

62-23

Rossville

Old Muirkirk Road

Beltsville vicinity

Rossville developed out of a community of freedmen who had formed a Methodist congregation just after the end of the Civil War. Queen's Chapel was established in 1868. Most of the members lived in the immediate area near Beltsville and Laurel, or in the rural enclave colloquially known as "Swamp Poodle," supporting themselves as laborers on local farms or at the nearby Muirkirk Iron Furnace. Nearly 20 years later, after the death of Mark Duvall, a white farmer who owned considerable property in the Vansville area, some of his land became available to these families. In settling Duvall's estate, the Equity Court ordered the division and sale of 24.8 acres of Duvall's property which was located just east of Queen's Chapel; this land was surveyed and divided into 12 unequal lots along the north side of the road between Muirkirk Furnace and Montpelier. Within a year, the 12 lots were purchased by local black families, many of whom were employed at the furnace. By 1889, structures had been erected on all but one lot.

One of the new landowners, Augustus Ross, gave his name to the community, and his was one of the first houses to be built there. Other families who built houses in that first year included two of the six founders of Queen's Chapel. The largest lot was purchased by Rebecca Lodge #6, Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham; this organization was one of many fraternal orders offering support to members in time of illness and emergency. It is the County's most visible symbol of the growth during the Reconstruction period of black benevolent societies, which, together with the newly established churches and schools, were the main source of support for newly freed people during this difficult period. The lodge, now known as Abraham Hall, has always been closely associated with Queen's Chapel, and has remained a focal point in the small community of Rossville.

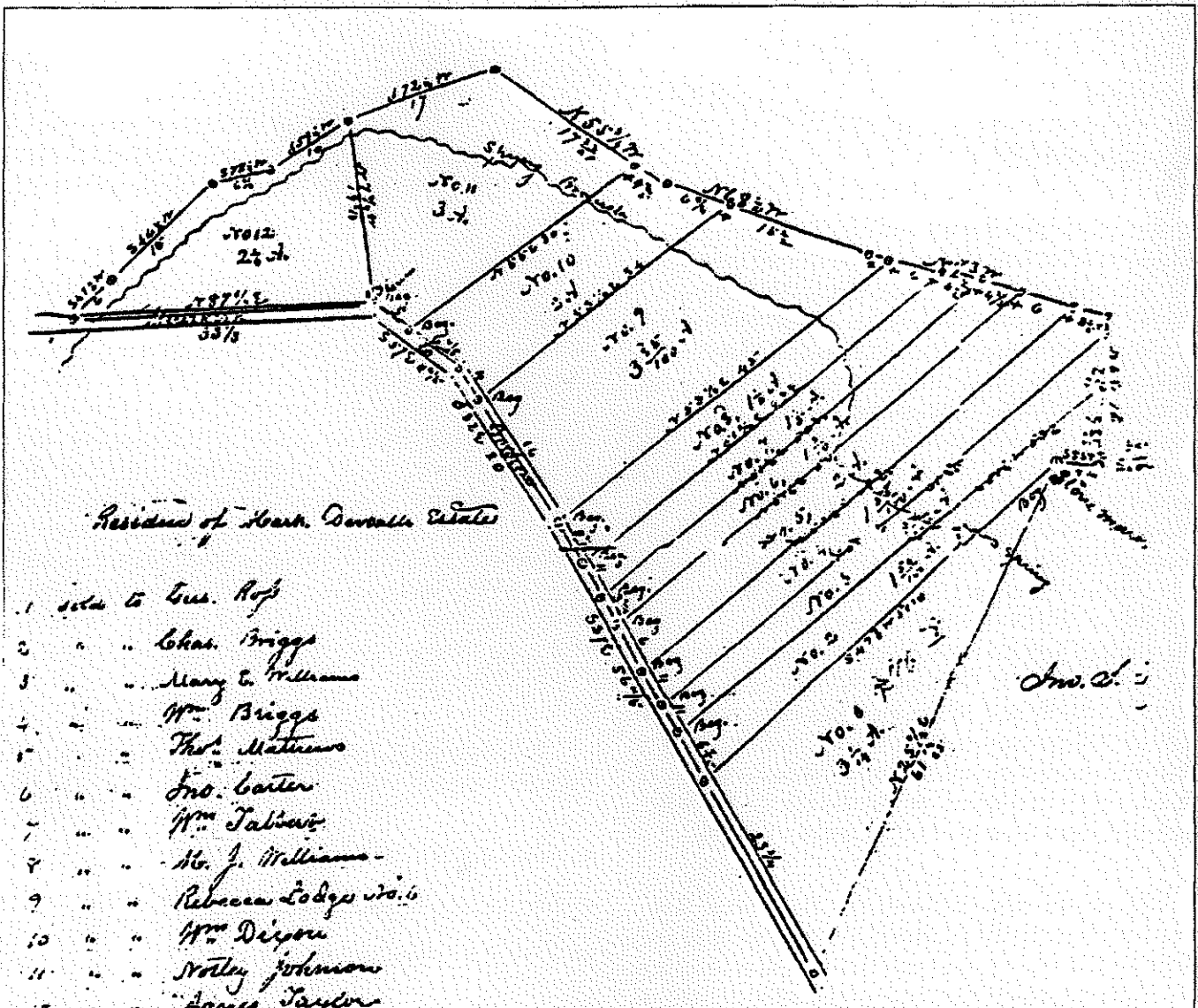
The new residents of Rossville created their own small farms on their individual properties; many continued to work at the Muirkirk Furnace.

Schools for the black children of the area had been established after the Civil War at Muirkirk and at Swamp Poodle; after the settlement of Rossville a school was opened in Abraham Hall and continued there until the building of a Rosenwald school in 1922.

The small community of Rossville remained stable for many years, with second and third generations of the founding families staying in the community. Even today, some of those family members still live in the neighborhood. Only a few of the original buildings of the community still stand, however, most having been replaced by modern homes. The Rosenwald school has been considerably altered, and the original Queen's Chapel has been replaced by a brick church of the 1950s. The centerpiece of the community, Abraham Hall, was restored and rededicated in 1991, and is again the focal point of the historic community of Rossville.

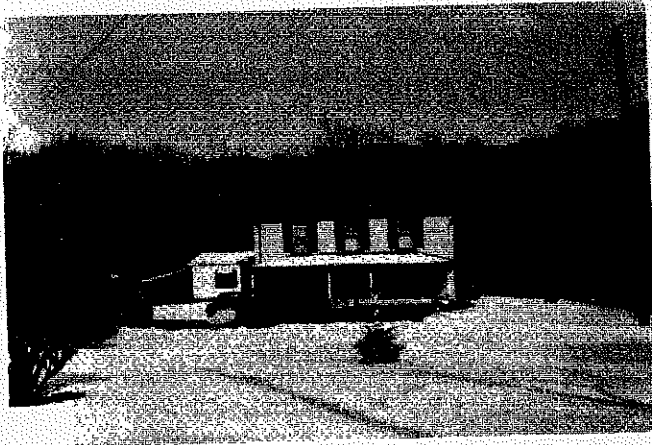
The following historic properties in the Rossville area are described below:

- Abraham Hall (62-23-7)
 - Thomas Matthews House (62-23-17)
 - Muirkirk School (62-23-20)
 - Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church Site and Cemetery (62-23-21)
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will certify that I have carefully surveyed for Geo. C. Taylor the following
 acres more or less of land called Spring & below in Transylvania Co. Va.
 the residue of the estate of the late Mark Duvall in
 common for the same at a stone marked B. B. above of Geo. C. Taylor's land
 (1) 16 1/2 acs. (2) N 75 W 26 ps. (3) N 63 1/2 W 22 1/2 ps. (4) N 55 1/2 W 22 1/2 ps. (5) S 75 1/2 W 17 1/2 ps. (6) S 67 1/2 W 10
 ps. (7) S 67 1/2 W 15 ps. (8) S 47 1/2 W 6 ps. to the main road from junction to
 with said road (9) S 77 1/2 E 33 1/2 ps. to a Gum tree (10) S 57 1/2 E 11 1/2 ps. (11) S 32 E 20 ps
 S 75 1/2 E 33 1/2 ps. These several said roads & with Geo. C. Taylor (12) N 25 1/2 E 26 1/2 ps. to
 the main road at (13) N 75 1/2 E 4 1/2 ps. in the beginning containing 24 1/2 acres

Rossville: Plat of Rossville, 1886



62-23-17

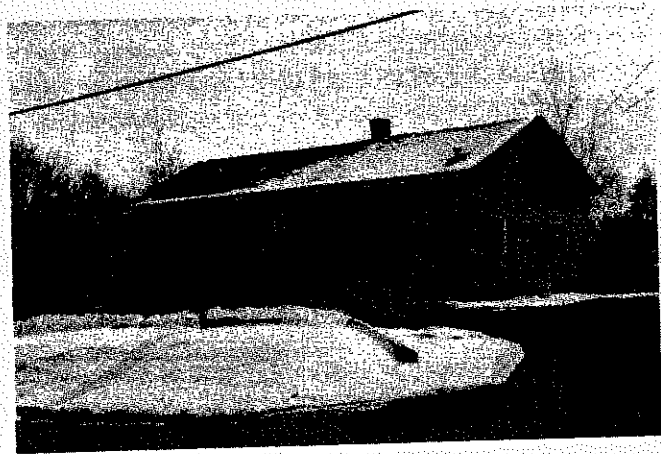
Thomas Matthews House
7700 Old Muirkirk Road
Rossville

The Matthews House is one of the first dwellings built in the developing community of Rossville, and one of few buildings surviving from that earliest building period. It is a side-gabled dwelling of wood frame construction, three bays wide, with entrance in the central bay of the main facade. This house is representative of the traditional I-house form: one parlor on each side of the central stairhall. A kitchen wing is attached at right angles at the center rear of the house. The original wood siding is presently covered with stucco, painted yellow. A one-story hip-roof porch shelters the entire facade.

This house was built in 1888 for the family of Thomas and Adaline Matthews and was one of the most substantial houses of the original building period in Rossville. Thomas Matthews came from northern Anne Arundel County; in March 1887, he purchased Lot 5 of the new subdivision of Mark Duvall's land. Archival records indicate that Matthews bought five shares in the Independent Savings and Building Association, thus receiving \$500 with which he began his building project. By 1889, with the help of other members of the new community, he had completed the two-story frame dwelling for his family. His was one of the largest and best-built houses in the Rossville community; it was assessed in 1889 at \$450, while the other eight

houses by then completed were assessed at values ranging from \$100 to \$250.

Thomas Matthews died before 1895. His wife remained in the community, and in 1895 married Knotley Johnson, who, like Thomas Matthews, had been one of the founders of Queen's Chapel and an early builder in Rossville. Adaline Matthews Johnson's house was repossessed by the Building Association and sold in 1908 to Louisa Briggs, whose descendants live in the house still. During the 1920s, Mrs. Briggs's son built several small additions in the rear of the house and applied the stucco over the original wood siding. The house remains in good condition and is a visible reminder of the early Rossville community, a significant example of substantial home-building by an upwardly progressing black laborer in a new community of his peers.



62-23-20

Muirkirk School
7813 Muirkirk Road
Rossville

The Muirkirk School, though considerably altered, is one of the surviving schoolhouses built during the 1920s through the Rosenwald program. It serves now as an American Legion lodge.



62-23-7

Abraham Hall

7612 Old Muirkirk Road

Rossville

Abraham Hall is the best example in Prince George's County of an African-American benevolent society lodge. Of crucial importance to its community, the building has recently been restored and rededicated, the first African-American Historic Site in Prince George's County to be fully restored with public funds.

Abraham Hall is a two-story front-gabled building of wood frame construction, sheathed with German and plain horizontal siding, painted beige. It has a small side wing which is a miniature replica of the main block and which forms a small kitchen; there is a one-story addition at the rear of the main block. The main block is three bays wide with entrance in the central bay through paneled double doors. The long windows which light the main block are framed by louvered shutters painted dark green. The interior of the main block consists of one large room on each story, extended on the first story to include a raised stage in the rear. Interior trim is typical of the period: multiband molding with bull's-eye corner blocks and molded chair-rails surmounting beaded wainscoting.

This benevolent society lodge was built in 1889 at the center of the newly developing community of Rossville. It was built by Laurel contractor/builder John W. Jackson, who at the same time was assisting with the construction of several of the

dwellings being built in that community. The land was purchased by Rebecca Lodge #6, the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a fraternal organization chartered in 1877 which provided emergency financial assistance to its members. The new lodge building at Rossville, which soon came to be known as Abraham Hall, always had a close association with the nearby Queen's Chapel Methodist Church, and its charter members were also members of the chapel. Abraham Hall served not only as a meeting place of the benevolent society, but also as a place of worship after Queen's Chapel burned in the 1890s and until the second chapel was completed in 1901. The lodge also served as a schoolhouse before the construction of Muirkirk School in 1922. The lodge was the scene of many camp meetings for the congregations of Queen's Chapel and other churches of the Laurel Charge. As the community of Rossville has changed over the years, Abraham Hall has remained its focal point.

Only two 19th-century African-American benevolent society lodges survive in Prince George's County, a fact which makes this building particularly important. In September 1991, after a long restoration process, Abraham Hall was rededicated for public and private use. As the first black Historic Site in the County to be fully restored with public funds, it marks a significant milestone in the historic preservation efforts of Prince George's County.

The building is one story high, side-gabled and of wood frame construction. The classrooms were originally lighted by banks of windows on the main facade, but all of those windows have been structurally closed. Only the central doorway remains as the only opening in this facade. There are two small windows in each of the east and west gable ends. The original wood siding is now covered with beige/gray synthetic shingle.

This school (Colored School 2 in Election District 1) was built in 1922, as part of the same building effort which saw the completion of the schoolhouses at Chapel Hill, Fletchertown and Duckettville. The first school for black children in this area was constructed in 1867 by Charles Coffin, the owner of the Muirkirk Furnace and employer of many African-American residents of the area. Although its exact location is uncertain, Coffin's school must have been located near the furnace complex; in later years, the school was operated by the County's public school system. After the beginning of the Rossville community in 1888, classes were held in the immediate community, probably at first in the Queen's Chapel building and afterwards, for approximately 20 years at the turn of this century, in Abraham Hall.

By 1919, the black population of Rossville and surrounding areas began to put pressure on the County Board of School Commissioners to establish a new school for the community. The board purchased property just south of Rossville on the other side of the public road, and in 1922 bonds were issued to support the construction of schools at Muirkirk (Rossville), Chapel Hill, Fletchertown and Duckettville. A building committee was appointed in April of that year, including local residents William Tolliver, Edward T. Gross and Harry Ross. Like the other schools in this group, the construction of the Rossville school was partially supported by funds from the Rosenwald program. The two-room schoolhouse was completed and opened in 1922; it had a capacity of 48 students, heat was provided by a wood stove, and water was available from a well just across the road in Rossville. The survey of "Colored Public Schools" taken in the following year indicated that the community

was justly proud of the new and modern building, and that it was quickly fitted out with new desks.

The Muirkirk School was closed in 1950 and, together with many other small schools for black children, was auctioned in November of that year. It was purchased a few years later by American Legion Post #235, whose members included many longstanding residents of Rossville. Although the building has been substantially altered and no longer conveys the appearance of Rosenwald-period schoolhouses, it is significant because of its close ties with the Rossville community for nearly 75 years.



62-23-21

**Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal
Church Site and Cemetery**

7410 Old Muirkirk Road
Rossville

This is the site of the original Queen's Chapel, built in 1868, which became the anchor of the Rossville community 20 years later. The original chapel has been replaced twice, most recently by a brick church which stands on the opposite side of the road. The site of the original chapel is now the cemetery of Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church; it is a tranquil, gently sloping grassy area, bordered by woods on east and west, and dotted with old cedars and many old gravestones. The

oldest inscribed gravestone dates from 1886, and some of the early stones exhibit attractive hand-carved inscriptions. On the north side of Old Muirkirk Road stands the present-day Queen's Chapel, built in the 1950s, a front-gabled brick church building with a flat-roofed, square corner tower. The south gable front of the church is dominated by a large tripartite gothic-arch window filled with stained glass, and the long sides of the nave are lighted by slimmer gothic-arch windows, separated by shallow brick buttresses.

The first Queen's Chapel was established just after the Civil War, when William Minnix, a local farmer and landowner, sold a small piece of his land to six black men who had expressed the need for a place of public worship. In January 1868, Minnix sold to six trustees (Henry Edwards, Thomas Quinn/Queen, Thomas Matthews, Ferdinand Key, Knotley Johnson and James Powell) 3/10 acre of land on the south side of the public road between Muirkirk Furnace and Montpelier, for the erection of a "substantial building to be used as a place of public worship and schoolhouse for the colored people." The land included a small graveyard which was already being used by the black people of the Muirkirk area. A small log chapel was built on the west side of the graveyard, and for approximately 30 years this building was the center of worship for much of the local black population. In 1893, Queen's Chapel became part of the Laurel Methodist Charge, which also included St. Mark's in Laurel.

The log chapel was destroyed by fire in the late 1890s, and for several years, Methodist services as well as classes were held at Abraham Hall. In 1901, a new chapel of wood frame construction was erected on the site of the log chapel. This frame chapel served the community for more than a half century, during which time the chapel was enlarged and more land was purchased for expansion of the graveyard. By the early 1950s the congregation had grown substantially; the congregation acquired land on the north side of the road and began the task of raising money for a larger church. The cornerstone for that brick structure was laid in September 1953; the church was completed three years later, and the 1901 chapel was demolished.

Since that time, the graveyard has expanded eastward to include the site of the old chapel.

The present Queen's Chapel is less than 50 years old, but it is symbolic of the first chapel erected in 1868, which marked the beginning of the Rossville community. The site of the original chapel and the graveyard which marks its location are very significant in the African-American history of this area and the early community of freedmen in Prince George's County.



Laurel 2
St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church
601 Eighth Street
Laurel

St. Mark's Church is a landmark on the western edge of the City of Laurel. It has a long history of significance to the local African-American community.

St. Mark's is a front-gabled church building with a corner entry tower. It was constructed in 1921 of rusticated concrete block, giving it a particularly decorative surface texture. The north and south long walls of the nave are three bays long, lighted by gothic-arch windows separated by slim buttresses. The east gable front is lighted by a large tripartite stained-glass window, and the gable above it is covered with dark wood shingles, making an attractive contrast with the bright white of the rusticated block. A two-story tower, with flared pyramidal roof and finial, is set into the northeast corner of the church building; entrance is into the east face of the tower through a pedimented porch with decorative posts of the same rusticated block. The gable-roof apse at the west end of the church has been enclosed by a fellowship hall addition built in 1979.

A group of black Methodists had been worshipping in a small frame building owned by James Hebron, one of their number. In 1891, Hebron and two other men acquired from the Jenkins family of Montpelier a lot on the west side of Church (now Eighth) Street. The frame building, Hebron Hall,

was then moved to the new lot where it stood across the street from the recently (1884) constructed Laurel Colored School. Together these two buildings became the nucleus of the black community of Laurel. In 1895, this church became part of the Laurel Charge of the Methodist Conference, and the same pastor served both St. Mark's and Queen's Chapel (see page 21).

In 1921, a new building program was undertaken, and construction began on a new church building. George ^{Clarke} Levi, a laborer experienced in masonry, is credited with molding the block with which the church was built. Before construction began, Hebron Hall, which had served 30 years as the house of worship, was moved a short distance south on the east side of Eighth Street where it served as a social hall. Late in the 1940s, the congregation set up a building fund, and 30 years later the west addition was constructed, expanding the sanctuary and providing a pastor's study and fellowship hall.

St. Mark's has served an active congregation, largely because of the old and stable black community of Laurel, many members of which worked at the Laurel Mills or the Muirkirk Furnace. St. Mark's is a strikingly handsome landmark on the main westbound street through present-day Laurel; it is significant not only because of its unusual appearance, but because it represents the religious center of a longstanding urban black community.

*it was George Clarke
he was experien in
masonry*