

Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

I, Brenda Crutchfield, am writing to respectfully urge the Commission to deny any request to demolish the 24 Martins Lane property and to give full consideration to its preservation. It is part of the living story of African American history and my family history within the City of Rockville. Once such places are destroyed, the community loses an irreplaceable connection to the people, struggles, achievements, and daily lives that shaped our community better known as Haiti.

Rockville's African American history is deeply rooted in neighborhoods, burial grounds, and family homes that speak to generations of resilience, community-building, education, and civic life. Across Rockville, preserved historic places have helped document stories of segregation, neighborhood formation, and the longstanding presence of Black families and institutions. Given that I grew up in Rockville, I understand the significance of preserving the African American community. I grew up in Lincoln Park and when I got married, I moved to Haiti community. In the Spring of 2004, The Mayor and Council of Rockville erected a sign for the Haiti-Martins Lane Community. The sign states this neighborhood was established in the 1830's. 24 Martins Lane is the central property of the Haiti community which was owed by Samuel Martin who was a freed black man. All the properties are owned by my family. Haiti community is also located near Carver Education Service Center which was the only black high school during segregation in Montgomery County and is designated as a historical site.

To access this property, there is a shared ingress and egress that is owned by my family. My husband and brother-in-law created this path for family members to use to access 22 and 24 Martins Lane. 22 Martins Lane has been declared historical by the City of Rockville which is considered the homeplace. In 1909, 24 Martins Lane was built for my in-laws. The landscape and the interior of the property were beautiful. My husband and I lived in this property at the beginning of our marriage. It is very unfortunate that the City of Rockville did not declare 24 Martins Lane historical the same time that 22 Martins Lane was declared. The City of Rockville has pictures of me and my family for the historical significance of the African American family. The pictures were displayed in the Rockville Library. Located less than mile away is the Haiti Cemetery which is a historical black cemetery that former slaves are buried.

If the 24 Martins Lane is demolished, it would greatly affect the historical significance of the Haiti Community and the surrounding 5 properties. The surrounding properties were all owned by family, Crutchfield's and Prather's. The property still has good bones and will be able to be restored. If given the opportunity, my family and I will restore the property.

Brenda Crutchfield

[REDACTED]

Rockville, MD 20850

[REDACTED]

24 Martins Lane testimony

From Gretchen Crutchfield [REDACTED]
Date Wed 5/20/2026 10:22 AM
To History <History@rockvillemd.gov>

WARNING - External email. Exercise caution.

To The Rockville Historic District Commission,

I, Gretchen Crutchfield, have been married to Wellington Nathaniel Crutchfield, Jr. for 36 years, and during that time I have come to deeply understand and appreciate the importance of the Crutchfield family history tied to 24 Martins Lane and the surrounding Haiti community in Rockville.

For the past 30 years, we have raised our family in the adjacent property at 22 Martins Lane. Over the years, I have been privileged to witness firsthand the reverence and pride the Crutchfield family holds for this property and the surrounding neighborhood. The home at 24 Martins Lane is not simply an aging structure — it is a rare and irreplaceable symbol of perseverance, family unity, and African American history in Rockville. Wellington's grandparents built this home, and generations of the Crutchfield family lived, worked, gathered, and built their lives there. The property stands as a testament to a time when African American families created strong, self-sustaining communities despite the barriers and inequities they faced.

The Haiti neighborhood represents one of the few remaining physical connections to Rockville's historic Black community. Families in this area shared not only land and homes, but traditions, values, faith, and mutual support that shaped generations. The destruction of 24 Martins Lane would erase an important part of that story and further diminish a cultural landscape that has already suffered tremendous loss over time.

What is especially troubling is that neighboring properties with shared historical significance have received historic protections, while 24 Martins Lane — a property equally tied to the same community history and family lineage — has not been afforded the same consideration. The home contributes directly to the integrity and historical character of the Haiti community and should be preserved as part of Rockville's commitment to protecting its cultural and architectural heritage.

Preservation of this structure matters not only to the Crutchfield family, but to the broader community and future generations who deserve the opportunity to see and understand the history that helped shape this city. Once demolished, this living piece of African American history can never be recreated. The family remains willing and committed to restoring the home and preserving its historic character so that its legacy may continue.

I respectfully urge the Historic District Commission and the City of Rockville to recognize the historical, cultural, and community value of 24 Martins Lane and take every possible step to preserve this important landmark.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Crutchfield

[REDACTED]

Rockville, MD 20850

[REDACTED]

Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

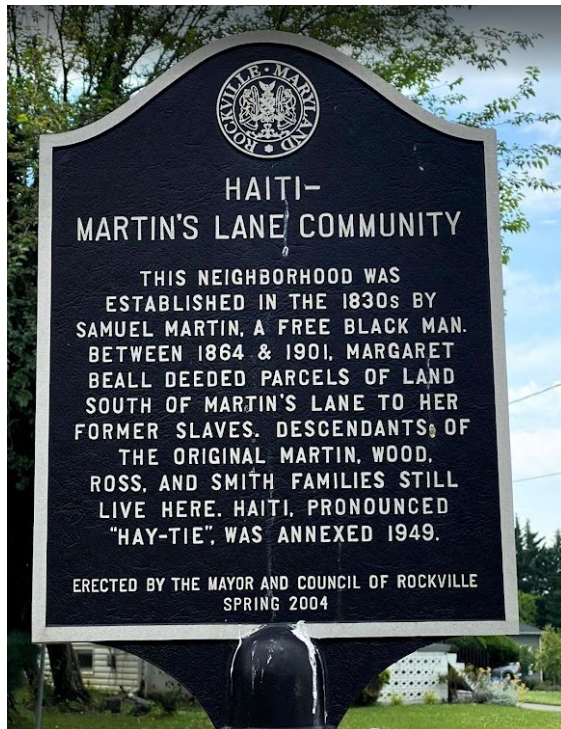
I am writing to respectfully urge the Commission to deny any request to demolish the 24 Martins Lane property and to give full consideration to its preservation. This site represents more than a structure alone; it is part of the living story of African American history and my family history within the City of Rockville. Once such places are destroyed, the community loses an irreplaceable connection to the people, struggles, achievements, and daily lives that shaped our community better known as Haiti.

Rockville's African American history is deeply rooted in neighborhoods, burial grounds, and family homes that speak to generations of resilience, community-building, education, and civic life. Across Rockville, preserved historic places have helped document stories of segregation, neighborhood formation, and the longstanding presence of Black families and institutions. In the Spring of 2004, The Mayor and Council of Rockville erected a sign for the Haiti-Martins Lane Community (see sign below). The sign states this neighborhood was established in the 1830's. 24 Martins Lane is the central property of the Haiti community which was owed by Samuel Martin who was a freed black man (see graphic below). The land was subdivided into three adjacent properties, 16 Martins Lane, 20, Martins Lane and 22 Martins. All the properties are owned by my family. Once 24 Martins Lane was sold, I was not given a chance to purchase the property to restore it back to its original beauty.

To access this property, there is a shared ingress and egress that is owned by my family. My father and uncle created this path for family members to use to access 22 and 24 Martins Lane. 22 Martins Lane has been declared historical by the City of Rockville which is considered the homeplace. In 1909, 24 Martins Lane was built for my grandparents to live. The landscape and the interior of the property were beautiful. My cousin owns 16 Martins Lane, and my cousin currently lives at 22 Martins Lane. Growing up my cousins and I were able to run between houses. It is very unfortunate that the City of Rockville did not declare 24 Martins Lane historical the same time that 22 Martins Lane was declared. The City of Rockville has pictures of me and my family for the historical significance of the African American family. The pictures were displayed in the Rockville Library. Located less than mile away is the Haiti Cemetery which is a historical black cemetery that former slaves are buried.

If the 24 Martins Lane is demolished, it would greatly affect the historical significance of the Haiti Community and the surrounding 5 properties. The surrounding properties were all owned by family, Crutchfield's and Prather's. The property still has good bones and will be able to be restored. If given the opportunity, my family and I will restore the property.

I respectfully ask the Commission to protect this property from demolition and consider any available path toward preservation or designation.



Sincerely,
LaShane Crutchfield



Rockville, MD 20850



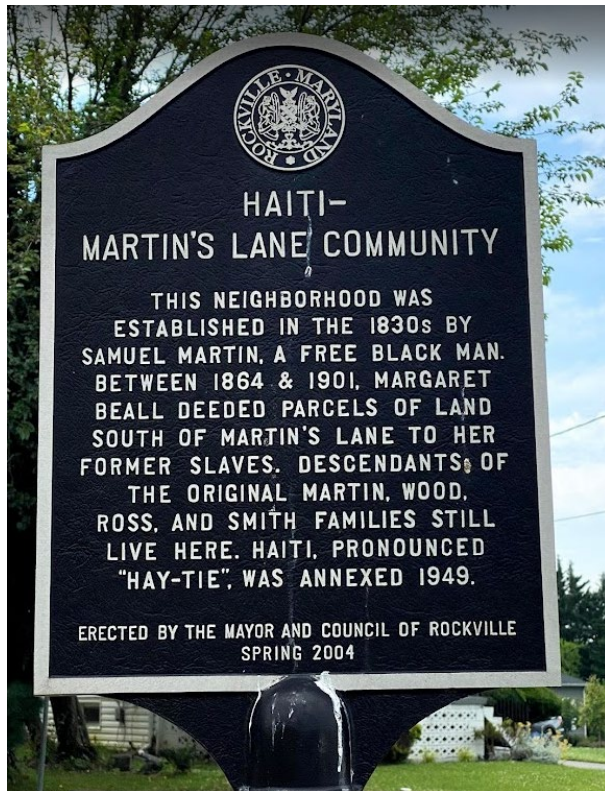
Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

I, Nicole Crutchfield, am writing to respectfully urge the Commission to deny any request to demolish the 24 Martins Lane property and to give full consideration to its preservation. It is part of the living story of African American history and my family history within the City of Rockville. Once such places are destroyed, the community loses an irreplaceable connection to the people, struggles, achievements, and daily lives that shaped our community better known as Haiti.

In the Spring of 2004, The Mayor and Council of Rockville erected a sign for the Haiti-Martins Lane Community (see sign below). The sign states this neighborhood was established in the 1830's. 24 Martins Lane is the central property of the Haiti community which was owed by Samuel Martin who was a freed black man. The land was subdivided into three adjacent properties, 16 Martins Lane, 20, Martins Lane and 22 Martins. All the properties are owned by my family.

To access this property, there is a shared ingress and egress that is owned by my family. My father and uncle created this path for family members to use to access 22 and 24 Martins Lane. 22 Martins Lane has been declared historical by the City of Rockville which is considered the homeplace. In 1909, 24 Martins Lane was built for my grandparents to live. The landscape and the interior of the property were beautiful. My cousin owns 16 Martins Lane, and my cousin currently lives at 22 Martins Lane. Growing up my cousins and I were able to run between houses. It is very unfortunate that the City of Rockville did not declare 24 Martins Lane historical the same time that 22 Martins Lane was declared. The City of Rockville has pictures of me and my family for the historical significance of the African American family. The pictures were displayed in the Rockville Library. Located less than mile away is the Haiti Cemetery which is a historical black cemetery that former slaves are buried.

If the 24 Martins Lane is demolished, it would greatly affect the historical significance of the Haiti Community and the surrounding 5 properties. The surrounding properties were all owned by family, Crutchfield's and Prather's. The property still has good bones and will be able to be restored. If given the opportunity, my family and I will restore the property.



Sincerely,

Nicole Crutchfield

[REDACTED]

Rockville, MD 20850

[REDACTED]

Demolition of Property located at 24 Martins Lane

From Wellington Crutchfield [REDACTED]
Date Wed 5/20/2026 10:18 AM
To Historic District Commission <HistoricDistrict@rockvillemd.gov>

WARNING - External email. Exercise caution.

To The Rockville Historic District Commission,

I, Wellington Nathaniel Crutchfield, Jr, am highly upset that the Historic District Commission is considering demolishing the 1909 structures (24 Martins Lane) with deep historic and family ties to the African American community. I share a boundary at 22 Martins Lane(which I'm the 7th generation to occupy) which is historical protected and I am confused why 24 Martins Lane was not historically protected in the same vein as 22 Martins Lane, which falls under the City of Rockville Historical guidelines. 24 Martins Lane holds a special importance in my heart because of family history. My grandparents built this house, and my father and his siblings grew up there. In fact, I share an ingress and egress with the house that my father and uncle paved by hand, which is the sole ingress and egress to 22 and 24 Martins Lane. The foundation is sound and we have family members who are willing to rebuild its former historic glory to preserve the house as it would have been in 1909. Unfortunately, we were not given the opportunity to bid on it. Now that we know it is slated for possible demolition, we have rallied as a family to save this important piece of Rockville architecture. To demolish the structure flies in the face of the City of Rockville's promise to restructure and preserve historical structures. Demolition of the property would affect the surrounding 5 properties in a negative manner and would destroy the compound known as Haiti. It was an oversight of the City of Rockville not to designate this property as historic when 22 Martins Lane was designated as historic. Currently there is nothing of this kind still standing in the City of Rockville. Due to the proximity of this property, any demolition will negatively impact on our historic property. It's place in Rockville's history cannot be denied.

Sincerely

Wellington Crutchfield Jr

Sent from [Outlook](#)



Outlook

24 Martins Lane

From Jane Wood <[REDACTED]>**Date** Mon 6/15/2026 1:58 PM**To** History <History@rockvillemd.gov>**WARNING - External email. Exercise caution.**

Good afternoon, I am in favor of demolition of 24 Martins Lane, Rockville, MD. I live at 23 Martins Lane, Rockville, MD

You may or may not be aware that 24 Martins Lane has been vacant for 21 years. To my knowledge, no one in the Crutchfield family made an attempt to have the property deemed historic prior to its being sold. I was born and raised on Martins Lane and moved back to Martins Lane 18 years ago.

Additionally, I believe it is a health issue. We have a fox that lives on my side of Martins Lane as well as coyotes. I have seen them cross from my side of Martins Lane towards 24 Martins Lane. There are also big black birds that live in 24 Martins Lane.

I will not be at the meeting on Thursday. Thank you, Rev. Jane Wood

June 16, 2026

David Hill

Rockville, MD 20850

Peter Fosselman, Chair
Historic District Commission
City of Rockville
City Hall, Planning Dept.
111 Maryland Ave., 20850
[transmitted electronically]

Re: For HDC meeting of June 18, written testimony for 2026-331-EOS (24 Martins Lane)

Dear Chairman Fosselman, Commissioners and Staff,

Please enter the attached written testimony into the record of the subject HDC matter and consider its argument(s) and conclusion. While I attended the original May 16 HDC meeting intending to testify so at that time, I am unable to attend the deferred June 18 meeting. While I still wish to support the Crutchfield family and Haiti Community in this matter with my observations and rationale to you.

Sincerely,



David Hill

*Former Interim Commissioner, MoCo Planning Board & MNCPPC
Former Commissioner (inc. Chair), City of Rockville, Planning Commission
Former Commissioner, City of Rockville, 2006 RORZOR Commission [zoning re-write]
Former Co-Chair, City of Rockville, 2002 Charter Review Commission
Former Commissioner (inc. Chair), City of Rockville, Board of Appeals
Former Officer & Director, Peerless Rockville*

This testimony pertaining to HDC 2026-331-EOS for 24 Martins Lane addresses three points:

1) Illogic

- a. The matter before and in the bailiwick of the HDC is historical significance, not the end consideration of a demolition permit. The crux of what the applicant is applying for and staff is recommending in their report, is that the condition of the structure on the property is poor and therefore the HDC should not find the property to have historical significance. That is taking procedural liberty (a short cut) to an eventual approval desired by the applicant to make way for other development plans. A potentially historically significant property may be both significant and have structures in poor condition at the same time. I propose that is the case here. The HDC role in this process is to pass judgement on historical significance, not structural integrity alone or predominating.
- b. It appears uncontroversial that under City of Rockville ordinance relative to Historic Resources, Exhibit C, Criteria, Historic[al] Significance, all four of the required criteria are met. Staff finds and recommends so. I suggest the mentioned support for item C, could go further beyond Samuel Martin, as later members of the Haiti community are historical figures as well in City history. Is there anything else relevant for the HDC to conclude this is a historically significant property? All the criteria under this direct category are met. Staff also finds criteria A, and I argue below also criteria E, seem fulfilled in the supporting “Architectural, Design, and Landscape Significance” criteria. Leaving a net preponderance of all criteria fulfilled. This is a strong outcome that this property is indeed historically significant (since only one criteria could produce a favorable recommendation by the HDC). I further point out that to make the overriding position by applicant and staff that poor structural condition trumps historical criteria is not explicit in the definition of “Integrity” in the same section: “*the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics....*” First this refers to a property, not just the foremost structure. Second, this property does have further characteristics than just the house focused upon [see below for more].

2) Historical Integrity of the Haiti Community

While historically the Haiti Community was formed in three chunks, well described in the staff report, the modern orientation of structures devolves to two nodes: along Martins Lane (with Bickford Ave.) and along North Street (with McClane Ct.) The large parcel and mostly open landscaping of 24 Martins Lane, plus the private drive access

nearby, is the glue between these two nodes. This is critical to the contiguity of the Haiti Community. Create a barrier to sight lines and casual movement by and through this property leaves the Haiti Community fractured in two. I foresee that North Street+ will ostensibly become part of West End and a curtailed Haiti will survive only along Martins Lane (impoverished spatially by the perceptual reduction). The extant Haiti Historic District will similarly have trouble with relevance. From this observation, I assert that criteria E under “Architectural, Design, and Landscape Significance” should be answered in the affirmative. Indeed the mostly open landscaping (or even historic trees, bushes and plantings) does *“Represents an established visual feature of the neighborhood or City because of its physical characteristics or landscape components.”* This is not to say that no to scale and similar density structures might be built on this large parcel, yet they require proportion and spacing to hold together the nodes of the Haiti Community.

3) Future Replacement Development

While considering future development to the site is a forward looking perspective, I suggest that overriding historical criteria to approve demolition is equally forward looking, so equitably inbounds now for passing consideration. The worst outcome here would be demolition of even poor condition historic fabric without a viable way forward. A first technical zoning problem exists in building anything residential on this parcel. Such requires public right-of-way access and commensurate with its density. The tenuous property stem at the NE corner may be inadequate for density and forms a new pipestem situation. Pipestem development was prohibited without exacting waiver under the Giamo administration of the City. I have lost track of its current status, but someone should investigate. Further and larger, It takes little imagination to foresee what is proposed and likely as replacement development. You must only look to the tight, urban textured townhouses contiguous to Hiati at Martins Lane Square and Ivy League Square. These urban density townhouses are indeed the ostensible target of near Town Center housing policy and national trends. However, such is in tension with the historical texture of the Haiti community as outlined in #2 above. Tight sticks of three story plus townhouses will be a visual wall and dividing force through the center of the Haiti Historic District (as described above). Which will the City prioritize is beyond the purview of the HDC. Your role is to pronounce on whether historical significance is at stake in an anticipated demolition permit decision which will carry forward to further infill development. Not to make a prejudged outcome for the larger housing and planning decisions that should be informed by your recommendation on impact on historical resources (bringing this testimony full circle).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Rockville Library
Reference

METRO

Community
Clings to
Its HeritageRockville Blacks
Feel Boom PressureBy Eugene L. Meyer
Washington Post Staff Writer

First came the 17 town houses, which quickly sold for up to \$189,000, all to outsiders. Then, Mabel Hebron's husband was barely in the grave when a real estate agent called to ask if her property was for sale. Aaron Williams was offered \$250,000 for his house and lot. Several other neighbors have received persistent calls from developers avidly eyeing their land.

The object of all this interest is Martin's Lane, a close-knit black community of about 20 modest houses on large lots at the edge of booming, downtown Rockville. Named for a free black man who owned some of the land before the Civil War, the lane that now is considered prime real estate once was a dead-end dirt road nobody wanted to pave—much less develop.

But times have changed, and the tiny community of intermarried families stands at a critical crossroad. The issue residents face is whether to cash in on the opportunities at hand or stay put.

"Some people feel the land is so valuable, you can make a lot of money," said Warren G. Crutchfield, 52, a Martin's Lane resident living on land deeded to his slave ancestor, Jane Carroll Ross. "But personally, I feel some things must be preserved. They see the dollar signs; I see history."

In dealing with this predicament, residents are being studied, guided and lobbied by Peerless Rockville, a preservation group



Members of the Crutchfield, Prather and Wood families are part of the long history of Martin's Lane in Rockville.

dedicated to saving buildings—and in this instance a community.

"We started out thinking just about the buildings, but it's a way of life," said Eileen McGuckian, Peerless Rockville's executive director. "If the people left Martin's Lane, it simply would not be there. A kinship community would be shattered."

McGuckian is attempting to document the lane's rich history and to rally residents against the forces of change.

Despite such efforts, it may be just a matter of time before change overtakes Martin's Lane.

It now is part of a road that bypasses Rockville and leads to I-270. The Rockville Metrorail station is just blocks away.

See MARTIN'S LANE, D7, Col. 1



Several markers in the Martin's Lane cemetery date to the 1800s.

PHOTOS BY CRAIG HERNDON—THE WASHINGTON POST

Martin's Lane

MARTIN'S LANE, From D1

A high-rise General Electric office building faces the lane. A new post office, Paisano's Pizza and town houses adjoin it.

The land along the lane is zoned to allow as many as seven houses per acre.

The land itself is worth more than the houses, the city's historic district commission said last year.

"This inevitably makes the area a target of interest for more intense development despite the stated city policy of neighborhood preservation," the commission noted in a report highlighting urban "stresses."

The community also is threatened by the simple fact of age: Rosalie Mapson Campbell is 80; Oscar Wood, 87; Henry and Frances Crutchfield, 82 and 74; Mabel Hebron, 74; Aaron Williams, 70; Adele White, 74.

"I really wouldn't want to see it go," White said, "but I'll be going myself, eventually."

Some of the residents are widows living alone. In many cases, their children and grandchildren live elsewhere.

"There are still a lot of us who grew up on that hill who keep in contact," said Clarence Hebron Jr., 43, who works for General Motors in St. Louis.

"If any decision is made [to sell], it'll be made as a group because that's how close we are. But I know of one or two people willing to sell."

Claude Prather Jr., 39, reluctantly, is one. "I'm content here, right now," he said.

But development, he added, "is inevitable. Slowly but surely, it will come our way. Eventually, there will be something done up here. This is a lot of land for the older people to maintain."

For now, Prather mows his mother's lawn next door. Warren and Wellington (Buddy) Crutchfield do the same for their parents and for other elderly neighbors. They also maintain the cemetery, which the Crutchfields own.

Martin's Lane is like one big family, residents uniformly said.

The lane was named after Samuel Martin, a freed slave who owned the land on the north side as early as 1831.

His son, Samuel Martin Jr., died in 1873, and divided the land among his five daughters.

For years, Martins populated the land and were buried in the tiny cemetery that remains, well shaded and hidden from the street.

Samuel Martin left another, perhaps unintended, legacy: the community name of Haiti (pronounced Hay-tie), suggesting a possible fa-



PHOTOS BY CRAIG HERNOON—THE WASHINGTON POST

Development in the area around Martin's Lane has increased the amount of traffic in the neighborhood in recent years.



Mabel Hebron was called about selling her property after her husband died.

miliar link to Honore Martin, a Rockville merchant and slave owner from the French West Indies.

Few people still call the community Haiti, and the Martin lots were sold to other black Rockville residents, who built frame and brick houses there beginning in 1916. Today, there are no Martin descendants living on the lane.

The south side of the lane remains almost entirely in the hands of descendants of three slave sisters owned by Margaret Beall, whose manor home, the Beall-Dawson House, includes the county historical society a few blocks away.

"They say she was very good to her slaves," said Rosalie Campbell, a great-granddaughter of one of the sisters. Indeed, Beall sold large tracts to her former slaves for nominal sums.

Their names were and are Smith, Ross, Crutchfield, Prather, Carroll and Wood. In the sociological scheme of black Rockville, they were solidly middle class. Although many worked for white families as

domestics and handymen, others were teachers, schooled in Washington's then-segregated system because Montgomery County had no high school for blacks until 1927. Several attended Dunbar, the District's academically elite segregated high school for blacks.

The Martin's Lane settlement stood in marked contrast to the area a few blocks south around Middle Lane, a low-income black ghetto razed in the 1950s to make way for shopping centers.

On Martin's Lane lived the likes of bugle-playing William Wood, who founded the Rockville Memorial Day parade, civil rights leader and postal worker Alphonzo Lee, and Claude Prather's father, a successful businessman who owned an ice house, store and pool hall in Rockville.

In 1936, residents offered to mortgage their houses to finance a civil rights suit on behalf of black teachers.

Despite their higher status, there were slights and fights.

There was no water or sewer service until 1951, two years after Martin's Lane was annexed by Rockville.

The lane was not even paved until 1950, when it was surfaced to serve Rock Terrace Elementary, the last of the segregated schools built in the county. The school opened in 1952.

In the 1960s, residents united against city efforts to change the street name to Nelson the extension of Martin's Lane that passes through newer, more expensive and mostly white subdivisions.

The extension turned the formerly quiet lane into what Claude Prather calls a "very high-profile street," with commuters cutting through.

"Shucks, it's just like being on the side of a highway," said James (Buddy) Carroll, 67, whose parents' vacant frame house may be Martin Lane's oldest. "Some people fly through here like they're on a race track. It's gotten to be a nuisance."

But it was the town houses that set off the loudest alarms. The first was occupied in December, and all were sold by April, at prices ranging from \$169,000 to \$189,000—far beyond the means of the Martin's Lane residents.

None of the residents of the town houses is black. The three-bedroom units face an interior court, not the street or community.

"I like to see a little progress," Carroll said, "but I don't like to see it go beyond my pocketbook. Where are you gonna go, as high as things are?"

Still, the real estate people call. "When they start talking, I say 'No thanks,' and hang up," said Rosie Wood, 69.

Added Aaron Williams, who married into the Martin's Lane clan, "Some of the neighbors up here, you would probably hasten the end of their life if they had to leave this place. I don't care how fabulous [the offer] was."

Residents of Martin's Lane say they have something money can't buy.

"It's one of the last dynasties in Rockville," said Kelly Davis, 26. Vowed her mother, Brenda Crutchfield Davis, "We will be here till Thy Kingdom come."

City council hears report on Haiti-Martin Lane area

by Mary O'C. LoJacono

At a recent Rockville mayor and council meeting, Haiti-Martin's Lane was described as an "integral and multi-dimensional part of the city" that should be preserved for future generations of the original inhabitants.

At the meeting, members listened to a comprehensive report on historical black communities in Rockville, especially the community surrounding Martin's Lane and known as Haiti (pronounced Hay-tie) to the older residents.

Eileen McGuckian, project director and researcher for Peerless Rockville, was commissioned partly by the city to research the area last year. Her report to the council was accompanied by a 52-page report and analysis of the area, its people, its history and its development over the years.

McGuckian was joined in her presentation by Everett L. Fly, the project adviser, who also travels the country as an adviser with Entourage Inc. for similar projects.

McGuckian offered background information about the area with

slides of homes, many of which are still standing, and of plots of land subdivided throughout 150-plus years of the communities' existence.

She said she was impressed with the "rich history" of the neighborhood. By "listening to stories . . . and looking at old photographs," offered to her by the many descen-

Eileen McGuckian
. . . was commissioned partly by the city to research the area last year.

dants of the original developers, she was able to put the pieces of the community together. "It was like a jigsaw puzzle," she said.

The Haiti community was begun circa 1830 by a free black named Samuel Martin. He owned eight and three-quarters acres of land north of Martin's Lane, which was later subdivided into five equal plots for his children and grandchildren.

From Martin's Lane to North Street, the central part of the Haiti community began to sprout when former slaves and servants of the Beall family in the second half of the 19th century.

The community continued to grow as black investors and blacks from other areas began to buy into the already established community.

McGuckian pointed out that the

land was usually divided equally among the relatives of the elderly homeowners.

In addition, she added, the houses are only part of the rich traditions of the community. In what she called a "generational kinship community," McGuckian called attention to the fifth generation Crutchfields, who continue to live on the land.

Fly then told the council members about the uniqueness of this community. He said it is typical in many ways to other old communities, but, because of its integrity, it is one of the few communities of its kind. "The human and cultural resources," said Fly, give the community its integrity.

The early settlement date of 1830 is also atypical of most early black developments, he continued.

And finally, he said, the continuity of the neighborhood as a black community and the number of relatives of the original dwellers still living there is "incredible."

The council was pleased with the research. Councilwoman Viola Hovsepian said, "It brings back a lot of memories."

When asked what the city can do to preserve the unique characteristics of the neighborhood, McGuckian offered some suggestions.

She said making the community a historic district "may or may not be the answer." She compared it to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater . . . You can't throw the people out and save the buildings," she said, and preserve the neighborhood. She said the people are as important to the neighborhood as

the buildings and landscape.

McGuckian said the city could "provide support" to the residents. She said they are constantly being approached—up to four or five times a week—by developers who want to buy their land.

She also said, "The economic pressures for the next generations

to find affordable housing" is increasing. She said the next generation should be able to live on the land of their forefathers.

"The challenge is survival," McGuckian said.

The council will expect another report from Peerless Rockville as the research continues.

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Carol Stuart Watson

*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815
home of the Montgomery County Historical Society
103 W. Montgomery Ave., Rockville, Maryland*

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HAITI, AN HISTORIC BLACK COMMUNITY

by Eileen McGuckian

Montgomery County has always had a substantial black population. Although there were few large plantations, slave owners and slaves were scattered around the County, as were free blacks. By 1860, slaves comprised 30 percent of the County's population, while free blacks represented 8 percent. Blacks, free and slave, have resided in and near Rockville since the town's establishment as the seat of County government in 1776.

Editor's Note: Eileen McGuckian is Executive Director of Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, Ltd., an organization dedicated since 1974 to preserving structures of historic and architectural significance in the Rockville area.

Four black communities are associated with Rockville. The oldest area, called "Rockville" or "The Lane" and located along North Washington Street and East Middle Lane, probably developed concurrently with the town. The next oldest, Haiti, situated north of town along the Frederick Road, was established as early as 1830. Settlements on Falls Road followed in the 1840's with Lincoln Park 50 years later. These neighborhoods were linked by common schools, churches, and activities.

Haiti¹ is Rockville's oldest surviving black community. Important in building its rich heritage were free black Samuel Martin and his heirs, slaves formerly owned by the Beall family, black builders, and investors. Descendants of these early residents live in Haiti today, providing a tightly interwoven kinship community.

The community of Haiti is significant for its early settlement date, its variety of development patterns, the contributions of its residents to Rockville and the County, the integrity of its buildings and landscape, and its historical relationship to institutions, families, and events. The purchase of land from former slave owners, settlement by freedmen, continuation of a kinship community, existence of vernacular architecture, and pattern of replacement housing are representative of Montgomery County rural black communities. However, the existence of such an intact nineteenth-century cultural landscape in any urban area is highly unusual.

Haiti possesses a distinct sense of place. The landscape reflects the life which has gone on there for 150 years. The homesteads, with their buildings, gardens, and hedgerows, are still arranged to provide basic needs. Open space formerly used for extensive gardens and livestock continues to define the community and reflect its development patterns. Buildings include simple nineteenth-century dwellings hand-built in the traditional manner, mail-order pre-cut houses, homes constructed by local black builders, and replacement homes for succeeding generations of the original families.

SAMUEL MARTIN AND MARTINS LANE

The first mention of Samuel Martin was in the U.S. Census of 1790, where he was listed as head of a household of four non-whites. Thirty-five years later, Martin was assessed by Montgomery County for a lot he shared with Honore Martin, a local merchant and Orphans Court Judge; the relationship between the two men is unknown. The lot, number 32 in the original town of Rockville, located on the west side of Washington Street above Wood Lane, by 1831 was assessed solely to Samuel. When he died in 1837, Samuel Martin left "a log dwelling house 40' by 16' and a paled garden in good order"² on a half acre of land, livestock, produce, and furniture.

1. The name "Haiti" is not an uncommon one for black settlements in America, its nineteenth-century association with independence and freedom for blacks often producing fear among southern whites. How Montgomery County's Haiti was named is unknown, but we do know that its history begins with the story of a free black named Samuel Martin.

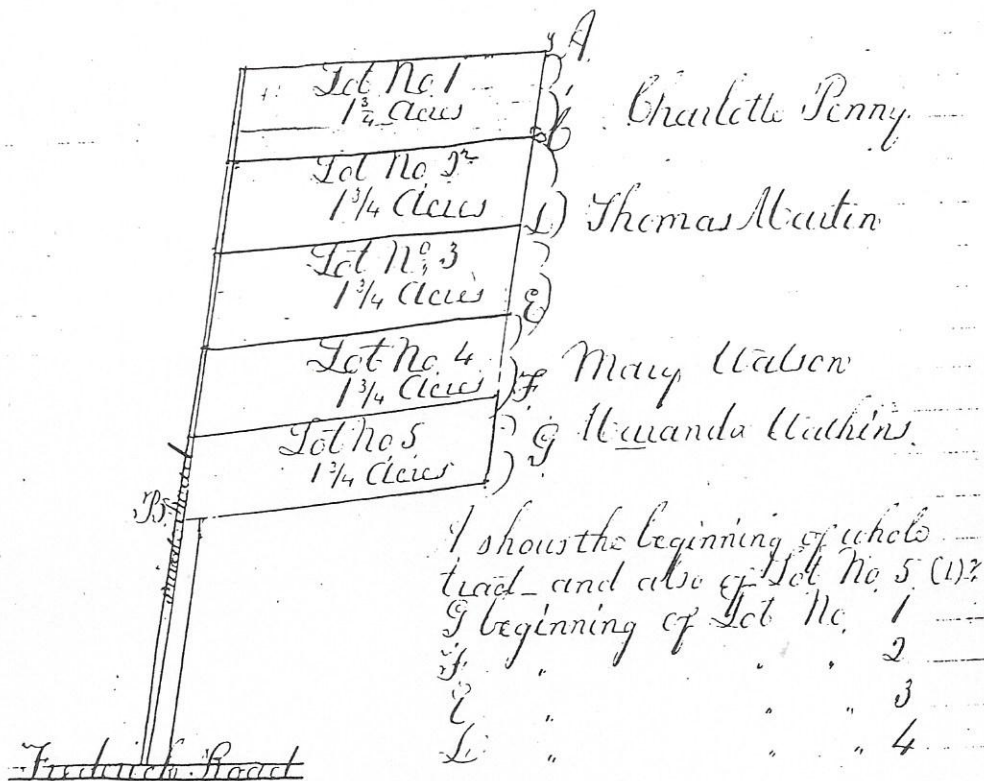
2. Inventory of the estate of Samuel Martin, 1837.

Martin's wife Helen, in preparing her will the following year, left the property to a Doctor Horatio Clagett of Washington County in return for his care and supervision of her daughter Mahala, who was then Clagett's slave. The will was not probated and eventually, through the court, lot 32 became the property of Samuel Martin, Jr.

Samuel, Jr., also owned 8 3/4 acres of "Exchange and New Exchange Enlarged." This property was along the Frederick Road, to the north of town, and adjacent to the extensive holdings of Upton Beall. The lane leading into Martin's homestead, which was also the northern boundary line of the Beall property, has for the last century and a half been known as "Martins Lane."

Samuel Martin, Jr., died in 1873, leaving a considerable estate, as well as the respect of those who knew him. His will divided the property among his wife, children, and grandchildren. The farm north of Rockville was divided into five equal parts, each of which was 1 3/4 acre. The lots, numbered from west to east, are shown on the plat of the division of Samuel Martin's estate.

The Martin family inheritance was subdivided with each succeeding generation. Lot 1, the westernmost parcel inherited by Charlotte Penny, by the end of the nineteenth century held a house for her sister Agatha Smith and her husband Dennis, the Abraham Jones family's summer house, and a small local burying ground. The cemetery, begun by the Smiths selling plots in their rear yard, holds many Haiti residents, the first of whom was Charlotte Penny (1889).



Plat Showing Division of Samuel Martin, Jr.'s, Estate
This plat is taken from Montgomery County Judgment Records,
Book EBP 14, page 125.

In 1924, Alphonzo Lee purchased the Jones property. He contracted with local black builder Raymond LeRoy Baker to construct a two-story Dutch Colonial frame house there, choosing Sears & Roebuck's "Chatham" model for the design. Mr. Lee, a postal worker who was a major force in Montgomery County's civil rights movement for 40 years, made his home here until his death in 1974.

Lots 2 and 3 of Samuel Martin, Jr.'s, estate were sold by Thomas Martin to a white real estate speculator from Washington, D.C. Nathan Bickford's 1892 subdivision included 25 lots averaging 3400 square feet each, a lot of 1.07 acres, and a 30-foot avenue which carries Bickford's name. Dwellings were constructed on a number of these lots by the 1940's. Some were built by Mr. Baker, others were built for members of the Martin family who returned to Haiti in the summer. One of these cottages still stands (19 Martins Lane), enlarged by William Wood into a craftsman-style permanent dwelling.

Mary Watson subdivided her inheritance, Lot 4, into four lots in 1901, selling the largest to Alfred P. Brent of Washington, D.C., seven years later. Brent built his house and barn here, later selling parcels to Henry Hartman and Clarence Hebron. The Hartmans built their house at 15 Martins Lane about 1927, the Hebrons at 17 Martins Lane about 1941.

Lot 5 came through the children of Miranda Watkins Martin. By 1911, it was divided between Arthur and Nora Johnson of Washington and Arthur's sister Evelyn and her husband Simon Smith. The Johnsons had grown up near the Woodlawn Hotel (now Chestnut Lodge), and several members of the family purchased lots on Martins Lane. Both families contracted with Arlington builder S. Leonard Gray (who had married a Johnson sister) to build their houses (11 and 13 Martins Lane) in 1915 and 1916.

THE BEALL FAMILY AND ITS SLAVES

The area of Haiti situated south of Martins Lane had been owned by the Bealls since the late eighteenth century. Members of the Beall family had figured prominently in Rockville from the town's establishment as the seat of Montgomery County; in 1776, Brooke Beall, a wealthy Georgetown merchant, was appointed the first Clerk of the Court. Upton Beall, succeeding his father in office, set up housekeeping in Rockville.

Beall and his second wife, Jane Neale Robb, constructed their Federal-style brick dwelling house in Rockville between 1813 and 1820. They relied upon slave labor to farm and mill their Potomac River property and to operate their household in Rockville. The inventory of Upton Beall's estate at his death in 1827 included 25 slaves, most of whom probably lived on the outlying plantation. Others lived in the brick mansion house or in separate slave dwellings on the 67½ acres in Rockville. Either housing arrangement would have fit into the pattern for antebellum Montgomery County where most slaveowners held fewer than ten slaves.

The Montgomery County Historical Society, utilizing historic and architectural evidence, has determined that a small number of Beall slaves lived above the brick kitchen of the Beall-Dawson house. Two small rooms, originally separated from the rest of the second floor and reached only by an enclosed stairway from the kitchen, were used by slaves whose duties required their presence in the main house. This relationship continued even after Emancipation, as evidenced by the 1870 census.

"Margaret Bell" was shown as aged 50 and "keeping house"; in her household were former slave Catherine Smith ("servant"), two young male black farm laborers, a 64-year-old black male blacksmith, and four young black girls, at least two of whom were Smith's daughters.

Jane Neale Robb Beall died in 1849, and the three Beall daughters -- Matilda, Jane, and Margaret -- inherited the property, including 21 slaves.

The family, particularly Upton and his daughter Margaret, appear to have had a somewhat benevolent and paternalistic attitude toward the blacks who were their slaves. We know several instances of Upton's concern for individuals, and Margaret permitted certain families to reside some distance away from the direct control of the main house. However, although education of free Negroes and slaves was not forbidden by Maryland law, the three Haiti residents known to have been Beall slaves could not read or write, and the Bealls did not manumit their slaves much before slavery was abolished in the State on November 1, 1864.

THE ALFRED ROSS FAMILY, SLAVE AND FREE

One of the 21 slaves inherited by the three Beall daughters at their mother's death in 1849 was Alfred, listed as age 21. A decade later, on the eve of the Civil War, the sisters owned 51 slaves (including Alfred and three listed as fugitives) and three "slave houses." Where did Alfred and his family live?

By 1866, the Alfred Ross family appears as a separate household, on land owned by Margaret Beall. Alfred Ross, "negro," was assessed for \$200 worth of livestock and \$100 in household furniture; no land or "improvements" were mentioned. Meetings of the newly formed Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church were held at the Ross house until the congregation built their own house of worship.

Alfred Ross appeared on the 1870 census as age 35, born in Maryland, owning \$100 worth of personal property, and unable to read or write. His wife Jane kept house, and most of the five children in the household attended school.

Alfred Ross purchased "the use and occupation of the house and lot ... now occupied by him" from Margaret J. Beall on June 23, 1871, for \$5.00. The deed specified that "the said Margaret J. Beall during her life shall supervise and control the management of said house and lot."³ The supervision clause was removed in 1893 when the land passed to newly widowed Jane Ross and her children.

Alfred and Jane Ross's house was located at the northern end of the Beall property, close to the lane leading from the Frederick Road to Samuel Martin's homestead. It was sited on high ground to catch the breezes and views of the Frederick Road below. That it was located a good distance from the main house indicated a measure of trust on the part of the Bealls and autonomy for the slave family. Slaves valued their homes for their privacy from whites.

3. Land Records of Montgomery County, Maryland, Book EBP 9, page 477.

It is likely that Alfred Ross constructed his own dwelling, for he described himself to the census enumerator in 1870 as a carpenter. Slaves customarily built their own houses, those built by freedmen after the Civil War being the most telling evidence. During slavery, specialization was rare, and slave artisans were versatile men capable of many tasks.

In constructing his home, Ross was likely to have followed the traditions with which he was familiar. He probably shaped his building materials by hand, obtaining most locally from their natural state. He likely believed the typical one-and-one-half story dwelling with fieldstone foundation, exterior weatherboards, centered chimney, little ornamentation, and gable roof most appropriate for a rural Montgomery County slave dwelling of the nineteenth century.

Studies of extant examples and memoirs of individuals such as Josiah Henson suggest that the Ross house would have contained one room and a fireplace on the first level and a sleeping loft above. It probably featured two items which Frederick Douglass described in his autobiography: a ladder stairway and a "hole dug in front of the fireplace beneath which Grandmamma kept her sweet potatoes"⁴ out of the frost. Even in slave times, the house extended beyond its four walls, the outbuildings and work places being used in ways which resemble indoor activities today.

Alfred Ross probably would have made the furniture for his home -- a modest bedstead, table and chair, maybe a dresser, and pegs or nails on a wall for hanging clothing not being worn.

We all are indebted to Alfred Ross's heirs that this house still stands today, at 22 Martins Lane. An investigation suggests that the original structure was a one-and-one-half story log and timber framed dwelling of approximately 20 feet by 17 feet. It sat on a shallow fieldstone foundation, surmounted by huge log sills. The east-west joists are large logs which retain their bark and are hewn on the upper plane.

From examination of the attic emerges a picture of a house whose outer walls have been raised, perhaps more than once. An intriguing ledge running on the inside of the second-floor exterior walls may indicate the height of the loft story of the original dwelling.

In the years after the Civil War, the Rosses worked hard, their family grew, and they prospered. They improved the appearance and utility of their homestead as they could afford to, adding glazed windows, wood-burning stoves, and more rooms. They constructed additional outbuildings -- a meat house, chicken house, privy, hog pens, and barns. They planted fruit trees and gardens near the house, utilizing the remaining land for cornfields, pasture, and a source of wood.

Five years after taking title, Ross was assessed at \$400 for the house and lot, \$50 for household property, one cow valued at \$20, and "implements" (agricultural or

4. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, CT: Park Publishing Co., 1882), p. 30.

carpentry tools?) worth \$15. The family kept cows, chickens, horses, and hogs; they built a stable and a summer kitchen.

Ross probably made the handsome four-paneled doors still in the house and may have had a hand in constructing a traditional frame dwelling next door for his daughter Flora and her husband Adam J. Powell. This house, oriented to face the Frederick Road, was the second of several family homes to be built nearby.



Descendants of Alfred and Jane Ross, July 1988
Photograph by Craig Herndon, *The Washington Post*

At the time of his death, Alfred Ross's estate consisted of the dwelling on almost one-half acre and three adjoining lots of over 7000 square feet each. Lot 1 with the old house went to Maria Eliza Ross, the unmarried daughter, who made a home for her mother and then kept the property until her own death in 1925.

A sizeable two-story north addition, one room with projecting bay and cross gable, was made to the original house during Maria's ownership. The two sections were joined physically and visually by a full-length front porch, new entrance door and stairway, beaded German siding on the front, and re-orientation of the house to face down the hill toward Frederick Road. The result was a stylish Victorian vernacular dwelling with a center-hall plan.

Later, another one-story, one-room addition was made to the west of the original block. The old kitchen, initially a separate structure, was joined to the one-room addition by an enclosed porch on the south.

The Ross house was successively owned by Flora Powell, her daughter Gertrude McKnight, granddaughter Frances Crutchfield, and now by her great-grandson Warren Crutchfield. The sixth generation of the Ross family now lives within a stone's throw of the original slave dwelling. This family is a representative and important part of the Haiti community.

OTHER HOMES CONSTRUCTED ON BEALL LAND

Between Emancipation and her death in 1901, Margaret J. Beall deeded close to 30 parcels of land to former slaves and servants of the Beall family. The parcel size and location varied, but many black families purchased land in the area north of Rockville and south of the Martin land.

Besides Alfred and Jane Ross, two other Haiti families who can be traced back to slavery are those of Edward Wood and Catherine "Kitty" Smith. Oral traditions of both families trace them to Beall ownership. Both purchased sizeable parcels near the Rosses at nominal prices in the 1870's, and both are ably represented by family members still living on that land. Unfortunately, the first- and second-generation Wood and Smith homes survive only in recollection.

Other families who purchased land from Margaret Beall and constructed their homes in Haiti include the Carrolls, Hattons, Proctons, Smiths, Herberts, and Jacksons.

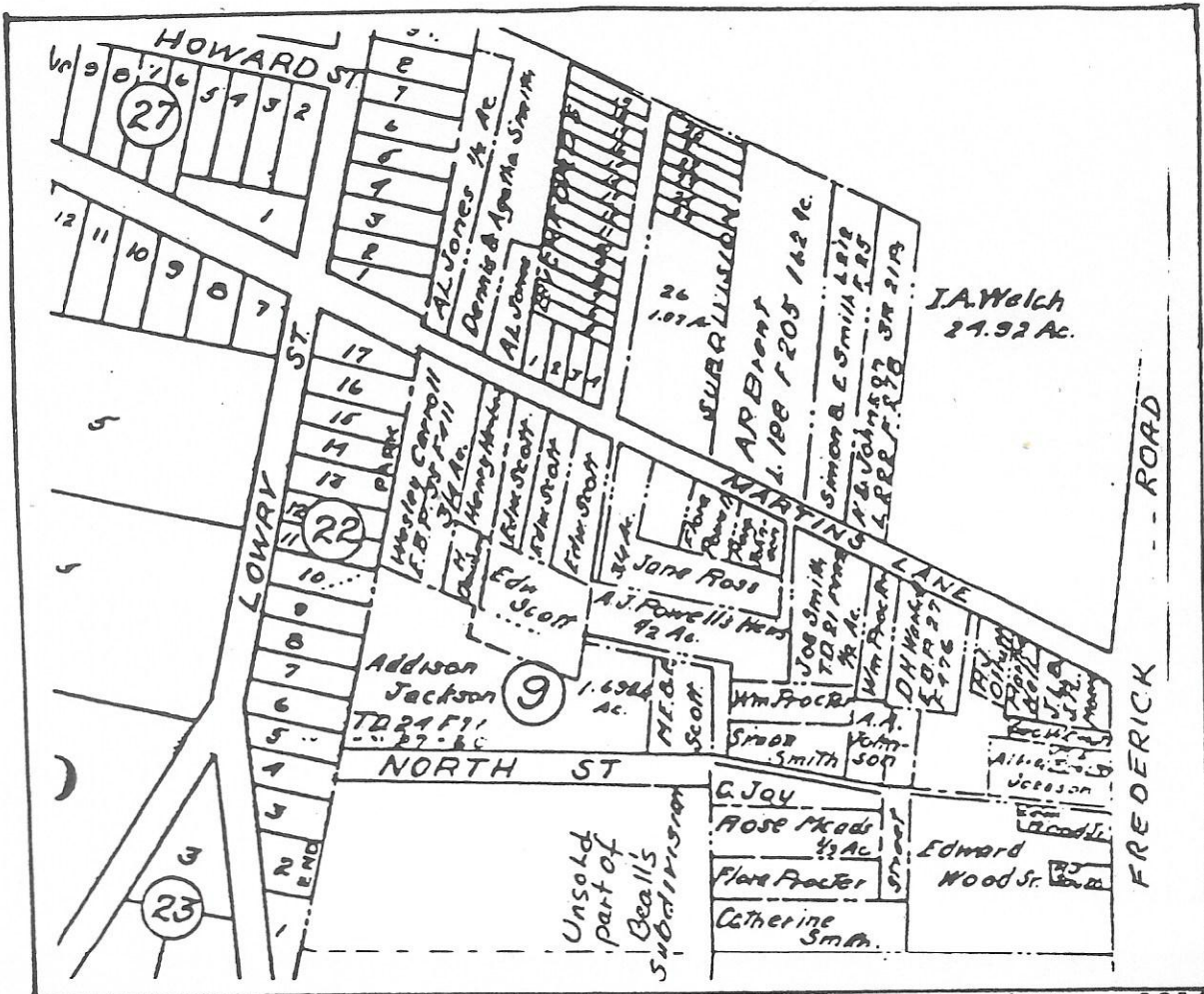
The Wesley Carroll house at 206 Martins Lane is a particularly fine example of a late nineteenth-century vernacular dwelling constructed for a black family. Like the original block of the Ross house and others studied in Haiti and elsewhere in Montgomery County, its tone is one of verticality and modest scale. A comparison of this 1887 house with the one built by Alfred Ross indicates a strong continuity in architectural traditions from slavery to freedom. The two homes reflect changes in the economic and social status of their occupants; leaving behind the slave strategy of "making do," the free landowners could focus on building or adding rooms for specific functions, comforts as well as necessities, and even some decorative elements.

The southernmost portion of Haiti to be developed is located on the south side of North Street, from Van Buren Street west. While oral tradition places a log dwelling house at the west end of this block, the area remained an unsold and undeveloped portion of Margaret J. Beall's 1893 "Beall's Subdivision of Part of Rockville" through the first quarter of the twentieth century.

A number of lots had been sold by 1910, but, because of economic downturns and lack of interest, development was not as swift as anticipated or hoped. Margaret Beall's three heirs abandoned 12 blocks of the subdivision, including this section. By the time of resubdivision in 1926, sales had increased, and a number of black families and investors purchased 13,500-square-foot building lots on North Street.

As it was absorbed into the black enclave, North Street became known as the "first lane" of Haiti, with Martins Lane termed the "second lane." The frame vernacular buildings constructed on North Street included traditional nineteenth

century house types, bungalows, and modest homes suitable for rental. Among the first owners were Cora Hodge, Rev. James S. Cole of Jerusalem M.E. Church, James Doy, and John Barcus.



Haiti, from Deets & Maddox Real Estate Atlas, 1916

HAITI IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By 1900, Haiti had approximately 15 homes and a population of 60. Residents included a large number of laborers (on the railroad, in businesses, in service industries) and household workers (laundress, cook, butler), but there was a growing group of teachers and government workers. Parents were actively involved in improving the education provided at Rockville Colored Elementary School but often boarded their older children in Washington so they could attend high school.

By the 1920's and 1930's, an increasing number of Haiti residents took jobs with the Federal Government, commuting downtown by train, trolley, and automobile to opportunities which were not yet available to blacks in Montgomery County. They voiced their discontent with the inequalities of separate school systems, segregated

public facilities, and other attitudes and limitations faced by blacks in Maryland at that time. When the barriers of segregation were challenged in Montgomery County, Haiti residents were in the forefront. For example, when black teacher-principal William Gibbs sued the Board of Education for salary parity with white teachers, Martins Lane residents offered their mortgages as collateral so that NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall could press the case.

A wave of construction in the first quarter of the twentieth century brought another generation of residents and dwellings to Haiti. In addition to those built on Samuel Martin's old homestead, other "American Four-Squares" and bungalows were added to the architecture of the community. Some of these were designs taken from Sears or Aladdin Homes catalogues. A number were constructed by black builder S. Leonard Gray or by his apprentice, Raymond LeRoy Baker.

The residential community of Haiti supported and received support from a number of local institutions -- churches, schools, social and benevolent organizations, and businesses. Services and socials at Jerusalem, Clinton, and Mt. Calvary Churches provided entertainment, encouraged the needy, and united the community. Camp Meeting at Emory Grove, Fair Days, school field days, and parades were all occasions to have a picnic and a band at Hatton's Park on Martins Lane, or a baseball game at the Odd-fellow's property on Middle Lane. Benevolent societies such as the Oddfellows and the Galilean Fishermen offered insurance and a burial site as well as social events.

While not all of those organizations still exist in Rockville, the churches remain active, three schools (Rock Terrace, Carver, and Lincoln) constructed for blacks still exist, and two black-owned businesses (Snowden Funeral Home and Hebron Press) are alive and well today.

Although suburbia has reached Haiti, the community retains many of the physical characteristics which distinguish it from other historic developments, black and white, in Rockville. The pattern of subdividing homesteads for succeeding generations played a major role in the location of property lines, buildings, and open space which are so important to this neighborhood.

Haiti was annexed into the City of Rockville in 1949. The two lanes were paved in 1950; the City provided water and sewer the following year. With these encouragements, modest but solid dwellings were built on McLane Court, Bickford Avenue, and the north side of North Street.

The central portions of Haiti filled in with the next generation of the Wood and Ross families, and the community incorporated these new dwellings with grace. Martins Lane was widened in 1965 to further access large subdivisions to the west. Several old trees were lost, and increased traffic lessened the solitude of the semi-rural community.

* * *

Peerless Rockville set out to document the history of Haiti's buildings but quickly learned that it is the inseparable combination of people, buildings, and the cultural landscape which comprises the fabric of this important black community. The close-knit relationships which have existed for generations, 150 years of building

traditions, and the character of the neighborhood's open space are equally significant components of Haiti.

Today, while there are immediate and long-term threats to the continuation of this historic black community, there also exist many positive aspects which have contributed to its survival in the past and will be a force for its preservation in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Story is based on a study, begun in 1988, by Peerless Rockville with co-operation and funding provided by Haiti residents, the City of Rockville, and the Maryland Historical Trust. The study was prompted by the realization of the pressures for more intense residential and commercial development on the community of Haiti because of its proximity to Maryland Route 355, the Rockville Metro Station, and Rockville's Town Center and the recognition that black communities in Montgomery County are rapidly disappearing because of such pressures. The study is continuing in 1989 with a small grant from the American Association for State and Local History matched by Peerless Rockville, the City of Rockville, and the efforts of volunteers.

The author wishes to acknowledge the work of Judith Christensen, Anne Cissel, Nina Clarke, Marilyn Harper, Everett Fly, Jean Russo, and numerous other individuals who contributed their time and expertise.

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HAITI (MARTIN'S LANE)

Need to preserve county's black heritage is growing

by Eileen McGuckian

The need to record and preserve the black heritage of Rockville and Montgomery County is a persistent and growing concern. It has acquired a sense of urgency as dramatic changes have come to the city and to the county.

Homes have been demolished. Roads have been built and widened. Office buildings and townhouses have sprouted. As older residents have passed on, old photographs and family documents have been lost. Entire century-old black communities have been obliterated in all but memory.

The community of Martin's Lane, off North Washington Street near the "new" post office and municipal pool, is at a juncture. The community's history still exists in its buildings, in its families, in photographs and memories, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that time is running out. We must assemble and document the remaining pieces of Martin's Lane history while they are still available.

With these concerns in mind, Peerless Rockville, residents of Martin's Lane, the City of Rockville, and the Maryland Historical Trust have joined to document the community's past and to plan for its future. Funded through the State Certified Local Government program, with local resources providing matching funds and "in-kind" services such as labor and materials, this project will unfold in phases through June 1988.

Residents of Martin's Lane, Peerless Rockville members, and others have already begun to re-

search the history and development of Rockville's oldest black neighborhood. They have learned that a free black named Samuel Martin owned a small farm just north of the small town of Rockville, and that each generation of

they are lost. We will look at people, buildings, and institutions, using primary source materials to document the community's evolution from rural farmstead to urban neighborhood. At the same time, we will survey the remaining build-

into full-scale community history. For further information, or to participate call project director Eileen McGuckian at 762-0096.



his heirs divided it into smaller parcels to provide the streetscape of the north side of Martin's Lane.

They have also learned that houses on the south side of the road were in some way associated with the Beall family, who lived in the large brick house on West Montgomery Avenue. One family, the Woods, has begun to document its history and hold reunions annually.

There is so much to learn. What are the institutions which save the community identity, provided historical continuity and served cultural needs? Who are the community's families and how have they provided for succeeding generations? How does Martin's Lane's experience compare and contrast with that of other black communities in Rockville, in Montgomery County, in Maryland, and elsewhere in the United States?

Our task is to locate, identify, record and interpret the historical resources of Martin's Lane before

ings, cataloguing house types, comparing and contrasting with other structures, and analyzing evolution and integrity.

Older buildings in the Martin's Lane-North Street area have been identified, and some 15 will be documented in depth.

Volunteers are needed to look through old records, photographs, papers and artifacts, to talk to older residents about family and community memories, and to organize materials.

In the spring, we'll begin to interpret what we've found, presenting it to the public in exhibit and workshop form.

In June, we will return to the community, to the mayor and council, and to interested groups to share our findings.

While documentation of historic black communities has been done elsewhere in Montgomery County, the scope of this project is unequalled in Maryland. And, it's Peerless Rockville's first venture

Holding On to a Rich Heritage

In Downtown Rockville, One Family Recalls 150 Years of History

By BARBARA RUBEN
Special to The Washington Post

Warren Crutchfield can look out the windows of his brick rambler on Martin's Lane in Rockville to the white frame house where he grew up, just a few dozen feet away. His 88-year-old mother lives in a white stucco house behind that. And across the street and down a grassy path, his great-grandfather and innumerable aunts, uncles and cousins are buried in a cemetery shaded by locust and oak trees.

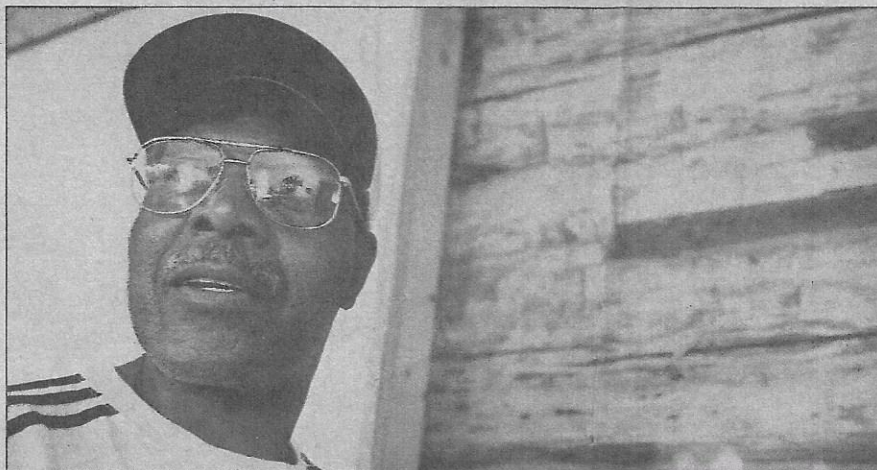
Crutchfield, 64, is the fifth generation of his family to live in a community where many residents can trace their roots back to freed slaves who settled in the area. Martin's Lane takes its name from Samuel Martin, a freed slave who owned land on the north side of the street as early as 1831. Land on the south side of the street once was part of a vast plantation owned by Margaret Beall, who sold the land to former slaves for nominal sums.

Old-timers call the tiny, close-knit African American community Haiti (pronounced Hay-tie), possibly because slaves who once worked there came from the French West Indies. Others simply refer to it as Martin's Lane, a street lined by tidy bungalows, century-old homes and newer ramblers. Kinship Park, a small city park just south of Martin's Lane, takes its name from the close ties of families in the community.

"The generation behind us told us, 'This is your forefathers' land. It is yours to take care of,'" Crutchfield said. "That's something we would like to instill in the next generation."

During Crutchfield's childhood in the neighborhood in the 1940s, his grandmother held teas with white linen tablecloths underneath apple and pear trees in the yard, which also included a chicken coop and pig pen. Large unfenced lots filled with bikes and basketball hoops still stretch behind the houses.

See MARTIN'S LANE, H3, Col. 3



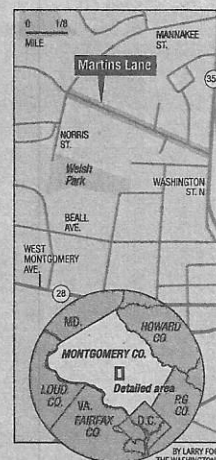
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL C. DONIGLI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



Warren Crutchfield stands in front of an original portion of the 150-year-old house he grew up in. Left, Mabel Hebron, Elaine Crutchfield-Hebron, and Jamil Crutchfield, Frances, LaShane and Nicole Crutchfield.

WHERE WE LIVE

Martin's Lane



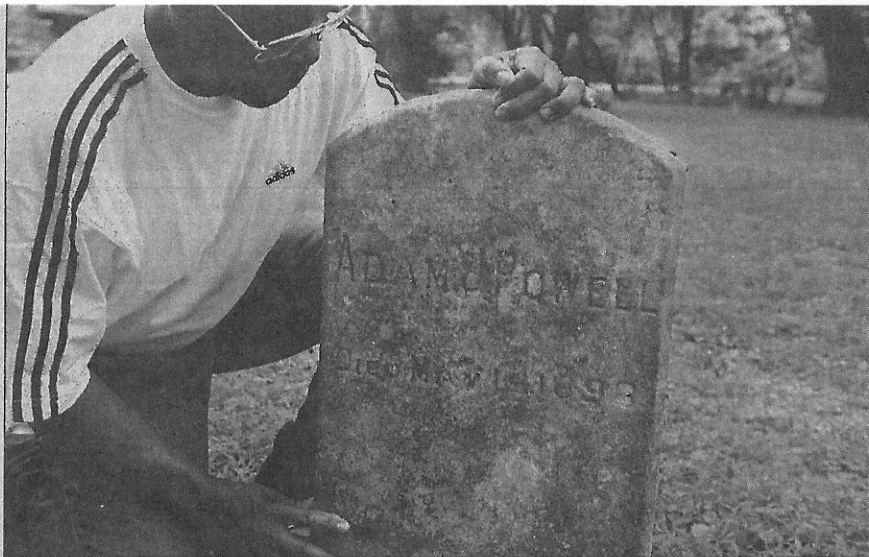
BOUNDARIES: Martin's Lane runs from North Washington Street on the east to Norris Street on the west.

HOME MARKET: A new four-bedroom, four-bathroom colonial house sold for \$395,000 on Martin's Lane last month. Since July 1999, three three-bedroom town houses on Martin's Square Lane have sold for \$189,000 to \$207,900. A new colonial, scheduled to begin construction in the fall, is for sale at \$409,000.

SCHOOLS: Margaret Beall Elementary, Julius West Middle and Richard Montgomery High schools.

WITHIN A FIVE-MINUTE WALK: Restaurants and many stores, including Giant and CVS; a post office; Rockville Municipal Swim Center.

WITHIN A 10-MINUTE WALK: Rockville Metro station, Montgomery College.



BY MICHAEL C. BONFILL FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Warren Crutchfield visits his grandfather's grave at the cemetery across the street from his house.

Their Forefathers' Land

MARTIN'S LANE, From H1

But today the 12-acre community lies in the shadow of downtown Rockville; county municipal buildings are only a few blocks away, as is the Metro and the burgeoning mini-malls of Hungerford Drive and Washington Street. Martin's Lane is now some of the last undeveloped land in the downtown area, which translates to pressure on the residents.

Mabel Hebron, who came to Martin's Lane during World War II, lives across the street from Crutchfield. She and her husband paid \$800 for the two acres on which they built a house.

When her husband died 12 years ago, developers wasted no time in knocking on her door.

"My husband was barely in his grave, and here they came offering me money to sell the place," said Hebron, 85. "But I told them no, and I've told everyone else coming around no. They're building around everywhere, and no one's safe."

Crutchfield knows that as well as anyone. From his back yard, he can see a mound of rust-brown-colored earth dug up for two new \$400,000 colonial-style homes being built on a subdivided lot. In 1987, 17 town houses rose at the end of Martin's Lane on a new street called Martin's Square Lane.

"The market is such that new construction in infill sites is so in demand that as soon as you can get people in to see a house, not just the floor plans, it sells relatively quickly," said Marc Fleisher, a real estate agent with Long & Foster, who sold one of the two new homes while it was still under construction in July. The second house will be built later this year.

Fleisher cites the community's proximity to the Metro, downtown Rockville and shopping as part of its allure.

Crutchfield said he and his family in five of the houses on the south side of the lane could reap \$3 million to \$4 million if they sold to developers. But he is not interested.

"We have a rich heritage we're trying to keep. But it's very difficult trying to maintain it because everyone is chasing the almighty dollar," said Crutchfield, a retired physical education teacher who taught at Sherwood High School in Olney. "Every day, every single day, there's a postcard in the mail to let us know if we sell, they'll buy."

But if there's a rush to develop the area now, progress initially came slowly to Martin's Lane, which remained gravel until 1950. And then it was paved mainly to provide access to Rock Terrace Elementary School, the last segregated school built in Montgomery County, now used to teach students with developmental disabilities.

There was no water or sewer service until 1951. Residents say their community was bypassed because it was African American.

But residents have fond memories of the days before the sloping street was paved.

"We used to sled down the hill at night, and when we'd get ourselves back up to the top, our mothers would be waiting with hot chocolate," said Elaine Crutchfield-Hebron, 61, who has married twice, both times to men in the community.

"It's a beautiful neighborhood. We always had someone to take care of us, there was always someone home in one of the

houses. You could just stop over and you'd get invited to dinner. We didn't have to worry about day care or anything like that," said Crutchfield-Hebron, Warren Crutchfield's sister.

Today, the traffic on Martin's Lane is far too heavy for sledding, however. James "Buddy" Carroll, 78, who has lived on the lane his whole life, likens cut-through traffic on the road to a race track.

"It takes you I don't know how long to get out of your driveway. Sometimes I just sit and sit there waiting for a break in the cars," he said. The once-quiet lane connects to Nelson Street, which passes through newer subdivisions and winds around to Interstate 270.

Carroll lives next door to the house he grew up in, the oldest house in the community. Built in the 1880s, the small, blue two-story house has been unoccupied since Carroll's mother died in the early 1990s. Carroll's great-grandfather, Wesley Carroll, a farmhand at the Beall plantation, bought three-quarters of an acre from Margaret Beall for \$145. He then borrowed \$500 to build the house.

Carroll's two daughters live with him. But Warren Crutchfield's two daughters no longer live on Martin's Lane.

LaShane Crutchfield, 32, lives in Silver Spring and teaches technology education at Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda.

"If I had a choice I'd try to stay right in this neighborhood, but the prices are too high," she said. "My grandfather would say he wanted to keep things the same for his children and his grandchildren, the same as his great-grandparents' children. And that would be nice. If I had children, I would stay here."

Megan Flick

From: Rick and Lisa Gundling <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2026 2:41 PM
To: Megan Flick
Cc: Katie Gerbes
Subject: Re: Opposition to Application 2026-331-EOS

WARNING - External email. Exercise caution.

Thank you, Megan. I don't think we'll be able to make it tonight, so the link would be great.

Also, I just noticed that in the Notice we received, it says that the request is for "Evaluation of Significance (demolition proposed)." I realized that it didn't say anything about the proposal for the 23 townhomes in that field, or turning the driveway into a two-lane road.

So, for clarification, if that house is demolished, we have no opinion about that at this time, as we don't know the details yet.

We are opposed to a two-lane road and 23 townhomes taking its place, if that's what's being planned.

Thanks so much,
Lisa Gundling

From: Megan Flick <mflick@rockvillemd.gov>
Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2026 2:27 PM
To: Rick and Lisa Gundling <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Katie Gerbes <kgerbes@rockvillemd.gov>
Subject: RE: Opposition to Application 2026-331-EOS

Thank you for providing testimony. Do you plan to attend tonight's meeting and testify in person? If so, I can add you to the speakers list. Otherwise, I can send you the link to the meeting if you wish to participate virtually.

Please let me know, thanks!



Megan Flick, AICP
Principal Planner
Community Planning & Development Services
P. 240-314-8225
www.rockvillemd.gov



From: Rick and Lisa Gundling [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, June 18, 2026 2:18 PM
To: History <History@rockvillemd.gov>
Subject: Opposition to Application 2026-331-EOS

WARNING - External email. Exercise caution.

Dear Historic District Commission,

We own [REDACTED] Martins Lane in Rockville and we oppose turning the driveway next to ours into a two-lane road, as referenced in Application 2026-331-EOS.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rick & Lisa Gundling
[REDACTED] Martins Lane
Rockville, MD 20850