

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF AMELIA ROBISON

I, Amelia Robison, of Nauck, Arlington County, Virginia, being of sound mind, memory and understanding, do hereby make, publish and declare this paper writing as and for my last will and testament, hereby revoking and annulling all former wills I have made.

I direct my executor hereinafter named to pay all my just debts, funeral and testamentary expenses as soon as practicable after my decease.

I give and devise to my son Charles Robison of Arlington County, Virginia, my old home property located in what is commonly called "The Bottom" near Walker's Chapel, in Washington Magisterial District of Arlington County and described as follows:

Beginning in one of Hedgman's lines in the center of the County Road from Falls Church to the Little Falls Bridge; thence with said line N. 14 1/4 degrees W. 31 poles and 5 links to a stake; thence N. 56 3/4 degrees E. 10 poles 17 links to a stake in the center of said county road; thence along the center of said county road S. 13 1/2 degrees E. 13 poles and 8 links, S. 9 1/4 degrees W. 7 poles and 16 links, S. 7 degrees E. 6 poles, and being the same land mentioned and described in deed dated August 2, 1906, and recorded in Deed Book 113, at page 521, of the land records of Arlington County, Virginia.

Arlington County Probate Records

Figure 1: Will of Amelia Robison.

The Bottom: An African America Enclave Rediscovered

BY JESSICA KAPLAN

*There was a colored settlement and cemetery...isolated after the Civil War when the Little Falls Road north of Walker's Chapel was abandoned.*¹

Eleanor Lee Templeman

*I give and devise to my son Charles Robison of Arlington County, Virginia, my old home property located in what is commonly called 'The Bottom' near Walker's Chapel...*²

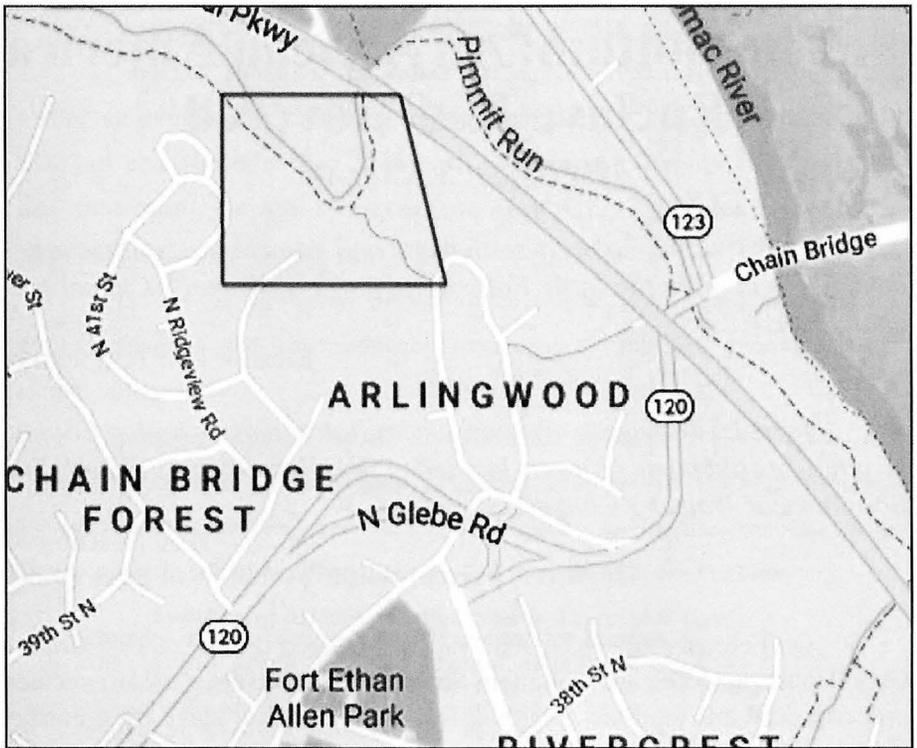
Amelia Robison

(Figure 1, page 6, Will of Amelia Robison, 1929.)

On February 16, 1857, John Jackson entered the Alexandria County Court House on Queen and Columbus Streets. He handed the clerk an executed property deed and paid the recording fee. John, a former slave from Fairfax County, had just purchased three acres of land near Chain Bridge. Wooded and remote, hard work and perseverance would make the tract farmable and end John's reliance on white employers. What former slave dares to dream this could happen?

Like John, several other free colored men and women bought small parcels of land by the west end of Chain Bridge. The area, in "a valley, steep, darkly wooded," nestled alongside Pimmit Run, straddled both Alexandria (now Arlington) and Fairfax Counties (Figure 2, page 8, Current map of The Bottom.)³ Residents called it "The Bottom," perhaps because it was low-lying and periodically flooded. Established before the Civil War, this small enclave of free African Americans, offered sanctuary to several families struggling to earn a living and create a safe community. The Bottom remained their home through challenging times: war, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, segregation, and suburbanization.

Very little primary documentation exists to tell the story of The Bottom. Available records including, census data, deeds, wills, maps, and the Southern Claims Commission (SCC) Papers, provide insight into the forces that drove black community development in the nineteenth century. The same materials reveal the constriction of these communities and the rights of African Americans that took place in The Bottom as well as throughout Arlington.



Google Maps

Figure 2: The Bottom on Current Map.

In the 1950s, most of The Bottom became the anchor for an overpass of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Today, walking west from Chain Bridge on the National Park Service’s Pimmit Run Trail, the vale can still be accessed. Gone are the shanties and humble outbuildings, the small fields of corn and rye, and the African American families that called the area home.

Beginnings

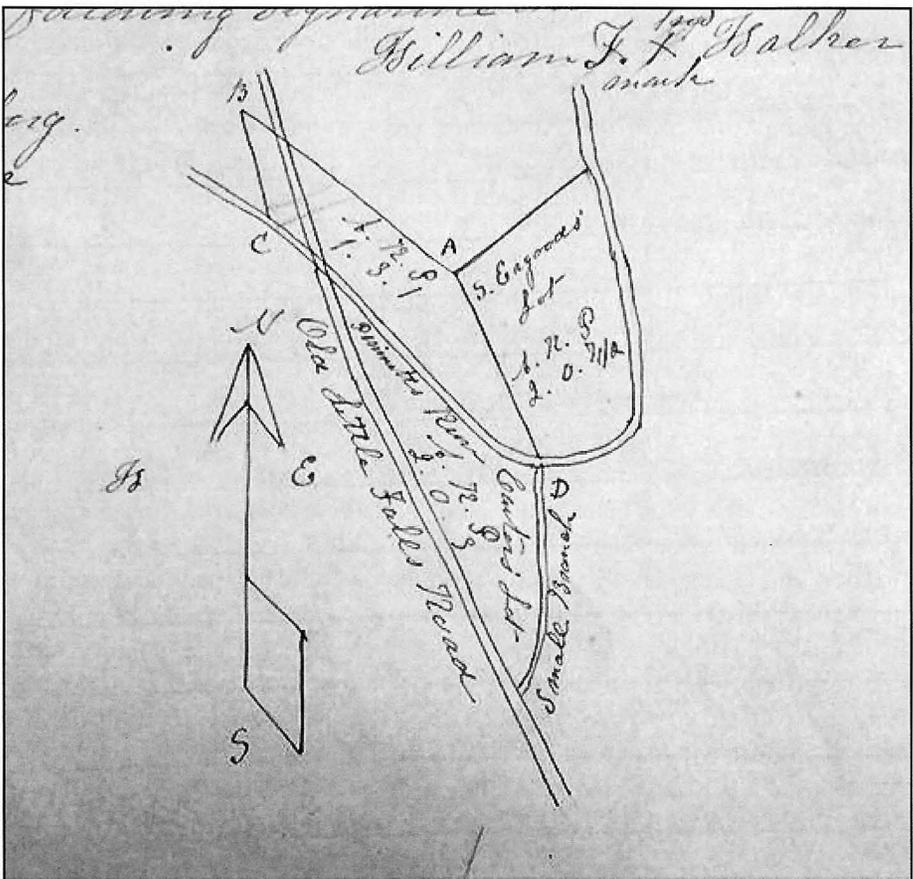
In October of 1854, Elizabeth S. Bowen and her husband John, sold nineteen acres of their 300-acre tract along Pimmit Run to William Walker. Bowen had inherited the land from her uncle, Alfred Ball. Originally part of Fairfax County, then the District of Columbia, the tract reverted to Alexandria County after Retrocession in 1846.⁴

Walker, the oldest son of farmer David Walker, was born and bred near the Bowen’s. Along with his brothers James and Robert, William helped estab-

lish Walker Chapel Methodist Protestant Church on Glebe Road. The Walker family provided the land on which to build the church.⁵

William's nineteen-acres sat in a hollow, the northern tip in Fairfax County and the remainder in Alexandria. Pimmit Run flowed in a U through the secluded timber-laden valley. A small stream or branch, trickled south from the curve of the U. (Fig. 3, Page 9, Plat of The Bottom.)

Within three years of purchasing the property, William did something odd for the times. He sold three acres of land to John Jackson, a former slave, and his wife Ann, both of Fairfax County. A day later, John sold half his property to his older brother Henry.⁶



Fairfax County Land Records

Figure 3: 1879 Plot of Carter's land in the Bottom.

John Jackson and William Walker had known one another since they were children. In testimony before the SCC, an organization created by Congress to investigate the wartime claims of Southern Unionists, John explained his close relationship with William. “Mr. Walker and myself lived right near to each other and were more or less together every day (I used to see him every morning; or every evening since he was a boy.)” John also informed the Commission of his own legal status, “I was a slave raised man until I was 25 years old, and commenced getting my liberty about 6 or 7 years before the war.” He “came by” his freedom via “emancipation.” John also had a good sense of humor. When SCC counsel asked if he was a colored man, he replied, “I don’t know whether I am colored or not, but my wife is as black as my hat.”⁷

Jackson appeared in Fairfax County in the 1850 U.S. Census as a free man so his timing may have been off. Regardless, if he and William lived near one another, there’s a good chance John resided just over the border in Fairfax County.

A year after deeding property to John Jackson, Walker sold three acres of the Pimmit tract to African Americans, George and Eugina/Jane Carter, past neighbors of John in Fairfax County.⁸ On the 1850 census, their households appear very close to one another. John possibly introduced George and Eugenia to William Walker.

Born free, George Carter in August of 1835 registered as a free Negro in Fairfax County. His registration entry described George as “five feet seven and an half inches high, about twenty one years of age, a dark mulatto with a pleasing countenance, large nose and mouth, several scars on the right corner of his mouth, a scar on the back part of the fore finger near the end, no perceivable marks or scars – is a free man of colour born free.”⁹

Several other families moved to The Bottom before the Civil War. Luke and Hanah Carter lived there with Hanah’s children from a previous marriage. They appeared on the 1860 U.S. Census residing very close to the Jackson brothers and George and Eugina Carter. Luke, a DC slave, had run away from his owner, Allison Nailor. With Hanah’s help, he eventually paid Nailor for his manumission. Hanah was born free. According to Luke’s SCC testimony, Hanah purchased two acres of land from Elizabeth and John Bowen in the Pimmit Run tract. Luke stated, “[My land] run[s] between two branches...it was a vacant lot bought from a man named Mr. Bowen and I fenced it along the public road (Old Little Falls Road).” No record of a deed between the Bowens and Hanah exists. In 1879, Luke and Hanah officially purchased their two acres in The Bottom from our old friend William Walker, not the Bowens.¹⁰ (Fig. 3, page 9, 1879 plat of the Carter’s land).

Hanah might have initiated her land purchase with the Bowen's. By the time she had saved enough for a final payment, Walker owned the property. As with other free African Americans, a lease purchase type of arrangement was made with income from the land worked funneled towards a final payoff. Full title would then transfer. Historian Curtis Vaughn discussed informal land transfers like this and how they may have reflected a personal relationship between African American buyers and white sellers. Buyers trusted that title would be officially transferred or "vested" after final payment.¹¹

Why did William Walker, a white southerner, sell property to colored men and women four years before the outbreak of the Civil War? This property transfer occurred earlier than similar sales recorded in most other black communities in the area. Without additional information, one can only speculate. His friendship and regard for John Jackson may have been one reason. Did their relationship help him see blacks in a more enlightened manner than others of his time? Walker's ties to the Methodist faith may also have affected his willingness to sell acreage to blacks. The religion often looked unfavorably upon slavery. Perhaps the condition of the land at The Bottom impacted his ability to sell it to whites. It was heavily wooded and hilly, Pimmit Run flooded periodically.

Several other free black families rented in the Pimmit Run area. John and Allen Honesty's families called The Bottom home in the 1850s and 1860s before leaving the region. During the Civil War, William Vaughn, a good friend of Luke Carter's, worked a piece of land two farms away from Carter. Luke's brother William lived with or near his brother. In 1862, James S. Hyson, George Carter's son-in-law, resided in The Bottom despite the fact that he rented property in another part of Alexandria County.¹²

On the Fairfax side, Elizabeth and George Honesty lodged with the Eskridge family and Harriet Brice and her children lived on a half-acre plot bounded by Pimmit Run, John and Lydia Waggaman's farm, and part of Gilbert Vanderwerken's vast holdings. In 1865, she officially purchased the parcel from the Waggaman's.¹³

Poor and hardworking, the families of The Bottom faced constant discrimination. The labor of the entire family – often extended as well – was essential if the clan hoped to purchase and cultivate their land.¹⁴ A wide range of ages often existed in families, many consisting of four or more children and even grandchildren. In 1860, Hanah Carter's household was composed of eighteen and twenty-year-old daughters, ten and six-year-old sons, and a baby. Residents grew crops on their smallholdings including staples like corn, potatoes, wheat, and rye. Outside mostly spare shanties, they tended kitchen gardens and small apple orchards and raised livestock.

To bring in additional income, some of the men and women of The Bottom performed menial jobs for their white neighbors. The men competed with German and Irish immigrants as well as hired slaves for jobs as field hands and laborers. A few, like William Vaugh, worked in the stone quarries along the Potomac. The women often took in laundry or found employment as domestic servants.

In the 1850s, the majority of African Americans in Alexandria County were free.

Though slaves outnumbered free blacks in Fairfax, former slaves were legally required to leave the county a year after emancipation. Though loosely enforced, the law may have been the initial impetus for John Jackson's move from Fairfax to Alexandria. In both jurisdictions, slavery was declining as large plantations gave way to smaller family farms.¹⁵

Clear trends appear in the stories of The Bottom's free African American families. Many originally lived in Fairfax County and moved to Alexandria either before or right around the time of the Civil War. Neighbors in Fairfax, they may have been enslaved together before gaining freedom and chose to live near one another. Perhaps they followed their friend John Jackson to Alexandria or had heard that William Walker was willing to sell land to free blacks. Whether leasers or owners, they found relative safety in numbers and in the secluded, timber-lined hollow of The Bottom.

Civil War

The isolation of the Bottom ended during the Civil War. In September of 1861, Union forces built Fort Marcy on the hill to the north of Pimmit Run and Fort Ethan Allen to the south at the crest of what is now Military Road. So close was the Bottom to these fortifications that one resident claimed, "You [could] talk loud enough by [Luke Carter's] to hear it in the Fort."¹⁶ (Fig. 4, page 13, Map of fortifications near The Bottom.) Rifle trenches were cut through the land to connect the forts, perhaps through the farms in The Bottom. The area was largely deforested and many homes destroyed. In March of 1862, a 10th Mass Infantry soldier wrote of the area around the forts, "Not a fence or rail to be seen, everything burned up for fuel, and only a few dwellings, and these of very poor class."¹⁷

Though not shown on official Civil War maps, The Bottom appears on a map drawn by Union soldier, E.L. Halsey detailing the encampment of his regiment, the 127th NY Volunteers, in the vicinity of Forts Marcy and Ethan Allen (Fig. 5, page 14, E.L. Halsey map). The map was created in October of 1862, a month after the disastrous loss by the Yankees at the Second Battle of Manassas and the retreat of Major General Franz Sigel's 9,800 strong First Corp

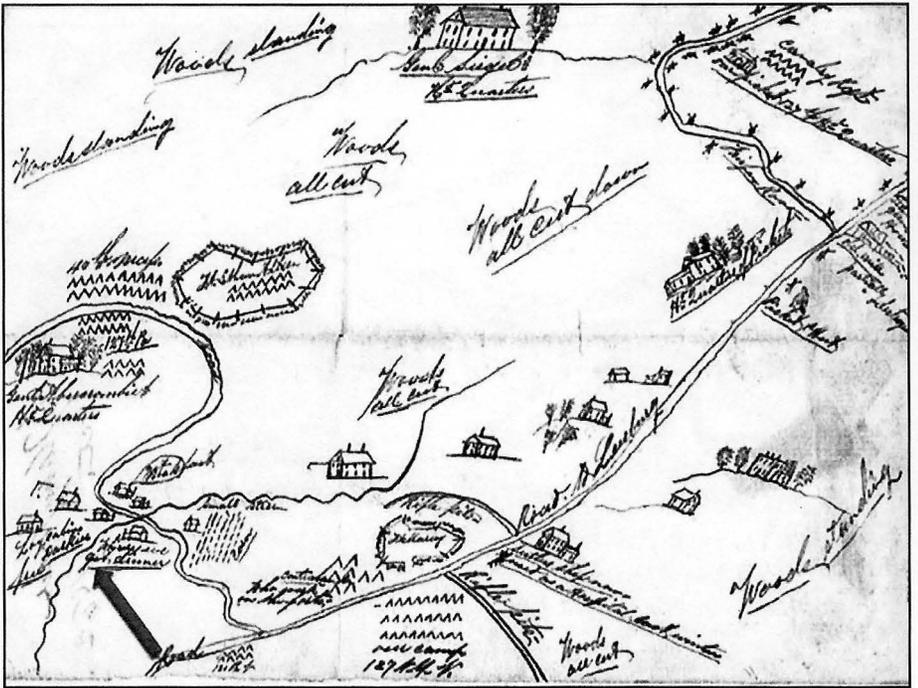


Library of Congress

Figure 4: The Bottom between Forts Eathan Allen and Marcy.

to the Chain Bridge region. The Bottom lay where the “small stream” met the “road” between the two forts amongst a scattering of homes. Halsey labeled them, “Log cabins, darkies, free.” He documented where he received breakfast and dinner amongst the “darkies” and where one family was growing corn.

Though not drawn to scale, Halsey’s map provides wonderful information. It shows which regiments were encamped around Forts Marcy and Ethan Allen, where woodlands had been cut or preserved, the location of pickets, and the general’s headquarters. Halsey labeled an encampment of contraband “who work on the forts” on the Fairfax side of Pimmit Run, close to the Road



Railsplitters.com

Figure 5: E.L. Halsey 1862 Map of Union Encampments.

to Leesburg. It would be fascinating to know if the families of the Bottom befriended them.

The presence of the Union army provided entrepreneurial opportunity for the families. Luke Carter helped build Forts Marcy and Ethan Allen and would have received good wages.¹⁸ Other men of the Bottom must have worked on the fortifications as well. If soldiers ate at the homes of residents, as the map indicates, they likely paid for their meals. Families sold baked goods at the forts and women could provide washing and ironing services.¹⁹

Spencer Hyson, a free African American and long-time laborer for John Waggaman, ran Waggaman's farm during much of the war. In September of 1861, Waggaman and his family fled to Washington. Union troops ravaged much of his farm, confiscating hay, corn, potatoes and more. They cut down 25-30 acres of woodland and left it to rot. Hyson employed a team of workers to haul the abandoned timber to soldiers for fuel and building supplies. In an SCC deposition for John Waggaman's claim, Hyson described his activities in 1862, "I was hauling pretty much all winter. I did not haul every day, but 2-3 days during the week."²⁰

Unfortunately, the Yankee occupation brought more mayhem than prosperity to The Bottom. Union soldiers moved freely through the woods and valley between Forts Ethan Allen and Marcy. They used Pimmit Run as their personal washroom and laundromat. They wandered through the properties of the various families in The Bottom and ate at their homes. The encamped soldiers hounded Luke and Hanah Carter's household. Through Luke's 1877 SCC testimony, their interactions are well documented. Luke testified: "The Union army took [my fence] and burned it up...They had the commissary right in my yard...[They] made their cook houses and places right alongside the apple trees." The troops took down Carter's "little shanty" to use for fuel and stole his farm horse. Carter also sharecropped outside of The Bottom and had most of his potatoes, corn and cabbages stolen by Union soldiers.²¹

Most soldiers felt contempt for African Americans. They often used the racially pejorative term "darkey" to describe them. In its regimental history, a soldier from the 4th New York Heavy Artillery, stationed at Fort Marcy, remarked, "Having fun with the darkeys was one means of amusement." Many stereotyped these African American men and women to be ignorant, lazy, and lacking in morals and felt free to harass them at will.²²

Despite this overt racism, the skin color of families of The Bottom branded them as Union supporters. This may have afforded them a slight measure of safety their native white neighbors lacked. They were generally not suspected of being secessionists or spies.

Of the individuals living in the hollow, Luke Carter, Sanford Williams, and James Hyson were the only ones to risk seeking compensation for their losses through the SCC. (Hyson lived in the Pimmit area in 1862, but claimed restitution for crops he farmed elsewhere.)²³ Regrettably, the National Archives lost Sanford Williams' claim. Luke Carter was second-guessed and treated with condescension throughout his painful SCC testimony. Providing evidence in front of a cynical all white court must have been intimidating. Luke claimed around \$2,000 worth of losses, but received only \$33 as recompense, a pittance (Fig. 6, page 16, SCC claim settlement for Luke Carter.) Few SCC petitioners received just compensation, but Luke's case seems egregious. Officials wrote of his request, "It is rare that a claim has come under our observation as grossly exaggerated as this...Carter...fails...to make it reasonably certain that any considerable amount of property was taken for army use."²⁴

Luke's neighbor William Vaugh also received heavy-handed treatment while testifying in Carter's case. When asked about Carter's stolen horse Vaugh stated, "It was a bay horse in tolerable good order. It was a good looking horse... [worth] \$50 to \$70." The attorney responded to Vaugh, "It was a poorish horse, wasn't it?" Vaugh changed his tune, "Yes sir..."²⁵

Reconstruction and Recovery

The Civil War ended in the spring of 1865, but it took years for Northern Virginians to overcome the destruction and dislocation it caused. For families in The Bottom, slavery's demise must have brought great joy, but a dose of fear and many questions. Soldiers had left Forts Marcy and Ethan Allen and no longer harassed them, but would relations with neighboring white communities improve or worsen? Was the promise of equality real? On a practical level, could they afford to rebuild their farms and feed and educate their families? Would their newly freed brethren overrun the area eating up resources and jobs?

The population in The Bottom rose significantly after the war. By 1880, at least sixteen families resided there. That number eventually reached around twenty. Both Henry and John Jackson's families expanded quickly during the 1860s, adding eleven additional residents. The number of Carters increased as well. Two of Hanah's daughters, Harriet Turner (Bowles) and Sarah Turner (Gray), married during the war and started families as did her son, William H. Boston. In all 30 individuals related to Hanah and Luke lived on their two acres. As Hanah and Luke's situation illustrated, friends and relatives, faced with limited housing options, economic hardship, and new social proscriptions, needed to band together.

Many newcomers settled in The Bottom during this period on the Alexandria and Fairfax sides of Pimmit Run (See Appendix at the end of this article: Chart of landowners and renters). Renters made up the majority. The multi-generational Generals, were an exception. They farmed near,

A handwritten document from the Southern Claims Commission. At the top, it reads "Claim No. 48630" and "Sett. No. 5174". The name "Luke Carter" is written in large cursive. Below that, the amount "\$ 33.00" is written, followed by "Due" and a checkmark. The text continues: "OUT OF THE APPROPRIATION FOR 'Claims of Loyal Citizens for Supplies furnished during the Rebellion.' For amount allowed by the Southern Claims Commission." Below this, it says "Reported July 18, 1878" and "Returned ' 20, 1878". At the bottom, it reads "Requisition No. 8767, dated July 22, 1878, transmitted for Warrant July 27, 1878". There are several initials and a signature at the bottom right.

Ancestry.com

Figure 6: Southern Claims Commission for Luke Carter, July 1878 Encampments.

though not within The Bottom. In 1873, John Waggaman sold several acres to Joseph and Mary. Waggaman, like William Walker, facilitated the ownership of land by black families.²⁶

During Reconstruction, several other black communities, larger than The Bottom, took root in Fairfax County. Closest were Lincolntonville and Odrick's Corner. Progressives, General John S. Crocker and his brother Henry, were among the few whites in the area willing to sell land to freed slaves. In what is now Chesterbrook, they offered plots along Kirby Road between Church Road and Potomac Hills. The community was called Lincolntonville. The Crocker and Gunnell families also sold land to blacks outside of Lewinsville along Spring Hill Road. African American Alfred E. Odrick donated a portion of his land to build a schoolhouse. The area became known as Odrick's Corner. In all, General Crocker granted over 60 parcels of land to blacks in Fairfax County.²⁷

African American farm laborers began renting property in Alexandria County's Halls Hill area during and after the Civil War. Bounded by Lee Highway, George Mason Street and Glebe Road, the neighborhood took its name from Basil Hall, the owner of the land. Hall did not fit the progressive white model. A former slave owner with a long history of mistreating his chattel, he was motivated to sell to blacks in the early 1880s by economic necessity. Previous attempts to sell his entire plantation to white buyers had failed. Halls Hill flourished as an African American community.²⁸

Whether humanitarian or economic motivation prompted the sale of land to blacks, land ownership was extremely important to African American families in The Bottom and beyond. Many had deep agricultural roots in Alexandria and Fairfax and wanted to remain. Land meant independence and the ability to sustain their families. With it, they controlled their own time and labor. They sacrificed a great deal to buy it and worked hard to keep it. The men and women of The Bottom who owned their property had one-step up on the average freedman who lacked the psychological and physical security ownership brought. Renters of The Bottom gained from living in an ethnically and politically aligned community.

For the families of The Bottom, especially renters, full economic autonomy from whites was probably elusive. Residents grew crops on home plots and raised chicken, swine, and dairy cows, but given the very small acreage of their homesteads and the burgeoning population in The Bottom, many needed to work on larger farms (owned by white families) to make ends meet. The demand for labor had increased since the war, but jobs available to blacks remained largely unskilled.²⁹ On the 1870 census, almost all of the Alexandria men were laborers or farm hands. The women were mostly domestic servants and laundresses.

The story of William H. Boston, Hanah Carter's son by a white father, shows how one family made ends meet. In the 1870s, William and his daughter Ida lived on Hanah and Luke's property in The Bottom. In the 1880s, he and his second wife Henrietta, rented a home from William Ball on the Georgetown Pike in Fairfax County. Due to the Ball's financial problems, the Boston's were able to buy fifteen acres of the Ball farm. While cultivating their land, the Boston's worked several other jobs. Henrietta cooked for neighboring white families and William quarried stone on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Washington.³⁰

Like William Boston, several men of The Bottom toiled in the nearby stone quarries that lined the Potomac River from Pimmit to Spout Run. From 1867 to 1894, Gilbert Vanderwerken owned the Potomac Blue Stone Quarry Company. Samuel Eskridge and Andrew Brice, Harriet's son, most likely quarried for him. This work could be extremely dangerous. Using hand drills, sledgehammers, and explosives, they removed stone from the Potomac cliffs and loaded it onto barges headed to Washington. St. Elizabeth's Hospital and the Healy Building at Georgetown University were built using this well-known stone.³¹

According to the 1870 and 1880 censuses, most women of The Bottom stayed "at-home" or were "keeping house." In a post-slavery world, the ability for colored women to work at home and not for white families was an important political statement. A few families needing additional income sent their wives out as domestic servants or nannies. Wife and mother, Georgiana Hammiltree (sometimes Hammontree) resorted to this work. More commonly, unmarried daughters, such as Ellen Jackson, became servants in the homes of white families.

Around 1871, the dream of public education for the children of The Bottom became a reality. The Sumner school for black students opened its doors to residents of the Washington District of Alexandria, in which The Bottom was located. By 1872, the school moved to the Odd Fellows Hall on Hall's Hill. By mid-decade, there were 50-60 students, studying reading, spelling and geography. The three-mile walk to Hall's Hill was long, but undoubtedly worth it. For Fairfax County children, Lincolnville and Odrick's Corner housed colored schools, the former being around two and a half miles from The Bottom.³²

Religion played an important role in the lives of African Americans and must have been essential to many in The Bottom. Unfortunately, no documentary evidence exists on the presence of a church in the community. Calloway Methodist Church in Halls Hill and the First Baptist Church of Chesterbrook in Lincolnville were the closest black churches. Historian Eleanor Templeman found evidence of an African American cemetery on the outskirts of The Bottom in the 1960s, but its exact location remains a mystery.

Post-Reconstruction-1900

In the late 1870s and 1880s, signs of change began to appear in Alexandria County (Fig. 7, page 19, The Bottom in the 1878 Hopkins map of Alexandria). Most importantly, railroad lines began emerging connecting Washington and Alexandria City to Alexandria County. Small communities began to grow around railroad depots, increasing the population in the county and beginning the suburbanization process. The railroad lines lay to the west of the Village of Walker Chapel and The Bottom, which remained largely agricultural.

The remoteness of the region appealed to Washingtonians hoping to buy or build summer homes in the county. On sizable tracts near Walker Chapel, the wealthy Nelson family built “The Hill,” Gustav Dittmar constructed “Dittmar House,” and William Roberts erected “Glenmore.” Many others followed suit over the next few decades.

White Washingtonians began buying property within The Bottom as well, though they refrained from building fancy estates. In 1884, George F. Honesty, in debt to Charles Newbold, a white businessman from Washington, D.C., transferred ownership of his land to Newbold. There’s no indication that Newbold lived there, though his family held title for decades. He probably rented the land to African Americans. At the time of sale, Newbold agreed to transfer a portion of the Honesty property to the Metropolitan Western Railroad Company. The company never ran a line through the sector.³³



Library of Congress

Figure 7: GM Hopkins Map of Alexandria County, 1878. Top left arrow points out The Bottom.

In 1887, Harriet Hyson, the daughter of George and Eugenia Carter, inherited the family farm. She and her husband, living in the Nauck area of Arlington, sold their acreage to Edgar Fewkes of Washington, D.C. According to the 1880 census, Fewkes was a rag dealer, not a wealthy man. Whether Fewkes rented the land or maintained a summer residence is unclear.³⁴ In 1896, real estate investor, Leopold Luchs, bought Sanford William's land at a public auction. Sanford's inability to pay his state and county taxes resulted in the forced sale of his property.³⁵ Luchs owned property just west of The Bottom. For the first time, but not the last, a land speculator made inroads into the hollow.

Between 1880 and 1900, the beginning of Jim Crow, the population of The Bottom began to change. Hanah Carter's offspring and their families spread across the region to Washington, D.C., Falls Church, and Langley. Others families of The Bottom moved to solidly African American parts of Alexandria and Fairfax. Those migrating to the District were able to take advantage of more plentiful, and sometimes better job opportunities. They found excellent black schools, possibly the best in the country.³⁶

Some Bottom residents probably commuted to Washington for work. The area's close proximity to Chain Bridge made this possible. Richard Hyson, Albert's son, worked as a laborer at the US Navy Yard. Jobs with the government offered stability and higher wages than colored men and women could find in private employment, though the latter were mostly closed to blacks.

By 1900, far fewer colored families remained in The Bottom and many of the original residents had passed away including John Jackson, Spencer Hyson, Harriet Brice, and Hanah and Luke Carter. John Jackson was the only old timer to leave a will. In it, he devised his property to his wife, Anne, during her lifetime and to his son, Benjamin Francis, upon her death.³⁷ In 1889, Spencer Hyson died intestate. He had many children, but only his brother, Albert Hyson, was living in The Bottom.

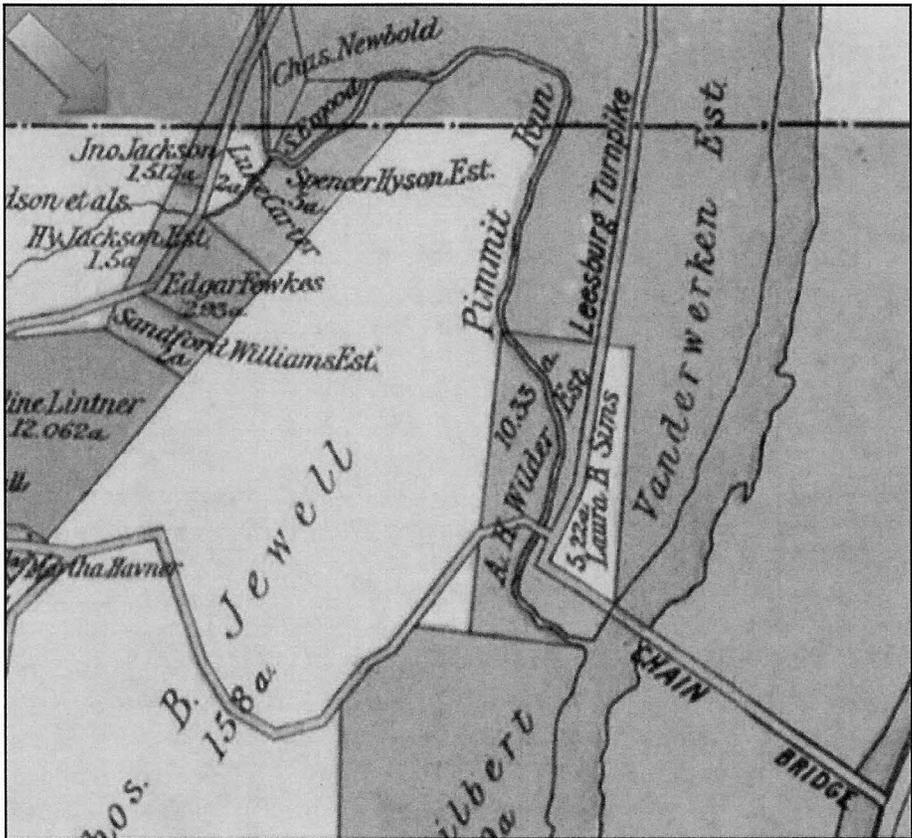
Suburbanization and Segregation

The turn of the century ushered in a period of substantial growth to Alexandria and Fairfax Counties. Despite the fact that running water and electric lights remained rare, white families flowed into the region. Mass transit lines such as the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad made their commute to jobs in the District easy and affordable. To provide housing for these newcomers, a growing number of real estate developers invaded the counties, buying farmland and subdividing it for residential use.

As the white population grew, increased racial discrimination and segregation took hold. Beginning in 1902, local Democrats began enforcing a poll tax to "improve the quality and character of the voter," a euphemism for

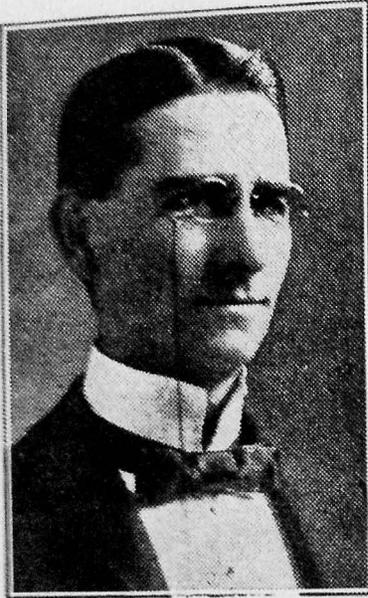
limiting the voting rights of blacks. Anti-black housing covenants made their ugly appearance, barring “any person not of the Caucasian race,” aka African Americans, from purchasing land or homes in “white” subdivisions. After 1919, areas near The Bottom like Walker Chapel and parts of Chain Bridge Heights became off limits to blacks.³⁸

The neglect of infrastructure in black communities and the severe underfunding of black schools also caused a great deal of damage to African Americans. Specifically impacting The Bottom was the abandonment of the road to Pimmit Run Bridge, which led from Walker Chapel down the west side of The Bottom. Instead, the county built a new route using Chain Bridge Hill (now Glebe Rd to Chain Bridge), circumventing the community.³⁹ The establishment of a regional KKK headquarters in Ballston, only a few miles from The Bottom, also portended trouble.



Library of Congress

Figure 8: Property Map of the Bottom, 1900.



CHARLES I. SIMMS

Among the enterprising young lawyers of Alexandria County Virginia, Mr. Charles I. Simms stands with the foremost in his profession. Mr. Simms was born in Portsmouth, Va., thirty-seven years ago. Locating at Glencarlyn, in Alexandria County, in 1894, he immediately exerted an active interest in the political and economic affairs of the County, being particularly active in the crusade against gambling and the illegal liquor traffic which flourished uncontested at that time. Besides practicing law in Alexandria County and Washington City, Mr. Simms handles a line of the choicest suburban properties to be had around Washington, and he has been instrumental in bringing to the County some of its leading citizens of to-day. He is President of the Glencarlyn Village Improvement Society, and under his guidance this beautiful suburban village has taken on a new lease of life.

Crandall Mackey, A Brief History of Alexandria County, Virginia

Figure 9: Charles I. Simms, Investor and Real Estate Developer, 1907.

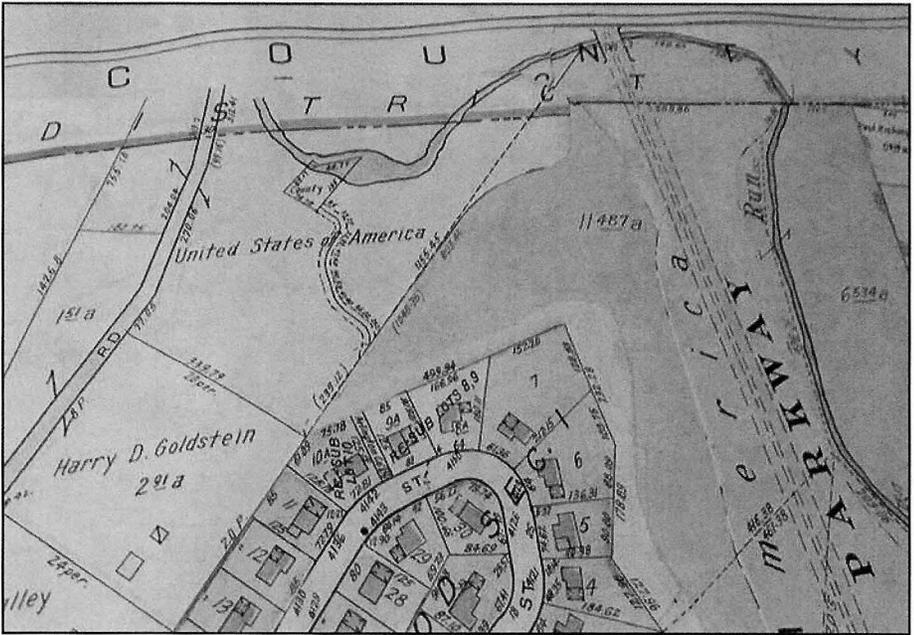
Throughout Alexandria and Fairfax Counties, white in-migration and institutional injustice slowly destroyed black communities.³⁹ The Bottom was on a similar trajectory. Throughout the early 1900s, the enclave remained intact though less populated (Fig. 8, page 22, The Bottom on Strum's map of Alexandria County, 1900.) The will to hold onto the land ran strong among long-time owners. Usually one of their children remained on the farm when an old-timer passed. Amelia Robison (sometimes Robinson), daughter of Henry Jackson, and Horace Carter, son of Luke and Hanah, bought out their sibling's rights to the land when their parent's died. Luke and his wife Isabel ran into financial difficulties and had to use the homestead as collateral. In 1907, unable to pay back a second loan, the property was sold at auction to a local developer. Robison, a widow with six children, lived in the Pimmit Run area, working as a laundress for most of her life. Around 1919, Robison moved to Nauck, but retained ownership of the family land. In her will, she devised "my old home property located in what is commonly called "The Bottom" near Walker's Chapel," to

On the Fairfax side of The Bottom, the Hamiltree and Brice descendants still cultivated their land. Old-time renters such as Caroline Evens, now widowed, remained on her property with four grandchildren.

Newcomers to The Bottom were generally renters such as Civil War veteran Paschal Carter and family and “bluestone quarryman,” Zach Nester, wife Rachel, and five children. They appeared on the 1900 census, but had moved by the next enumeration.

The End

From 1896 on, when Leopold Luchs purchased Sanford William’s acreage, developers and speculators sought out land in The Bottom. In 1910, real estate investor Charles I. Simms, bought Luke and Hanah Carter’s land from Horace (Fig. 9, page 22, Photograph of Charles I. Simms). In 1919, John Jackson’s daughter, Ellen Brice, sold her land to investor Ransom Edmonson.⁴³ The Hyson and Robinson families held their land for as long as possible, but the trend continued. Slowly, developers and speculators, hoping to turn a nice profit, purchased all the old homesteads (Fig. 10, page 23, Map showing investor ownership of The Bottom).



Plat Book of Arlington County, Virginia, 1964
Figure 11: Map showing US Government Ownership of The Bottom.

Plans to develop The Bottom never reached fruition. In 1930, Congress approved the development of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, a park and scenic highway along the banks of the Potomac from Mt. Vernon to Great Falls in Virginia and Fort Washington to Great Falls in Maryland. The proposed route in Virginia ran through the Pimmit Run area.

Despite the lack of historical writings on *The Bottom*; land and probate records, the census, small newspaper articles, soldier's drawings, and SCC documents provide a tiny window into its existence and the lives of its residents.

Investors continued to amass land in the valley, knowing they would cash in via the government. By 1953, The Bottom was entirely owned by real estate investors, Samuel Goldberg and Percy and Clarence Talley. In 1959, the U.S. Government, utilizing eminent domain, purchased the area from the men.⁴⁴ (Fig. 11, page 24, Map showing U.S. Government ownership of The Bottom)

Conclusion

In 1857, when John Jackson bought three acres of woodland from William Walker, he founded an African American community that would provide safety and sustenance for its residents for decades. A former slave, Jackson knew that land often held the key to self-reliance. He could not control the hostile white society around him, but he could now feed and shelter his growing family and possibly save for the future. Renters in The Bottom had less economic self-sufficiency than John, but retained the benefits of a small, tight knit community.

Despite the lack of historical writings on The Bottom; land and probate records, the census, small newspaper articles, soldier's drawings, and SCC documents provide a tiny window into its existence and the lives of its residents. The Bottom, one of the oldest free black enclaves in the area, teemed with life and purpose. Though small, it harbored Jackson and its other families during times of great change - from the Civil War through Reconstruction and the beginnings of segregation. As with several other African communities in Alexandria/Arlington and Fairfax Counties, it could not withstand the incredible growth and suburbanization of the region. Segregation and institutional racism eventually coerced residents of The Bottom into specific African American neighborhoods in Arlington and beyond. In the end, the Federal Government, always relevant to the Arlington story, became the owner of most of the area as it claimed the land to create a commuter parkway.

In many ways, the story of The Bottom is a microcosm of Arlington's. The complicated forces shaping the small community from 1850-1950 were also at work molding the rest of the county.

Despite the noisy overpass, most of The Bottom remains undeveloped today because of the construction of the George Washington Parkway. Follow the Pimmit Run Trail northwest of Chain Bridge and let the contours of the land and the peaceful flow of the stream remind you of a once forgotten community (Fig. 12 page 26 , The Bottom today).

About the Author

Jessica Kaplan is a lapsed archivist and 27-year resident of Arlington. She lives in a farmhouse build by Will Marcy in 1904, located near Marcey Lane in north Arlington, above Pimmit Run. Walks along the Pimmit Run Trail and discoveries in the archives about the people who once lived there peaked her interest in the subject matter of this article.



Figure 12: Photograph of The Bottom today.

Courtesy of Jessica Kaplan

Appendix

Black and White Land Owners and Renters in The Bottom 1850s – 1950s

By Household Heads

1850s

John and Delilah Jackson
Henry Jackson
Hanah Turner**
George & Eugina Carter
Sanford Williams**

1880s

John & Eliza Jackson
Henry & Jane Jackson
Hanah & Luke Carter
George Carter
Sanford Williams
Spencer Hyson
S. Esgood
Harriet Brice
Mary Generals
Rezin & Margaret Generals
George F. Honesty

Black Land Owners

1860s

Henry & Jane Jackson
Hanah & Luke Carter**
George & Eugina Carter
Sanford Williams**
Spencer & Matilda Hyson**
Harriet Brice

1890s

Heirs of John Jackson
Heirs of Henry Jackson
Luke Carter
Albert and Pleasana Hyson
S. Esgood
Harriet Brice
Heirs of Joseph Generals
Margaret Generals
Sanford Williams

1870s

John & Eliza Jackson
Henry & Jane Jackson
Hanah & Luke Carter
George & Eugina Carter
Sanford Williams
Spencer Hyson**
George F. Honesty
S. Esgood*
Harriet Brice
Joseph & Mary Generals
Rezin & Margaret Generals

1900s

Ellen Jackson Brice,
Frank Jackson
Amelia Jackson Robinson
Horace and Isabell Carter
Albert and Pleasana Hyson
S. Esgood
Heirs of Harriet Brice
John and Sarah Gray*

*Unclear exactly when land was purchased

**Lease purchase process

Black and White Land Owners and Renters in The Bottom 1850s – 1950s

By Household Heads

1910s

Ellen Jackson Brice,
Frank Jackson
Albert & Richard Hyson
Andrew & Alice Harris
Jerry & Georgiana
Hammiltree*
Isaiah & Mary Carter

1940s

Richard Hyson

By Household Heads

1850s

Elizabeth & John
Bowen
William J. Walker
John & Lydia
Waggaman

1880s

Charles Newbold
Edgar & Susan Fewkes
William J. Walker

1910s

Heirs of Charles
Newbold
Charles I. Simms
Ransom Edmonson
Susan Fewkes

1940s

Talley Family
Samuel Goldberg
Robert CHECK

Black Land Owners

1920s

Richard Hyson
Jerry Hammiltree
Mary Carter

1950s

Mary Agnes Hyson

White Land Owners

1860s

William J. Walker
John & Lydia
Waggaman

1890s

Charles Newbold
Leopold Luchs
Susan Fewkes

1920s

Heirs of Charles
Newbold
William Edmonson
Susan Fewkes White

1950s

Percy Talley
Samuel Goldberg

1930s

Richard Hyson
Jerry Hammiltree
Mary Carter

1870s

William J. Walker
John & Lydia
Waggaman

1900s

Charles Newbold
Susan Fewkes
Leopold Luchs

1930s

Claude N. Norton
Talley Family
Susan Fewkes White
William Edmonson
Samuel Goldberg

Land Ownership By Decade

	African American Households	White Households
1850s	5	3
1860s	7	2
1870s	11	2
1880s	11	3
1890s	9	3
1900s	7	3
1910s	5	4
1920s	3	3
1930s	3	5
1940s	1	3
1950s	1	2

Renters in The Bottom

By Household Heads

1850s

(no census available)

1860s

Elizabeth Honesty
 Harriet Brice
 William Vaugh
 James Hyson
 Allen Honesty
 Willie & Lovinia Carter

1870s

Samuel & Sarah
 Eskridge
 Jerry & Georgiana
 Hammiltree
 Maria Haydock
 John & Mary Honesty
 Alfred & Amy Lewis
 Willie & Lovinia
 Carter
 John & Caroline Evens
 John & Sarah Gray
 Tecumsah & Lydia
 Milner

Renters in The Bottom

By Household Heads

1880s

Samuel & Sarah
Eskridge
Jerry & Georgiana
Hammiltree
Maria Haydock
John & Mary Honesty
Alfred & Amy Lewis
Willie & Lovinia Carter
Washington & Harriet
Watts
Patrick & Margaret
Reed
John & Sarah Gray
John H Jones
John Williams
Thomas Shipman

1890s

(no census available)

1900s

Paschal & Margaret
Carter
Sampson & Mary Carter
Zach & Rachael Nester
Henry & Serena Jones
Benjamin & Sarah
Roberson
Franklin & Sarah Gay-
lon
Charles Jones
James Roberson
Caroline Evens

Sources

¹ Eleanor Lee Templeman Papers, Series I: Cemeteries and Other Destroyed Sites, Center for Local History, Arlington Central Library.

² Arlington County Probate Records, Last Will and Testament of Amelia Robison, April 8, 1929.

³ The Rambler, *Washington Star*, Part IV, Vol 1, The Public Library, Washington, DC. August 9, 1914, p. 119.

⁴ Arlington County Land Records, "Elizabeth and John Bowen to William Walker, October 17, 1854, Liber Q37, Folio 304 and *Walker Chapel United Methodist Church*. [S.I.: s.n, 1970, p. 3.

⁵ *Walker Chapel United Methodist Church*, p. 3-4.

⁶ Arlington County Land Records, "William Walker to Jno Jackson," Feb. 16, 1857, L3Q-T7, F306 and "John Jackson to Henry Jackson," Feb. 17, 1857, LQ-T3, F 307-308.

⁷ Ancestry.com, *U.S. Southern Claims Commission Allowed Claims, 1871-1880*, <https://www.ancestry.com>, Accessed December 2016. Original: *Southern Claims Commission Approved Claims, 1871-1880*: Virginia, Microfilm Publication M2094, 45 rolls, Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 217; National Archives and Records Administration, File #11436, William Walker, March 4, 1875, pp. 41-42. I tried to find the owner of John, but was unable to do so.

⁸ Arlington County Land Records, "William Walker to George Carter, September 23, 1858, Liber 3Q-T7,

Folio 565.

⁹ Donald Sweig, *Registration of Free Negroes Commencing Sept Court 1822 and Register of Free Blacks 1835*, History Section Office of Comprehensive Planning, Fairfax Co., 1977, p. 107.

¹⁰ Ancestry.com, File #11573, Luke Carter, pp. 1-2. Arlington County Land Records, William Walker to Luke Carter, November 13, 1879, Liber J4, Folio 568.

¹¹ Curtis Vaughn, *Freedom is Not Enough: African Americans in Antebellum Fairfax County*, PhD Dissertation, George Mason University, 2014, p. 175 and Nan Netherton, *Fairfax County, Virginia: A History*, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1992, p. 455. Though not the case with Hanah, it was not uncommon for deeds to be lost or left unrecorded during this time period. Many poor blacks couldn't afford the trip to the courthouse to file their deed or the fees involved so never formalized their deeds. In the process, their documentation was lost.

¹² Ancestry.com. 1850 and 1860 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com, 2010. Luke Carter, SCC, #11573, Testimony of William Vaugh, p. 33-34. James Hyson, SCC, #20754, p. 450. James was married to Harriet Hyson, whose father, George Carter, owned property in The Bottom. He moved to The Bottom during the war, but did not remain afterwards.

¹³ Fairfax County Land Records, "John and Lydia Waggaman to Harriet Brice, October 5, 1865, Liber F4, Folio 80.

¹³ Vaughn, pp. 124-125.

¹⁴ C.B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia: A History*, (Arlington, VA: Arlington Historical Society), 1976, p. 87. Rose provides statistics on the number of free and enslaved African Americans. William Jebe Immel, *The Destruction of Slavery in Northeastern Virginia*. Master's Thesis, George Mason University, Fall, 1994.

¹⁵ Luke Carter, SCC, #11573, Testimony of William Vaugh, p. 34.

¹⁶ Captain Joseph Keith Newell, ed., "Ours," *Annals of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry*, Springfield: C.A. Nichols & Co., 1875, p. 73.

¹⁷ Luke Carter, SCC, p. 17.

¹⁸ Franklin McGrath, ed., *History of the 127th New York Volunteers, "Monitors," in the War for the Preservation of the Union, September 8th, 1862 – June 30th, 1865*. [n.p., 1898, p. 19. Soldiers from the 127th NY Volunteers bought "what was beginning to be regarded as delicacies from the colored folks and country people who were allowed to approach and sell across the camp guard line."

¹⁹ John H. Waggaman, SCC, #36705, pp. 52-60.

²⁰ Luke Carter, SCC, pp. 14-29.

²¹ Hyland Clare Kirk, *Heavy Guns and Light: A History of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery*, (New York: C.T. Dillingham), 1890, p. 78. On stereotypes: Jonathan R. Dols, *Yankees and Secesh: Civil-Military Relations in Alexandria, Virginia and New Orleans, Louisiana*, Master's Thesis, Wake Forest University, 1995, pp. 72, 80.

²² *Alexandria Gazette*, March 6, 1873, p. 2.

²³ Carter, SCC, p. 11. Levi Jones, another black petitioner from Alexandria County, #12805, also faced harsh treatment by SCC officials. He petitioned for \$2580 and was awarded \$183.

²⁴ Luke Carter, SCC, p. 37.

²⁵ United States Census Records, 1870, <http://ancestry.com>. I found the names of many residents of The Bottom in the census, though not all. For the Generals' land purchase, Fairfax County Land Records, "John H. Waggaman to Joseph Generals," May 28, 1873, Liber B5, Folio 360.

²⁶ Andrew M.D. Wolf, *Black Settlement in Fairfax County, Virginia During Reconstruction*, December 1975.

²⁷ John Paul Liebertz, *A Guide to African American Heritage of Arlington County, Virginia*, Department of

Community Planning, Housing and Development of Historic Preservation Program, 2016, pp. 12-22.

²⁸Netherton, p. 448.

²⁹Wolf, pp. 67-69. Henrietta was also a midwife for local black women.

³⁰Charles V. Grunwell, "Blue Stone from the Hills," in the *Washington Star*, Sunday Magazine, January 30, 1966, pp. 10-12.

³¹Liebertz, p. 20 and Wolf, pp. 21-22.

³²Arlington County Land Records, "George F. Honesty to Chas Newbold," December 19, 1884, Liber F4, Folio 530-4.

³³Arlington County Land Records, "Harriet Hyson to Edgar Fewkes," Liber H4, Folio 199.

³⁴Arlington County Land Records, "Geo. H. Rucker to Leopold Luchs," Liber 104, Folio 8.

³⁵Nancy Perry, *The Influence of Geography on the Lives of African American Residents of Arlington County during Segregation*, Ph.D. Dissertation, George Mason University, 2013, p. 85.

³⁶Arlington County Probate Records, "Last Will and Testament of John Jackson," Liber B10, Folio 179.

The enumerators of the 1900 census may not have performed a thorough inventory of The Bottom. Hanah and Luke Carter's son, Horace and his wife Isabel, who inherited their land in 1897, are missing. So are the descendants of Harriet Brice, Alice and Charles Harris, who appear in the 1910 census.

³⁷Crandall Mackey, *A Brief History of Alexandria County, Virginia; Its Wealth and Resources, Great and Growing Industries, Educational and Social Advantages*, The Newling Printing Co., 1907, p. 25 and Arlington County Land Records, "CA Granger to Sam Goldberg," February 3, 1939, Liber 465, Folio 585. The covenant read, "Neither the said land nor any part thereof, nor any interest therein, shall ever be sold, leased, conveyed, devised or, in any way owned or occupied by any person not of the Caucasian Race."

³⁸Templeman, Series I.

³⁹Perry, pp. 69-74.

⁴⁰Arlington County Land Records, "Luke Carter to Horace Carter," Liber 105, Folio? "Luke Carter From William H. Boston, "Luke Carter to Charles I Simms," January 23, 1909, Liber 114; January 25, 1909, Folio 351, Liber 119, Folio 374; and on October 24, 1910, Liber 126, Folio 227. For Amelia Robison: "George Jackson, Phillip and Theresa Jackson, and Jane and Charles Thompson to Amelia Robison," August 2, 1904, Liber 113, Folio 521; "Charles Robison to Claude N. Norton," September 19, 1935, Liber 375, Folio 335. Amelia's Will: Arlington County Probate Records, "Last Will and Testament of Amelia Robison," April 8, 1929, Will Book 15, Folio 596.

⁴¹The Rambler, *Sunday Star*, Part IV, Vol 1, The Public Library, Washington, DC. August 9, 1914, p. 119; William G. Collins, ed., *Arlington County, Virginia Directory, 1912*, Collins and Porter, 1912; Arlington County Land Records, November 7, 1921, "Robert Hyson, Ulyssis Hyson, Mary Williams Moten, Lissie Williams Tinner, Clarence Jones, Florence Jones Carpenter, and Dorothy Points to Richard Hyson," Liber 178, Folio 523. Arlington County Land Records, September 30, 1953, "Mary Agnes Hyson to Clarence and Lou Talley," Liber 1166, Folio 548; Adverse Possession description: Liber 1199, Folio 42.

⁴²Arlington County Land Records, "Ellen Jackson Brice to Ransom C. Edmonson," May 2, 1919, Liber 164, Folio 256 and December 13, 1922, Liber 318, Folio 220.

⁴³Arlington County Land Records, "Percy Talley to United States of America," March 1, 1957, Liber 1284, Folio 237 and Liber 1609, Folio 168.

Compiled by the author using Alexandria County and Fairfax County Land Records, Tax Records, Maps, U.S. Census and Southern Claims Commission Documentation. The lists are as accurate as the records allow.