

2004-2005 Evaluation of Howardsville Historic District

The Howardsville Historic District (053-0062) in Loudoun County was documented in 2004 and recommended eligible for the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) by the Evaluation Committee of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). The historic district was recommended eligible under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: African American and Criterion C in the area of Architecture, with a period of significance of c. 1870-c. 1955.

At its meeting in March 2005, the State Review Board (SRB) recommended that the historic district is eligible for the VLR and NRHP. SRB member Warren Hofstra suggested that a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPD) for Loudoun County's historic African American communities "would allow for a more integrated interpretation and better draw public attention to an important historic resource in the region."

Current Evaluation of the Howardsville Historic District

An MPD often is a useful tool for preservation planning and for streamlining nominations of historically or thematically related resource types. It is a common misconception that an MPD allows for the listing of a property that could not, on its own, meet VLR/NRHP eligibility criteria. In fact, each individual property, site, structure, object, or historic district that is nominated under an MPD must be eligible for the VLR and NRHP in its own right.

Because a considerable body of research on historic African American communities has accumulated over the past twenty years, and preservationists' collective understanding of these historic places has advanced, as of this writing, *an MPD is not recommended as necessary* for the Howardsville Historic District to be nominated successfully to the VLR and NRHP.

Since 2004, many of the resources within the Howardsville Historic District have been resurveyed twice. In 2009-2010, an architectural survey of the Unison Battlefield Historic District (053-6087) was conducted. Howardsville is within the battlefield historic district's boundary; however, Howardsville's founding postdates the Civil War, and, therefore, the individual resources within the community, as well as the Howardsville Historic District in its entirety, are not classified as contributing to the Unison Battlefield Historic District. The following individual resources were resurveyed in 2010: 20929 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0003); 20857 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0001); 20965 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0004); 21011 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0005); and 20987 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0006).

In 2024, the properties at 20857 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0001), 20965 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0004), 21011 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0005), and 20987 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0006) were resurveyed as part of a countywide survey update.

The Howardsville Historic District was not surveyed in its entirety in 2009-2010 or in 2023. The district's VCRIS record has not been updated since 2004.

The property at 20999 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0002) has not been resurveyed since 2004. In 2013, the property owner at the time inquired with DHR staff about individually nominating the property to the VLR/NRHP. DHR staff responded that a nomination of the Howardsville Historic District was preferable. No further work on the property's individual eligibility was submitted to DHR.

All of the historic resources in the Howardsville Historic District that were present at the time it was first surveyed in 2004 are extant. Based on the historical information currently available about the Howardsville Historic District, CPG recommends that the district is **locally significant** under **Criterion A** in the areas of **Ethnic Heritage: Black** and **Community Planning & Development**. Eligibility under **Criterion C** in the area of **Architecture** is also applicable because Howardsville is a representative example of a rural, African American community founded during the Reconstruction Era and continuously occupied since then, and therefore, is representative of a type, period, and methods of construction that are distinctive to such communities. Finally, the historic district is recommended to be **locally significant** under **Criterion D** in the area of **Archaeology: Non-Aboriginal: Historic**. The undisturbed quality of the historic district and its historic associations are summarized below.

The historic district's **period of significance** is currently recommended to be **1874-c. 1968**, beginning with land purchases by Jacob "Jack" and Sophia Howard, Andrew Cosberry, and Jeremiah "Jerry" Basil in what would become the village of Howardsville. The end date for the period is suggested to end in c. 1968, when the last major federal Civil Rights legislation was passed to outlaw tactics associated with Jim Crow segregation. Research conducted during the course of this project is expected to lead to the refinement of the start and end dates for the district's period of significance. For example, the Gracie Reed House at 21011 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0005) has a possible construction date of c. 1840; if categorized as contributing to the district's significance, a c. 1840 start date to the period of significance may be warranted depending on the resource's specific characteristics and association with the district as a whole. Based on the results of fieldwork, research, and oral history interviews, a different end date for the district's period of significance may be identified.

Historical Overview

Two years after the Howard, Cosberry, and Basil families founded Howardsville, Armistead Summers purchased a one-acre lot on Greengarden Road (Route 719). In 1879, Frank, Walker, Elizabeth, Eli, and Clinton Summers bought a two-acre tract, and Jacob Colbert acquired a one-acre lot. Most of Howardsville's early residents were Emancipated people who farmed their land and/or had large gardens. Some supplemented their incomes by working as farm laborers,

domestic servants, laundresses, cooks, and other occupations available to African Americans at the time. Oral history states that some early residents were masons who built many of the dry-laid stone walls still extant in Loudoun County today. Other residents produced baskets and brooms using materials grown on their farms. Such products utilized vernacular traditional skills and creative energies among African Americans, much of it based on knowledge passed down through generations of enslaved relatives and ancestors. In rural Virginia during the Reconstruction Era, Emancipated people often pooled resources to purchase as much land as they could, then subdivided it among themselves, thus creating small communities

By 1900, at least eight African-American families owned and worked their own farms in Howardsville. One area resident, James Valentine, worked as a peddler of various wares. According to Reid family members, after their family arrived in Howardsville during the 1920s. Clarence Reid worked as a horse trainer on a private estate near Upperville in Fauquier County. The equestrian industry that emerged in Loudoun County during the late 19th century and expanded during the early 20th century provided employment opportunities for Howardsville men in both private stables and at Middleburg's horse training track. By 1930, the community had grown to include eight dwellings, with a population of 49 people. Seven of the eight families owned their house. According to census data, adult residents continued in traditional occupations that included domestic servant, farm laborer, horse trainer, and stonemason. A newer occupation, chauffeur, was held by at least one person.

Howardsville residents historically attended the Austin Grove Methodist Episcopal Church (053-5137) in nearby Rock Hill. The church is not within the Howardsville Historic District boundary. The community's schoolchildren walked three and one-half miles to Willisville, which had the nearest public grade school that served African Americans. That school is within the Willisville Historic District (053-5116).

Loudoun County was home to approximately 32 rural Reconstruction Era communities. Many of these persisted into the late 20th century, overcoming obstacles imposed by the Jim Crow era of segregation and benefitting from the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, such rural communities are increasingly threatened by suburban sprawl, infrastructure projects, and redevelopment.

Architectural Overview

The Howardsville Historic District is located in the western corner of Loudoun County near its border with Clark and Fauquier counties, approximately eight miles northwest of Middleburg. When evaluated in 2004, approximately six properties comprised the district and were located between 20800 and 21000 Greengarden Road (Route 719) along the northwest side of the road. The district encompassed approximately 32-acres. Recorded architectural resources primarily consisted of vernacular log and frame, one-and-one-half to two-story single dwellings

constructed between c. 1840 and c. 1900. The houses mainly face Greengarden Road, with several set far back on lots ranging in size from one to ten acres; typical lot sizes were one to three acres. The houses featured vernacular design, materials, and construction methods. A unifying feature was the use of raised stone foundations. All of the historic resources identified in 2004 are extant.

Two character-defining features of the historic district that were identified during field survey in May 2026 are the dry-stacked stone walls that continue to define property boundaries and edges of fields and roads and the prevalence of ornamental plantings at the occupied properties. The age of the stone walls likely varies and some may have been rebuilt over time. Their presence, however, is likely associated with the historic district's early residents who were responsible for building the mortared stone foundations found at several extant historic-age resources. Residents of the historic district are known to have been professional stone masons. Retention of the stone walls, therefore, is notable because they represent the skill and craftsmanship of masons in the district over time and they are a character-defining visual element. Extensive ornamental plantings are present at multiple properties within the district, and many incorporate decorative stone to edge beds and make utilitarian features, such as culverts, more attractive. The ornamental plantings are thought to be a continuation of the district residents' tradition of vegetable and fruit gardening for sustenance, as well as a demonstration of pride of ownership among residents. Information about both of these attributes will be sought during research and oral history conducted for the nomination project.

The Gracie Reed House at 21011 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0005) was assessed to be the oldest house in the community with a construction date of c. 1840. It was considered representative of the log or stone dwellings that lower and middle-income Loudoun County residents occupied in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Representative examples of modified I-house dwellings were also found in the community. The I-house form typically consists of a two-story, side-gable, single-pile house with a central hall and flanking rooms. A full-width or nearly full-width front porch is often present and exhibits applied, mass-produced ornamentation of the type that became widely available during the late-19th century. In Loudoun County's African American communities, a "modified I-house" was identified during a 2004 countywide survey as a prevalent domestic resource type. Featuring the typical I-house fenestration, the modified examples had smaller footprints, slightly different interior floor plans, and simpler architectural stylistic attributes when compared to the typical I-house type that is described in the *Classic Commonwealth: Virginia Architecture from the Colonial Era to 1940* style guide. Such dwellings have become increasingly scarce since 2004. In contrast, the dwelling at 20965 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0004) is a nine-bay, side gable, frame dwelling composed

of three, three-bay sections built at different times, and is an example of vernacular design that was adapted as the occupants' needs and means changed.

Archaeology Summary

Professional understanding of the potential significance of cultural deposits associated with late-19th through mid-20th century African American sites has grown rapidly over the past two decades. In 2019, Site 44LD1629 (Howardsville) was found to be potentially eligible for the historic registers by DHR staff during an environmental review project associated with the installation of a sewer line within historic village's boundary. In a Phase I archaeological survey report, the results of investigations and recommendations were summarized as

[including] pedestrian survey, which documented standing historic structures and ruins, as well as subsurface investigations in the form of 960 shovel test probes that were excavated at Howardsville. The entire survey area was assigned site number 44LD1629. The areas surrounding the extant historic houses and former structure foundation remains, including the artifact loci, have the potential to yield significant information related to the founding and occupation of Howardsville...

Despite the fact that no subsurface cultural features apart from middens were identified as a result of the survey, it is likely that such features exist in the vicinity of both historic-age buildings and structures as well as house foundations and ruins. Additionally, while the documented middens contain an admixture of nineteenth and twentieth century artifacts and little apparent vertical stratigraphy, such historic midden features can yield significant information from an analysis based on horizontal artifact patterning...

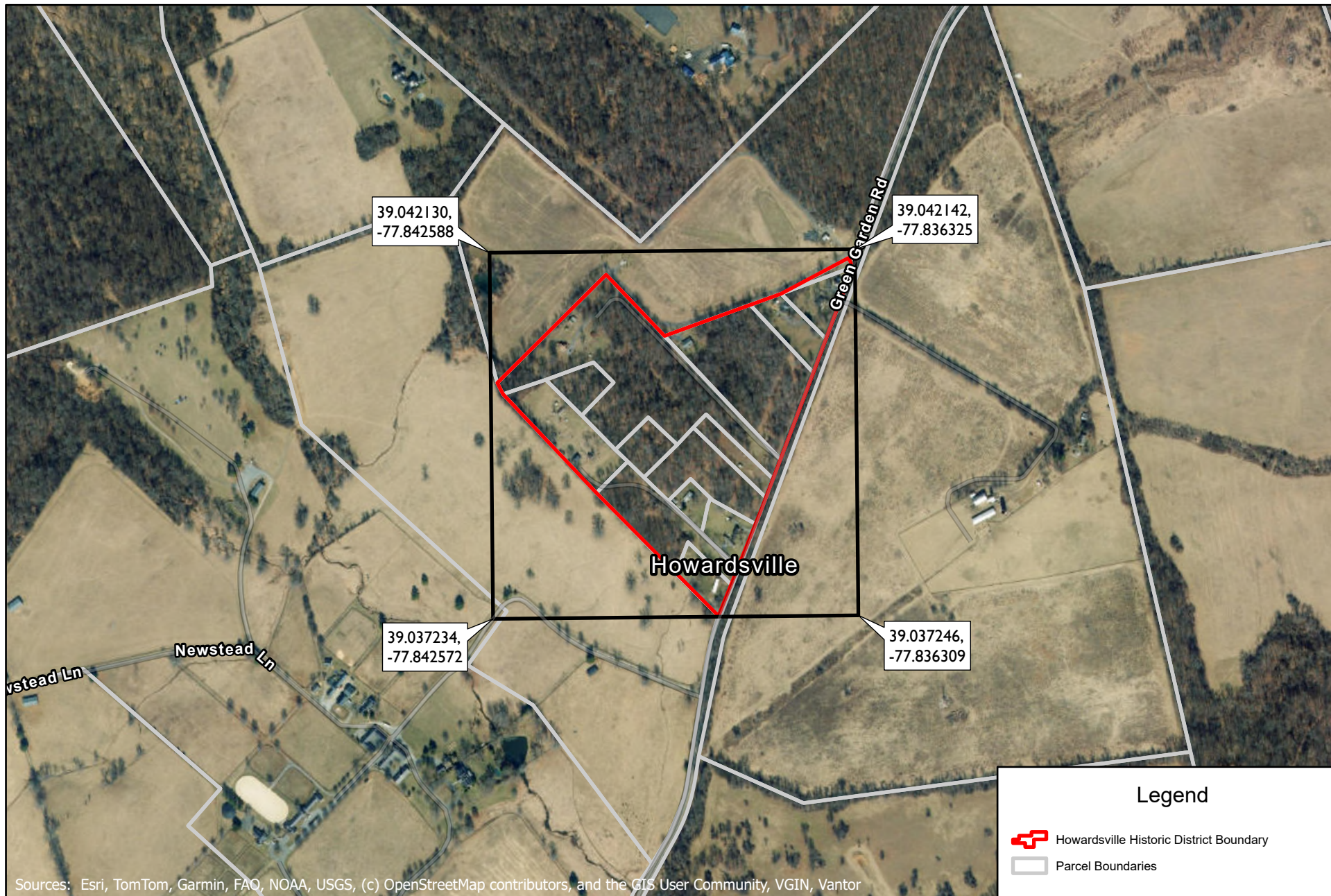
Areas surrounding the extant historic-age houses as well as the building ruins and foundation remains, including the artifact concentrations and midden features, have the potential to yield significant information related to the founding and occupation of Howardsville post-1865.¹

Several more undisturbed dwelling sites and ruins have been identified in Howardsville, including as many as three on the 10-acre parcel at 20929 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0003) and at 20987 Greengarden Road (053-0062-0006). Due to the relatively undisturbed condition of many of the properties in Howardsville, additional cultural deposits related to the community's history from Reconstruction through the third quarter of the 20th century are

¹ Ralph Koziarski, Peter Regan, and Scott Seibel, *Phase I Archaeological Survey of the Community of Howardsville, Loudoun County, Virginia*, prepared for County of Loudoun, Virginia, prepared by URS Corporation, July 2013, on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, p. 7-1 – 7-2.

considered likely to exist.² To address the historic district's research information potential under Criterion D in the area of Archaeology: Historic: Non-Aboriginal, the nomination for the Howardsville Historic District will include a set of research questions relevant to the general post-Emancipation context will be drafted. This research design can also be used to guide future collection and research of archaeological data.

² Ralph Koziarski, "Howardsville," 44LD1620, Virginia Cultural Resources Information System, November 2012, on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond.



Location Map

Howardsville Historic District
Bluemont, Loudoun County, Virginia
DHR ID# 053-0062
2026



Legend



Howardsville Historic District Boundary



Building Footprints



Parcel Boundaries



Sketch Map

Howardsville Historic District
Bluemont, Loudoun County, Virginia
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0 480
Feet



























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