

Rossville (62-023)

Rossville is significant as an example of a small, late-nineteenth-century African-American rural settlement.¹ Rossville was formed by a group of freed African-Americans who in 1868 established Queen's Chapel, a Methodist congregation near Beltsville.² Land for the church was purchased for five dollars from the Minnix family. The site was originally used as a burial ground for local African-Americans and a church was later built on the site.³ The Chapel, a log structure, was also used as a schoolhouse for neighboring children. In 1886, individual members of the congregation and other African-Americans purchased twelve lots along the north side of Old Muirkirk Road. By 1889, structures were erected on eleven of the lots.⁴ In the late 1890s, Queen's Chapel was destroyed by fire and a wood-frame building replaced the log structure. The congregation outgrew the second building and constructed a larger brick church that was completed in 1956.⁵ For over one hundred years, Queen's Chapel has served as a central gathering point for this small African-American community.

Rossville was named for Augustus Ross, one of the first landowners along Old Muirkirk Road. Residents of Rossville supported themselves by working at the nearby Muirkirk Iron Furnace or by farming. The largest lot on Old Muirkirk Road was purchased by the Rebecca Lodge #6 of the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a fraternal organization whose purpose was to support its members in times of illness or emergency. On this lot they constructed a lodge now known as Abraham Hall (PG: 62-023-07). Over the years, Abraham Hall has been used as a meeting place, church, and schoolhouse.⁶

The 1861 Martenet map shows the estate of Mark Duvall. A portion of Duvall's land was later subdivided into twelve lots and became the site of Rossville. The map also shows Muirkirk Furnace, where many of Rossville's residents worked.⁷ By 1878, the Hopkins map documents some growth in the area, including new residences and Queen's Chapel. Old Muirkirk Road also appears on the map.⁸

There is one Historic Site in Rossville:

- PG: 62-023-07, Abraham Hall (NR), 7612 Old Muirkirk Road

There is one Historic Resource in Rossville:

- PG: 62-023-17, Thomas Matthews House, 7700 Old Muirkirk Road

Other identified resources:

¹ Howard S. Berger, "Rural Villages in Prince George's County, 1815-1930," in *Historic Contexts in Prince George's County: Short Papers on Settlement Patterns, Transportation and Cultural History* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1991), 7.

² Susan G. Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1996), 18.

³ William H and Henrietta V. Minnix to Henry Edwards, Thomas Quinn, Thomas Matthews, Ferdinand Key, Knotley Johnson and James Powell, deed, Prince George's County, 1868.

⁴ Pearl, *African-American Heritage Survey*, 18.

⁵ Pearl, *African-American Heritage Survey*, 20-22.

⁶ Pearl, *African-American Heritage Survey*, 18.

⁷ Simon J. Martenet, "Atlas of Prince George's County, Maryland, 1861, Adapted from Martenet's Map of Prince George's County, Maryland" (Baltimore: Simon J. Martenet C.E., 1861).

⁸ G.M. Hopkins, "Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington, Including the County of Prince George Maryland" (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, C.E., 1878).

- PG: 62-18, John Carter House, 7620 Old Muirkirk Road
- PG: 62-19, William Tolliver House, 7616 Old Muirkirk Road
- PG: 62-023-20, Muirkirk School, 7813 Muirkirk Road
- PG: 62-023-21, Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church Site and Cemetery, 7410 Old Muirkirk Road

Windshield Survey

A windshield survey of Rossville was conducted in July 2007. The rural setting of Rossville remains largely intact, but subdivisions on the north and west of Rossville have begun to encroach on the landscape. The Muirkirk West Neighborhood Park, owned by M-NCPPC, is located south of Old Muirkirk Road; it protects the viewshed of the neighborhood and provides a natural boundary. Only a few late-nineteenth-century buildings are extant; most have been replaced with twentieth-century construction. Most of the construction dates from the 1930s and 1940s. Architectural styles in Rossville reflect a range of popular styles from the 1890s to the 2000s and include Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Dutch Colonial Revival, and vernacular interpretations. Building forms include I-houses, bungalows, Cape Cods, and ranch houses. Many of the structures have been altered by rear and side additions. There are a variety of outbuildings in Rossville, including garages, sheds, and trailers. The 2007 survey area expanded to include Queen's Chapel and cemetery, located on the western side of Rossville.

Historic District Evaluation

Rossville represents several Prince George's County Heritage Themes including black history and residential architectural styles. Rossville meets the following criteria for designation as a Prince George's County historic district:

- (1)(A)(i) and (iv)– Rossville is significant as a free African-American community that developed during the transition from slavery to freedom in the post-Civil War years. Rossville served as a cultural and social center for the African-American community. The establishment of a church, school, and benevolent society reflected a sense of unity and self-sufficiency within the small community.
- (2)(A)(iv) – Rossville is significant as a community that represents an emerging African-American community in the late nineteenth century.

In 2003, the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) determined that Rossville (7410-7800 Old Muirkirk Road and 7808-7813 Muirkirk Road) was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district under Criterion A, as an example of a free African-American community that developed after the Civil War. The period of significance was defined as 1868-1953. Because of a loss of integrity in design, materials, and workmanship, MHT determined that Rossville is not eligible under Criterion C.⁹

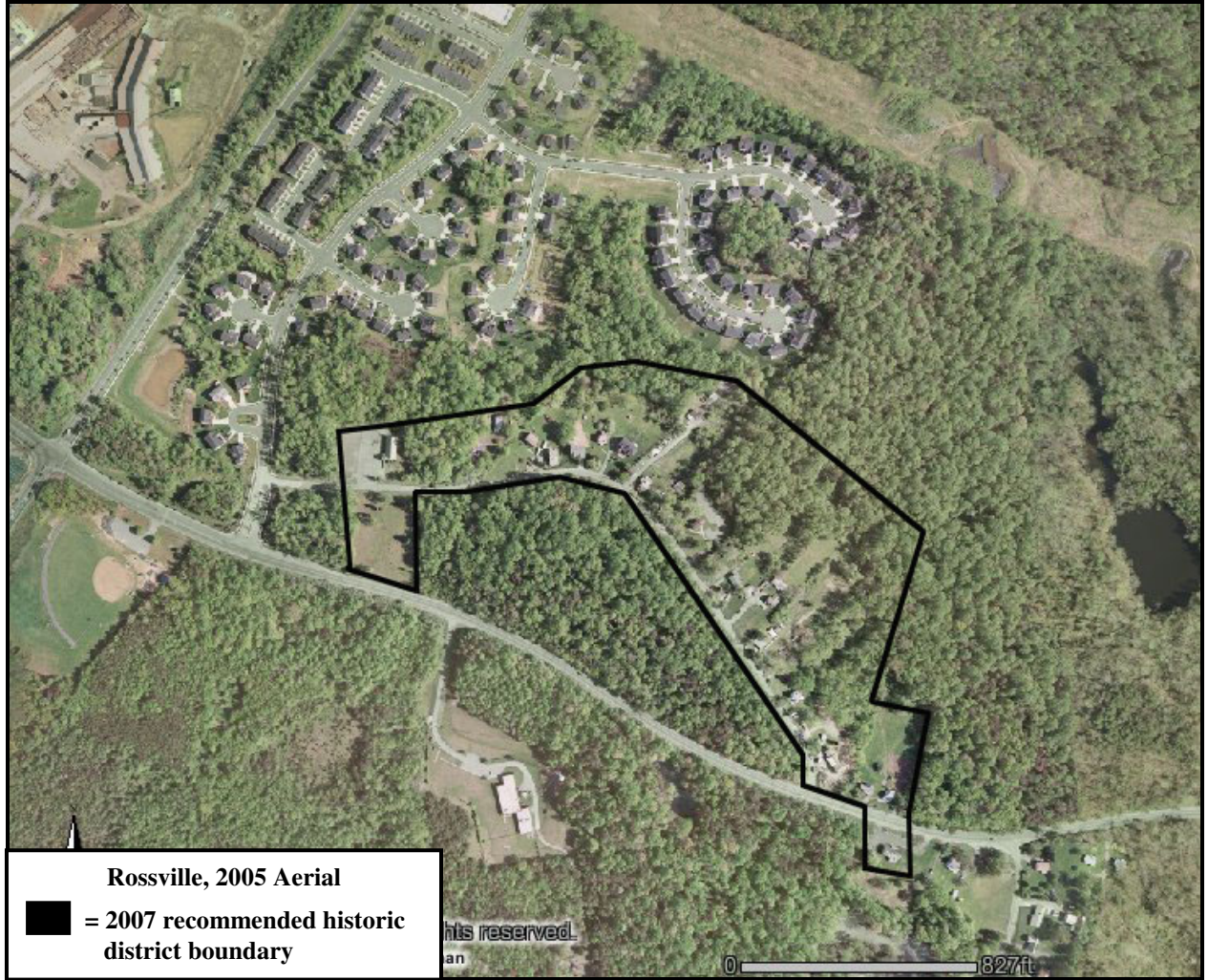
In addition to this determination of eligibility, Rossville is recommended eligible for listing in the National Register under the Multiple Property Documentation Form for African-American Resources in Prince George's County under Criteria A and C.¹⁰ The community meets the requirements for listing as a late-nineteenth-century African-American settlement. In addition to the number of dwellings that

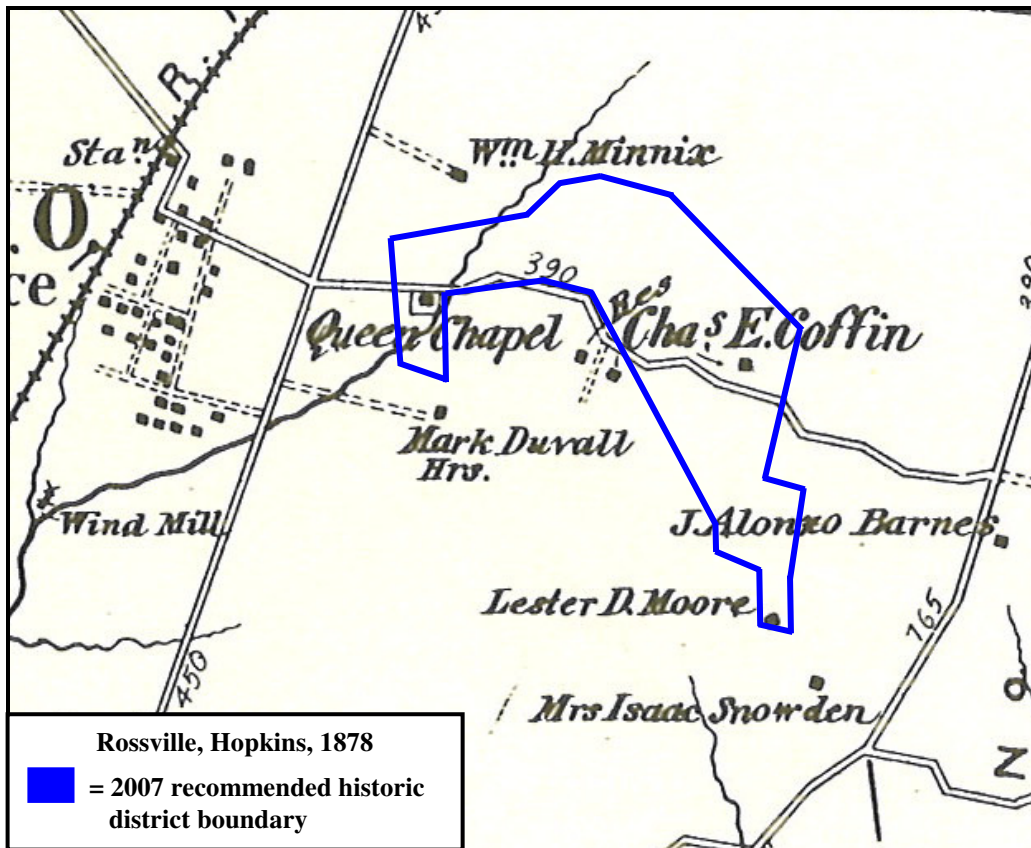
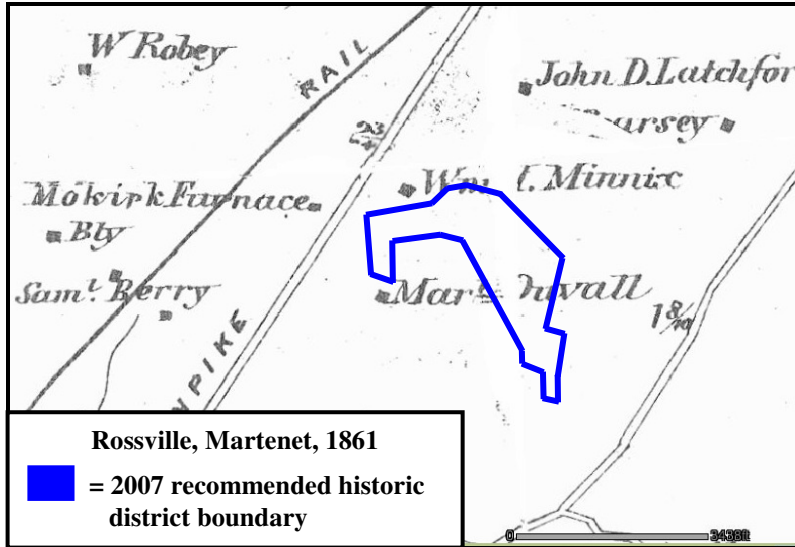
⁹ Ann Bruder, "Rossville," Maryland Historical Trust, Determination of Eligibility Form, prepared 26 August 2002.

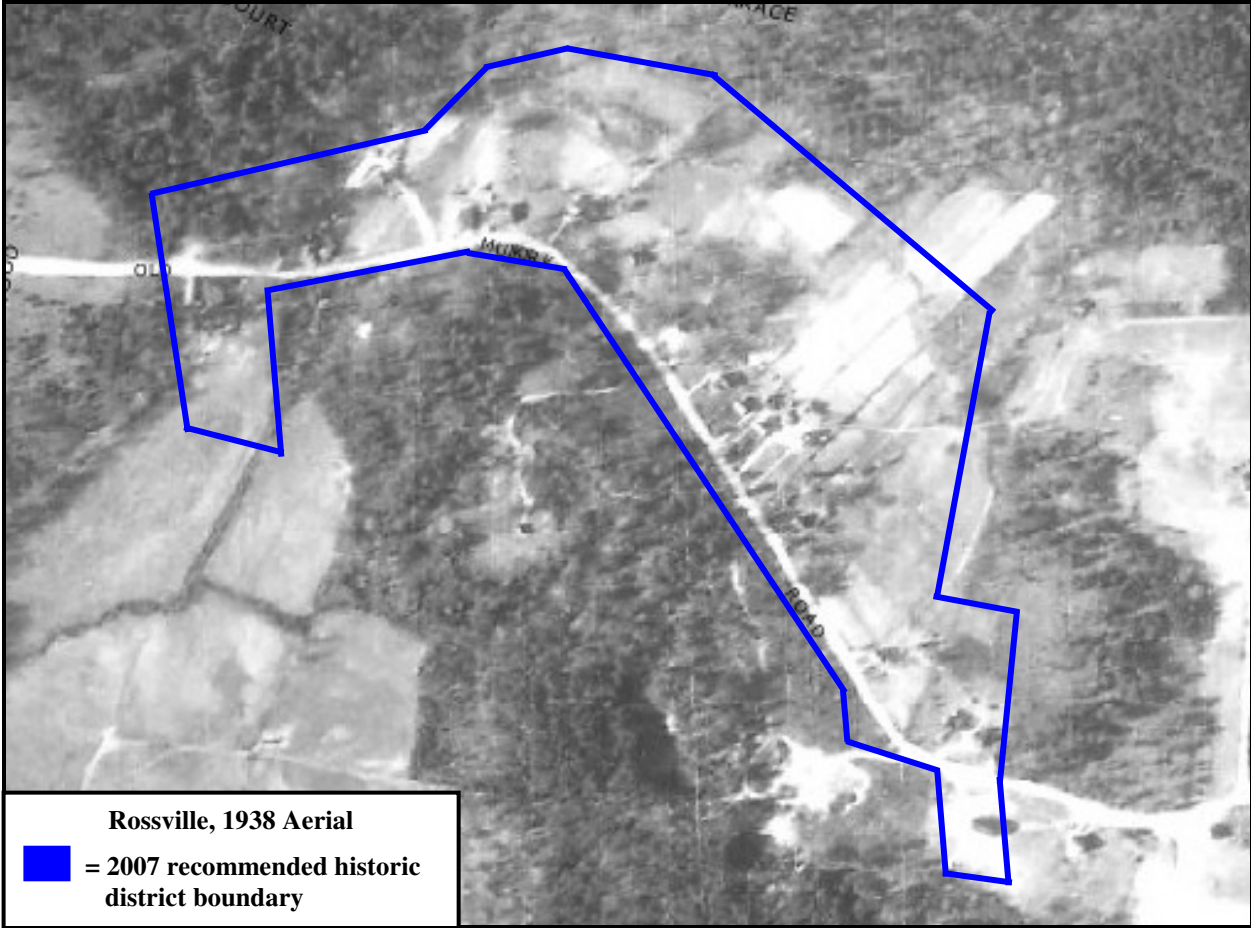
¹⁰ Betty Bird and Associates, "African-American Historic Resources in Prince George's County," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, October 2003.

document the evolution of domestic architecture, Rossville still contains a fraternal lodge, school, and church. Rossville has retained its integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

Prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc.
November 2007









Looking north across Queen's Chapel Cemetery (PG: 62-023-21) towards Queen's Chapel United Methodist Church (*EHT Traceries*, 2007)



Looking northeast, 7600-7602 Old Muirkirk Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2007)



Looking northwest, John Carter House (PG: 62-18), 7620 Old Muirkirk Road - Thomas Matthews House (PG: 62-023-17), 7700 Old Muirkirk Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2007)



Looking northwest, 7616 Old Muirkirk Road - John Carter House (PG: 62-18), 7620 Old Muirkirk Road (*EHT Traceries, 2007*)



Looking northwest, 7710 Old Muirkirk Road. (*EHT Traceries*, 2007)



Looking northeast, Abraham Hall (PG: 62-023-07) (NR), 7612 Old Muirkirk Road (*EHT Traceries*, 2007)