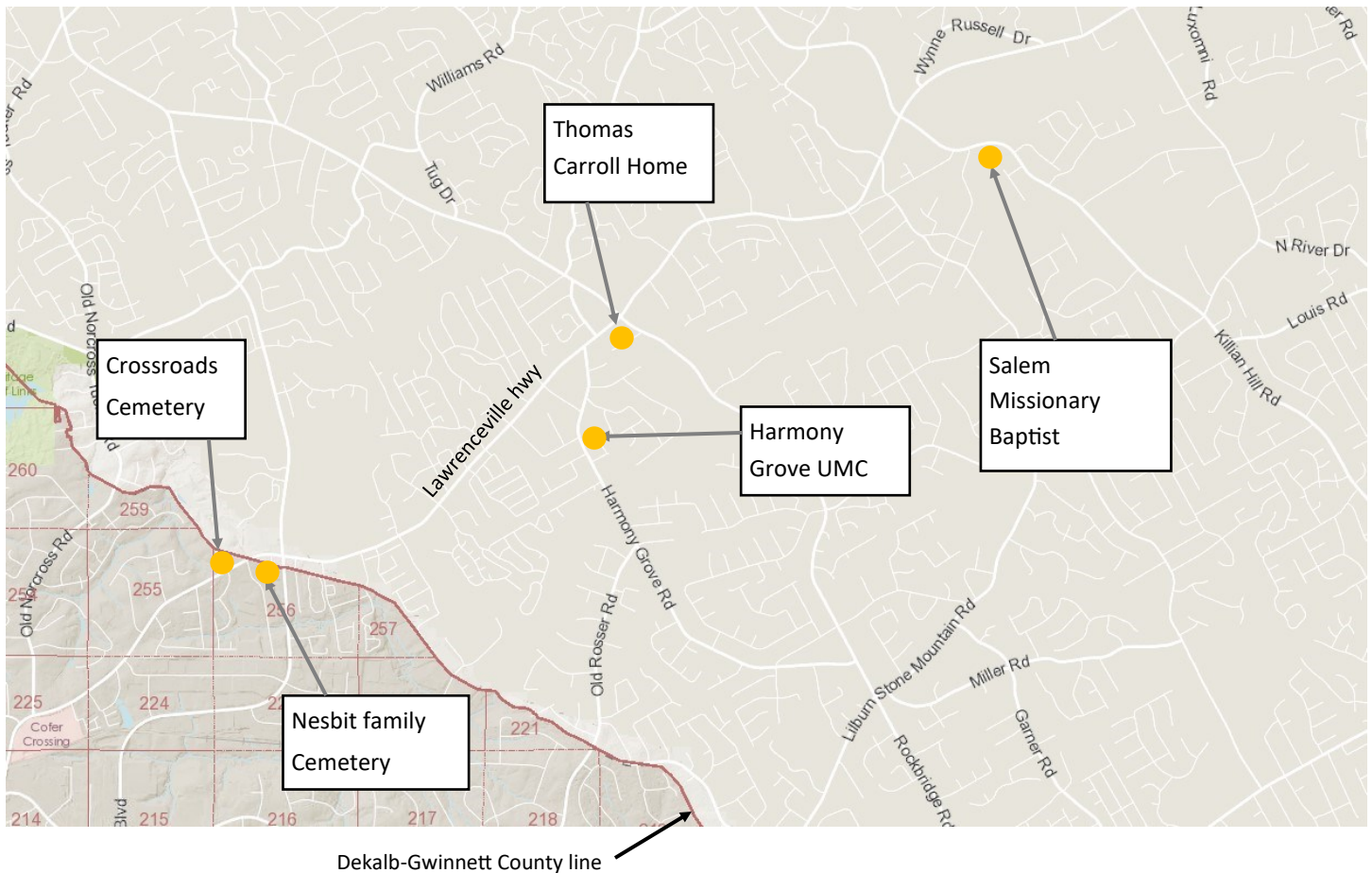




Representatives of Harmony Grove United Methodist Church, Salem Missionary Baptist Church and Boy Scout Troop 100 participate in a clean-up day at Crossroads cemetery in October, 2022

# Crossroads Cemetery

By Ann Tew  
Fall 2022



## Location Map

Crossroads M.E. church, and later Mt. Calvary church, met on William Nesbit's land just over the county line in Dekalb County. The site was also close to his home.

The Crossroads/Mt. Calvary congregation moved in the 1880s to property along what is now Harmony Grove Road, and renamed themselves Harmony Grove Methodist.

Thomas Carroll, William Nesbit's half-brother, lived at the intersection of Rockbridge Road and Lawrenceville Highway. Salem Missionary Baptist Church was established by slaves from his plantation in the 1830s and met on his land. Their church has remained in the same location since the mid-1800s.

# Land in Gwinnett

## *Early Land Distribution*

After creation of the county in 1818 and establishment of county government in the next year, surveyors were sent out to measure the land within the county. Four districts were created (4, 5, 6 and 7) and then the land was further subdivided into Land Lots. (this is not unique to Gwinnett County, other counties use this system of land measurement as well). They attempted to make each land lot contain approximately 250 acres.

Beginning in 1820, the portion of the county that had originally been part of Franklin and later Jackson County was distributed to landowners under something called the head-rights system. Each head of a family was given 220 acres of his own selection, and 50 additional acres for each dependent. The 1820 census showed 689 families in Gwinnett, with a total population of 4741 (2748 males, 1993 females).

### **Land Lottery**

The surveyors completed their work in the summer of 1820 and immediately thereafter a land lottery system was set up to distribute the remainder of the land. People came from far and wide to participate in the lottery, purchasing tracts of approximately 250 acres.

The county population increased to over 13,000 by 1830, a gain of 8,700 over the 1820 census, due mainly to the land lottery. By 1840 it had dropped back to just over 10,000, and did not increase back to the 1830 level until after 1870 and the end of the Civil War. Many of the people who came in because of the lottery did not stay, and as more land opened up to the west, they sold their farms for what they could get and moved on. As these first owners departed, the remaining landowners in the County began to consolidate their holdings and plantations began to replace smaller farms. These plantations were cultivated by slaves and a landed aristocracy developed that grew in power, wealth and influence until it was destroyed by the Civil War.



A portion of a Gwinnett County map from 1869 showing Land Lots in the vicinity of William Nesbit's land

### **Farming**

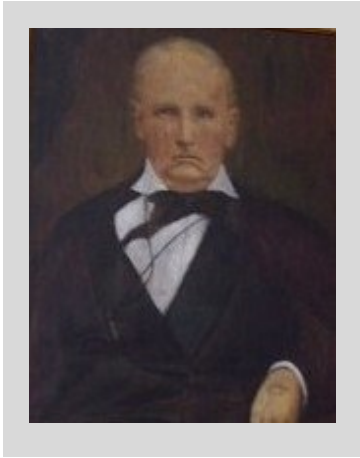
Farming was the principal industry during the period up to 1860, and farmers were in general a well-to-do class. Towns and communities prospered, and the institution of slavery also seems to have flourished. Less than 25% of the farmers owned slaves, but the slave-owners were the wealthy class. A young negro man or woman was worth as much as a two-hundred acre farm for many years after the organization of the county. Small farmers cultivated their own fields and gathered their own crops, but the man who farmed on a large scale on his plantation owned slaves.

### **Taxpayers**

In 1860 in the Berkshire post office district of Gwinnett (where both William Nesbit and Thomas Carroll lived) there were 176 taxpayers and 40 of these were slave owners. Of the taxpayers, 77 paid \$1 or less in yearly taxes.

Half the wealth of the County was lost by the Civil War as plantations gave way to small farms.

# William Nesbit



From the portrait of William Nesbit that hangs in the old Lawrenceville Courthouse (the Gwinnett Historical Society)

In the early 1800s, what is now Gwinnett County was still wilderness, with much of the land still held by the Cherokee. However, after additional treaties and land deals, three counties, Hall, Walton and Gwinnett, were formed by the State legislature on the same day in 1818. These counties were named for Lyman Hall, George Walton, and Button Gwinnett, the three delegates who represented Georgia at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776, and who signed the Declaration of Independence. A land lottery held in 1820 also served to draw settlers to Gwinnett and what was then the western boundary of the settled land in Georgia.

One state to the east in York County, South Carolina, Joseph Nesbit, an immigrant from Ireland, and his wife Sarah Miller Nesbit, had a son in 1789 and named him William. Shortly after William's birth, his father Joseph passed away. His mother remarried a man named James Carroll in 1792 and had several more children. After James Carroll died also, William, his mother, and his Carroll half brothers and sisters left South Carolina and moved to what was then Jackson County, Georgia.

William Nesbit married Mary Lollis (Lawless) in Jackson County in 1809 when they were both twenty, and they started a family. After the War of 1812 began, longstanding Cherokee support for the British began causing ill feelings between them and the white settlers. Several forts were built at points along the frontier line to help provide security for the settlers. Fort Daniel was built at Hog Mountain in Jackson County and another fort was planned for 30 miles west, called Standing Peachtree. It then became necessary to build a road connecting the two forts, and in 1812, William Nesbit and two others from Jackson County (Isham Williams and Robert Young), were asked to supervise construction of a road along the Chattahoochee river to connect the two forts. This road ran from Hog Mountain through Suwanee and eventually became Peachtree Road. After completion of the road, William entered the military and fought in the War of 1812 in 1814-1815, and then moved his family to Gwinnett County, near the Dekalb/Gwinnett line.

He became a leading citizen of the young county, serving as the second sheriff of Gwinnett County for many years beginning in 1820, and also served two terms as a State senator. His land holdings grew and he owned over 900 acres at the time of his death, including a plantation of 650 acres, with many enslaved persons to help work the land.

The land where Crossroads church met was at the southern end of his plantation, and in 1860 he officially deeded this land to the Methodist Episcopal church.



# Thomas Carroll



The home of Thomas Carroll located at Rockbridge Road and Lawrenceville Hwy.



Salem Missionary Baptist Church, started by Thomas Carroll's slaves, located on Killian Hill road in Liburn



Liberty Baptist Church, organized in the home of William McDaniel in 1840. This eventually became Lilburn First Baptist.

The Crossroads Church probably looked similar to this.

Thomas Carroll, William Nesbit's half-brother born in 1806, also came from York County, South Carolina to Gwinnett, eventually settling in Lilburn at Rockbridge Road and Lawrenceville Highway around 1829. According to the Salem Missionary Baptist Church website, around 1834 Thomas Carroll instructed his slaves to construct six small frame buildings. Five of these were tenant houses or dwellings for slaves, but one was designated as a church where the slaves could gather and worship. This small frame building was the start of the present Salem Missionary Baptist church on Killian Hill Road in Lilburn, the oldest known historically black church in Gwinnett County.

Before the start of Salem Missionary Baptist, it is thought that slaves worshipped at the Camp Creek Church in Lilburn, but after Salem began, in addition to those in the Carroll household, enslaved persons in the households of the Pickens, McDaniel, Carter, McCurdy and Hunt families also met there. Other family names among the founding member include Stevens, Nesbit, Bailey, Williams, Hopkins, Pugh, McCurdy, and Jackson.

Thomas died in 1849, but his widow, Rhoda Blake Carroll maintained his plantation and in 1860 also owned over 900 acres of land. 26 enslaved persons were listed in the 1860 census. Both Thomas and Rhoda Carroll are buried in the First Baptist Church Cemetery in Lilburn.

Salem Missionary Baptist Church operated under the auspices of the Carroll plantation for its first 30 years, and in 1862, Darling Carroll, one of the sons of Thomas and Rhonda Carroll, donated a parcel of land to the "slave church", and the second meeting house was built near the present church.

# Slavery

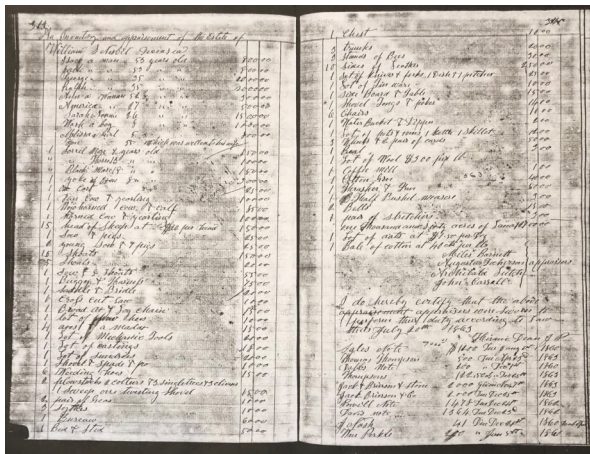
## William Nesbit's Plantation

The US Census of 1830 notes 11 White persons in William's Nesbit's Gwinnett household, and 12 slaves. The 1850 census notes 26 slaves, but on the 1860 Census, three years before his death, he noted 11 slaves. After his death in 1863, most of his land holdings and household goods, including 9 enslaved persons, were sold at auction on the courthouse steps in Lawrenceville.

William's first wife Mary died in 1849 and he remarried in 1860. His widow did not stay in Gwinnett County but remarried and is buried in Oakland Cemetery in Dekalb. However several of William's twelve children remained in Gwinnett and Dekalb and were landowners in their own right.

Many people with the last name Nesbit (both from William Nesbit's children and from enslaved people that were a part of his household or the households of his relatives) remained in the area.

Nearby Nesbit Elementary School is named in honor of Miss Clara Nesbit, a well known teacher and educator in the 1920s and 1930s. In Gwinnett and Atlanta. Her grandparents, Perry Nesbit, Sr. and his wife Fanny, were thought to be enslaved in the household of one of William Nesbit's children. Miss Clara is buried along with her parents in her family's cemetery in Duluth.



An "inventory and appraisement "of William's estate was done in 1863 as a part of his will, and the following enslaved persons were named, along with their estimated value:

Isaac	male	53 years old	\$800
Jack	male	50 years old	\$800
Ralph	male	35 years old	\$2000
George	male	35 years old	\$2000
America	woman	27 years old	\$500
Anna	woman	55 years old	\$500
Sarah	woman	26 years old	\$1500
Wash	boy	8 years old	\$1000
Malissa	girl	6 years old	\$800
Han		55 years old	(willed to his wife)

## Thomas Carroll's Plantation

Thomas Carroll died in 1849, but his widow, Rhoda Carroll, maintained his plantation of several hundred acres. The 1860 census (just before the beginning of the Civil War) notes 26 enslaved persons in her household.

# Crossroads M.E. Church

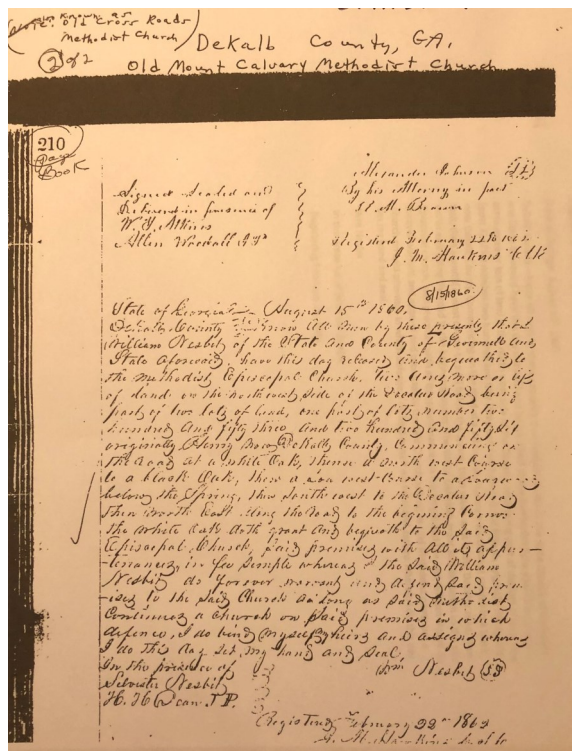
## The Property

Families and landowners living near the Nesbit farm in the 1830s included Nash, Harris, Gober, Wood, Pounds, Luckie, McDaniel, Lankford and Bryson.

In 1839, several of these families built Crossroads Methodist Episcopal church on William Nesbit's land in Dekalb County. It was located near the county line with Gwinnett along the Decatur-Lawrenceville road, the road that connected the two county seats. That church was destroyed by fire in 1859, and a second church was built, renamed Mt. Calvary.

In 1860, three years before his death, William Nesbit deeded a little over 2 acres of land to the church, officially transferring to the M.E. church the land where they had already been meeting.

In 1880, after the Mt. Calvary church also burned, the M.E. congregation relocated to Gwinnett County and formed Harmony Grove Methodist Church but retained the 2+ acres of land in Dekalb. The original 1860 deed gave no linear dimensions to the property, instead "commencing at a white oak and running northwest to a black oak", but it can be assumed that the footprint of the property was formed by the land occupied by the church building, the churchyard, and the adjacent cemetery.



1860 deed from William Nesbit to the M.E. church

### 1860 deed transcription:

Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of W.Y. Atkins, Allen Woodall JP

Alexander Johnson by his Attorney in fact R. M. Brown

Registered February 22, 1862 J. M. Hawkins

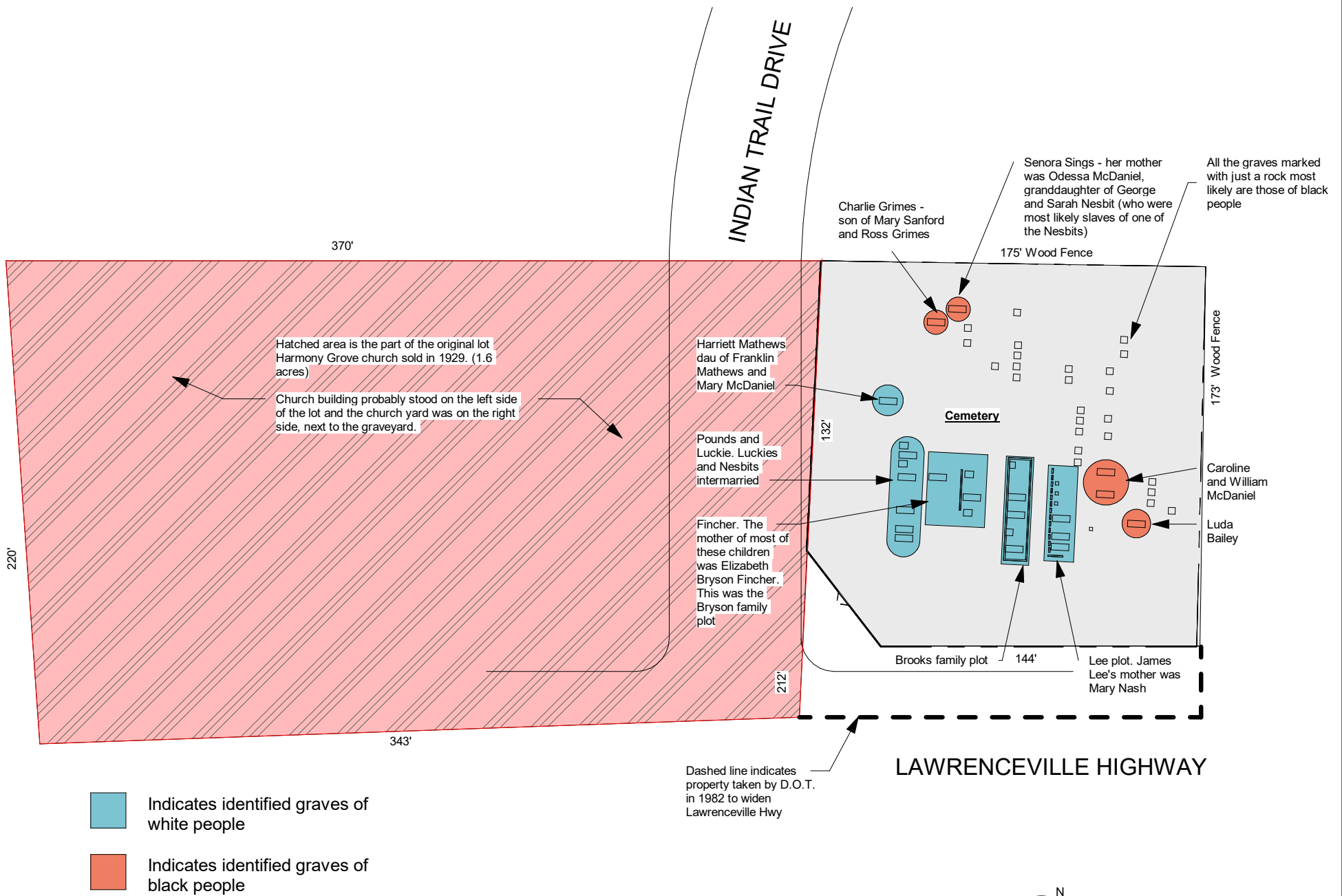
State of Georgia August 15<sup>th</sup> 1860

Dekalb County – know all men by these presents that William Nesbit of the state County of Gwinnett and State aforesaid have this day released and bequeathed to the Methodist Episcopal Church, two acres more or less of land in the north west side of the Decatur road being part of two lots of land, one part of lot number two hundred and fifty three and two hundred and fifty six originally Henry and now Dekalb County. Commencing on the road at a White Oak, thence a north-west course to a black Oak, then a south west course to a (?) below the Spring, then south west to the Decatur road, then north east along the road to the beginning corner. The White Oak doth grant and bequeath to the said Episcopal church, said premises with all its appurtenances in fee simple and the said William Nesbit do forever warrant and append said promises to the said Church as long as said Methodist continues a church on said premises in which defense, I do bind myself my heirs and assigns wherein I do this day set my hand and seal.

Wm Nesbit

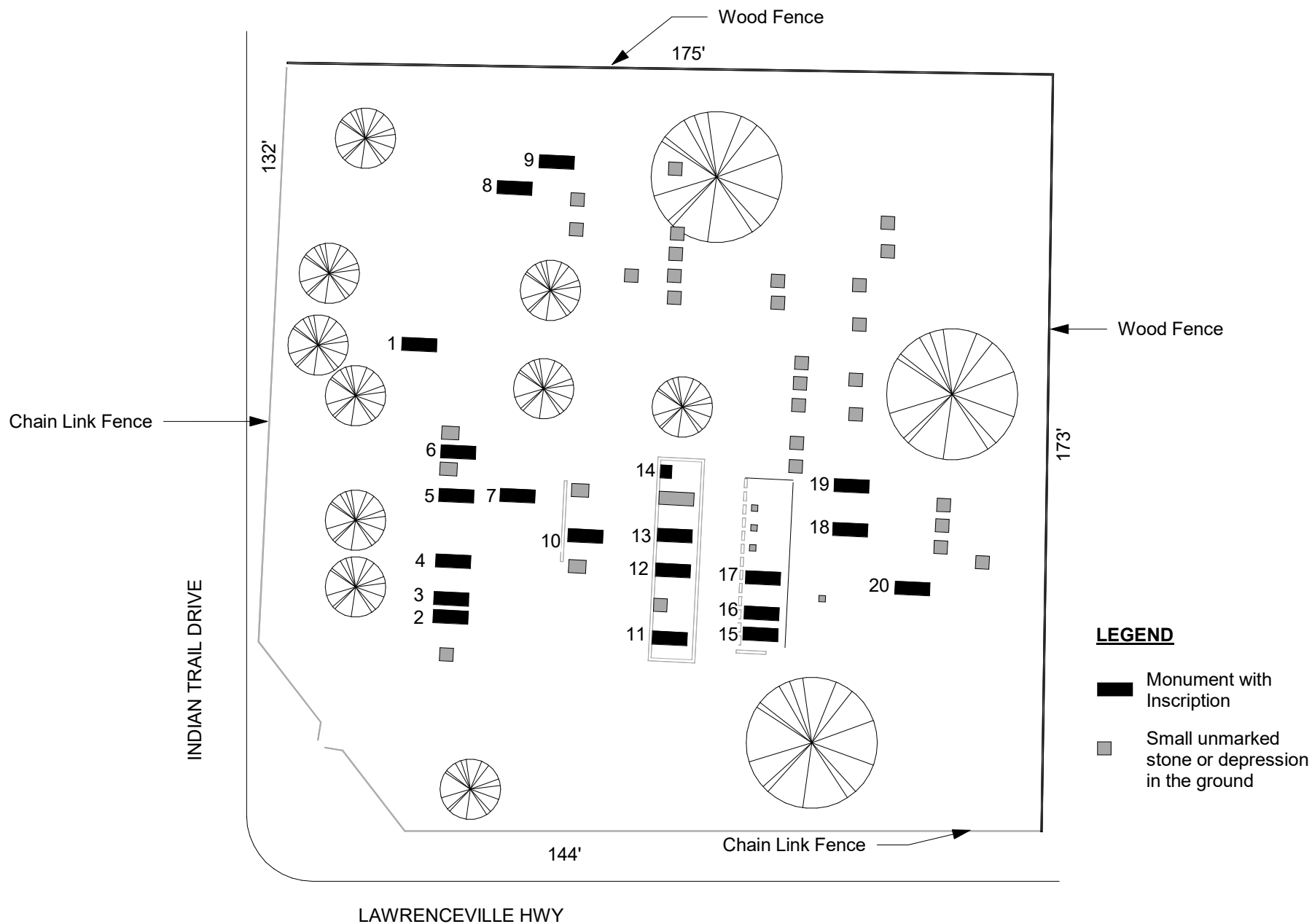
In the presence of Sylvester Nesbit

Registering February 22, 1862



## Crossroads Cemetery Overall Site





# Crossroads Cemetery Plan View

See the chart on the next page for names and dates of numbered graves

CROSSROADS - LIST OF NAMES							Oct-22
See plan for numbered stones			from 1931 Inventory by Franklin Garrett	from Find-A-Grave	from Paul Graham/ Rootsweb 2004		
No.	Name	Date					
20	Bailey, Luda	1904-1909		X	X		
11	Brooks, J. L.	1852-1917	X	X	X		
	Brooks, Elmer	1885-1891		X	X		son of Mr and Mrs AA Brooks
13	Brooks, Jacob M.	1829-1878	X	X	X		
12	Brooks, Rachel L. Duffle	1836-1901	X	X	X		wife of Jacob M. Brooks
	Brooks, J.L.	1852-1917		X	X		
	Bryson, Arminda A	1832-1904	X				
	Bryson, Ellen Sidney Tatham	1806-1890	X				wife of Jefferson Bryson
	Bryson, Jefferson	1806-1894	X				
	Dickner, Ella Estell	1922-1925		X			
	Fincher, C.H.	1874-1875	X				son of T.H. and E.A. Fincher
10	Fincher, E Imer	1885-1891	X				son of Mr. and Mrs. A.A. Fincher
	Fincher, J.J.	1876-1876	X				son of T.H. and E.A. Fincher
	Fincher, Leon J.	1872-1875	X				son of T.H. and E.A. Fincher
7	Fincher, M.L.	1866-1868		X	X		
	Fincher, Minnie A.	1873-1873	X				son of T.H. and E.A. Fincher
8	Grimes, Charlie	1895-1948		X	X		WWI
	Grimes, Mary Sanford	1879-1931		X			
	Grimes, Emma Allen	1904 - 1936		X			dau of Mary Sanford and Ross Grimes.
16	Lee, Amanda J. Scott	1855-1883	X	X			wife of J.H. Lee
17	Lee, Henry M.	1890-1890	X	X	X		son of J.H. and E.L. Lee
15	Lee, James Henry	1852-1912					
5	Luckie, Lane			X	X		
	Luckie, Lucy Benton	1837-1910	X	X	X		wife of T.S. Luckie
6	Luckie, T.S.	1823-1902	X	X	X		full name: Theophilus Sterling
	McClendon, Joshua	1847-1923		X			
19	McDaniel, Caroline	1838-1906	X	X	X		wife of Wm. McDaniel she hath done what she could
18	McDaniel, William	1838-1914	X	X	X		age 76 years. He was an honest man and was loved by all the white people of the community
1	Mathews, Harriett	1830-1880	X	X	X		
3	Pounds, Dollie L.	1860-1921	X	X	X		wife of Richard N. Pounds mother
4	Pounds, Frank A.	1887-1891	X	X	X		
2	Pounds, Richard N.	1857-1891	X		X		about 34 years father
9	Sings, Senora	1935-1938		X	X		
14	Tavarich						

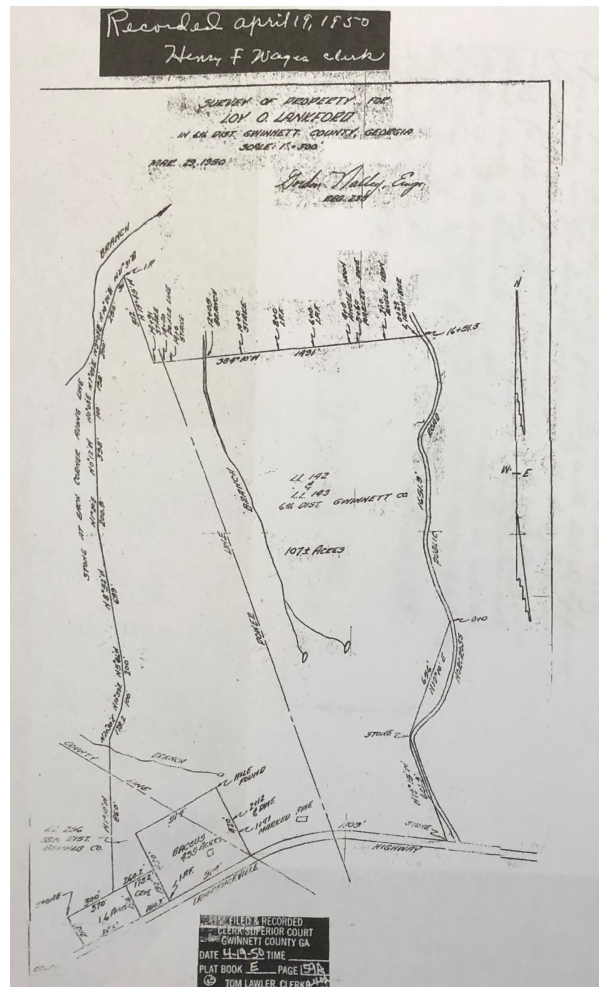
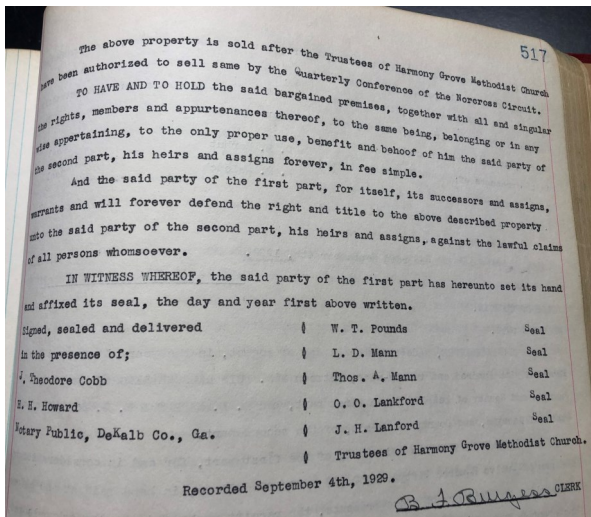
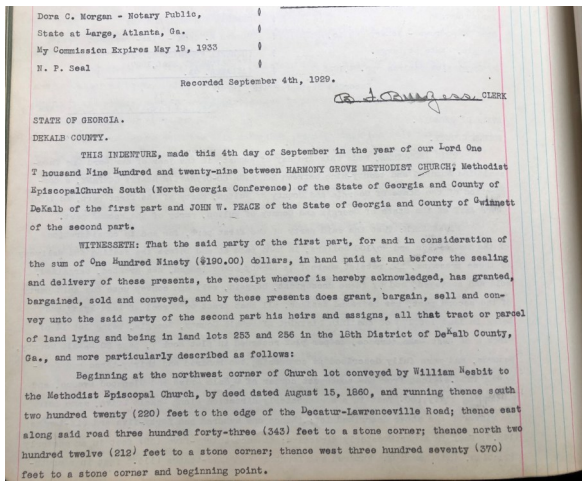
# Harmony Grove

## What happened to the Land?

After the sale of his estate, a piece of William Nesbit's land of approximately 150 acres remained intact and was sold and resold several times by the early 1900s. This tract was mostly in Gwinnett County but a portion extended into Dekalb and adjoined the church property. Around 1900, this land was acquired by John W. Peace, who then had a homestead there. In 1929, Harmony Grove church sold 1.6 acres of their land (all but the cemetery) to John W. Peace . The deed for that sale gives linear dimensions for the portion of their land that was sold, and states that the church trustees were given permission to sell by the Norcross Circuit of the Methodist Church.

### *Harmony Grove and Crossroads Cemetery*

One of the founding families of the original Harmony Grove congregation in the 1880s were the Lankfords. J.B. Lankford wrote a history of the Harmony Grove congregation that appeared in “A Complete History of Every Church in Gwinnett County, Georgia” published in 1911. Loy Lankford, one of J.B. Lankford’s grandsons, founded Tucker Real Estate Company along with his daughter, Catherine Lankford Banks, and acquired the 150 acre John Peace property in 1950. They subdivided the land, with Catherine Banks retaining the property immediately behind the cemetery. She eventually subdivided this into several house lots in the early 2000s, before her death in 2015. J.B. Lankford and his wife, Clara, are buried in the Harmony Grove cemetery, as are his son Oscar and his wife Joanna.



The 150 acre tract of land with the cemetery lot and the 1.6 acres sold by Harmony Grove shown in the lower left corner

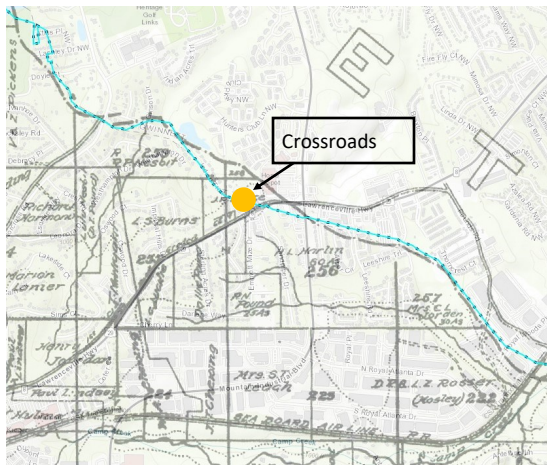
# Echoes of the Past

Gwinnett county in the time of Crossroads church was a rural place. Although neighbors were close, most people lived on small farms and not right next door to one another.

Some formerly enslaved people stayed in the area after the Civil War, while others moved elsewhere. In many cases they took the same surnames as the households they had been a part of.

The members of Crossroads were most likely small landowners and farmers who lived in the area around the church. Their black neighbors were most likely former slaves of the large landowners. Several white families had family plots in the Crossroads cemetery, and possibly it became more of a community cemetery for the black families who lived nearby after the church relocated to Harmony Grove.

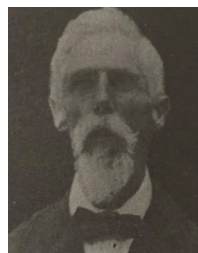
Although Harmony Grove maintains the cemetery, it was no longer in active use after 1950 (the last burial was in 1948). It is a relic of the rural past.



A 1915 map of the area around the cemetery shows the adjacent landowners



This unnamed couple were former slaves in Gwinnett, later employed by J.B. Lankford



J.B. Lankford



The Lankford home on Rockbridge Road in Lilburn



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