



# A WALK THROUGH WILLISVILLE

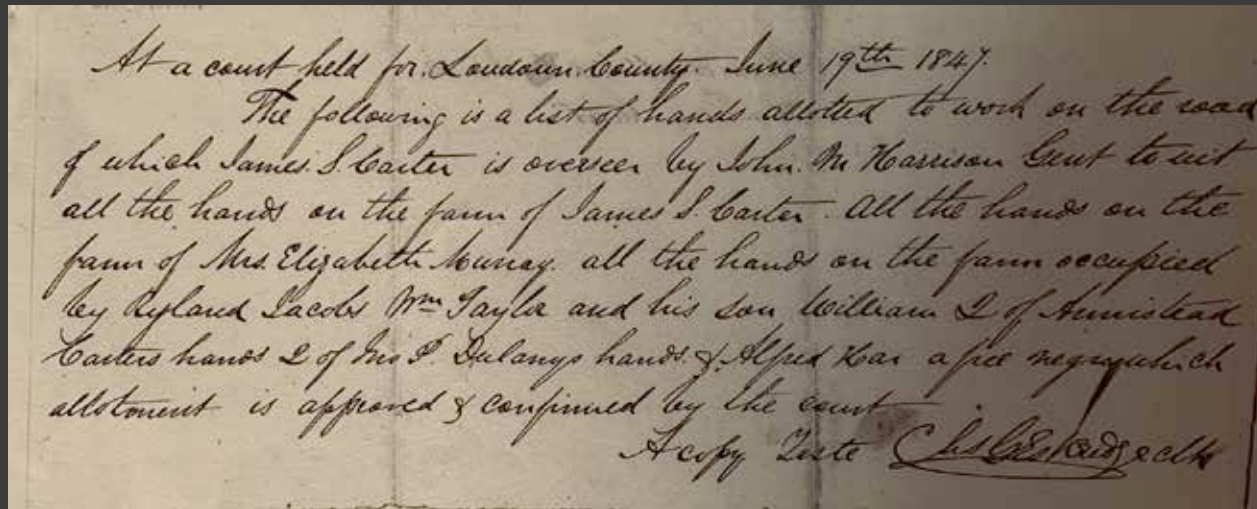
WILLISVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

AUGUST 13, 2019

Willisville's **origins** most likely pre-date the Civil War as a **community of Free Negros, the Enslaved and possibly an Overseer.**

The location of the village was at the intersection of four large farms – Crednal, Clifton, Catesby and Blakely Grove.

These large farms also had a large labor force of Enslaved. It is possible that a 'quarter' or collection of slave dwellings for the field laborers were located in the vicinity of Willisville



At a court held for Loudoun County June 19<sup>th</sup> 1847.  
The following is a list of hands allotted to work on the road  
of which James S. Carter is overseer by John M. Harrison Gent to wit  
all the hands on the farm of James S. Carter. All the hands on the  
farm of Mrs. Elizabeth Murray. all the hands on the farm occupied  
by Ryland Jacobs W<sup>m</sup> Taylor and his son William L of Amistad  
Carter's hands L of Mrs P. Dulany's hands J. Alfred Har a free negro which  
allotment is approved & confirmed by the court  
Attest Clerk *[Signature]*

*Fletchers Road Case (Willisville Road), 1847*  
*"2 of Jno P Dulany's hands & Alfred Har [sic] a free negro"*

## Alfred Hoe (b. 1802)

From personal property records, we know there were 73 free Negroes living in western Loudoun in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of these, we know there were several in the Willisville neighborhood - Alfred Hoe, Joseph Nickens, Henson Willis.

All Free Negroes had a skill. Free Negroes had to petition to remain in the state, and would have been granted that permission based on good behavior and skill set. Hoe was a carpenter and would have been a valuable laborer.

**Alfred Ho** (born 1802) was a Free Negro. Here he is listed in an 1847 road case as John Dulany's free Negro. In the 1850 census, Hoe appears living within the Dulany household. By 1860, he is listed as living separately with his own family

## Henson Willis (b. 1821 )

The first record of Henson Willis is the 1856 Loudoun County Personal Property tax records where he is listed as 'Hughes Willis.'

Henson Willis appears frequently in Ida Dulany's diary and is identified as a 'Free Negro.' Henson's second wife, Lucinda, was enslaved by Ida Dulany's family. Henson's first wife was enslaved by Colonel Dulany's family and died in childbirth at Welbourne.

Henson was a 'mechanic,' a skilled laborer and possibly worked at the Clifton Mill as well as for the surrounding farm owners.

Henson possibly lived at the edge of Catesby and would have bartered labor in exchange for permission to reside on the Seaton property.





## The Willis House, circa 1840

Originally constructed as a one and a half story log cabin. The original portion is seen here, the south gable end and stone chimney.

Willisville also likely had its origins as a community  
for the Enslaved

The Dulanys, Seatons, Glascocks, Carters, and Fletchers were all large slave holders. The 1860

Slave Schedules indicate there were at least **130 to 140 enslaved**  
**living** in the area which would become Willisville

We also know from tax records, there were **twenty slave dwellings**  
to accommodate these 130 enslaved.

Some of these dwellings would have been located near the main house, but some would have been  
located remotely, in 'quarters' for the field laborers.

We know from Rebecca Dulany's diary that some enslaved at Welbourne were located on the farm  
and some were located at the Dulany mills known as Millsville.

Where were these 20 slave dwellings located?

Were these houses around Willisville?

Are any remaining?





## The William H Peters House

Circa mid 19<sup>th</sup> century

The William Peters House has architectural features, which lead us to believe the house was possibly a slave dwelling or dwelling for multiple free families. The house had two front doors, each entering into a separate room, not connected at the interior. A third exterior entrance provided access to a small loft above. The house had a root cellar and separate kitchen.

Henry Jackson, enslaved at Welbourne, purchased this three acre parcel from Townsend Seaton May 24, 1875, the same day as George Evans purchase. It is possible Henry Jackson lived here before building the Brewer House.



## The George Evans House

mid 19<sup>th</sup> century

was originally accessed from a private lane,  
not Welbourne Road, so not functionally  
related to the village.

The house had two front doors and a  
detached kitchen. The George Evans House  
would have housed several families.

George Evans purchased this three acre lot  
from Townsend Seaton of Catesby in 1875, on  
the same day as Henry Jackson's purchase of  
his three acre lot.

George Evans was one of the original three  
Willisville Trustees for the school. It is not  
known if he was free or enslaved. He likely  
had a relationship with Townsend Seaton.  
His wife, Julia Evans, is buried at Crednal





**Anderson House**  
**Rear portion, circa mid 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The rear portion— originally build as a single room— possibly dated to before the Civil War.

**John Howard**, possibly enslaved by the Seaton family of Catesby, is living here immediately after the War and was the first African American to purchase a 3 acre lot in 1872 in the area, which would become Willisville.



The house is sited away from Welbourne Road and until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, was accessed from Willisville Road, not Welbourne Road. It's odd location indicates it was not associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century building patterns of the village

It is located near the George Evans House and was likely the two dwellings were functionally related

The Warner House  
Circa 1850

# Reconstruction of the 1870s and early Equal Rights legislation

marked a period during which there was an effort to allow the newly Emancipated to get onto equal footing as citizens.

One of the rights accorded with citizenship was the **right to own property**, a powerful tool to:

1. Ability to self govern one's own community
2. Establish societal traditions of worship and education.
3. Create wealth and transfer between generations

# Willisville School, 1868

*“The said school to be governed by such rules and by laws as shall be determined from time to time by a majority of said Trustees and their successors in Office.”*

Willisville's first deed is recorded in 1868 with the purchase of a half acre lot from Armistead Carter by the three School Trustees – George Evans, Benjamin Berry, and Gardner Peters.

The deed is **significant** not only for establishing the African American right to own property but also for establishing village's right to act as a **self-governing community**.

The school was funded partially by the Freedman's Bureau but **largely by Colonel Dulany**. It is one of many examples of neighbors working together successfully as a community with the full support of the white neighbors



School House between Middlebury &  
Upperville near R. H. Dulany. The freedmen  
have a deed for  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre are erecting the  
school house thereon. Size 18 X 30 Log  
Trustees George Evans, Garner Peters & Benj.  
Berry. They have a teacher employed  
named, Gil Pierce. School will  
probably commence Jan 1. 1869

Lieutenant Smith, of the Freeman's Bureau, describing Willisville school progress, 1869

The school was funded partially by the Freedman's Bureau but largely by Colonel Dulany. It is one of many examples of neighbors working together successfully as a community with the full support of the white neighbors





[Mc]Gill Pierce, date unknown  
First Schoolhouse, Willisville



## Willisville Cemetery, 1873

Land ownership also represented a chance for African American societal cultures to survive. Not only was the community able to worship and educate their children, but so too were they able to bury their dead in a permanent and protected space. Early African American burial grounds have been lost, such as the approximately 25 burial sites recently discovered in St. Louis. Without the right to own property, there was no protection of their sacred spaces. A notable exception to this is the cemetery for the enslaved at Crednal.

After the War and with the purchase of the school and church lot, the community of Willisville was able to secure a location for their community cemetery, which they located on the east side of the half acre school lot. Henson Willis was the first burial in Willisville in 1873, the year before his widow Lucinda purchased their home.

# Establishment of the Village: 1880s and 1890s

1877 marked the end of Reconstruction. At the federal level, the celebrated equal rights legislation, and many of the social and civil freedoms that came with it, began to be eroded.

Despite thriving neighborhood economy, property tax records illustrate a life of subsistence living. Reduced salaries were a way of life for both races living in rural Loudoun. Henry Jackson and Lucinda Willis, two of the more prosperous Willisville landowners, each owned a cow worth \$20 and \$25 respectively. Lucinda Willis owned a clock - the only one in the neighborhood. Neighboring tenants owned much less; personal property taxes reveal some families owned nothing at all.

The 1880 census shows approximately 16 families living in Willisville; five of those were owner occupied including the founding families - Evans, Howards, Jacksons and Willis families. Willisville still did not have an established name; geographical location was still identified by adjoining white landowner in Loudoun County Land Tax Records. John Howard and Henry Jackson, now established landowners, were listed living 'nr Seaton.' "Willisville," as a geographical description, did not appear until 1890.





Henderson House, 1890-1895



## Henderson House, 1890-1895

Built by George Evans for son Thomas Evans and his wife, Kate Marshall Evans. The house was left to her second husband Frank Henderson for his lifetime and then to Kate's children. The house was part of the George Evans estate. In Evan's will, he gave away more property than he owned, creating land disputes which continue today.

This house built directly across the street from the Gaskins House and about the same time and demonstrates the regularity that was important to the village.

House originally had a meat house, root cellar, and rainwater-fed cistern. In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had one of Willisville's few car garages



Frank Henderson (b. 1865)

Son of Caroline Olden, who was possibly enslaved by the Dulany family. Frank Henderson was the Welbourne coachman and the second husband of Kate Evans. Here he is pictured outside of Welbourne with Colonel Dulany in the drivers seat



20<sup>th</sup> Century Improvements in the Village:

1920s and 1930s



## Second one-room Schoolhouse, 1921

The log school burned in 1918. The neighborhood, wanting publicly-funded education as was accorded to their white neighbors, petitioned the Loudoun County School Board to rebuild the school. In 1920, the School Trustees - Frank Henderson, Dorsey Warner, and Moses Peters - sold the lot to LCSB. John Howard, one of the older Trustees, opposed the sale and was removed as Trustee



## Willisville Store, 1922-1924

The Willisville Store was built between 1922-1924 by Neville Atkinson, granddaughter of Colonel Dulany. Grantland Henderson was the first store owner and lived in the residential space on the second floor. He was also a jockey, likely working in the Neville stables.

The rural store was the center of the village economy. With limited transportation outside of the village and Jim Crow segregation laws, the store represented the only area for purchase of items, which could not be produced at on the farm. As well, with few southern banks in operation, rural stores operated on credit, becoming their own de-facto banking system.





## 2<sup>nd</sup> Willisville Chapel, 1924

This chapel was built jointly by the community and Mary Neville, the Colonel's daughter.

The stylistic features of this chapel set it apart from other African American places of worship. African American chapels were typically frame. A few were stone, such as the chapel at Rock Hill, built in 1911. The lancet windows, ashlar stone, soldier courses indicate it was constructed by skilled craftsmen, likely the Hall family, who were noted local contractors stone masons in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Originally there was a belfry, which was not replaced during the last renovation

Willisville La.  
Feb. 5. 1931.

To -  
The Loudoun Co, School Board.

Mr. A. L. Emerick,  
Division Supt.

We the patrons of the Willisville School take this opportunity of thanking the Board in answering our petition; straightening up our building and securing more seats thereby relieving our children of a little of their uncomfortableness, But we are not satisfied; we are still desirous of something; This has been brought to bear upon us by the steady increase, overcrowded conditions. We realize that some re-adjustment is necessary and it must be made if any benefits are to be derived for our children.

1 The crowd condition of the school room makes it unsanitary, unhygienic. Think of each individual child

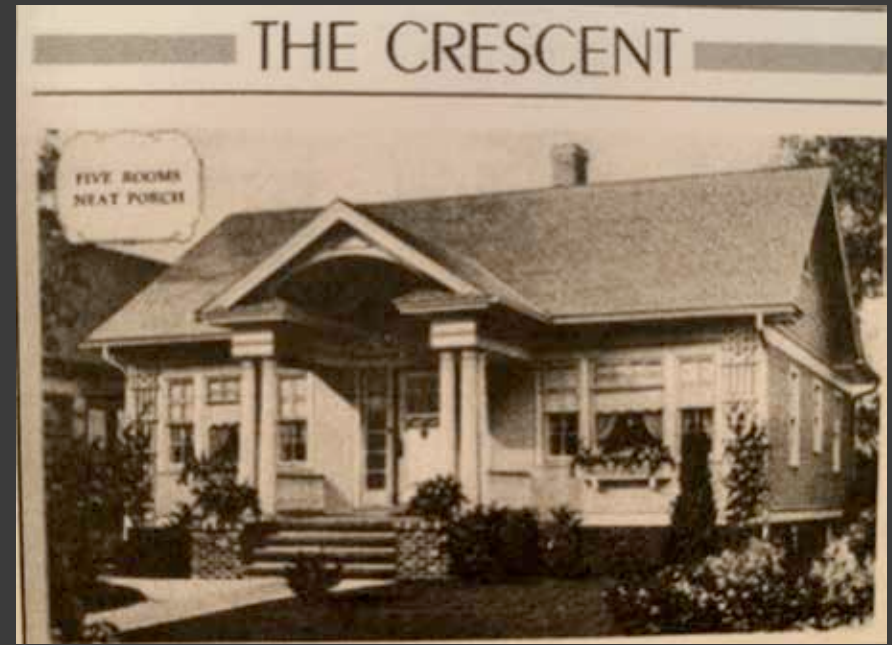
1931 Willisville parents  
petition for school house  
improvements

By 1930, there was an average  
of 51 students attending the  
one room school house



In 1932, the  
school house  
addition was  
constructed.  
Mildred Gray was  
hired to help Anna  
Gaskins.





## Moton House, 1930-1933

The house is likely a Sears Kit house, shipped to The Plains by rail. It bears resemblance to the 'Crescent House,' depicted here in the inset photo. Judging by land tax records, this was the nicest house in the village when it was constructed. It had the first indoor plumbing.

Built between 1930 and 1933 by Clifford Moton who rode for Robert Neville and later for Erskine Bedford. Moton married Rebecca Hackley They later divorced.





## Willis House additions, 1932

The Willis House additions were constructed by Dudley Gaskins for his family. Gaskins likely also constructed the barn. He was a hostler, a coveted position. Census records indicate hostlers earned the highest income of all Willisville residents. Other hostlers were Clifford Moton and Colonel Brooks. Gaskins also owned his own horses. Gaskins would take cast-offs from white owners and race, show, or breed his own. He ran a winner at Glenwood Park under a white person's name (African Americans were prohibited from competing in white events.)

# Households and Lifestyles:

1940s and 1950s



Ernest Brooks (1879-1960), Cattleman at Catesby

Judging from the Loudoun County property tax records, the Willisville population remained relatively stable totaling about fourteen households. Some stayed but many continued to migrate north for industrial jobs and to evade Jim Crow, which remained pervasive in Virginia.

The horse industry continued to offer employment for the residents of Willisville. **Ernest Brooks** (age 65) had moved his family of five children and one grandson from Welbourne to Willisville, renting the **Henderson House**. While at Welbourne, Brooks had worked in the stables and then transitioned to work at Catesby with their prized show cattle. His children, including **Anne Brooks (Lee)**, attended the Willisville School. His grandson **Robert Eugene Brooks** (1933-2002) also was attending Willisville Elementary and went on to join one of the early expeditions to Antarctica.





## Howard House, 1954

This is a house of solid field stone, built by the Howard family, generations of stone masons. There is a similar house to this, also built by the Howard family, in the village of Trappe. Dudley Gaskins sold a  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre lot to his daughter Emma in 1951 at her marriage to Bishop Beverly Howard.





7th Grade Graduating Class Willisville School - 1956



## Transition to a New Era

The 1950s closed a chapter on Willisville. Charles Briggs was the last to be interred in the Old Willisville Cemetery in 1950. 1954 marks the construction date of the last contributing structure included in the historic district. In 1956, Anna Gaskins died ending her half-century dedication of teaching at the Willisville School.

In the 1950s also marked a long-overdue period of transition in the educational system. In the 1954 case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, "Separate but Equal" was finally overturned in the Supreme Court, legally ending federally sanctioned racism.

The Willisville School conditions remained sub-standard; it was over-crowded, cold, and without social services. In 1953 the Health Department approved expenditures to bring a dentist to colored schools, a nice but inadequate gesture. Willisville parents continued to advocate for better school condition. In 1959, unable to meet the standards of 'equal,' the Willisville Elementary school closed.

# Final thoughts

**The Story Continues:** Please share your stories of Willisville. We hope to one day publish a book and look forward to including more family histories

**Contribute:** Carol Lee has established a non-profit for the future preservation of Willisville, the **Willisville Preservation Foundation (WPF)**

**Stay Tuned:** We still have a long way to go. We will continue our work for the preservation of Willisville. Stay involved.

Many thanks,

Jane Covington and Carol Lee