

**UNION WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH CEMETERY ON PINEY
MEETING HOUSE ROAD (PINEY MEETING HOUSE CEMETERY,
WIDEAR CEMETERY)**

Directions: Piney Meeting House Road near Piney Glen Lane. [A.D.C.
Map: Montgomery, page 30, grid coordinates G-6.] **Condition of cemetery:**
Neglected for many years, cleaned up in 1990, stones in poor condition.
Inactive cemetery. **Earliest known death:** 1953. **Location of transcribed
records:** Montgomery County Historical Society Library, 42 West Middle
Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20850. **Comments:** Four marked graves,
African-American cemetery.

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WESLEY UNION METHODIST CHURCH CEM.
ACCESS FROM 11440 PINEY MEETING HOUSE
POTOMAC

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WESLEY UNION METHODIST CHURCH
ACRES FROM 11440 PINEY MEETINGHOUSE
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Washington Post
Sep 24, 1983

\$162 Tax Sale Turns Out to Be Cemetery Site

County Says It's Up to Buyer
To Be Careful When Buying;
Land Once Was Black Church's



By Ray Lustig—The Washington Post

This fieldstone marks the grave of James W. Windear.

By Jim Brady

Special to The Washington Post

Just as the bulldozer clanked toward a tiny vine-covered thicket on the edge of Montgomery County's expanding mansion lands, the Rev. George Arichia Windear ran from his car, arms waving.

Frantically, Windear explained to the dozer's driver that beneath the tangled growth about to be graded lay the cemetery of a church he had known as Wesley Union Methodist, one of the first free black congregations in Montgomery.

The driver climbed down and pulled back the vegetation. Among the weathered fieldstones was a marble slab marking the grave of James W. Windear, who died at 43 years of age in 1946 after coming down with what his brother recalled was "throat trouble." The driver notified the property owner.

That was how Saul Joseph, 64, a Beaver, Pa., developer with holdings in Ohio, Pennsylvania, the District and Maryland came to learn a few years ago that the county had sold him a graveyard.

"I had no idea" when he bought the 0.62-acre parcel on Piney Meetinghouse Road for \$162.51 at a 1977 tax sale that it contained a cemetery, Joseph said.

Joseph was one of a number of land-buyers who come upon discoveries about their new properties after they deed it from the county—after it is too late, according to Chris Malone, an assistant county attorney who handles Montgomery's tax matters, including sales of properties whose tax bills have gone unpaid for longer than the county will

But for nearly 30 years after, its cemetery continued to fulfill a community need.

"All those people who lived up in that area were buried in that cemetery," Windear said. "Even after they moved to the city, they were brought back up there to be buried. They grew up there, and all their family and relatives and friends were up there. . . ."

Members could bury family and friends without paying a fee, Windear said. Burial records were rare; most graves were marked with fieldstones, "a big one at the head and a small one over the feet," he said.

"They would keep families together, and I imagine there were some graves on top of one another," he said. "They buried people there until they couldn't fit anymore." His brother apparently was among the last interred on the site. The few other legible grave markers remaining show burial dates in the '40s.

The graveyard was apparently not well-maintained in subsequent years, and the forest growth overtook it.

Shortly before 1977, the state tax assessors' office placed the property back on the county tax logs, and assessed it at \$1,050, according to county land records.

When no one paid the taxes, the county automatically put it up for public sale for the overdue amount, county Circuit Court records showed. Joseph won a bid on that property among a number of other properties he had bid on in the tax auction, and his attorney proceeded through the routine procedures of acquiring deed to the land.

The lawyer checked voter rolls, the county Reg-

according to Chris Malone, an assistant county attorney who handles Montgomery's tax matters, including sales of properties whose tax bills have gone unpaid for longer than the county will tolerate.

"People come back complaining that we've sold them land that's under water or land-locked or on a flood plain," Malone said. "It's up to the buyer to be careful about what they're getting. Once we sell it, they've got it."

The last owners before Joseph were Nelson Cooper, Thomas Jenkins and Aaron Turner, trustees of the Methodist Church, who bought the land in 1873 for \$25 from Ruben C. and Clara V. Creamer, according to a frayed, hand-lettered document in the county land records office that referred to the plot as "Piney Thicket."

Windear's grandfather, Alfred Harden, a child freed from slavery at the Civil War's end, helped hew the pine planks to build the one-room church, the 88-year-old clergyman said in a recent interview. The church thrived along with other rural black congregations in the region they called Brickyard, an area now speckled with the mansionettes of Potomac, one of the area's wealthiest suburbs.

Windear married his wife, Dorothy, in 1917, and, like many blacks who had grown up on farms surrounding Washington, they moved to the city for the promise of a new future. With the younger generation leaving and the older members dying out, the Methodist Church on Piney Meetinghouse Road closed around 1919, Windear said.

DEED OF SELLER PROPERTIES TO HAVE BEEN SOLD AT AUCTION, and his attorney proceeded through the routine procedures of acquiring deed to the land.

The lawyer checked voter rolls, the county Register of Wills and certified in court records that he even "searched the [local] telephone directories . . . and was unable to locate a listing" for the trustees, who would each be at least 110 today.

Three letters notifying the trustees of the sale that would claim their property went to the church—whose only trace is the rubble of its foundation—and were returned, stamped "insufficient address." Windear said that he had known two of the trustees, and that "all of them are dead in that cemetery."

The court authorized Joseph to get deed to the property in 1978. State law requires a special court decree to sell a cemetery, but court and land records offer no indication that county officials knew there was a cemetery on the parcel they sold to Joseph.

He said the land wasn't really adequate for a large house, and he had simply bid on it as a lark. Joseph said he would not disturb the cemetery, and intends to continue paying the small property tax. "I pay hundreds of thousands in property taxes. This one is of no consequence," he said.

County attorney Malone said the county would take back a piece of land only if the new owner could prove either that it didn't exist or its listed boundaries were substantially wrong.

Which is not to say Joseph is stuck with a useless property, Malone offered. "If he's looking for a place to bury his friends or family, he can do it."

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UNION METHODIST CHURCH
ACCESS FROM 1940 PINEY MEETINGHOUSE
POTOMAC

Potomac residents restore cemetery

Group hopes to block road widening project

by Linda VanGrack Snyder
Staff Writer

They showed up with rakes, shovels, and chainsaws and went to work.

Fifteen volunteers, including members of the Piney Meetinghouse Road Coalition and other Potomac residents, spent several hours recently clearing overgrowth and exposing graves and grave markers at a neglected cemetery on Piney Meetinghouse Road near Piney Glen Lane.

"We found tombstones buried under trees and honeysuckle," said coalition member Pat Cullinane. "There were vines so large that Tarzan would have had a field day."

The cleanup uncovered at least three marble headstones, Cullinane said, but added they were in pretty bad shape. "The years of neglect had taken their toll," he said.

Cullinane said the group also uncovered 50 sunken plots, with "homemade foot stones to mark the end of the grave."

The restoration revealed the stone wall foundation of the Piney Meeting House, and possible evidence of a second building, perhaps part of a second church building.

The Piney Meetinghouse Road Coalition was formed last May to fight county efforts to widen the road to accommodate traffic from two planned housing developments bordered by Travilah Road and Boswell Lane.

"We want to be sure that the county government recognizes Piney Meetinghouse Road as historical," said coalition



Photo by John Aikins

Pat Cullinane uses a chain saw to clear brush at the overgrown cemetery on Piney Meetinghouse Road.

spokesman Marc Wine. "We are rediscovering important community history. This road is part of the county's history."

The coalition spent \$1,400 to have large tree limbs and overgrowth removed before the two-and-a-half hour effort to restore the historic gravesite.

The group expects to spend at least another \$2,000 to install a monument listing the names of those known to be buried at the site and a historical marker to explain the significance of the spot, Wine said.

"The restoration won't be complete until we determine what kind of monument and signage will be placed there," Wine said.

The cemetery was part of the Union Wesley Methodist Church

that was established in 1874 by freed slaves. The church, which played a major role in Potomac's black community until it closed in 1920, was known as the Piney Meeting House. The road eventually took on that name.

Volunteers were able to document grave markers from as late as 1943, but records from the Snowden Funeral Home in Rockville indicate that burials took place there in 1953.

The coalition will propose that Piney Meetinghouse Road be included on the rural rustic roads list, Wine said.

Coalition member Elie Pisarra said plans to maintain the cemetery in the future have not yet been formed, but that she would like to see it become an ongoing community project.

Historic cemetery for freed slaves to be restored

by Myra Mensh Patner
Staff Writer

Some of the funds being collected for a legal defense fund targeted at stopping the county from widening Piney Meetinghouse Road may be used to restore a nearby burial ground established in the 19th century for freed slaves.

Marc Wine, co-leader of the Coalition for Piney Meetinghouse Road, said he is negotiating with several landscaping companies, including Creative Landscaping for Potomac, to remove overgrown weeds, vines and dead logs. The contract may provide planting around a planned memorial marker, he said.

Wine said the contract to restore the cemetery will be for \$1,000 to \$1,500, money solicited for the coalition's legal fund.

The neglected, little-known cemetery lies near the corner of Piney Glen Lane and Piney Meetinghouse Road.

"This will enhance the cause for not widening the road so it would appropriately come out of the funds," said Elie Pisarra, co-leader of the Piney Meetinghouse Coalition.

The cemetery—once part of

the Union Wesley Methodist Church, which no longer exists—is on land owned by a Pennsylvania family. Pisarra said the family has given the coalition permission for the cemetery clean-up.

The Coalition for Piney Meetinghouse Road was formed May 1 to fight the county's plans to widen Piney Meetinghouse to as much as 24 feet to accommodate traffic from two housing developments planned near Travilah Road.

The coalition sent a July 13 letter to about 200 residents in the Piney Meetinghouse Road area asking for contributions of \$1,000 each to the legal defense fund. "We've raised a few thousand dollars," said Wine.

The coalition's letter stated,

"Other administrative costs will also be incurred." Wine said the cemetery clean-up expense "comes under the 'other'. It will be a very small portion. We're trying to get as much donated as possible."

Wine said he does not know how much money will be necessary for the upcoming legal battle, for which the coalition has retained the Rockville law firm of Lynott and Craven. The county planning board has already recommended widening the road and will present its written opinion Aug. 9.

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July 1990
Gazette

Not on Atlas

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'Gone but not forgotten'

Black cemetery forgotten, sold

By Eddy Atwell
Sentinel Staff Writer

A residual piece of property in Potomac, sold for delinquent taxes four years ago, has since been discovered to be an abandoned black cemetery and may be the last vestige of what used to be a black community called "The Pines."

The cemetery, located on Piney Meetinghouse Road just north of Piney Glen Lane, was formerly part of the Union Wesley Methodist Church, which shut its doors in 1920. Only the church building's foundation remains.

The Rev. George A. Windear, the only known survivor of the church, remembers a cluster of 15 to 20 homes about a quarter of a mile from the church which was known only as "The Pines." The people who lived there worked on surrounding farms or in saw mills and attended the Methodist Church.

At one time, the church was "the largest around in that neighborhood, in my estimation," said Win-

dear, a 83-year-old preacher at St. Luke's Baptist Church. "People came from as far away as Toby-town."

The congregation disbanded when there were "not enough people to keep the church open," Windear explained. "The old people died off and the young people went to the city to get jobs and they didn't want to come back."

Windear, his brother, and his sisters, however, continued to maintain the cemetery. "We use to pack a picnic basket and go up there and clean it up every spring," Windear recalled.

When his brother died in 1946, Windear had him buried in the cemetery. Windear soon found the upkeep of the cemetery too much work and discontinued his efforts to keep it clean.

The county tax assessment office, without record of the existence of a cemetery on the site, discovered the previously unknown property and began taxing it in 1970. The team which assessed the 0.62-acre lot

apparently did not realize that it contained a former burial ground, although the cemetery contains at least two large headstones and several grave markers.

"I don't even know if anyone realized it was a cemetery," Douglas Jernigan, county revenue director, said. "It should have been tax exempt if it was."

The cemetery would have qualified for exemption from property taxes, Robert Rudnick, county supervisor of assessments, said, but "there was never an application to consider it for exemption." If there had been the property would never have been sold the way it was.

The lot was listed under the name of Aaron Turner and Trustees of the Methodist Church, and an assessment notice and subsequent tax bills were mailed under his name. Turner, who owned the land adjacent to the church's property, died many years

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Cem. ID No. 141 - Union Wesley Meth. Church Cem.

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