The North Carolina Historical Review

VOLUME XCVII PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER 2020 NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

Rooted in Freedom: Raleigh, North Carolina's Freedmen's Village of Oberlin, an Antebellum Free Black Enclave

M. Ruth Little

Oberlin Village, one of the striking examples in North Carolina of a Reconstruction-era freedmen's settlement, has received scant attention from historians (Figure 1). Two principal published sources provide most of the known facts. The primary source, Willis G. Briggs's eyewitness history, "Oberlin Village Emerged during Reconstruction," was published in 1948 in the *Raleigh News and Observer*. Lawyer Briggs, born in 1875, the grandson of prolific nineteenth-century builder Thomas H. Briggs, knew many Oberlin pioneers, such as carpenter Thomas Williams, who worked for his grandfather, and Seth Nowell, whose public dray hauled goods for Raleigh merchants from the freight depot.[1] From 1865 to 1872, a Republican alliance of Black and White promoters in Raleigh—Black legislators James Henry Harris and Wilson W. Morgan; Black minister S. S. Ashley; J. Brinton Smith, an educator; Gov. William W. Holden; and sheriff Timothy F. Lee—worked to help freedmen build their own homes in Oberlin Village. White land speculator Lewis Peck commenced the lot sales, perhaps for financial gain rather than racial uplift. *Culture Town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities*, published in 1993, compiled oral histories from elder African Americans born in the early twentieth century. "I have been told that the original Oberlin property was given to Black people by a wealthy white person in the 1860s," recalled Frank James Flagg, the only

1. Willis G. Briggs, "Oberlin Village Emerged during Reconstruction," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948; Ruth Little, "Oberlin Village Historic Overlay District Report for the Raleigh Historic Development Commission, 2017 (hereinafter Little, "Oberlin Village Historic District Report"), https://rhdc.org/sites/default/files/OberlinVillageHODReport.pdf.

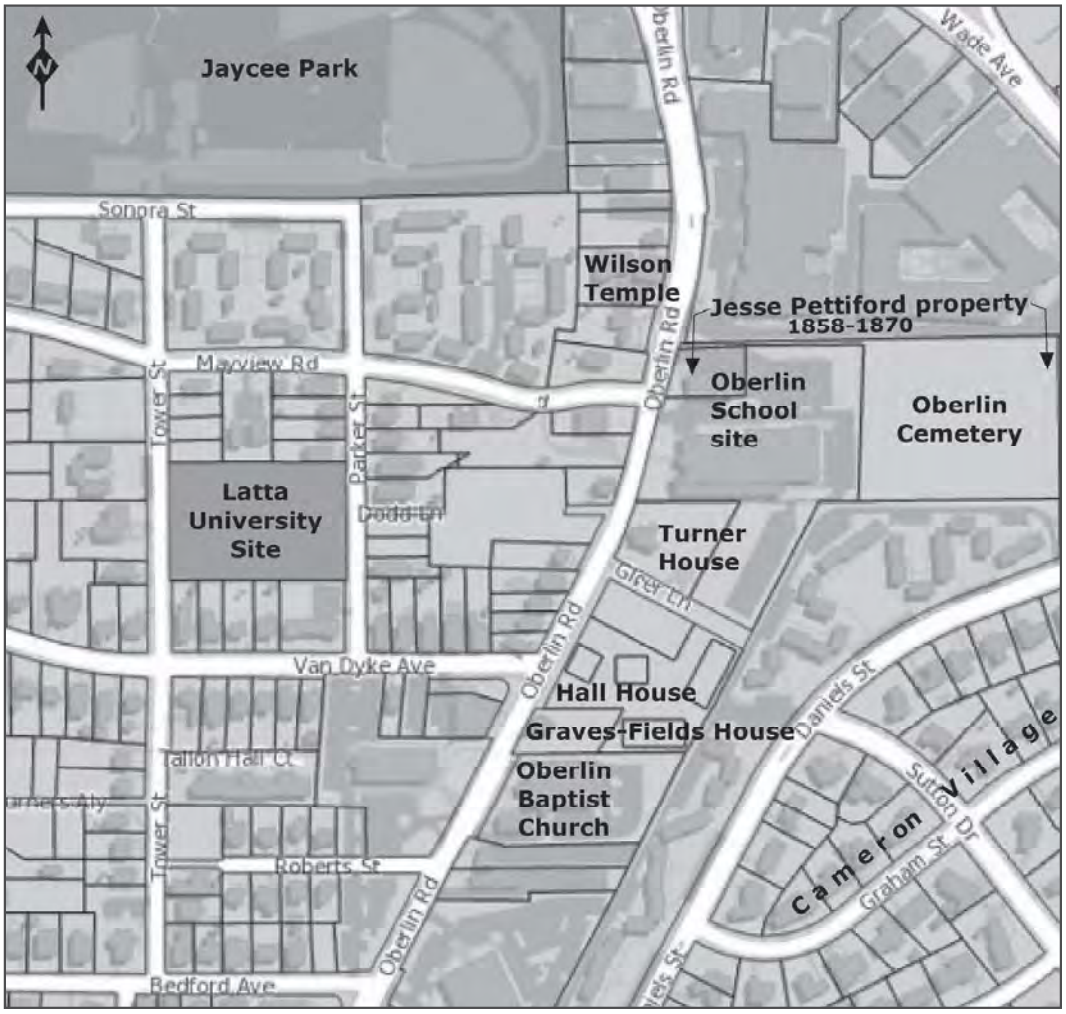


Figure 1. Map of Oberlin Village by M. Ruth Little and Andrew Edmonds, 2020, overlaid on City of Raleigh and Wake County iMAPS, Wake County Geographic Information Services.

interviewee who mentioned an origin story.[2] Flagg's memory fits the oft-repeated oral tradition that the Duncan Cameron family gave homestead lots along Oberlin Road to freed slaves at the end of the Civil War.

New research has revealed a previously unknown chapter of Oberlin's history—it is no ordinary freedmen town but an antebellum free Black enclave that grew into an African American municipality, built away from White supervision by former slaves freed during or after the Civil War. Because it was rooted in freedom, Oberlin Village provided a legacy of freedom and land ownership, creating an enduring

2. Linda Simmons-Henry and Linda Edmisten, *Culture Town: Life in Raleigh's African American Communities* (Raleigh, N.C.: Raleigh Historic Districts Commission, 1993), 33.

Black settlement with an elevated degree of home ownership, artisanal pride, and an irreproachable reputation. Censuses, deeds, estate papers, and an eyewitness account weave a rich story of a unique Black town on Raleigh's outskirts.

The legacy of the Cameron and Mordecai families, large landowners in this west Raleigh suburb, echoes to the present. Duncan Cameron (1777–1853), the largest plantation owner and slaveholder in North Carolina, resided at his Fairntosh Plantation in Orange County (now Durham County) twenty-five miles away, where most of his slaves worked on a number of related plantations. In 1835, soon after becoming president of the State Bank of North Carolina, he acquired ten acres along Hillsborough Street from William Boylan and built a grand house. The entire family, along with their household slaves, relocated to Raleigh in 1836. In 1841, Duncan purchased the 157-acre Episcopal boy's school across the street from his Raleigh mansion and leased the property to St. Mary's School for girls. After his wife, Rebecca's, death in 1843, Margaret, their only healthy daughter, served as her father's mainstay, managing the large Raleigh household with a small slave labor force.[3]

At Duncan's death in 1853, his daughter Margaret Cameron (1811–1886) became one of North Carolina's richest women. Margaret's assets included the Raleigh mansion, stocks and bonds, vast land tracts, and more than one hundred slaves, most of whom lived at Fish Dam, Peaksville, and Jones plantations in Orange County. In 1849, George Washington Mordecai (1801–1871) of Raleigh succeeded Duncan as president of the State Bank of North Carolina, which brought him into Margaret's social circle. Margaret's brother Paul Cameron forbade a marriage that would transfer her assets to George Mordecai without a prenuptial agreement. Six months after her father's death, she married George Mordecai, who moved from the Mordecai plantation north of Raleigh into the Cameron House on Hillsborough Street. They merged their lives and, to some extent, their assets. Her assets were managed in a separate account book titled "Property received from Margaret B. Cameron 1853–1870."[4] During the years 1857–1860, the Cameron household slaves consisted of the same twenty-three individuals: twelve adults over age eighteen and eleven children under eighteen years, identified only by forename and age. The oldest house slave, a matriarch named Silla (Priscilla), age sixty-one, was a third-generation Cameron slave whose grandchildren, Agnes and Bryant, lived with her. The house

3. Collection Overview, George W. Mordecai Papers #522 (hereinafter Mordecai Papers), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Mordecai, George Washington." In 1894, the family sold the St. Mary's School property to the Episcopal Church.

4. Sydney Nathans, *To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary Walker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 102; "Plantation Accounts: Property Received from Margaret B. Cameron, 1852–1870," Folder 289, Mordecai Papers.

slaves helped Margaret care for her ailing sisters and shelter a host of nieces and nephews from her and George's families who came to live with her in Raleigh.[5]

Silla's daughter, Mary Walker (1818–1872), the caregiver for Margaret Cameron's invalid sister, Mildred, was missing from these house slaves. Mary became the famous bane of the Cameron family when she fled her owners during a stay in Philadelphia in 1848 at the age of thirty, leaving her mother and children behind in Raleigh. She lived in freedom in Philadelphia and later Cambridge, Massachusetts, protected by abolitionist friends for the rest of her life. Despite Mary's repeated efforts for the next seventeen years to purchase her family and bring them to freedom in the North, her mother, Silla, died in slavery in 1864. Although the family treated their slaves with solicitude, not one was ever freed voluntarily by their owner, even during the painful saga of escaped slave Mary Walker's attempts to buy her children after she established a life of freedom in the North. After Raleigh surrendered to Sherman's army in 1865, Gen. Oliver O. Howard, later head of the Freedmen's Bureau, found Agnes and Bryant at the Cameron Mansion in Raleigh and informed them that they were free and that their mother wished them to move to join her in Cambridge. The family was reunited a few months later and remained together until Mary's death in 1872.[6]

Recent research in deeds, family papers, and census records has now disproved the tradition that Oberlin Village originated with the generosity of a slaveowner. Instead, it began with the Cameron-Mordecai sale of land to a free Black before the war. In 1858, George and Margaret Cameron Mordecai sold a sixteen-acre parcel of their land, described in the deed as the "tract of land on which said Jesse Pettiford now lives" on "the new road from Raleigh to Hillsboro," bounded by William Boylan's land, to free Black Jesse Pettiford for $160.[7] This was the northwest corner of a 155-acre tract that George purchased from John Devereux in 1853, adjacent to the 159-acre St. Mary's School property owned by the heirs of Duncan Cameron. The Cameron-Mordecais then owned about three hundred acres between their mansion and Pettiford's land.[8]

5. Jean Bradley Anderson, *Piedmont Plantation: The Bennehan-Cameron Family and Lands in North Carolina* (Durham, N.C.: Historic Preservation Society of Durham, 1985), 40.
6. Nathans, *To Free a Family*, 20, 30, 216, 219, 221–222, 249.
7. George and Margaret Cameron Mordecai to Jesse Pettiford, January 6, 1858, Book 22, pp. 187–188, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh. In the mid-1800s, the road was known as the New Hillsborough Road, a north-south extension from Chapel Hill Road. Chapel Hill Road was later renamed Hillsborough Road and finally Hillsborough Street. The north-south extension was known as New Hillsborough Road by 1858 and renamed Oberlin Road in the early 1870s. It was called by its older name for some time.
8. John Devereux to George Mordecai, October 10, 1853, Book 20, p. 492, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. The tract, which sold for $1,550, stretched between the St. Mary's School land west to the New Hillsborough Road and east to St. Mary's Street. See C. L. Mann plat map "Part of Mordecai-Cameron Lands," 1920, 4.66 in Wake County Plat Maps, Wake County Register of Deeds, Raleigh. The bulk of the property remained woodland until the twentieth century. In 1910, the St. Mary's tract, excluding the

Jesse Pettiford (1792–1870) apparently worked for the Mordecais as a tenant farmer and saved enough money to purchase the tract. A free mulatto born in Virginia, Pettiford descended from illustrious free Blacks who had lived in Granville County, North Carolina, since the mid-1700s in a free community that straddled the Virginia-North Carolina border. His father, Drury Pettiford, was a free Black soldier in the Revolutionary War in Virginia.[9]

The 1860 census shows that Pettiford's household included his wife, Edny, and children Roscoe Lee, Dicey, Angeline, Luvenia, and Nathan in an enclave of five free Black families on both sides of New Hillsborough Road (Figures 2a and 2b).[10] At the age of sixty-eight, Pettiford was a generation older than the literate mulatto craftsmen around him. Pettiford's grown son Roscoe Pettiford, a railroad foreman, and his family lived in a separate dwelling. Stone mason Benjamin Morgan lived across the road on property that he owned; his household included Price Paschall, a free mulatto day laborer. Benjamin Morgan (ca. 1825–1912) married Jane Chavos [Chavis?] in Wake County in 1857.[11] His brother, blacksmith Wilson W. Morgan (1827–1892), played a large role in Oberlin's Reconstruction history. Brick mason John Emanuel (Manuel) and his family apparently rented: Manuel purchased a six-acre parcel on New Hillsborough Road in 1867.[12] Mechanic Hugo Branch and his family lived around the Pettifords, apparently on rented property. With $125 of property value and $100 of personal property, Morgan was slightly wealthier than the others. Pettiford's real estate value was $60. The other three men owned from $25 to $100 in personal property and no real estate.

Because the connected Pettiford and Morgan homesteads with three dwellings stood close to the Confederate fortifications along the western edge of St. Mary's School, they appear on an 1863 Confederate map (Figure 3) and an 1865 Union map (Figure 4). Tenant dwellings were apparently not delineated on the maps.[13]

---

campus at the southeast corner, was subdivided into the Cameron Park development. In 1947, Willie York purchased the former Devereux tract to develop the Cameron Village mixed-use commercial and residential project.

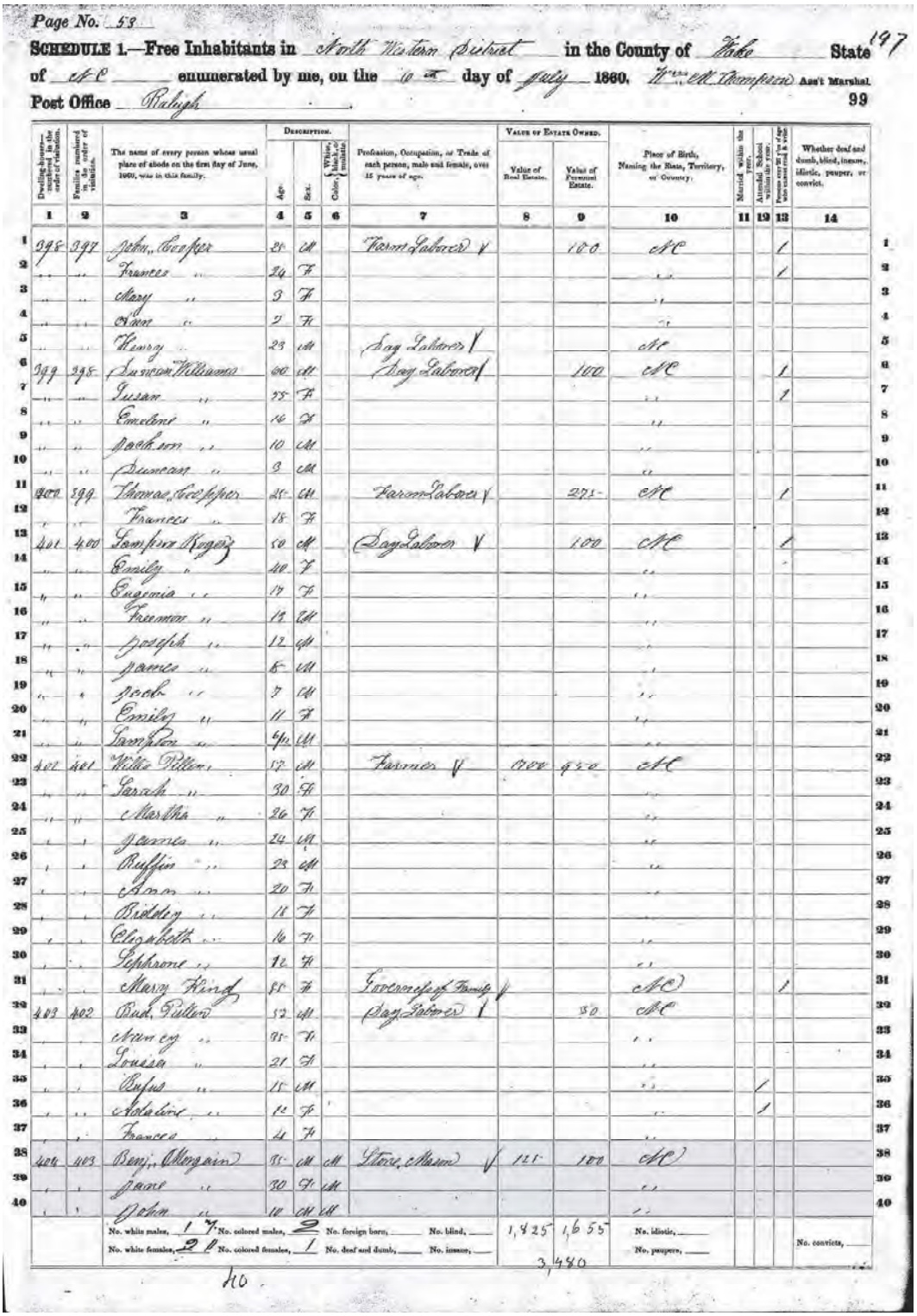
9. Paul Heinegg, *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina: From the Colonial Period to about 1820*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2001), http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/Pettiford_Riley.htm; Free African Americans in North Carolina before the Civil War, www.freeaainnc.com; Death notice of Durry [*sic*] Pettiford, Revolutionary soldier, in Wake County, N.C., *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, September 12, 1838.

10. 1860 U.S. Census, Wake County, Northwest District of Raleigh, Household 405, pp. 53–55 (retrieved from Ancestry.com); Erin Bradford, Free African Americans in Antebellum North Carolina, s.v. "Pettiford, Jesse," https://freeaainnc.tribalpages.com/tribe/browse?userid=freeaainnc&view=0&pid=458&ver=2483. Jesse Pettiford was born to free parents, Drury Pettiford and his wife, Lucy. Jesse had two other children, Nicholas and Albert, who apparently lived elsewhere, likely children by a previous wife.

11. Benjamin Morgan and Jane Chavous wedding certificate February 7, 1857, Ancestry.com. A deed for his property has not been located.

12. James Dodd and wife to John Manuel, $260 parcel adjacent to Mrs. Wilson Whitaker's property, January 21, 1867, Book 31, p. 363, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina.

13. "Survey of All the approaches to the City of Raleigh," drawn by H. T. Guion for the Confederate Army in



Page No. 53

SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in North Western District in the County of Wake State of N C enumerated by me, on the 10th day of July 1860. Wm. H. Thompson Ass't Marshal. Post Office Raleigh

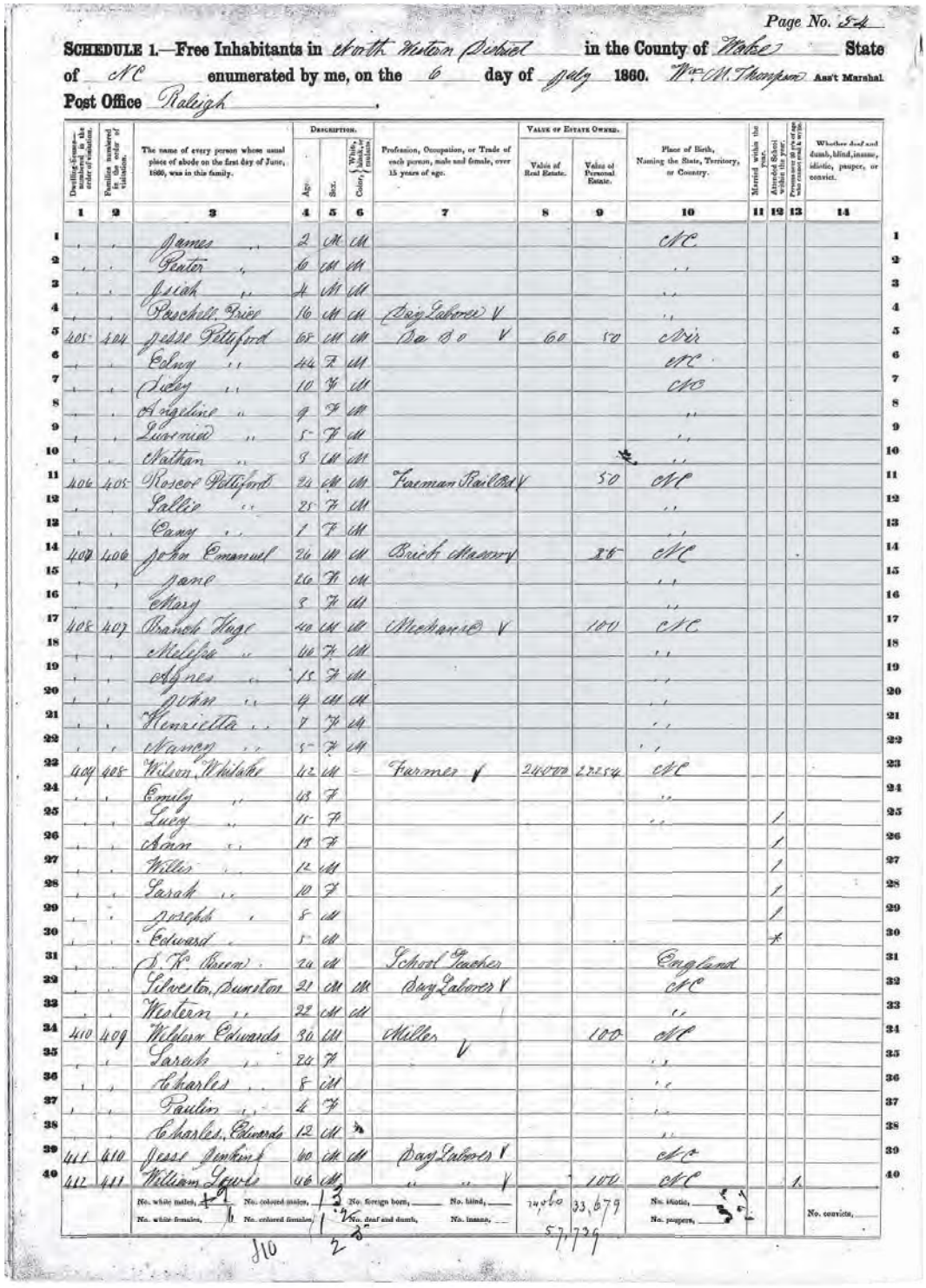
197

99

Dwelling-houses numbered in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	Description. Age.	Sex.	Color, black, or mulatto.	Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	Value of Estate Owned. Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.	Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 20 yrs of age who cannot read & write.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
398	397	John, Cooper	28	M		Farm Laborer		100	N C			1	
"	"	Frances "	24	F					"			1	
"	"	Mary "	3	F					"				
"	"	Ann "	2	F					"				
"	"	Henry "	23	M		Day Laborer			N C				
399	398	Lucinda Williams	60	M		Day Laborer		100	N C			1	
"	"	Susan "	55	F					"			1	
"	"	Emeline "	16	F					"				
"	"	Jackson "	10	M					"				
"	"	Duncan "	8	M					"				
400	399	Thomas, Cooper	25	M		Farm Laborer		275	N C			1	
"	"	Frances "	18	F					"				
401	400	Sampson Rogers	50	M		Day Laborer		100	N C			1	
"	"	Emily "	40	F					"				
"	"	Eugenia "	17	F					"				
"	"	Freeman "	14	M					"				
"	"	Joseph "	12	M					"				
"	"	James "	8	M					"				
"	"	Jacob "	7	M					"				
"	"	Emily "	11	F					"				
"	"	Sampson "	6/12	M					"				
402	401	Wiley Pullen	17	M		Farmer	400	450	N C				
"	"	Sarah "	30	F					"				
"	"	Martha "	26	F					"				
"	"	James "	24	M					"				
"	"	Ruffin "	23	M					"				
"	"	Ann "	20	F					"				
"	"	Bridsey "	18	F					"				
"	"	Elizabeth "	14	F					"				
"	"	Stephanie "	12	F					"				
"	"	Mary King	85	F		Govern of Family			N C			1	
403	402	Red. Pullen	52	M		Day Laborer		50	N C				
"	"	Nancy "	95	F					"				
"	"	Louisa "	21	F					"				
"	"	Rufus "	15	M					"		1		
"	"	Adaline "	12	F					"		1		
"	"	Frances "	4	F					"				
404	403	Benj. Morgan	45	M	M	Store, Mason	125	100	N C				
"	"	Jane "	30	F	M				"				
"	"	John "	10	M	M				"				
		No. white males, 17 No. colored males, 2 No. foreign born, ____ No. blind, ____					1,425	1,655	No. idiotic, ____				
		No. white females, 20 No. colored females, 1 No. deaf and dumb, ____ No. insane, ____						3,480	No. paupers, ____				No. convicts, ____

10

Figure 2a. Oberlin Black enclave in the 1860 Census for Wake County, N.C. The five free Black families in the enclave begin with Benjamin Morgan in Household 404 (lines 38–40 of schedule and lines 1–4 on following page).



Page No. 54

SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in North Western District in the County of Wake State of NC enumerated by me, on the 6 day of July 1860. Wm. M. Thompson Ass't Marshal

Post Office Raleigh

Dwelling-houses numbered in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	Description: Age.	Sex.	Color, black, or mulatto.	Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	Value of Estate Owned: Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.	Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 20 yrs of age who cannot read & write.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1		James "	2	M	M				NC				
2		Peter "	6	M	M				"				
3		Josiah "	4	M	M				"				
4		Paschell Price	16	M	M	Day Laborer	V		"				
5	405	404 Jesse Pettiford	68	M	M	Da Do	V	60	50	Mir			
6		Edney "	44	F	M				NC				
7		Lucy "	10	F	M				NC				
8		Angeline "	9	F	M				"				
9		Laurence "	5	F	M				"				
10		Nathan "	3	M	M				"				
11	406	405 Roscoe Pettiford	24	M	M	Fireman Railroad	V	50	NC				
12		Sallie "	25	F	M				"				
13		Carey "	1	F	M				"				
14	407	406 John Emanuel	26	M	M	Brick Mason	V	26	NC				
15		Jane "	26	F	M				"				
16		Mary "	8	F	M				"				
17	408	407 Branch Hoge	40	M	M	Mechanic	V	100	NC				
18		Melipa "	46	F	M				"				
19		Agnes "	15	F	M				"				
20		John "	9	M	M				"				
21		Henrietta "	7	F	M				"				
22		Nancy "	5	F	M				"				
23	409	408 Wilson Whitaker	42	M	-	Farmer	V	24000	22854	NC			
24		Emily "	43	F					"				
25		Lucy "	11	F					"		1		
26		Adam "	13	F							1		
27		Willie "	12	M							1		
28		Sarah "	10	F							1		
29		Joseph "	8	M							1		
30		Edward "	5	M							*		
31		J. R. Green	24	M		School Teacher			England				
32		Silvester Sumerton	21	M	M	Day Laborer	V		NC				
33		Western "	22	M	M				"				
34	410	409 Wilson Edwards	30	M		Miller	V		100	NC			
35		Sarah "	24	F						"			
36		Charles "	8	M						"			
37		Paulin "	4	F						"			
38		Charles Edwards	12	M						"			
39	411	410 Jesse Jenkins	60	M	M	Day Laborer	V			NC			
40	412	411 William Lewis	46	M		" "	V		100	NC		1	

No. white males, 4 No. colored males, 3 No. foreign born, — No. blind, — 74,60 33,679

No. white females, 1 No. colored females, 1 No. deaf and dumb, — No. insane, — 57,739

No. idiotic, — No. paupers, 3 No. convicts, —

10 2 3

Figure 2b. The other four families in the Oberlin Black enclave in the 1860 census, beginning with Jesse Pettiford, are listed in Households 405–408 (lines 5–22 of schedule).

Figure 3. The connected Pettiford and Morgan homesteads with three dwellings stood close to the Confederate fortifications along the western edge of St. Mary's School. They are pictured in this detail of an 1863 Confederate map, "A Survey of All the Approaches to the City of Raleigh." War Department Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Gov. Zebulon B. Vance ordered earthen breastworks built around Raleigh in 1863 and required slave owners to conscript one of every ten male slaves from eighteen to forty-five years of age to build them.[14] At the end of the Civil War in 1865, a Union army engineer, using the captured 1863 Confederate map, drew a revised

1863, War Department Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Map of the Rebel Lines at Raleigh, 1865. War Department Records, National Archives. The original 1863 map was captured and redrawn by the Union army in 1865. Elizabeth Reid Murray, *Wake, Capital County of North Carolina*. Volume 1: *Prehistory through Centennial* (Raleigh, N.C.: Capital County Publishing Co., 1983), 1:495.
14. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:496.

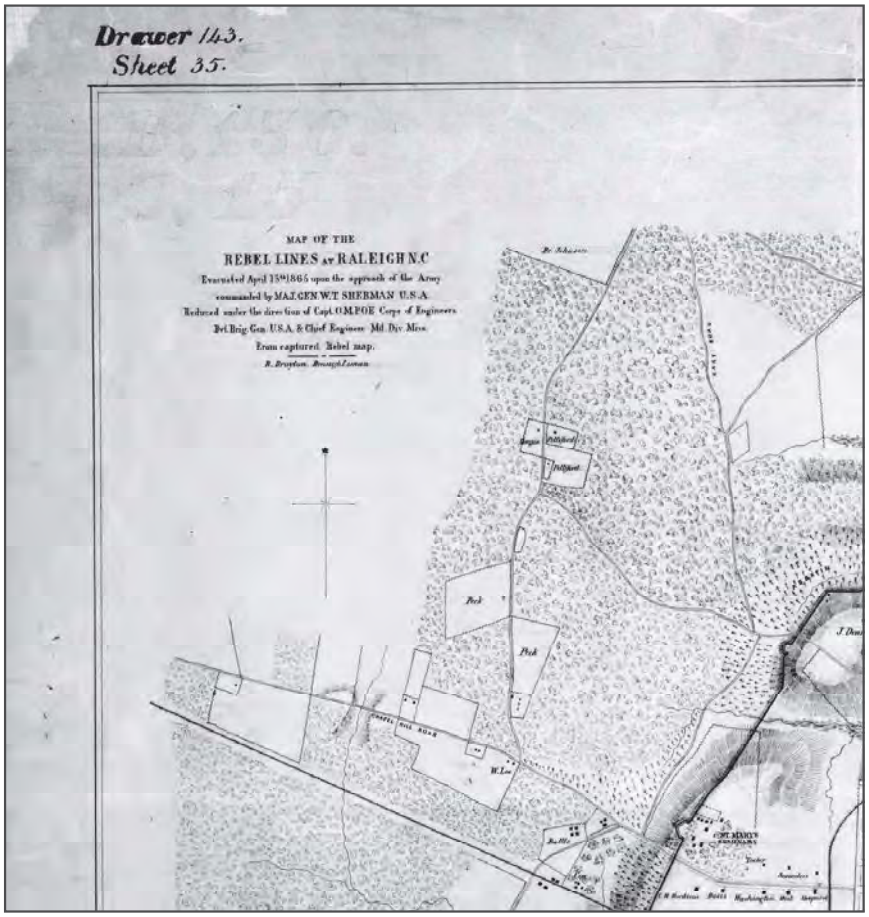


Figure 4. The Pettiford and Morgan homesteads are also pictured in this detail of "Map of the Rebel Lines at Raleigh N.C.," 1865. War Department Records, National Archives.

map. Other properties on the maps belonged to Whites: the Peck fields flanking the road to the south, the large tract owned by W. Lee at the south end of the road at Hillsborough Street, and the farm of Dr. Johnson at the north end of the road.[15]

Before the Civil War, this rural suburb known as the "North Western District" of Wake County contained New Hillsborough Road, which ran north to south along a favorable ridge some one and one-half miles from the State Capitol in Raleigh. Land along the road from Hillsborough Street north belonged to the Camerons, Pecks, William Boylan, Thomas Briggs and James Dodd, and W. W. Whitaker, along with farm laborers and a small number of free Blacks.[16] These free inhabitants did not include the slaves at the Cameron mansion and at St. Mary's School. The free Blacks on New Hillsborough Road lived between wealthy White farmer

15. A small tract owned by the Riddle family is shown near Peck's Fields on the 1863 map.
16. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948.

Willis Pullen, whose household with eight children included a governess, and wealthy White farmer Wilson Whitaker's household, which held six children, D. K. Breen, a schoolteacher from England, and two young free mulatto laborers. Other neighbors were a White grist miller and a few free mulatto laborer households. The White children in the neighborhood attended school; none of the free Black children did.[17]

Free Blacks, many of them artisans whose livelihoods depended on commercial interaction, tended to cluster in towns, where they lived among White families with slaves in the classic "salt and pepper" patterns that characterized antebellum North Carolina towns until the end of the century. The coastal town of New Bern held the largest percentage of free Blacks of any North Carolina city in 1850: eight hundred free Blacks, 17 percent of the population, lived there. Of the 330 free Black boys and men in New Bern, 20 percent were artisans, and most owned property in the racially mixed suburb of Dryboro, extending north of New Bern's core. In 1860, New Bern's 689 free Blacks were the largest concentration in North Carolina; Wilmington contained 573 free Blacks, and Raleigh was a distant third at 466, 8 percent.[18]

In Raleigh, free Blacks tended to live near one another, unlike slaves who generally lived on the property of their master. An 1807 census of Raleigh recorded twenty-three of the total number of thirty-three free Blacks living in the most populous East Ward, along with 197 Whites and 111 slaves.[19] In 1850, Wilson Willis Morgan, brother of Benjamin Morgan, lived with his wife, Susan, her mother, and younger sister among wealthy White families a few households from George W. Mordecai, northeast of the city limits. Free Black Susan Simpson had married Morgan in 1849 and kept her own property after marriage with the same "feme sole" prenuptial contract used on behalf of Margaret Cameron Mordecai. She had worked for Thomas P. Devereux, a wealthy antebellum Raleigh citizen and early railroad promoter. Just before the marriage, Morgan executed a prenuptial agreement to invalidate his interest in a $432 debt owed to her "for services rendered by her to Thomas P. Devereux" so that Susan would enjoy the use of the money as a "feme sole" (single woman). Such consideration for a wife's rights would have been unusual in a White marriage and was surely rare in those between free Blacks.[20]

17. Wake County Manuscript Population Census, "Northwest District," 1860, (retrieved from Ancestry.com).
18. Catherine W. Bishir, *Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 28, 31, 85, 119, 127–128.
19. Richard Mattson, "The Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods in the 19th and 20th Centuries," North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, November 1988, p. 3, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/survey-and-national-register/surveyreports/RaleighAfricanAmericanNeighborhoods-1988.pdf.
20. Wilson Morgan to Susan Simpson, November 19, 1849, Book 18, p. 368, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina.

North Carolina's 1860 population contained two-thirds Whites (about 630,000); one-third slaves (about 330,000); and 3 percent free Blacks (about 30,000). In 1860, Raleigh contained 2,693 Whites, 2,383 slaves, and 466 free Blacks, about 8 percent of the population. Fifty-four owned real estate, including seventeen farmers, and about 220 free Black families owned personal property.[21] Free Black households lived throughout the city both scattered and in small enclaves of four or more households on less desirable land closer to downtown, especially on streets near railroad-related industries, and on cheaper land tracts outside city limits. The small fraction of free Blacks who owned property often lived among White residents; for example, three free Black artisan families lived beside White families in southeast Raleigh. A free Black enclave clustered in northwest Raleigh around St. Paul AME Church, 402 W. Edenton Street at the corner of Harrington Street, organized in 1849. The St. Paul community was one of the first and most cohesive Black clusters prior to the Civil War.[22] An 1886 article for the *Atlantic Monthly* by O. W. Blackwell described Raleigh's postbellum free Black settlements as clusters of "frail little huts" occupied by "barbers, fiddlers, or Jacks-of-all-trades."[23]

At the end of the war in 1865, the capital, Raleigh, became a center of African American freedmen's efforts to exercise their new rights as citizens. When Sherman's troops occupied the town and the slaves were freed, the household slaves in the Cameron and Mordecai families left their masters and mistresses "within weeks," and only a few remained at the Raleigh house out of the contingent of almost two dozen who labored there in bondage. Mary Walker's children went to live with her in Massachusetts, and the other freed slaves likely resettled in Raleigh. In October 1865, some 120 Black delegates to the Freedmen's Convention of North Carolina, including James Henry Harris, future promoter of Oberlin Village, met in St. Paul AME Church, Raleigh's principal African American church. In 1866, the federal government abolished southern state constitutions and governed the states under military force, obliging each state to write a new constitution that gave full citizenship to freed slaves. In 1867, the Military Reconstruction Act, which gave Black men the right to vote, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship for Blacks, enabled former slaves to compete for political power with their former masters only two years after the abolition of slavery.[24]

21. John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790–1860*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 18, 231.
22. Mattson, "Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 6, 6 n. 23, 7.
23. "David Dodge" (O. W. Blackwell), "The Free Negro in North Carolina," *Atlantic Monthly* 57 (January 1886): 20, quoted in Mattson, "Evolution of Raleigh's African-American Neighborhoods," 7.
24. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Reconstruction and the Formerly Enslaved," Freedom's Story: Teaching African American Literature and History, TeacherServe, National Humanities Center, www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865–1917/essays/reconstruction.htm.

North Carolina's 1868 constitutional convention swept into power an alliance of White and Black Republicans that facilitated establishment of freedmen's colonies, all-Black settlements along town outskirts. William W. Holden, governor from 1868 to 1871, led North Carolina Republicans during the Republican tenure in state government when they gained a majority in the legislature in the 1868–1870 General Assembly.[25] One of the twenty Black legislators, James Henry Harris of Raleigh, played a prominent role in the New Hillsborough Road settlement during the Reconstruction era. Although Holden was impeached by the Democrats in 1870 and removed from office in 1871, Republican power did not end until the Democrats regained control of the legislature in 1876. During the eight-year interruption of White conservative rule, one of the most turbulent periods of North Carolina history, situations were favorable for Black towns.

The earliest known landowner to sell lots to African Americans, White merchant and entrepreneur Lewis W. Peck, subdivided "Peck's Fields" on both sides of New Hillsborough Road in 1866 and sold lots at the average price of $50 for one acre of land. Peck's commission store stood in Raleigh near the Capitol. Thomas Williams, a carpenter employed by Thomas Briggs, paid $90 for 1 3/4 acres; Norfleet Jeffreys bought 1.9 acres for $95; Henry Jones, one acre for $50; and Seth Nowell, 1 3/4 acres for $50.[26] Others who bought lots in Peck's Fields were William Armstead, Robert Wyche, and Talitha Norwood in 1866; Isham Ferrell, Alfred Patterson, Monroe Smith, and Asa Hunt in 1867; and Henry Jones in 1868.[27] George Mordecai's postbellum real estate activities suggest that he participated in the frenzied freedmen land rush as a speculator if not a developer. In 1869, he brought a successful suit against Lewis Peck, allowing him to buy 45½ acres of Peck's land on New Hillsborough Road in a sale at the courthouse door.[28]

Sheriff Timothy F. Lee purchased, subdivided, and sold lots along New Hillsborough Road from 1869 to 1871. Lee, a White Union soldier and Republican from Brooklyn, moved to Raleigh after the war and married into the family of J. C. L. Harris, a White Republican attorney who lived in the New Hillsborough Road area. An ally of James H. Harris, Lee served as sheriff of Wake County from 1868 to 1874.[29] Lee purchased about thirty-four acres of land at a public

25. Elizabeth Balanoff, "Negro Legislators in the North Carolina General Assembly, July, 1868–February, 1872," *North Carolina Historical Review* 49, no. 1 (January 1972): 23.
26. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948.
27. Wake County Grantor Index, Lewis W. Peck, Lewis W. Peck Estate File, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. Peck died in 1891. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948.
28. Sheriff T. F. Lee to Geo. W. Mordecai, January 1, 1869, Book 29, p. 459–460, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. This deed stems from the Superior Court case *George Mordecai v. Lewis W. Peck*.
29. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:630, 643, Appendix B; Elizabeth Reid Murray and K. Todd Johnson, *Wake: Capital County of North Carolina*. Volume 2: *Reconstruction to 1920* (Raleigh, N.C.: Capital County Publishing Co., 2008), 357; J. G. de Roulhac-Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York: Columbia

sale of the William Boylan land, north of the Peck land along Oberlin Road, for $1,626 in June 1869 and seven acres at the northwest corner of Chapel Hill and New Hillsborough Roads (now Hillsborough Street and Oberlin Road) in July 1869 and sold to Blacks at low prices.[30] In 1871 and 1872, Lee sold a $100 lot to James Shepherd, a $50 lot to Black shoemaker John James, and a $126 lot to Betsy Hinton.[31] James Shepherd was not the well-known Dr. James E. Shepard, born in 1875 in Oberlin Village and founder of North Carolina Central University in Durham. The location of the residence of Rev. Augustus Shepard, father of Dr. Shepard, is not known.[32]

James Henry Harris (1832–1891), a leading Black moderate Republican politician in North Carolina and the nation from the 1850s to the 1880s, was a strong promoter of the freedmen's village on New Hillsborough Road. Harris was born in Granville County as a "free dark mulatto," apprenticed to an upholsterer, and started his own business in Raleigh. He traveled to Oberlin College in Ohio and then worked for Black freedom in 1862 in Canada, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. In 1863, he returned to North Carolina, learned that his wife and her parents had fled to Terre Haute, Indiana, and joined them, where the governor commissioned him to raise the 28th Regiment of U.S. Colored Troops for the Union army. After receiving a teaching certificate from the New England Freedmen's Aid Society in August 1865, he returned to Raleigh to teach freedmen and helped organize the Union League, an association allied with the Republican Party.[33] At least 80 percent of its members were Black. Harris served in the 1868–1870 North Carolina House of Representatives, the first containing African Americans, and distinguished himself among his fellow twenty Black legislators as the "most sophisticated, switching in a

University, 1914). In 1873, Sheriff Lee's tax collection accounts came up $30,000 short, and former governor W. W. Holden took him to court. Lee won, and Wake County went Democratic for the first time since Reconstruction began.

30. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948; William H. Bagley to Timothy F. Lee, September 24, 1870, Book 30, p. 597; Alfred Williams to Timothy F. Lee, July 27, 1869, Book 27, p. 503, both in Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. In August 1869, Fendol Bevers surveyed and divided a portion of it into seven numbered lots, plat dated August 10, 1869, in Book 35, p. 425, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina.

31. Timothy F. Lee to James Shepard, December 12, 1871, Book 33, p. 271; Timothy F. Lee to John James, November 11, 1872, Book 34, p. 786; Timothy F. Lee to Betsy Hinton, November 4, 1872, Book 34, p. 746, all in Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina.

32. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Shepard, James E."

33. Affidavit of John Dickinson, Granville County, N.C., 1848, in James Henry Harris Papers (hereinafter Harris Papers), Private Collections, State Archives of North Carolina; Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora Hatley Wadelington, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, 2nd rev. ed. (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, 2011), 85; "James Harris Obituary," *Raleigh Gazette*, June 6, 1891; Frenise A. Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina, 1876–1894* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 29, 110; Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:555. Harris served as a Raleigh alderman, worked to erect the Colored Institution for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind in Raleigh, and published the *North Carolina Republican* newspaper in the early 1880s. NCPedia, s.v. "Union League," https://www.ncpedia.org/union-league.

wink from politician to statesman, from cool calculator to warm agitator."[34] Harris served in the North Carolina Senate from 1872 to 1874 and again in the House in 1883.[35]

A number of land companies sprang up after the war, primarily to encourage northern White investors and immigration to the South. Willis G. Briggs credited James Harris with being the first Raleigh developer to establish building and loan associations that gave loans to African Americans, allowing Oberlin to be a Black settlement "wherein the Negroes own their homes."[36] In 1869, Harris and J. Brinton Smith incorporated the Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association (RCLBA) at a meeting held in the St. Paul AME Church in Raleigh, with Harris as president and Smith treasurer. Smith, a White schoolteacher from the North and an officer of the Freedman's Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church, served as the first principal of the school that became St. Augustine's College, which opened in 1868 in Raleigh. Their cooperative lending corporation, said to have been the first mortgage cooperative in North Carolina, operated for ten years as a land developer and mortgage bank that enabled many in Oberlin and throughout Raleigh to construct homes.[37] The RCLBA bought five acres of the William Boylan estate in 1869 and sold adjacent lots to Wilson Copeland, John Dickerson, and Alfred and Sarah Williams the same year. Wilson Copeland borrowed $400 to purchase a three-acre lot on "new road" adjacent to house carpenter John Flagg's lot and to build a house. Bank servant John Dickerson purchased a house on a three-acre lot for $199 located on the "new road adjacent to Wilson Copeland and Simon Barker." Two hundred dollars would buy three acres at fifty dollars apiece and a fifty-dollar house. Alfred Williams and his wife, Sarah, mortgaged a three-acre lot adjacent to Wilson Copeland and Simon Barker for $157 to construct a house.[38] Two other lending

34. Balanoff, "Negro Legislators in the North Carolina General Assembly, July, 1868–February, 1872," 54; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Harris, James Henry."

35. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Harris, James Henry." The Harris Papers contain an 1881 petition of sixty-four leading White citizens of Raleigh, both Democrats and Republicans, that testify to Harris's character and integrity. This poignant testimonial was used in court to defend Harris against a charge of colluding to commit railroad bond fraud with carpetbaggers Milton Littlefield and George Swepson during Reconstruction. Among the signatories were leading merchants and attorneys, the editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer,* and the president of the University of North Carolina.

36. Willis G. Briggs, manuscript speech to Sandwich Club about James Harris, 1936, Willis G. Briggs Papers, Private Collections, State Archives of North Carolina; Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:561.

37. "History," Saint Augustine's University, www.st-aug.edu/history.html; Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948; Murray, *Wake, Capital County,* 1:643; *Raleigh Daily Standard*, March 8, 1869; "Cooperative Movement," *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, March 24, 1869; "Raleigh Co-operative Land and Building Association," *Raleigh News*, February 11, 1873.

38. Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association to John Dickerson, June 14, 1869, Book 27, p. 459; A. Williams to Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association, June [day unknown], 1869, Book 27, p. 461; Raleigh Cooperative Land and Building Association to Wilson Copeland, June 14, 1869, Book 27, p. 462, all in Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. The deeds included two shares of association stock. Deeds stipulated that the buyer pay 6 percent interest per year in equal monthly

institutions assisted freedmen in Oberlin and in Raleigh. A branch of the National Freedman's Saving and Trust Company was established in 1868, with Harris and Governor Holden among the directors. The private company, not affiliated with the federal government's Freedmen's Bureau, was weakened by incompetence and went bankrupt in 1874.[39] The North Carolina Land Company, whose president was George Little of Raleigh, established in 1869, was one of the more successful postwar ventures to attract northern investors to North Carolina.[40]

The heirs of wealthy White farmer Wilson Whitaker platted the planned town of "San Domingo" on Whitaker's hundred-acre farm a short distance north of "Peck's Place" around 1870. The subdivision consisted of four new streets: Grant Avenue, presumably named for President Grant; Wade Avenue for Benjamin Wade, an early Ohio abolitionist; Baez Street for the then president of Santo Domingo (now Dominican Republic); and Butler Street (later Chester Road).[41] The names of prominent White abolitionists and Black statesmen reflect the subdivision's intended African American buyers. San Domingo was a thriving section of the freedmen's village until its redevelopment as a White subdivision in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Although freedmen purchased numerous lots in the late 1860s, many of them lived in the East Ward, a Black stronghold of Raleigh, in 1870. Drayman Seth Nowell, carpenter John Flagg, newspaper pressman Norfleet Jeffries, bank servant John Dickerson, shoemaker John James, minister Wilson W. Morgan, and tinner Roscoe L. Pettiford lived in a cluster in Raleigh's East Ward in 1870. This lag in home construction may reflect the difficulty of financing house construction or the convenience of Raleigh itself, compared to the village's location outside the city. The 1870 census of Raleigh Township, whose Western Ward included the new village, listed only some fourteen Black families living close together, including carpenter Thomas Norwood; well digger Charles Hunter; laborers Nicholas Alford, Badger Harrison, Daniel Green, Simon Raynor, and Bryant Perry; and the female-headed households of Nancy Iredell, who did housework, and Carolina Williams, a washerwoman.[42]

installments on the loan and retain homeowner's insurance on the property. Failure to pay interest for six months would mean foreclosure.

39. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:576.

40. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:561–562.

41. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:644. See Amelia Whitaker et al. to Willis H. Whitaker, August 8, 1871, Book 32, p. 577, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina; and resurvey plat of San Domingo, by C. L. Mann, 1913 (Wake County Plat Book 1911, p. 109), in the Book of Maps, Wake County Register of Deeds.

42. Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Wake County, North Carolina, Raleigh Township: Raleigh East Ward and Raleigh Western Ward, pp. 78–88, esp. 85–87, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, State Archives of North Carolina).

Several of the slaves freed by the Cameron-Mordecai family and by St. Mary's School later settled in Oberlin Village. A memoir by a student who attended St. Mary's School during the Civil War recalled that the Reverend Aldert Smedes, the kindly school rector, advised and financially assisted the former slaves who had worked at the school to buy homes in the New Hillsborough Road settlement.[43] The identity of two Oberlin residents who were former Cameron-Mordecai family slaves are preserved in twentieth-century Raleigh local traditions. Stephen Stephens, a slave of the Cameron-Mordecai family, worked on the breastworks in 1865 and moved to the New Hillsborough Road settlement after emancipation. Oberlin pioneer Andrew Andrews was remembered for his good fortune in having received a Confederate pension for helping to build the breastworks. By 1880, Andrews, age twenty-eight, lived in Oberlin with no real estate. He may have been the ten-year-old Andrew who was a Cameron house slave in Raleigh in 1860.[44] Mrs. Margaret Mordecai bequeathed in her 1886 will a one-acre lot on Oberlin Road to Annie B. Davis, her former slave and later household servant.[45]

Jesse Pettiford lived to see freedmen's homesteads built around him and was probably personally acquainted with some of the White and Black Republican leaders—especially Timothy F. Lee and James H. Harris, who assisted African Americans with homes—before his death in 1870. Pettiford relied on his family and a network of White and Black farmers to help him manage his farm. In 1866, his son Roscoe cleaned his well, sold him a barrel of corn and fodder for his livestock, and loaned him three dollars. In 1869, the aging Pettiford hired neighbors James Morgan, Willis Pullen, W. H. Morgan, and W. H. Jones to work his land and harvest his corn. He bought cotton seed from Richard Sheppard, a Black farmer in East Raleigh.[46]

In 1869, Pettiford paid well-known surveyor Fendol Bevers, who lived near Peck's farm, $13, a considerable expense, to survey and subdivide his property into individual lots for his children. (The Bevers subdivision map has not been found.) Bevers, county surveyor, drew the new township map for the county in 1871.[47] Pettiford's will, written in January 1869, was probated in January 1870 at his death.[48]

43. Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, *The Saint Mary's of Olden Days* (Raleigh, N.C.: Bynum Printing Co., 1932).
44. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:496. Stephens told his story in 1930s newspaper interviews. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948; 1880 Raleigh Tax List (microfilm, State Archives of North Carolina); Margaret Mordecai Account Book (see page for 1860), Mordecai Papers.
45. Will of Annie B. Davis, probated 1918, Sydney Nathans to Ruth Little, email, May 18, 2020.
46. Estate of Jesse Pettiford, 1870 (hereinafter Pettiford Estate, 1870), Wake County Estates Records, State Archives of North Carolina (retrieved from Ancestry.com); Richard Sheppard, 1870 Census, Wake County, East Ward, Raleigh, Population Schedule.
47. Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948; Fendol Bevers, "Map of Wake County," 1871 (hereinafter Bevers, "Map of Wake County"), State Archives of North Carolina, https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ncmaps/id/241.
48. Will of Jepee [Jesse] Pettiford, January 16, 1869, Books 34–35, pp. 60–62, Wake County Wills, State Archives of North Carolina (retrieved from Ancestry.com).

His seven children—Roscoe Lee, Dicy, Luvenia, Nathan, Angeline, Nicholas, and Albert—each received one acre, with the youngest, Nathan and Luvenia, receiving an extra two acres to benefit them until they reached legal age and then to be owned jointly by all the children. This accounts for eight acres of the sixteen owned by Pettiford, leaving another eight acres that may have been separately bequeathed to Pettiford's wife, Edny. He appointed farmer and Wake County legislator Stokes D. Franklin as his executor and guardian of his youngest, Nathan and Luvenia. Pettiford may have been acquainted with Franklin as one of the legislators who served in the 1868–1870 legislature that included African Americans, including James H. Harris, for the first time in history. Franklin owned a well-known vineyard in House's Creek township, just north of the Northwest District where Oberlin was located, in 1870.[49] The property of Angeline, Nicholas, and Albert corresponds to the footprint of Oberlin Cemetery; that of Dicy, Luvenia, and Nathan to the boundary of the former Oberlin School parcel. At his estate sale on July 2, 1870, son Roscoe purchased the contents of Jesse's house for $15. Roscoe and his brother Albert Pettiford, along with neighbors J. D. Morgan, W. H. Morgan, and S. D. Franklin, purchased cows, yearlings, oxen, axes, lots of iron, a spinning wheel and reel, a cradle, hides, potware, and buckets.[50] By the time his estate paid the costs of the survey, probate fees, executor fees, and outstanding debts, his family were left with $10.61 cash. Nonetheless, his wishes were fulfilled, and his heirs received individual property to perpetuate the Pettiford family's presence.

By 1872, so many residents lived in the village that Raleigh's *Daily News*, a White Democratic paper, noted that the new residential area, which the newspaper called "Morganton" (apparently for Benjamin Morgan), constituted "our principal suburban village, distant about two and a half miles from the city." The reporter remarked that its population was "composed almost exclusively of colored families who are represented as very industrious and thriving, and we learn has increased so rapidly within the past few months that it will soon require a municipal corporation of its own."[51] The village, considered a self-sufficient community, apparently never developed any system of self-government or management. It never incorporated as a town, remaining a rural suburb that received a post office in 1892 that was discontinued in 1894, and then was annexed into Raleigh in 1920 as White suburbs encircled it.[52]

White newspapers referred to the colony by neutral names, such as "Peck's Place," "Morganton," and "Save-Rent," and by derogatory references, leading its citizens to

49. Bevers, "Map of Wake County"; Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:546, 594. Roscoe is listed in the 1860 census with his family right after his father's household.
50. Pettiford Estate, 1870, State Archives of North Carolina.
51. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:644.
52. Murray and Johnson, *Wake, Capital County*, 2:689.

assert their right to name their own community. The *Raleigh Daily News* printed a letter on March 13, 1872, from "Many Citizens:"

> Dear Sir:
> You will please do us the kindness to correct the many errors you have unknowingly made in the name of our flourishing little village. It is neither Morganton, San Domingo, or "Save Rent" but Oberlin. With a due compliance, you will greatly oblige etc.[53]

The paper published a condescending response:

> At the request of "Many Citizens" we publish the following communication handed us by one of the same yesterday. In answer to which we will say, call it what you please. We are sorry we ever called it anything but should necessity hereafter require it, we shall call it Morgantown, San Domingo-Save Rent-Oberlin.[54]

Residents' move to create their own name for their community, rather than accept the often derogatory names assigned by the White Raleigh press, appears to have coincided with Oberlin's emergence as a physical reality. Residents are believed to have chosen the name "Oberlin" for the connections of several Raleigh African Americans, in particular, that of James Henry Harris, to Ohio's Oberlin College, associated with freedom and educational opportunities for Blacks.[55] For several years, the White press resisted the new name. For example in August 1872, the *Raleigh Daily News* reported that "About 80 negroes from Oberlin—San Domingo—Save-Rent—Morganton—marched into the city yesterday with banners flying and drums beating" to cast their ballots for Ulysses S. Grant for president.[56] Throughout the 1870s, the fiery White conservative Democratic newspaper, the *Raleigh Sentinel*, referred to Oberlin as "a romantic and notorious village of Oberlin," "that classic village," and "an African colony."[57]

The Pettiford and Morgan families sold or donated land parcels for the essential village institutions—a cemetery, a church, and a school—in the 1870s and early 1880s. In 1873, Nicholas Pettiford sold the one-acre tract of the Pettiford homestead he inherited from his father, Jesse, for $45 to the trustees of Oberlin Cemetery—John Manuel, Coffee Williams, Mingo G. Croom, Seth Nowell, and Nelson Turner. Lemuel Hinton, Isham Ferrell, R. L. Pettiford, and James D. Morgan are listed in the deed but not named trustees. The cemetery tract, described in the deed as being located in the village of Oberlin, was bounded on the east by property of the late George W.

53. *Raleigh Daily News*, March 12, 1872.
54. *Raleigh Daily News*, March 12, 1872.
55. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:644–645.
56. "The Oberlin Procession," *Raleigh News*, August 2, 1872.
57. "Stolen Goods," *Raleigh Sentinel*, December 21, 1872; "Fire," *Raleigh Weekly Sentinel*, November 9, 1875; untitled article concerning Hayes and Settle Club meetings, *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 21, 1876.

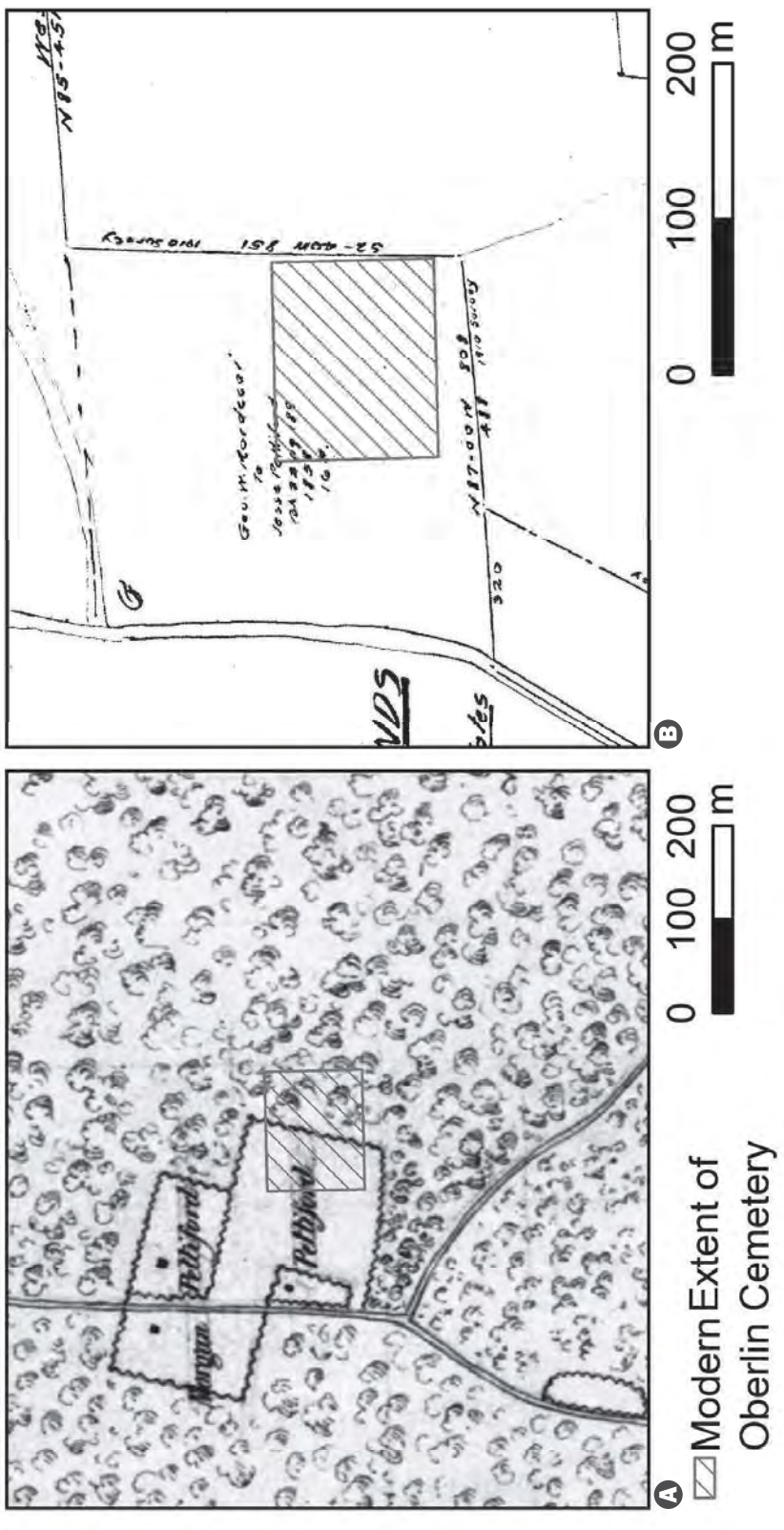


Figure 5. Modern extent of Oberlin Cemetery (hatched polygon) compared to two historic maps. (A) The modern extent occupies land identified as Pettiford's in an 1865 map of Confederate lines around Raleigh, North Carolina. (B) A map created in 1920 by C. L. Mann from compiled survey, deed survey notes, and historic surveys indicating that the land was sold by George W. Mordecai to Jesse Pettiford in 1858. The boundary for Pettiford's land is noted on Mann's map as being resurveyed in 1910. Map by John Wall, from "Analysis and Characterization of Closed Topographic Depressions" (Ph.D. diss., North Carolina State University, 2018).

Figure 6. Uninscribed fieldstone headstones can be seen in the front row in this view of Oberlin Cemetery. Photograph by M. Ruth Little, 2017.

Mordecai, on the south by Albert Pettiford's lot, and fronting on Luvenia Pettiford's lot (Figure 5). The deed specified that the land was to be sold in lots for burials; failure to use the property as a cemetery would cause it to revert to the trustees (Figure 6).[58] In 1874, Rev. Wilson W. Morgan, a prominent Republican who had served as a Wake County representative in the General Assembly from 1870 to 1872, donated a parcel to church trustees Mingo G. Croom, N. S. Farrer, L. B. Hinton, S. B. Cravan, and Henry Forter to build a church (Figure 7). Wilson Temple United Methodist Church also included a school (Figure 8).[59] Oberlin Baptist Church, 814 Oberlin Road, was founded as Mount Moriah Church in the 400 block of Oberlin Road and became

58. Nicholas Pettiford to John Manuel, Coffee Williams, Mingo G. Croom, Seth Nowell, and Wilson Farror, July 18, 1873, Book 40, p. 445, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. When the image of Jesse Pettiford's farm boundary from the 1865 "Map of Rebel Lines at Raleigh" is layered into the spatial grid of a current map, the cemetery overlays a portion of the sixteen-acre Jesse Pettiford homestead. See Figure 2.
59. W. W. Morgan and wife to M. G. Croom et al., September 9, 1873, Book 37, p. 227, Wake County Deeds, State Archives of North Carolina. The actual date when Oberlin residents organized the Methodist Episcopal Church is unknown; they built their first sanctuary about 1873. In 1876, the Oberlin Methodist Episcopal Sunday School (later Wilson Temple) celebrated the country's first centennial at the new fairgrounds at the end of present-day Stafford Street. "Grand Centennial Celebration," *Raleigh Sentinel*, August 4, 1876.

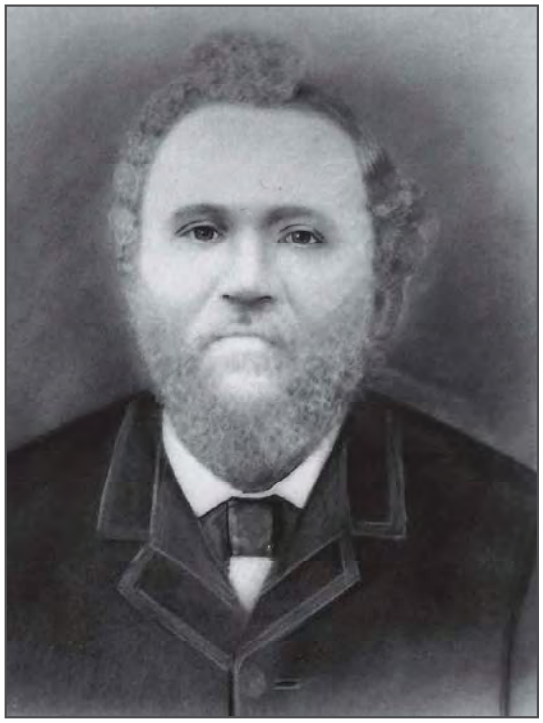


Figure 7. Rev. Wilson W. Morgan, a prominent Republican, served as a Wake County representative in the North Carolina General Assembly from 1870 to 1872. In 1874, he donated a parcel to church trustees Mingo G. Croom, N. S. Farrer, L. B. Hinton, S. B. Cravan, and Henry Forter for the use of the church, which also included a school. State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh.

Oberlin Baptist Church on its present site in 1880. The founder and first pastor, Rev. Plummer T. Hall, built a parsonage at 814 Oberlin Road around 1890.[60]

Newspapers from the 1860s and 1870s record the prominent community roles played by a number of Oberlin's pioneers. Norfleet Jeffries, a pressman of the *Raleigh Daily Standard* newspaper, bought a lot on Oberlin Road in 1867 from Lewis Peck. In 1870, he lived in East Raleigh but had moved to Oberlin Road before 1880. On March 6, 1867, the newly organized Colored People's Association assembled at Flagg's Hall and elected Jeffries chairman. Norfleet Dunston, an Oberlin man and a justice of the peace, served on the planning committee for the eighth celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 2, 1871.[61] In 1872, Norfleet Jeffries served as president of the ninth Emancipation Celebration association, when some

60. "Rev. Plummer T. Hall House," Raleigh Historic Landmark, Raleigh Historic Development Commission, https://rhdc.org/plummer-t-hall-house; Rev. Plummer T. Hall House, nomination, National Register of Historic Places, N.C. State Historic Preservation Office, 2002, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/WA3522.pdf.
61. "Anniversary Celebration," *Raleigh Daily Standard*, December 19, 1870. This may be the same Norfleet Dunston, born in 1836, who was a farmer in Oberlin in the 1880 and 1900 censuses. Little, "Oberlin Village Historic District Report."

Figure 8. Photograph of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, 1023 Oberlin Road, by M. Ruth Little, 2017.

three thousand Blacks and Whites marched from the AME Church on West Street to Metropolitan Hall (Raleigh's city hall), to celebrate.[62] Citizens created new social and fraternal service-oriented organizations, many affiliated with their churches. J. D. Morgan and R. L. Pettiford were elected secretary and treasurer of a Grant and Wilson Club organized in Oberlin village in 1872.[63] A "Hayes and Settle Club" organized in Oberlin in July 1876 selected John Flagg as its president. Activities at its September meeting included an address by Sheriff Tim Lee and music by the Raleigh Colored brass band.[64]

By 1880, Oberlin Village was flourishing, with approximately 130 Black households on large rural lots, primarily along Oberlin Road. Fifty-eight of them were valued between $200 and $500, indicating substantial dwellings.[65] No map of the village

62. *Raleigh Daily Standard*, October 18, 1870; "Meeting of the Colored People of the City of Raleigh," *Raleigh Daily Standard*, March 12, 1867; "Emancipation Celebration," *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Era*, January 11, 1872.
63. "Organizing," *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Era*, September 28, 1872; Little, "Oberlin Village Historic District Report."
64. Untitled articles concerning Hayes and Settle Club meetings, *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 21, September 3, 1876; Little, "Oberlin Village Historic District Report."
65. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Wake County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (retrieved from Ancestry.com); 1880 Tax List, Oberlin, Raleigh Township, Wake County (microfilm, State Archives of North Carolina).

survives from this era, but this description in the 1880 *Raleigh City Directory* conjures a favorable image:

> Quite a town, composed almost entirely of colored people, has grown up a mile northwest of the city. The length is more than a mile and it has some 750 inhabitants. It has been given the name Oberlin. The houses . . . are almost entirely of wood, but little stone or brick being used in the construction of dwellings. An ample space is given each dwelling, and this causes the city to cover much ground. . . .[66]

In 1880, Oberlin's reputation as an industrious colony derived from its high number of artisans and other tradesmen, who commuted to town, two miles or so away, by horseback or horse-drawn wagon. Two-thirds of the men worked as artisans and service workers; one-third of the men and a few women in the rural town worked as farm laborers. Simon Hodges, Henry Andrews, Grandison Turner, and Andrew Andrews owned farms; Plummer T. Hall, W. W. Morgan, Jackson Jeffries, and John Jeffries ministered to churches; and Kitty Ligon and Pauline Morgan taught school. The number of house carpenters—Lunsford Butcher, Henry Farrar, Eaton Robinson, William Manly, Henry Hall, Albert Hopkins, John Flagg, Henry Jasper, Seth Christmas, Oliver Brown, Spencer Williams and Charles Lockett (cabinetmaker) slightly outnumbered stone or brick masons: Thomas Williams, James Rire, George Overton, Charles Higgs, John Struderick, John Manuel, William Burnett, James Rex, and James S. Morgan. Shoemakers Lewis Smith, William Alston, William Rand, and Charles Manley, blacksmiths Willis Haywood and Calvin Chorris, tinner R. L. Pettiford, and plasterer Isiah Perry plied their trades. Seth Nowell, Bryant Haywood, and two others worked as draymen, four worked as servants or stewards, two were cooks, two, landscape gardeners, one, a barber, and one, a well digger. Bob Headen was a miller, John Dunston, a machinist, and Daniel Green a cemetery sexton (likely for the Oberlin Cemetery). Most of the women worked as well, primarily as laundresses (twelve), seamstresses, cooks, servants, nurses, and farm laborers. Seven scattered White households lived in Oberlin, included Gaston Stafford, keeper of the State Fairgrounds; lawyer J. C. L. Harris, whose sister married Wake County sheriff Timothy F. Lee; and James Dodd, farmer and partner of Briggs and Dodd contractors.[67]

Most of Oberlin's antebellum free Black families remained in Oberlin in the Reconstruction era, but the connection frayed by the twentieth century. Roscoe L. Pettiford, known as Ross (1835–1909), a tinner and coppersmith on Fayetteville Street in Raleigh, became the family patriarch after his father's death in 1870.[68]

66. *Raleigh City Directory*, 1880.
67. 1880 Census, Wake County: Raleigh Township, Population Schedule; Briggs, "Oberlin Village," *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1948.
68. Chataigne's *Raleigh City Directory*, 1875–1876. By 1875, Ross Pettiford was living on Johnson Street in west Raleigh but returned to Oberlin by 1880. At his death in 1909 he left his wife, Sarah Jane, the

In 1918, the last Pettiford remaining in Oberlin was Jesse, a tinner like his father and grandfather.[69] Brick mason John Manuel lived in Raleigh by 1870, where he owned a $600 house with his family, including two young apprentices in brick masonry, but returned to Oberlin by 1880. In the 1910s, a number of Manuels still lived in Oberlin. In 1910, Benjamin Morgan and the Pettifords still lived in successive dwellings, just as they had in 1860. Benjamin was a "reverend" living with his niece Gertrude Pauline Morgan, daughter of his brother Wilson Morgan, and nephew Fred Morgan.[70] His 1912 will left his estate to Pauline, a schoolteacher. The will states that Pauline was "given to him by her father and was adopted by me."[71] Benjamin's brother, blacksmith, minister, and state legislator Wilson Willis Morgan (1827–1892), lived in Raleigh's East Ward with his second wife, Elizabeth, and seven children, including Pauline, age eleven in 1870 and in Oberlin in 1880, working as a minister, with his daughter Pauline, a schoolteacher, in his household. Wilson served in the state House of Representatives as a Republican from 1870 to 1872. Wilson's sons, James S., a brick mason, and Alexander, a salesman, lived in Oberlin in 1883 (Figure 9).[72] Around 1900, Wilson built a house at 1015 Oberlin Road for James, who lived there the rest of his life. When Ross Pettiford died in 1909, he appointed his "trusty friend" James Morgan as his executor.

In the mid-twentieth century, Jesse Pettiford's great-grandson erected a stained-glass window at Wilson Temple United Methodist Church to honor Jesse Pettiford as the "Founder of Oberlin."[73] Twenty-first-century Oberlin residents wonder who he was. Memory of the Oberlin freedmen pioneers remains bright, but the village's antebellum free roots have been forgotten.

Oberlin Village was no ordinary freedmen's village because it is the only one in North Carolina known to have roots as a free Black settlement. Some, like James

homestead on the New Hillsborough Road and his personal property for the rest of her life. As his father had done, he subdivided his homestead into eight lots and stipulated which heir would inherit which lot after his wife's death. His favored daughter, Novella, received lot number 1, his "home house," and his organ. Ross's children A. B., Mattie, Jessie, and James, and grandchildren Willie Morgan, Leroy Turner, and Johnnie Pettiford remained in Oberlin Village for some years. Will of Ross L. Pettiford, 1907, and codicil, 1909, Estate of R. L. Pettiford, State Archives of North Carolina.

69. *Raleigh City Directories*, 1910 to 1920.

70. 1910 Census, Wake County, Raleigh Township, Sheet 7A, Population Schedule (retrieved from Ancestry.com).

71. Will of Benjamin Morgan, probated in Wake County, 1912 (retrieved from Ancestry.com).

72. Murray, *Wake, Capital County*, 1:643; Wilson Willis Morgan, 1870 Census, Wake County, Raleigh East Ward, p. 313A (retrieved from Ancestry.com); *Raleigh City Directory*, 1883.

73. Pettiford Family stained glass window, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. W. B. Pettiford, Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, 801 Oberlin Road, Raleigh, N.C.. Jesse's great-grandson, Dr. William Bryant Pettiford (1893–1956), the window's donor, was the son of Jesse's son Ross Pettiford's son Alvin Pettiford. In 1930, Dr. Pettiford worked as a medical intern at St. Agnes Hospital on Saint Augustine's College campus in east Raleigh. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Wake County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington D.C.; Dr. William B. Pettiford death certificate, January 26, 1956 (retrieved from Ancestry.com).

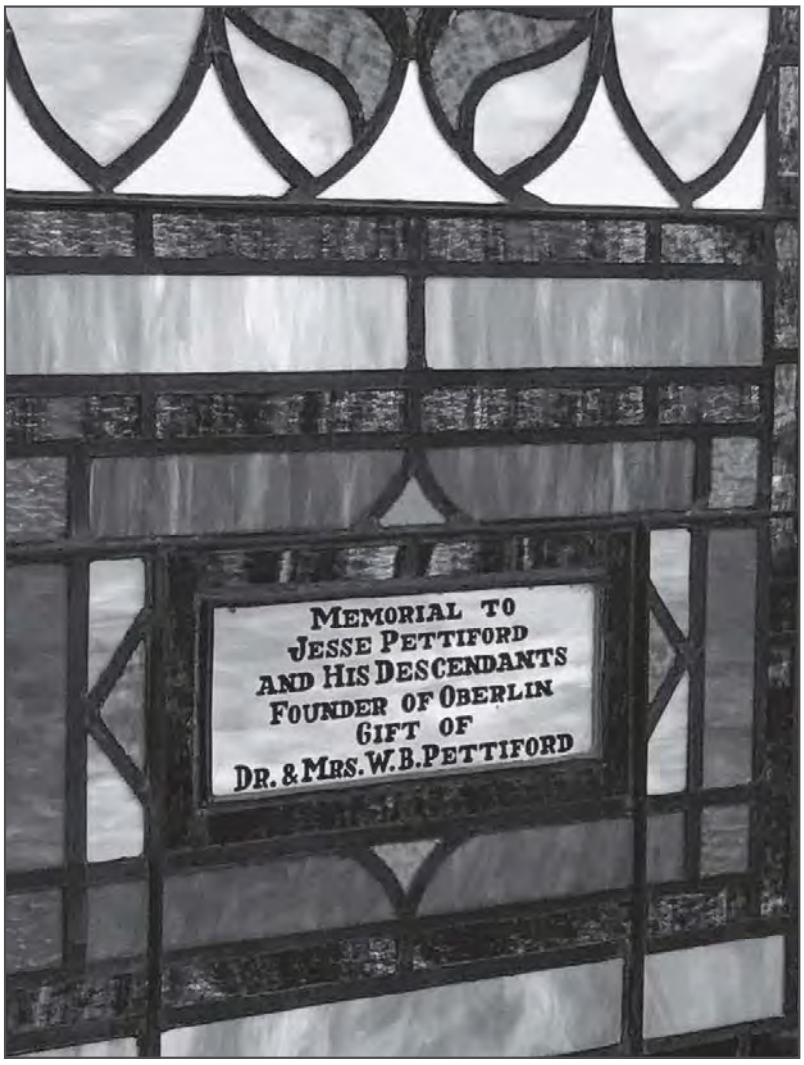


Figure 9. In the mid-twentieth century, Jesse Pettiford's great-grandson erected a stained-glass window at Wilson Temple United Methodist Church to honor Jesse Pettiford as the "Founder of Oberlin." Jesse Pettiford stained glass window, Wilson Temple United Methodist Church. Photograph by M. Ruth Little, 2017.

City near New Bern and Roanoke Island, were founded during the Civil War by the Union army to provide for the "contraband" slaves who freed themselves by escaping into military protection. Princeville, established by freed slaves on the swampy bank of the Tar River across from Tarboro in eastern North Carolina, differs from Oberlin in that its freed people successfully squatted on White property, later purchasing the land and incorporating a town that has endured. Others were privately created by White landowners or African Americans who purchased property and subdivided lots. Method, a rural development on a sixty-nine-acre tract west of Raleigh, was purchased by African Americans Jesse Mason and Isaac O'Kelly in 1870 and sold to

their own race, who built small cabins on sizeable lots in the early 1870s.[74] Regardless of the variations among these Black towns, they are alike in being born after the end of slavery. Freedmen settlements were more likely to survive than free Black enclaves because of their larger size and the firm legal status of a freedman, compared to the precarious freedom of a free Black. With Oberlin Village's roots in antebellum freedom and as a particularly successful example of federal Reconstruction, it is a unique freedmen village in North Carolina.

Dr. Little established Longleaf Historic Resources, a historic preservation consulting firm in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1990 to provide preservation services to owners, advocates and developers of historic properties and to the public sector. She is the author of nine books on North Carolina architecture and decorative arts, including Cameron Park, North Carolina: A Remote Retreat on Hillsboro Street, 1910–2010, Carolina Cottage: A Personal History of the Piazza House, *and* Sticks and Stones; Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers.

74. Oak Grove Cemetery, nomination by M. Ruth Little, National Register of Historic Places, September 11, 2018, North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/WA2484.pdf.