

Finding the BlueMont Colored School

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Summary

Larry Roeder, Anthony Archiero and Henry Plaster visited the site of the former Bluemont Colored School on September 23, 2017, with permission of the Loudoun County Public Schools. They located the site, now deep in the forest near Bluemont, and made photographs and measurements, which are described below.

In the interest of preserving an important part of African-American school history, our recommendation is that LCPS never sell the property, but if disposed, that it be turned over to a registered non-profit dedicated to the preservation of Black history. We also suggest a street marker be erected on the Snickersville Turnpike informing the public of the school and its location. At present, nearly everyone we interviewed in Bluemont thought that the Snickersville Academy was the “colored school,” which is not accurate. A sign would preserve the memory of the place.

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Background

Title: For the sum of \$5, on April 22th, 1878, the Mount Gilead School District which included Bluemont, then called Snickersville, purchased from Benjamin F. Young about a quarter of an acre of land near the village on which was already standing a “free school for colored people,” which was also a place of worship for the same. The small lot was part of a larger tract Young had previously acquired from Dr. George E. Plaster. Note: Benjamin Franklin Young, a black man, was an "apprentice doctor" to Dr. George E. Plaster shortly after the end of the Civil War, grandfather to Henry Plaster, our guide¹.

The deed placed the school under the control of three white, Quaker trustees, members of the Goose Creek Meeting House. We did not find any mention of this particular school in the minutes of the Meeting House, though there was a School Committee and the Quakers did help find a graveyard for African-Americans.

The trustees were:

- **Hugh** (last name hard to read). We suspect this is Hugh Rogers Holmes, a farmer and Hicksite Quaker² who was born Dec 4, 1830 and died in the Mt. Gilead district December 4, 1914³. Holmes was also a teacher, as was reported in the Friends Monthly Meeting Report of January, 1856.



- **James W. Nichols**, who appears to have been born about 1836 and was married to Hannah Howell. He died in 1909.



¹ First known black physician in Loudoun, apprenticed by Dr. George E. Plaster, ca 1870, former lieutenant in the Confederate Army and Snickersville physician. See [Timeline of Important Events in African American History in Loudoun County, Virginia](#) by Eugene Scheel, A Waterford historian and mapmaker and the [Thomas Balch Library](#), Leesburg, Virginia. <http://www.loudounhistory.org/history/african-american-chronology.htm>. See also [From the History of Snickersville](#) by Jean Harris: [https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2008/11/4/652031/-](https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2008/11/4/652031/)

² See Goose Creek Monthly Meeting, First Month, 1896, Swarthmore College; Swarthmore, Pennsylvania; *Minutes, 1896-1920*; Collection: *Baltimore Yearly Meeting Minutes*; Call Number: RG2/B/G661 1.6

³ See Virginia Death Certificate for Hugh Rogers Holmes in Ancestry.com.

- **Samuel W. Brown**, born about 1837 and was a Quaker in the Goose Creek Meeting House, same as Hugh Rogers Holmes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel W. Brown". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and somewhat slanted to the right.

Control was given these three men and their successors forever of a free school property for colored people. Because the houses on the lot were built by donations and subscriptions, it was understood the location could remain a place of worship so long as this didn't interfere with the keeping of public education. The deed was registered May 2, 1878⁴.

We need to more fully research on the term houses. How many? Perhaps just an additional outhouse.

History of the School:

From the deed, it would appear that free education for African-Americans may have predated 1878. Public schools didn't begin until 1870/71, so this site is historically important to both Loudoun County and the local African-American community.

Loudoun County School records in the Edwin Washington Archives indicate that Bluemont was a one room frame school, heated with wood, that it closed in the 1932/33 academic year⁵ and the kids likely then were hauled to Rock Hill⁶.

⁴ Deed is in possession of the LCPS Planning Office and a copy is the archives of the Edwin Washington Project.

⁵ See Edwin Washington File" 6.6 General Lists – Student Enrollment Cards for Bluemont Colored. See also 9.2 1923 map of Loudoun County by Oscar Emerick, Superintendent of Schools. See also term reports for 1920/21 to 1931/32. We know that the school was open from 1917 at least (when the enrollment cards began) to 1932/33.

⁶ See Edwin Washington Colored Petition Files for petition of October 3, 1934 asking for relief for the transport of Bluemont children.

Location of Bluemont Colored School

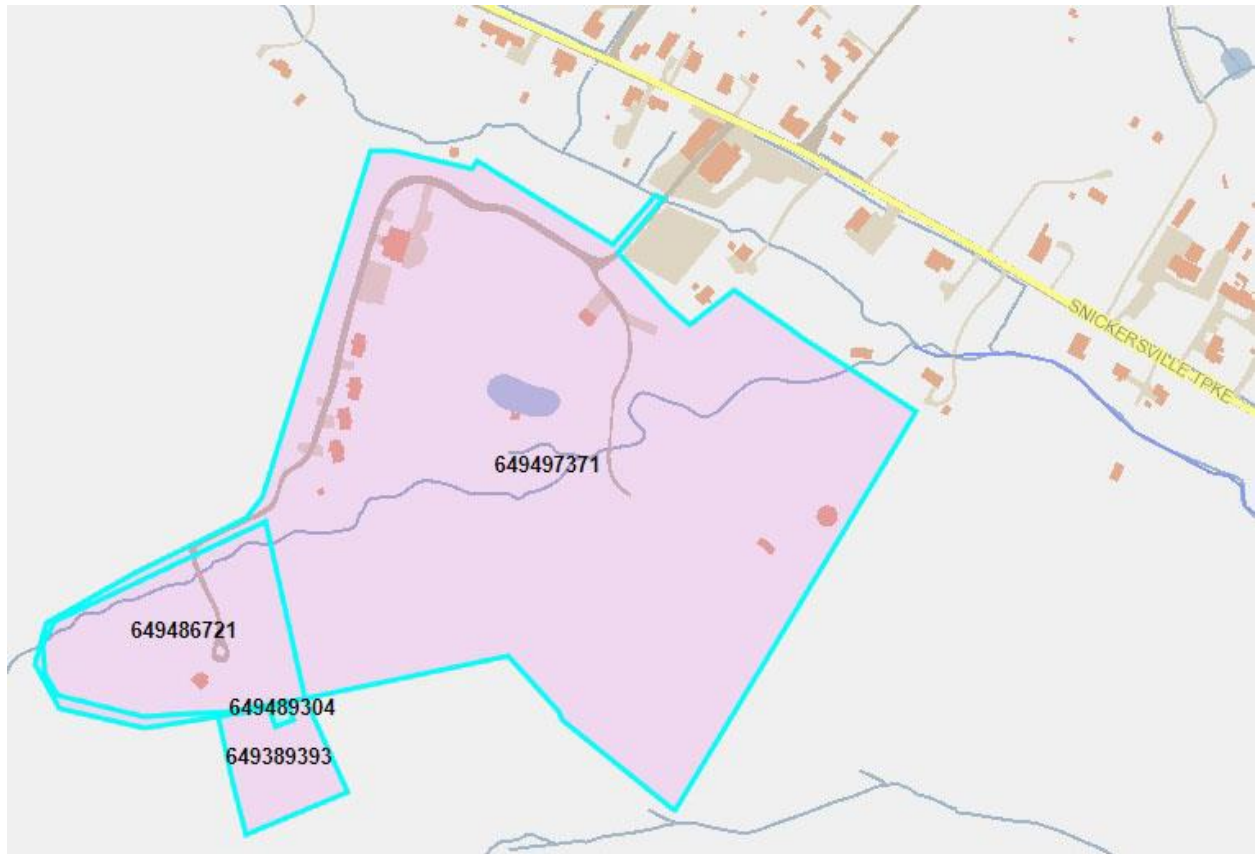


Figure 1 Map Courtesy of LCPS, Planning Office, 2017

The school property is about .25 acres and is known as Parcel 649-48-9304, just south of Snickersville Turnpike and SE of Bluemont Village Lane.

We assembled in a parking lot adjacent to Bluemont Village Lane (dark brown line in the pink shape) and then drove onto the Boulder Crest Retreat property (Parcel 649497371) until reaching a locked gate. Boulder Crest gave us the combination and we then proceeded to the end of the lane, which is a circle in Parcel 649486721. Also at the circle was a residence, which became our staging area. The school property was on a rise of land, well hidden in trees to the south of our staging area and impossible to see; but by using a compass, we determined the proper location, which was reached by walking along a foot path to the left of the structure. Just past a bend in the path, on the south side is the footprint of the school house, a small rectangle of foundation stones, still very well laid out.

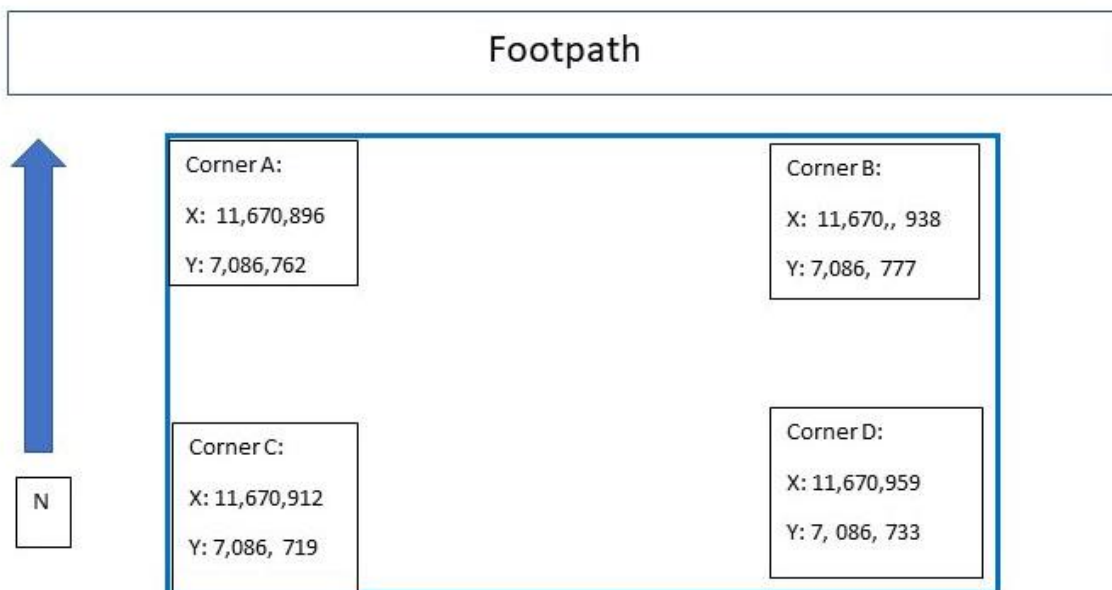


Figure 2 House at the circle. Footpath is the left.

The modern house was also easily seen from that location at 10 degrees, NE to the furthes corner (left in this picture). Taking the reverse azimuth from the modern structure, in other words, would show the exact location in the school property of the center of the school house.

We were unable to use our GPS mechanism, due to lack of internet connectivity; but do plan on returning in the spring before growths begin to verify our measurements.

Although we unable to measure the contours of the land, due the lack of GPS tools, we had already been able to identify the four corners of the .25 acres, thanks to the Mapping Service of Loudoun County Public Schools.



Next we measured the walls, each of which is made of stacked stones. We set measuring sticks along the perimeter and then measured the distance between each. It was difficult to maintain balance during the exercise and the front part along the footpath (the A-B line) was particularly hard, so some margin for error should be allowed.

We used the same A, B, C, D corner designations for the building and the lot.

Distance between A and B was approximately 32'4", whereas the distance between C and D was approximately 31'.4", so only an inch off.

The distance from A to C was 26'4", whereas the distance from D to B was 26"4".



Condition of the site:




The footing along the contours is slippery. Across the base of the footprint are also thorny vines which should be removed before careful inspection.

The footprint itself is very clear to the eye. The land slopes, so the builders probably laid timbers across the stones at a graduate elevation in order to achieve a level flooring before building the house.

Artifacts:

We removed several artifacts for further examination back at the archives and to show the Planning Office. Further surveying of the plot and the land around it to locate the old outhouse and other items will require a more formal, archeological process, using grids.

Item	Location	Photo
<p>Partial Brick</p> <p>Size: 2"x4.5"x3.75"</p>	<p>Located at the corner of point A on the school footprint, lying loose next to the wall. This was the only brick we found. One side has heavy moss on it.</p>	
<p>Partial Window Pane</p> <p>Size: 3.75"x3.25"x1/8"</p>	<p>Located about 30" from the C corner on the C-D line</p>	

<p>Broken Quartz Stone with flat surface</p> <p>Size: 7.45"x3"x4"</p>	<p>Located about 6' from the B corner on the B-D line..This is the only example. We wonder if it is a fragment of a former step.</p>	
<p>Broken bowl bottom</p> <p>Size: 5.5"x6/8"x.5"</p>	<p>Located about 6" from the C corner on the C-D line. This is the only example of crockery that we found.</p>	
<p>Possible flashing from a roof.</p> <p>Size: 7"x2.5 at the widest. Paper thin.</p>	<p>We found many fragments inside the footprint and along the C-D line. This item was found near the D corner on that line.</p>	

Photos of the Site:



Figure 3 Henry Plaster and Tony Archiero on Corner A. The footpath heads away to the west. The yellow sticks were used to mark sections of the walls. Each length was then measured.

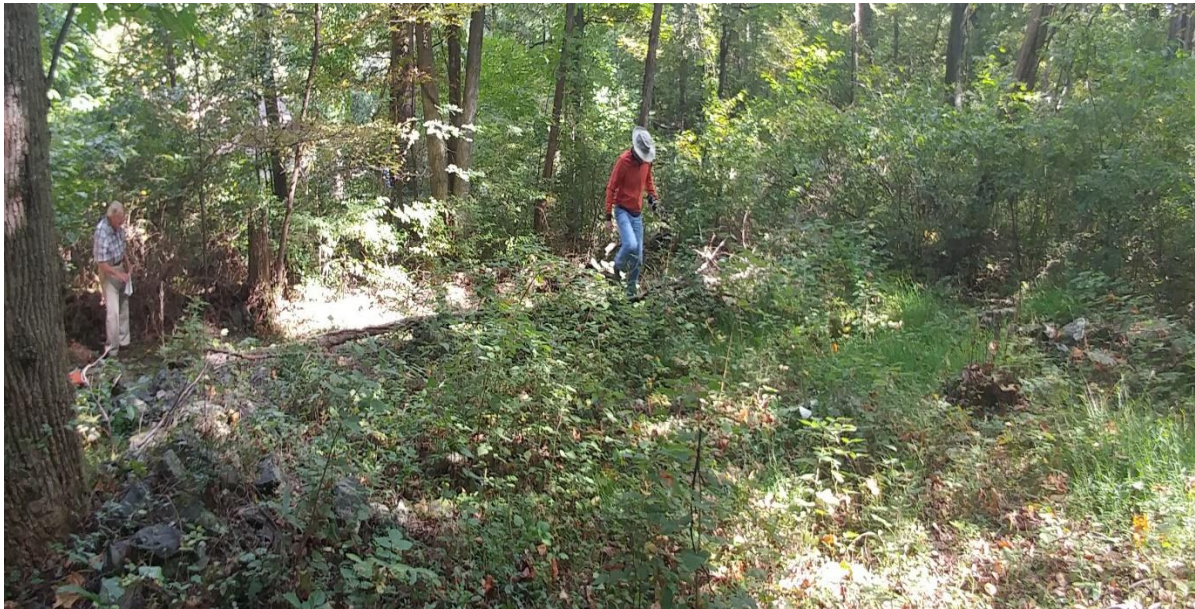


Figure 4 Henry and Tony showing the A B Line with Tony at the B Corner and Henry at the A corner. Notice the heavy foliage throughout.