

Lessons May Rise From Relics

Pr. William School, House Could Move to Black History Park

By NIKITA STEWART
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The farmhouse owned by Epa and Amanda Barnes, a prominent African American couple in Prince William County more than a century ago, had been documented in history books and on Civil War-era maps.

But the house itself had been discarded, cast off in an auto parts junkyard off Dumfries Road, like the mangled, rusting cars and mounds of worn tires that surrounded it for years.

"All you could see was a roof with trees coming out of it," said Brendon Hanafin, Prince William's historic preservation manager.

Today, the Barnes House is being preserved. It is one of two abandoned buildings—both slices of the county's African American heritage—being salvaged with the idea of moving them to a black history park near Manassas that Prince William officials are planning.

The other building is the Lu-



BY MARGARET THOMAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

"A school incorporates the life of a community," says Lillian Gaskill, wearing period clothing at the Lucasville School.

casville School for Colored Children.

The two buildings speak of a history that stretches beyond Virginia's well-known plantations and battlefields, said Lillian Gaskill, a former head of the Prince William Historical Commission.

"I envision having busloads of children coming to learn the missing history of Prince William County," said Gaskill, 71, a native of the District who traced her family roots to Prince William. "You need to know that we

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HISTORIC SITE FILE: **LUCASVILLE SCHOOL**
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Structures Could Head to Black History Park

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did exist in the community, and we functioned like respectable colored citizens."

The rescue and planned restoration of the buildings is the latest example of Prince William's relatively recent efforts to preserve its history. Already, the county is restoring a Colonial home, two courthouses and a house that served as a hospital during the Civil War.

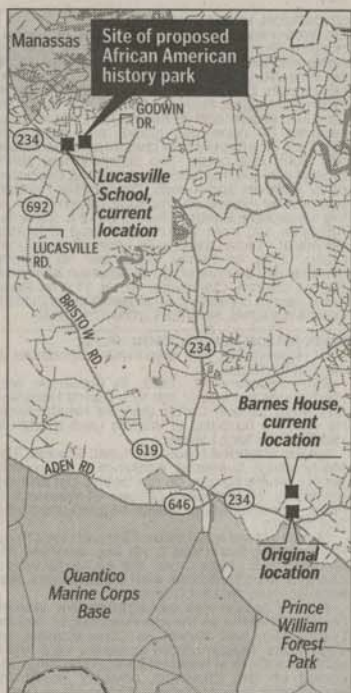
The first county census in 1790 counted 167 free blacks and 4,704 slaves among 11,615 residents, making blacks nearly 42 percent of the population, according to the county's African American Heritage map drawn by cartographer Eugene Scheel and printed in 2001. Today, blacks make up 19 percent of Prince William's population, according to the 2000 Census.

"Back in the old days, blacks were not encouraged to live within city limits," Scheel said. "A lot of black communities were formed just outside the town."

Lucasville was just south of Manassas and was settled by ex-slaves from nearby plantations, according to the map. The community was home to 100 people by 1880 and was the "largest Negro village in the central county," according to the map.

The school was authorized in November 1883 to serve the children of the community and opened in 1884, records show. Through the years, the school suffered from low enrollment but managed to stay afloat until 1926, when students were bused to a new school in Manassas.

Farther south, Independent Hill



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became home to the Barnes family. Eppa Lee Barnes and Amanda Lambert Barnes raised at least 12 children and several grandchildren in the home, and their descendants lived there until the 1960s. The house first appeared on a deed in 1870, but architectural historians have estimated that the home was built earlier.

Although the Barneses and a subsequent owner changed the house, most of it, built by area craftsmen, remained intact, Hanafin said. "You have to take off layers," he said as he smoothed his hand over the original pine siding.

While renovations on the home hid the building's historic architecture, the changes, especially by a

junk dealer who eventually bought the property, also delayed the home's decay, Hanafin said. "He put a roof on it in the 1980s to keep his stuff dry and saved the building," he said.

In the case of the Lucasville School, the owner added a lean-to, which helped keep the 120-year-old building standing, he said.

Both buildings were at one time slated for demolition but were saved through the efforts of local preservationists.

The Barnes House, noted for its Tidewater architectural style and pine flooring, had to be moved to make way for the widening of Dumfries Road (Route 234). On a cold morning in January, workers hauled the building a half-mile and stored it at the county landfill, where it sits oddly like Dorothy's house in Munchkinland on a crisscross of steel beams. A few feet away, a pile of stones that were once the home's three chimneys sits covered with weeds, a casualty of the move.

Putting the Barnes House back together will cost \$196,250, including \$38,000 to reconstruct the chimneys, according to a 56-page report completed by a consultant in October.

If the house becomes part of the African American heritage park, the county would have to absorb the costs. Officials are considering another less attractive but perhaps more affordable possibility: making the house an extension of a proposed library. In that case, the costs could be tacked on to a bond referendum that would have to be voted on by voters in 2006, Hanafin said.

But the county's goal is to put the two structures in one place to

preserve a more complete picture of African American culture during the late 19th century.

The red schoolhouse is as delicate as the Barnes House. The building is so dilapidated that it leans 30 degrees.

It could have been destroyed for the construction of Mayfield Trace, a new subdivision of 210 homes on 99 acres in the county's Longview area. The county's historic commission intervened, and Pulte Homes, the developer, agreed to move the structure a half-mile away to Godwin Drive.

Michigan-based Pulte Homes will pay an estimated \$50,000 to disassemble the one-room building piece by piece, move it to the 15,000 square feet of open space that will be the park, and reconstruct the building, said Melanie Hearsch, a spokeswoman for the developer. The relocation and reconstruction will begin early next year, she said.

The red schoolhouse will reflect the history of educating blacks in Prince William, where there were once 17 "colored schools," Gaskill said. "At the turn of the century, there were only four. . . . What makes me excited about it is that there's a legacy that a one-room schoolhouse leaves. A school incorporates the life of a community. What did it sound like when it rained really hard on that roof? Who were the children who learned around the potbellied stove?"

Saving the schoolhouse and the Barnes home has been an ambition for Gaskill. "Somehow, I wanted very desperately to save one house where African Americans lived and one school where their children learned," she said.