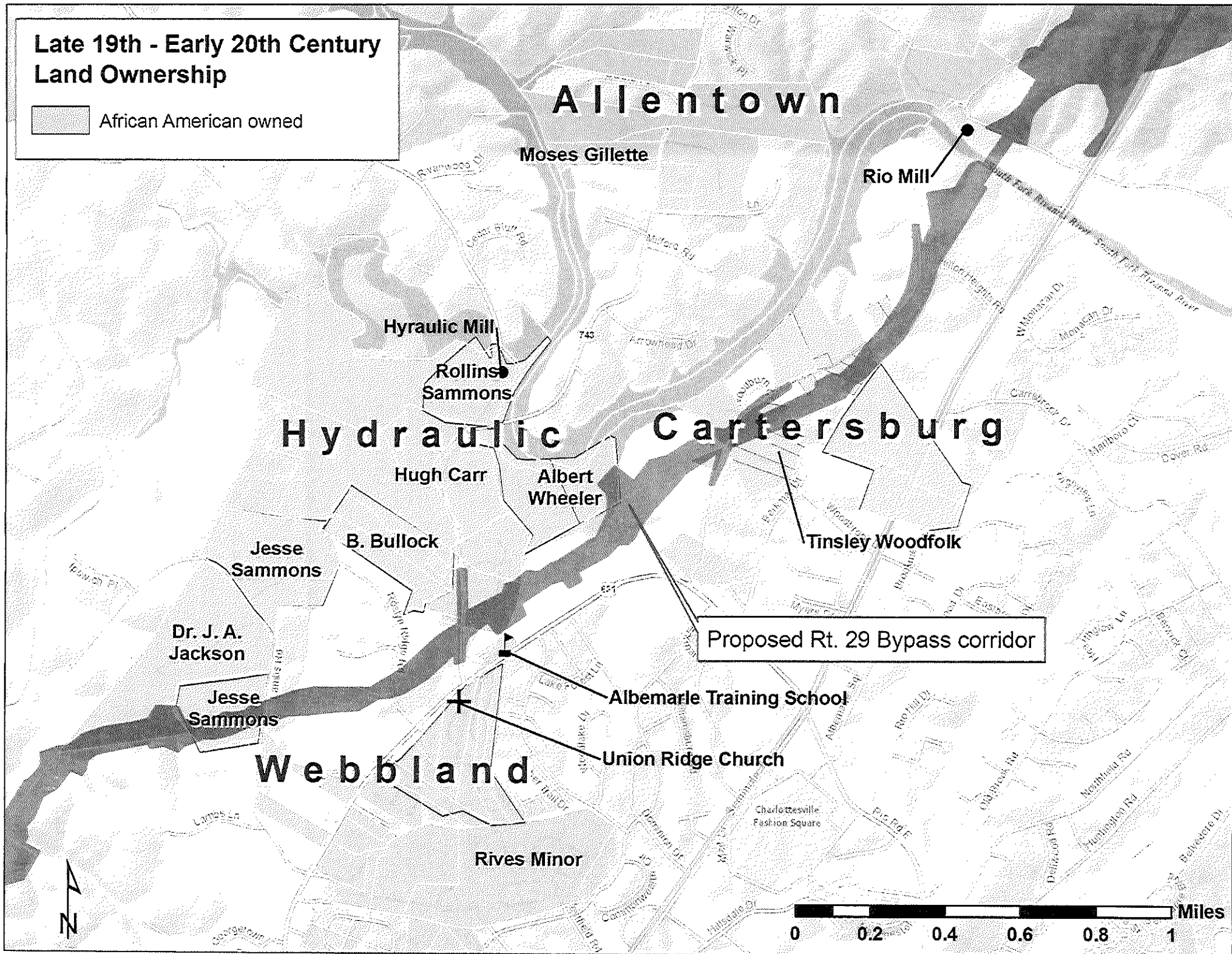


Late 19th - Early 20th Century Land Ownership

 African American owned



Bypassing History: A Community Runs Through It

What the discovery of the Sammons cemetery reveals about the African American history of Hydraulic-Union Ridge and the need to preserve its memory

The following information is borrowed from a report sent to the Virginia Dept of Historic Resources from Cinder Stanton, on behalf of the Central Virginia History Researchers.

THE SAMMONS CEMETERY (and house) was part of a larger historic community of African-American farmers, tradesmen, and professionals that grew up after Emancipation. They faced the challenges of the new social order with ingenuity and determination. Many of them were landowners, some with farms of 50-100 acres. This community, that surrounded its church and school and the Hydraulic Mills, stretched for two miles from present US Route 29 (Georgetown neighborhood) to the Hydraulic Mills (Hydraulic, Union Ridge, Webbland, Allentown neighborhoods) and to Woodburn Road (Cartersburg neighborhood).

The Cartersburg-Woodburn section of the Hydraulic Mills-Union Ridge community, which was once quite densely populated, is in the direct path of the proposed Route29/Western Bypass. It is apparent from public records and local knowledge that there are family burial grounds in this area that deserve further assessment.

THE HYDRAULIC MILLS sat at the junction of Ivy Creek and the South Fork of the Rivanna River for more than a century and was the commercial hub for a large rural area northwest of Charlottesville. A bustling village grew up around the two grain mills, with a store, a sawmill, blacksmith and cooper's shops, a wool carding machine, dwellings, and a post office. Grain raised in the surrounding farms and plantations was brought to the mills for processing into flour and cornmeal, and the flour was shipped down the Rivanna to distant markets.

In 1872 the African-American miller at Hydraulic, Rollins Sammons, purchased the mills in partnership with W. W. Worledge. Sammons ran the milling operation into the 1890s. In 1966, what remained of the village of Hydraulic Mills was flooded by the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir.

UNION RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH, at the heart of the Hydraulic Mills-Union Ridge community, was founded as the Salem Church two years after the Civil War ended. Berkeley Bullock and Albert Wheeler were among Union Ridge's trustees and Jesse Scott Sammons was the church secretary. In 1876 an African-American preacher, George Crawford, one of the six men who had bought land as a group, gave the congregation a quarter-acre for a church building. The Union Ridge Church still stands today as the home of an active Baptist congregation.

ALBEMARLE TRAINING SCHOOL is an extraordinary example of the African-American belief in the importance of education. The one room Ivy Creek School created shortly after the Civil War evolved into the Albemarle Training School, the first black high school in Albemarle County and a magnet for African-American students outside the city of Charlottesville. Jesse S. Sammons, Rives Minor, and Hugh Carr's daughter Mary Carr Greer were all important figures in this development, as teachers and principals. Sammons's and Minor's daughters, Albert Wheeler's son Thomas, and others in the community also became teachers. Like the Jefferson School in Charlottesville, the Union Ridge/Albemarle Training School paved the way for many African Americans who aspired to full participation in the American dream.

The Cemetery

Jesse Scott Sammons (1853-1901)

Born free, the son of Rollins and Sarah Sammons, Jesse Sammons lived with his family at the Hydraulic Mills. Between 1881 and 1885 Jesse Sammons purchased two tracts of land totaling 73 acres about a mile southwest of the Hydraulic Mills, the property on which the cemetery was recently discovered.

Jesse S. Sammons was a leading figure in the educational, religious, and political life of Albemarle County in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Having attended the Freedmen's School (Jefferson Graded School) Sammons was the first teacher at the one-room Ivy Creek school about a mile west of the mills and the first principal of the Union Ridge Graded School which would later become the Albemarle Training School. Politically active in the biracial Readjuster party in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Sammons was a candidate for the Virginia General Assembly and served as secretary of the Republican Coalition Club of Earlysville Precinct; its constitution was cited in a national publication as representative of the able leadership and organization of black Virginia voters at the time.

Sammons was also an active churchman: a member and secretary of Union Ridge Baptist Church and an officer at the state level in the Baptist Sunday School Convention.



Lula Minor Gibbons Sammons (1863-1928)

In 1888 Jesse Sammons married Lula Minor Gibbons. Born enslaved, she was the daughter of Anna and Edward Gibbons, a skilled carpenter, and the niece of the Rev. William Gibbons, a prominent Charlottesville and Washington, DC minister, whose wife Isabella Gibbons, taught for a number of years at the Jefferson Graded School in Charlottesville. Jesse and Lula Sammons had two daughters and two sons.

Robert J. Sammons (1891-1924)

Robert J. Sammons, their older son, left the Albemarle County farm by 1916 to live with relatives in New Jersey and worked as a dining-car waiter. He died at the age of 31 in Jersey City and was brought back to the family cemetery for burial.



George Rutherford Ferguson, Sr. (1877-1932)

Dr. George R. Ferguson was the first African-American physician with a sustained practice in Albemarle County. He and his first wife, Luella Brown had two children, Louise Ferguson and George R. Ferguson, Jr. After Luella's death, Dr. Ferguson married Eva Sammons, daughter of Jesse and Lula Sammons.

Both father and son were active in the NAACP and George R. Ferguson, Jr., became president of the local chapter of the NAACP. GRF, Jr. led efforts to desegregate the University of Virginia hospital as well as local schools. His daughter Olivia, was one of the Charlottesville Twelve, a group of elementary and high school students who integrated the city schools in 1959. In 2012, the City of Charlottesville erected a historical marker to the Charlottesville Twelve and gave Ridge St. the honorary name of George R. Ferguson Way.

1730

Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings
1735

1750

Mary Hemings
1753

(Sally Heming)
1773

Betty Brown
1759

Nancy Hemings

1770

Joseph Fossett
1780

Sally Jefferson Bell ♡ Jesse Scott

Burwell Colbert ♡ Critta Hemings
1783

1790

Harriett Sammons
1780

Robert Scott ♡
1803

Nancy Colbert
1810

1810

Peter Fossett
1815

Rollins Sammons ♡
c.1815

Sarah Bell Scott
1827

Elizabeth Scott (Cox)
c. 1824

1830

(Isabella & Wm Gibbons)
1835 1825

1850

LULA GIBBONS ♡
1863

JESSE SAMMONS
1853

Nannie Cox Jackson
1864

1870

ROBERT SAMMONS
1891

Eva Sammons ♡
1887

GEORGE FERGUSON, SR. -m-- (Luella Brown)
1878 1884

1890

1910

George Ferguson, Jr.
1912

1930

SAMMONS - FERGUSON CEMETERY

1950

*caps=headstones

Olivia Ferguson McQueen

Hydraulic-Union Ridge Community Leaders

Rollins Sammons (c1815-c1893) and **Sarah Bell Scott Sammons** (1827-1909) were prominent residents of the village of Hydraulic Mills. Born free, Rollins Sammons worked as a miller and owned and operated the Hydraulic Mills for more than twenty years. Sarah Bell Scott Sammons, the daughter of Robert and Nancy Scott, was the great-great-granddaughter of Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings, matriarch of the well-known Hemings family at Monticello. They had 12 children, including Jesse Sammons.

Albert Wheeler (c1826-after 1900), who was born in slavery, practiced his blacksmithing trade in freedom, first in North Garden and then at the Hydraulic Mills. He was a trustee of Union Ridge Baptist church. In 1872 Wheeler bought a 32-acre farm close to the mills on the east side of Hugh Carr's River View farm. There he and his wife, Wilmina, raised six children.

Berkeley Bullock (c1835-1908) purchased a 35-acre farm between the properties of Hugh Carr and Jesse S. Sammons. He was a principal founder of the Union Ridge Baptist Church. In the 1890s he moved into Charlottesville, where he owned a popular restaurant at Union Station and engaged in the wood, coal, and ice business. He was described as "one of the pioneer businessmen of the city."

Hugh Carr (c1840-1914) was born in slavery on the plantation of RW Wingfield of Woodlands. He led a life in freedom that exemplifies the struggle and accomplishments of many former slaves in the post-bellum Hydraulic Mills area. At first sharecropping, he began purchasing property in 1870 and left over a hundred acres to his heirs at his death. Carr's River View farm remained in the family for a hundred years and is now a site on the African American Heritage Trail of Virginia.

Rev. Tinsley Woodfolk (1848-1907), born in slavery, was a prominent Baptist minister. He founded three churches in Albemarle County, including Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Earlysville. In 1873 he and his wife Letitia Allen (1852-1923), bought land in the Cartersburg section of the Hydraulic Mills community, where they raised ten children; some descendants remain in the Charlottesville area.

Rives Minor (1856-1926) was a noted educator. Having attended the Freedmen's school in Charlottesville, Minor taught for 30 years, many of them at the Union Ridge Graded School, where he served as principal after Jesse Sammons. He owned over 60 acres close to Union Ridge Baptist Church. His daughter Asalie Minor Preston, also a noted educator, endowed the Minor-Preston Educational Fund that awards scholarships to worthy students in the Charlottesville-Albemarle community.

Horace Solomon (1858-1927), whose family had been enslaved in the Hydraulic Mills area, bought his own farm in the Georgetown section of the Hydraulic Mills-Union Ridge community. He and his wife, Fannie Harris (1862-1943), raised fifteen children; his descendants still live in the area.

Mary Carr Greer (1884-1973) and **Conly Garfield Greer** (1884-1956) are prime examples the role education played in the lives of freed slaves and their children. Mary, eldest child of Hugh and Texie Carr, attended Union Ridge Graded School and as principal of the Albemarle Training School, oversaw its development into a 4-year accredited institution. Mary Carr Greer Elementary School on Lambs Road is named in her honor. Her husband, Conly Greer, a fellow graduate of the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute (now Virginia State), became Albemarle County's first African-American extension agent. Greer taught African-American farmers and 4-H youth modern farming techniques.

Dr. John A. Jackson (1888-1957), educated at Howard University was a dentist in Charlottesville. He owned an 82-acre farm adjacent to Jesse S. Sammons that his father, Andrew W. Jackson had purchased it in 1918. Here Boy Scouts camped and learned to cultivate a garden, and a swimming pool provided a recreational opportunity for African-American children in Albemarle County.