

Background Report-September 2026

Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church & Cemetery, With history of “colored” school and camp meetings

This report includes reproductions of much of the research material that has been assembled by multiple generations of community historians with family ties and deep interests in the African American heritage of the greater Marietta community, and in honor of those connections to the history of Lancaster County and places beyond. The material presented here includes primary and secondary sources of records consisting of photographs, newspaper articles, biographies and autobiographies, family documents, oral traditions and personal perspectives.

The public presentation of this material is summarized in two commemorative markers permanently installed on West Fairview Avenue in Marietta, PA where the church and school once stood, and where the church cemetery was established early in the 19th century. Dedicated September 2026, one marker focuses on church history and community advocates who preserved that history. The other highlights camp meetings that church members helped to organize, and the school attended by children of church members who were not welcomed into the area’s public schools until about 1888. Those historical markers are reproduced in this report for reference purposes.

This community history effort — the commemorative markers, landscape design and production of this report — was launched in 2025 by The Marietta African American Legacy Initiative, a volunteer community organization of Marietta residents and those who hold this community in honor and esteem. MAALI members secured generous financial donations, contributed services and in-kind support from area residents, businesses, local government and community not-for-profit organizations. This effort was undertaken in collaboration with the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania (AAHSSCPA) and the Borough of Marietta. This material and more items of community history will be included in the African American Heritage Collections and Archives of LancasterHistory, Lancaster County’s Historical Society, officially organized in **1886** and incorporated in **1901**.

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Michael Gentry Sweeney

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Andre Dominguez—Marker installation

Randy Harris—Historian & graphic designer

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AAHSSCPA

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Pastor

Marietta Cemetery

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Jeff Hudson—Liaison & Borough Council
Vice President, 2023 - 2026

Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church & Cemetery

Although only fragments of its early history survive, Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church played a significant role in Marietta's African American community for more than eighty years. But over many decades its ministers, congregants and its stewards have collected and conserved its scant historical record, to document the work of serving its members and showing the church's lasting impact on Marietta and the region's Black community.



Albert R. Smith, Sr.
At Wesley AME Church.
Date & photographer unknown

Timeline of a faith community

- 1853— Congregation founded
- 1861 – 1862—Arsonists destroy Church
- 1861 – 1875—Congregation meets in "Colored" school house
- 1869 – 70—"Wesley Colored Church" listed in County directory
- 1875 — Second frame church built
- 1890 – John Fairfax begins service as pastor
- 1908-1913—"Colored Camp Meetings" bring thousands of believers
- 1937 – Congregation defunct; First Baptist congregation worships for two years
- 1954 – Church damaged by Hurricane Hazel
- 1960 – Dilapidated building razed by Marietta Jaycees

Born in West Virginia, Albert Rogers Smith (B. August, 22, 1893—D. 1949) was a veteran of World War I who suffered from toxin gas exposure on the battlefield. Smith worked for many years as the chauffeur for Lancaster Orphans Court Judge Eugene G. Smith (1855 - 1928), who lived with his family on Lime Street in Lancaster. A member of Wesley AME Zion Church, Albert Smith is reported as serving this faith community by digging graves at the church cemetery.

From an essay by Catherine Jane Smith Tucker, daughter of Mr. Smith, in *The Scoop on Marietta: A small river town*, by Lyn Baker Alarie, Landisville, PA, Yurchak Printing, 2012.

Fairfax Family: Faith, Enterprise & Leadership

By Michael Gentry Sweeney

Members of the Fairfax family are among Marietta's most respected African-Americans, helping to shape and sustain religious, economic and civic life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John Wesley Fairfax pastored the AME Zion Church on this site and helped organize annual Colored Camp Meetings. His brother Chanceford Fairfax served congregations in York, New York State, Boston, and beyond. The family's influence extended to business and civic life. Josiah Fairfax owned a bakery and worked as a barber. Howard Fairfax managed an insurance company in York, Pennsylvania.



Numbered graves & base map from "The Cemeteries of Marietta, Pennsylvania" by James C. Landis, 2011. Burials shown recorded by Geo-Graf, Geophysical Investigations/Geophysical Penetrating Radar Specialists, 2026

Guardians & Advocates

By Michael Gentry Sweeney

Two early champions of restoration for the Wesley AME Zion Cemetery were Mrs. Catherine Jane Smith Tucker and Mrs. Thelma Mae Waters. Their dedication marked the first organized effort to preserve and protect this historic burial ground. In 1992, they secured a \$2,000 grant to begin restoration work but lack of clear property ownership halted their efforts. A company that claimed ownership attempted to remove existing tombstones and construct a residence on the property.

With passion and foresight, Mrs. Waters, contacted Lancaster historian Dr. Leroy Hopkins, who intervened and demanded that all activity cease, preventing the desecration and destruction of the cemetery. In July 2025, concerned residents formed the Marietta African American Legacy Initiative (MAALI). With the assistance of many others, the group documented evidence supporting abandonment of the cemetery parcels and presented this information to the Borough of Marietta.

WESLEY AME ZION CEMETERY BURIALS

D --- Death Certificate N/O --- Newspaper/Obituary

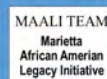
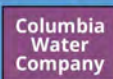
Known as of July 2, 2026. Research continues...

1. Miller, Emma H. (1873-1880).....001
2. Miller, Lizzie H. (1867-1876).....002
3. Broadnax, Joseph B. (1848-1908).....003
4. Broadnax, Dora E. (1884-1915).....003
5. McCurdy, Ferdinand (1879-1910).....004
6. McCurdy, Joshua (1876-1910).....005
7. McCurdy, James (1868-1898).....006
8. McCurdy, Julia Fairfax (1852-1938).....007
9. Fairfax, Richard (1846-1914).....008
10. McCurdy, Andrew E. (1870-1949).....009
11. McCurdy, Priscilla F. (1868-1947).....009
12. Fairfax, Eliza Shaw (1855-1920).....010

Unmarked Graves

13. Smith, Andrew (1863-1908).....D
14. Fairfax, Mary (1893-1908).....N/O
15. Fairfax, Rev. John Wesley (1860-1927).....D
16. Fairfax, Emma Elizabeth (1853-1921).....N/O
17. Robert Davis (1844-1925).....D
18. Fairfax, Rev. William Harrison (1890-1936).....D

The Marietta African American Legacy Initiative—a volunteer organization of community residents—was formed in 2025 to research, design and install this landmark as part of a series of commemorative memorials in collaboration with the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania and the Borough of Marietta. MAALI extends its thanks for the support of the following individuals and organizations who contributed in a variety of ways to make this initiative possible:



Dedicated
September 2026



Although only fragments of its early history survive, Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church played a significant role in Marietta's African American community for more than eighty years. Over many decades its ministers, congregants and its stewards have collected and conserved the historical record of this faith community that existed before the Civil War, before Emancipation and before the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that outlawed slavery. While its historical record has been relatively limited to a small number of newspaper articles and scant photographs, the church has had a lasting impact on the Black community throughout the region and across the state.

Despite the major setback of suspected arson attacks at the outbreak of the Civil War, the congregation continued its mission into the 20th century, hosting "Colored Camp Meetings" from about 1908 until 1913. Reports indicate that upwards of 5,000 worshippers attended these meetings each August from throughout Pennsylvania and surrounding states.

By 1937 the AME congregation was defunct and the building was occupied by the First Baptist Church. The Baptist congregation lasted here only two years before it disbanded in 1939.

The church was later used as a boarding house for out-of-town workers. Hurricane Hazel severely damaged the already deteriorating structure in 1954. The building was later removed by the Marietta Jaycees in 1960.

Timeline of a faith community

- 1853 — Congregation organized, according to a newspaper account from 1921**
- 1861 – 1862 — Arsonists destroy Church**
- 1861 – 1875 — Congregation meets in “Colored” school house, also known as the “African School”**
- 1869 – 70 — “Wesley Colored Church” listed in County directory**
- 1875 — Second frame church built**
- 1888 — Colored School closed and schools integrated**
- 1890 — John Fairfax begins service as pastor**
- 1908-1913 — Colored Camp Meetings held in Heisey’s Woods, drawing thousands of worshippers**
- 1937 — Wesley Congregation defunct; First Baptist congregation worships here for about two years**
- 1954 — Church damaged by Hurricane Hazel**
- 1960 — Dilapidated building razed by Marietta Jaycees**



**Albert Smith, Sr. at Wesley AME Church.
Date & photographer unknown**

Born in West Virginia, Albert Rogers Smith (B. August, 22, 1893—D. 1949) was a veteran of World War I who suffered from toxin gas exposure on the battlefield. Smith worked for many years as the chauffeur for Lancaster Orphans Court Judge Eugene G. Smith (1855 -1928), who lived with his family on Lime Street in Lancaster. A member of Wesley AME Zion Church, Albert Smith is reported as serving this faith community by digging graves at the church cemetery.

From an essay by Catherine Jane Smith Tucker, daughter of Mr. Smith, in *The Scoop on Marietta : A small river town*, by Lyn Baker Alarie, Landisville, PA, Yurchak Printing, 2012.

WESLEY AME ZION CEMETERY BURIALS

D --- Death Certificate

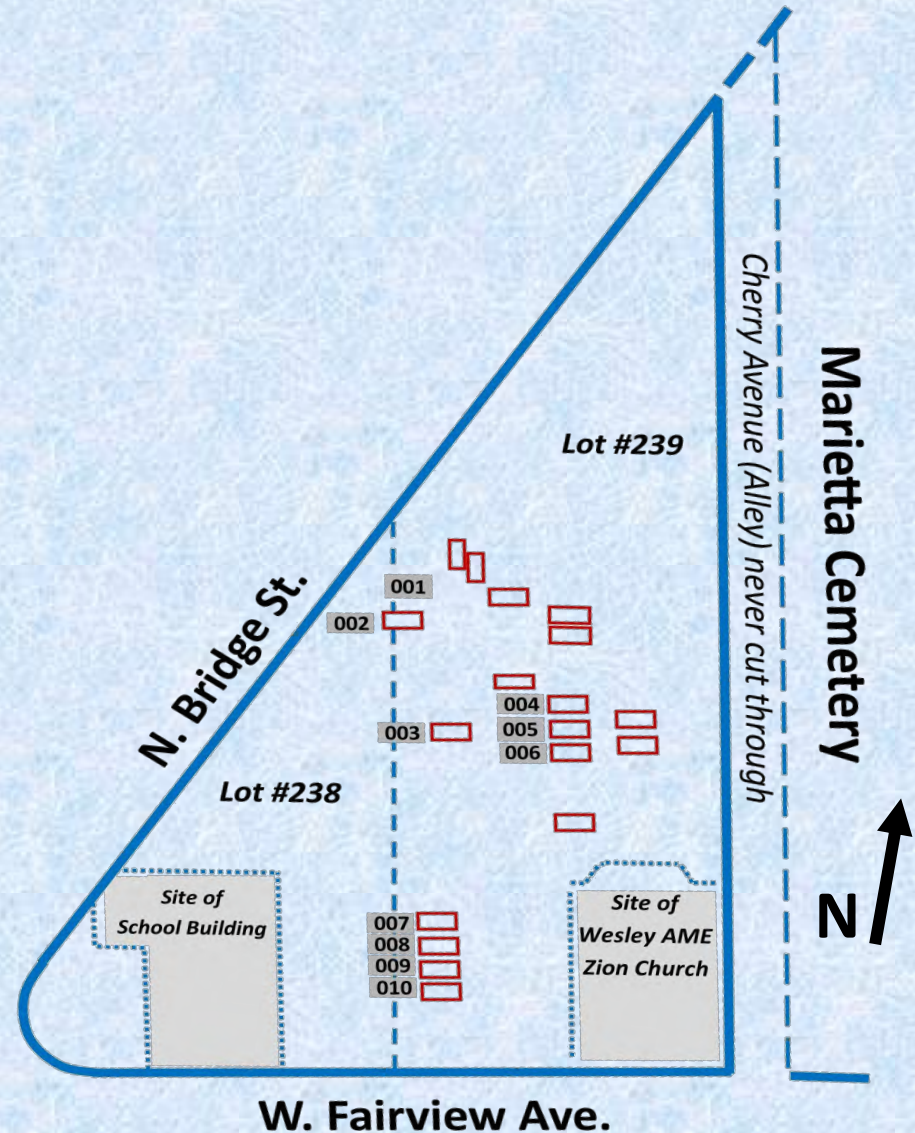
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Numbered graves & base map from "*The Cemeteries of Marietta, Pennsylvania*" by James C. Landis, 2011. Burials shown recorded by Geo-Graf, Geophysical Investigations/Ground Penetrating Radar Specialists, 2026

Fairfax Family: Faith, Enterprise & Community Leadership

By Michael Gentry Sweeney

The Fairfax family emerged as one of Marietta's most influential African American families. Their leadership helped to shape the community's religious, economic and civic life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They helped to sustain Marietta's African-American community and their display of prominence is still visible today in the large tombstones at nearby Bethel AME Church Cemetery.



Dr. Samuel Gilliland

Founder of Gilliland Laboratories,
predecessor of today's GSK facility

John Wesley Fairfax pastored the AME Zion Church on this site, which is located two blocks west of the Bethel AME Church. Rev. Fairfax helped to

organize the Colored Camp Meetings, held annually just outside Marietta from approximately 1908 to 1914, where as many as 5,000 worshippers gathered. John Wesley's brother Chanceford Fairfax served congregations in York, New York State, Boston, and beyond.

Rev. Harrison Fairfax is also mentioned in records. He was a minister and a printer who lived in Philadelphia.

The family's influence extended into business and civic life as well. Josiah Fairfax owned a bakery and worked as a barber. He once shaved Ulysses S. Grant at Colonel Duffy's mansion on Marietta's east side. Howard Fairfax managed an insurance company in York, Pennsylvania.

Julia Fairfax Brown's husband, Howard Brown, worked as a driver for Dr. Gilliland's laboratories. The Browns and lived across the street from Wesley Cemetery on what is now GSK property.

Dr. Gilliland strongly favored their son, Samuel Brown. Recognizing Samuel's promise, Dr. Gilliland hoped to send him to medical school. His death in 1929 ended those plans, but Brown spent his career serving others as a respected nurse's assistant.



**Sam Brown, Sr.
son of Melissa
Fairfax Brown**

Wesley AME Zion's Fields of Freedom

Colored Camp Meetings & School

Where Education, Faith and Community Converged

BIG COLORED CAMP.

Excerpt-Semi-Weekly New Era, Lancaster, PA
Aug 19, 1914

5000 Attend Sunday Services In Heisey Grove at Rheems

Sunday was one of the greatest days ever experienced at the colored camp in Heisey's Grove at Rheems. The attendance was the largest in the history of this camp, fully five thousand people attending the evening services. The singing was a feature and was said by many to be the best ever heard on these grounds. Rev. Dennis Barnhart preached at 3 p.m. to the satisfaction of all present. Andrew McCurdy and Geo. Brown, of Marietta, led the song service at 7 p. m. Eugene Dunson and Marris Wilson had charge of the song service. At 7:30 p.m. Charles Seevers, of Mt. Joy, led the testimonial meeting. Amidst many hallelujas and amens this service had to be brought to a close for the preaching. Rev. J. O. Stewart, of Marietta A. M. E. Church, was the speaker and he brought a wonderful message to those who were privileged to hear him. Camp continues over next Sunday.



School, rebuilt after 1861 fire



The School

Little is known about the early history of the "Colored School," also known as the "African School." For generations of Black children in Marietta, this school represented one of the few educational opportunities available before integration.

It was not until 1888 that local newspapers reported the school was in such disrepair that action was necessary, but the building was determined to be too expensive to repair or replace. The township and borough decided to integrate the schools, seven years after segregated schools were found to be illegal in Pennsylvania.

The Inquirer, Lancaster, PA - Sep. 15, 1888

Marietta's colored children are now in the schools with the white children. The old colored school building on the edge of the borough, that had for many years been maintained by the joint efforts of the borough and the township, had fallen into such a dilapidated condition as to be unfit for use, and both parties objected to the expense of a new

building, or to repairs that would cost almost as much as putting up a new building, hence the placing of the colored children in the various other schools. As the law expressly prohibits separate public schools for colored children Marietta has, at last, by accident, got into line with the law.

The Marietta African American Legacy Initiative—a volunteer organization of community residents—was formed in 2025 to research, design and install this landmark as part of a series of commemorative memorials in collaboration with the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania and the Borough of Marietta. MALLI extends its thanks for the support of the following individuals and organizations who contributed in a variety of ways to make this initiative possible:



Eater
Foundation

GEO-GRAF
Ground Penetrating
Radar Specialists



Jones
Landscaping
Maytown



Lancaster
History

MAALI TEAM
Marietta
African-American
Legacy Initiative



Dedicated
September 2026



Joseph Maze (b. July 1, 1853) death certificate: April 27, 1933

Form V. S. No. 5

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS

1. PLACE OF DEATH
County of Armstrong
Township of Marietta, Pa.
Borough of Marietta, Pa.
City of Marietta, Pa.

Registration 200
District No. 36-13-41
Primary Registration 36-13-41
District No. 36-13-41

File No. 37899
Registered No. 29

2. FULL NAME Joseph H. Maze
(a) Residence, No. Walnut St. St. Ward.
(Usual place of abode)
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred 60 yrs. mos. 0 ds. (If nonresident give city or town and State)
(If nonresident give city or town and State)
Length of time in U. S. if of foreign birth? yrs. 0 mos. 0 ds.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3. SEX Male
4. COLOR OR RACE Colored
5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (write the word) married

6a. If married, widowed, or divorced
HUSBAND of Minnie Harris
(or) WIFE of Minnie Harris

8. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year) July 1, 1853

7. AGE Years 79 Months 9 Days 26
IF LESS than 1 day hrs. 0 min. 0

9. OCCUPATION OF DECEASED
(a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work Naturalist
(b) General nature of industry, business or establishment in which employed (or employer)
(c) Name of employer

9. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) Pittsvalina, Pa.
(State or Country) Pa.

10. NAME OF FATHER Unknown

11. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (city or town) Pa.
(State or Country)

MAIDEN Louisa

12. NAME OF MOTHER Louisa

13. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (city or town) Pa.
(State or Country)

14. Informant Minnie Maze
(Address)

15. Filed May 1, 1933 S. B. Graham
REGISTRAR

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

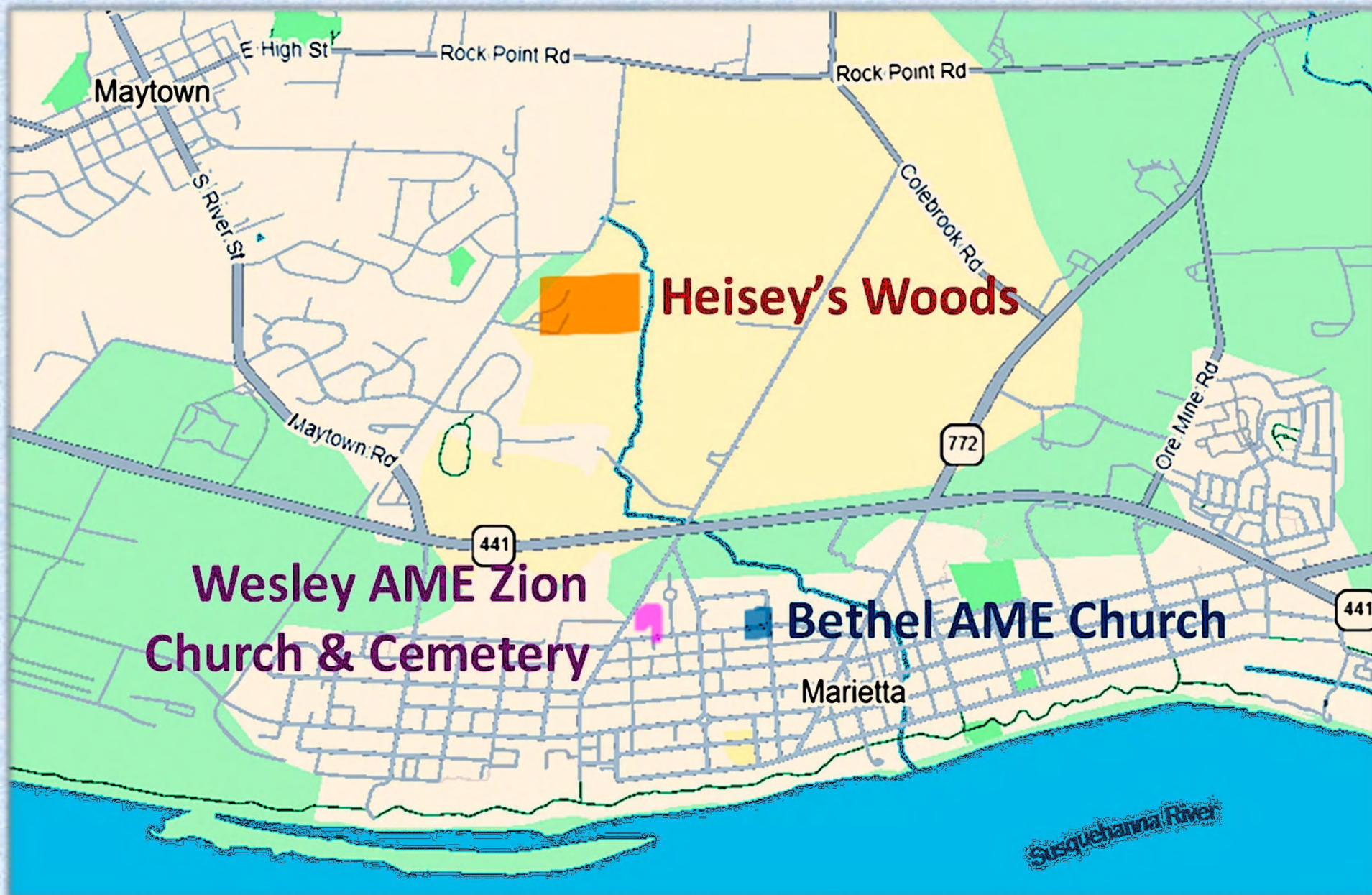
16. DATE OF DEATH April 27, 1933
(Month) (Day) (Year)

17. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from Apr. 21, 1933 to Apr. 27, 1933
that I last saw him alive on Apr. 27, 1933
and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at 11 P. m.
The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:
Cerebral Hemorrhage
82.2-97
(duration) yrs. 0 mos. 0 days
CONTRIBUTORY Arteriosclerosis
(Secondary) (duration) No yrs. 0 mos. 0 days
18. Where was disease contracted
if not at place of death?
Did an operation precede death? No Date of Apr. 29, 1933
Was there an autopsy? No
What test confirmed diagnosis? Unconsummation
(Signed) W. H. Plaster M.D.
Apr. 29, 1933 (Address) Marietta, Pa.
*State the DISEASE CAUSING DEATH, or in deaths from VIOLENT CAUSES, state (1) MEANS AND NATURE OF INJURY, and (2) whether ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDAL, or HOMICIDAL. (See reverse side for additional space.)

19. PLACE OF BURIAL, CREMATION OR REMOVAL Bethel A. M. E.
20. UNDERTAKER J. Lewis Fry
(OVER)

DATE OF BURIAL May 12, 1933
ADDRESS Marietta, Pa.

Joseph H. "Joe" Maze was one of the key organizers of the Camp Meetings in the Marietta area. The Colored Camp Meetings were primarily organized by the people that attended Wesley AME Zion Church. However, members of Bethel AME Church and First Baptist also participated. Joseph Maze, a prominent leader, attended and is buried at Bethel Marietta



MARIETTA LODGE IS ENTERTAINED

Marietta, Mar. 3—Following the meeting of Chiques Council, No. 1825, Royal Arcanum, the members were entertained by Fred W. Schaub, the newly-installed Regent for the ensuing year. A social hour was spent in playing games, and refreshments in abundance were served.

Sixty-eighth Anniversary.

On Sunday, April 3, the A. M. E. Zion church, West Fairview street, Marietta, of which Rev. John W. Fairfax is pastor, will begin a celebration in honor of their sixty-eighth anniversary. On Sunday morning, at 10.30 there will be an old-fashioned song and praise service; at 3 o'clock the Rev. Francis J. S. Morrow, of the First Methodist church, Marietta, will officiate. At 7.30 o'clock the pastor will be in charge, and Andrew E. McCurdy, one of the trustees, will give an outline of the church's history. A silver offering will be lifted at all the services. Wednesday evening, April 6th, Rev. Pinder of the Mt. Zion church, Columbia, will preach; Friday evening, April 8 there will be an old-fashioned class meeting, beginning at 7.30. Sunday, Apr. 10th, will be the great Womans' Day, with all day services. At 10:30, a song and praise service; 3.00 p. m., platform service, conducted by Mrs. Green, of Lancaster. For the occasions, the best choirs of the county will have members assist in the services. The public is cordially invited to all services.

Accepts New Position.

Raymond Hoover, of Billmeyer, has resigned his position with the Union Stone Quarry, and accepted a one with the York Haven Paper company.

Revival services are in progress in the Bethel church, West Fairview street, Rev. E. T. Young, pastor, everynight during the week. The services are well attended, and they will in all probability be continued.

Indicates 1853 as year of church organization as Wesley AME Zion.

Few records documenting the church's founding survive. This 1921 newspaper article provides one of the strongest known references identifying 1853 as the church's year of organization.

Intelligencer Journal
26 Aug 1910, Fri · Page 3

Rheems Campmeeting.

About 1,000 people attended the A. M. E. Zion church campmeeting

on Sunday, which was held in Heisey's grove, Rheems. Rev. Harrison Fairfax of Marietta, conducted the services on Sunday afternoon and Rev. Chas. Severa, of Mt. Joy, had charge of the evening services. The meeting will continue for two weeks with special services on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings of each week.

What is a Camp Meeting?

By John K. Jenkins

Camp Meetings in the United States originated out of, and were part of the **Second Great Awakening**, a revival movement in the early 19th century that emphasized emotional, and participatory worship.

Colored Camp Meetings were large outdoor African American religious gatherings, where people traveled long distances to camp outdoors in tents, wagons, or temporary shelters. These meetings occurred during the summer months, were usually held in tents or under open-air “brush arbors”, lasting several days, or sometimes weeks, and could draw thousands of attendees.

Before the Civil War, free and enslaved African Americans used camp meetings to develop distinctive traditions of worship, that included singing of hymns and spirituals, testimonies, baptisms, and communal prayer.

Attended by people from many denominations, the camp meeting served as a spiritual revival, and a social and cultural event. These gatherings offered participants a break from daily labor, and opportunities for social interaction. Some Northern and border-state gatherings also provided opportunities for abolitionists to share information and assist freedom seekers. After the Civil War, Colored camp meetings became important centers of African American religious and social life, offering worship, family reunions, cultural expression, leadership, and a celebration of community and freedom during segregation.



Brush arbor

A brush arbor meeting is a traditional, open-air religious revival service held under a temporary shelter made of wooden posts and leafy tree branches.

Lancaster New Era
Fri, Aug 07, 1914 ·Page 3

Colored Campmeeting Will Open Sunday.

The seventh annual colored campmeeting of the Mt. Joy, A. M. E. Church will begin in Heisey's grove, between Mt. Joy and Elizabethtown, along the trolley line, on Sunday next, to continue three Sundays. Camp will open Sunday with the following services: 10:30, an old-time love feast, led by **Robert Davis** and Henry Green, of St. Paul's, U. A. M. E. Church, Lancaster; 2 p. m., a jubilee song service, led by Eugene Dunson and Maria Willson, of Strawberry St. A. M. E. Church Lancaster; 3 p. m., the pastor will preach the opening sermon, subject: "The Christian Soldier"; 7:30 p. m., an old-time song service; 8 p. m., the Rev. W. M. Scott, of Lancaster, will preach the sermon. Rev. Chas. W. Stewart is the spiritual director. There will be special trolley service on the Mt. Joy line.

The Colored School, also known as ‘The African School’

Little is known about the origins and early history of the Colored School. It was not until 1888 that local newspapers reported the building had fallen into such disrepair that action was necessary. Because repairing or replacing the school was considered too costly, the township and borough



decided to integrate the schools instead. This decision came seven years after Pennsylvania had declared segregated schools illegal. The continued operation of the Colored School after segregated education had been outlawed illustrates how legal change often lagged behind local practice.

This is photo of the Marietta Colored School, sometime after the 1861 fire. Also known as “The African School,” it closed in 1888. Photograph date and photographer unknown.

**Tombstone Inscriptions of the
Wesley African Methodist Church Cemetery
255-257 Fairview Avenue, Marietta, PA.**

Excerpt from:

The Cemeteries of Marietta, Pennsylvania

Copyright By James C. Landis, 2011

Reprinted with permission of the author, May 15, 2026

***HISTORY:* Tombstone Inscriptions of Wesley African Methodist Church Cemetery**

The history of the Wesley African Methodist Church and Cemetery is extremely difficult to trace. The church became defunct before World War II, and the premises was effectively abandoned in the early 1950s. As a consequence of decades-long disinterest, much of the church and cemetery history has been relegated to obscurity. Land records for this parcel are anonymous before 1969 making a chain of title for ownership severely incomplete. As a tax-exempt property, the county tax records contain no information on this odd, triangle-shaped lot. Early Marietta tax assessment records – an extraordinary historical resource – offer practically no help, because unfortunately, the borough assessors often ignored these triangular lots altogether. Only scant historical references are available regarding the church, so much of its story remains unknown. In spite of a profound lack of information, it is possible to piece together some semblance of a history for this burial ground. This abandoned premises is now in private ownership with its own street address of 255-257 Fairview Avenue.

Continued

Persons who are unfamiliar with this distinction in ownership often assume that this forgotten corner belongs to its larger neighbor - the Marietta Cemetery Association. (Being situated on the northeast corner of Bridge Street and Fairview Avenue – contiguous to the large cemetery and absent a clear demarcation of property lines, presumed ownership is quite understandable.)

The unfortunate situation for the caretakers of the Marietta Cemetery is that this former church lot has existed in a sorely neglected condition for decades. Every year, the staff of the Marietta Cemetery endures stinging criticism and never-ending complaints about the lot's appalling appearance.

The Wesley African Methodist Church and Cemetery parcel is one of the sundry triangular lots that were created as a consequence of rather peculiar circumstances which originated under the colonial surveyors employed by the Penn proprietorship in the early eighteenth century. In 1719, Isaac Taylor received instructions to lay out several tracts of land a short distance below Conoy Creek for the early Indian traders who had established trading posts there. Taylor was the provincial surveyor for Chester County (of which Lancaster County was still part). He surveyed the boundaries for these first tracts at right angles with the river bank and made the side lines parallel to each other.

Continued

As successive tracts to the south of these early trading posts were surveyed, the orientation of “parallel sides” was continued without regard to the curving of the Susquehanna River. By the point where the river passed the future site of Marietta, its course turned in an easterly direction. The result was the peculiar angle to the division lines for the six patents granted from the Penn proprietorship upon which the Borough of Marietta and its environs would eventually be situated. When David Cooke, Jr. (1750-1824) and James Anderson IV (1767-1815) laid out their villages of New Haven and Waterford in 1803 and 1804 respectively, their plans called for town lots and streets to be oriented perpendicular and parallel to the river bank. This resulted in the creation of triangle-shaped lots at the ends of the numerous rows of town lots where the founders’ plan converged with the property boundary of the colonial land grants.

This triangular parcel consisted of two lots #238 (situated at the very corner of the intersection) and #239 (adjacent to the east). Both lots were laid out in the section of the borough known as “Benjamin Long’s Addition”. Benjamin Long (1787-1859) was a miller from East Donegal Township. In 1812, he built a handsome brick dwelling on the northeast corner of the square and set himself up as an innkeeper. Long soon became involved in the frenzy of land

Continued

speculation that engulfed the borough at the time. On 3 April 1813, he purchased a parcel of 53 acres 137 perches from James and Mary Anderson, who – according to Anderson family history – were faced with the prospect of “financial embarrassment” at that time. The sale price of this parcel was \$450/acre which netted Anderson proceeds totaling \$24,235.

Long expanded the limits of the town beyond Walnut Street by laying out lots to the north and creating the thoroughfare of Fairview Avenue. According to earliest assessment lists for the Borough of Marietta, Benjamin Long was the owner of lots #238 and #239 from 1814 to 1821. For reason unknown, Long’s venture failed, and he soon defaulted on his payments for the land purchase. James Anderson was forced to sue Benjamin Long for \$8,090.60 in the courts of Lancaster County. Anderson ultimately received a judgment, but the debt was not collected by the sheriff until 1817. With the collapse of the Susquehanna and Marietta Trading Company Bank in 1821, Long – like many men in town – fell victim to the devastating economic crash that followed. Many of his undeveloped building lots in the borough were ultimately seized by the sheriff who advertised them for sale in the local newspaper on 4 August 1821.

Continued

John Bernard Scheing and his wife, Julianna, purchased the lots at the sheriff's sale in 1821 and held title on them until 1833. The borough tax assessment rolls show that the property was owned by "Jacob Shyne–Shine–Shing–Scheing" between 1822 and 1833. It would appear that borough assessors had some difficulty with Bernard's proper identification in their records. On 5 July 1833, the Scheings sold their lots to Dr. Samuel Houston (1792-1865). Dr. Houston was a prominent leader of the Marietta community in the decades just prior to the Civil War and was well known throughout the borough for his outspoken abolitionist views. At one point, his orations against slavery so enraged certain segments of the population that he felt it necessary to flee town for a while until tempers cooled. The assessment records confirm that Samuel Houston owned lots #238 and #239 from 1833 until 1843. On 23 June 1843, Samuel Huston and his wife, Esther, sold both lots – along with numerous other lots – to his brother, Thomas Huston [Lancaster County Deed Y-6-172].

Colonel Thomas Huston (1788-1871) lived in Maytown, and the assessment records from 1843 to 1856 show him as the owner of these "vacant" lots. (The 1856 assessment roll is the last year available among the borough's rare collection of tax records.)

Continued

This neighborhood of Marietta remained undeveloped for decades, and the early borough tax assessments list many of the lots along Fairview Avenue as “vacant” – otherwise indicating that they were unimproved.

Occasionally, the assessor would include the notation “farmed” as an indication that the land was being used for agriculture. It was a common practice throughout the Borough for residents to utilize these “vacant” lots for gardens, and owners often leased their lots on an annual basis for the growing of vegetables.

Based on the historical evidence, the “Colored School” and “AME Ch” were built on the triangular parcel at the northeast corner of Fairview Avenue and Bridge Street some time about 1857 or 1858. (Roe’s 1881 map of Marietta shows the school on lot #238 and the church on lot #239.) It is presumed that this school is the same location referenced in the local newspapers of the Civil War era. During the mid-nineteenth century, it was customary for the local school directors to publish annually a list of the persons who had been engaged for the ensuing year to teach in the sundry public schools of the borough. One of the positions that the director often had difficulty staffing was that for the “African School.”

Continued

In April of 1861, the United States was rapidly succumbing to the events that would initiate the American Civil War. The attack on Fort Sumter and its surrender resulted in the call for troops on 15 April by President Abraham Lincoln for the purpose of recapturing the fort and other federal property seized by the secessionist states. The strain of unfolding events was felt within the borough as those who were angered by the culminating struggle sought to assign blame for conflict. It was widely believed and accepted by folks that the agitation by fanatical northern abolitionists had driven the southern slave states into secession. Prominent abolitionists within the borough suffered rebuke by their fellow townsfolk. Some individuals, however, took retribution against the black community as the following entry shows. *Continued*

Minutes Book of the Pioneer Fire Company, Marietta, PA

April 19, 1861 11 o'clock Friday – The alarm of Fire was given at 11 o'clock and the Company repaired to the Engine House and proceeded with the apparatus to the fire which was the burning of the African Church (Bethel A.M.E.) on Fairview Street which was burned to the ground, supposed to be the work of incendiary's as the other church (Zion M.E.) was also on fire. The apparatus was brought into use on Walnut Street in wetting the roofs as the flakes of fire was falling on the roofs, but there was no further damage than the burning of the church. The apparatus was returned to house and the roll was called by C. M. Foulz as the Secretary could not see to call the roll due to some infection in his. On Motion adjourned – Wm. Child, Jr., Secr.

While arsonists succeeded in destroying the Bethel A.M.E. church, the fire at the Wesley (or Zion M.E.) church was apparently extinguished. Fifteen months later, the church building was set ablaze again.

Minutes Book of the Pioneer Fire Company, Marietta, PA

Thursday Morning Aug. 7th/62 – Alarm of Fire about three o'clock this morning. Apparatus proceeded to the scene of conflagration which proved to be the upper African meeting house (Zion M.E.) which was entirely consumed as also the colored School House and a small private dwelling. The engine did not go into service owing to there being no water near and there being an insufficiency of hose to reach water. J. M. Larzelere.

The incident was also reported on in the local paper.

The Mariettian, Marietta, PA ~ Saturday,
August 9, 1862 – p.3.

 The African church was discovered to be on fire on Thursaay morning about three o'clock. The church is located on Green Lane, at the west end, far from pumps or any kind of water, and could not, possibly be saved. The colored school house—owned in common between the Borough and Township—adjoining the church and the dwelling of Peter George Sebastian, colored, also adjoining, were burned to the ground. It was, unquestionably, the work of an incendiary. It was set on fire once before, but was extinguished before doing much damage.

Continued

A search of Marietta newspapers from the Civil War era yielded the following rather curious advertisement published by the trustees of the Wesley AME Church. The circumstances that precipitated this notice are unknown, but no doubt, it is probably the main topic of town gossip.

Weekly Mariettian, Marietta, PA ~

Saturday, 10 January 1863 – p.3

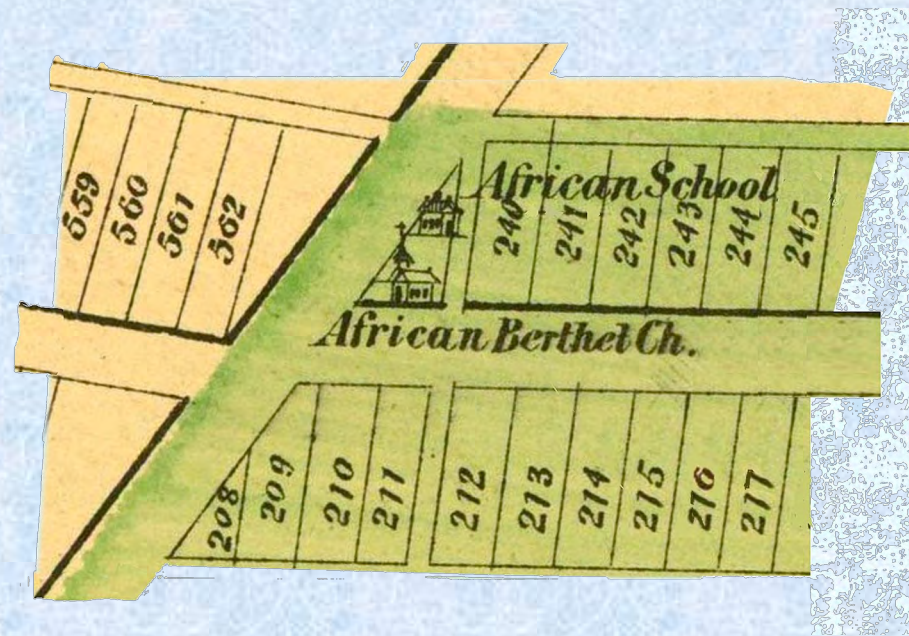
PUBLIC NOTICE. We the undersigned, Trustees of the Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zions Church of Marietta, hereby give public notice that

DR. SAMUEL HUSTON

is in no manner or form authorized to transact any business for said Trustees, or any control over any property belonging to said Church.

**MOSES PINKNEY,
THOS. THOMPSON,
WM. SUMMERS.**

Marietta, December 29, 1862.



Detail, Borough of Marietta, from the 1875 Historical Atlas of Lancaster County.

The church and school were rebuilt before 1875. AS shown here above, the 1875 Historical Atlas of Lancaster County shows icons for the “African Berthel Ch” and the “African School”.

Continued

The 1899 atlas for Lancaster County shows several buildings at the northeast corner of Fairview Avenue and Bridge Street but does not identify them. The 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for the Borough of Marietta shows the “Bethel African Church” at 258 Fairview Avenue and the school at 262 Fairview Avenue.

By 1937, the AME congregation was defunct, and the premises were occupied by the First Baptist Church. This congregation lasted here only two years before it disbanded after which the buildings stood little used for more than a decade. Weakened by lack of maintenance, the empty structures were severely damaged in 1954 by Hurricane Hazel and were finally torn down in 1959.

Both lots have reverted to private ownership in the last half of the twentieth century. The school lot – #238 – is now identified on the county tax assessment rolls as 255 Fairview Avenue, and since 24 March 1972, it has been owned by Mr. Leo Cohen of Marietta. The Lancaster County Tax Claims Bureau sold this lot to Mr. Cohen at public vendue on 30 October 1971 for \$83.87 as property of Charles P. Mitzell. Mr. Mitzell had previously purchased the lot from the estate of Charles C. Harris in 1969. [Lancaster County Deeds E-62-0124 & Q-58-293] The church lot – #239 – is now identified on the county tax assessment rolls as 257 Fairview Avenue, and since 6 February 1980, it has been owned by R. W. A. U. Associates c/o ModTech, Inc., Chester Springs, PA. The Lancaster County Tax Claims Bureau sold the lot at public vendue on 16 October 1979 for \$900.00 as property of an unknown owner. [Lancaster County Deed I-79- 0032]

Continued

The chain of title for the previous 100 years for either lot could not be determined as nothing about them was recorded in the Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds Office.

Although the buildings were removed more than half a century ago, the graves of persons buried there have remained undisturbed. The lack of regular care during the past 50 years has meant that the cemetery has been sorely neglected allowing wild growth to flourish and over take the spot. Numerous grave markers are reported to have vanished over the years so that now only the handful which are listed here remain.

In recent years, however, guardian angels have been providing regular attention to the location and the appearance of the cemetery is much improved. In 2008, a new grave marker was added for Civil War veteran Richard Fairfax, courtesy of a life-long resident of the Borough, Catherine Jane Smith Tucker.

Guardians & Advocates *of* Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church

Two early champions of restoration for the Wesley AME Zion Cemetery were **Mrs. Catherine Jane Smith Tucker** and **Mrs. Thelma Mae Waters**. Their dedication marked the first organized effort to preserve and protect this historic burial ground.

In 1992, they secured a \$2,000 grant to begin restoration work—an extraordinary achievement that reflected their commitment to honoring those laid to rest here. However, their efforts were halted when they were unable to legally establish clear ownership of the cemetery property. Without verified ownership or lawful authorization, they were prohibited from proceeding further. Their advocacy was prompted by a troubling development: two cemetery lots, containing numerous grave sites had been improperly conveyed as ordinary real estate and transferred to private parties, including one titled to an out-of-state shell entity and another to a limited liability company.

Continued



**Mrs. Catherine
Jane
Smith Tucker**



**Mrs. Thelma
Mae Waters**

Guardians & Advocates, *continued*

T

here were stated intentions to remove existing tombstones and construct a residence on the property.

Through the vigilance of Mrs. Waters, who contacted **Dr. Leroy T. Hopkins, Jr.**, immediate action was taken. Dr. Hopkins, one of the founders of the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania, intervened and demanded that all activity cease, preventing the desecration and destruction of the cemetery. Their concerted actions preserved the sacred ground that otherwise might have been lost, laying the groundwork for the preservation work that continues today.

In the decades that followed, various concerned citizens made informal efforts to care for and maintain the grounds. However, without recognized ownership or formal authority, long-term restoration remained legally and practically difficult.

In July 2025, a group of concerned residents formed the Marietta African American Legacy Initiative (MAALI). With the assistance of individuals experienced in property research and municipal processes, the group documented evidence supporting abandonment of the cemetery parcels and presented this information to the Borough of Marietta.

Under Pennsylvania law and the Borough's Property Maintenance Code, cemeteries are subject to municipal requirements regarding upkeep and public safety. Grass and vegetation must be maintained in accordance with these standards. When a property is not maintained in compliance, the Borough must notify the titled owner(s) of record. If no responsible party responds or remedies the violation, the Borough may take corrective action as permitted by law.

Continued



Dr. Leroy Hopkins

Guardians & Advocates, *continued*

A Community Responsibility

If the Wesley AME Zion Cemetery appears to be unmaintained or in violation of the Borough's Property Maintenance Code, residents are encouraged to respectfully contact the Borough of Marietta so that appropriate enforcement procedures can be initiated.

Civic engagement is not criticism — it is stewardship. By remaining attentive and informed, the community continues the legacy begun by Mrs. Tucker and Mrs. Waters: protecting and honoring this sacred ground for future generations.

The News-Journal, May 2, 1927

FUNERAL OF REV. FAIRFAX
Marietta, May 1—The body of Rev. John W. Fairfax was brought to Marietta by Undertaker Frey from Lancaster and taken to his late home in West Marietta. Funeral services will be held on Tuesday afternoon at 1:00 oclock from his late home, and at 2 oclock from the Zion A. M. E. church, West Fairview street, where he was at one time pastor. Burial will be made in the cemetery adjoining the church.

Marietta's colored children are now in the schools with the white children. The old colored school building on the edge of the borough, that had for many years been maintained by the joint efforts of the borough and the township, had fallen into such a dilapidated condition as to be unfit for use, and both parties objected to the expense of a new building, or to repairs that would cost almost as much as putting up a new building, hence the placing of the colored children in the various other schools. As the law expressly prohibits separate public schools for colored children Marietta has, at last, by accident, got into line with the law.

Joseph McCann Stafford and Josiah Fairfax are both barbers in 1890

Pennsylvania > Lancaster > 1890 > Lancaster, Pennsylvania, City Directory, 1890

MARIETTA BOROUGH DIRECTORY.

515

Shank James, lab., h Front
 Sharp Charles, lab., h Second
 Sharp Frank, lab., bds r Marietta pk
 Sharp Henry, moulder, h Essex
 Sharp Thomas, lab., h Essex
 Sharp Walter B., tinner, h Decatur
 Sharp Wm., h r Marietta pk
 Sheffman Albert (George & Sheffman), h
 Second
 Shellenberger Aaron, lab., h Front
 Shellenberger Levi, quarryman, h Second
 Shickley George, lab., h 106 Second

Spencer Abraham, lab., bds 41 Front
 Spencer Joseph L., lab., h 47 Front
 Sperla Adam, lab., bds Marietta pk
 Sperla Lewis, lab., h Marietta pk
 Sperla Mary M., wid. John B., bds Mari-
 etta pk
 Stacey Edward, foreman, bds 1 Market
Stafford Joseph M., barber, Market, h Wal-
 nut
 Stahl John J., h 114 Market
 Stahl Sarah E., wid. George W., h 114
 Market

Evans David, driver, h 83 Front
EXCHANGE BANK, 5 Second
 Eyde Eli C., tel. operator, h Walnut
 Eyde Eli H., clerk, h Walnut
Fairfax John W., Rev., A. M. E. Zion
 Church, h Equador
 Fairfax Josiah, barber, h Gay
 Fairfax Richard, lab., h Essex
 Fassnacht Henry B., shoemaker, h Second
 Fassnacht Mellinger B., packer, h Second
 Fickes George O., auctioneer, 114 Second,
 h 114

Pennsylvania > Lancaster > 1899 > Lancaster, Pennsylvania, City Directory, 1899

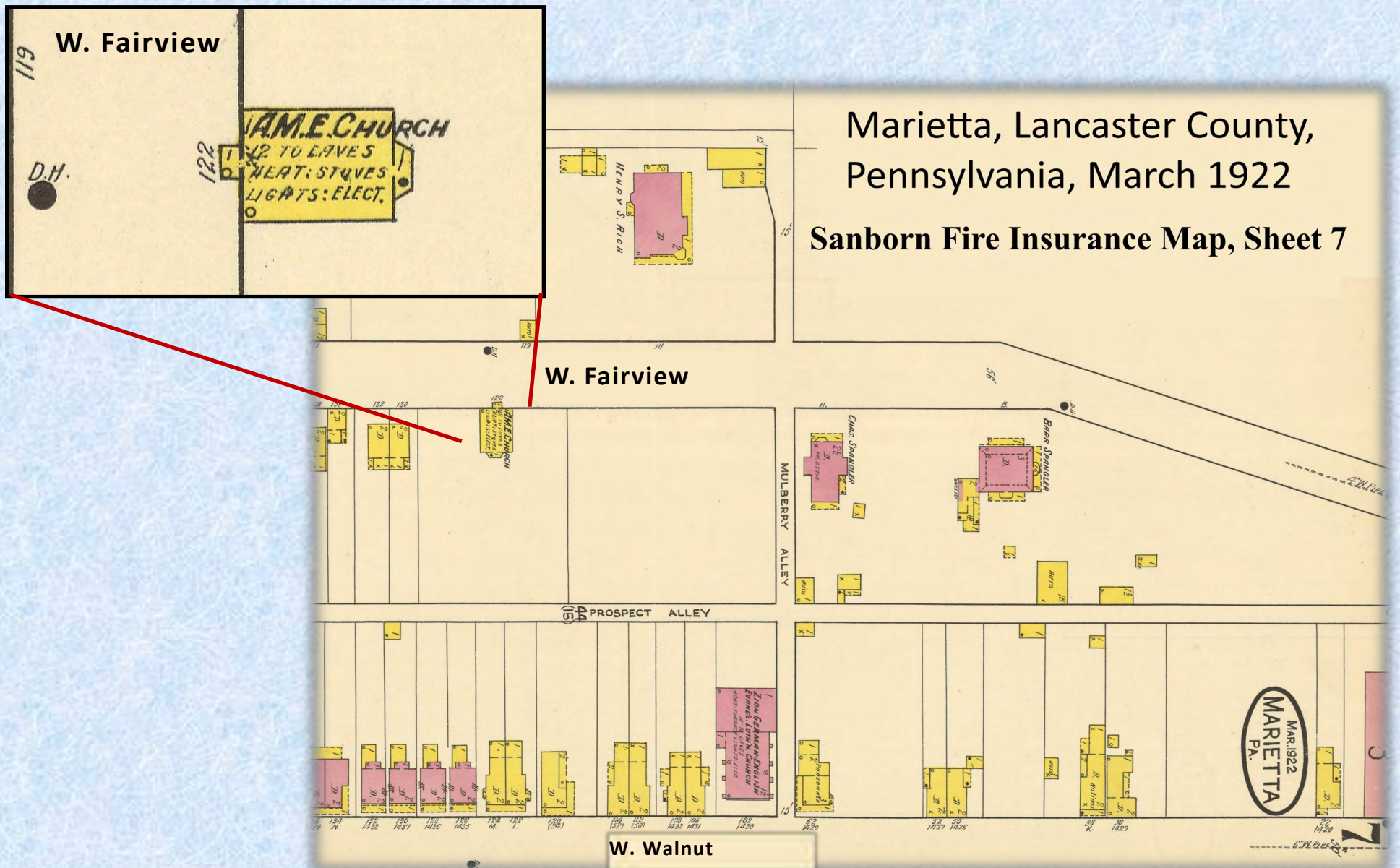
Barbers.

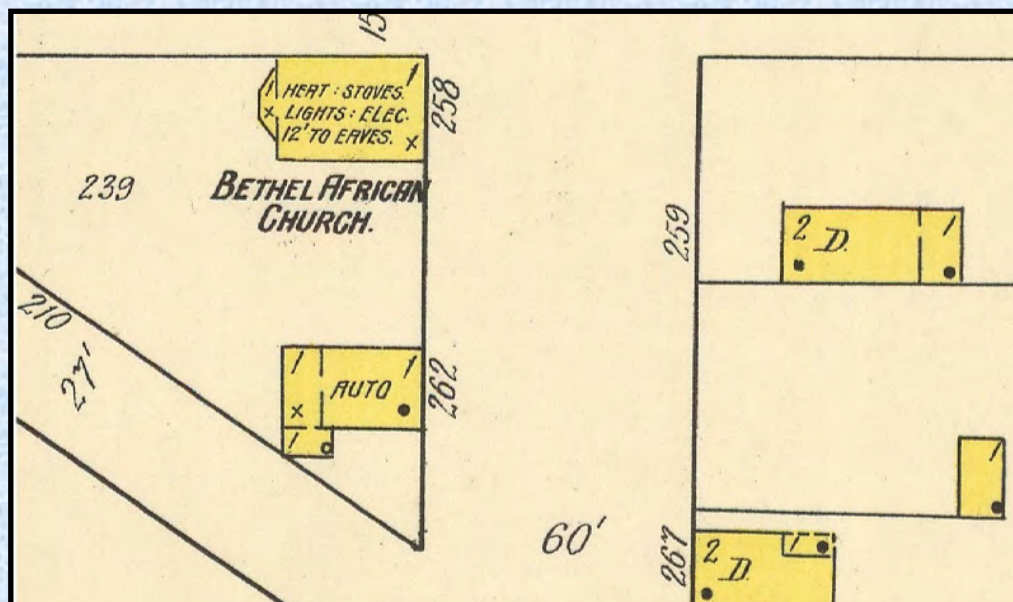
Espenshied John W., Front cor Gay
 Freed Daniel W., 126 2d
Stafford Joseph M., 39 Market
 Walker John W., Elbow lane

Ziegler Leonard, Front

Carpenters and Builders.

Bahn Adam, Sugar alley
 Mutch Simon H., 2d cor Lumber alley
 Sipple Frank J., Chestnut nr 2d





**Sanborn Fire Insurance Map
Marietta, Lancaster County,
Pennsylvania
March 1922. Sheet 8**

