

Rio Mills and Cartersburg

Forgotten Stories of the Rivanna

Albemarle County Historic Preservation Committee
May 2018



The Albemarle County Historic Preservation Committee has researched and compiled the history of the Rio Road/29—Rio Mills area with the goal of producing content for riverside exhibits and historic markers, for making recommendations for incorporating historic context into the Rio/29 Small Area Plan, and in honor of Historic Preservation month.

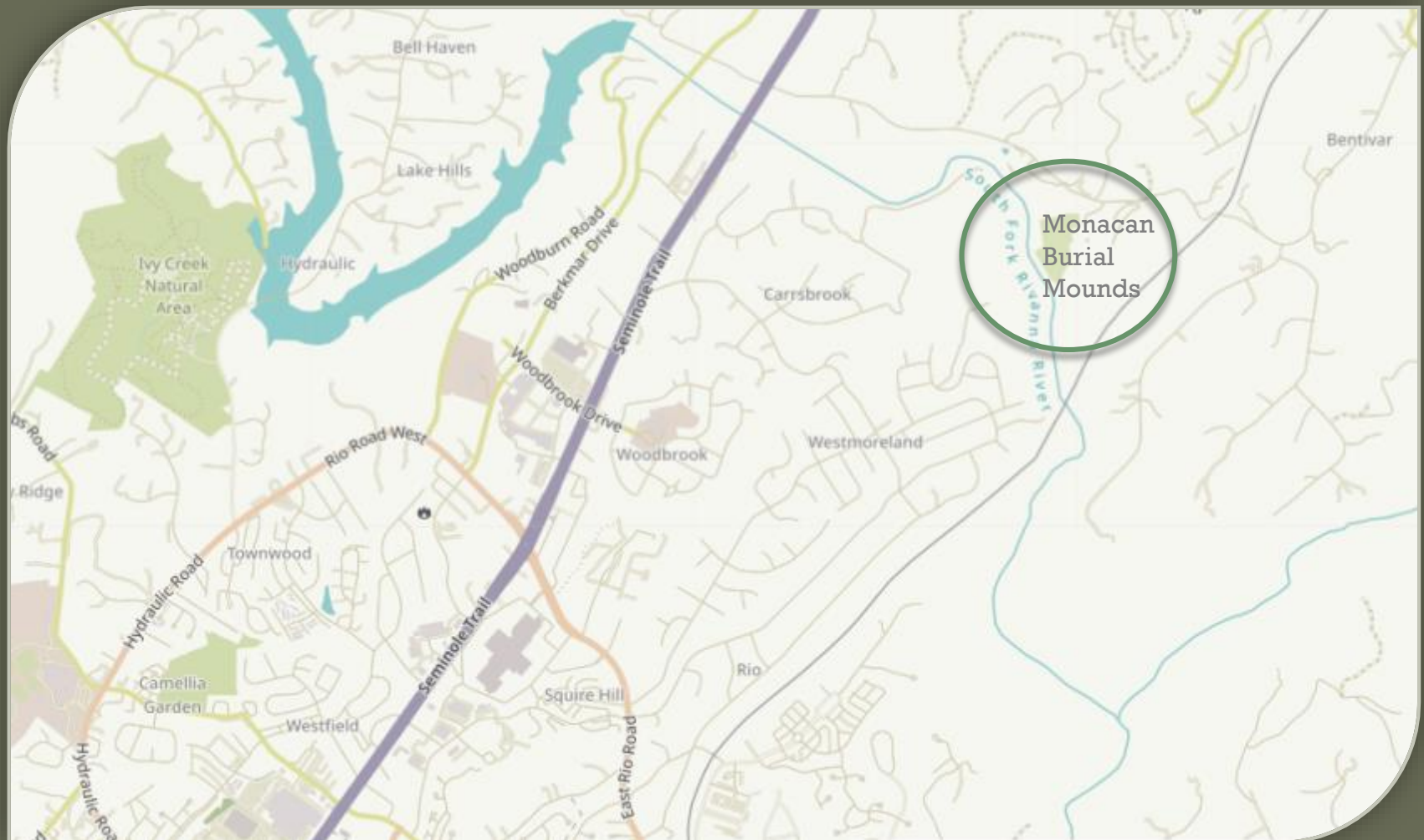
The Committee has mounted this display of some of its relevant research for the project in the Albemarle County Office Building. Additional information may be found at the HPC's web page at

<http://www.albemarle.org/historicpreservation>



Chapter I – Early Inhabitants

(10,000 BC through 1789)



Monacans and Colonials

Monacans

- The Monacans lived in the central Virginia Piedmont between the fall of the James and the Blue Ridge. They spoke a Siouan language.
- Monacans during the Late Woodland period (c1000-1607) probably farmed maize and squash and probably used bow and arrow technology, too.

Watercolor drawing "Indian Village of Pomeiooc" by John White (created 1585-1586) depicts a village from the Tidewater, but there is evidence that Monacans built circular villages



INDIAN VILLAGE OF POMEIOOC (no. 34A, cf. pls. 81, 134)

VIRGINIA

Maffawomecks

Signification of this mark
To the English hath been discovered
what kind of it is related to
King James &
Ordinary English



POWHATAN

He held this state of fashion when Capt. Smith
was admitted to his presence
1607

Stu
go
WONS

MANN AHUACKS



The Savage
here a Gun
which is a
weapon



THE VIRGINIAN SEA



Scale of 1000 fathoms



WOKES

Monacans - Monasukapanough

- In his 1608 map, John Smith included Monasukapanough, which is along the north bank of the Rivanna River today. Smith included four other villages, as well.
 - “King’s Howse” depicted
- This area was occupied sporadically for several centuries due to shifting agricultural strategies.
- Smith's map records not only the geographic features of the Chesapeake, but also its cultural aspects, including more than 200 Indian towns. Many of the place names remain in use today.



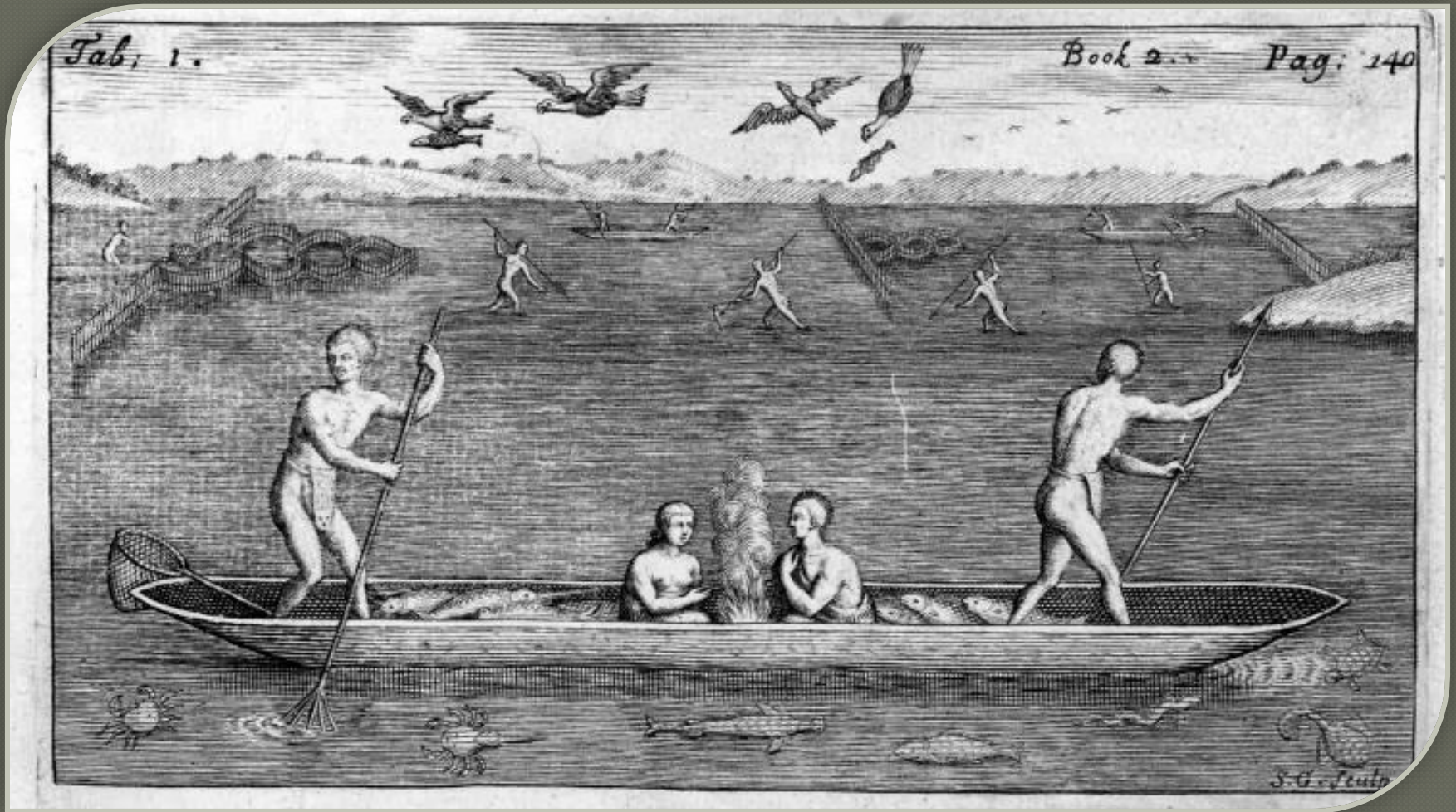
Monacans – Early Accounts

- In 1754, Thomas Jefferson observed Indians conducting a ceremony at the mound near the South Fork of the Rivanna.
- Later, he recounted a party passing on its way to a mound “with expressions which were construed to be those of sorrow,” meaning that Indians were still paying their respects to those laid to rest in the mound.
- In 1784, Jefferson excavated a burial mound (He called them “barrows”).

These burial mounds in the Ohio Valley are attributed to the Hopewell peoples, and predated the Shawnee and other American Indian peoples of the region



Monacans – Early Accounts



Early depiction (ca. 1722) of Virginia natives on a river from Robert Beverley's The history of Virginia, in four parts

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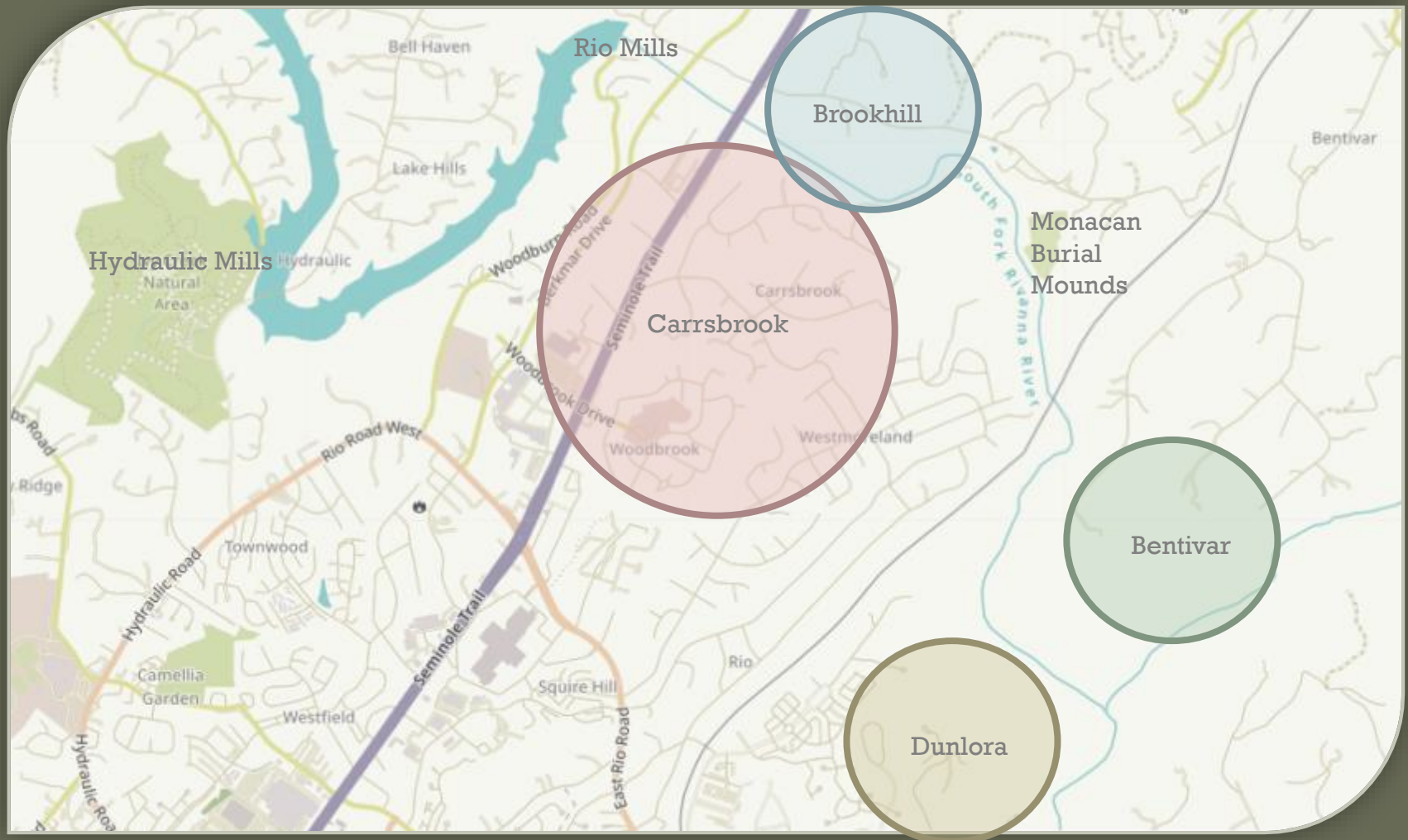
- *It was situated on the low grounds of the*
- *Rivanna, about two miles above its principal*
- *fork, and opposite to some hills, on which*
- *had been an Indian town. It was of a*
- *spheroidical form, of about 40 feet diameter*
- *at the base, and had been of about twelve*
- *feet altitude, though now reduced by the*
- *plough to seven and a half, having been*
- *under cultivation about a dozen years.*

■ *- Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (1785)* ■

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Chapter II – Antebellum

(1789 - 1860)



Plantations and Economy

Plantations and Economy

- Major Thomas Carr (1678–1738) of King William County accumulated more than 10,000 acres between 1730 and 1737 north of present-day Charlottesville, along the north fork of the Rivanna River, west of the Southwest Mountains.
- Carr gave most of this land to his son, John (1706–1778), of Bear Castle in Louisa County. John Carr's descendants built elegant Jeffersonian-type houses in Albemarle County. One son built **Bentivar**, another built **Dunlora**, and a third built Glen Echo and **Carrsbrook**.
- The Harrisonburg and Charlottesville Turnpike (approved by General Assembly in 1853) passed over the river here on a covered bridge built atop a mill dam.
 - The Turnpike crossed the Blue Ridge at Swift Run Gap, entered the county at Nortonville, fell into the Buck Mountain Road west of Earlysville, ran to Rio Mills, ascended the hill south of the river by the present easy grade, and continued by way of Rio Station and Cochran's Mill to town.

Plantations and Economy



Bentivar

- John Carr's youngest son, Garland (1754–1837), built the single-story, double-pile Bentivar on a bluff overlooking the fork of the north and south branches of the Rivanna River.
- The house burned in 1830 and a new one was erected as a one-story, double-pile brick house with a fully exposed cellar.
- Originally, the house stair arrived at a small portico with columns made of pie-shaped bricks.
- Other features include a Flemish-bond facade with the other three walls of five-course American bond with Flemish variant, a stuccoed molded-brick cornice on all four sides, a hipped roof culminating in a belvedere, and nine-over-nine sash above nine-over-three cellar windows.



Spring house

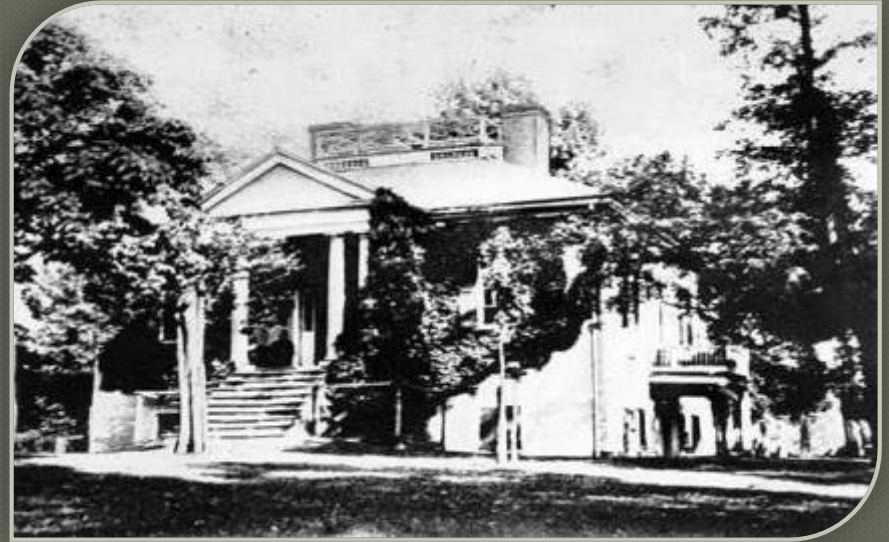
Carrsbrook

- Carrsbrook was built in the 1780s by Thomas Carr (c.1736-1807) on a high bluff above the south fork of the Rivanna River, with sweeping views of the river valley and the Southwest Mountains.
- The house has a five-part composition, with a two-story central pavilion, a rear passage to pavilion wings, and connecting hyphens.
- The verticality of the house, the steepness of the roofs, the asymmetry, and the unusual floor plan characterize the design as a provincial adaptation of the Palladian form that strays from classical standards.
- From 1798 to 1815 Peter Carr, Thomas Jefferson's nephew, resided in the house. Carr operated a private school in the residence beginning in 1811.

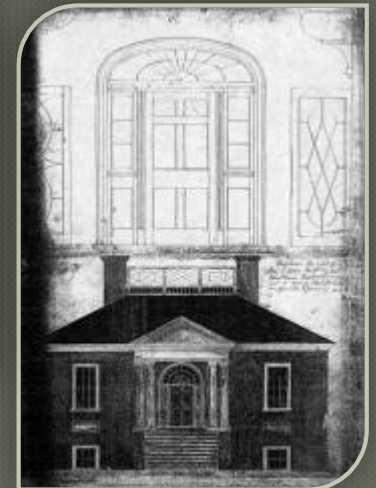


Dunlora

- Samuel Carr (1745–1777) probably built the first house at Dunlora just south of the fork of the Rivanna and across the river from Bentivar. His nephew, Colonel Samuel Carr (1771–1855), had a brick house (right) built here in 1828 by Thomas R. Blackburn and William B. Phillips.
- This house had an exposed cellar, an exterior stair to a piano nobile portico, and a hipped roof with belvedere.
- In 1846 the property passed to a descendant, Major William S. Dabney, who willed the western part of the Dunlora property to his former slaves at the end of the Civil War; the tract became known as the Free State.
- Dunlora was burned by an arsonist in 1916, and the shell was renovated by architect Eugene Bradbury. He altered the entrance, lowered the first-floor level to the ground, constructed another one-story portico with paired columns, and reconstructed the widow's walk.



Cook's house



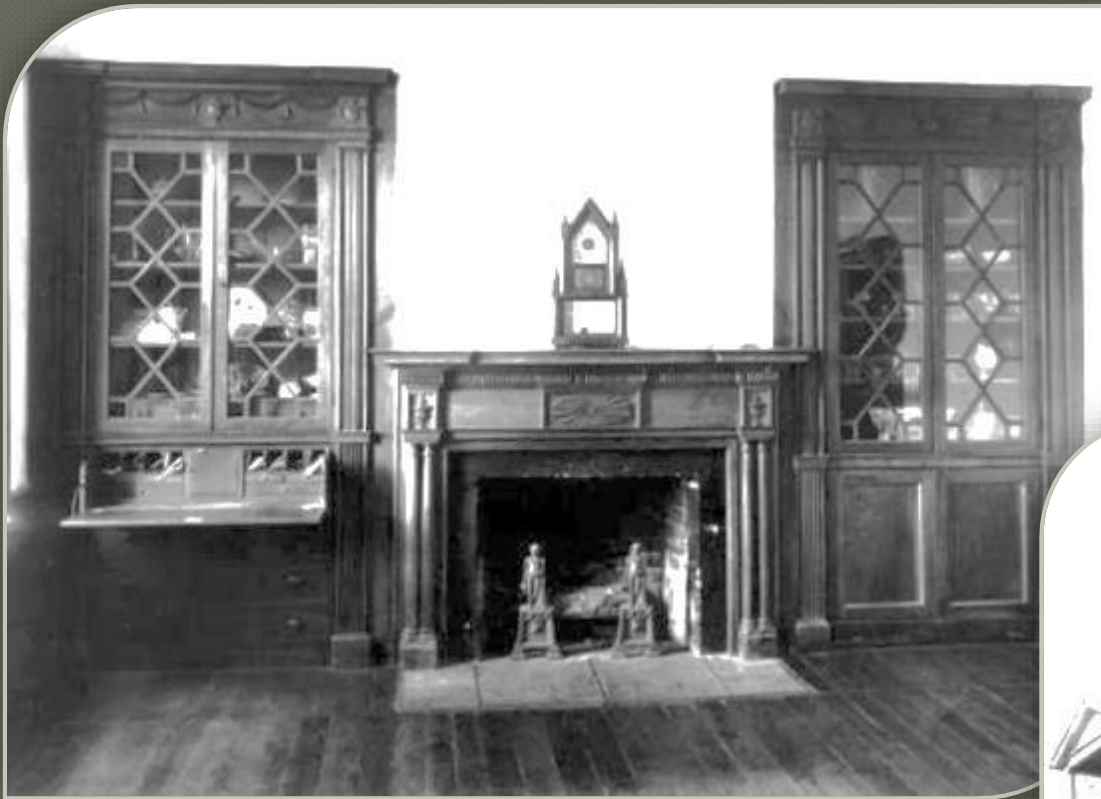
Brookhill

- Brookhill was built about 1815 by James “Cutfinger” Minor (1788-1841) on the Rivanna River north of Charlottesville.
 - According to local tradition, Minor earned his sobriquet as a young court clerk when he cut off the forefinger of his writing hand to end his clerking days after he had become disenchanted with the prospect of spending the rest of his life working indoors.
- The house differs from the typical brick Federal house with its asymmetrical plan, and entrance hall and a salon to the rear for greater privacy.
- On the outside of the house, the penciled Flemish-bond facade and other walls of three-course American bond contain a raised-brick belt course between the first and second floors and a molded-brick cornice above.
- In 1857 the dentist Dr. Charles Minor, James Minor’s cousin, conducted a school for boys at the house.



Photo by Margaret Maliszewski

Brookhill

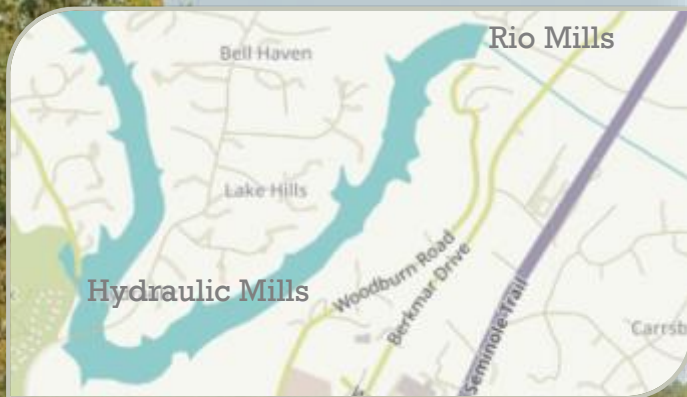


Brookhill's double-pile dwelling has an unheated entrance hall, beyond which are a parlor and a dining room. The latter contains a built-in cherry china press with drawers below, one of which unfolds to become a writing surface.



Rio Mills

- The community of Rio Mills was founded when William H. Meriwether built the first mill there in the early 1830s, located downstream from the present-day South Rivanna Reservoir dam.
- The Rivanna flowed quickly in this location and was well-suited to powering waterwheels. The construction of two additional mills followed. The mills produced flour and cornmeal, and as much as 6,000 feet of circular-sawed lumber a day.
- Upriver was the mill village of Hydraulic. Built in the early 1800s, the mill supplied much of the lumber used to build the University of Virginia. By mid-century, the mill complex grew to include a grist and merchant mill, a miller's house, a cooper (barrel maker), blacksmith, country store and post office. By this time, Hydraulic had become the head of navigation for the Rivanna River. Farmers from all around brought wheat and tobacco to be processed and sent downriver by batteau to Richmond and beyond.



Approximate
location of mill



Photo by Jeff Werner

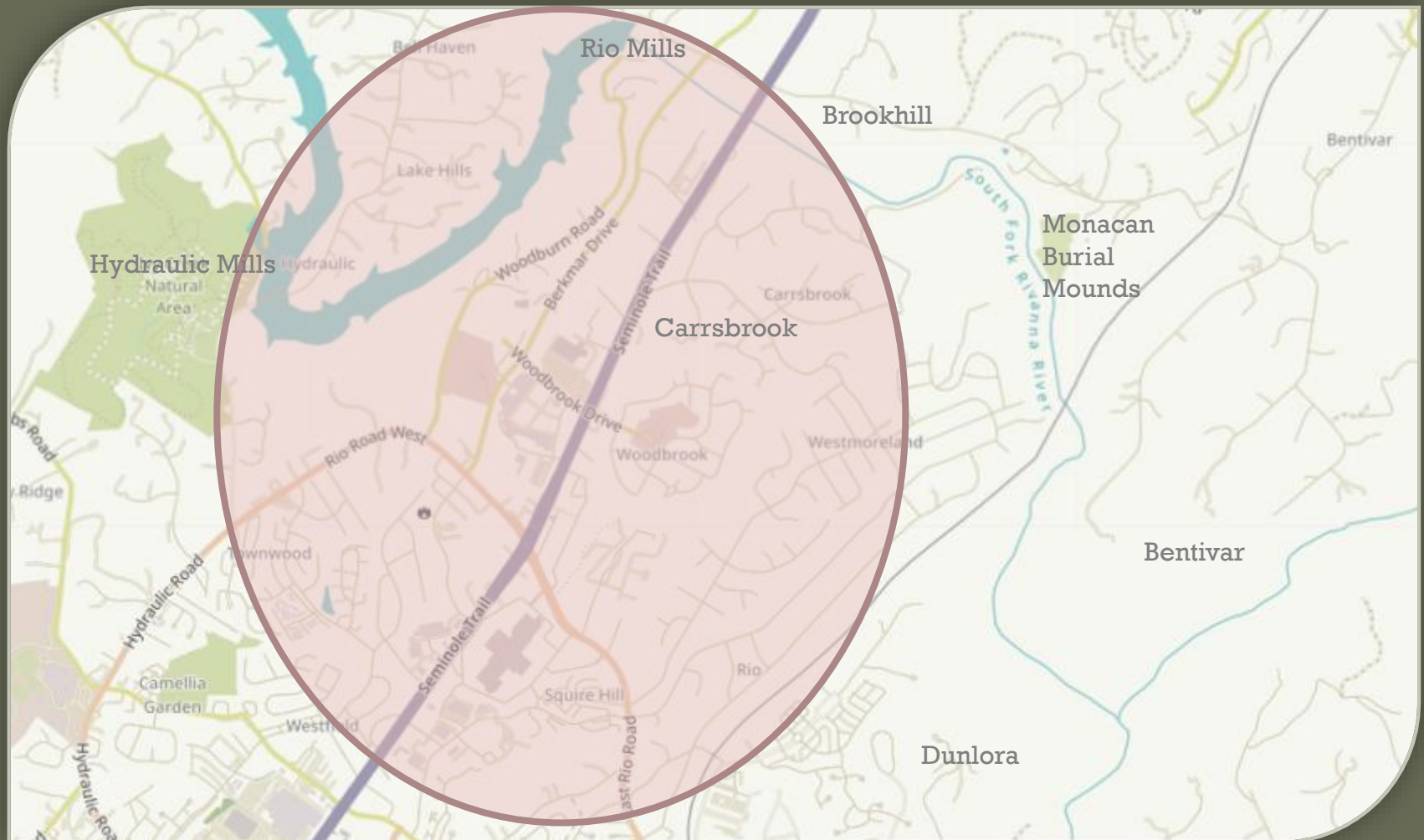
Rio Mills



The Turnpike crossed the Rivanna on a covered bridge built atop a mill dam at Rio. Just downstream, along the left bank, were three mills, a cooper's shop, a blacksmith's shop, a store, the millers' homes and several other houses.

Chapter III – Civil War

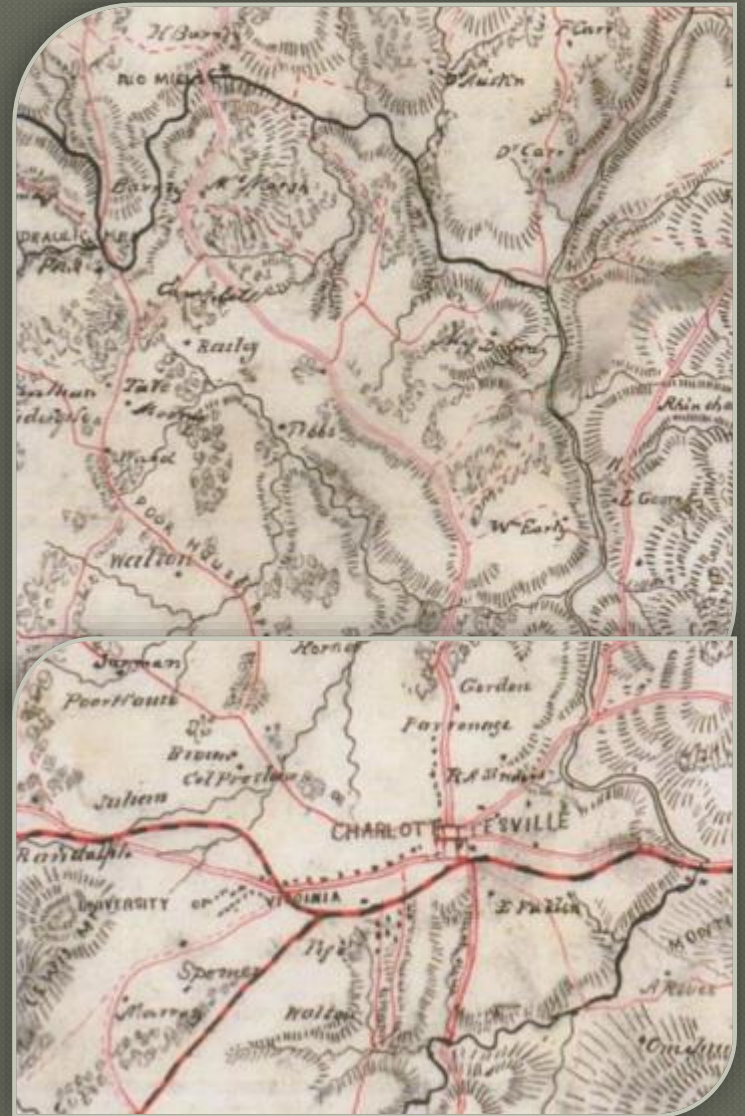
(1860 - 1865)



Battle of Rio Hill

Battle of Rio Hill

- In 1864, under command of Union Brigadier General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick, General George A. Custer set out with 1,500 men to raid Albemarle County.
 - This raid was meant as a diversionary tactic to distract from a cavalry raid on Richmond.
- From Stanardsville and on to Earlysville they marched, coming to the covered bridge at Rio Mills.
- On February 29, they launched a surprise attack against the Stuart Horse Artillery Battalion, about 200 men in winter quarters under the temporary command of Captain Marcellus Moorman.
 - These winter quarters were located on the slope behind what is now Agnor-Hurt Elementary School on Berkmar Drive.
- During the skirmish at Rio Hill, Custer mistakenly believed he and his men were outnumbered and thus retreated. On the north side of the Rio Mills bridge, they set the span on fire to stop the pursuing Rebels. Rio Mills was set afire, leaving only foundations and mill stones to mark its existence.

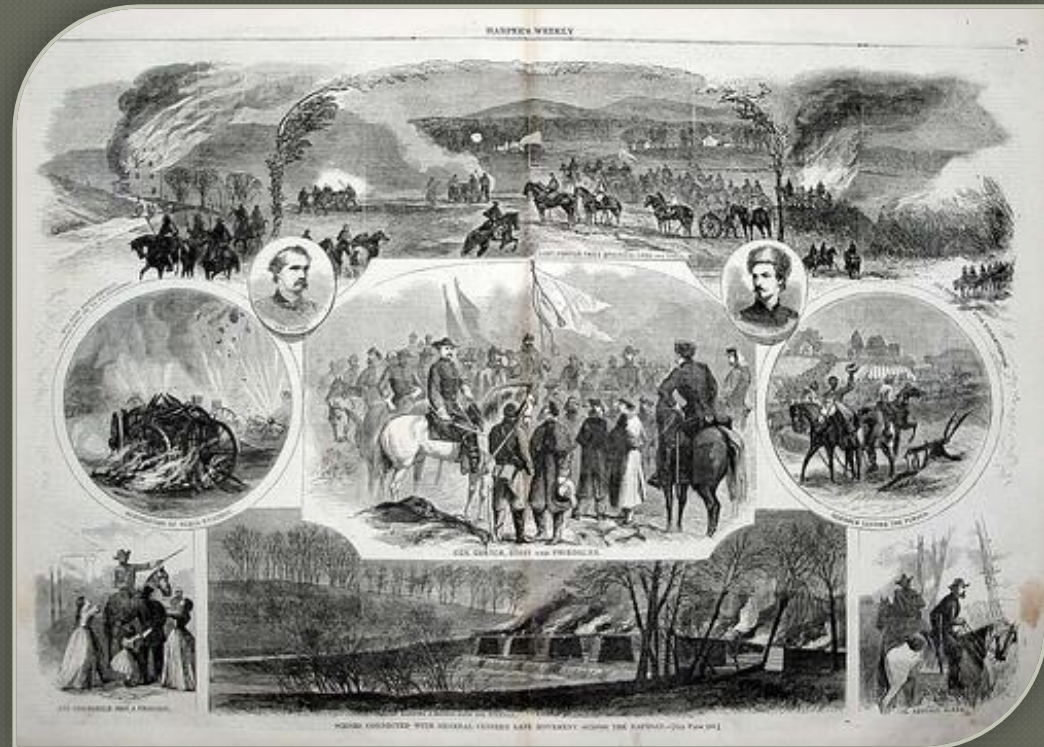


1864 Campbell Map of Albemarle County

Battle of Rio Hill

*Right: Harper's Weekly
depiction of Custer's Raid into
Albemarle County, February
29-March 1, 1864*

*Below: "Burning a bridge on the
Rivanna, Feb. 1864" by Alfred R.
Waud. Waud, a well-known
newspaper artist, accompanied
Custer's expedition. He sketched
this drawing of the burning of the
bridge over the Rivanna River at
Rio Mills by Custer's men.*



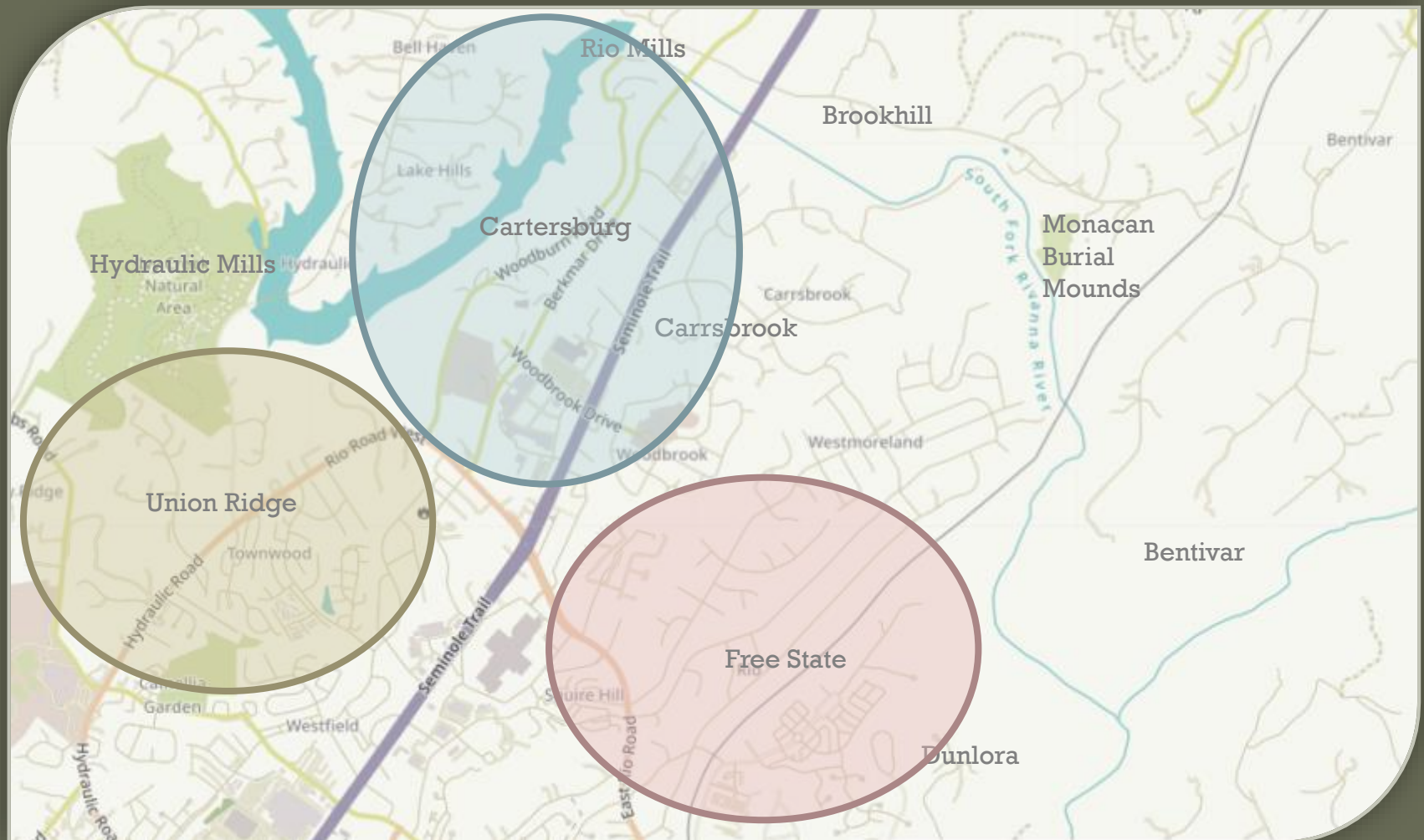
Battle of Rio Hill



c. 1900 photo of Rio Mill covered bridge taken by Gitchells. This bridge was constructed as a replacement for the bridge that was burnt by Custer in 1864.

Chapter IV – Post Emancipation

(1865 – mid-20th century)



Cartersburg Community

Postbellum Communities



1907 Massie
Map of
Albemarle
County

Postbellum Communities

- After the war, freedmen were able to buy small tracts of land on the edges of plantations in the area, where some had been enslaved. In 1868, 6 men purchased a 50-acre tract and divided it.
 - Many land owners appear to have been former slaves or descendants of former slaves of Carrsbrook or other plantations in the surrounding area.
- By 1880, a mixed community of black and white residents, called Cartersburg, existed south of the Rio bridge along the old road to Charlottesville.
- These families supplemented the produce of their small and often steep plots with work on white-owned farms, on the railroad, and in domestic service. Census data lists several men as blacksmiths and women as laundresses.



Washer Woman, by Hale Woodruff

Postbellum Communities – People

Berkeley Bullock (1835-1908), formerly enslaved in Earlysville, purchased a 35-acre farm between the properties of Hugh Carr and Jesse S. Sammons. He was a principal founder of what became Union Ridge Baptist Church. In the 1890s he moved into Charlottesville, where he owned and operated a popular restaurant at Union Station and engaged in the wood, coal, and ice business. He was described as “one of the pioneer businessmen of the city.”



*Berkeley
Bullock*

Hugh Carr (1840-1914) was born in slavery on the plantation of R. W. Wingfield of Woodlands. He led a life in freedom that exemplifies the struggle and accomplishments of many former slaves in the post-bellum Hydraulic Mills area. At first renting farmland on shares, he began purchasing property in 1870 and left over a hundred acres to his heirs at his death. Carr and his second wife, Texie Mae Hawkins, raised seven children, instilling in them the value of an education, something Carr never had. His children became teachers and community leaders, most notably his daughter Mary Louise Carr Greer. Hugh Carr's River View farm remained in the family for a hundred years and is now the Ivy Creek Natural Area.



Hugh Carr

Moses Gillette (1837-after 1920) was the son of Martha and Moses Gillette, a cooper at the Hydraulic Mills who had been born in slavery at Monticello and trained in his trade there. The younger Moses Gillette purchased ten acres of land across the Rivanna River from the mills in 1875. There he farmed and raised a very large family.



*Moses
Gillette*

Rev. Tinsley Woodfolk (1848-1907), born in slavery, was a prominent Baptist minister. He founded three churches in Albemarle County, including Pleasant Grove Baptist Church established in Earlysville before 1874. In 1869, he married Letitia Allen (1852-1923), who had been enslaved on the Burnley plantation that adjoined four contiguous lots that Tinsley and other family members bought in 1873 in Cartersburg. Tinsley and Letitia Woodfolk had ten children; some of their descendants remain in the Charlottesville area.

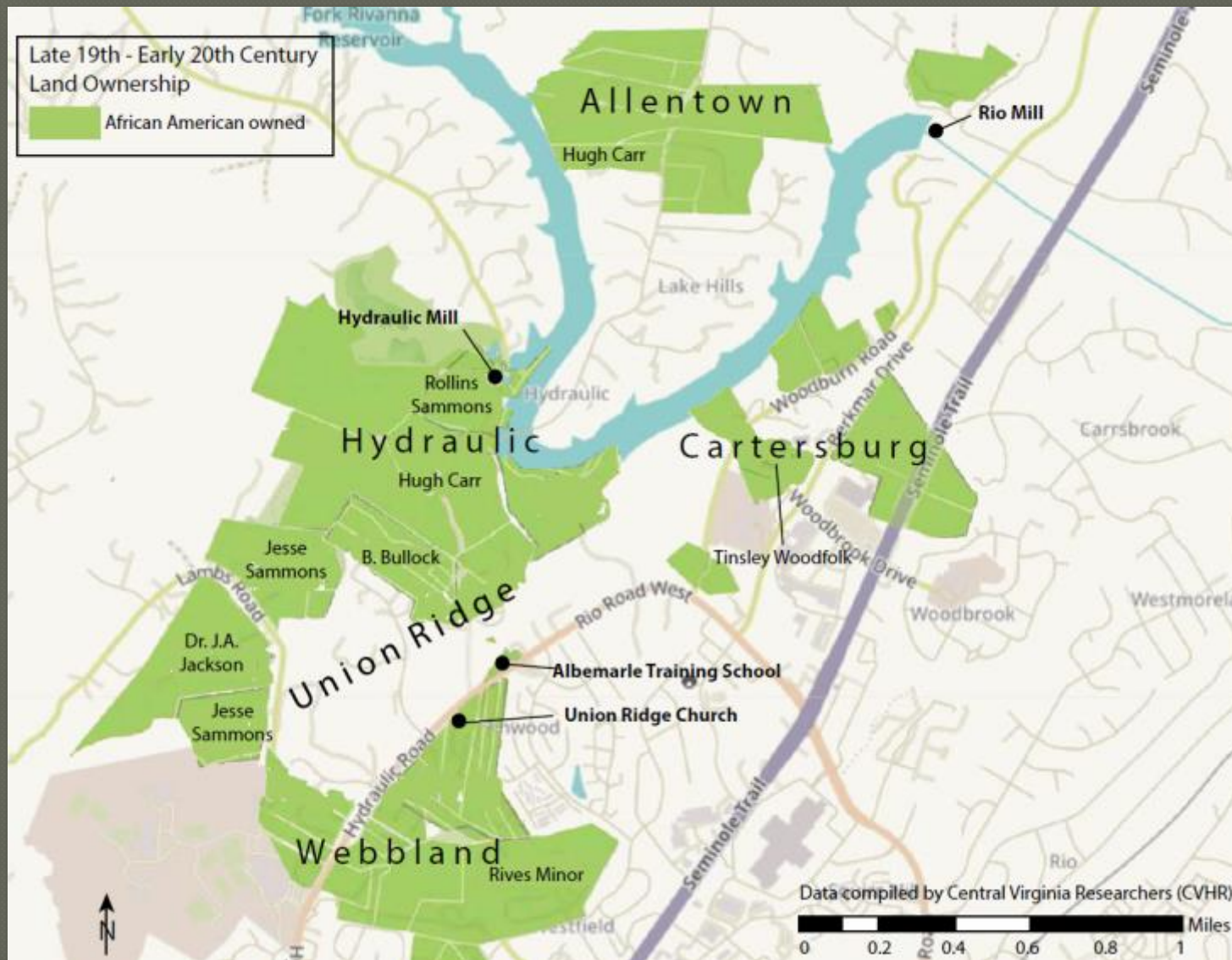
Postbellum Communities

- By 1891, there were almost 60 black landowners in an area that included the interconnected neighborhoods of Georgetown, Webbland, Hydraulic, Union Ridge, Allentown, and Cartersburg.
- At the heart of the community was the Union Ridge Baptist Church, founded as the Salem Church two years after the Civil War ended.
- In 1876 an African-American preacher, George Crawford, one of the six men who had bought land as a group, gave the congregation a quarter-acre for a church building.
- The Union Ridge Church still stands today as the home of an active Baptist congregation.



Postbellum Communities

Late 19th – Early 20th Century Land Ownership



Postbellum Communities

- The Rio Mill stopped operating in the early 20th century.
- Limited opportunities in the Jim Crow south caused some area residents to begin to migrate northwards.
- By the 1940s the encroachments of an expanding suburban Charlottesville started to alter the makeup of the community.
- Only remnants of the once-thriving African-American community survive today. Scant evidence remains of the mill and industry around Rio Mills.



Chapter V – Rio Today

(mid-20th century - today)

1937



1957



1974



Rio Today

1965-1966: Construction of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir



Photo by Stephen Barling

The dam today

Rio Today



New Berkmar Drive extension spans the
Rivanna just downriver from the dam

Photo by Jeff Werner

Credits

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