



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 200-5009; 200-5006; 200-0021-0036

1. General Property Information

Property name: Free Hill Cemetery (200-5009) and Columbia Baptist Church (200-5006; 200-0021-0036)

Property address: 116 Rivanna Street

City or Town: Columbia

Zip code: 23038

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Fluvanna County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building Site Structure Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 5.4 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town Village Hamlet Rural

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

The Free Hill Cemetery property is located in Columbia, Virginia, and includes the 2.8-acre historic Free Hill Cemetery, and the adjacent 2.6-acre Columbia Baptist Church and contemporary cemetery north of it. The Free Hill Cemetery is defined by Tammany Street on its west, St. James Street [State Rte 6] on its south, and non-extant platted Cameron Street on its north and Green Street on its east. Although the northern one quarter of the Free Hill Cemetery is fairly level, the remaining three quarters of the parcel lies on a south-facing hillside. The Columbia Baptist Church and cemetery parcel lies adjacent to and northwest of the Free Hill Cemetery and is defined by Rivanna Street on its west, Tammany Street on its south, Andrew Street on its north, and the non-extant platted Tammany Steet on its east. The church facilities are constructed on a low northwest-southeast ridge and are composed of a church, a picnic shelter and a shed. All of the buildings and structures are aligned with the orientation of the northwest-southeast ridge. A gravel surfaced entrance drive passes the church facilities on their north providing access to Columbia Baptist Church and linking Rivanna Street on the west with Tammany Street on the east. A contemporary cemetery and burial ground lies adjacent to and north of the church facilities and entrance drive.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Traditional forms with Gothic Revival buttresses

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: _____

If the builder is known, please list here: _____

Date of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1805 (Cemetery); ca.1880, 1977, 1987, ca.2010 (Church)

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

The Free Hill Cemetery is a 2.8-acre parcel of land that encompasses historic lots 37, 38, 53, and 54, as well as portions of historic road corridors including Cameron Street on its north and Green Street on its east in the Town of Columbia, Virginia. Free Hill Cemetery is a predominantly wooded property with several large, several hundred-year-old oak trees, and numerous trees less than 60 years old. Largely clear of significant undergrowth, a limited number of small holly trees, yucca plants, and periwinkle groundcover are present, most likely representing symbolic intentional plantings. At its northern end, an open, sodded northeast-southwest oriented strip of land connecting with Tammany Street on its west is present on the most level portion of the burial ground. This open corridor is believed to be a remnant portion of the historic Columbia to Lyles road trace. Currently the strip of open land provides vehicular and pedestrian access to the Free Hill Cemetery and connects with the Columbia Baptist Church. A total of 140 human interments have been located and mapped within the Free Hill Cemetery. The burials lie both north and south of the historic Columbia to Lyles road. Of the 140 burials, only 28 (20%) contain some form of grave marker, mostly commercial stones, funeral home temporary markers, and field stones. The bulk of the burials are characterized by shallow generally east-west oriented grave slumps. The earliest documented burial is that of an unidentified female who died in 1822. A marker for an infant named Jacob Holmes who died in October 1839. The known, mapped burials within Free Hill Cemetery are generally dispersed with a number of small clusters of rows, perhaps containing related family members. The older portion of the Free Hill Cemetery is believed to be located south of the historic Columbia to Lyles road corridor. No buildings or structures are present within the Free Hill Cemetery parcel. Portions of the Free Hill Cemetery, particularly north of the historic Columbia to Lyles road corridor, are still being used for burial purposes today by members of the Columbia Baptist Church and the Free Hill community.

The 2.6-acre Columbia Baptist Church parcel contains the Columbia Baptist Church and a contemporary burial ground north of and adjacent to it. The contemporary burial ground slopes down to the north and possesses numerous rows of marked interments. The Columbia Baptist Church parcel is nearly entirely open and covered with sod. Two small clusters of trees are present, one behind and south of the church, and a second east of and adjacent to the Rivanna Street corridor.

Columbia Baptist Church is a one-story, 3,760 gsf brick and brick-veneered building that links main church structure (2,000 gsf) with fellowship hall (1,760 gsf). The current building is a composite of many construction alterations and additions dating from about 1880 to about 2010. The gable-roofed church axis runs northwest to southeast on the site, with its entrance façade facing northwest, away from the Free Hill Cemetery. Beneath the

brick veneer exterior are the walls and floor structure of a ca. 1880 frame structure with clapboarding. Remnants of a bell tower structure, including the dismantled cast iron bell, remain in the attic above the northwest narthex. Salvaged hand-squared timbers, with Roman Numeral markings, have been reused in the reconfigured framing where the bell tower once existed. Features of the ca.1880 frame church are readily visible in only a few locations, such as: 1) the exposed clapboard walls enclosing the rear, northeast exterior doors and chancel stained-glass window; 2) the stained-glass window above the door between narthex and sanctuary, which was originally exposed to both spaces in the ca. 1880 frame church when the narthex ceiling was higher; 3) the brick chimney on the northeast elevation. The ca. 1880 frame church, probably originally supported by masonry piers, received a concrete block foundation wall in the mid-twentieth century. Bathrooms were added to each side of the bell tower's narthex in 1973. An extensive fire in 1977 forced a closure during which the entire roof system, including bell tower, was replaced, and the exterior brick veneer and buttresses were added. In 1987, the large fellowship hall, connected to the southwest side of the church with a hyphen, was constructed. Lastly, in about 2010, an addition with toilets was appended to the fellowship hall's northeast elevation.

Stretching northeast from that side of the church, are several utilitarian structures—a covered picnic structure, a storage shed, and a partially fenced playground. All of these structures are noncontributing late 20th century additions.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

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- Columbia to Lyles [Wilmington] Road Trace - Likely established ca. 1788 with the Town of Columbia, Virginia. The historic road is clearly visible within the Free Hill Cemetery landscape as a northwest-southeast oriented sunken linear corridor. The historic road trace appears to be relatively intact and shows up on LiDAR images for Free Hill and the broader Columbia vicinity.

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Columbia, Virginia was established by an Act of the General Assembly in 1788 on land owned by David Ross. In 1805, Ross gifted a small parcel of land to the white trustees of Columbia. The deed granted one acre of land, what would become the Free Hill Cemetery, "for the purposes of promoting religious worship and the instruction of youth, ...and building thereon houses for religious worship, ...for the accommodation of the preachers or teachers." The plat accompanying the gift provides few landmarks as to the location of the one-acre lot but does depict a road on the north side of the parcel described as "leading from Columbia to Lyles, Va."

The origins of Free Hill, an historically African-American residential neighborhood, dates to the transitional late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Free and enslaved African Americans are known to have been living and working in Columbia, Virginia since its establishment in 1788. Population statistics document that the African-American population of Columbia grew from 7 to 79 between 1800 and 1850, reaching its zenith between 1825-1834. Typical occupations of pre-Emancipation Free Black residents of Columbia included boatman, waterman, and packet driver for men, and seamstress, spinner and weaver for women. Beginning in the 18-teens several free African Americans purchased town lots, primarily in the western part of Columbia.

In 1936 white Works Progress Administration historian and Columbia resident Susie V. Shepherd documented the 'Columbia Burying Ground.' Shepherd described her memory of the Free Hill Cemetery growing up in the late nineteenth century. "Fifty years ago the Burying Ground on Free Hill was shaded by trees and crossed by paths. ...The stately oaks, pressing aside the granite stones, brought from beside the rolling James, appealed to one as the most desirable monuments. ...In many cases people have been placed above one another, as the burial place seemed to be full years ago." Shepherd also recalled the presence of a brush arbor and early church or "log meeting house," likely located somewhere in the more level northern part of the cemetery, during a visit there in her youth. "The colored people were holding a 'Big Meeting' in an arbor near the 'Log Meeting House' on Free Hill, and we would be there whenever time came for singing."

The Columbia Baptist Church, successor to the brush arbor and 'log meeting house,' was established in 1870 and began worshipping in the 'Rock House' located further south on St. James Street [Route 6]. In 1880 Trustees of the Columbia Baptist Church including Wilson Woodson, Warner Langhorn, Philip Turpin, and William Langhorn, purchased from the Town of Columbia lot 19, adjacent to and northwest of the Free Hill Cemetery and located on the corner of the intersection of Rivanna and Cameron Streets. A new house of worship replacing the Rock House was constructed on the property shortly thereafter. By 1949 the Church had purchased the adjacent historic lot 20 containing what are now a picnic shelter, parking area and playground. In 1965, Free Hill Cemetery was logged and possibly graded by the Columbia Town Council; the timber was sold to fund a road-building project. Twenty years later in 1969, Trustees also purchased Columbia lots 3 and 4, located north of and adjacent to the church and currently utilized as a contemporary cemetery. In 1987 a new Fellowship Hall connecting with the sanctuary was constructed southwest of and adjacent to the church.

The Free Hill community is not only important because it existed at all, but it is particularly significant because it survived and persevered in the face of both personal discrimination and institutional racism at a time when most white Virginians were antagonistic to their well-being and very existence. Pre-Emancipation Free African Americans living in Columbia established and maintained personal and socio-economic relationships with both whites and enslaved African Americans in Fluvanna County and larger central Virginia. Wherever possible they

utilized the means within their control to maintain family bonds, provide for themselves, establish a meaningful community, and to pursue greater freedoms through their own labor and the purchase of real property. According to Susie Shepherd, Free Hill had always been occupied by free people. In interviews conducted with its African-American residents, Shepherd noted the surnames of many families, surnames that also appear in Fluvanna County's Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes. Many residents of the contemporary Free Hill and the broader Columbia vicinity, are descended from these individuals. The Free Hill Cemetery represents the final resting place for many pre-Emancipation Free Hill residents, and their post-Emancipation descendants.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

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5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: _____ Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Columbia Baptist Church

organization: _____

street & number: 116 Rivanna Street

city or town: Columbia state: VA zip code: 23038

e-mail: coldhollowfarm@yahoo.com telephone: 434.390.1218

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: _____

organization: _____

street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____


Date: _____


PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!



LOCATION MAP

Free Hill Cemetery and Columbia Baptist Church
Fluvanna County, VA
DHR No. 200-5009, 200-5006

 Proposed Boundary


0 100 200 400
 Feet






LOCATION MAP

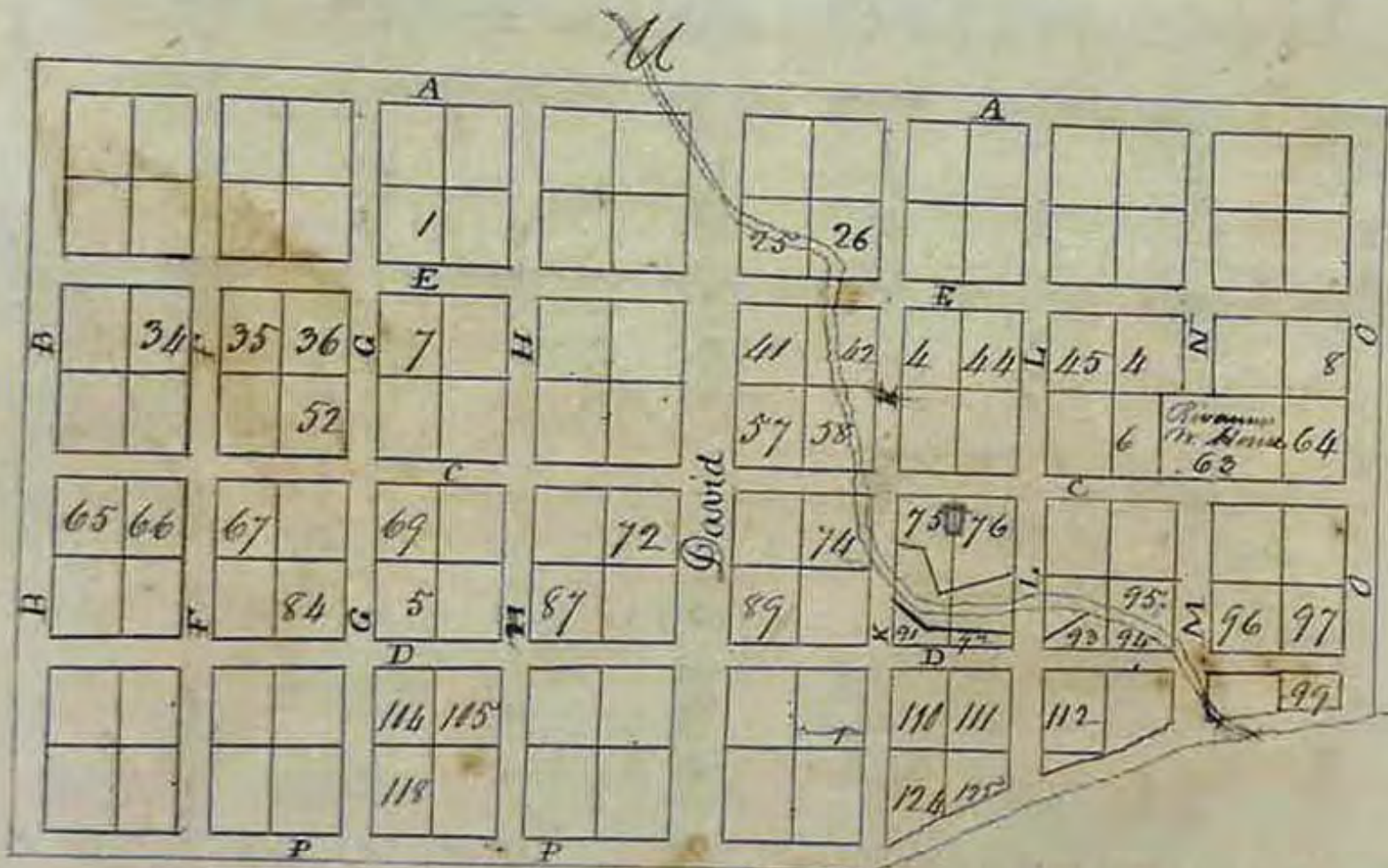
Free Hill Cemetery and Columbia Baptist Church
Fluvanna County, VA
DHR No. 200-5009, 200-5006

 Proposed Boundary

0 100 200 400
 Feet







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