

## Virginia Department of Historic Resources PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the proposed district for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the district could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

<b>General Property Information</b>	For Staff Use Only DHR ID #:
District Name(s): <u>Willisville Historic District</u>	
District or Selected Building Date(s): <u>ca. 1840-ca1925</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post      Open to the Public? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Main District Streets and/or Routes: <u>Welbourne Road(Route 743) Willisville Rd.(Route 623)and 34000 block of Welbourne Rd.</u> City: <u>Middleburg vicinity</u> Zip: <u>20184</u>	
County or Ind. City: <u>Loudoun County</u> USGS Quad(s): <u>Bluemont</u>	

<b>Physical Character of General Surroundings</b>	
Acreage: <u>24</u> Setting (choose one): <input type="checkbox"/> City <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Corridor	
Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features/Streetscapes: <u>The Willisville Community is located in southwestern Loudoun County near (northwest) the Town of Middleburg. The main thoroughfare through the community is Welbourne Road or Route 743. Welbourne is a gravel road that travels southeast towards St. Louis, another small African American community and eventually on to Middleburg. Willisville is the sonly community located along Welbourne Road. The small district features small parcels to larger 3 acre parcels historically used for farming. Today the parcel division remains intact with the exception of an few newer homes that have been constructed along Welbourne Road.</u>	
Ownership Categories: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Local <input type="checkbox"/> Public-State <input type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal	

<b>General District Information</b>	
What were the historical uses of the resources within the proposed district? Examples include: Dwelling, Store, Barn, etc...	
<u>Dwelling, Church, Store, School,</u>	
What are the current uses? (if other than the historical use)	<u>Single Dwelling, Church</u>
Architectural styles or elements of buildings within the proposed district:	<u>Bungalow/Craftsman, Late Victorian, Colonial Revival, Gothic Revival, Vernacular adaptations of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> styles. .</u>
Architects, builders, or original owners of buildings within the proposed district:	<u>Builders: John Allison, Albert Hall, James Jackson Owners: Henson &amp; Lucinda Willis, Gaskins.</u>
Are there any known threats to this district?	

**General Description of District:** (Please describe building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district and a general setting and/or streetscape description.)

The historically African-American community of Willisville is located in the southwestern part of Loudoun County in the vicinity of Middleburg, Virginia. The approximately 24-acre district is comprised of sixteen historic buildings that line the gravel Welbourne Road (Route 743) between Willisville Road (Route 623) and the 34000 block of Welbourne Road.

Parcels vary from less than one-half acre to three acres in size in this rural community. Most of the lots have irregular shapes. Many are deep lots with short frontages on Welbourne Road.

Willisville demonstrates many of the characteristics of a rural hamlet. The community incorporates a number of different building types and styles and is grouped tightly around Welbourne Road. Open lots appear primarily behind buildings, away from the main thoroughfare. The village's eastern and western ends are anchored by the Willisville Chapel and the former Willisville School, respectively. Other historic community buildings include the former Willisville Store, that is now occupied as a residence. Buildings are mainly stone or frame in construction and vary in height from one to two-stories.

Possibly the oldest building in Willisville today is the house that stands at 34017 Welbourne Road (#053-5116-0008). This two-story, cross-gable, stuccoed house features an enclosed, hipped-roofed porch on its façade. However, the oldest section of the house may be the front gable portion that features a massive stone exterior chimney on its southwest gable end.

In 1868, George Evans purchased a building located on the northeast corner or the intersection of Willisville and Welbourne Roads to be used as Willisville's first church and school. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1917.

In 1921, after the land was deeded to the Mercer District School Board, the Willisville School (DHR #053-5116-0014) was built to replace the 1868 one-room schoolhouse and church that had burned. In 1934, the building was enlarged by a rear classroom addition. Though converted into a residence, the historic form of the schoolhouse is still visible. The 1921, frame, front-gable school contains three 6-over-6 windows on its east and west elevations.

The Willisville Chapel stands at 34008 Welbourne Road (DHR #053-1049). In 1924, Mary D. Neville, a white landowner living nearby, proposed to donate the land and finance the building of a new Willisville church if residents were able to collect the first \$1,000 dollars necessary for construction. Church trustees Frank Henderson, Moses Peterson, William Gaskins, Dudley Gaskins and Daniel Hampton led a successful fundraising effort. According to local residents, Neville drew the design of the stone church, modeling the building in a French country style. Builder John Allison executed the woodwork for the building and Albert Hall and James Jackson completed the stone masonry. The typical rural church, built of stone with a steeply pitched, front-gable roof features a square belfry that surmounts the front gable and an oculus window on the façade.

The Willisville Store is the only historic commercial business identified in the hamlet (DHR #053-5116-0009). This two-story, front gable former store, now a residence, has enclosed, one-story, shed-roofed porches on its north and south elevations. There are two, one-over-one windows centered in the front gable end.

Though modest in style, Willisville's residential buildings reflect a range of architectural styles including Late Victorian, Bungalow/Craftsman and Colonial Revival characteristics. The I-house at 33973 Welbourne Road features a Late Victorian three-bay front porch with hipped roof, brackets and detailing (#053-5116-0003). The bungalow form, popularized by several mail-order house companies like the

Sears, Roebuck Company and the Aladdin Homes Corporation is also present. One possible example of a Sears' kit house stands at 33978 Welbourne Road (DHR #053-5116-0011). Built circa 1925, the house closely resembles the Sears "Crescent" model kit house, which was sold between 1921 and 1933. Another bungalow stands at 34001 Welbourne Road (DHR #053-5116-0006).

Though few new residences were erected after the 1920s, the stone-clad Cape Cod house at 34007 Welbourne Road dates to 1956. The lack of extensive modern-day building and subdivision has allowed Willisville to retain its historic character.

**Significance Statement:** Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the proposed district. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Please list all sources of information. Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

At the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), more than one thousand people who had been enslaved in Loudoun County before the war left the area permanently. The former slaves who stayed often settled in small communities throughout the county. These communities were generally comprised of extended family groups. They help illustrate how African Americans settled in segregated enclaves both because of state-supported racial discrimination and for mutual support.<sup>1</sup> The village of Willisville was one such settlement. Most likely, the community took its name from Henson and Lucinda Willis who, in 1874, purchased 3.75 acres of land from Townsend L. and Mary Seaton who owned a plantation just south of the settlement.

Despite many obstacles, land ownership and farming by formerly enslaved people and their descendents continued to grow at a sometimes astounding rate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Virginia. As historian Loren Schweningen has noted, “former slaves and their children in Virginia became almost obsessed with the idea of acquiring their own land.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, between 1870 and 1910, black farm ownership in Virginia rose 3,641 percent, from 860 to 32,168 black farm owners. Schweningen attributes the extraordinary rise in property ownership among Virginia’s African Americans to a variety of conditions. Among these was a longstanding tradition of black proprietorship in the state, increased opportunities to acquire mortgage money, the establishment of a variety of race-based mutual aid societies, the promotion of ideas of “enterprise and self-sufficiency” by Virginia’s Hampton Institute, and the efforts of African-American such as John Mercer Langston, Congressman for Virginia’s 4<sup>th</sup> District, John Mitchell, editor of the *Richmond Planet*, and Richmond banker Maggie Walker to encourage property ownership.<sup>3</sup> The village of Willisville reflects these trends toward property ownership among Loudoun’s African Americans and toward the formation of tight-knit, racially segregated communities.

Though Henson and Lucinda Willis did not purchase property until 1874, they and their children appear in the 1870 census records of the area as do members of the Howard, Murray, Turner, and Jackson families. Most likely, at least some of the residents listed in the 1870 census attended the settlement’s one room school built for the area’s African American children. The school also served as multi-denominational Christian chapel that was built in 1868. By 1884, the congregation was Methodist. That year, Lucinda Willis sold a half-acre of her property to the church so that a parsonage could be built for the church minister.<sup>4</sup>

In 1917, the Willisville Chapel and School was destroyed by fire. Between 1917 and 1924, church services were held “under trees in fair weather and in the winter in a cottage owned by Mrs. Lemmon on Welbourne Farm.”<sup>5</sup> In 1924, Mary Dulaney Neville, a white landowner who lived at nearby Pelham (DHR #053-0125), offered to help finance and design a new Willisville church if residents were able to collect the first \$1,000 necessary for construction. Led by church trustees Frank Henderson, Moses Peterson, William Gaskins, Dudley Gaskins and Daniel Hampton, the congregation was successful in its fundraising efforts. Local residents recall that Neville, who had been born in France, modeled her design of the stone building after French country style churches. Builder John Allison constructed the woodwork for the building and Albert Hall and James Jackson completed the stone masonry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One common historical trend seen in several of Loudoun County’s larger towns was that the African American neighborhoods were excluded from the town boundaries when the towns were incorporated.

<sup>2</sup> Loren Schweningen, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Schweningen, pp. 173-174.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Scheel, “Willisville History Dates to Pre-Civil War Era,” *Loudoun Times Mirror*, April 28, 1983, A-14.

<sup>5</sup> *Willisville Chapel United Methodist Church: Church History*, n.a., n.p

<sup>6</sup> *Willisville Chapel United Methodist Church: Church History*; Elaine E. Thompson, *Courage My Soul: Historic African American Churches and Mutual Aid Societies*. [Leesburg, Virginia: Loudoun Museum, 2000] p. 21.

After the destruction of the school in 1917, Willisville children attended school in St. Louis until 1921, when the trustees of Willisville Chapel deeded the land where the former Willisville Chapel and School stood to the Mercer District of the Loudoun County School Board to build a new school. The 1921 building remained in operation until 1962.

Willisville is no longer populated solely by African Americans. The hamlet remains an isolated rural community set among the large estates that make up much of western Loudoun County. The store and school are now occupied as residences, but the church remains active.

**Sponsor** (Individual and/or organization, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please use a separate sheet.)

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Dulaney Morrison, Mosby Heritage Foundation		
	(Name)		
1461 Atoka Road	Marshall	VA	20115
(Address)	(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)
dulany@gmail.com			
(Email Address)		(Daytime telephone including area code)	

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Dulaney Morrison, Mosby Heritage Foundation

Daytime Telephone: (      )

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form)

Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>	Same as above		
Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Miss <input type="checkbox"/>	(Name)	(Firm)	
(Address)	(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)
(Email Address)	(Daytime telephone including area code)		

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. <input type="checkbox"/>	Tim Hemstreet County Administrator		
Miss <input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Hon. <input type="checkbox"/>	(Name)	(Position)	
Loudoun County	P.O. Box 7000		
(Locality)	(Address)		
Leesburg	VA	20177-7000	703-777-0200
(City)	(State)	(Zip Code)	(Daytime telephone including area code)

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this district.

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes  No   
Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes  No

Willisville Historic District  
Loudoun County  
2018 PIF

