



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

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

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 051-0228

1. General Property Information

Property name: Old Saint John's Baptist Church Cemetery

Property address: 49 Calvary Lane

City or Town: White Stone, VA

Zip code: 22578

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

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

Building Site Structure Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 3.57

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town Village Hamlet Rural

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

Calvary Lane in Lancaster County, Virginia (GPS 37.689548,-76.385206)

As per the Virginia Department of Historic Resources DHR Architectural Survey Form - ID: 051-0228:

The Old Saint John's Baptist Church Cemetery is located adjacent to and west of Calvary Road, a spur that now serves as access to a nearby residential parcel. The cemetery is largely in mature wooded cover, with small cleared sections adjacent to the road. Topography appears to generally define boundaries, with a ravine to the north and west and a logging road serving as a conjectural southern boundary. The road leading north from Dunton Mill is modern Highway 3 between White Stone and Kilmarnock. The Church is presumed to be on Harris Road which intersects Highway 3 on the left side. The presumed church site is the building marked with a cross on the provided topical map. The layout of Harris Road has been reconfigured since this map was made. The right angle where Harris Road turns upward to the left of the church is considered to be the location of Old Saint John's Cemetery. That would place the Old Saint John's Chapel somewhere on the south side of Harris Road between what is now known as the Interfaith Service Council building and Cherry Hill Road to its east.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): _____

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

If the builder is known, please list here: _____

Date of construction (can be approximate): _____

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

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

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

- In 1867, African American congregation members requested dismissal from Morattico Baptist Church to form their own church and was granted dismissal. Old St. John's Baptist Church, organized in 1868, after which the cemetery was developed. Morattico Baptist Church approved and readily assisted in securing a new place of worship on land provided by William George, upon which Saint John's Baptist Church was built. Per the Old St. John's Baptist Church *Minutes Book*, references are made to the sexton, collecting money to expand the burying ground, selling the burying grounds lots, cleaning the grave yard, and fencing and railing of the grave yard, and repair of the fence. Excerpt - *Old Saint John's Cemetery: "A New Look at a Forgotten Church and a Lost Cemetery in Kilmarnock, Virginia"* by Kerry A. Petersen : (References with the *Minutes Book* Concerning Old Saint John's Cemetery, pp: 10 - 12).
- Full Transcription of the Old Saint John's Baptist Church Minutes Book, Lancaster VA Historical Society, Lancaster, VA. <https://lancastervahistory.org>
- There are currently numerous head stones, foot stones, metal grave markers, unmarked graves depressions within the cemetery. Located approximately 1,000 feet east of the Old St. John's Baptist Church's former site at the terminus of Calvary Lane, the 3.57-acre cemetery remains in continuous use into the late twentieth century.
- 1916 Topographical Map identifying the Old St. John Cemetery Church and Cemetery Site
- VDHR Current Map of Cemetery Location
- Old St. John's Cemetery Survey Plat

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

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Old St. John's Baptist Church Cemetery is eligible for listing in both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in African American history, religion, community development, and Reconstruction-era self-determination in Virginia's Northern Neck. Established in 1868, the church and its cemetery served as a spiritual, cultural, and social anchor for free-born and newly emancipated African Americans in Lancaster County, VA following the Civil War. On July 6, 1867, African American members of Morattico Baptist Church requested dismissal from the congregation in order to establish their own church. The congregation unanimously adopted the following resolution: "Resolved to assent in this request without formality and tender them our best wishes for their temporal and spiritual welfare. On July 4, 1868, St. John's Baptist Church was formally organized as the first independent African American Baptist church in Lancaster County. The church was founded under the leadership of Pastor Nelson Lee together with Deacons Charles P. Morrison, Crosky Wright, Spencer Pinn Sr., Joseph Beane, James Edwards, Armistead Jackson, Richard Lee Sr., and William McCampbell, Clerk. Armistead S. Nickens served as the church's first treasurer. Early members included several individuals of exceptional local and regional significance, among them Richard Lee Sr., a Civil War veteran of the 9th Massachusetts Cavalry; Private Alfred Carter, a Buffalo Soldier who served in the 10th U.S. Cavalry; and Armistead S. Nickens, Lancaster County's first African American elected state legislator. Nickens served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1871 to 1875, helped establish one of the county's earliest schools for African Americans in 1876, and advocated for transportation improvements that later culminated in the construction of the Downing Bridge connecting Tappahannock, VA and Warsaw, VA. Also associated with the church were Benjamin and Elizabeth Norris, parents of Dr. Morgan E. Norris, recognized as the Northern Neck's first African American physician, who practiced medicine from 1917 until 1964. In 1928, Dr. Morgan E. Norris, led a campaign to build for the first brick elementary school for African American students in the Northern Neck of Virginia.

- St. John's Baptist Church rapidly expanded, reportedly reaching nearly 1,000 members before its dissolution circa 1893. Several African American Baptist congregations evolved, including: Mt. Olive Baptist Church (1873), Wicomico Church; Willie Chapel Baptist Church (1884), Lancaster; Calvary Baptist Church (1892), Kilmarnock from which New St. John's Baptist Church was established (1910), Kilmarnock; Mt. Vernon Baptist Church (1893) White Stone; and Sharon Baptist Church (1898), Weems, VA. The Old St. John's Baptist Church business minutes began on September 19, 1875, and continued through June 1888, documenting the life of the congregation during Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction era. These records were maintained by Spencer B. Pinn Jr., commonly identified in the volume as "S.B. Pinn," who later became clerk of Calvary Baptist Church following the division of the original congregation. Following the dissolution of Old St. John's Baptist Church, the church records remained in the possession of the Pinn family for three generations. In 2004, the surviving Minutes Book was transferred to Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library (MBWM & L), now known as the Lancaster VA Historical Society. Dr. James E. C. Norris later recalled discovering the volume among the possessions of Elsie Byrd Nickens Coleman, granddaughter of Spencer Pinn Sr. and a longtime educator in Lancaster County. Although no above-ground remains of the original church survive, the associated cemetery endures as a highly significant cultural landscape. Located approximately 1,000 feet east of the church's former site at the terminus of Calvary Lane, the 3.57-acre cemetery has remained in continuous use into twentieth century. Stewardship of the cemetery passed collectively to Calvary Baptist Church, Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, Sharon Baptist Church, and New St. John's Baptist Church. A serious historical restoration effort began in 2025, led by an interracial and interdenominational group of committed individuals. More than 700 burials have been documented within the cemetery, and ongoing research suggests that as many as 1,000 individuals may be interred there, making it potentially the oldest and largest African American burial ground in Lancaster County. The earliest identified marked burial is: Luther H. Nickens (1887–1929).

In addition to the bulleted information sources listed below, please also note other attached supporting documentary resources with this document, inclusive of:

- Poll Book for Colored Voters, Kilmarnock, 3rd District, Lancaster, County, VA, October 22, 1867
- Morattico Baptist Church Minutes/ Ledger - Church Clerk – Excerpts 1866 - 1868 (Original located at the VA Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA) <https://baptistheritage.org>

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

- Deed
- Survey Plat
- VDHR Architectural Survey Assessment Report - DHR ID:051-0228
- Minutes from St. John's Baptist Church Minutes Book (Transcription located at the Lancaster VA Historical Society) <https://lancastervahistory.org>
- *Research Publications, Research Book, Newspaper Articles*
- *Old Saint John's Cemetery: "A New Look at a Forgotten Church and a Lost Cemetery in Kilmarnock, Virginia" by Kerry A. Petersen*
- <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/51527/old-saint-johns-cemetery>
- Photographs inclusive of aerial view

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

Private: x Public\Local Public\State Public\Federal

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

1. name/title: Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, Pastor Gernard Reed
street & number: 269 James Wharf Road
city or town: White Stone state: VA zip code: 22578
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

2. name/title: Calvary Baptist Church, Pastor Samuel A. Cain
street & number: 83 Bluff Rd.
city or town: Kilmarnock state: VA zip code: 22482
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

3. name/title: New St. John's Baptist Church, Pastor Peyton Waller
street & number: 560 S. Main Street
city or town: Kilmarnock state: VA zip code: 22482
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____
Date: _____

4. name/title: Sharon Baptist Church, Pastor Sylvester Bunns
street & number: 1413 Lumberlost Road
city or town: Weems state: VA zip code: 22576
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____
Date: _____

•• *Signature required for processing all applications.* ••

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

Contact person: _____
Daytime Telephone: _____


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


name/title: Francine Aytes Hunter, Co-Chairperson
organization: Old St. John's Baptist Church Cemetery Historical Restoration Committee
street & number: 6540 Mattawan Trail
city or town: Mechanicsville state: VA zip code: 23116
e-mail: fahunterot1@gmail.com telephone: 804 - 301 - 7806
Date: 4/18/2026

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

PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Old St. John's Baptist Church Cemetery
Lancaster County, VA
DHR ID# 051-0228

 Proposed Boundary

0 450
 Feet

