

Finding the BlueMont Colored School

By

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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. With the help of compass and topographical maps, hhe site, now deep in the forest near the historic village of Bluemont, was located. photographs and measurements, are described below.

In the interest of preserving an important part of African-American school history, our recommendation is that LCPS should never sell the property, or if disposed, that it be turned over to a registered non-profit dedicated 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.



Figure 1 Henry Plaster and Tony Archiero consulting topo map. Behind them are sticks we used to measure the old walls of the school house.



Figure 2 Tony Archiero at front of site.

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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.” The building had also been a place of worship. This was part of a larger tract Young had previously acquired from Dr. George E. Plaster. **Note:** Benjamin Franklin Young, an African-American, was an "apprentice doctor" to Dr. George E. Plaster shortly after the end of the Civil War. George was grandfather to Henry Plaster, our guide¹.

The deed placed the school under the control of three trustees, white Quakers, all members of the Goose Creek Meeting House.

- **Hugh R. Holmes²**



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



- **Samuel W. Brown**, born about 1837.



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

¹ Young was the 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/>.

² Superintendent of the 1st Day School for Goose Creek in April, 1888

this didn't interfere with the keeping of public education. The deed was registered May 2, 1878³.

We need to more fully research on the term "houses". How many, and where was the rest of the Black community and its graveyard? We plan on further research on that and the Quakers.

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, as well as Loudoun's Quakers.

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 year⁴ and the kids then were hauled to Rock Hill⁵.



Martha Branche (May 31, 1911 - ?). Graduated from Dunbar HS and Miner Teachers College in Washington, DC.

Sang and could also coach baseball. Taught grades 1-7 at Bluemont for one year, 1931/32.⁶

Married Curtis W. Scott in Washington, DC 5 September, 1934⁷. Was 4'7" and weighed 100 pounds. Baptist.

Address in Washington in 1931/32 was 811 G St, NW.

For other teachers, see Bluemont Colored School at www.edwinwashingtonproject.org.

³ Deed is in possession of the LCPS Planning Office and a copy is in the archives of the Edwin Washington Project.

⁴ 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.

⁵ See Edwin Washington Colored Petition Files for petition of October 3, 1934 asking for relief for the transport of Bluemont children.

⁶ Colored Teacher Per Box, Edwin Washington Archives.

⁷ *District of Columbia, Marriage Records, 1810-1953* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA:

Location of Bluemont Colored School

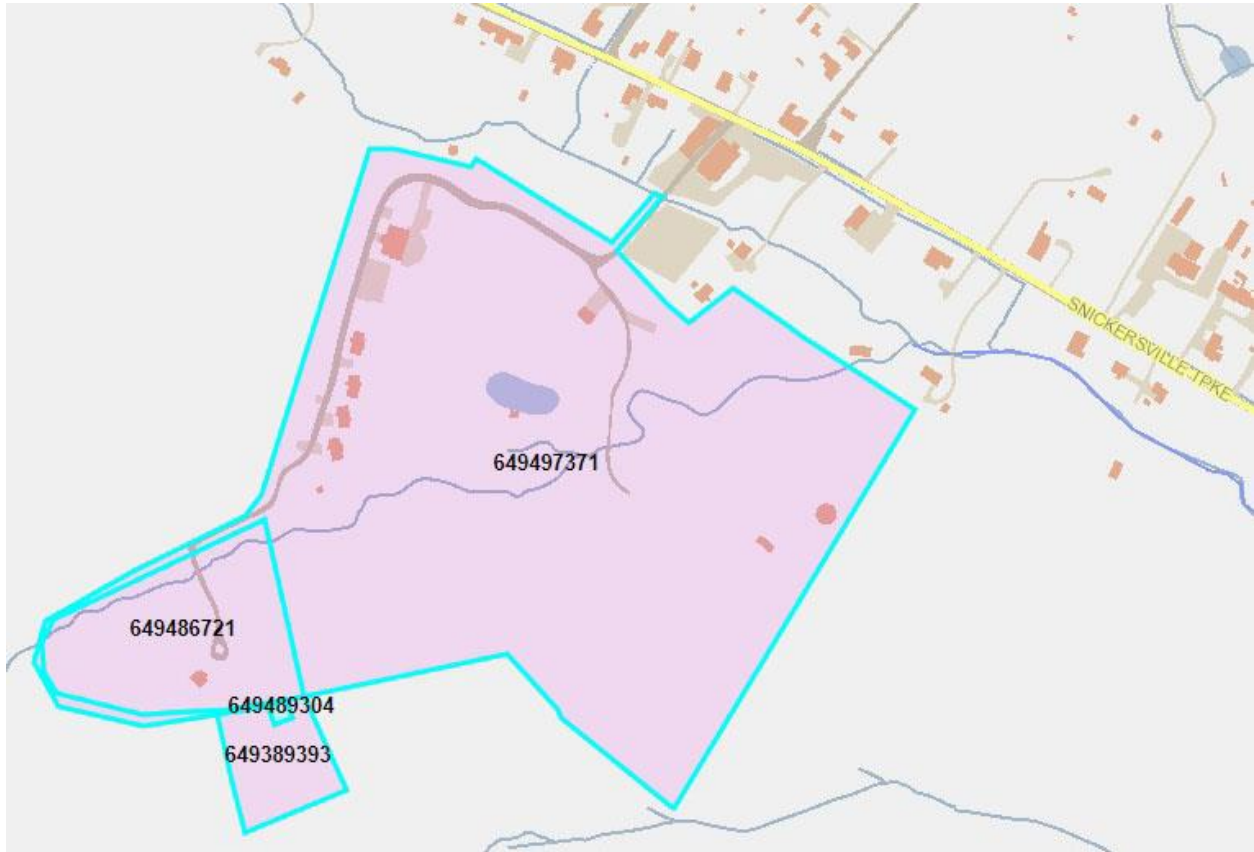


Figure 3 Map Courtesy of LCPS, Planning Office, 2017

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.



Figure 4 The Gate

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, which allowed us to then proceed 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 (left) is the footprint of the school house, a small rectangle of foundation stones, still very well laid out.

Trek to Bluemont Colored School



Figure 5 House at the circle. Footpath is the left.

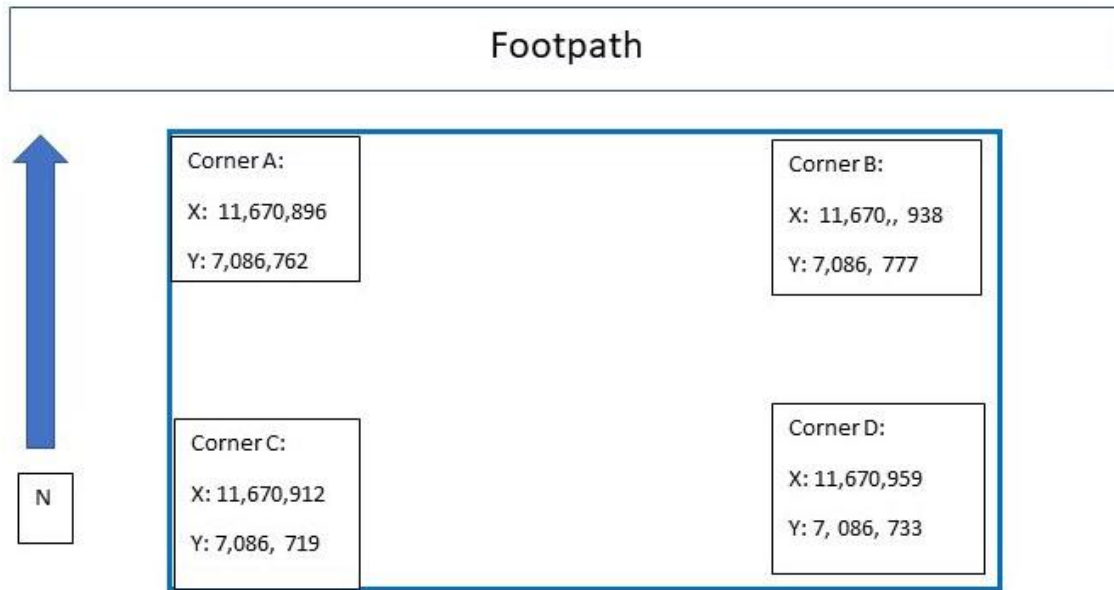


Figure 6 The old footpath. Turn right. School on left.

The modern house was also easily seen from that location at 10 degrees, NE to the furthest corner (left in this picture). Taking the reverse azimuth from the modern structure 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 7 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 8 Bits of Window Pane lie about. Photo by Anthony Archiero



Figure 9 Rock walls can be hard to walk over. Photo by Anthony Archiero

Trek to Bluemont Colored School

A-B Line



Figure 10 Henry and Tony showing on A B Line. Tony at B Corner and Henry at the A corner. Notice the heavy foliage throughout.



Figure 11 Larry looking over the A-B Line. B is to his left.

Trek to Bluemont Colored School

A-C Line



Figure 12 A-C Line looking at C from A corner

B-D and D-C Lines



Figure 13 B-D line, looking from B Corner. Larry is on the C-D line near the C corner. Note the steepness of the B-D line, which made measuring difficult.

Trek to Bluemont Colored School

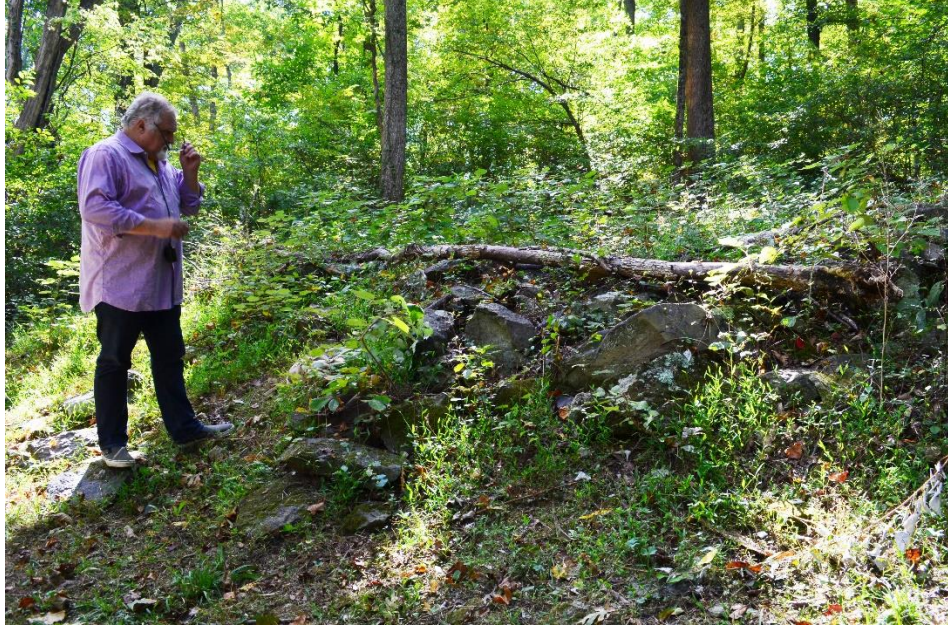


Figure 14 Larry looking at the B Corner. Very slippery.

Black Churches and Cemetery



Figure 15 Ruin of Black Church along the old road to the staging area.

“The Colored School allowed Sunday "church" service from its beginning. Later (in the 19th century) the colored community there built the church in your photo. In about 1915 to 1920 (the date is known, but I have forgotten) the congregation moved it to the still standing "colored church" on the Turnpike near Foggy Bottom Road.

The Rock Hill Cemetery is south of Airmont on Furr Road' Source Henry Plaster, 9/30, 2017.

Trek to Bluemont Colored School



Figure 16 New Church along Snickersville Turnpike