfiction. Educated at Wake Forest and Johns Hopkins, Dixon was a lawyer, state legislator, preacher, novelist, playwright, actor, lecturer, real-estate speculator, and movie producer. (Kinney)

Having purchased an elegant plantation property deeply rooted in the history of the county, Thomas Dixon's arrival was equated with a celestial event: "A sparkling, glittering meteor burst into the world of Ware Parish in 1899..." (Jones, *World of...* 169). Using a restored log cabin at "Dixondale," formerly Elmington, as his study, Dixon authored, and published, several books: *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden - 1865-1900* was published in 1902. In 1905, Dixon's *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* was published. Dixon's Gloucester-authored works were central to America's first "blockbuster" film, D.W. Griffith's 1915, *Birth of a Nation* (169).

Dixon's writings also contributed to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan which had been all but eradicated by Federal prosecutions under the Force Act of 1870-71(Hine 403-4).

While living in Gloucester, Dixon authored a third, lesser-known text from which Gloucester County would draw its county motto. Published in 1905, Dixon's *The Life Worth Living* chronicled the author's experiences as a Gloucester resident and his impressions of Gloucester's black population:

In three years I've hired over one hundred negro farm hands and discharged all save three of them, who are first-class men...Large groups of my African neighbors keep horses, dogs and children and yet are opposed to a strenuous life of systematic and constant labour. (48)

Dixon's impression of Gloucester's blacks included laziness, ignorance and dishonesty as the premier qualities within the county's black population. His use of the term "African" to describe his neighbors carried the full charges of "otherness" and "inferiority" that were central to the ideologies of "Jim Crow-ism" and "White Supremacy" that informed much of white social and political thought during the Jim Crow Era 1880-1915.

However, not all Gloucester's non-black residents shared Dixon's low esteem for blacks. Andrew Jackson Andrews, a Confederate veteran, was born within one-half mile of Cappaosic Wharf. In 1905, Jackson published an autobiography, *A Sketch of the Boyhood Days of Andrew Jackson Andrews, of Gloucester County, Virginia and His Experience as a Soldier in the Late War Between The States*. In a poem included within his book, Andrews pleaded for justice for blacks:

Did not the Black Troops

Fight for U. S. (Uncle Sam)
At the battle of San Juan Hill

Save the Eiders on that day
And there the Spaniards kill?

Did they not, with bayonets bright,
Charge in a gallant manner

Saved North and South
From disgrace

And the Star Spangled Banner?

In his poem Andrews, who, unlike Dixon, served in the military during times of war, acknowledged the service of blacks during the Spanish American War. Apparently to Andrews that service as a basis for moving beyond “political strife” and treating blacks with greater justice and fairness. However, though Virginia’s black cemeteries contained ample evidence of black service, voices like that of Andrews were ignored in the halls of power in Gloucester County and beyond. So it was against segregation’s rising tides that Gloucester County’s blacks struggled as the 20th Century opened.

In *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development*, copyrighted in 1907, Dr Booker T. Washington used Gloucester’s black community as a model of success. Washington pointed out that Gloucester blacks owned and paid taxes upon a full sixth of all the privately-owned property in the county. Washington noted the creation of multiple houses of worship, all Baptist, and strong participation by the county’s blacks in area schools (68-70).

The African American communities of Gloucester County, like other African American communities throughout the South, were “born” with the creation of black churches. However, they were born into a strange world organized around laws and rules, contracts, leases, deeds, customs, beliefs, and values long hidden from blacks. They were born into a world where the real and the ethereal, the physical and the spiritual overlapped: the world of texts, letters upon pages, and the power of written beliefs, understandings, and ideas. For survival and growth in such a world, literacy was recognized as vital.

The importance of education and of literacy to the enslaved Africans was made manifest in the slave narratives of individuals such as Olaudah Equiano (1789), John Jea (1815) and Frederick Douglass (1845). The thirst for literacy and learning found in the life stories of these exceptional figures raged equally strongly among the vast sea of newly-freed African Americans.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, as discussed in Chapter I, African American communities began to establish African American churches. The creation of churches to serve the “spiritual” needs of the communities was not viewed locally as controversial. In some instances, former slave owners donated the land on which these entities were erected. However, the churches quickly turned to attempting to serve the needs of their constituent communities in more secular ways. One of the first signs of this more worldly mission being undertaken by the African American churches in Gloucester County was the emergence of church-affiliated schools.

Schools that served the communities of recently liberated “Freedmen” began to appear close upon the heels of the county’s first black churches. This second development, the creation of centers of educational opportunity, flew directly in the

face of the local traditions that had grown out of the plantation-based social and political traditions of the community. Unlike the churches with which they were often associated, the schools became points of social/cultural contention and the targets of political and economic violence. The resistance to “Negro education” lay not only in the traditions of the past, which were powerful, but also in the practical concerns of the white population.

The 1860 Federal Census indicated that Gloucester County’s majority population was black and mulatto (*Historical Census Browser*). Naturally, the social and legal structure of the county, like that of Virginia as a whole, was carefully designed to protect the dominant status of the white population. Access to education was one of the privileges of the “free and white.” Since 1814, education had been available to the white poor through The Gloucester Charity School. The more affluent members of the white community sent their children to the county’s private academies.

In 1818, Dr. William Taliafero and others founded Newington Academy. Miss Fannie Hughes started Benvenue, an academy for girls, in 1825. The school burned in 1843. Belle Roi Academy was founded in 1850 (Thomas 30). The best-known private educational center in the county during the 19th Century was The Gloucester Academy. This school was started by Mr. John Tabb shortly after the end of the Civil War and existed until 1914 (McCartney 212).

Most of Gloucester’s educated population complied with laws enacted by the State of Virginia in 1805 and 1842. These laws enjoined against the educating of blacks, “day or night,” within the borders of the state. An 1838 law proscribed that any black that left the state and obtained an education from returning (212). The

denial of education to blacks was also justified by the moral-philosophical tenets of the same social-economic system that supported the premise that the Negro, a lesser form of man, could not be educated: “John C. Calhoun, on whose former plantation Clemson University now sprawls, once wrote, ‘Show me a nigger who can do a problem in Euclid or parse a Greek verb, and I’ll admit he’s a human being’” (qtd.in Eisiminger 54).

If education was the measure of a human being, denying the Negro education was an attempt to deny the Negro any claim to humanity. At the conclusion of the Civil War, the defeated states of the Confederacy could not enforce their systematic exclusion of the Negro from educational facilities against the mandate of the Federal government. However, these states, including Virginia, sought avenues to impinge upon the education of Negroes in order to maintain “White Supremacy.”

An 1873 editorial “White or Black Supremacy”, published in the *Gloucester Herald* addressed the point directly. According to its author it was a question of: “whether the state of Virginia is to remain under the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race or whether she shall pass under the ruthless sway of the ignorant sons of Ham.” It was, the article stated, “...a question of life and death” (Jones, M. 2).

The creation of a public school system in Virginia was mandated by the 1869 ratification of the Underwood Constitution, which made no mention of segregated schools. In 1870, the General Assembly mandated that any new schools be separated by race. The first Superintendent of Public Instruction, the man who would oversee bringing education to all, was William Henry Ruffin. Ruffin, a former slaveholder and son of a slaveholding ancestry, made no secret of his feelings on “Negroes”:
“The southern Negroes are polite, amiable, quiet, orderly, and religious; and hence it

is hard to believe that as a class they are without moral character. And, yet such is the unhappy truth” (Wynes 100).

Some argued that participation in democracy required universal public education in order that the citizenry might give its “informed consent” and the fact that poor whites, as well as blacks, would benefit from the creation of such a system. However, education, if it included Negroes, was met with resistance. In Gloucester County, Rev. William E. Wiatt, the first County Superintendent, reported that... “property-holders, on a large and moderate scale are opposed to it” (McCartney 210). While the issue of public education, in general, was one that was not fully embraced by many Virginians, attitudes toward making education available to Negroes were, in many quarters, openly hostile. As one prominent Virginia planter observed, “The Negro does not need it (education) to fit him for suffrage, since the Negro will soon be stripped of that right” (Wynes 122). Despite resistance, Gloucester’s black community, which in 1870, according to the Federal Census, constituted 53% of the county’s population, committed itself to providing for the education of its members (*Historical Census Browser*).

The importance of education and literacy was clearly reflected in the histories of Gloucester’s black churches. Among the numerous deeds through which blacks obtained properties, the education, or lack thereof, of area blacks was enshrined. A number of Trustees and others associated with the transactions were illiterate. This fact was reflected on deeds where the individual had affixed his or her “mark” instead of signing.

If the timeline associated with the life and career of T.C. Walker, long regarded as the single “important” black in the county, is accepted as accurate,

Walker's *Honey-pod Tree* indicates the early and grassroots nature of the evolution of Gloucester's black schools. Walker's posthumously-published autobiography was drawn from a series of interviews conducted by Florence L. Lattimore. In the interviews, Walker apparently indicated that he was an infant at the time that the Civil War, or rebellion, ceased, a point seemingly contradicted in the autobiography (Lattimore 8-11). The autobiography indicates that the first attempts at establishing a school for Negroes took place when Walker was ten years old (roughly 1871). The first school was located in "an old brick shop." A second school followed. This one was located in the Sassafras Stage area in a log cabin belonging to Jim Lemon (the literate member of Sassafras Stage/ Bethel Church). When Walker was 12 or 13, a third school began in the form of a Sunday school at which the teacher tried to include lessons in reading (Walker 17-19).

All of these early attempts at providing educational opportunities to the newly-freed blacks were planned and initiated by the freedmen themselves. Though their resources were limited, Gloucester's black community evidenced the same thirst for "book-learning" that scholars, and observers, indicated existed throughout the whole of the former Confederacy. Regardless of whether it was inspired by pious desires to read the Bible or consciousness of the fact that literacy was a potent and vitally necessary survival skill for the future, the desire for literacy placed the newly freed blacks in direct opposition to the position of many of their former owners. Virginia's planter class was vehemently unwilling to be taxed to provide funds for the universal educational system mandated by the state's new Constitution, adopted in 1869. The elite class resisted spending on education for the poor generally, and they were specifically opposed to the education of "Negroes." In the minds of the planter

class, the future role of the freedman was to be identical to their role during enslavement. The free Negro did not need to be educated to perform the functions of manual laborers, domestic servants, and farm hands.

Gloucester's public school system was established in 1871. As was the case throughout the South, black and white students attended separate schools. The first Superintendent of the county's schools was the Reverend William E. Wiatt, the former pastor of Union Baptist. Most of the early schools were single room wooden structures and were poorly equipped for their educational missions (Gray 178-80). The black churches of the area remained intimately involved in the development of educational opportunities for African American communities. As the churches had become central features around which communities developed, black schools were established in close proximity to, if not upon, church-owned properties. The connection between black churches and black schools was evidenced in other ways, as well. According to Roane L. Hunt's "Churches of Guinea," James Tonkin, an early leader of First Morning Star, also served as Principal of Bena School which was located near that church (22). Similarly, Reverend Reuben Berkeley served as pastor of Morning Glory and Smithfield Baptist churches, founder of the first Sunday schools in the county and for 33 years taught in the public school system (Berkeley). Zachariah T. Whiting, a Gloucester County native, actively demonstrated the important connections between the independent black churches and schools.

Born in 1850, Whiting was a slave. Though he had no opportunities for formal education as a slave, and limited opportunities immediately after Emancipation, Whiting was able to acquire rudimentary education by getting help from literate neighbors. As a grown man, he was able to get four years of public

education in the Gloucester County Public school system. Later, he attended the Richmond Theological Seminary for two years. Whiting returned to Gloucester County and was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1877 by the First Baptist Church of Gloucester County. Whiting guided the building of Gloucester's Berea Baptist Church in 1893. Over his career, Whiting built and/or served as pastor for a number of churches in the Tidewater area. Whiting indicated that he saw (equal) education as the first priority for blacks. He viewed education as more pressingly urgent than his second priority, black participation in area churches (Caldwell 596-97).

Despite numerous individual successes, the early black efforts at providing education for their communities occurred against a backdrop of white resistance to black social, political, and educational advancements. Spotswood Hunnicutt Jones described the racial realities in Reconstruction Era Gloucester County as a period in which, "[...] the etiquette of the Southern caste system was carefully preserved. No attempt was made to destroy white supremacy in the social or economic sphere of the community" (145). African Americans, though mostly poor, dedicated their limited resources, their labor, and materials to support schools for their children. The 1880 Census indicated that black families in all three of the county's Districts attended school in large numbers. Having been pressed into service shortly after Emancipation, the small one-room structures that served as schools continued to carry the bulk of the load in educating the county's blacks as the 20th Century drew near. Though these schoolhouses were cramped and dark, black students utilized the classroom spaces afforded them in numbers that far exceeded those of their white counterparts.

Norris Linwood Thomas researched the history of the county's educational structures in the 1930s. His work supported the existence of a strong, "indigenous" awareness of the value of education in Gloucester's black community. According to Thomas, in 1880, County Superintendent, William ap W. Jones, reported:

...the colored people seem to have clearer ideas of what education is, and a high appreciation and desire for education. I do not mean to say that the whites have depreciated in this respect, but that the advance is more marked among the colored. (52)

According to Thomas' research, there were 20 white schools in Gloucester County in 1880. The total white enrollment was 816 students. There were 24 white teachers. At the same time, there were 13 black schools with a total enrollment of 995. There were 9 black teachers. Though black students constituted 54% of the student population, black teachers made up only 27 % of the teachers employed in the county. In 1890, there were 25 white schools with 999 students and 27 black schools with 1486 students (54). This imbalance in educational opportunity would persist until the middle of the 20th Century. In the intervening years, the education of blacks in Gloucester County would both benefit from and suffer because of the county's close proximity to General Samuel Chapman Armstrong's Hampton Institute.

Founded in 1868 with the Support of the American Missionary Association (AMA), Hampton's model of black education focused on preparation of students as teachers in local schools, scientific farming, manual labor, and domestic sciences.

In preparing young blacks to fulfill their roles in the economic, social, and political realities of the Post-War South, Hampton Institute was initially little more, academically, than a good common school which ended at the tenth grade.

Hampton's limited educational offerings came at the price of social and cultural indoctrination of Hampton graduates, future teachers, and community leaders, with beliefs in black inferiority and dependence upon the paternalistic grace of whites. This view, which underpinned broader philosophies of marginalizing, disenfranchising, and retarding the social, economic, and political advances of the formerly enslaved was not unique to Armstrong and others at Hampton Institute. In *The Education of Blacks in the South*, James D. Anderson, describes the landscape of black education in a quote from Charles W. Dabney, President of the University of Tennessee:

We must recognize in all its relations that momentous fact that the negro is a child race, at least two thousand years behind the Anglo-Saxon in its development [...] nothing is more ridiculous than [...] teaching Latin, Greek and philosophy to the negro boys who come to their schools. General Armstrong of Hampton, and Principal Washington of Tuskegee have worked out a sensible plan for the education of the negro. Our state schools for this race should be modeled after their plan. (Anderson 85)

According to Anderson, Hampton's agricultural and industrial offerings were secondary to its teacher preparation program. Hampton, and its white supporters, wished to develop a cadre of black teachers and community leaders that had been selected by whites and, therefore, dependent upon and loyal to the values and goals of the "white establishment." These individuals would, in turn, promote the Hampton ideology of hard manual and agricultural labor, respect for the racial status quo, avoidance of political activity, and contentedness with, and submission to, "White

Supremacy” (46-52). In some ways Hampton functioned in the post-Civil War era in much the same way that the Black Codes of southern states functioned before the War and, with revisions, in its aftermath. The National Archives web site, *Timeline of Events Leading to Brown v. Board of Education Decision, 1954*, describes Black Codes:

Black Codes was a name given to laws passed by southern governments established during the presidency of Andrew Johnson. These laws imposed severe restrictions on freed slaves such as prohibiting their right to vote, forbidding them to sit on juries, limiting their right to testify against white men, carrying weapons in public places and working in certain occupations. (Black Codes)

Among of the chief functions of Black Codes were upholding and reinforcing “White Supremacy” by keeping blacks under strict social and legal control, subservient and available as cheap labor for southern planters.

In 1888, Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial High School (locally known as Cappahosic Academy) was established by William Weaver and T.C. Walker. The school, which was largely funded by a Northern group, the American Missionary Association (AMA), was, initially, limited in its scope: offering training in “rural industries” (for boys) and sewing and cooking (for girls). The creation of the school was the result of decisions first taken outside of Gloucester County.

William B. Weaver was sent to Gloucester by General Armstrong, who had sent other Hampton teachers into the county. Armstrong was the philosophical and spiritual father of Hampton Institute and of its most prominent former student, Booker T. Washington. In *Up From Slavery*, published in 1901, Washington described Armstrong as being, “of that Christlike body of men and women who went into the Negro schools at the close of the war by the hundreds to assist in lifting up my race” (45).

Armstrong had visited Gloucester County at least once. In *The Honey-pod Tree*, published more than 50 years after Washington’s autobiography, T.C. Walker described the event which took place at Cappahosic Ferry:

...I saw approaching the shore a rowboat bring a man whose appearance I shall never forget. He was an erect distinguished-looking white man of stern face and keen eye. The negroes awaiting him were mostly men. Among them was Frank Page, who welcomed him to the shore as if he were receiving the Savior. (20)

Armstrong’s own estimation of his work and mission at Hampton was less glowing. According to Donal F. Lindsey, Armstrong once explained, “You see I’ve only [...] boosted darkies a bit, and so to speak, lassoed wild Indians all to be cleaned and tame(d) by a simple process I have invented know(n) as the ‘Hampton method’” (112). The impact of Armstrong’s “Hampton method,” and the spread of its disciples throughout the rural south, would dominate, if not control, the education of Gloucester’s black community until the middle of the 20th Century.

Weaver reportedly taught students briefly in his home. In December of 1879, Weaver opened a school in a little log structure that had formerly been used by the

enslaved as a meeting place. Eventually, with the help of local blacks and the approval of the local school board, a two-story building was erected. Weaver would later convince local black leaders of the need for an industrial school for the county's black population. With the support of local blacks, Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School began in a wood-framed structure that had once functioned as a store (Richings 231-32).

From the description of the school's early offerings, Lawyer Walker, William B. Weaver and the other blacks who were associated with the school's creation, intended that the school follow the Booker T. Washington model being used at Hampton Institute, from which Walker had graduated and which Weaver had attended (Bagby 19).

In 1901, Hollis B. Frissell, then the Principal of Hampton Institute, said: "We have felt for many years at Hampton that the study of books in the case of the blacks was of secondary importance ,..."(qtd. in Dabney 450). The education offered at Hampton emphasized those principals that later scholars would identify as acceptance of the inferior social and economic status of blacks and accommodation with the forces of disenfranchisement and white supremacy. A school which taught blacks to, as Booker T. Washington had advised in his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Speech, cast down their buckets where they were was not, initially, a threat to the racial status quo of the county (Washington 960).

Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial High School, popularly known as Cappahosic Academy, grew slowly, at first. However, after the erection of the main building in 1890, Cappahosic's impact on black education in the county, and state, was profound. In 1891, to lessen the financial strain on the school, the American

Missionary Association (AMA), which also supported Hampton, purchased it. William G. Price, one of the school's Hampton-educated faculty members, was selected by the AMA to replace Weaver as principal in 1899.

Price was born in Albermarle County in 1868. His father was believed to have been a former slave, who lived a life dedicated to hard work and land ownership. Price graduated from Hampton in 1890. After teaching briefly, Price attended Westfield Academy in Westfield, Massachusetts for an advanced four-year course designed to prepare high school teachers. The course work included science, math, English Literature and French and Latin (Bagby 54-55). A few years after successfully completing his course of study, Price joined the faculty of Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial High School.

Though Price was a Hampton alumnus, his additional, northern, educational experience expanded his personal educational philosophies far beyond the "Hampton Method" (45-57).

Eventually, Price's educational philosophies injected elements of W.E. B. Du Bois into the Cappahosic environment. Du Bois, the first black to earn a PhD. from Harvard was a very vocal, eloquent and persistent critic of Washington. Described in the *Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader* as, "...a historian, a sociologist, a teacher, a cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a magazine editor, a novelist, a governmental envoy, a Pan-Africanist..." Du Bois was a tireless advocate for the social and political equality of blacks (Sundquist 5). This extended well into the field of education. In *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois addressed developments relating to in black education. According to Du Bois:

Such higher training-schools tended naturally to deepen broader development: at first they were common and grammar schools, then some became high schools. And finally, by 1900, some thirty-four had one year or more of studies of college grade. This development was reached with different degrees of speed in different institutions: Hampton is still a high school, while Fisk University started her college in 1871, and Spelman Seminary about 1896. [...] It can thus be seen that the work of education in the South began with higher institutions of training, which threw off as their foliage common schools, and later industrial schools, and at the same time strove to shoot their roots ever deeper toward college and university training. (69)

Under Price's leadership, the academic program at Cappahosic developed into a "high" school in much more than name. Prior to the construction of the Academy, most black schools in the county were simple, under-funded, one-room structures which the congregation of a nearby black church had more often than not started. Cappahosic, on the other hand, was constructed using funding provided through assistance from a fund containing \$1, 600,000 set aside by Daniel Hand of Connecticut (Negro in Virginia 300-01). A large, well-designed campus, with impressive buildings, high flung spires, and a large staff, Cappahosic gave black students sitting in wood framed, one-room schools all across the county a real and palpable sense of the wider, grander world to which education could lead them. Cappahosic Academy, under Price, sailed against the prevailing winds of

Armstrong's model of "appropriate" education for Negroes. In fact, for most of Price's tenure, Cappahosic was a fully-accredited Academy offering a comprehensive Scientific Farming program, a full high school curriculum, a College Preparatory Course and a Teacher Training Course (Bagby 67-68). Advanced Cappahosic students had completed one of the most rigorous courses of study in Gloucester County and one of the most demanding high school curricula in the state. The level of success obtained by Price and the Cappahosic faculty was made possible by the financial support of the AMA and funds raised by the school's agricultural programs. Other black schools in the county, whether church affiliated or county run, were less fortunate.

While Virginia, on the whole, was not a poor in comparison with surrounding states, Virginia's system of funding public schools was, by design, like those of other southern states, hostile to publicly funded Colored schools, "All schools were inadequate, but the Negro schools in general were the worst in the state. In 1899 Virginia Negroes made up about 42 percent of the school population, and about one third of school funds were spent on their schools" (Dabney 442).

From the very beginning of the public school system in the state, legislators had tried to make funding inequality a matter of law. Failing this, they finally structured the laws so that, though not mandated by statute, impoverishment of local black schools was all too easily accomplished. The funding of each county school system was based on the total number of students, black and white, enrolled in the system. However, the actual allocation of the funds within the local system was left to the discretion of the local government. The Constitution of 1902 did not clearly stipulate how the funds for Negro schools were to be disbursed. The result was often

disastrous for Negro schools. In 1901 Appomattox County spent \$5,230.66 on white schools and \$960 dollars (18%) on Negro schools (256). The 1900 census indicated that blacks constituted 40% of the population in Appomattox County at the time. This practice was rooted in the philosophy that any school, however poor, was enough for blacks, regardless of population statistics. 1907-8, counties with black majorities in their schools reported spending 4.8 times as much on educating each white child as per black child. In 1910, Virginia's annual spending on educating a white child was \$12.84—the state spent \$5.60 on each black child (257).

This practice was especially detrimental in that, in effect, the counties were being paid because of the presence of blacks, and the funds that the blacks obtained for the counties were spent on educating the white children of those counties.

Virginia's black public schools had been vulnerable from their inception. Their funding was controlled by white government officials. Fear that educated blacks were more likely to challenge white supremacy and far less likely to be content with the stigma of racial inferiority informed the thinking of many in state government.

School funding was a convenient and wide-spread remedy for white fears. Gloucester County was not an exception.

In contrast to the trend, Cappahosic grew. By 1896, the number of buildings on the Cappahosic Academy campus had expanded to accommodate a full-time enrollment that exceeded 70 (Bagby 59).

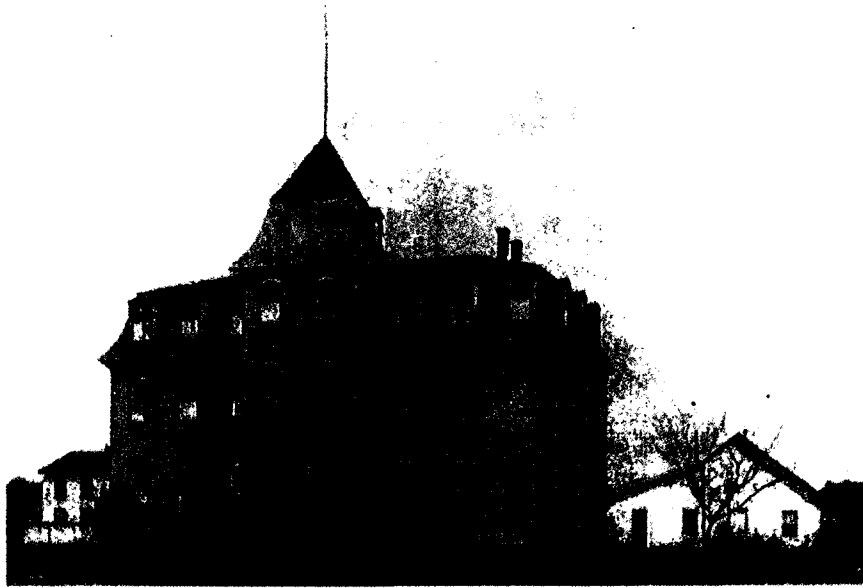


Photo Courtesy of Glo-Quips Archives

Cappahosic students either paid fees to attend, or, following the Hampton Institute model, were required to pay a portion of their bill by working at the school. Tuition in 1892-3 was 1 dollar a month. Room and board was provided for 9 dollars a month (58). Enrollment of a student at Cappahosic represented a considerable investment. Though its early academic curriculum was not threatening, the amount of money dedicated to Negro education at the school, in a poor county, in a state in which Negro education was viewed as wasteful, if not dangerous, highlighted the inadequacy of funding for Negro education at other sites in both Gloucester County and Virginia at large: “In less than ten years it (Cappahosic) owned nearly one-hundred and fifty acres of land, with two large buildings and other school property valued at \$14,000” (*What Hampton Graduates...* 67). While Cappahosic continued to grow as a premier school offering a full 12 years of education within a challenging academic environment, public education for Gloucester County’s black citizens

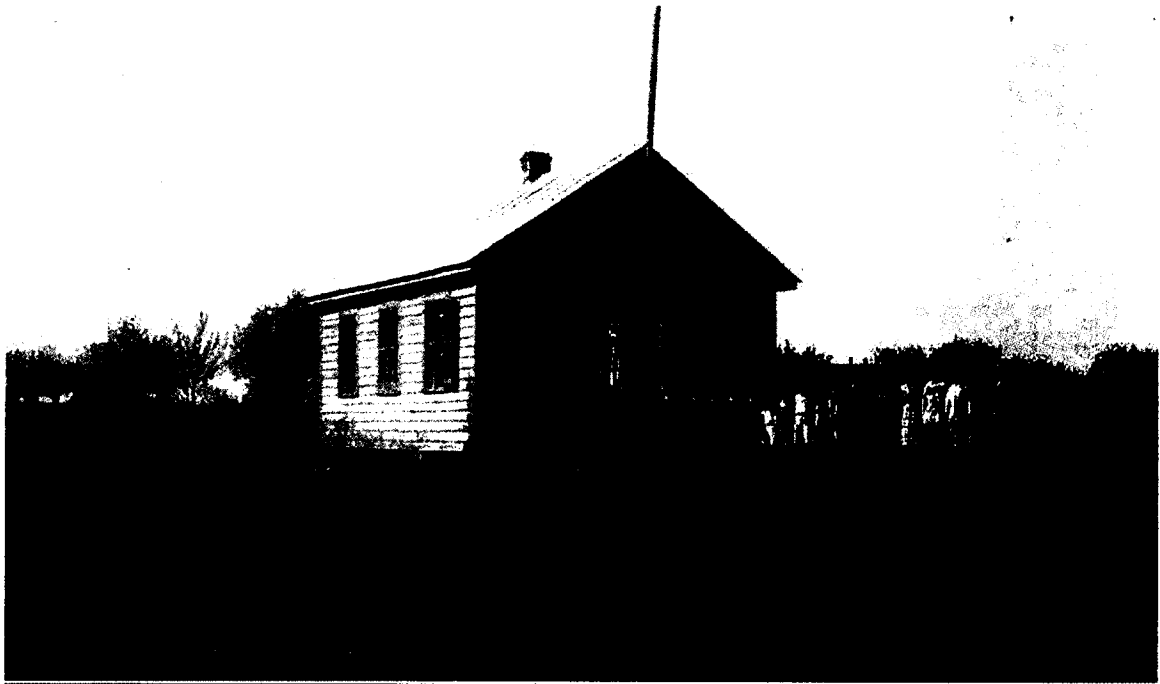
stagnated. Since Emancipation, education had been one of the battlefields upon which the struggle to assert and maintain white supremacy was waged. The symbolism and functions of Cappahosic Academy were blots upon local claims of black “inferiority.”

Cappahosic’s reputation had grown far beyond the limits of the local environs. In May of 1894, an event similar to Walker’s description of General Armstrong’s visit to Gloucester took place and was described in *The American Missionary* by Deacon Samuel Holmes. However, on this occasion, the crowd that gathered was much larger and the “Savior”-like figure who landed at the Cappahosic Ferry was the most prominent black man in the nation’s history: Frederick Douglass. Douglass had come to Cappahosic to give the school’s Commencement Address. The presence of the greatest leader and fighter for the equal rights of blacks drew a very large audience. Despite inclement weather, blacks began to gather 24 hours before Douglass’ arrival. The crowd escorted Douglass and his party from the landing and onto the campus that he had very personal interests in: Two of Douglass’ granddaughters worked at the school: one served as a teacher, and another was the head of the school’s culinary department (359-60).

Douglass’ demand for equality in all things, including education, was well known. Speaking at Manassas in 1894, Douglass, in a speech entitled “Blessings of Liberty and Education,” told his audience that blacks (Negroes) were, ... “entitled to justice, liberty and equality before the law and everywhere else. Man saw that he had a right to liberty, education, and to an equal education, and to an equal chance with all other men in the common race of life and in the pursuit of happiness”(“The Blessings...”).

In another of his speeches, "Self-Made Men," Douglass summed up the lessons of the age. His words mirrored the educational, political, and social realities of the county. He told his Gloucester County listeners that "...The natural laws for the government, well-being and progress of mankind, seem to be equal and are equal; but the subjects of these laws everywhere abound in inequalities, discords, and contrast" (Douglass).

As Cappahosic, supported by the AMA, grew, the problems inherent in under-funding continued to plague Gloucester County's Public schools, both black and white. Though black schools were clearly less supported by the county than were white schools, as the curriculum of Cappahosic expanded into college preparatory and high school courses, there was no public, white high school in the county.



White School 1910

Jackson Davis Collection



Colored School- Gloucester County, VA, 1910 – Jackson Davis Collection

After Virginia's 1901-02 adoption of a new constitution disenfranchised blacks politically, the dynamics of white supremacy within the state's Public School System accelerated. The supposed intellectual inferiority of blacks was a central pillar of the white supremacist doctrine and, in order to reinforce and spread this belief, a vast gulf was created between black and white educational opportunities at all levels. The most obvious evidence of the systematic and concerted effort to reinforce white supremacy and further debase and marginalize blacks was the creation of public high schools to serve the educational needs of white Virginians.

In 1906, the conditions of black education in Virginia's public schools were described in an annual report of the State Superintendent of Schools. Among the key

facts noted in the report was that “There were no public high schools for negroes” (Richardson 9).

In With Reverence for the Past, McCartney reported that, according to R. A. Folkes, the Gloucester County School Superintendent, 1908 was the first year in the history of the Gloucester County Public School System that black students were outnumbered by whites (221). At the time, the county had two white high schools. Hayes High School was opened in 1906; it was joined by Botetourt in 1907. By 1914 Achilles, the county’s third white high school would open (Gray 180). During the same period, the publicly-funded education of the county’s blacks terminated after the 6th or 7th grades. As late as 1910, church-created black schools, such as the school at Rising Valley, one of the daughter churches of Zion Poplars, were still in use among the county’s blacks.



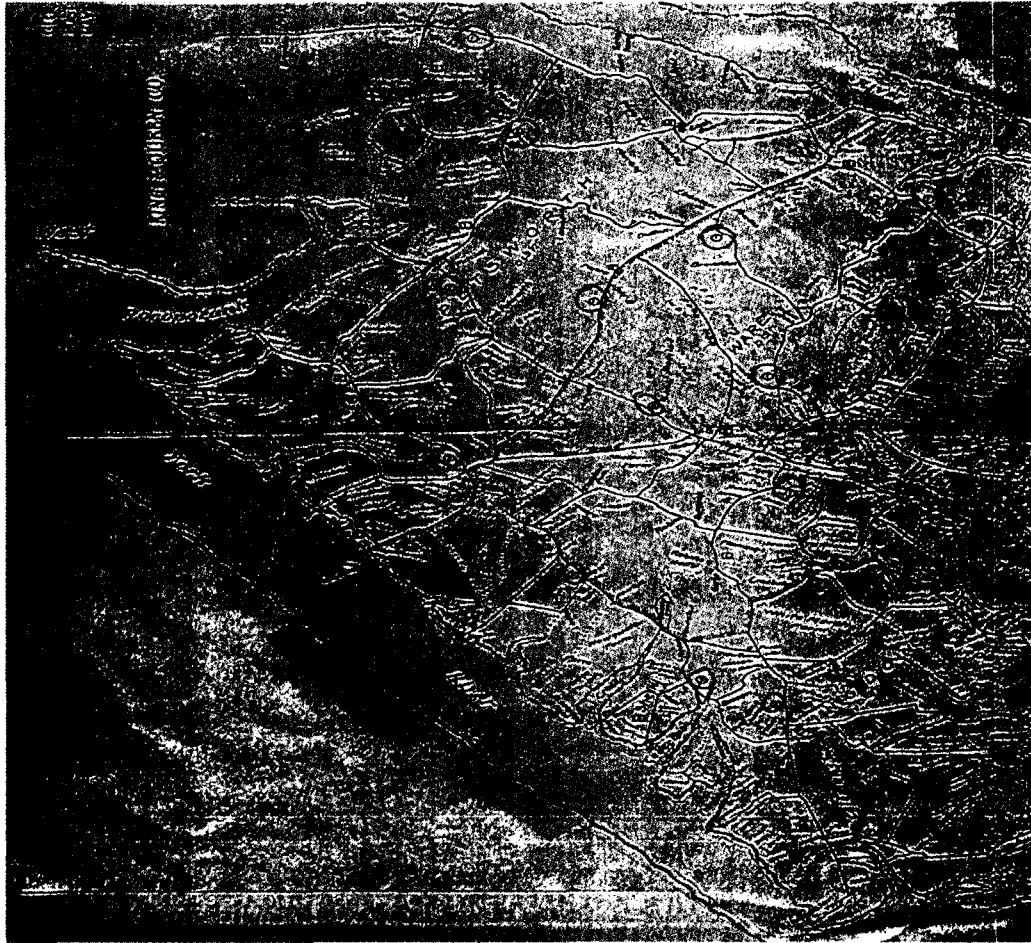
(Rising Valley school, Jackson Davis Collection)

In addition to being underfunded and limited in the number of years of course work available, the black schools of Gloucester County, as was customary throughout the rural south, also afforded black students a shorter school year than was afforded white students.

Superintendent Folkes, who was also the County Surveyor, produced a map in 1912 which included the locations of all the schools in the county. Folkes also included the number of faculty at each school. Folkes' 1912 map documented the high degree of change that was taking place in the system at the time. The number of schools had changed radically since the 1910-11 school session. In 1910-11, according to Norris Linwood Thomas, there had been 49 white schools and 32 black schools, with enrollments of 904 and 879, respectively, and each school was staffed by a single teacher (58).

As noted on the 1912 Folkes map, there were 20 colored schools in the county at that time. These schools were scattered across the county from the Bena (Guinea) and Coleman Swamp areas (Gloucester Point) in the south, to the fringes of the Pianktank River in the north, Ware Neck in the east, and west to the Purtan Bay area. 31 teachers staffed these schools. The map indicates that there were 21 white schools, also scattered throughout the county. 45 teachers staffed these schools. Census data taken two years earlier, in 1910, indicated that blacks constituted 47 % of the county population at the time. (*Historical Census Browser*). Thus, while the number of schools per community seemed defensible, the staffing situation was clearly imbalanced. The imbalance was due in large part to the larger staffs at the white high schools-usually five teachers each.

R.A. Folkes 1912 Map of Gloucester County, VA



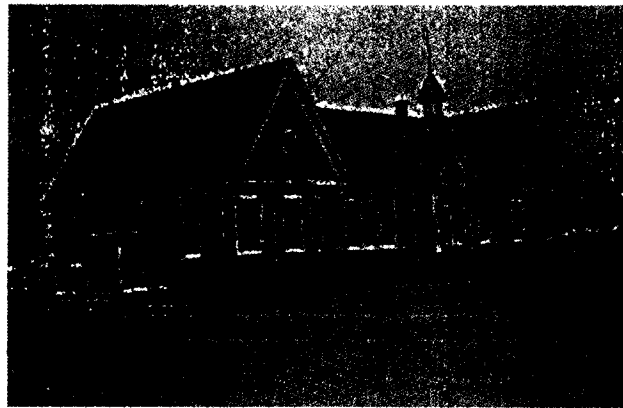
Arrow indicates the general location of Cappahosic Academy

Circles indicate locations of Black public schools

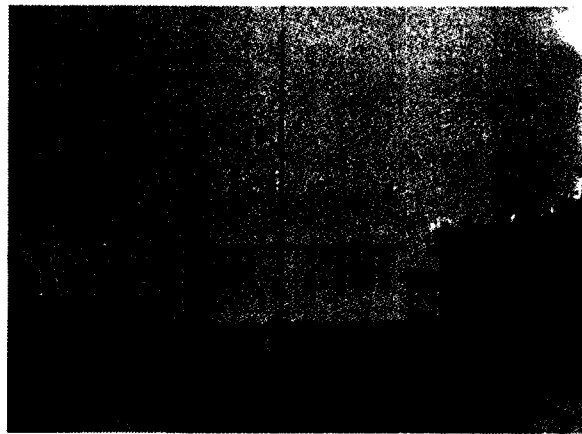
Within Gloucester County's Public School system, the three white high schools, Botetourt, Achilles, and Hayes, were the "flagships" of white education in the county in the early 20th century. These schools had extensive course offerings that included music, foreign languages, higher mathematics, and science. These were the institutions where, to evoke Calhoun, Euclid and Greek verbs being taught separated human beings from lesser forms within the county. The physical grandeur

of the high schools in contrast to the mostly one- room structures that served as black schools symbolized the relative importance, and economic and political power, of the respective communities. *The Triangle*, a yearbook shared by the three institutions, reported on the growth and expansion of the schools in the 1920s.

Hayes Store High School began to offer courses in 1904-05. Initially a four-roomed building, Hayes would be expanded in 1910-11 to 6 classrooms, an auditorium, and a large hall. The school would be expanded again in 1923 (Belcher 85-100). In



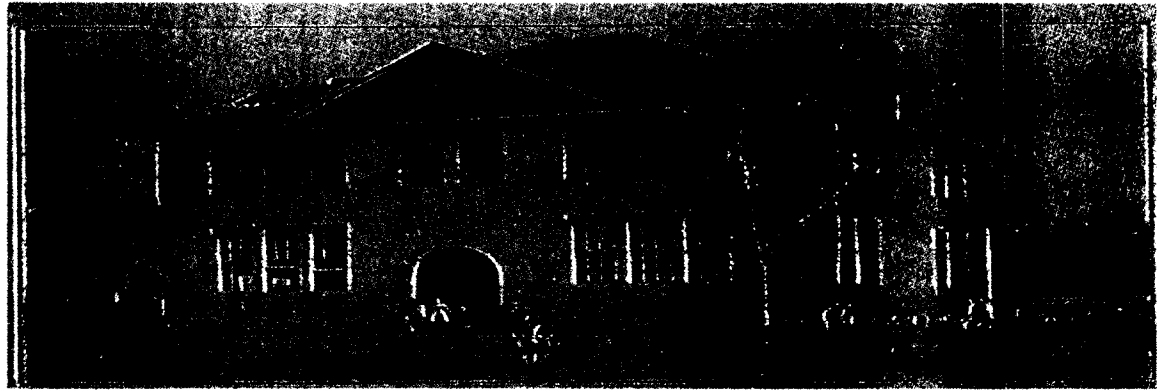
Hayes High School 1923 (*The Triangle*)



Hayes Area Black School, 1910

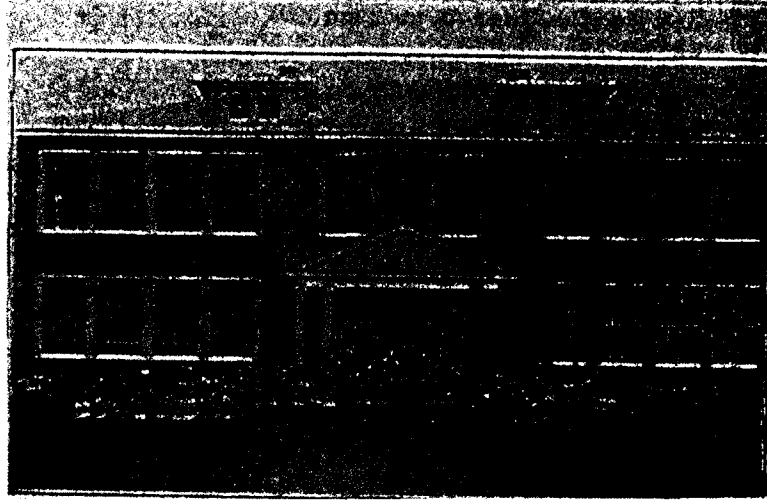
Jackson Davis Collection

Botetourt School was opened in 1908. The first building was a two-story, cement block structure. The school's 4 classrooms operated classes for both elementary and secondary school students. A second building, dedicated to the High School Department, would be erected in 1923. The new building would have running water, electricity, and steam heat. It would contain 6 classrooms, a laboratory, a domestic science room, gymnasium, two offices and a large auditorium (48).



Botetourt High School 1916(The Botetourt Annual)

Achilles High School dates from 1911. One hundred and twenty pupils were enrolled in the first session, rising to 325 by 1923. The school had, over 13 years, produced 33 graduates (11-25).



Achilles High School (The Triangle 1923)

The disparity in the educational opportunities within Gloucester County between 1900 and 1920 could not help but be viewed, through the eyes of the county's relatively stable black residents, as glaring. While white students attended schools such as the county's three, modern and well-staffed high schools, the black public schools had not progressed much beyond the earliest day of reconstruction. Many of the black schools were still one-room structures. There were a few exceptions as far as physical plant.



Bethel School 1902

According to the United States Census, 1900, Gloucester County's African American community numbered 6,608 persons, or 51.4 percent of the county's population. In the state of Virginia, 37.7% of the population was African American (*Historical Census Browser*). In conjunction with poverty and violence, the beginning of the Twentieth century was not actually a change for most African Americans but a continuation of the injustices of the past.

In 1910, blacks constituted 47% of the population of the county, a slight decline from 1900. At the same time, black students accounted for 49% of the enrollment in the county's schools. 49 white schools served 904 students, while 32 schools served 879 black students (Thomas 58). Continuous and systematic underfunding, under equipping, and overcrowding of schools that educated Negroes, and, therefore, limited their education experiences to the most rudimentary of curricula, had been a central tenet of the education, both private and public, which had been in place since the establishment of the very first "Negro" schools in the state. This philosophy actually shaped the educational ideologies and philosophies of some of the black leaders who would later shape the system of black education in Gloucester County and beyond.

Though intended to address the lingering impacts of enslavement, Armstrong's strategy of educating blacks for their "inferior positions" and providing the educations which lifted them up only "a bit," was symptomatic of black education across the segregated South. This was evidenced in the public schools of Gloucester County, and at Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School, or Cappahosic Academy.

Within such an educational view, the lack of a high school for blacks in the county and limiting education of blacks to only those things that would make them useful in the scheme of southern labor and economic structures was not only desirable, but logical. Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School gave some blacks in the county an opportunity to have their children attend an “academy,” as the children of the “better class” of the rural white south had, historically. As initially established, however, Cappahosic Academy was an academy in name only. This began to change in 1899.



Cappahosic Academy: Courtesy of Gloucester County History Museum

Under the guidance of its second principal, William G. Price, Cappahosic had begun a transformation. Before the first decade of the 1900s drew to its end, the curriculum of Cappahosic Academy included 12 years of education. The programs offered at the school included a college prep program and a teacher-training course. Available classes included 4 years of English, 2 years of history, 4 years of math- (up to trigonometry), 3 years of science (through physics), 4 years of Latin and German, and by 1925, two of French (Bagby 68).

Cappahosic Academy was also quite exceptional in its ability, under Price, to build a faculty. The Academy boasted a faculty of 8 when Price arrived there in 1896. The 1912 Folkes map indicated the white high schools of the county had faculties of five each. In 1911-12, Cappahosic had a faculty of 12 (75).

The American Missionary Association made William G. Price, who had joined the faculty of Cappahosic in 1896, principal of the school in 1899. The Albermarle County-born, Hampton Institute-educated Price was an outsider and not deeply involved in the county's local, political struggles. The impact of this change within the faculty of the school was immediate. The American Missionary - Volume 52, No. 1, March, 1898, listed the member of Cappahosic's faculty:... "Prof. W. B. Weaver, Cappahosic, Va.; Mr. W. G. Price, Priddy's, Va.; Mr. D. D. Weaver, Cappahosic, Va.; Mrs. E. Sprague Weaver, Cappahosic, Va.; Miss Carrie E. Steele, Charleston, S. C.; Mr. R. L. White, Cappahosic, Va.; Miss Ada Baytop, Ark, Va" (6). As Principal of Cappahosic, Weaver bore the title of Professor, though he, unlike Price, had completed no college level coursework. The school employed Weaver's wife and brother, as well, and all, along with R.L. White, called Cappahosic home. Miss Ada Baytop was a native of Ark, a nearby Gloucester County community. Miss Steele, Price's future wife, was, like her husband-to-be, from an area that lay far outside the county's borders (Bagby 70).

The decision to replace W.B. Weaver, who was a friend of, and, who, according to local histories, cofounded the school with T.C. Walker, with an "outsider" resulted from a power struggle among the predominantly white trustees. One of the offshoots of the decision was the withdrawal of Walker's support from the school (60). This decision by Walker may have come from, or been influenced by, a

source predating Price's involvement with the school, and with, in fact, the county, by decades.

In *The Honey-pod-Tree*, his autobiography, Walker, who was born on the Captain Baytop's Spring Hill Plantation, recounted being raised as the "play child" of a prominent white couple- Lieutenant and Mrs. Baytop. According to Walker, his surrogate parents, who "tucked him in a little trundle bed beside their own," gave him his name (1-15). Walker's narrative left the actual time--between the ages of three and ten--that he spent in the home of the Baytops unclear. This old and intimate relationship with the Baytops might explain, among other things, Walker's selection of the Cappahosic area as the location for the school, "The Stubbs family lived at Cappahosic House for many years. Later on it was the home of the Baytops. During their residence there the place became known as "Baytop" (Farrar 22).

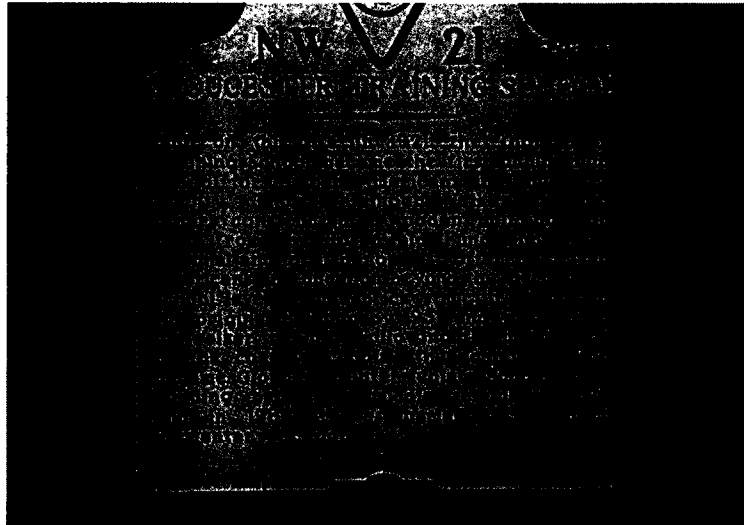
Though he does not address the matter in *The Honey-pod Tree*, Walker must have had a great sense of attachment to the lands in the region called home by his "play family," and the school that took its name from area. His resentment at the project he helped found being entrusted to Price, instead of himself, at Weaver's removal, was, likely, an important variable in Walker's role in the future of education in the county. Walker realigned himself with those who promoted "public education" for blacks. While there is a twenty-three page chapter on Negro education in *The Honey-pod Tree*, there is no mention of Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial or "Cappahosic Academy."

According to Walker, he and other blacks in the area created a "High School" that was "on par" with Gloucester's white schools. Walker described Gloucester County Training School as "the only school in Gloucester County that gave a negro

boy or girl the opportunity to go beyond seventh grade” and goes on to claim that the school grew until it offered “ a regular four year high school course” (206).

A 2001 historical marker erected by the Department of Historic Resources recalls the history of the Training School.

Gloucester Training School became the first public high school for African Americans in Gloucester County. Thomas Calhoun Walker, Jr. and others constructed a wooden building with gifts from the Rosenwald Fund and other national and local donors. It offered African Americans an education *beyond the elementary school level* (italics added).



Gloucester County Training School’s curriculum was almost exclusively focused on Industrial Education, thus it was in no way on “par” with the white high schools in the county. According to the African American Heritage Trails Tour, 12th grade was not available until 1954, a year after Walker’s death (African American).



(Gloucester County Training School-Jackson Davis Collection 1923)

The Gloucester County Training School began its operations in the fall of 1921. The Training School, which began in a two-room wooden structure, was funded by contributions from local blacks, the Rosenwald Fund, and the Jeanes Fund, which were administered, historically, by Tuskegee and Hampton Institute respectively. The Rosenwald Fund (Foundation) was created, in 1912, through the personal friendship between Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, President of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Initially begun in Alabama, the Rosewald Foundation provided funds for improved school buildings in rural areas. The Foundation's influence quickly spread throughout the South. The funds were administered through Tuskegee (Norrell 368-370). This gave Washington, and his allies at the county level, a great deal of influence in rural education. However, this influence came at a price. Gloucester's T.C. Walker was the chief agent, and beneficiary, of the advent of Rosenwald Schools.

Walker's personal friendship with Washington had begun when he was at Hampton Institute. Walker was a student in one of Washington's classes and, according to Walker, Washington used Walker's individual success as an example of the benefits of a Hampton education. The friendship between these two Hampton graduates and Armstrong-Frissell loyalists continued when Washington left Hampton for Tuskegee (*Honey-pod* 32-33). Walker accompanied Washington on a speaking and fund raising tour in 1906 that took the two to New York City. Addressing the White Rose Industrial Association, Washington's message urged blacks, as laborers, to work harder than their white counterparts. The audience was told that black women, as cooks, seamstresses, scullery maids, and nannies, had to work not only as well as "white girls," but better. He continued on to inform the audience that the same held true for black men as janitors and bootblacks. For his part, Walker praised General Armstrong for his contributions black education and assured the audience that blacks in the South were progressing with support- "aid and sympathy"- from whites: remarks intended to refute the opinions of Thomas Dixon, Jr., then a Gloucester resident (*New York Times* 2-12-06).

In the early summer of 1913, Washington visited Gloucester and Mathews counties. In speeches delivered during this visit, Washington spoke to "colored folk" about the need for cleanliness, frugality, and good habits and responsibility in labor. He was accompanied on his visit by Robert Russa Moton of Hampton Institute. Moton led the "colored people" in the crowd in a number of songs and "made a very favorable impression" (*The Mathews Journal* Vol. X). Moton, who would be elevated to Principle of Tuskegee upon the death of Washington in 1915, mentioned Walker as an ally of Hampton's Extension Service, which managed Rosenwald funds. In his

memoir, *Finding A Way Out*, Moton described Walker as "...a very successful lawyer, partner and teacher..." (75).

Walker's relationship with Washington, and his access to funding and other support from the nationally-acclaimed "Wizard of Tuskegee," allowed him to develop a great deal personal influence and control among Gloucester County blacks through Rosenwald Schools. He could influence which communities the schools would be located in, who would be employed to staff them, and most importantly, their curricula. The identification of Gloucester Training School as a High School gave some local residents the impression of progress. The buildings were more substantial than most of the schools initially created by the black churches in the county. However, the "Training School," with its limited school term and its clearly accommodation-oriented curriculum, caused resentment among many of the county's black communities. Walker's strict adherence to the philosophies of his Hampton University mentors and benefactors made him the object of "severe criticism from some blacks who considered him too accommodating" (Smith. J. Clay 229)

Walker's promotion of the Rosenwald Fund and other Tuskegee-controlled sources as the key to local educational needs became the core of his claims to dominance in local leadership. The Rosewald schools were products of a massive undertaking. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation:

The Rosenwald rural school building program was a major effort to improve the quality of public education for African Americans in the early twentieth-century South. In 1912, Julius Rosenwald gave Booker T. Washington permission to use some of the money

he had donated to Tuskegee Institute for the construction of six small schools in rural Alabama, which were constructed and opened in 1913 and 1914. Pleased with the results, Rosenwald then agreed to fund a larger program for schoolhouse construction based at Tuskegee. In 1917 he set up the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a Chicago-based philanthropic foundation, and in 1920 the Rosenwald Fund established an independent office for the school building program in Nashville, Tennessee. By 1928, one in every five rural schools for black students in the South was a Rosenwald school, and these schools housed one third of the region's rural black schoolchildren and teachers. At the program's conclusion in 1932, it had produced 4,977 new schools, 217 teachers' homes, and 163 shop buildings, constructed at a total cost of \$28,408,520 to serve 663,615 students in 883 counties of 15 states. (National Trust)

In rural counties such as Gloucester, Rosenwald schools assured that most rural blacks would continue to be undereducated and occupy the lowest levels of the local economy and social structure. Additionally, the Rosenwald Foundation paid only one third of the costs of the building of a school. Access to Rosenwald funding was dependent upon school projects meeting several provisions: the design of the building had to meet Tuskegee design standards. When completed, the school, and the land, had to be deeded to the local school board. Blacks routinely provided the

land and materials and often bore the majority of the costs associated with construction (Anderson 156-58).

The generation of Gloucester blacks that came out of slavery in 1865 used their meager resources to obtain land for churches. They contributed building materials and sweat in erecting structures that they would own and use to stabilize their community and provide services to ensure a brighter future, such as education. In the opening decades of the 20th Century, Gloucester's black community was again using their limited resources to secure land, contributing building materials and their labor to erect building in efforts to provide better life experiences and brighter futures for their children through education. However, the buildings that they erected belonged, upon completion, to the county, and the services provided in those buildings did not look toward the future, but fettered them and their children with the old chains of injustice and inequality that had bound their ancestors for 350 years.

Jackson Davis, Field Agent for the General Education Board, in an article published in *The Southern Workman*, called County Training Schools one of the most positive developments in Negro education. In his article, "County Training Schools," Davis celebrated an educational development "that carried through the eight grade with the intention of adding two more grades as soon as practicable." Davis explained the overall curricula of County Training Schools as, ... "five years of primary work and two more of elementary work, with suitable industrial courses[...] three years of advanced work emphasizing all the arts of home making and farm life [...] last year a simple course in teacher training" (47, 481-82). In another *Southern Workman* article, "Building a Rural Civilization," Davis explained the genesis of County Training Schools:

During the World War, [...] a great many new avenues were opened to the colored people, and there has been a steady migration to the large industrial centers until some sections are threatened with a serious shortage of farm labor [...] One of the frequent reasons given by negroes for moving into the cities, both in the North and South, is that their children have a better opportunity for education. (49, 501-02)

In “The Black Migration”, W.T. Andrews addressed education as a cause for the migration of blacks out of the rural south, “ In my view the chief causes of negro unrest unrest and disturbance are as follows: the destruction of his political privileges and curtailment of his civil rights; no protection of life liberty and property under the law...no educational facilities worthy of the name in most of the southern states” (102). “Early African-American Schools in Southwest Virginia”, discusses the complicated history of Training schools:

“At that time, the school was named "The Appalachia Training School" by a local minister. In 1939, the idea of consolidation of all African American high school students started to be implemented. During the time, it was felt that the name of the school should be changed. Many thought the word "Training" made it sound as if the school was a vocational school instead of a high school. (Southwest Virginia)

The Gloucester County Training School, like similar schools across the South, was not an attempt at uplifting the race. In the aftermath of World War I, blacks began to

migrate into urban area of the South and into northern cities seeking to benefit from the availability of non-agricultural jobs and educational opportunities. In order to stem the outward flow of labor, Southern school boards embraced the Rosenwald provided Training Schools as rural, black “high schools.” While the fund did improve the physical conditions of many black schools, it had other effects, as well. The creation of Rosenwald schools effectively severed the connections between the local black churches and the schools in which black children were educated. Communities, congregations and families lost the ability to guide, monitor, and influence many aspects of the education afforded blacks at the county level.

The control of both funds for the buildings and the curriculum by narrowly-constructed guidelines promulgated by a consortium of northern industrialists, southern planters, and Hampton Institute-Tuskegee based accommodationist had devastating and lasting impacts on education in southern, rural counties such as Gloucester. Gloucester County Training School, like others cast in the Rosenwald school mold, never operated as a High School, though, in *The Honey-pod Tree*, Walker refers to it as such and claims that it had a “regular high school curriculum” (206-207).

The Training School was not the only Rosenwald school that Walker, as the “Self appointed, unpaid, superintendent of Negro Schools of Gloucester County,” controlled (Walker 49). Between 1920 and 1925, Walker and his allies oversaw the establishment of five other Rosenwald schools in the County.

Bena-Hayes and Bethel Schools were initiated in 1922-23. These were followed by the Woodville and James Store Schools in 1923-24. The Purton School was established in 1924-25. Students at these smaller, “feeder” schools did mostly

primary and elementary work. A percentage of them would, eventually, go to the Gloucester Training School for “advanced” studies. Walker served as the “Principal” of the Gloucester County Training School. This gave him an educational “title” similar to those held by his regional allies, Washington and Moton, and his local nemesis, Cappahosic’s Price.



Woodville (Rosenwald) School 2010



Rosenwald School Superintendent Kenney, Mr. Gresham, Principal Walker, Miss Smith. Gloucester County Training School. Date: October, 1923 (Jackson Davis Collection)

Though the Rosenwald Fund operated on a matching funds formula under which local blacks were required to provide a third of the required costs of constructing schools, the formula was quite different in Gloucester County. In most instances, as they had done since Emancipation, Gloucester County's black bore most of the burdens involved in their attempts to provide education for members of their community.

The Bena-Hayes School was the only Rosenwald School for which local blacks contributed less than the required third of the costs. Blacks contributed \$1000 of the \$5,500 cost of the school, or 18%. The total costs of the Gloucester County Training School were \$10,000. Local blacks provided \$3,900, 39% of the total. Blacks provided over 70% of the costs of building Bethel School. Of the \$5,500 total, blacks provided \$3,900. Black contributions to the Woodville construction budget were similar to those of Bethel. Of the total of \$3,500, blacks provided \$2,500 or 71.4%. The Purton School was constructed with \$3000. Of this sum, local blacks provided \$2,300. The 76.7% contributed by local blacks was the highest contribution level in the county. The James Store School was constructed at a cost of \$3,500. Local blacks provided \$2,300 of the construction costs, or a total of 65.7% (Fisk University Rosenwald Database 10-24-10).

Prior to his death, Washington explained both how the Rosenwald funds were used and the overall design philosophy applied to school construction: "in

connection with the building of schools we are using as far as we can Sears and Roebuck materials; [...] I think we will have to be very careful not to put so much money into a building that it will bring about a feeling of jealousy on the part of the white people who may have a schoolhouse that is much poorer” (Harlan 198). In practice, the Rosenwald model returned much of its budget, including black contributions, to Sears and Roebuck in the purchase of material, extended the power of white local school boards by deeding to them properties purchased largely by black contributions and reinforced the assumptions inherent in the ideology of “white supremacy” by assuring that black schools would not rival those of whites in either physical plant or curriculum. At a time when even black colleges such as Hampton Institute were not offering full high school curricula, County Training Schools remained, by design, “High Schools” in name only. As the white schools of Gloucester County expanded to provide fully- developed high school curricula at multiple locations, Gloucester Training School marched slavishly on in the educational tradition described by Hampton’s second Principal, Hollis B. Frissell, ...“ devoting special attention to instruction in trades and manual training” (Walters 54). According to local historians, at the Gloucester Training School, girls were taught useful skills such as cooking, nursing and sewing, and boys received instruction in carpentry, bricklaying, paperhanging, painting and automotive repair. Students also received some academic training (McCartney 223).

Though there were no public high schools for Gloucester’s black students during the period Walker reflects on in his life story, there was a black “high school”

in the county: Cappahosic Academy. Under the leadership of William Price, the school was able, despite weakening financial support during the 1920s, to maintain some of the highest academic standards in the state. This was accomplished during the early 20th Century, a period in which support for Negro education was soft, at best, all across the state:

In the entire state four times as much money per pupil was spent for salaries of white teachers than for salaries of Negro teachers. There were school seats for 96 per cent of white school age and about 50 per cent of the Negroes of school age [...] by 1918 only four Negro high schools outside the cities were reported as offering four years of instruction. (Moger 257))

Though not formally accredited by the state as a high school, Cappahosic offered black students, who could afford to attend it, an education that enabled them to attend, and succeed at, Hampton Institute, Historically Black Colleges and, eventually, white Ivy League Universities. Successful completion of Cappahosic coursework also allowed graduates to serve in the public school system as well-qualified teachers. Literally, every day that Cappahosic Academy opened its doors it flew directly in the face of most of the nation's racial thinking. The concept that blacks were intellectually inferior to whites formed the basis for the on-going discrimination against and repression of blacks throughout Virginia, and throughout the South. Cappahosic graduates challenged this concept.

Amid white supremacist claims that the Negro was inferior, no attention was paid to the facts that the structures and curricula that had been created to educate the

“Negro” were inferior and, thus, could produce little other than an inferior product. Limiting the education of the Negro was a matter of state policy and a central tenet of maintaining the resurgent Confederate claims of “white supremacy.” As one white Virginian observed:

Education elevates the Negro, hence renders him less tractable and less willing to fulfill the duties of a subservient class; hence it widens the chasm between the races and instead of solving the problem, only hastens the period when the inevitable selection of segregation, subordination, or extermination must be made. (Wynes 123)

At the same time that inferiority was being claimed, some Virginians, like University of Virginia Professor Richard Heath Dabney, opposed the education of Negroes for more practical reasons: “Dabney opposed the education of the Negro on the grounds that it would only serve to make him the industrial competitor of the white man”(123). Thus, “the Negro” was denied education on the grounds of contradictory reasons. To some, “Negroes” were inferior. To others, educated Negroes would be so “dangerous,” that they would have to be “exterminated.” And, finally, the educated “Negro” would become an economic competitor with whites. The cause for the fear of educated Negroes was, without question, rooted in the sudden changes in social structure occasioned by the South’s defeat and the rapid successes achieved by the former slaves. It is worth noting that, according to William Price, in 1910, the U.S. Census data indicated that, “96.2 percent of black farmers (in Gloucester County) owned their own farms...” (Bagby 64-65). Price had helped establish the Gloucester Land, Building and Loan Association to help blacks become landowners. This might have been another point of tension and resentment for Price

and other supporters of Cappahosic among the traditional powers in the county-- including T.C. Walker.

Walker, known locally as “buy land Walker,” was clearly involved in land transactions. In *The Honey-pod Tree*, Walker discusses his role in the Gloucester Land and Brick Company. In describing the start-up of the company, with the help of a white land owner, Walker explained that: “...transactions should be only with me personally. So, while as a company we were given possession of the land, Mr. Hopkins held me responsible for collecting the money from the would-be purchasers and for reporting fully to him, from time to time, on the company’s financial condition. (107- 8)

Locally Walker is often given sole credit for the high rate of land ownership within the County’s black community in the early 1900s. However, Bagby notes that William G. Price and others associated with Cappahosic created the Gloucester Land, Building and Loan Association, an alternative route to land ownerships among blacks, in 1905. The impact of the Association became quickly apparent:

Partly as a result, Price (who served as treasurer of the cooperative for several years) could report from the 1910 census that a remarkable 96.2 percent of black farmers in Gloucester County (versus 88.6 percent of white farmers) owned their farms, however small... “our building and loan association has already singled out those 34 Negro tenant farmers of Gloucester [the other 3.8 percent] with the hope of making them also farm owners.”(64-5)

Walker's roles as a practicing lawyer and an intermediary in numerous for-profit land transactions produced financial opportunities for Walker himself. The activities of Price and his competing association denied Walker a monopoly.

Taking into consideration the high level of land ownership among them, the conditions within Gloucester's African American community in the early decades of the 1900s were, apparently, at least for many, quite different from those experienced by others in much of Virginia in the same time line. In *Virginia: The New Dominion*, Virginius Dabney describes the reality of Virginia's poor whites, "Low-income whites, who had never had much of anything, were living in some of the decaying mansions. These sallow-complexioned, undernourished citizens were still eking out a bare existence, often despite the ravages of hookworm, pellagra or malaria" (Dabney 442).

As rural whites struggled to overcome illiteracy, poverty, and the fracturing of their claims of racial "superiority," the existence of Cappahosic Academy fermented resentment among poor whites and the Old Aristocracy that had led them all into the twin disasters of war itself and defeat. Set against this background, Cappahosic took on the qualities of a blasphemous anathema in the minds of the "Old Guard" of the county.

Among the chief figures in the county's post-war history, was General William Booth Taliaferro. The former Confederate General, who served with distinction during the Civil War, was widely known as being a benefactor and promoter of the career of T.C. Walker. Walker described their relationship in some detail in *The Honey-pod Tree*. Of Taliaferro, with whom Walker would "partner" in

law, he wrote, “General William B. Taliaferro [was] another eminent white citizen of Gloucester County and one of the most liberal men of the south. He it was who had represented Gloucester at the hanging of John Brown. (67)

Taliaferro, a member of one the county’s oldest and famous aristocratic families, was commander of the Virginia Militia unit at Harper’s Ferry after the John Brown raid, and a member of the Command Staff at Fort Wagner when it was attacked by 54th Massachusetts, black troops under the command of white officers. He was credited with using his local influence to assure that Walker became a lawyer. After Taliaferro’s death in 1898, there is no indication that Walker’s loyalty to the General, or the General’s family and friends, which would have included the Baytops, his “play” parents’ family, ended. Nor is there any indication that the support given to Walker and his “accommodationist” leadership by those who survived his initial benefactor actually ceased. There were, however, occasional setbacks.

When, in 1921, Walker petitioned the local school board for funds to provide secondary education for black students, he was told that no funds were available. Walker, using some of his own money, and obtaining aid from the Rosenwald Foundation, opened The Gloucester Training School that same year. A ninth grade was added within a year (203-07).

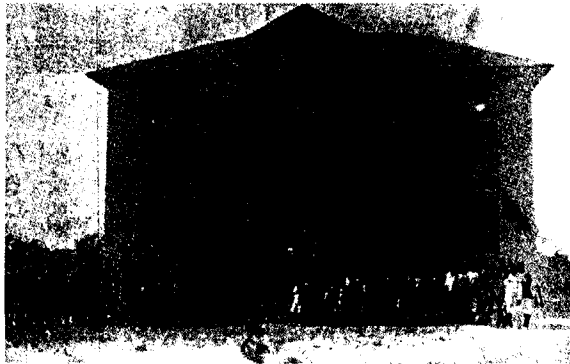
Walker’s School, with its more conservative, Booker T. Washington-Hampton curriculum, was soon able to expand. Walker was given full use of nearby buildings without having to purchase them, and the state and county political and media establishment carefully documented and promoted the School.

While there is no direct record of Walker having started “his” School as an alternative or competitor to Cappahosic, this is at least suggested by Walker maintaining a “dormitory” in association with the school. The “dorm” seems totally out of place in the public education system of Gloucester County’s Public School system. Not even the white high schools boasted such a facility. The only other “dorms” were associated with Cappahosic (Bagby 77-78).



Training School Dorm Building

Jackson Davis Collection



Gloucester Training School 1921



Considered for School

Dormitory

Jackson Davis Collection

Jackson Davis Collection

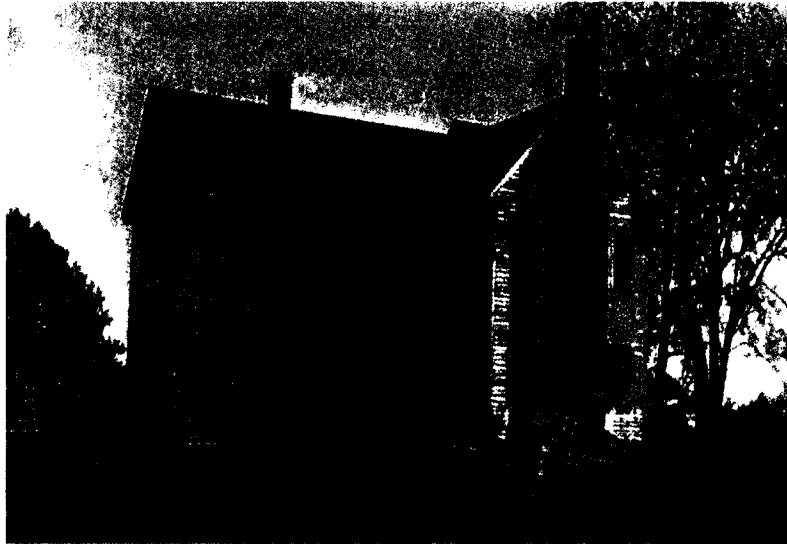
Walkers's School, as well as Bethel Church School, which he was reported to have helped create in the same year, would eventually gain funding from the local school board. With Walker, who commanded open and obvious support from prominent white citizens in and out of government, pushing the school, poor blacks found themselves a captive audience of the "self-appointed Superintendent of Negro Schools." Thus, though Cappahosic had earned a regional reputation for excellence, it wanted local support. At the same time, The Gloucester Training School became the showplace for "Negro education in the county" (77-87).

Walker's school gave black students the promise of learning trades and getting jobs, however inconsequential, and incomes, however small, in 9 years. Price's school, though less expensive than in its early history, was still unable to compete with a free school. Also, Walker's school, offering 9 years of education for free, in a new building--albeit it wood-frame and not brick like major white schools of the same period-- must have seemed a vast improvement over the one-room school houses and 7 or 8 abbreviated years of education that they had long been accustomed to. It must be remembered that the need for high school educations for Virginia's black population was not commonly accepted. In 1918, outside of the major cities, records indicate that only 4 black high schools existed within the borders of the state (Moger 257). In the 1920 Virginia census, blacks as a community numbered 690,017--almost 30% of the total population (*Historical Census Browser*).

The Hampton-educated Walker's promotion of an approach to the education of black students that could not help but limit, if not destroy, any hopes of most of those students being able to pursue college careers, was typical of the period. The

figure that would best symbolize the practice at the national level would be another Hampton graduate, Dr. Booker Taliaferro Washington. The curriculum developed for Cappahosic, by Price, was designed to propel black students into undergraduate schools and beyond (Bagby 68). Walker and others who supported Gloucester Training School were stopping far short of offering even a modicum of “educational equality” to blacks who were still 47% of the county’s population as of 1920 (*Historical Census Browser*). Many of the county’s blacks recognized the disadvantages under which their children were being placed. White students were to continue to be given freely what black parents could only afford their children through paying tuition and other costs out of their family budgets.

The mid to late 1920s was a time of challenge for Price and Cappahosic Academy. The changing economic conditions in the post-World War years resulted in reductions in support from the AMA. Simultaneously, the number of Cappahosic students that used the school’s dormitory declined sharply. The spread of Rosenwald, “free” schools and the advent of the County Training School were among the factors that triggered the decline (Bagby 78-79). The opening of dormitories at the County Training School helped to reinforce the illusion that it was the overall educational equal of Cappahosic Academy and this siphoned away at least a small portion of Cappahosic’s dormitory enrollment.



Gloucester County Training School New Dormitory. T.C. Walker; Date: October, 1923

(Jackson Davis Collection)

During this time frame, the number of blacks who left Gloucester County seeking better opportunities also increased. Most black Virginians had no access to standard high school facilities. In order for their children to receive high school educations, black parents had to utilize private institutions. In paying for what their tax dollars helped to provide for the state's white students for free, black parents were, in effect, taxed twice. Even those blacks who could not afford the additional costs of sending their children to private schools, such as Cappahosic, realized that the majority of tax collections used for education in the county went into the support of the white schools. By 1930, the black population of Gloucester County had declined to 39% (*Historical Census Browser*). This eight percent drop indicated an acceleration of the downward trend in black population numbers that had declined only slightly in the preceding three decades.

Despite its having been accredited as a high school in 1928, the 1930s would witness the demise of Cappahosic Academy. As the Great Depression deepened, AMA support, which had been dwindling for the latter half of the 20s, fell sharply, as did enrollment. Faced with economic emergencies, Cappahosic was unable to generate local support to save itself. Bagby surmises: "Here Price's unspoken rivalry with T.C. Walker, dating back to the 1890s, must have played a role. Cappahosic closed in June of 1933" (Bagby 81). With its closing, the only full high school education available to blacks in Gloucester County ceased. Though there is only antidotal evidence to support it, the closure of the school, is said, by local elders, to have been at least part of what spurred a new wave of migration from the county. The 1940 census data indicated that the black population of the county would drop to 33% (*Historical Census Browser*).

The closure of Cappahosic did not end the struggles of Gloucester's blacks for higher educational standards and opportunities for their children. The elimination of the only high school curriculum available within the county for black children highlighted the glaring and systematic inequalities within the county school system. Gloucester's black community responded through local churches and other organizations and founded the Gloucester County School Improvement League. In a series of petitions and reports submitted to various agencies of the county government, these groups would agitate for equal educational opportunities, in both physical plant and curriculum, for the county's black students. The campaign, which spanned decades, broke into full public debate in the 1940s.

Starting with the first of the Rosenwald schools, black families had both paid taxes and made contributions to support the local schools which served blacks. The

schools that served their children continued to be neglected and basic services, such as transportation and sanitation, were ignored. The inequalities were clearly and daily displayed:

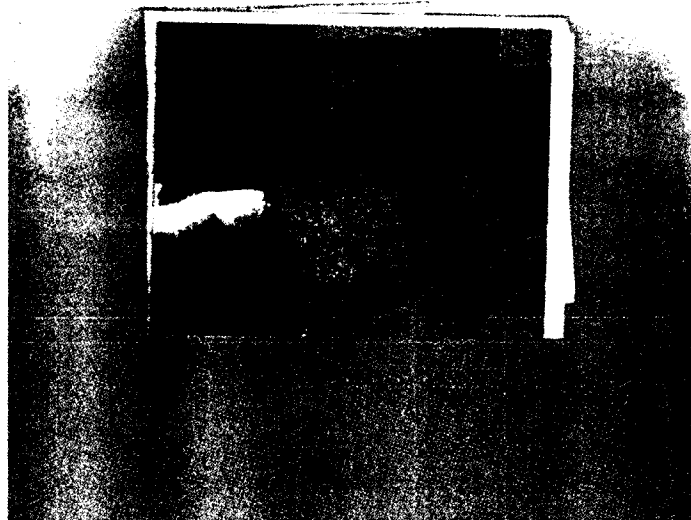
In Gloucester County during the late 1940s, someone in a passing school bus yelled racial slurs at two black girls standing beside the road. One girl shouted back. The driver stopped, white kids piled out, and the girls ran. White kids rode to school. Black kids walked. In Suffolk in the 1930s, a black teenager picked up supplies at a white high school to bring back to his classmates. As he passed an open window, he heard a strange noise: clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack. Inside, an entire class pounded away on typewriters. Back at the teen's school, the only typewriter belonged to the principal. White kids studied for college and careers. Black kids "trained" for sweat-of-the-brow jobs, not professions. ("No Easy Journey")

The efforts to improve black schools were met with open resistance, broken promises, and protracted delays. The heightening tensions which centered on educational issues were emblematic of leadership changes within the local black community and worsening race relations nationally. The leaders of the Gloucester County movement to improve black schools fought not only against disinterested, or hostile, white county officials, but also against "Jim Crow" patronage and long-established accommodationist leadership among county blacks. The leaders of the movement to improve black schools confronted county officials at school board and

other county government meetings and in the local press. At the heart of their complaints were the Rosenwald Schools, which had become the only schools available to county blacks. Despite continued, and substantial, contributions from the black community, the maintenance of the original 1920s buildings had been neglected, and no new schools had been constructed. With the 1933 closure of Cappahosic Academy, only those blacks who could afford to send their sons and daughters out of the county had any hope of providing them educations beyond junior high school. The Hampton/Tuskegee-inspired belief that blacks did not need, and could not benefit from, higher education, formed the bedrock of the pedagogical philosophies of the county's educational officials, including T.C. Walker, the "self-appointed" superintendent of colored schools.

The school improvement advocates were led by a local physician, Dr. R. S. Turner. The Jamaican-born Turner was a Howard University Medical School-trained General Practitioner who had begun his practice in Gloucester in 1936 (Lind 5). Turner, whom locals remember as being fearlessly outspoken, helped to organize petition drives to increase black turn-out and participation at school board and other county government meetings and wrote extensively about conditions at black schools in letters and articles published in the local, weekly newspaper, *The Gazette-Journal*. One of Turner's primary concerns was the poor conditions at the Gloucester Training School, the "Flagship" of black education in the county. Turner played a prominent role in the 1940's quest to improve the educational experiences afforded Gloucester's black students. In public meetings and in newspaper submissions, Turner lambasted local school officials for poor maintenance of the building, inadequate heat, lack of running water, absence of sanitary drinking water, unsanitary toilets, and lack of

transportation. Turner, also, noted gross inadequacies in the curriculum offered at the school (Turner 4).



Dr. R.S. Turner:

Courtesy of Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal

Turner, who like W.G. Price, was not a Gloucester “native,” was regarded by white officials, and by T.C. Walker, as an outside agitator and trouble-maker who led the “good” blacks of the county astray. In March of 1941, when the School Board reappointed the Superintendent who had for 20 years overseen the county schools, Dr. Turner was among those who opposed the reappointment of J. Walter Kenney. In the February 13th issue of the *Gazette-Journal*, a lengthy and scathing critique written

by Turner had been published in the Readers Write section. Under the title of “School Administration”, Turner detailed the black community’s concerns ranging from physical plant, health, sanitation, curriculum and teacher’s salaries. In his critique, Turner concluded that, “The negro schools are a disgrace to this county...The colored people of this county are indignant and disgusted with the administration of our schools” (4).

T.C. Walker responded to the growing criticism. In a letter written on March 22nd and published in the March 27th issue of the *Gazette-Journal* that reported Kenney’s reappointment, Walker identified himself as a “life long resident” and shared his views on black education in the county. He credited Civil War era whites, men such as Reverend W.E. Wiatt, William Ap. W. Jones, Major W.K. Perrin, and General W.B. Tallaferro, for supporting “negro” education and for creating an environment of “positive race relations” which “lasted up to the present time.” Walker lamented the possible eruption of racial tension due to the activities of the School Improvement League. In his letter, Walker clearly identified the “cause” of the worsening tensions. The eruptions were not the work of “native Negroes” of the county. Walker reasserted his support for Kenney and gave his readers a “history” of black education in the county that claimed that the Gloucester Training School had an 11th grade at the time of its organization. His letter, published in the Reader’s Write section of the newspaper, like his later autobiography, made no mention whatsoever of Cappahosic Academy. Walker closed the letter with a direct appeal to county blacks:

I am calling upon the Colored people of Gloucester County to use their best efforts to cooperate with the friends of the Negro race in an

effort to make and keep Gloucester County a fit place in which to live rather than to excite the public against well thinking and appreciation of our efforts in the past...Keep Gloucester County “The Land of The Life Worth Living.”

(Walker 2)

Another letter written by Walker, and directed to the black farmers and their wives, was published in the *Gazette-Journal* in early April of 1941. Written on April 8th and published in the April 10th issue, the letter advised county black farmers to be more frugal, to plow and plant more gardens, raise more pigs, have their wives and daughters raise more poultry and to improve upon the breeds in their flocks(2).

Walker’s advising area blacks to concentrate on agricultural issues in the midst of a broad-based, highly organized campaign for better schools echoed advice highlighted by Booker T. Washington in his 1895 speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. Walker advised county blacks to “Cast down your bucket where you are.” By counseling Gloucester blacks to dedicate their energies to agriculture, he would be supported by white county officials, especially those involved in the debate. Improvement of agricultural practices in black gardens, pig pens, and chicken coops hardly required serious changes in either physical plant or curriculum in black schools in the County.

When, In the following May, County Supervisors met in contemplation of levying additional taxes for schools, Turner’s allies in the School Improvement League joined him in open opposition. The defenders of the plan, backed by Kenney, all held to a common theme. Speaking on behalf of Kenney’s supporters, Mr. John T. DuVall indicated that while he had no objection to people who were new to the

county being involved in county affairs, he felt that they knew less about county issues than life-long residents. Mr. J.C. Hogg also spoke in support of Kenney. Mr. Hogg criticized “new-comers” who stirred up trouble in the county. T.C. Walker also supported the school board’s decision to reappoint Kenney, despite the fact that The Gloucester School Improvement League presented a petition against the reappointment that contained 1, 348 black signatures. Walker blamed state laws and not local officials for the problems. He also recalled how county whites “helped” the blacks to obtain schools. According to Walker, many of the blacks who signed the petition had no real understanding of the issues involved and reminded the gathering that they needed to remember conditions at the opening of the century (“Supervisors”1).

The members of the League who attended the meeting expressed their opposition to a proposed increase in taxes for schools on varied grounds. Before they could support an increase, the leaders of the League wanted a thorough accounting of funds already allocated and/or collected. Among the concerns of the leadership of the League was the practice of “training school” students being required to pay tuition in order to attend a publicly-funded school. Members of the County’s black community were familiar with schools that required that students and their families pay for their educations. Cappahosic Academy had long been a model among them. The black community was also very aware of the differences between the Cappahosic campus and curriculum and the black schools that remained in the aftermath of Cappahosic’s closure. Payments were required at the Gloucester “training” school. Students who failed to pay were denied instruction, their diplomas withheld, and their graduations blocked. This situation, according to Commonwealth Attorney, George P. DeHardit,

required investigation by a Grand Jury. When asked by County Supervisors to identify individuals involved with the collection of these funds, the group was told by Joseph Atkins, who headed the League delegation, "I'm told that T.C. Walker collected some" (1,8).

William Weaver, an ally of Walker since the creation of Cappahosic Academy, attended the meeting and addressed the gathering. Weaver indicated that he had come to the meeting as an independent; however, based upon what he had heard, he joined those who opposed the tax plans until a full investigation had been conducted. Dr. Leonidas Morris addressed the issue of the lack of transportation for black students, specifically in the Piney Swamp area. (8). In Dr. Morris, the School Improvement League had a spokesperson whose roots within the County, and its history, could not be challenged. The Morris family of free blacks descended from a 17th century indentured servant:

... Elizabeth Morris, a servant of Middlesex County, was of mixed ancestry because the vestry book of Christ Church Parish described her in 1706 as "A Mulatto Woman." ... Like her children, Elizabeth's grandchildren were indentured, beginning when daughter Winnie gave birth to her own daughter, Bidy, at age fifteen... By 1742, Winnie had three sons: Francis, George, and James. (Two other children, Thomas, born 1843, and William, born 1845, were likely sons of Winnie's older brother, James Morris.)... the Morrises intermarried with other free families of

color—notably those with the surnames of Lockley, Driver, Lemon, Bluford (Blueford), and Thias—and built large families. (Bynum)

Kenney's reappointment, and persistence of the poor conditions in black schools, led to a more active and organized campaign on the part of Turner and others and to heightened tensions within county politics and within the black community. In response to the positions taken on the school issue by county officials, and the claims of Walker and others, that the "school issues" were the work of "outsiders," the Gloucester School Improvement League intensified its efforts and area churches, in which the quest for education began, figured prominently.

The May 1, 1941 issue of the *Gazette-Journal* also contained Reverend John W. Lemon's report on an Easter Sunday (April 13th) meeting at a black church which focused on education. Representatives from across the County gathered for the event at Morning Glory Baptist Church. The centerpiece of the meeting was the reading of a report on the history of black education in the County.

The report, "Some Facts of Negro Schools in Gloucester," written by William G. Price, whose health was rapidly failing, was read to the gathering. Included was a history of Cappahosic graduates. According to Price's report, the first student to graduate from Cappahosic's high school curriculum, John Bluford, followed in the footsteps of W.E.B. Du Bois. Bluford graduated from Harvard and also did graduate work at Cornell. He served as Dean of North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College for an extended period. After leaving A&T, Bluford relocated to Kansas City, Missouri, where he became the head of a high school science department. Another

Cappahosic graduate, Thomas Lemon, completed college work, including a Doctorate, and became Dean of Cheney State in Cheney, Pennsylvania. Price's report also mentioned another member of the Bluford family, F.D., as an early success. F.D. Bluford is described by Price as having completed "college and graduate work "and followed John as Dean of A & T..." (Lemon, John 8).

These examples of success also underscored long-standing tensions within the county. The Bluford and Lemon families were prominent among those black and mulatto families that had lengthy histories in the county as "free" people and were among those that county officials had attempted to remove in their petition of 1836. Price's history both established a sense of the academic and social achievements of Gloucester blacks, and, perhaps more importantly, it served as an open challenge to the limited, agriculturally focused, educational philosophy of Walker, J., and his allies.

At the same time that Price's voice was, from his "sick bed," added to the growing public education debate, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was becoming increasingly active in Gloucester. The *Gazette-Journal* issue that reported on the Easter "mass educational meeting," at Morning Glory Baptist contained a brief announcement of an upcoming "mass" meeting of the Local NAACP. Rising Valley Baptist Church was to host a guest speaker, Ms. Ella Baker. The brief announcement described Baker as "[...] field campaign director, of the New York office [...]" (Carter, O. Nelson 6).

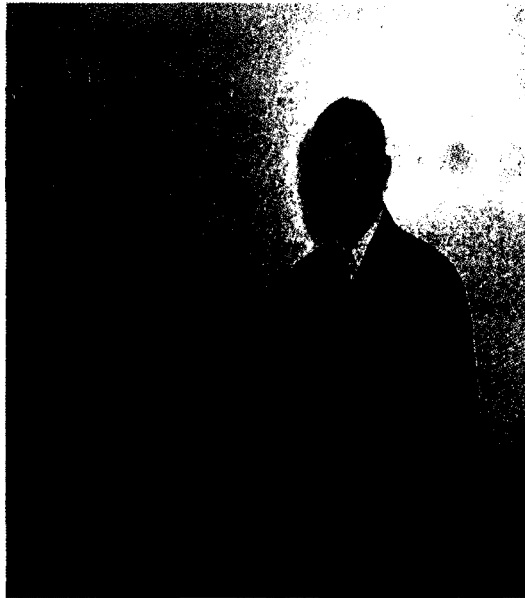
The very public, and often personal, conflict between the School Improvement League and its opposition intensified. The League moved, in May, to refute Walker's allegations that the "eruptions" about the inequalities in the

educational opportunities afforded blacks was the work of outsiders, not “native Negroes” of Gloucester.

In an open letter published in the Gazette-Journal’s May 29th issue, Mrs. Harriet Lemon Inman, daughter J.C. Lemon, and a “native” of the County, described the broad nature of the community support the League and its leadership enjoyed. Mrs. Lemon Inman indicated that the group was actively supported by the local Colored American Legion and other lodges, a Homemakers club, Garden Club, a Mother’s Club, County-wide Parents-Teachers Association, Men’s Club, Local N.A.A.C.P Chapter, and black churches. Though she began by expressing her appreciation for the suffering of blacks in Virginia dating back to 1619 and her pride in the accomplishments of her race, her letter was also sharply critical of both County officials and their leading black supporter. Lemon Inman pointed out that county blacks had, in fact, contributed \$25,000 to the support of black schools during the time that Mr. Kenney had served as Superintendent and that no new schools had been built during that time, and that existing schools, for which blacks had borne the majority of the costs, had been neglected. She clearly and bluntly rejected the notion that Walker had been responsible solely for progress in black education in the County:

No self-appointed Negro leader has been responsible for the work that has been accomplished in this county by our group. It has been the work of the Colored people at large [...] This came about through the influence of such capable Negro citizens as W.G. Price and the late Carrie Price, Reverend and Mrs. J.W. Lemon, Mr. and Mrs. W.H.

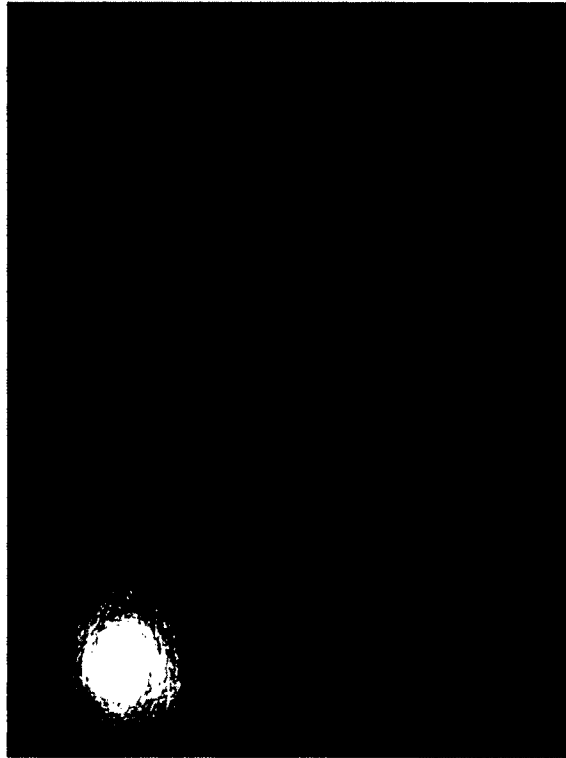
Carter and Drs. Morris and Turner, who worked with this group *rather than for personal gain or praise*(italics added). Some of these have gone to the school board only to be insulted and turned away. But, the Eausaw (Esau) and Judas type was given a hearing. (Lemon, Harriet-Inman 6)



Dr. Leonidas Morris

Courtesy of Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal Archives

Lemon Inman's letter, in which she praised the leadership and educational contributions of William Gibbons Price was published five days prior to Price's death. Price, who had suffered a protracted illness at his home in Cappahosic, would have been under the care of local black physicians, Turner and Morris, both of whom were active in the leadership of the School Improvement League.



William G. Price

“Gloucester’s African-American Heritage Trails”
Gloucester History Museum

The obituary published in the June 5, 1941 Gazette-Journal acknowledged Price as both an educator and community leader:

William G. Price, outstanding Negro educator, died at his home at Cappahosic, Monday following a lengthy illness. He was 76 years of age. He was for over 35 years principal of the Gloucester County Agricultural and Industrial School at Cappahosic. He was the Treasurer of the Gloucester County Building and Loan Association and prominent in the civic and business affairs among the Negroes of this section. (Among the Colored 5)

The death of Price, and the subsequent recollections and discussion of the impact of Cappahosic Academy on educational opportunities for local blacks, added to the heightened tensions in race relations within the County. These tensions persisted into the mid-1940s, as the School Board and Supervisors continued to resist black calls for fundamental improvements in the County's black schools. In 1944, local conditions in Gloucester County would begin to resonate within the national struggle for black Civil Rights.

In what the *Washington Post* described as “a bold and dangerous act of defiance and dignity in rural Virginia or anywhere in the South of 1944,” a member of one of Gloucester's black families began a journey that would lead to an important Supreme Court decision (*Morello*). Irene Morgan's refusal to give up her seat on a Greyhound bus to white riders resulted in her being arrested and fined. Over a decade before the more famous Rosa Parks event, Jim Crow Interstate Transportation Laws had met and defeated by a descendent of a family that had come out of enslavement in Gloucester County. *Morgan v. Virginia*, would eventually result in a Supreme Court decision overturning Virginia's Jim Crow policies on buses traveling interstate. The case was argued before the Supreme Court by a team of NAACP attorneys that included Richmond-based Spotswood Robinson III, future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and William Hastie, Dean of Howard Law School. The 1946 victory in *Morgan*, was followed up in 1947 by a series of NAACP education-related actions in Virginia, including Gloucester County. In what was described as a “notable case,” black citizens, after almost 30 years of requests and petitions for improvement in the black schools of the county, filed suit in the United States District Court. The suit named the County School Board and Superintendent Kenney as defendants. In

the following year the Court ruled that “there is discrimination against the colored children by the school authorities of Gloucester County”... (Wilkerson 21).

In September, Robinson, Oliver W. Hill, Martin A. Martin and supporters of the School Improvement League escorted a group of black students to Gloucester’s Botetout High School and attempted to enroll them there. The attempt failed; however, the tactic allowed the black lawyers to request further action on the part of the Court. According to a December 30, 1999 Gazette-Journal article, “Gloucester, A Pioneer In Movement for Integration,” in 1949 Gloucester County made improvements at the Training School and changed the school’s name to T.C. Walker School and, shortly thereafter, a new white high school was built (10). The naming of the school after Walker was widely opposed in the black community. Local residents recall that the renamed Training School’s course of study did not include a 12th grade until the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Topeka*.

Almost 100 years after black churches such as Zion Poplars and First Morning Star began to offer rudimentary educational courses, and more than 20 years after the closure of Cappahosic Academy, The County School System finally became desegregated in 1968, and black educational institutions disappeared from the county’s political and physical landscapes.

The legacy of the struggle for equality in educational opportunity in Gloucester County was one of both pride of accomplishment and lasting resentment. Reverend William Foxwell, one of the first black science teachers employed by the county, was interrogated by his family physician shortly after his hiring. Foxwell’s doctor wanted to know exactly who he had talked to at the school board. The interrogating physician was Dr. Robert S. Turner, a former leader of the School

Improvement League. Dr. Turner was appointed to the Gloucester County School Trustee Electoral Board in 1970 (Foxwell).

In the aftermath of desegregation local black educational sites, and their histories, were relegated to the shadows of the County's history: Cappahosic Academy was granted no exception. An outgrowth of the thirst for education reflected in the initial creation of church schools, Cappahosic Academy became a symbol of what could be achieved by blacks. In the era, and area, in which it existed, its grandeur and its success were its greatest weaknesses. Cappahosic was a testimony to the powerful possibilities latent in the bringing of high-quality educational opportunities to the black community. In an age of "negritude" and black submissiveness, Cappahosic Academy did not compete with, or follow, surrounding schools, black or white-- Cappahosic led. Its example, and legacy, fuelled the aspirations and determination of many in the black community who participated in the struggles waged by the Gloucester School Improvement League.

In a final irony, Woodville School, a small, wood -framed Rosenwald school would somehow survive long enough to become an object of architectural and archeological study, while the entire campus of Cappahosic Academy utterly disappeared from the landscape. Local histories centered on the explanation that its roof leaked and it "just collapsed." Whatever the historical facts, Cappahosic Academy's just collapsing was probably inaccurate. Even if no hand touched its empty frame, Cappahosic was marked for destruction when a gifted outsider, William G. Price, brought the hopes engendered in the works of Euclid and "E Pluribus Unum" to the sons and daughters of black families in Gloucester County, Virginia, the birthplace of many of their ancestor's worst nightmares.

Chapter III:
No Longer Lost at Sea

First Purchase African M.E. Church was in the Quarters outside the southern town limits [...] called First Purchase because it was paid for from the first earnings of freed slaves [...] A few graves in the cemetery were marked with crumbling tombstones; newer ones were outlined with brightly colored glass and broken Coco-Cola bottles. Lightning rods guarding some graves denoted dead who rested uneasily; stumps of burned-out candles stood at the heads of infant graves. It was a happy cemetery.(Lee 118)

In her 1960 classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's description of the local African American cemetery as a "happy cemetery" captured much of the beauty and the irony of the experiences of post-Civil War communities. Throughout the South, the first purchases of newly-freed blacks were properties to be used to establish churches. As black sanctuaries rose from the dust of agricultural areas and former slave quarters, the former fields of bondage were landscaped with evergreens and flowers and consecrated with prayers. As steeples and bell towers were lifted up to the sky, another form of landscaping and cultural architecture emerged from the shadows of the newly-raised buildings: cemeteries.

While most Americans viewed cemeteries as places of solemnity, sadness and even dread, the formerly enslaved could adorn them with complex, bright signifiers

and imbue them with a sense of celebration and joy that tempered, if not completely overcame, the sense of loss normally associated with such fields. In most rural, southern communities, the formerly enslaved had endured centuries of cultural, social, and family disjointedness and denials of humanity both in life and in death. The earliest members of the enslaved African Diaspora transported into Gloucester County lived and labored in close proximity to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic. For those first enslaved peoples of Gloucester, the waters of the region were not just physical barriers to eastward escape; they were also a vast and marker-less repository of terror and of loss.

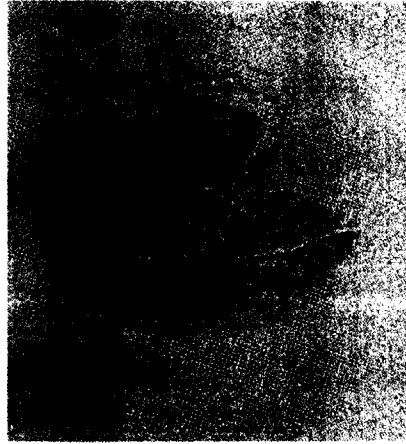
Though through their enslavement they lost much, the early enslaved Africans brought many things into colonial Gloucester. They brought with them value systems, patterns of faiths, religious beliefs and systems, elements of culture, social structures, and memories. For many of the early enslaved, these memories included the evermore distant happiness of life before enslavement and the seemingly unending horrors of the Middle Passage. Uprooted from cultures in which the dead were venerated and consecrated with ritual practices and ceremony, the anonymous, callous, dehumanization engendered in the tossing of the bodies of those Africans who succumbed to the terrors of the Passage into altar-less waters and waiting sharks marked an end and demanded that the enslaved adapt to cultural disruption and craft for themselves not only a new beginning but bridges between past and present. A major element of this had to do with memory. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy described memory of slavery as instrument used in constructing black interpretations of modernity (71). Memory also became a central motif in black literature.

In reference to her 1987 novel, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison indicated that: “The gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist. It’s bridged for us by our assuming responsibility for people no one’s ever assumed responsibility for. They are those that died en route. Nobody knows their names...” (Williams, Lisa. 151).

Though West African concepts of the soul varied widely, many cultures believed that the “soul” of the deceased survived and undertook a journey into an afterlife or began a new form of existence. This transition, made by the deceased, and the rituals and ceremonies associated with funerals were vital elements of West African spiritual, social, and cultural identity (Herskovits 190-206). The loss of the freedom to consecrate and sanctify their deceased loved ones was one of the major, ever-present manifestations of the power of the slave-owning class. In her research on the early enslaved populations in the York River area, Lorena Walsh concluded that, prior to 1687, some slave owners permitted the enslaved to hold funerals. After 1687, in fear that such occasions had been used to plan attempted uprisings, the Colonial Council of Virginia issued a ruling ordering masters to not allow the enslaved “to hold or make any solemnity or Funerells for any dece[ase]d negroes” (Walsh 105). While it is possible that owners continued to allow the enslaved to bury their dead, the existence of a “law” against slave funerals forced the enslaved to seek the permission of masters for the “privilege.” At Gloucester locations such as Rosewell, Fairfield, Shelly and Little England, slave-owning families established and maintained family cemeteries, conducted funerals and, under elaborate and durable markers, buried their dead. At the same time, the majority of enslaved who died simply disappeared beneath the soil.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass recalled the death and burial of his mother: “My mother died when I could not have been more than eight or nine years old, on one of old master's farms in Tuckahoe, in the neighborhood of Hillsborough. Her grave is, as the grave of the dead at sea, unmarked, and without stone or stake” (Douglass 60).

Douglass’ mother, Harriett Bailey, shared the fate of millions of enslaved Africans who died in bondage, a fate all too well known among Gloucester’s enslaved blacks. Some Gloucester plantations might have had designated areas that served as their slave burial fields. However, with the passage of time, physically unmarked and scantily documented, the dead, figuratively, joined the enslaved Africans tossed from the decks of slave ships during the Middle Passage. As Gloucester’s formerly enslaved made their first uncertain steps into initially circumscribed freedom, many remained in the general areas of the plantations upon which they, and their ancestors, had been chattel, “Now on our place when a slave die, ’ole overseer would go to de saw mill an’ git a twelve inch board, shape it with a point head and foot, an’ dig a grave to fit it. Den he tie de body to de board an’ bring it in de hole to keep it from stinkin’” (Perdue 289).



Gloucester County Slave owned by the Dabneys of Elmington (circa 1840)

Smedes, Susan Dabney, 1840-1913 *Memorials of a Southern Planter*.

The first purchases made by many of the newly-freed were lands upon which to build homes and/or to establish churches. With the newly-obtained security of land came the ability to dedicate areas to practical needs of survival, and with the attendant ability to conduct sacred- religious ceremonies and rituals of worship came the ability to disrupt the cultural and social anonymity that had dominated their existences: the ability to, through landownership, sustain and nurture the living and to consecrate and show reverence for the dead. The selecting, adorning and landscaping of sites, “earth writing” as Kenneth E. Foote describes it in *Shadowed Ground*, is a powerful factor in matters of culture, identity and memory:

In one sense *culture* refers to collective beliefs and values, the social conventions and traditions that bind individuals to a group or community. [...] Culture is in this sense a sort of collective or social memory. This concept of memory provides an important bond between culture and landscape, because human modifications to the

environment are often related to the way societies wish to sustain and efface memories. [...] Landscape might be seen in this light as a sort of communicative resource, a system of signs and symbols capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication. In effect the physical durability of landscape permits it to carry meaning into the future so as to help sustain memory and cultural traditions. (33)



Old slave quarters: Jackson Davis Collection

In *The Last Great Necessity*, David Charles Sloane describes the dilemmas faced by the enslaved Africans:

African American slaves were particularly susceptible to losing their rights to burial places [...] the racist slave holding society's attempt to strip African Americans of legitimate familial and community relationships encouraged them to develop and protect the areas in which they could express their sense of family and community. (15)

At many locations in Gloucester, the legacy of unprotected burial fields, histories hidden under fields of grass and daffodils symbolized the terrors of the enslaved past every bit as much as did the Honey-pod tree which had served as the slave auction block. Beginning with the slave burial field at the plantation called "Shelly," the very earliest field identified in county documents, the landscape of Gloucester blossomed with plantations and unmarked, largely undocumented, slave burial areas. As documented in *The World of Ware Parish*, "Shelly" was part of the original Rosewell complex of the Page family frequently visited by Thomas Jefferson. The Shelly burial field is described as, "...where members of the Negro Carter family are buried" (Jones 158).

It the aftermath of the Civil War, many of Gloucester's plantations remained intact and in private hands. Access to these properties, if it existed, had to be negotiated with the owners of the properties. Though the existence of slave burial fields was widely known, little documentary evidence survived. Slave cemeteries all across Gloucester, to include its center of political, legal, and economic power, fell into disuse, decay, and were lost to speculators and developers. Various listed as

“colored” and “slave” burial fields, cemeteries in Gloucester Court House, at Waverly on Highway 14, at the Highway 17-Ark Post Office, and 2.2 miles west of Gloucester on Federal 17, were among the few to be acknowledged, almost a century later, in the documentary record (Epitaphs 117).

Enslaved blacks, who had been for most of the County’s pre-Civil War history the majority of the county population, had built the area’s mansions and other buildings, cleared its fields and roads, had been denied the right to create and maintain any lasting symbols of their presence and their experiences. Black burials had left few visible, enduring marks upon either the physical or historical landscape. In the years following the conclusion of the War, black cemeteries and burial fields, whether church-affiliated or established and maintained by family groups, were small, secure islands surrounded by seas of centuries of loss. As the poplar tree of Zion Poplars served as an Afro-centric counter-symbol of resistance and transcendence of the dehumanization symbolized by the Honey-pod tree auction block, black cemeteries created counter-symbols to the anonymity of unmarked plantation burials. In consecrating and legally protecting burial areas, blacks, formerly enslaved and historically free, exercised the ability to, as Frederick Douglass had done in his *Narrative*, tell their own stories and write lasting histories of themselves, their families, lives, and beliefs as formerly-enslaved Africans and as Free People of Color. In “Putting the Past under Grass,” Blanche Linden-Ward asserts that:

Graveyards are literal repositories of the past, but they were not always regarded as places of history. Only awareness, preservation, and reinterpretation of the past turns old artifacts and documents into

the stuff of history. Only an instinct for preservation of the past premises the careful marking and keeping of evidence for future reference, based on the belief that there must be some use for it, albeit not evident in the present. (281)

The broad and diverse range of grave and burial art, aesthetics, and architecture created in the African American cemeteries of Gloucester County indicate that among the varied communities of post- War blacks, the “instinct to preserve the past” was a strong and dynamic element of that County’s cultural milieu. The post-Civil War black cemeteries of the County were sites of reverence, consecration, contestation, and community cohesion and cooperation. Created in the shadow of the older cemeteries of the dominant white elite, at places such as Warner Hall-the plantation of George Washington's great-great grandfather, Fairfield-home of Virginia’s first Governor, Abingdon Episcopal Church, White Marsh Plantation, called by Robert E. Lee “ ...the most beautiful place I have ever seen”(Farrar.38), and Ware Episcopal Church, the black cemeteries of the County allowed for the consecration of the final resting places of members of formerly-enslaved individuals and families whose presence in the County, in many instances, dated as far back in history as that of many of the area’s most elite white families. The ability to establish and maintain communal burial fields and cemeteries gave the formerly-enslaved, and the long-marginalized free blacks, the opportunity to articulate their understandings of their relationships with one another, and with the broader sacred worlds of the living and the dead. Cemeteries allowed development and consecration of their senses of identity and their spiritual beliefs:

Cemeteries are a rich example of cultural and ethnic diversity. Burial practices tend to be vivid manifestations of cultural homeostasis. Since such customs are slow to change, one can witness today, in the remnants of the grave, factors of an ethnic group's ancient material culture. (Thompson, Sharyn 5)

Each black cemetery, or burial field, whether church-affiliated or private, evolved in its own unique, complex, and highly symbolic way. Each field bore evidence of service both nationally and locally. They, over time, celebrated the lives of soldiers in the nation's many wars- beginning as early as Lee's surrender at Appomattox and the storming of San Juan Hill. Each cemetery commemorated the lives of local community "servants": educators, preachers, nurses and doctors. They also consecrated the lives of unnamed individuals, laborers, watermen, farmers, parents, families, and friends. As such, each cemetery was a papyrus upon which histories were written in small things and, often, encoded in distinctly Afro-Baptist ways. Each consecrated, protected burial, whether marked or unmarked, was a step in the long journey away from the world of enslavement's anonymity, marginalization, and loss described by Harriett Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*:

The graveyard was in the woods, and twilight was coming on [...]
A black stump, at the head of my mother's grave, was all that remained of a tree my father had planted. His grave was marked by a

small wooden board, bearing his name, the letters of which were nearly obliterated.

(Jacobs).

The great mass of Gloucester's nascent and formerly-enslaved "black communities" began to exercise their new social and cultural self-expression as descendents of a multi-cultural and multi-tribal African Diaspora that had incorporated many of the values and beliefs of the culture by which they had long been subjugated. Many, but not all, were traditionally Christian in their religious beliefs. Of the Christians, the overwhelming majority were Baptist. However, among these Baptist congregations were those who embraced Christianity by fusing it within the frameworks of religious traditions passed down through generations, the "African(Afro)-Baptist." While many blacks embraced the doctrines and ceremonies of Christianity, the influence of African systems of worship and ritual were neither obliterated nor forgotten. One of the areas in which evidence of this became most apparent was in the landscapes of the county's older African American cemeteries.

Many of the Afro-Baptist burials evidenced their "uniquely African qualities" on two levels: the general landscaping and the "mini-landscapes"/artwork of individual graves. Many of Gloucester's black cemeteries and burial fields contained variations in the orientations of individual graves and, in some cases, in areas of the wider burial fields. "At Utopia (*Carters Grove*) two adults were buried with their eyes facing west rather than east, and two others were interred along a north-south rather than an east-west axis. The variation in itself suggests continuing West African influences" (Walsh106).

The second level of evidence was created in the architecture of individual graves and the patterns of decoration or adornment selected to mark, border, or inscribe their surface areas. The cemeteries of Gloucester County evolved to contain many examples of the persistence of “native” West African burial traditions that Thompson notes, and, also, variations of these practices that have evolved to encompass modern cultural, technological, and material advancements. African American cemeteries of the County also served as palates or templates upon which the newly-freed communities of African Americans proved their abilities to form, of a fusion of West African and Euro-Christian ritual beliefs, a modern, African American, symbolic, commemorative lexicon of their histories.

Gloucester’s black cemeteries and burial fields were made places of consecration and cultural self-expression by the conscious and deliberate inclusion, in many instances, of elements of West African funerary and spiritual-religious signifiers. One of the most widely used West African traditions during the post-Civil/Jim Crow time-frame was the inclusion of plants, especially trees, in direct association with the burial of human remains. Thompson describes the importance of trees in the Kongo-Angola burial motif:

Trees planted on graves also signify the spirit; their roots literally journey to the other world. Hence Kongo elders plant trees on graves, explaining ‘ This tree is a sign of spirit, on its way to the other world’. The mooring of spirit with trees on graves appears in Southern Haiti, where the rationale is phrased this way: Trees live after us, death is not the end (139).



Rising Valley Baptist Church 2010

The symbolic use of trees as elements of burials took place, in greater or lesser degree, in all of the African American cemeteries of Gloucester. As time passed, the trees associated with individual graves, or group of graves, grew to dominate, shade, and further consecrate whole areas of burial fields. In some cases, the tree and other forms of marking, headstones and/or capstones merged into a single unit. In a few cases, the tree moved or broke the associated stone or masonry marker, fusing the artificial marker into the natural marker of the tree.



Zion Poplars 2010

The cemetery at Zion Poplars Baptist Church was one of the first locations in the county at which this tradition was utilized in a formal burial field and the site of one of the most powerful merging of Euro and Afro-Baptist burial elements.

The burial field at Zion Poplars was held as a sacred or consecrated space by members of Gloucester's black population prior to Emancipation, due to the presence of the unique, seven-trunk, natural altar that stood there in the form of a Poplar tree. Thus, when the brush-arbor congregation that worshipped beneath the tree/trees built their church on the site, the building they raised drew much of its sacred meaning from the natural altar with which it was associated. When the congregation established its cemetery on the same property, each burial placed human remains below earth within a field already inter-penetrated by the root structure of a living, natural altar. When burials at Zion Poplars were either placed in intimate contact with living trees in the burial field or trees were planted upon individual graves, the field's West African influences became more complex. The symbolism of trees with deceased ancestors was associated, as was the number seven, with the Yoruba God, Ogun. 'Bade Ajuwon, in "Ogun's Irewoje: A Philosophy of Living and Dying," documents the ritual chants of Yoruba hunters: "Our father is now an ancestor in whom to confide. He is a transplanted tree that thrives, A tree that no longer dies, But bears countless fruits" (Ajuwon 195).

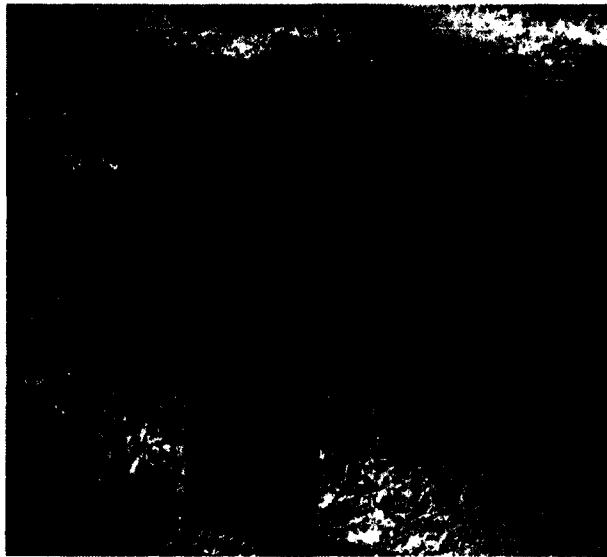
In *The Four Moments of the Sun*, Thompson identifies key elements of what he describes as "Kongo Atlantic graves": (1) The planted tree, with related usages such as the setting up of trunks or trees as 'blazes' or 'fords' to the other world; (2)

pipes, of all kinds, restating the metaphor of channeled voyaging through worlds; (3) the concept of the enclosure...

The centrality of living trees in burial areas was a common feature in black cemeteries County-wide. The tree that was most often used in these burials was the Cedar (Evergreen). This created an obvious duality of symbolism. The Cedar tree planted on or in close proximity to the grave continued the West African tradition. However, the selection of a Cedar for this purpose also drew upon elements of the Hebrew/Jewish Old Testament, "The Cedars in God's garden"-(Ezekiel 31:8). Mentioned numerous times in the Books of Ezekiel, Numbers, First Kings, and Isaiah, the Cedar was a "Holy" tree. That the slave community would select a symbolic element from a sacred text, which contained, among its central elements, the enslavement, and eventual deliverance, of a nation of people for inclusion in their "native," burial ritual was logical for the formerly enslaved. In *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Albert. J. Raboteau examines this development:

From the beginning of colonization, white Christians had identified the journey across the Atlantic to the New World as the exodus of a new Israel from the bondage of Europe into the promised land of milk and honey. For the black Christian, as Vincent Harding has observed, the imagery was reversed: the Middle Passage had brought his people to Egypt land, where they suffered bondage under Pharaoh. White Christians saw themselves as a new Israel; slaves identified themselves as the old. (251)

Cedars were, at times, mixed in with other trees in the early African American burial pattern at Zion Poplar Baptist Church. The oldest sections of the Zion Poplar Cemetery, on the eastern side of the burial field, were designed and adorned with other evidence of West African influence. These influences included association of graves with trees and other plants, whitewashing or using silver paint on capstones, and variations in the orientation of graves. In the early burials in the cemetery, at least one grave site was identified by cedar boards embedded in the earth. Thompson explains, “Thus *mbota* famous for its extremely hard wood suggests the hardiness of the elder’s spirit and resistance to the forces of time. This may have also reinforced the similar use of cedar in black America as a preferred wood for stakes and headboards (187).



In *Face of Gods*, Thompson indicates that similar grave markers were utilized by blacks in Suriname in the 18th and 19th centuries (131-136).

As the burial field expanded over time, the use of West African elements continued. In the newer sections of the cemetery, the western and south-western

sections, Gloucester's black families, as did others throughout the South, continued to place plants, usually evergreens, upon individual graves, along with the inclusion of whitewashing and of symbolic reflective surfaces and lamps (Holloway, Joseph E. 174-75).

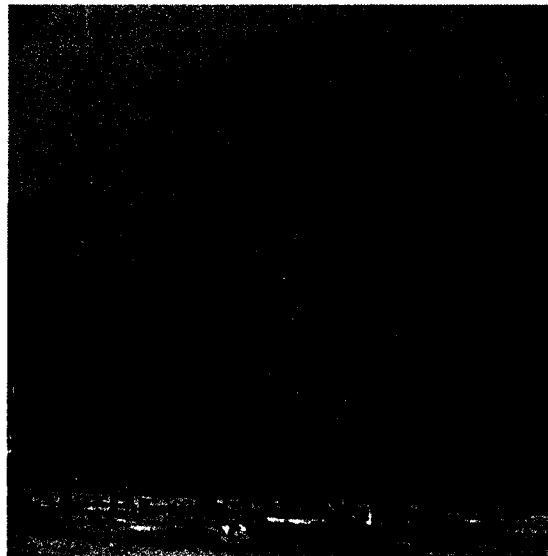
The use of the color white in grave decorations was another major type of burial decoration that linked the African American community of Gloucester County with West African cultures:

When Jefferson died, a white flag was hung on a bush to signal his death to those of the family at Tufton plantation, below Monticello. It may have been accidental, but in parts of Ghana, Upper Volta, the Ivory Coast, and the Congo, and among blacks in the West Indies and in New Orleans, white is the proper mourning color and connotes death. (Sobel 235)

Thompson's research found that the color white has many meanings within the Kongo-Angola cosmology including *iwa*, good character and *ashe*, spiritual power(*Flash* 6-11). Thompson's research also elaborates on the honorific quality of the color in relationship to bloodshed in ritual sacrifice: "In Kongo it is thought by some that the powers of the 'white realm' the kaolin-tinted world of the dead, are released by the sacrifice of a white chicken" (134). Another variation of this belief was documented in the Caribbean: "The whitewashing of tombs is repeated carefully every Christmas morning and formerly it was customary on these occasions to kill a white cock and sprinkle his blood over the graves of the family" (134-35). This symbolism of the blood of a sacrifice was rooted in pre-Christian, Kongo-Angolan

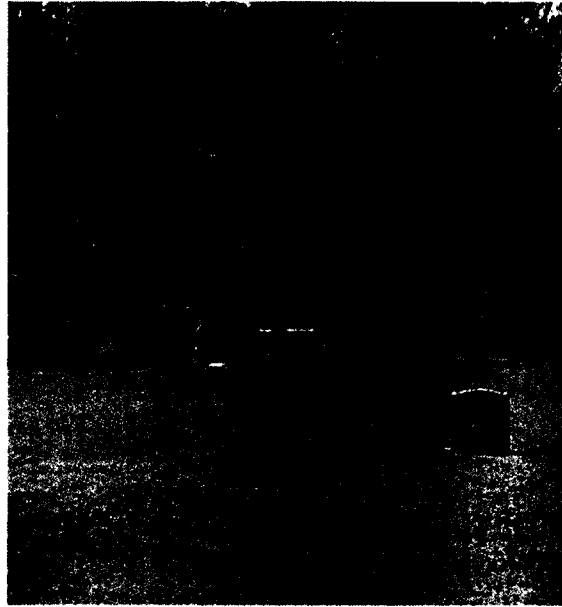
beliefs; however, the corollary symbolism of the crucifixion/sacrifice of the Christian “lamb,” the Christ, was easily adapted to Afro-Baptist symbolism. Thus, the two symbols merged easily within the belief systems of the early enslaved populations and their descendents. While there are no white roosters among the African American cemeteries of Gloucester County, there are the corresponding figures of white lambs and horses as figures in masonry, marble, and in plastic. As locally-available materials changed, the adornment of graves reflected the incorporation of newly-available materials and products in grave adornments.

Like the Zion Poplar Cemetery, the cemetery at “Old Glebe” (First United), was initially centered upon trees. The oldest section of the cemetery is near the northeast edge of the church’s property. On a small rise facing George Washington Memorial Highway, graves are interspersed within an impressive stand of cedars and other trees and plants. In many instances, the plants and burials were fused, creating a single entity. In other cases, the burials were placed so as to be “shaded” by the year-round green foliage and its living symbolism of spiritual or religious continuity.



(View of “Old” section from “newer” section)

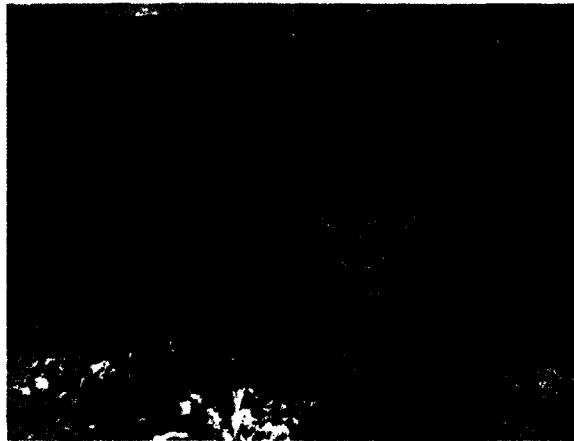
As the field expanded and Gloucester's blacks adjusted to the aesthetics of the dominant white funerary practices, the older, wooded areas of black cemeteries became physical and spiritual markers of community changes.



(View of “newer” section from old section)

As at Zion Poplars, a variety of crafted or manufactured materials were also used in creating the architecture of individual interments. Marble, cement, bricks, metal, and glass elements were used on grave surfaces to produce a field that reflected both Christian and Afro-Christian influences and values. The use of glass and other reflective elements in black burials has long been acknowledged as a culturally significant phenomenon. In *Signs of Diaspora/Diaspora of Signs*, Grey Gundaker noted: “In African American grave decorations, certain handmade headstones contain inset mirrors, tile chips, glass and other shiny objects. Silver paint and wavy lines cover grave slabs in southern black cemeteries [...] All these mirrorlike surfaces create a watery effect and a composed, deep stillness [...]” (75).

The evolution of First United Baptist Church's burials included examples of intricate glass grave art being used in black burials in the County. In the general area of the older section of the cemetery, three graves with glass markers were created. These glass squares were split, in order to have symbols placed inside them, and then resealed. In one case, the symbols placed inside were plants and flowers. The surfaces of the glass were etched with the names of the deceased. In the other case, the symbol was a white cross. Stone markers were also placed on each burial, as well as a metal plaque. Over time, the seam of the third failed and dirt and debris obscured its contents.



As the burial of human remains was a source of contemplation and conscious group actions, the inclusion of West African funerary elements among more traditional, Euro-Christian interments allowed congregations to express differences in politics and worldview, senses of history, identity, and social status. At the same time, the persistence of the mixing of these funerary elements in common or group burial fields allowed the congregants to express their cohesion as families and communities as well.

The cemetery of Bethel Baptist Church was one of the principal fields where cohesion, despite inter-group conflict, was enshrined. Bethel was the “Church Home” of T.C. Walker. After Walker’s death, he was remembered by a member of the Lemon family, Deacon A.W. Lemon of Bethel Baptist Church, who said, “He spread his branches far and near and spread the gospel of goodwill amongst both races”(U.S. Department of Interior).



Gloucester- Mathews Gazette Journal.

During the 1940s campaign to improve the educational opportunities for black students within the county, another Lemon, Mrs. Harriet Lemon Inman, challenged the history and quality of Walker's leadership in a letter published in the Gazette- Journal on May 29th 1941. In opposing Walker during the school battles, Mrs. Inman Lemon allied herself with other prominent Gloucester blacks. Among her allies was Dr. Leonidas J. Morris, a prominent, Howard University educated physician. He, and his wife, Beatrice, were, also, members of Bethel. Though Morris and Walker were antagonists during the "school improvement" struggles, the two, and their family members, were buried in the Bethel Baptist cemetery.

The Walkers, many of whom, as was written in *The Honey-pod Tree*, were largely descended from the county's enslaved blacks at the time of Emancipation, were buried in a large, elaborate family configuration. A large tree stands nearby, but it is not in the immediate-intimate area of the burials. Walker's own stone, the largest and most noticeable in the grouping was placed in an open and un-wooded position that insured its visibility from the nearby main road, Rt. 614. A small evergreen bush was planted at the northern edge of the array, closely associated with but not directly upon a family burial which took place after Walker's death. All the Walker graves were oriented east-west; and, otherwise, the entirety of the "Lawyer Walker" burials reflected Euro-Christian values in construction and symbolism.



Dr. Morris was a descendent of one of the largest and oldest families in Gloucester's Free People of Color population. Numerous members of the Morris family were listed as "Free" in the 1810 listing of 'free' heads of households in Gloucester (*Other Free...*). Dr. and Mrs. Morris were buried side-by-side on the Eastern or road side edge of the Bethel cemetery. Like the larger Walker grouping, the graves of Dr. and Mrs. Morris were placed in an East-West orientation. The couples' graves were marked with traditional, low, marble headstones. Finally, the rather modest grave architectures of the couple were placed in the shelter of a stand of pine trees.



The concentration of the Walker burials in a tight group created the impression of centrality and importance for those represented; however, though they are not in a single area of the cemetery, as many members of the Morris family were buried in the cemetery as Walker family members.

Differences in values and senses of identity were present in the community served by Bethel and its cemetery long before members of the Lemon, Morris and Walker families came into conflict on the issue of the County's black schools. The 1879 deed executed between William C. Stubbs and wife and Beverly Burwell, Harry Baytop, James Lemon and Braxton Drummond as Trustees, was for a church identified in the language of the deed as the "African Bethel Church" (Stubbs, William C.). The African influences which were apparently present in the

community, and reflected in the language of the deed, were not reflected in the eventual establishment of the church as Bethel Baptist. Yet, some members of the church held onto and acted upon their sense of their unique heritage in their burial practices and displays.

In her 1997 book, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove*, Lorena Walsh states that variations in orientation of graves suggested "West- African influences" (106). The most striking cases of burials that do not adhere to the otherwise widely practiced Judeo-Christian tradition of east-west burials are found in the Bethel cemetery. In one case, a group of seven individual graves were aligned in a carefully measured and straight east-west line in the Bethel field. Though these graves formed a line east to west, each of the seven of the closely-placed burials were oriented along a north-south axis. Of the seven, only one was adorned with a data-bearing marker: Emma M. Stubbs.



Emma M. STUBBS

Beloved wife of

G. W. Stubbs

Born May 1, 1888

Died Aug 7, 1918

Asleep in Jesus

Of the seven burials in the off-axis cluster, six were crowned with visible, above-ground, cement capstones. Though capped, no lasting inscriptions were created with metal plates or with information carved into the cement. The grave of Mrs. Stubbs has no visible capstone and is, instead, framed within a head-foot stone border crafted of marble.

Though her “resting place” was aligned off-axis with traditional Christian burial traditions, it was placed in relationship with a Christian field. Also, despite the non-traditional orientation, her burial was marked with a stone that bore testimony to her inclusion, at the time of her death, in the church’s “community of faith.” The Stubbs’ name features prominently in the history of the church. The original land usage, whether by deed or not, is attributed in local church lore to J. Cattlett Stubbs. The first deeded land was obtained from William C. Stubbs. The name “Stubbs” was common in the white population during the antebellum history of the county. In contrast, County census records documented no free blacks with the surname in 1830 (Washington, Edwin 31-39). In all likelihood, the black Stubbs were descendants of Stubbs “owned” individuals.

The second obviously intentional off-axis interment was also associated with a cluster of burials. As with the Stubbs grouping, the majority of the individual graves were not marked with identifying data. Four of the five graves were oriented

east-west. The fifth, featuring a smaller capstone, was oriented north-south. The only interment that featured identifying data was that of a veteran:

Charles T. HOLMES

Virginia

Pvt 510 Engrs

June 26, 1920

The off-axis burials were not the only burials constructed utilizing West African elements in the Bethel cemetery. There were, over the course of the cemetery's use, a number of interments in which trees or plants were placed in intimate contact with the resting places of the deceased. In one instance, both a cedar tree and a whitewashed capstone were utilized. Whitewashing, or silvering of capstones, was common. Among elaborate and expensive, professionally carved and etched marble symbols of identity, markers of wood and homemade concrete--some bearing simple hand crafted inscriptions-- were erected. In this, the (African) Bethel Baptist cemetery evolved much like other black cemeteries in the County. Yet, there were burials associated with the field that made it unique within the County.

Thompson noted "hidden" graves in *The Four Moments of the Sun*, "To this day, the more spectacularly traditional graves in black Georgia and South Carolina are sited by- and, in a few cases, even hidden within- woods or clumps of forest (187). Gloucester's black community also had burial areas "in the woods." While most of the burials at Bethel took place in the open areas that surrounded the church, there were other burials that casual visitors to the open areas of the field would not have been aware of. To the west and south of the church area, and the attendant

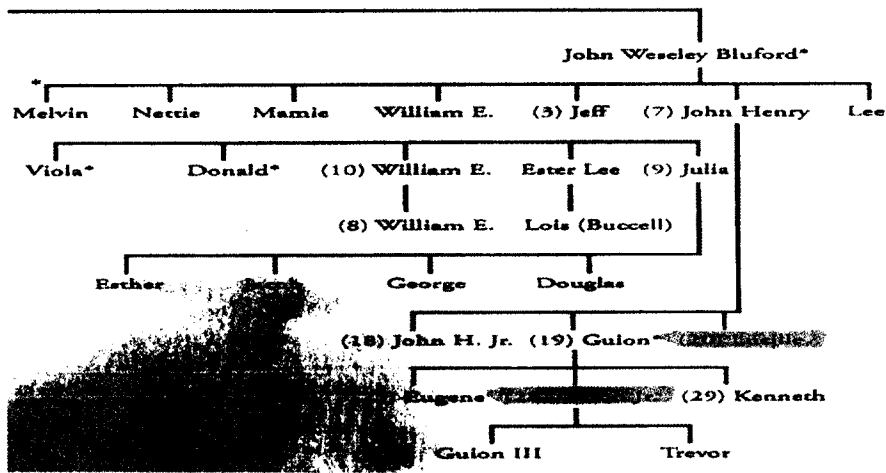
cemetery, stood a large, densely wooded area, cut by streams on either side, that formed the land into a peninsula. Also, large sink holes formed in the surrounding landscape. This area was also utilized for burials. Many of the graves in this area, which extended nearly 100 yards into the forest, were unmarked but featured concrete capstones. Marked burials took place in the area into the 1990s. Local histories indicate that some of the area was once tended, but the field was allowed to become overgrown due to economic constraints involved in maintaining the gravesites. While the overgrowth of the field may not have been intentionally designed to reflect the West African origins of those buried within it or to make connections with history and belief systems associated with the West African Diaspora, its blending of human activity and natural growth, over time, transformed the site:

Sacred groves are specific forest areas imbued with powers beyond those of humans; they are home to mighty spirits that can take or give life; they originate from a range of roots, and include: sites linked to specific events; sites surrounding temples; burial grounds or cemeteries housing the spirits of ancestors; the homes of protective spirits; ... (Laird)

If, as in West African belief, the association of a grave with a living plant or tree established a spiritual pathway connecting the deceased with the living world, as well as the world of the Ancestors, the Spirits, the numerous, normally unseen, “lost” graves at Bethel Baptist merged into the surrounding forested area as into a natural altar. As on old plantation lands throughout the county, the unmarked, lost graves of

the enslaved were overgrown, plowed under, or destroyed, while the ritualized and ceremonial forest burials at Bethel consecrated and reconnected with lost elements and identities of the County's enslaved African and free people of color past.

Among those who were laid to rest in the area under the trees was John H. Bluford. According to the Bluford Family Tree compiled by John W. Bluford, III, John Henry Bluford was the grandfather of the first African American to go into space, Guion Bluford, Jr.:





The importance of the symbolic connection with the spirit -ancestral world represented by the presence of trees on the sites that were chosen for sanctification was expressed in various ways throughout Gloucester's black community. The numerous cases of the placement of different types of trees upon individual graves was one form of consecration, "An *mbota* tree, planted on an elder's grave, provides an eternal signpost to a world beneath its roots" (Africanisms 167). Other manifestations of the concept were the selections or creations of wooded sites and, of equal importance, selection of sites upon which unusual or striking trees stood for burials and other religious usages.

The burial field and the sanctuary at Zion Poplars were both established upon the site where the brush arbor congregation that founded the church worshipped before emancipation. As the site evolved, both the sanctuary and the eventual

cemetery were located near the tree(s). The presence of the Poplars on the site was deemed sufficient to consecrate the surrounding landscapes. As at the “Old Glebe” and Bethel sites, a number of black churches and cemeteries were subsequently established upon land home either to striking individual trees or stands of them. The pattern was replicated at Rising Valley Baptist Church, Zion Poplars’ second daughter, and at New Mount Zion, a daughter church of Bethel.

The pattern was also created at numerous other locations across the County: at Pole Bridge cemetery, associated with Union Zion in Ware Neck, and at Gloucester Fields, a cemetery used by the congregations of First Morning Star, First United Baptist and others with no church affiliations. The complex interplay between these “living altars” as major, natural features and the arraying of individual, and group, interments ranging from unmarked graves, locally-produced “vernacular” head and foot stones, to interment identified with elaborate, expensive, commercially-produced tombstones, formed a foundation for the establishment of an enduring sense of the history, personalities, values, identities, and beliefs within interconnected and yet distinct communities.

M. Ruth Little defines vernacular grave markers as, “the native forms of marking graves in a place” (*Sticks and Stones* x). No singular vernacular developed in the cemeteries of Gloucester County. Instead, an inter-linked but fluid matrix of signifiers evolved, which allowed a broad range of representation and aesthetics. Most of these burials, within consecrated space, were exercises of an act of commemorative, ritual practice long denied the majority of the County’s black population under the “Chattel Slavery”- human property regime and gave subsequent generations of descendents of the formerly enslaved population the ability to identify

and commemorate their ancestors. The cultural, social, and economic differences within communities, and their variations over time, were freely and carefully expressed in the evolution of sites.

As the African American population became increasingly able to purchase commercially-manufactured markers, the use of handmade, home-manufactured markers declined, but it did not end. Evidence of these transitions was created continually in patterns or groupings of families, both blood and extended, and in material adornment and/ or the landscaping or horticultural treatments utilized. Fields in whose oldest sections un-emblazoned markers of concrete, wood or fieldstone, or long-lived plants, mark burials, calligraphy-bearing obelisks rose, enclosures of brick and masonry were built and expensive, marble monuments commemorated deceased individuals. However, many of the more modern burials evidenced continuations of elements of West African burial adornments, thereby connecting the deceased from different eras into an intricate and interwoven historical and cultural complex. At Morning Glory Baptist Church, as at other sites in Gloucester, the evolution of congregations from the general anonymity of enslavement to establishment of independent identities as individuals and as a community was recorded in burials. The congregation that, according to the Church's history, grew out of Bethel began as the Long Hill Prayer Community (Daughter).

The founding congregation included a large number of members from the Davenport family. The Davenports were not listed in any of the pre-Civil War Census data as "free." However, a 2007 history indicated that 13 of the 34 founders of Morning Glory were members of a family group descended from a free black female, Betsy Davenport, who was born in King and Queen County. As local histories were

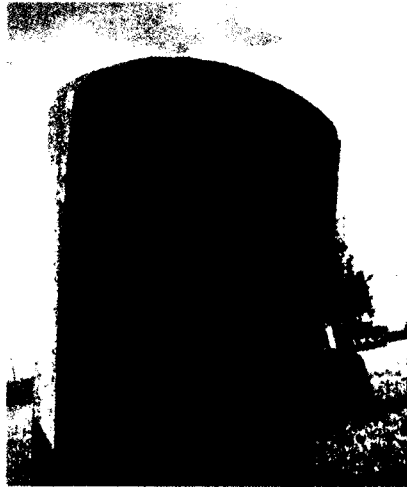
lived, and the living died, the burials of members of the Davenport family, like those of other families, mirrored changing conditions in the County and produced evidence of the complicated legal, cultural, and social forces that informed and shaped communities (Davenport 25).

The cemetery of Morning Glory was designed along European-American lines. Most of the burials were aligned on the East-West axis and were situated in neat and orderly rows. The practice of incorporating trees within burial architectures was minimal, though there were instances of rosebushes being used. Though there were few trees in the burial field that were directly associated with graves, trees were incorporated into the broader site of the church itself. The sanctuary was built with its front entrance near to a large, oddly configured cedar tree. Cedar was also the choice for the few burials in the field which utilized the grave/tree aesthetic. The cemetery also featured a mix of commemorative displays that reflected the family and group makeup of the congregation.

A hand-tooled and inscribed stone marks the burial of Mary F. Davenport. Mrs. Davenport died on Feb 20, 1908 at the age of 96. The 2007 church history contradicts the data on her marker, listing her birth date as 1828. According to the marker, she was born in Gloucester County in the year that witnessed the outbreak of the War of 1812. A founding member of the church, her grave is near an area of low, nameless, locally-made, cement markers. Though their arched tops are less than a foot in height, they were shaped in a fashion very similar to the tops of cedar-board markers used at Zion Poplars. These simple, unadorned burials, like the cedar markers, were, apparently, among the earliest marked burials in the field. Identified as the widow of Betsy Davenport's son, Thomas, and as a birth member of the

Lockley family (also very prominent in the burial field), Mrs. Davenport was one of the matriarchs of the congregation (Davenport 25).

Mrs. Davenport's relatively simple grave marker was, at one time, set apart by an enclosure of concrete posts and cannonball corner pieces. The enclosure of her burial site identified her as a major personality within the church community. Within the enclosure, three other burials were placed forming a family/extended family complex. Other Davenport burials are found in the field as individual burials or family/ extended family clusters. At some point, a tree planted in close proximity to Mrs. Davenport's burial complex was removed.



Mary F. Davenport

Alexander D. Davenport (1843) and his wife, Rosetta Whiting Davenport (1849), were also listed among the founders of the church. Rosetta Davenport, who, according to her grave marker, was born on February 7, 1846 and died February 19, 1916, was also buried at Morning Glory. Like Mary Davenport, the wife of Alexander Davenport was from one of the families, the Whitings, which also figured prominently in the church history, and would have been a matriarch of the church.

Her husband's history included being awarded a pension as a Confederate veteran:

In 1862, Alexander D. Davenport, a 20 -year old free mulatto, living in King and Queen County, Virginia, began serving the Confederate Army. It is unknown whether he voluntarily traveled to Richmond and offered his services or whether he was impressed into service as a result of the aforementioned Act of the Virginia Convention. In either case, he spent the next three years digging trenches, cooking, and washing for the Confederacy. At the end of the war, he returned to Gloucester County where he spent the rest of his life [...] He died 16 February 1925, less than four months later, a land owner and patriarch of the Davenport family, a portion of whose members still live in Gloucester. (Hunt 29)

Rosetta Davenport's tombstone was obtained commercially. It is a classical, sculptured, marble obelisk of the period. The stone is very similar to, though not as intricate as, the one that marks the burial of Reverend R. Berkeley, a major figure in church history. Again, as in the case of Rosetta Davenport, the type of marker, though clearly not Afro-centric, reflected the prominence of the deceased in the history of the congregation.

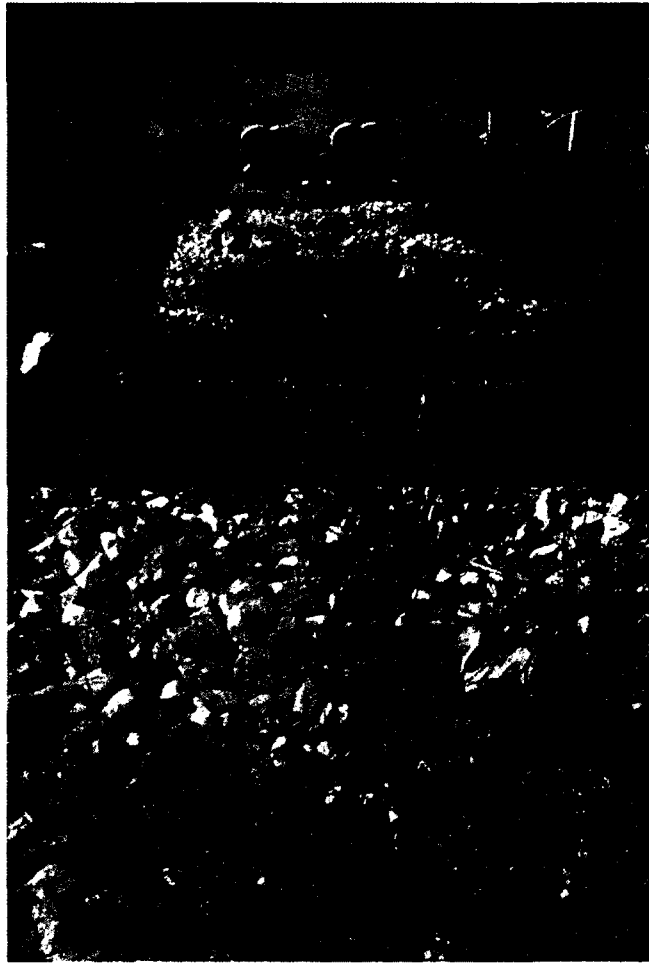


Rosetta Whiting Davenport



Reverend R. Berkeley

Other individuals and groups found ways to reflect their personal histories within the church history. Though the use of large trees on graves was limited, several burials featured the inclusion of flowering plants and small trees. Numerous burials also featured the whitewashing or silvering of capstones. Some burials were created in enclosures made of various materials such as bricks, wood, stones, and combinations thereof. A brick-bordered, double burial was created in the 21st century which reflected elements of West African burials in the use of white stones as a surface cover and the inclusion of a mixture of sacred and symbolic figurines (Africanisms 169).



Enclosure

Among the many unique burial treatments in Gloucester County's black cemeteries, one of the most striking was created at Morning Glory: an unmarked burial site was placed within a cluster of Brooks and Lemon burials. The grave, which bears no dates or other identifying data, was covered with an arched capstone of iron. The use of arched capstones of cement was fairly common in the black cemeteries of the County. These were often silvered, whitewashed, or textured to suggest water or fluidity in order to enhance their sacred display. The ceremonial or ritual use of iron, which, with the passing of time rusts and appears reddish in color, has West-African antecedents and corollaries.

The working of iron, iron implements, and the color red were associated with, and symbolized the essence of, Ogun, the Yoruba God. Any ceremony or ritual that featured the use of iron transformed the site of its usage into an altar to Ogun (Barnes 53-59).



The deliberate and conscious persistence of the inclusion, adaptation, and re-interpretation of West-African burial motifs and treatments within a multi-faceted syncretism of West-African, African American and Euro-American commemorative materials and applications was widespread in the County's black church cemeteries. This formed the interpretative basis for, and evidence of, continuing interactions between the lost ancestors of the distant past and subsequent generations of Gloucester County blacks.

Whether done deliberately or unconsciously, the creation of burial architectures that are identical in their layouts and elements, though separated by decades, forms interconnections between past and present, while at the same time influencing and informing future generations of traditions and beliefs that came into Gloucester County, from Calabar, Angola, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Guinea, with cargoes of enslaved Africans.

The creation of burial architectures that were identical in their layouts and elements, though separated by decades, formed interconnections between past and present, while at the same time influencing and informing future generations of ancestral traditions and beliefs.)



“Twin” graves featuring whitewash with wave effect, silvering, and Cedar trees.

Though Gloucester’s black population was widely dispersed in terms of geographical location, churches and church cemeteries, suggest that many customs

and traditions were shared throughout the County. They became, and continued to be, sites of continuity and interconnection. Black cemeteries, imbued with temporal, personal, emotional, and spiritual relevancy and resonance, became bridges between Gloucester's multifaceted black past and its complex present.

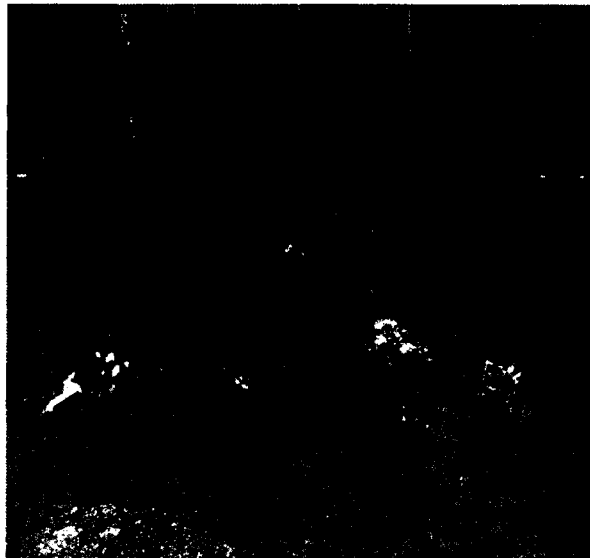


Pole Bridge Cemetery

Unlike most of the other black churches in the County, the church cemetery, Pole Bridge, the cemetery Union Zion Baptist Church was established on property removed from the actual meeting house by roughly two miles. According to the history of the church, the congregation began after a group of Ware Neck blacks attended a revival at Zion Poplars (Union Zion). Many of the blacks in the Ware

Neck area were descendents of blacks enslaved at Ditchley, Glen Roy, Belle Ville, Back Creek, Berg Westra, and Dunham Massie plantations. The enslaved populations of the area had produced leaders, such as Henry Jack Yates, and Civil War Congressional Medal of Honor winner James Daniel Gardner, and Buffalo Soldier Cupid Willis, who served in one of the black regiments that stormed San Juan Hill and whose courage was memorialized in CSA veteran Andrew Jackson Andrew's 1905 poem.

Pole Bridge Cemetery, much like Zion Poplars, Old Glebe- United Baptist, Gloucester Fields, and others, was located in an area with clusters of large and stately trees that imbued the cemetery with the qualities of a Sacred Grove. Stately hardwoods dominated the burial areas and a number of interments were located in close proximity with these "natural altars." There were also usages of other types of plants, variations in alignments, extensive use of whitewashing and silvering, and highly individualize and personalized grave adornments in the field, maintained by the church and by individual families.



Field stone and Rose Bush

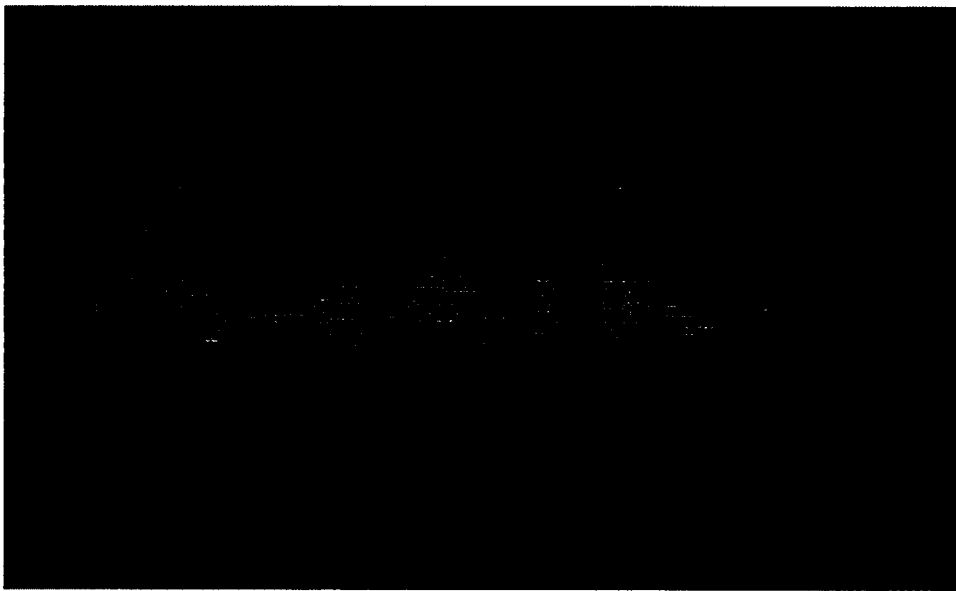
In *The Claims of Kinfolk*, Dylan C. Penningroth explains the importance of burials among West African populations as more than a matter of land itself, “Graves were important symbols of kinship and could literally be inserted into land to form the basis for a claim of ownership. The presence of a body in the land often carried powerful meanings for both property rights and family membership” [...] (36). The existence of burials within an area made the wide array of legal, social, and cultural connections within and between families and communities tangibly real and provable. The resting places of ancestors gave subsequent generations reference points for reflection, research, and re-interpretation.

Churches, cemeteries, and individual burials became physical, metaphorical, emotional, and spiritual “crossroads” of history for families and communities. The importance of such sites survived despite changing economic and social conditions, including emigration. For family members who lived their lives far removed from Gloucester’s rural environment, black church cemeteries became the “touchstones” through which the process of documenting and proving, or discovering-rediscovering, Family histories were enabled. Black Churches and their cemeteries served as primary texts of family histories and reconnections with ancestral pasts which otherwise existed as family legends and folk-tales:

James Harris was a slave, reportedly on the Hairston farm, somewhere near Williamsburg, Virginia. Somewhere around 1840 his son, John, swam the York River to escape the cruel Hairston. He arrived in Cappahosic, Virginia, where he later married Isabelle

Chapman. They moved to an area called Pampa. It was here that 13 children were born (Riley 1).

The history of the Harris family might have joined the histories of thousands of other black Gloucester families as flotsam and jetsam, debris on the shorelines of County history had it not merged with the history of one of the black churches in the County, New Mount Zion.



According to the church's history, New Mount Zion Baptist Church was begun as an off-shoot of Bethel Baptist in 1873. The residents of an area known at the time as "Brownsville" organized the church in response to the distance of Bethel from the area in which they lived, some 15 miles. The members met initially in members' homes, a log cabin, and a brush-arbor before building a house of worship ("New Mount Zion..."). The church was located in the region of Petsworth Parish

known as Woods Cross Roads/Pampa. The church served a community that was largely occupied with farming. To this end, many of the blacks in the community became land owners. The Harris family history notes that, shortly after the Civil War, “John Harris purchased 97 acres and his son-in-law, Thomas Chapman, bought 42 acres” (1).

Members of later generations of the Harris family migrated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Connelly, New York, and Los Angeles, California, while others remained in the County. One of those who remained in Gloucester, Reverend Sinclair Harris, (deceased 1970), served as Pastor of New Mount Zion and was buried in a cedar-shaded family grouping in the church cemetery. Among those who would share the heavily-shaded portion of the cemetery with the Harris’ were members of the Chapman, Davis, and Jones families: all related by marriage. However, New Mount Zion Cemetery was not a “single family” burial field. Among those buried were children, elders, young adults, farmers, and professionals from many different families. The cemetery held a community’s history in burials marked with identifying data in some cases, and, in other cases, without such data.

Among the very early marked stones placed was that of a Civil War veteran, Samuel Richardson, CO F, 114th CLD INF (Colored Infantry). The marker placed for Richardson bore no birth/death data.



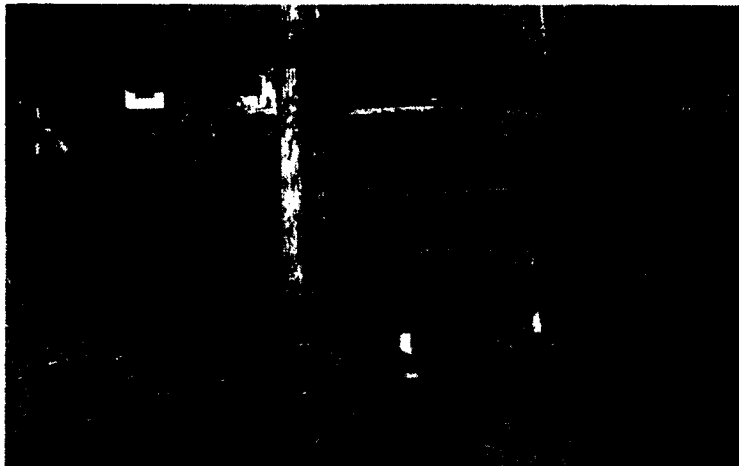
Though he, and the details of his service, remains effectively unknown and unacknowledged in the historical records of the county, Richardson served in a unit that was very active in the late stages of the War:

Ordered to Dept. of Virginia January 3, 1865. Siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond on the Bermuda Hundred Front till March, 1865. Appomattox Campaign March 28-April 9. Hatcher's Run, March 29-31. Fall of Petersburg, April 2. Pursuit of Lee April 3-9. Appomattox Court House April 9. Surrender of Lee and his army.
(The Forgotten...)

Richardson's marker was one of many veterans' markers erected from within the community served by the church during the nation's post-Civil War history. The officially sanctioned military markers for the community's veterans were placed in common, yet sacred, grounds with traditional European American burial architectures

and burials that utilized materials, treatments, adornments, and symbolisms of the distant West African origins of the community's population.

The New Mount Zion cemetery was designed around the presence of numerous cedars and stately hardwood trees. The earliest burials were placed in areas that were wooded. A number of the earlier graves, and others created later in the evolution of the field, were established in intimate contact with trees that predated the creation of the burials. In other instances, shrubs, evergreens, and flowering plants were added as burials were consecrated and established. While the placement of graves in association with trees was normally an honorific treatment reserved for elders and adult leaders, the practice could be modified. In the New Mount Zion cemetery, in a 1921 burial, the grave of a 7-year- old child was placed in a small space between two young cedars.

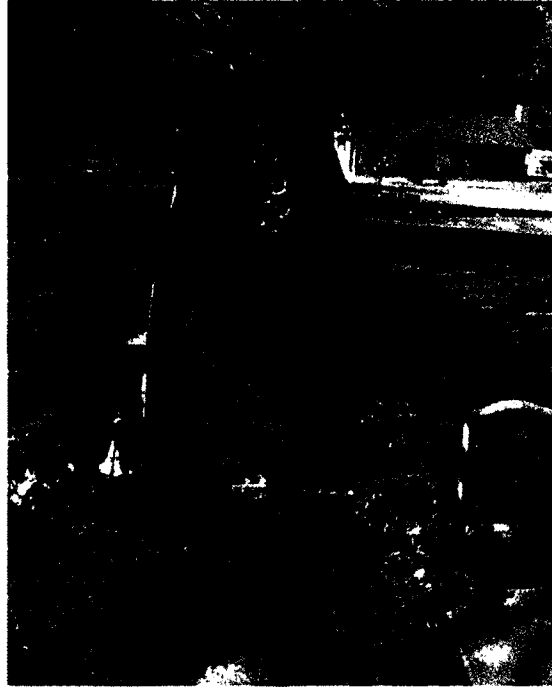


The prominence of trees in the burial field was consistent with the landscaping and design of other black burials in the County, though the actual sites of the cemeteries were separated by many miles. The connection between the dead and trees made within Gloucester's black cemeteries was a reflection of traditions that

endured in West Africa and among African American communities throughout the American South. It was reflected in the works of West African writers, such as Senegal's Birago Diop:

The dead are not beneath the ground,
They are in the rustling tree,
In the murmuring wood,...
In the wind hear the sobbing of the trees.
It is the breathing of our forefathers
Who are not gone, not beneath the ground,
Not dead. (Forefathers 182-183)

As the burial field at New Mount Zion grew, the space in close proximity to the grove of trees was exhausted, and later burials were placed in the open areas of the church's property. Though outside of the wooded area, burials continued to reflect and utilize West African burial elements. Graves continued to be whitewashed, silvered, or otherwise adorned with reflective materials. The reflective paint was often applied in swirling or wavy patterns. Some graves were adorned with personal items used or valued by the deceased. The suggestions of illumination and of spiritual "movement" were established by the use of solar powered lights (lamps) and decorative flags, a practice that continued into the 21st Century:



As in other cemeteries in the county, many burials fused elements of traditional- Eurocentric burial material such as elaborate, commercially manufactured markers, and bric-a-brac, otherwise mundane objects and inexpensive, widely

available materials. Iron was included in the architecture of the burial field with the creation of a burial marked with an iron cross, created in 2004. This diversity of commemorative styles created a complex rendering of history that enabled descendent generations, such as those of the Harris family, to rediscover and reconnect with their ancestral pasts.

In 2010, John E. Harris, a great-grandson of James Harris, the enslaved patriarch of the family, became involved in a family history project as part of an African American Culture class. Their research led them to the New Mount Zion cemetery and the graves of relatives interred there. In the course of their project, other members of the family became involved and concerned with issues involving family history, kinship, and matters of landownership. The Harris family would eventually be engaged in retracing and reclaiming the history, and property, of the family and attempting to gain a better understanding of the lives of their ancestors and relatives. All of this came about through John Harris attempting to develop a better understanding of the histories enshrined throughout the field of burials containing the physical remains of their relatives, and their friends and neighbors, who called the Woods Cross Road/Pampa area home.

The project resulted in both joy and sorrow for John Harris. He was pleased to be able to find and share historical sites and documents relating to his family history with his daughter and other members of his family. His sadness dwelled in the fact that he did not do more to collect family histories while relatives and elders, whose graves he visited, and whom he knew as a young man, were still alive, “I realize, even more now, that I really didn’t communicate well with my elders. The

sad thing about it was I was too immature to even ask questions about their past....”



(Harris, John E. - April 25, 2010).

The Harris family also rediscovered the remnant of the land that their ancestors had owned. Of the 92 acres that John Harris had once owned, the family retained only 5. Family members had been paying taxes on it since the death of John E. Harris, Sr. After consulting the Gloucester County Clerk’s Office, John E. Harris located the deed to the remaining property and visited the site. Though the Harris’ had continued to pay the taxes on the land, they discovered that a portion of it had been cleared of trees and undergrowth for a road or access-way. Two weeks later, John E. and Heather visited the land together. Upon their arrival, they discovered

that large posts and a chain barrier had been erected on what had been described to them at the Clerk's Office, and by the deed, as their land. The Harris' decided to have the property surveyed and began the process of obtaining the services of a local attorney in order to better protect their property rights. The experiences of the Harris's were directly related to the broader history of blacks in Gloucester County. The majority in the County at the end of the Civil War, blacks owned 1/6th of all the privately -owned real estate in Gloucester at the turn of the 20th Century. However, as in other rural, southern communities, many blacks migrated out of the County between 1910 and 1940.

Seeking opportunities beyond farming, agricultural labor, watermen, oystermen, and/or other seafood oriented occupations, or seeking better educational environments for their children, many lost their connections to the community and with family lands. In numerous instances, the land remained in the hands of elders who remained in the County of their birth. Upon the deaths of some of these elders, there were no family members locally who could protect real estate holdings. With the passage of time, many plots were sold or auctioned to settle unpaid taxes. In other cases, lands were declared abandoned, or simply claimed by wealthy whites in the area. The church burials of the Harris family and its in-laws and other relatives served as proof of the black presence in areas of the county in which the land usage and ownership patterns fluctuated over time. By establishing and maintaining cemeteries, Gloucester's various black communities demonstrated and fixed their claims to membership in kindred groups, communities, and congregations of land users and land owners in specific regions.

While most of the major black burial areas are associated with individual church communities and their commemorative and consecrating activities, Gloucester County had “multi-use” burial area to serve county’s black population. Sometimes referred to, by local elders, as a “Potter’s Field,” Gloucester Fields was used by a broad segment of the black community as a burial area.

Located off Highway 17 and at the end of Woodville Road, it served many different communities within the county. Identified by local Funeral Director Barbara Howard as a burial site used by First Morning Star Baptist, First United Baptist and other churches, and by individuals and families with no church affiliations, Gloucester Fields was created as a “Sacred Grove”. As at other such locations, the presence of trees and the orientation of individual graves to them, figured prominently in the layout and bordering of the burial sites within the cemetery. The field was bordered on the east by stretch of dense woodlands. The northern border was defined by a wooded edge and a by a creek, which, over time, carved out a deep ravine. The southern border was marked by a road bed, and, on the eastern side, by a small access road and housing.

Though called a “Potter’s Field,” a large number of the early burials there were clearly and distinctly marked. Burials were performed in close proximity to a central line of trees, and were also placed in intimate contact with other large trees within the borders of the site. Within the burial field, the actual orientations of graves varied over time, with several early interments being placed “off-axis.”

The earliest burials with markers that included durable, inscribed or etched markers date from the first decade of the Twentieth century. Over time, a variety of locally -manufactured, “vernacular” markers and commercially-produced tombstones

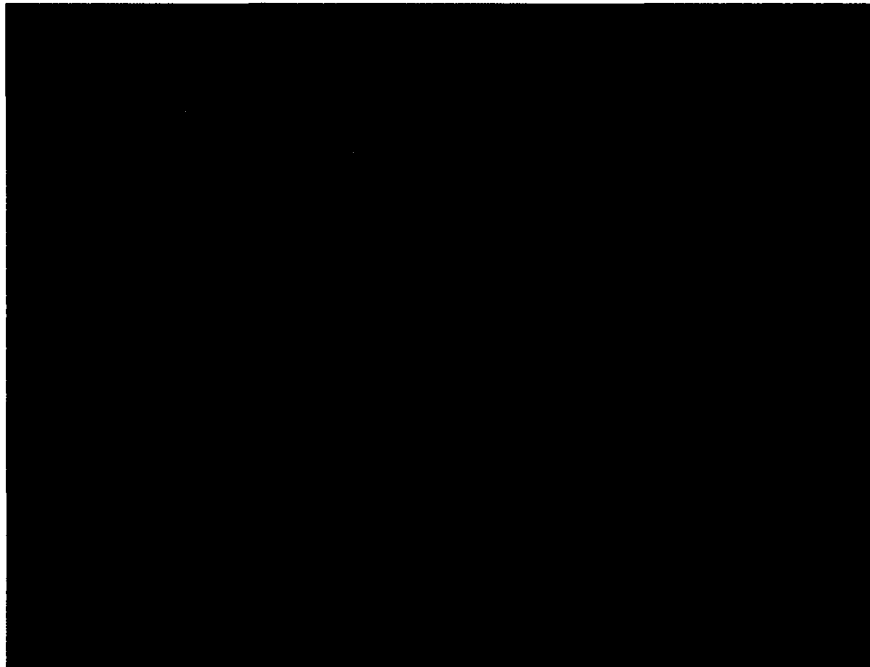
were utilized to mark individual and group burial areas in a mix of West African and Euro-American adornment traditions.

While “Potter’s Fields” are normally associated with burials of indigent, poor and unknown souls, Gloucester Fields became the home of one of the most unusual, and impressive, individual burials in the County. In December of 1926, “Mother” Cora Moody was buried in a bordered space.

The grave site provided the primary evidence of Cora Moody’s life and her status within her community. The location selected was on the western side of the line of trees that bisect the burial field and near a large tree. The grave was placed inside a concrete enclosure that was roughly twelve and a half feet by fifteen feet. The walls of the enclosure were approximately twenty inches in height. The grave was placed on an east/west axis and featured both head and foot stones.

The head stone selected to mark the burial place of Cora Moody gave her grave site a striking and complex quality. Though traditionally viewed as a phallic symbol and, therefore, used almost exclusively on male graves, a five foot tall marble obelisk served as Cora Moody’s monument.

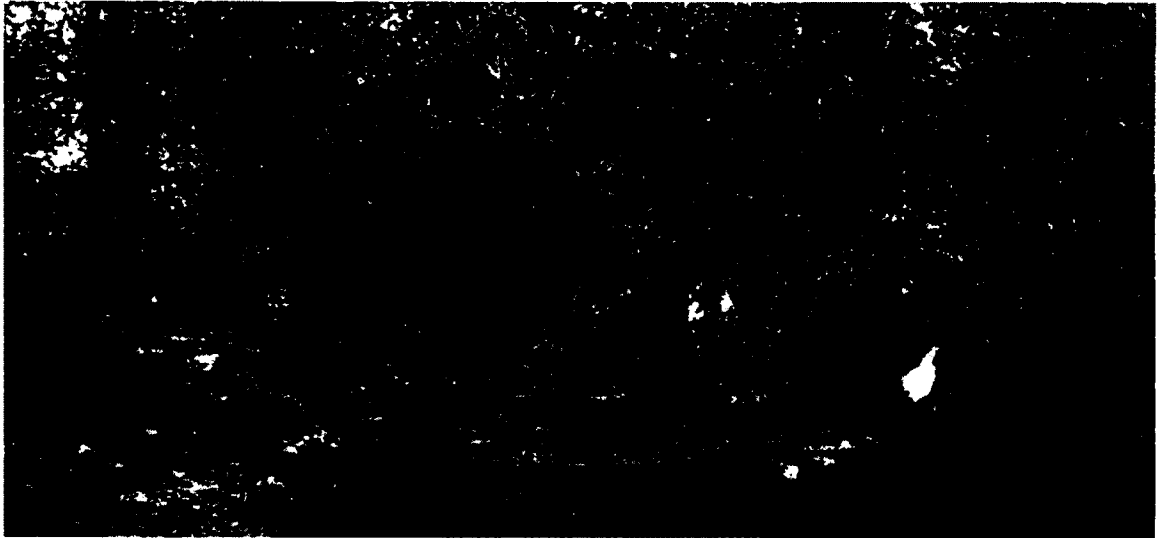




“Mother” Cora Moody

As it evolved, Gloucester Fields would include, as at the Bethel Baptist Cemetery, an area in which burials were placed in a heavily wooded area at some distance from the main burial areas. Given the overall size of the burial area, and the continued availability of space for burials within the main burial field, the usage of the secluded, wooded space was not dictated by a shortage of space within the field. Located along the northeastern edge of the cemetery, the area was accessed by an unpaved lane or path underneath overhanging foliage.

The interments within the space included individual graves and family/extended family groupings. A line of seven graves were placed in the northeastern-most corner of the property.

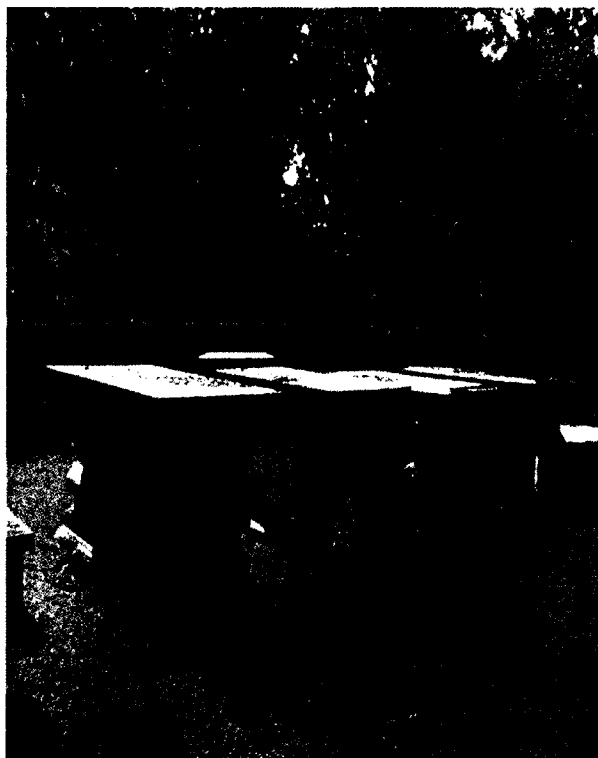


The Northeastern Corner (Hidden) Grouping

Gloucester Fields

Under the shelter and in the shade of trees whose roots, trunks and limbs resonated in both Judeo-Christian and West African cosmologies and belief systems, the Afro-American character of the communities that founded and maintained the churches and cemeteries evolved into active and dynamic cultural sites. Though many of the burials in the church cemeteries were influenced by West African funerary practices, the black cemeteries of Gloucester County continued to be locations in which West-African, Afro-Baptist, and Euro-American burial practices were blended and balanced. All the county's black cemeteries shared with their Euro-American counter-parts, to greater or lesser degree, similarities in orientation, material utilized, and design features of grave markers. The similarities shared within the church cemeteries were replicated in domestic burial fields and burials on privately-held, family or extended family properties.

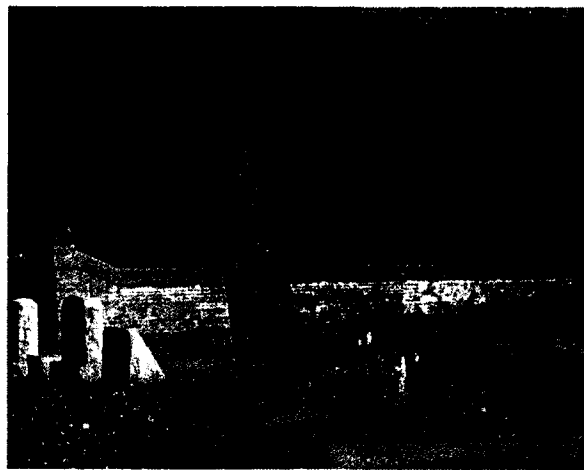
Along with unmarked and un-maintained, slave burial areas, antebellum plantations across Gloucester County featured clearly marked and well-kept “family” cemeteries. The members of the “ruling” families often rested in raised marble tombs or crypts, or, in some cases, brick and mortar vaults. Located upon carefully selected and highly visible terrains, the cemeteries and graves of members of the “Master Class” reinforced their power and privileges, their social, economic, and legal dominance not only among the enslaved but within the history of county as a whole.



Cemetery of Abingdon Episcopal Church

The complex nature of social and race relations within Gloucester County’s history was reflected in the creation, early in the 1900s, of Berea Cemetery. The burial field of a nearby African Baptist church, the Berea Cemetery was established in 1903 (Jordan).

Situated on the south side of Abingdon Episcopal Church, the Berea burials were placed in an open and sparsely-wooded area. The open layout of the field stood in stark contrast to the Abingdon burials which were surrounded by, and enclosed within, an impressive brick and mortar wall. The closeness of the two fields, and the obvious separation of black and white graves, was consistent with the White Supremacist ideology of the opening years of the 20th Century nationwide. Reflecting the “terrible intimacy” of the Gloucester County that Thomas Dixon, Jr. called home, and romanticized in *The Life Worth Living*, West-African/Afro Baptist adornments in the Berea Cemetery were muted and very subtle. The proximity of the Berea field to the sanctuary and cemetery of one of the most prominent colonial churches in the county placed activities there under the watchful eyes of members of the county’s religious, social and political elite. At the same time, the creation of a black burial field “at” Abingdon Episcopal continued a pattern of inter-relationships that dated back into the early 1700s, when slaves were baptized at Abingdon (Stubbs 14).



The Berea Cemetery near Abingdon Episcopal

The establishment of the relationship between the interred remains of ancestors and the ownership and control of lands which held them was central to a stable, physically verifiable history. Numerous Gloucester County's black families, motivated by the same desires to cement land ownership and their places in the history of Gloucester County, established domestic burial fields, both family and extended/interrelated family sites, to reinforce their ownership of land and to form bonds between family lands and successive generations. The development of domestic burial sites among African American and European-American communities, in part, sought to preserve and protect the past from the ravages of an uncertain future. Andrew Jacobs, "Histories Vanish Along With South's Cemeteries." describes the impact among black communities:

The old dead lie beneath a noxious carpet of brambles and poison ivy, their tombstones mostly shattered and their names long forgotten [...] Hundreds of people -- or perhaps more than a thousand, no one really knows -- are buried in this single acre of sloping earth [...] But preservationists say the most imperiled burial grounds are those historically used by African Americans. Part of the problem, they say, is that 18th- and 19th-century graveyards were often poorly marked, their occupants too poor to afford lasting monuments. In many places, the vast 20th-century migration of blacks to Northern cities depopulated many rural Southern towns, leaving black cemeteries hopelessly neglected. (Jacobs, *NYT* February 8, 2004)

"Is this the land your fathers loved?

The freedom which they toiled to win?

Is this the earth whereon they moved?

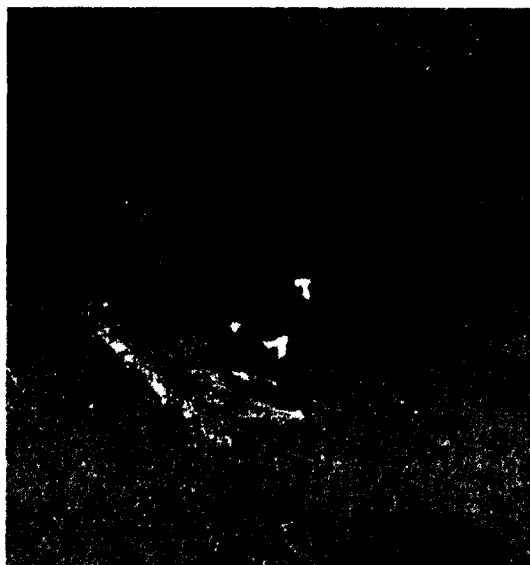
Are these the graves they slumber in?

(Douglass, *My Bondage* 448)

The former Guinea Road Greeter, Hollis Henry Corbin Sr., 63, of Gloucester, Va., died Dec. 19, 2009. He never complained about his disabilities. His smile was contagious and his outlook on life was terrific. Hollis was born in Hayes, Va., (Gloucester) to the late Thomas and Eunice (Gregory) Corbin. He was a Vietnam veteran. He is survived by one son, Hollis H. Corbin Jr. of Phoenix, Ariz.; three sisters, Marion C. Randall of Bena, Va., Annetta C. Cohill of Wilsonville, Ala., Eunice C. Ellis of Hayes, Va.; two brothers, Harold D .Corbin of Fredericksburg, Va., Webster M. Corbin of Hayes, Va.; four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild (Corbin).

Hollis Henry Corbin Sr. was laid to rest, among family and kin, in a domestic burial field, one held privately by a family or group of families. A native of Gloucester County, a veteran of the Vietnam War, and long-time member of First Morning Star Baptist Church, Mr. Corbin's is related to other domestic burials in the area.

The layout and design of the black, domestic fields were generally more symmetrical than the larger, more heavily-used, church cemeteries. White-washing, evergreens, and other forms of vernacular grave adornments were used, such practices were not as prevalent as in the larger, congregational fields. Also, most of the grave markers and tombstones, with the exception of very early burials, in the black domestic fields were of commercially-manufactured marble types utilized in white, mainstream cemeteries and memorial parks.

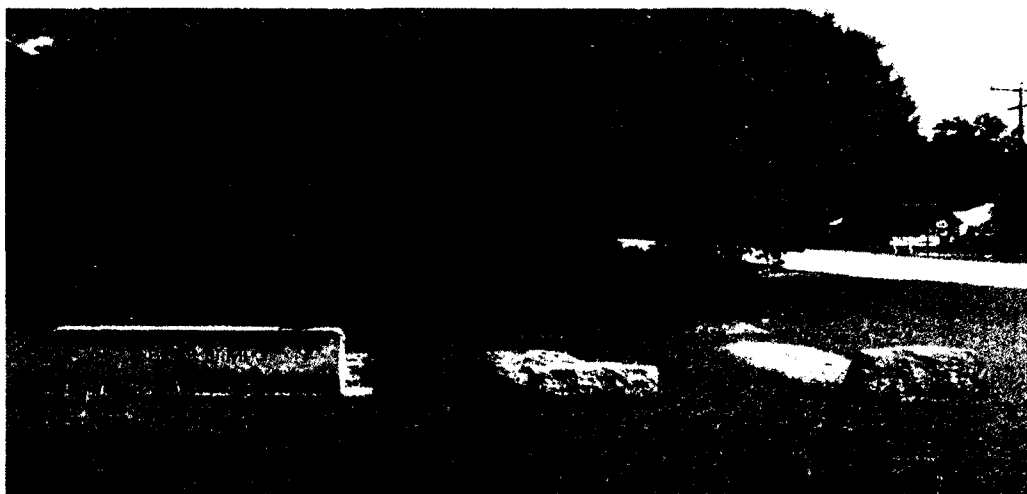


Dated burials in these cemeteries indicated that they had been in use since the early 1900s. However, the three unmarked graves that served as the final resting places of family members indicate that the first burials there were, possibly, from an earlier period. All three of the cemeteries identified were established in close proximity to stands of trees. The Gregory burials were placed in a grove and just south of a small creek, approximately 2 miles east of the Guinea Road/Highway 17 intersection and on the right side of the road. Among those who were buried there was Mr. Corbin's mother, Eunice Corbin, 1922-1969. The Gregory Cemetery, containing more than twenty graves, is the largest black domestic burial area identified in Gloucester County.



Gregory Cemetery

The Borum burials were placed in the same immediate area on the left side of Guinea Road. The Borum field was set in a wooded niche only a few feet from the surface of the road. The earliest marked grave placed in the field is that of James Thomas Borum, 1869-1915. A total of 6 marked graves were placed in the field. Another 8 graves were left unmarked.



Borum Cemetery

The Corbin burials were placed in the shelter of trees roughly one-half mile north of First Morning Star Baptist Church and the same distance from Union Baptist Church, all of which were on the right (east) side of the road. The burials in the Corbin field include the graves of Hollis Corbin, Sr.'s mother, Lydia M. Corbin- Feb 18, 1897- Dec. 26, 1987, and his father, Thomas H. Corbin, Dec. 25, 1886- Dec. 8, 1975. Thomas Corbin, like his son, was a veteran, having served in the U.S. Army in World War I. Four unmarked graves were also located in the field.



Corbin Cemetery

Another Bena/Guinea domestic/family burial area was created during the early 1900s. The Branch Cemetery was established on lands 0.3 miles north of Guinea Road on Heywood Lane. The burials, located in a wooded glade nearly 200 yards east of Heywood Road, were established on an east-west axis and within a few feet of a creek.



The Branch Cemetery

The Branch family, according to Guinea native Hamilton Williams, was a fairly large and “well thought of” family and had owned a large tract of land in the

area. Mr. Williams, a member of Union Baptist Church and very knowledgeable about the churches and families in the area, knew many of those buried in the Branch Cemetery. The very secluded location selected for the Branch burials, and their association with both trees and water, gave the site many of the same qualities found in the heavily-forested burial area at Bethel Baptist. Though the cemetery bears the name of a local family, Branch, those buried there had obvious connections with the history of the nearby black Baptist church, First Morning Star, the daughter church of Union Baptist. Among those buried in the Branch Cemetery were John Tonkin, son of one of the founding families of First Morning Star, and his wife, Vashti.



Hamilton Williams

Edward Hamilton (“Ham”) Williams inherited a deep appreciation for his family’s history in Gloucester County and a profound respect for the resting places of his relatives and loved ones. He maintains a family burial field in the same Bena\Guinea area as do the Corbins, Gregory’s and others. According to Mr. Williams the two men knew one another but not well. Yet, the histories of the two

men, like those of some many others, in Gloucester County and elsewhere, were woven into a complex local historical tapestry long before either man was born.

Hamilton Williams is a descendent of one of the Rowe family lines. The Rowe family history in Gloucester County can be traced through documentary records back into the early 1600s. Hamilton's great-great-grandfather, Edward (Ned) Henry Rowe, 1821-1890, was a farmer merchant and saw mill owner. In support of Ned Rowe's farm and home, several slaves were kept (Williams).

Pre-Civil War records hold no mentions of the name Corbin among the county's Free People of Color. The name Corbin is listed in *The World of Ware Parish* as one of the white names adopted by the formerly enslaved upon emancipation (148). Thus, like many of the black families in Gloucester County who remained in the County at the conclusion of the Civil War, the Corbin family more distant lines of descent are difficult to reconstruct.

Both natives of the county, the two were raised in the Guinea/Bena area. Hollis Corbin, Sr. would have been educated at the Gloucester Training School and later served in the military. Hamilton Williams attended Achilles High School, completing grade 7 after the school had become Achilles Elementary School. He moved up to Gloucester High School (now Page Middle School) at grade 8, graduating there as a Beta Club member" (Williams). Mr. Williams later attended an apprenticeship program at the nearby Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co.

The two also shared inter-linked church histories. Hamilton Williams began to attend Union Baptist Church in his early childhood and continued to attend throughout his adult life. Hollis Corbin's church was Morning Star Baptist, the daughter church of Union Baptist.

Members of Hamilton Williams' family were mostly interred in the Union Baptist Cemetery: however, some were buried in a small domestic burial field.

Hamilton wrote a brief description of his experiences with the area:

I became aware of and personally involved with the Benjamin Rowe Cemetery in the spring of 2003 after hearing about the legal difficulties a friend was having after his attempts to clean around his family gravesites at the cemetery. The owner of the surrounding field wanted to restrict his access to the cemetery and limit his clean-up efforts. I had read Harry Jordan's "Cemeteries of Lower Gloucester County, Virginia" and was mentally aware that the remains of my Great-Great-Grandfather, "Ned" Rowe, and his second wife, Lizzie Glass (Rowe), were resting there.

This was a 'head knowledge' but I had never actually fought my way through the brush and briars to visually confirm their gravesites. But now, hearing that someone wanted to actually keep me from this site raised my hackles and made me determined to do all I could to reclaim this cemetery – not just for my friend and his family but also for the history, memory and sanctity of the other families whose ancestors were resting here.

Long story short – after a couple of years of legal wrangling, my friend finally had a survey plat defining the cemetery and indicating a right-of-way. This effectively eliminated access problems and provided identified boundaries. Armed with this information, I set out in the spring of 2006 to reclaim the Benjamin Rowe Cemetery. From

literally a half-acre jungle, in the following two and a half years I whipped the growth down to allow push-mower maintenance. I now take pride in looking at a manicured, park-like setting for these ancestors – a place of honor has now been returned to them.

(Williams)



Benjamin Rowe Cemetery (before)



After

The Benjamin Rowe Cemetery was established in a small clump of trees in an otherwise open field. Though trees shade a section of the burial field, none of them were placed in direct or intimate contact with individual burials. The overall layout of the graves was symmetrical, and each grave was marked with a commercially-produced, marble marker.

The size and elaborateness of markers used within domestic burial fields in Gloucester County differed by class and ethnic group; however the existence of examples of domestic burials within both ethnic communities evidenced commonalities. The universal human impulses to identify, consecrate, and memorialize the resting places of ancestor's clearly motivated individuals and congregations in both communities. In *The American Resting Place*, Marilyn Yalom turns to Melville's *Moby Dick* to explain the importance of marked burials in both church cemeteries and domestic burial fields: in short, a burial site that loved ones could identify, maintain, and protect, for the sake of those whose loved ones were "lost at sea":

Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say - here, here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! (10)

In Melville's text, first published in 1851, Ishmael continues the thought when he wonders: "What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw

upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave” (10).

While the importance of marking and consecrating the burial places of ancestors was vastly important in both the black and white communities of Gloucester County, there were subtle and not-so-subtle differences. Euro-American churches, cemeteries and plantations, which dated from the Colonial era, made it possible for many white families to trace their lineages and visit the sites that contained the physical remains of ancestors over most of the historical periods witnessed by the County. For the formerly enslaved and, in some instances, for historically free people of color, the same could not be said. The black churches, and their burial fields, were post-Civil War developments, and the histories they provided and the traditions they began, while vital, did fully and completely bridge the distant past.

However, whether they incorporated West African landscaping and grave adornment techniques and treatments, or were European-American in layout, grave design, markers, and adornments, black church cemeteries and domestic burials marked changes in the history of individuals, families, communities, and American society as a whole. They were well-placed for the business of carrying the formerly-enslaved and Free People of Color forward. The remembrances of elders and of history became interwoven in church and community life through events such as homecoming and anniversaries. As Benjamin S. Baker notes of church anniversaries in *Special Occasions in The Black Church*: “it affords an occasion to recall the historic pilgrimage of God’s people who make up a particular household of faith [...].

The church anniversary is a high, holy day of a tridimensional look: the past, present, and future..." (106-07).

Little remains of the county's early black schools and despite the decline of blacks in Gloucester's modern population (8.8% in 2011): black churches and cemeteries continue to testify to the historical and continuing presence of blacks within the county's history. Deeply rooted, Black churches and cemeteries form the western end of a centuries long, broken bridge that spanned eastward, formed of centuries of souls described by Frederick Douglass as "as the grave of the dead at sea, unmarked, and without stone or stake".

Chapter IV
Sunrise-Sunset

Here lyeth Ye Body of
John PERRIN--Son of
Thomas and Elizabeth Perrin
Who departed this life
November 9, 1752
Aged 63 years, one month
and 2 days
(Little England Cemetery)

The April 14, 2007 death of Deacon John Perrin of the White Marsh community in Gloucester County was felt throughout the community. Though he was born on March 21, 1930, in Baltimore, Md., where his Gloucester-born parents had relocated to, for Mr. Perrin, Gloucester County was home. As a child, Mr. Perrin lived in and grew up in Millwood, a large post-Civil War community located between Rt. 614 on the south and Old Glebe to the north and by Highway 17 on the east and Haynes' Mill Pond on the west. Deacon Perrin attended school at Gloucester Training School, currently T.C. Walker Elementary School, after which he served for 6 years in the U.S. Army during the Korean War Era (1948-1954). Upon his discharge and subsequent return to Gloucester County, Mr. Perrin married Miss Gladys Mae Romaine of Doswell, Virginia. The couple had one child, a son, Alphonso Lee Perrin. A long-time member of Union Prospect Baptist Church, currently First United

Baptist Church, Deacon Perrin was a leader both in the church and in the wider world of Gloucester's black communities.

Though born in Baltimore, Maryland, a common destination for newly-freed black families and individuals seeking greater opportunities than those offered within Virginia's Tidewater region, Mr. Perrin was raised, and came into manhood, in the area of Gloucester County formerly known as Millwood. Millwood was comprised of numerous small farm and homesteads belonging to formerly enslaved blacks:

At war's end, landowners were confronted with both a new social reality and the need to find new ways to operate their farms. By selling, leasing, or gifting parcels of land to former slaves, they found ways to make amends, keep some of the laborers from moving to nearby cities, and allow their farms to survive. Prominent land owners prior to the Civil War, the Thrustons of Millwood took part in this process, dividing the eastern half of their property into numerous small lots for sale to African Americans. (Fairfield Plantation 4-5)



Seated from left: Lucy, John, and Robert Perrin

Standing: Lucy Agnes Carter (Grandmother)

Farm View Road, Millwood, circa 1933

The April 14th, 2007 death of Deacon Perrin was part of a journey of souls begun long ago. The Perrin name was adopted at the conclusion of the Civil War by formerly-enslaved blacks owned by members of one of the most prosperous families of Gloucester's colonial history, the Perrin family. Deacon John Perrin's story was very much a part of that history.

The First John Perrin in the history of the county was given a land grant by the Crown in 1651 which included the site that would become well known as Little England:

The Perrin grant at Sarah's Creek, Gloucester County, was dated April 1651. This four-hundred acre tract was awarded to John Perrin for transporting into the colony, at his own expense, eight persons--including three Negroes. The plantation and family apparently prospered from an early date: by the eighteenth century, Perrins 'occasionally sat on the County Court or held other prominent offices. In 1747, John Perrin deeded to his son, John, Jr. one "half part of every Sea Vessel which I am now possessed of and 22 negroes." (Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources)

Gloucester County's first John Perrin "left England when he was twenty-one years old in the year 1635. Records show that his was an affluent family in England already well established in the shipping business" (Mays 18). The 1770-82 Tax Lists of Gloucester County recorded that John Perrin was the owner of 1300 acres of real estate and 64 Negroes (Mason 100). The success of John Perrin was due in large part to the location of the family property.

The Perrin farm or plantation lands were located in the Guinea region of the County and had ready access to waterways and good harborage at places such as Crown Point. Farrar cites an excerpt from the July 1746 issue of the *London Magazine* as mentioning harborage in the Sarah's Creek area for "Men of War" (1). Over time, the Perrin name would come to designate a major harborage and water

way, the Perrin River. This placement gave the Perrin estate the ability to conduct shipping commerce readily and made the importation and exportation of commodities, including slaves, to and from the estate both easy and profitable.



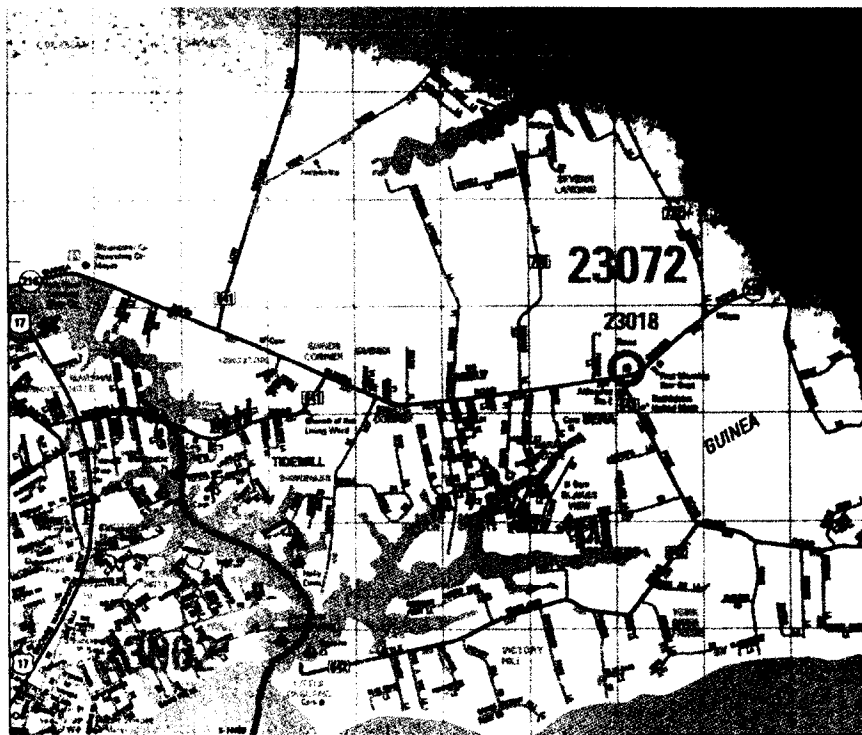
Perrin River/Crown Pointe.

Lucy Williams circa 1973 (Courtesy of Hamilton Williams)

As was noted earlier, ... 1700, more than 1100 enslaved individuals were transported from Calabar, Angola, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and *Guinea* (italics added) to Virginia. Almost 9000 came into Virginia via York River harbors (Walsh 7). The name of John Perrin is a point of origin for the region currently, and historically, as Guinea and for the documented presence of enslaved Africans within the county. While local customs vary on the source of the region's name; however, Guinea was a West African region within which the English traded heavily. This trade included enslaved Africans as commodities.

Guinea, the region that "Little England" was established, encompasses the location chosen by blacks to establish First Morning Star Baptist Church. The area is

known as Bena. According to *The Cambridge History of Africa*, the term “Bena” referred to a West African people, “...the Hehe, the Sangu, the Bena and the Pangwa pasturing large herds as well as cultivating eleusine and other cereals...” (3: 650). The name was also associated with a west African Kingdom, “...the Susu Kingdom of Bena and the adjacent Susu and Dylonke also retained the same narrow boundaries until new pressures arose in the eighteenth century in the form of the Futa Jalon jihad” (4: 281). Though the ancestral names of the enslaved Africans were lost, their presence within the area had lasting impacts on Gloucester’s history through the creation of areas within the landscape of the County which were inscribed with African names. This historical cultural and social interplay between enslaved blacks and free whites gave rise to a complex series of relationships and senses of identity as the names associated with lands and people changed.



Lower Gloucester County
ADC Maps

Over time, large portions of the original Perrin estate were sold. Among those who would eventually take possession of formerly Perrin lands was Joel “Tudor” Rowe -1853-1910. An active member of Union Baptist Church, in the aftermath of the Civil War, “Tudor” Rowe allowed area blacks to utilize a portion of his land as a burial field. According to the oral traditions of the county, the field was established when an elderly black female who had worked on the property asked permission to be buried there. As every plantation had a slave burial area which held the remains of the ancestors of many newly-free black, the common belief within the black community was that a desire to be buried near, or among, “kin” formed the basis of the woman’s request. Others soon followed suit, and the unnamed black burial field on Tudor Rowe’s estate expanded (Robins 1).

In 1943, the parents of Bernard Robins purchased the land along Seger Creek upon which the burials had taken place from William Hansford and Grace Lee Rowe. Mr. Robins, a Gloucester County native, earned a BA and a M. Ed from The College of William and Mary, and was a long time teacher and principal in the Gloucester County Public School system. According to Mr. Robins, who was born and raised in Guinea, his dad, Purcell (“Percy”) Robins, fenced the area and took measures to preserve and protect the burial area, believing that “‘no good’ would come to anyone who in any way ‘disturbed’ a cemetery.” Unable to find any information on the cemetery in the County Clerk’s Office, Bernard Robins and his wife, Debbie, had the property surveyed. The couple had the surveyor indicate the burial area on the plat, so that there would be a record of the presence of graves on the property (1).

According to oral histories, the first burials in the “free black” cemetery on the old “Tudor” Rowe estate took place very early in the 20th Century. The field grew with burials of members of the family of the elderly woman who first requested burial in the area and with burials of members of nearby First Morning Star Baptist Church. Mr. Robins collected information about the burial area from other black elders who had knowledge of the field:

Nelson Carter, a Gloucester African American funeral director, said that he did not have any record of the burials but may have buried as many as 70 people in the cemetery. With the exception of a few, all were buried in pine caskets and no markers were placed on any of the graves. There are three concrete vaults with exposed tops that are still visible; whereas, other suspected graves are apparent only because of indentations in the soil. (2)



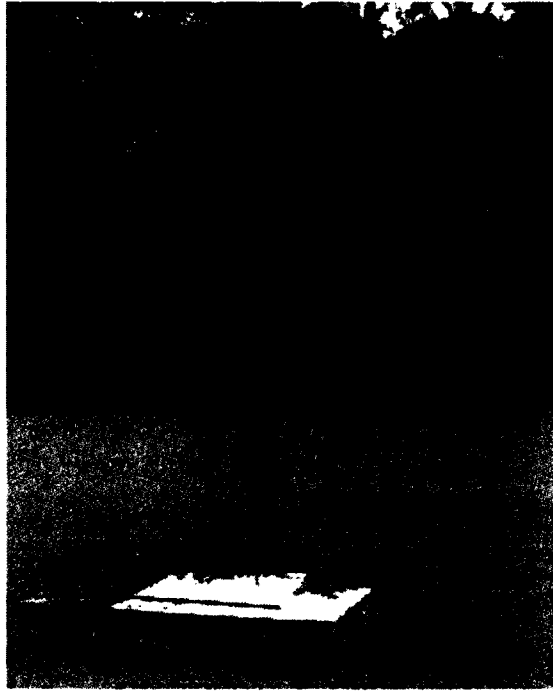
Bernard Robins

In stabilizing and documenting burials on their property, two generations of the Robins’ family held open a portal into the history of the County as a whole, and into the history of African-descended individuals in the County specifically. Though

there are no markers in the burial field that bear identifying data, the histories on the property and its usage collected by Mr. Robins, and others, helped further the ongoing connections between various generations and families of Gloucester County blacks in the Bena/Guinea region and their interactions with others in the area.

In the early 1990s, a delegation from nearby First Morning Star Baptist Church visited the burial area and collected a small amount of ceremonial “grave dirt” to be used in establishing a monument to those buried on the Tudor Rowe/Perrin lands. Though he does not recall the specific dates, Bernard Robins escorted the delegation to the undeveloped site which now holds his home:

I do know that it has been at least 22 years because Mrs. Phillips, Mrs. Cook, and I walked through the cornfield to get to the cemetery so that they could get some dirt to use at their dedication ceremony. We have been living here almost 21 years. (July 22, 2011)



HOME AT LAST

IN MEMORY OF LOVED ONES
WHO WERE ONCE BURIED IN
CAPTAIN TOOTERS CEMETERY

The selection of “Captain Tooter” instead of the widely known and used Tudor Rowe for inscription on the commemorative marker gave the monument an element of meaning closely linked to the lived experiences of the ancestors, emancipated and enslaved, who would have been Tudor Rowe’s contemporaries. The utilization of a vernacular term or nickname suggested both the unique nature of the history addressed and, though those buried in the field are not marked or named, the continuing importance of both. As Grey Gundaker notes:

Naming traditions are among the best-documented aspects of African American expressive culture. The everyday and the extraordinary intersect in well chosen names. Nicknames and given names move through everyday events with their bearer, simultaneously endowing him or her with roots in the community and specialness, especially if the name is an unusual one (185).

Although it was not created as part of a church site and was not restricted in its usage to an individual family, the Sedger Creek burial field evolved in such a fashion as to express elements common in both the black church and the black domestic burial traditions historically utilized in Gloucester County. The field was, first and foremost, a domestic burial field, in that it was established on lands held

privately by a family. The cooperation between the non-black, post-Civil War owners and members or descendants of the formerly-enslaved population that allowed the establishment and subsequent growth of the burial area underscored the complicated networks of relationships between the two communities throughout Gloucester County's history.

The establishment of the burial area on lands that had formerly been part of a large estate and home to a sizable enslaved population was not, in and of itself, unique. Enslaved individuals had been buried upon plantations from the earliest years of their importation by individuals such as John Perrin into the Virginia colony. However, these plantation burials, a form of "domestic burial," were seldom occasioned by markers or regular maintenance. Early burials of enslaved individuals were conducted, or allowed, for health and sanitation reasons more than out of respect and reverence for the deceased: the need to get the body underground, dispose of it, before it began to become putrid, decompose and possibly spread disease was the overriding concern. The crude nature of these interments left little visible evidence of the deaths, and more importantly, of the lives, of those buried in countless fields and wooded areas County-wide.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, despite the social philosophy of white supremacy and the legal strictures of racial segregation, the agreement to allow the establishment, growth and even limited maintenance of a black burial field on privately-owned white lands flew in the face of otherwise strictly-enforced and staunchly-held rules of racial etiquette. This unique field and the suggested continuing cooperation and inter-relatedness was made possible, in large part, by relationships begun in Union Baptist church during the antebellum history of the

county and continued after the War through relationships between Union Baptist and First Morning Star, its daughter: "Joel Madison "Tudor" Rowe, son of Capt. Sterling Rowe, was the "'burying grounds' giver" (Williams). The 1844 Union Baptist record of colored deacons included the names of individuals later identified as the Founders of First Morning Star and the names of their owners: "Billy Selden and Coleman Barnwell, belonging to Capt. Robins. Thompson, belonging to Major W.R. Perrin. John Cook, belonging to Capt. Sterling Rowe" (Union Baptist 7).

The historical interconnectedness, in both the history of enslavement and in church affiliations, that resulted in the creation of the field continued into the 1930s and beyond. A member of the Cook family was said to be among those from Morning Star that collected the grave dirt in the 1990s. Local oral histories identify the last burial in the Sedger Creek field as being that of a member of the Cook family:

The last person buried in the cemetery was a Margaret Cook which was either in 1937 or 1938. She died during the winter months and because the dirt lane leading to the cemetery was impassible, her casket was placed at the end of the lane and remained there for several weeks before she could be buried. (Robins)

In its layout, Sedger Creek, burial field did not, overtly, incorporate the relative orderliness of traditional black church or black domestic burial fields, nor the decorative and commemorative treatments associated with grave markers and tombstones. The majority of the estimated 60 post-Civil War burials in the field were not designated by stone, concrete, or other durable material markers. Rather, the burial field, as it expanded beyond the grave of the first elder buried there, closely

mirrored the antebellum burials of enslaved individuals. In some instances, flowering plants and foliage arrangements were, apparently, placed upon graves in a manner that also evoked pre-Civil War burials. Two burials utilizing unadorned and concrete capstones, which lacked identifying data on the deceased, were placed in the field.

In 1850, William Cullen Bryant's *Letters of a Traveller* was published.

Among his many observations, Bryant included a description of a black burial area:

[...] near a forest, lies the burial-place of the black population. A few trees, trailing with long moss, rise above hundreds of nameless graves, overgrown with weeds; but here and there are scattered memorials of the dead, some of a very humble kind...

(Bryant).

The post-Civil War Sedger Creek, burial field was, like the one observed by Bryant, placed in a wooded setting. The field was established in an area that was not only wooded, but was framed, or bordered, by living trees. The two burials in which capstones were part of the grave architecture were placed within feet of the base and root structure of an oak tree that was, apparently, mature at the time of the creation of the grave sites.



General Burial Field



Grave at the Foot of Oak

In 2011, work was done to clear the underbrush in the burial area. In the aftermath of these efforts, archeological evidence beyond the two capstones, foliage patterns and depressions was rediscovered. In the surface debris of the oak/capstone

area of the burial field, a piece of metal associated with one of the interments was found in the surface debris: eight inches in width, roughly three and a half inches high, weighing 12 ounces in its heavily- mineral-encrusted discovery state, a casket handle.



The Cincinnati Coffin Company Casket Hardware Catalogue, circa 1900, contains images of this piece of hardware and of the other casket hardware that would have accompanied it in adorning a commercially-produced coffin (Cincinnati...). The 1900 date is consistent with the local, oral history of the burial field. According to local lore, the field began to be utilized in the late 1800s-early 1900s.

The Jim Crow era cooperation, by individuals whose ancestors, and, almost certainly, living elders had been born enslaved in the region was unique. However, in other ways, the field bore strong resemblances to other black burial fields and cemeteries throughout Gloucester County.

The Sedger Creek burial field was created within a stand of trees. The trees themselves served as markers of the sacredness of the area, as Bryant had observed in

1850. While most of the burials are unmarked, two graves with concrete capstones which were placed in close association with the oak helped establish the “African”/black character of the field. The lack of marking upon the overwhelming majority of the graves, in a field created well after Emancipation, was, in comparison to other black burial fields in the County, unusual. While many graves in the County’s black church and domestic burial fields lack identifying data, no other clearly identified post-Civil War black burial field holds so many who, shaded by trees, rest “namelessly.” In this, though clearly associated with the congregation and the history of nearby First Morning Star Baptist, the Sedger Creek burial area has much in common with much earlier burial fields created in slave-holding South. In *The Cotton Kingdom*, Frederick Law Olmsted records his impression of a Negro graveyard and its markers:

Some of these were mere billets of wood, others were brick and marble, and some were pieces of plank, cut in the ordinary form of tombstones. Many family-lots were inclosed with railings, and a few flowers or evergreen shrubs had sometimes been sometimes planted on the graves; but these were generally broken down and withered, and the ground was overgrown with weeds and briars. (174)

Since individuals such as “Scotch Tom” Nelson and John Perrin began to import enslaved Africans into the Virginia colonies, Gloucester County became the final resting place of many anonymous/renamed and redefined Africans who lived and died as “chattel,”/human property. Local oral traditions, documents, texts and, though scant, photographic evidence, testifies to the fact that on every plantation in

the County a slave cemetery or burial area existed. In these areas, usually away from cleared lands used for agricultural purposes, human remains were deposited with little ceremony and no markers for much of the County's history. These burial areas, marker-less and untended, were consumed, either reclaimed by the natural processes of the advances of grasses, shrubs, vines and trees, or by the plow, the bulldozer and cement mixer of "progress." Each "Old-Timey" site lost was either a page torn from the history of Africans and African Americans in Gloucester County, or a library burned to the ground.



Mr. "Jim" Ash's store which contained Perrin Post Office.

Courtesy of Hamilton Williams

About The Page Nelson Society states that the descendants of Thomas "Scotch" Nelson continued live in Gloucester County and call it home (Page-Nelson Society). The Perrin name eventually only occurred in place names, Perrin Creek, Perrin Post Office, and among the names of black families descended from Perrin

“owned” individuals engaged in the long journey from Africans under enslavement, to freedom...private property to “free-born” human souls. Though their histories remained incomplete due to such losses, the African American/black communities of Gloucester County continued in their struggles to maintain their connections to their African past, to define themselves and hold on to, consecrate and venerate their own histories, to tell their own stories and honor their ancestors.

On Friday, April 20th of 2007, Deacon John Perrin was carried to his final resting place. His casket, flag draped, was accompanied by military Honor Guard, linking Deacon Perrin’s burial to those of Buffalo Soldier Cupid Willis, U.S. Colored Infantry veterans such as Samuel Richardson, and Medal of Honor recipient, Private James Gardiner, Co. I-36th USC, and other veterans of the nation’s major wars, police actions and conflicts. As an alumnus of the segregated and academically-limited Gloucester Training School, now T.C. Walker Elementary, Deacon Perrin lived to see his son, Alfonso Lee, and his numerous nieces and nephews, attend better funded and academically-challenging integrated schools. In this, his life story intersected with those of William Gibbons Price of Cappahosic Academy, Dr. R.S. Turner, and Dr. Leonidas Morris, and the numerous others who fought to bring equal educational opportunities to sons and daughters of black communities County wide.

Deacon Perrin’s casket was lowered into the earth at the edge of a tree line in an honorific area of one of Gloucester County’s historically black churches. Having spent his childhood and much of his adult life in the area once known as Millwood, Deacon Perrin was buried in the cemetery of First United Baptist Church. First United, formerly Union Prospect Baptist, was built on the Old Glebe site. The property originally was originally related to Abingdon Episcopal Church, the church

home of Augustine Warner, grandfather of George Washington, and others of the most prominent property owners and slave-holders in the County, such as the Pages, whose slaves also attended services there.

After Emancipation, the Church served the formerly enslaved of the White Marsh Plantation, Warner Hall, Fairfield and other plantations and free/colored population of the Millwood community in which Deacon Perrin was raised. Thus, Deacon Perrin's physical remains came to rest in the familiar settings of "home" grounds. Yet, neither his funeral service nor his burial marked endings.

The program distributed at Deacon Perrin's "Home-going" recited his history, his birth, the life lived, and his passage, as a journey from sunrise to sunset. According to Reverend William Foxwell, this description of life and death and continuation beyond the physical and temporal realms has long been widely used in funeral services in the County's black churches (Interview 8-3-11). What Reverend Foxwell and others described as a widespread funeral tradition in area black churches contained elements of belief systems brought into the New World by captive Africans: The Kongo Cosmogram.

The Cosmogram, which was graphically rendered as a horizontal line and a vertical line intersecting at the center of a circle, while forming a "cross" has, according to Robert Farris Thompson, nothing to do with the Christian belief associated Christ's crucifixion (Flash 108). Thompson drew upon the work of Janzen and MacGaffey for a description of the beliefs associated with the Cosmogram: "Bakongo believe and hold it true that man's life has no end, that it constitutes a cycle. The sun in its rising and setting, is a sign of this cycle, and death is merely a transition in the process of change" (108).

**HOMEGOING SERVICE
FOR
DEACON JOHN PERRIN**

SUNRISE-MARCH 21, 1930



SUNSET-APRIL 14, 2007

**FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2007
12:00 P.M.**

**THE FIRST UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH
GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA 23061
REVEREND ALLEN M. DAVIS, PASTOR**

Deacon Perrin was buried by members of a community that had, over the years, been much reduced in numbers. As mentioned earlier, prior to the Civil War, enslaved African and Free People of Color had made up the majority, 59% of the county's residents (*Historical Census Browser*). According to data collected in the

2000 Census, blacks made up only 8.8% of Gloucester's population (U.S. Dept. of Commerce). Much of the evidence of the existence of the large, complex and dynamic population that emerged from the shadows of slavery and Jim Crow-ism had vanished, as had the slave quarters and the auction block that had marked and marred the existences of their ancestors. There was little evidence of the schools, businesses and farms that had supported and sustained Gloucester's blacks during their emergence as free men and women. Yet, despite declining numbers and centuries of struggle and loss, Gloucester's black population continued to strive for brighter futures as "Americans" who live in Gloucester County, Virginia.

However, as Gloucester's black communities continued to evolve and change, churches and cemeteries continued to recover, preserve and pass on to subsequent generations, elements of their unique African/African American and Afro-Baptist pasts.

Deacon John Perrin was laid to rest beside his wife, Gladys Mae (December 26 1935- May 5, 1997). Their selected burial site was on the western fringe of the Old Glebe Cemetery. The only other burials in the immediate area were those of Rev. John W. Washington, a former Pastor of the church (July 4, 1886- Oct 18, 1958) and his wife, Carrie Washington (Aug 4, 1881- Nov 5, 1961). Both burial groupings were marked with commercially-manufactured marble markers. Years after his burial, the data on Deacon Perrin's stone remains devoid of a death date. To the immediate west of these four burials, those of two male church leaders born in different centuries and their wives, the landscape is wooded:

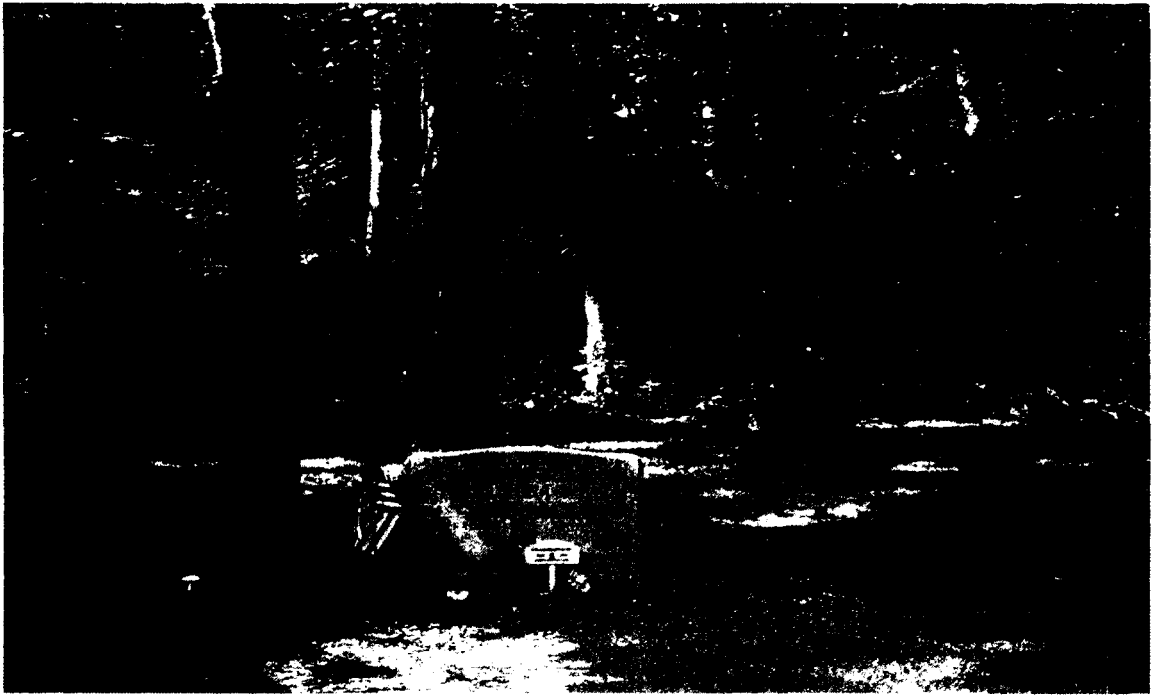
Hearing things more than beings,
listening to the voice of fire,
the voice of water.

Hearing in wind the weeping bushes,
sighs of our forefathers.

The dead are never gone:
they are in the shadows.

The dead are not in earth:
they're in the rustling tree,...

(Birago Diop, Senegal)



Conclusion:

For blacks living in Gloucester County, as throughout the former Confederacy, Emancipation marked beginnings as well as endings. The County's black population was made up of mostly "native" blacks, individuals who had been born in the county. This complex mixture of formerly-enslaved blacks and mulattoes, and of blacks and mulatto individuals and families, who had long histories in the County as Free People of Color, joined the county's white population in new forms of struggle.

For the black population, the contestations for post-Civil War "American" identities were, in many ways, struggles to obtain, and maintain, brighter and more secure futures and, simultaneously, to hold onto and consecrate elements of their pasts. Though many of their ancestral African names had largely vanished from usage, lost among the unmarked graves upon the area's plantations, and the formerly enslaved had joined the county's Free People of Color by adopting Anglicized names of their former owners, cultural differences derived from African origins, and the unique experiences of North American chattel slavery persisted. The newly-born, independent black American communities in the county manifested cultural and social patterns that were creolized.

The first evidence of this was manifested publicly in the early black churches that served these communities.

Though their histories remain difficult to precisely fix, black churches, in the form of hush-arbor congregations existed prior to Emancipation .The members of these unofficial churches often involved individuals and families that also attended church services in the white churches attended by their owners. The long history of multi-ethnic/racial interactions in the religious life of the county was documented in the published and acknowledged histories of both black and white churches in the county. These early religious interactions, in many ways influenced, but did not control, the Post-Emancipation development of Gloucester's black churches.

While all of Gloucester's black churches were Baptist in denomination, affiliation, organization, and governance, they also, incorporated "Afro-Baptist" elements which reflected unique beliefs and approaches to concepts of worship and senses of history. One of the ways in which this was manifested was in the process of naming. As Raboteau noted, the Christianity of the enslaved was double-edged: a mixture of accommodation and resistance. He pointed out the enslaved appropriation of the "Children of Israel" narrative as evidence of the enslaved consciousness of their human value and the identity as a unique people (250). The names chosen for independent black churches, in many instances, evidenced a continuation of this tradition.

Among the black churches established in Gloucester in the aftermath of Emancipation, a number of congregations selected names associated with the Hebrew history of enslavement and their subsequent journey from bondage to freedom. Churches such as Zion Poplars, (African) Bethel, Union Zion, New Mount Zion, and

Berea reinforced the perceived connections between the experiences of Gloucester's formerly-enslaved and marginalized blacks and those of the Children of Israel as depicted in the Bible. This, in combination with the creation of sites of religious activities and commemorations that reflected the influence of West African traditions reinforced the black quest for freedom and the assertions of identity into the Post-Emancipation social, cultural and political tapestry of the lives and landscapes of Gloucester County and beyond.

Though a rural county and seemingly far removed from America's mainstream issues, Gloucester County's black population was active and, eventually, intimately interwoven within one of the broad central issues of racial, social and political struggles that dominated America at the time. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the issue of education. Gloucester came closest to centrality in a national issue when, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it became a site of open contestation between the educational philosophies two very prominent black leaders. The conflicting educational philosophies of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois and Dr. Booker T. Washington dominated the history of black education in Gloucester County from the 1890s until the mid 1950s.

As blacks did throughout the post-Civil War South, Gloucester's black population struggled to obtain educational opportunities. Initially, the areas local black churches established and/or supported black educational aspirations through crudely-constructed, under-funded and poorly-staffed church or community schools.

Though public education for blacks generally languished from the 1890s until 1933, Gloucester's privately-operated Cappahosic Academy became one of the flagship black high schools in the nation. While providing students agricultural, mechanical, and domestic training consistent with Dr. Washington's Hampton Institute model, Cappahosic Academy, under Principal William Gibbons Price, did far more.

Under Price, Cappahosic also provided a full high school curriculum that Bagby described as one "which W.E.B. Du Bois would have approved" (43). At least partially in response to Cappahosic Academy, local accommodationists, led by lawyer T.C. Walker, a protégée of Dr. Washington, promoted alternative, public schools in the form of Tuskegee Institute associated Rosenwald schools. With the closure of the "Academy" in 1933, the educational opportunities of Gloucester's blacks quickly descended back into the legal and social quagmires of *Plessey-v-Ferguson* and unchallenged white supremacy.

In the 1940s, many Gloucester blacks, including local leaders of the NAACP, dissatisfied with the continuing decline in local educational opportunities, organized and implemented a campaign to improve black education in the County. The lengthy and sustained school improvement campaign in Gloucester County resulted in local legal decisions that, subsequently, influenced the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Brown-v-Topeka* decision.

In the end, despite the obvious historical importance of the buildings associated with creation of Gloucester County's black churches and schools, the sites which speak most directly, eloquently, and enduringly in preserving the sense of the history of blacks, both collectively and individually, are not found in buildings. Instead, the histories of the black population of Gloucester County, both enslaved and

historically free, is most clearly and intimately expressed where living landscapes of shrubs, flowers and trees, and arrangements of human burials are fused into sacred commemorative spaces. T.C Walker's *The Honey-pod Tree* and Thomas Dixon's *The Life Worth Living* both created impressions of Gloucester County's black communities and their histories. However, over time, Gloucester's blacks created far more telling and compelling narratives.

The black cemeteries and burial fields of Gloucester County chronicle histories of transitions from the anonymity of the unmarked burials of enslaved individuals who had long constituted the majority of those who lived, and died, in Gloucester and to their post-Emancipation lives of freedom. The post-Civil War cemeteries and burial fields of Gloucester County became sites of reclamation of humanity and heritage. Gloucester's black cemeteries and burial fields were, and are, living museums in which the flow of traditions and the intricate branching of family and community trees can be navigated, mapped and read. The documentary, oral narrative, and photographic histories of individuals and families associated with the rise of the county's black churches and schools are validated and authenticated and reflected within these sites.

These locations contain continually evolving ethno-graphic data where the interplay of accommodation, assimilation, and resistance can be studied. More importantly, these sites contain evidence of ethnically-keyed, West African burial and commemorative practices and a lasting record of their ebbing and flowing, and yet persistent, usage within the County's black population. In these sites, the descendents of enslaved Africans from Calabar, Angola, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Guinea established and maintained way-markers, signs and symbols, through

which subsequent generations would be able to chart the ebbs and flows and measure the growth of their own histories within a historically important region dominated by the rivers, fields and forests that gave birth to America itself.

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- 1979 Bachelor of Arts Degree: Radio, TV and Film/Journalism
University of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR
- 1991 Master of Arts Degree: English/Creative Writing
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
- 2012 PhD(Dr. of Philosophy) College of William and Mary
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2001- present Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton, VA
Assistant Professor of English: Preparation for College
Writing, Composition I & II, World Literature, Creative
Writing, Survey of American Literature I & II,
Introduction to African-American Studies, Survey of
Western Culture II
- 1999-01 Sullivan County Community College, Loch Sheldrake, NY
English Instructor: Speech, Critical Reading, Freshman
Seminar
- 1991-97 Knoxville College, Knoxville, TN
English Instructor: Composition I&II, African-American
Literature, The Humanities, Children's Literature,
Journalism, Creative Writing, English Literature

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

- 2001- present Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton, VA
Faculty Senate (2001-02), student mentor, advisor,
Coordinator-Honors Program (2001-05), Coordinator-
Creative Writing (2001-Present) (Coordinator of American
Literature I & II 2007- Present).

- 2003-04 Virginia Collegiate Honors Council, President
- 2002-03 Virginia Collegiate Honors Council, Vice President
- 1999-01 Sullivan County Community College, Loch Sheldrake, NY Coordinator of Retention and the Freshman Year Experience, Lead Academic Advisor, Coordinator of Operation Rebound, Chairman of Orientation Committee, active member of Student Affairs Committee
- 1991-97 Knoxville College, Knoxville, TN
 Coordinator of the Computer/Writing Center (1995-97)
 Chairman, Admissions and Academic Standards Committee (1996-97)
 Coordinator of the English Department (1993-95)

AWARDS

- 1990-94 W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
- 1991 Alex Haley Fellow, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

PUBLICATIONS

- 2002 “The Tree Of Life”, a short story, The Virginia Adversaria, Virginia Beach, VA
- 2000 Selected poems, Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, TX
- 1992 “Savaged History”, feature essay, The Brass Check, Vol. 1 No. 13, Knoxville, TN
- 1983 The Handbook of the Elves, poems and short stories, Wren Publishing, Balfour Press, Little Rock, AR