

# Welcome!

Friends of the African Union Church of  
South Coventry (FAUCSC)

Information Session

April 10, 2019

# Historical Overview of the Church and Burial Ground Site

- By early to mid-1800's there was a small African-American community living in South Coventry.
- Trustees of the African Union Church of South Coventry purchased plot of land along Coventryville Road and established a church and burial ground.
- Records of activity at the site span from 1834 (the deed) to 1882 (the latest date to appear on a gravestone).

# Historical Overview of the Church and Burial Ground Site cont.

- Today, the wooded site consists of the remains of the church foundation and the burial ground.
- There are likely two dozen or more graves: many marked with head and foot stones, three with engraved stones.
- FAUCSC was established in April of 2010 as a 501(c)(3) public charity with the mission to preserve the site of the church and graveyard



Foundation Remains







Two of the engraved stones showing damage

Transcriptions of three gravestones  
as recorded in November 1944  
by Ernest S. Chrisman:

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Susan Williams

Susan  
wife of  
Richard Williams  
daughter of  
George & Eliza Chester  
Died  
April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1853  
Aged 40 yrs. 8m. & 8 days.

# John Thomas

In memory of  
John Thomas

Born 1802 - Died Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> 1874

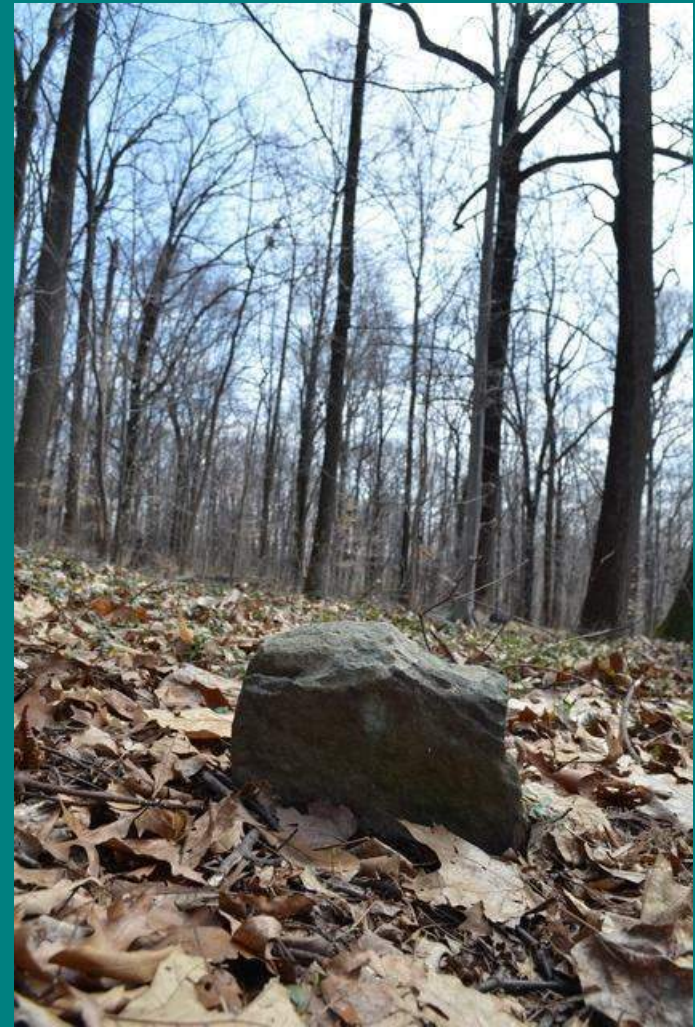
Aged 72 yrs.

Therefore be ye also ready for in such an  
hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.





Gravestone toppled  
and under ground surface



Typical gravestone  
at the site

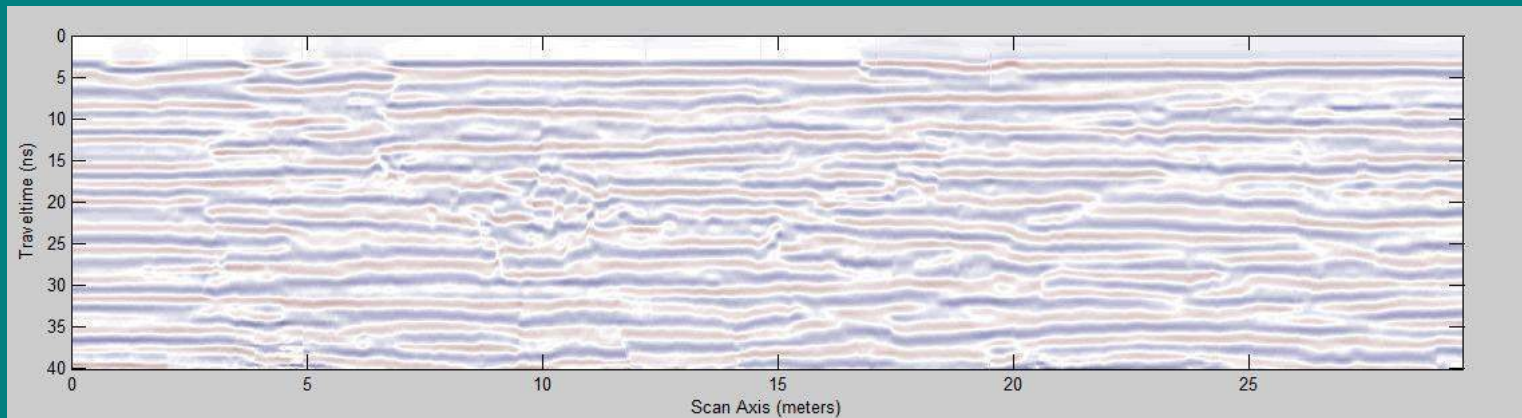
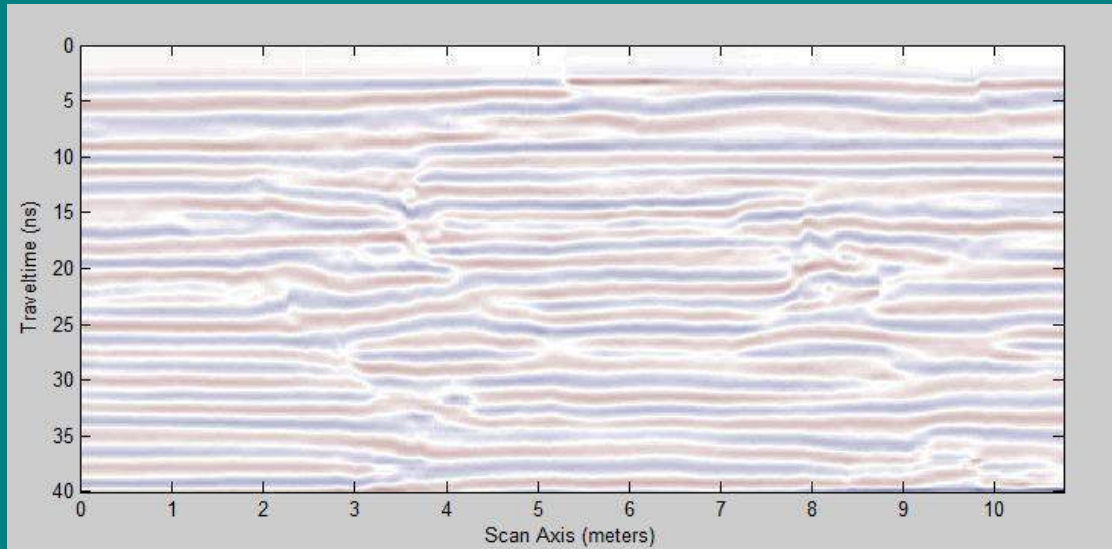


## Emma J. Johnson

Emma J. Johnson  
Died August 7, 1882  
Age 18yrs. 6 Mo's  
3 days.

Lord Jesus I long to be  
perfectly whole,  
I want thee forever  
to live in my soul.

# GPR Survey (Ground Penetrating Radar)



# History

- History of the Site and Community
- Related History and Research

# History of Site and Community

- Deed
- Maps
- Census



# From the Abstract of Deed

Date: September 15, 1834

Grantors: George Chrisman, Coventry Twp. and Ann his wife

Grantees: Trustees of African Union Church

-John Williams, John Thomas, George Brown, and  
William Hinson all of Coventry Twp.

-Joseph Smith of Montgomery Co.

Consideration: \$15

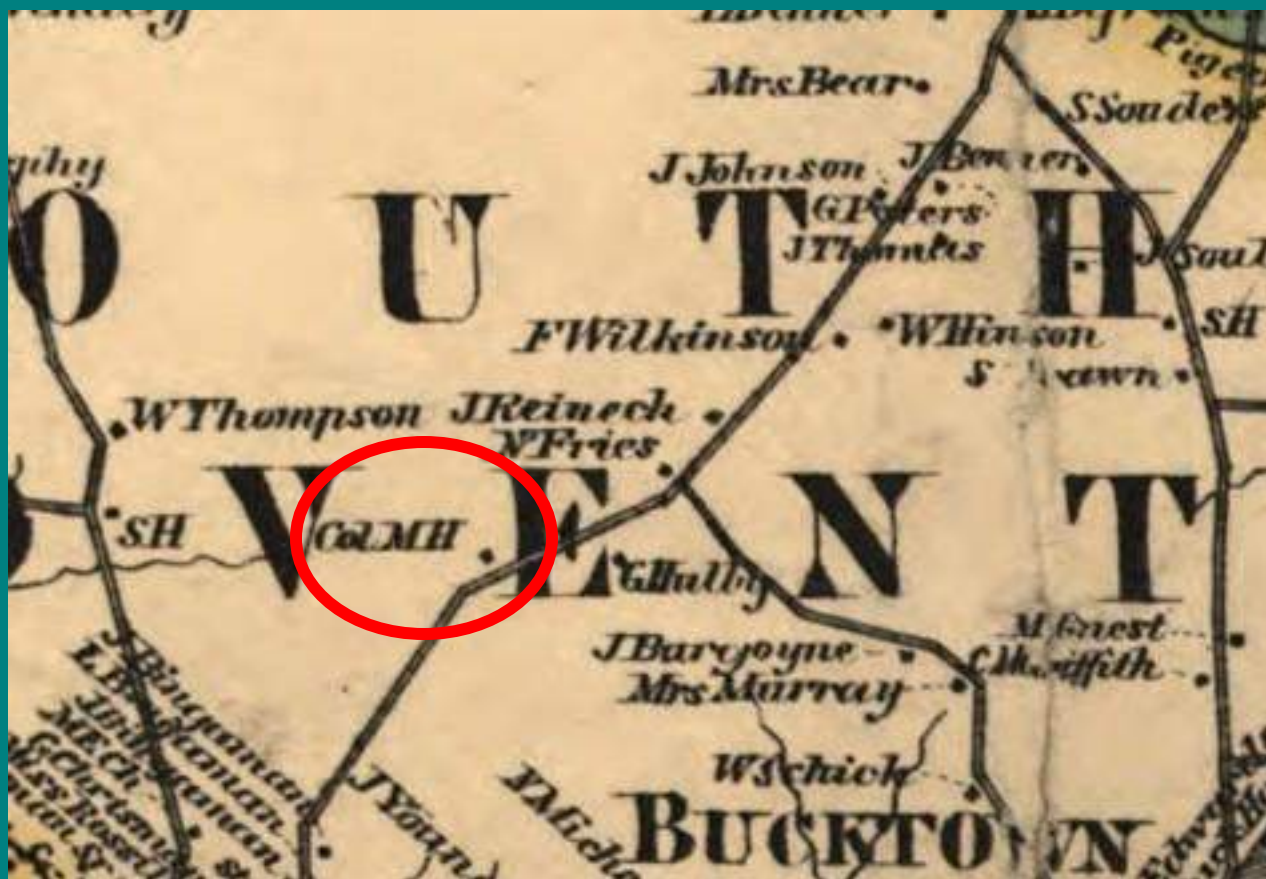
Purpose: For building a church thereon and for burying ground

# African Union Church

- The African Union Church is the oldest independent black denomination in the U.S.
- Founded in 1813 by Peter Spencer in Wilmington, DE
- Merged in 1866 with an offshoot of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.)
- Became known as African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church (A.U.M.P.)



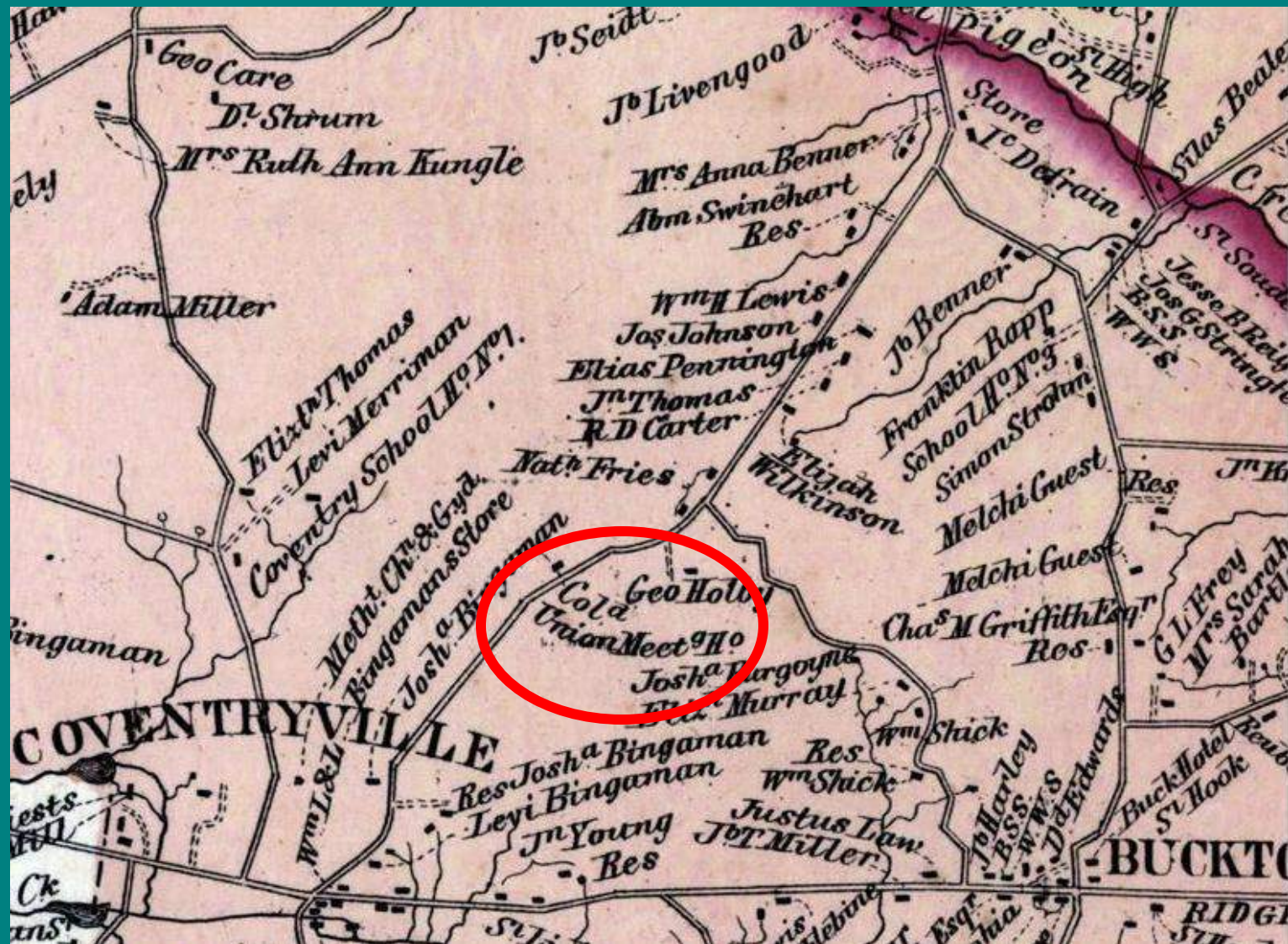
1860



1860

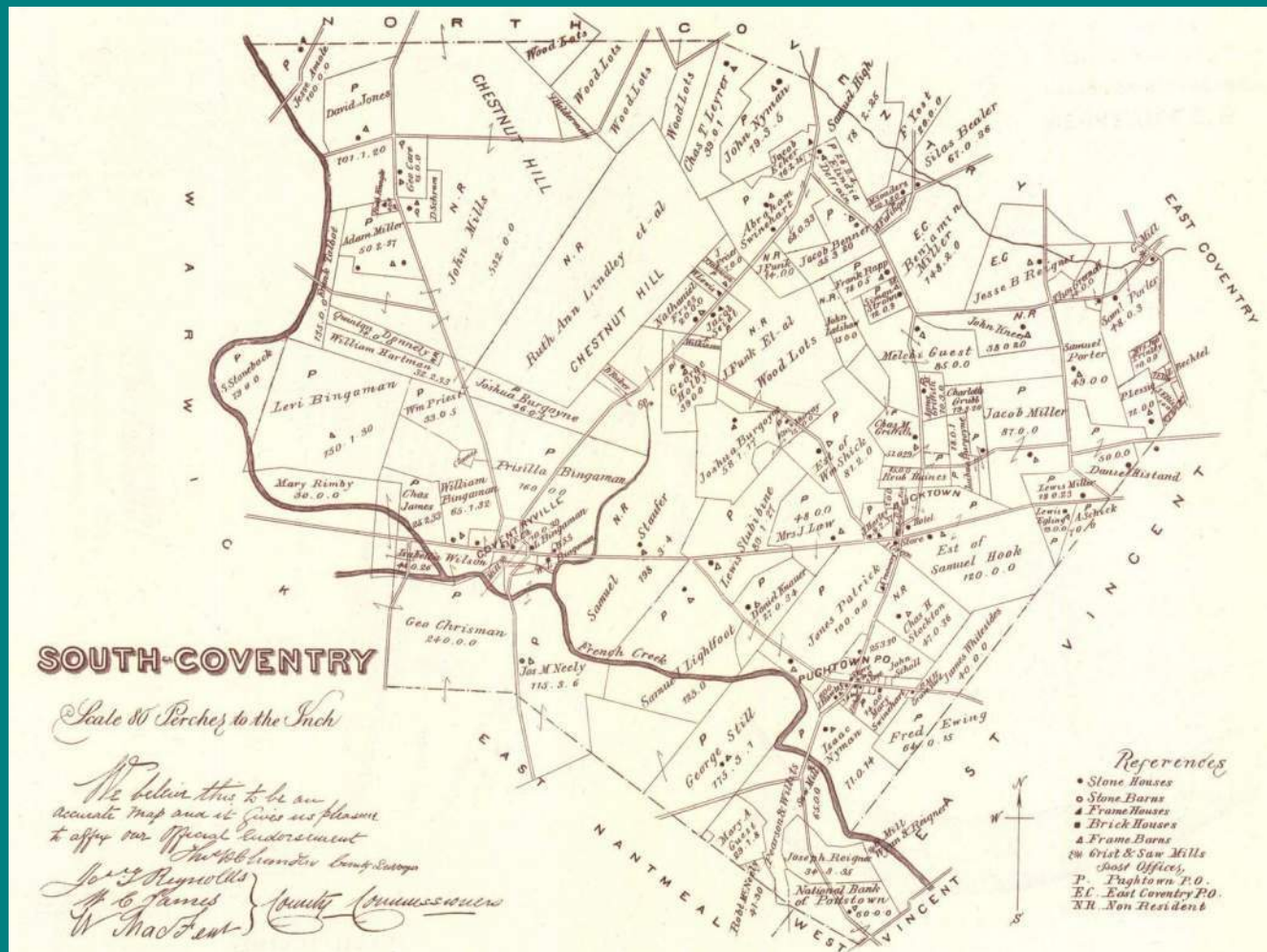
Site marked as Colored Union Meeting House



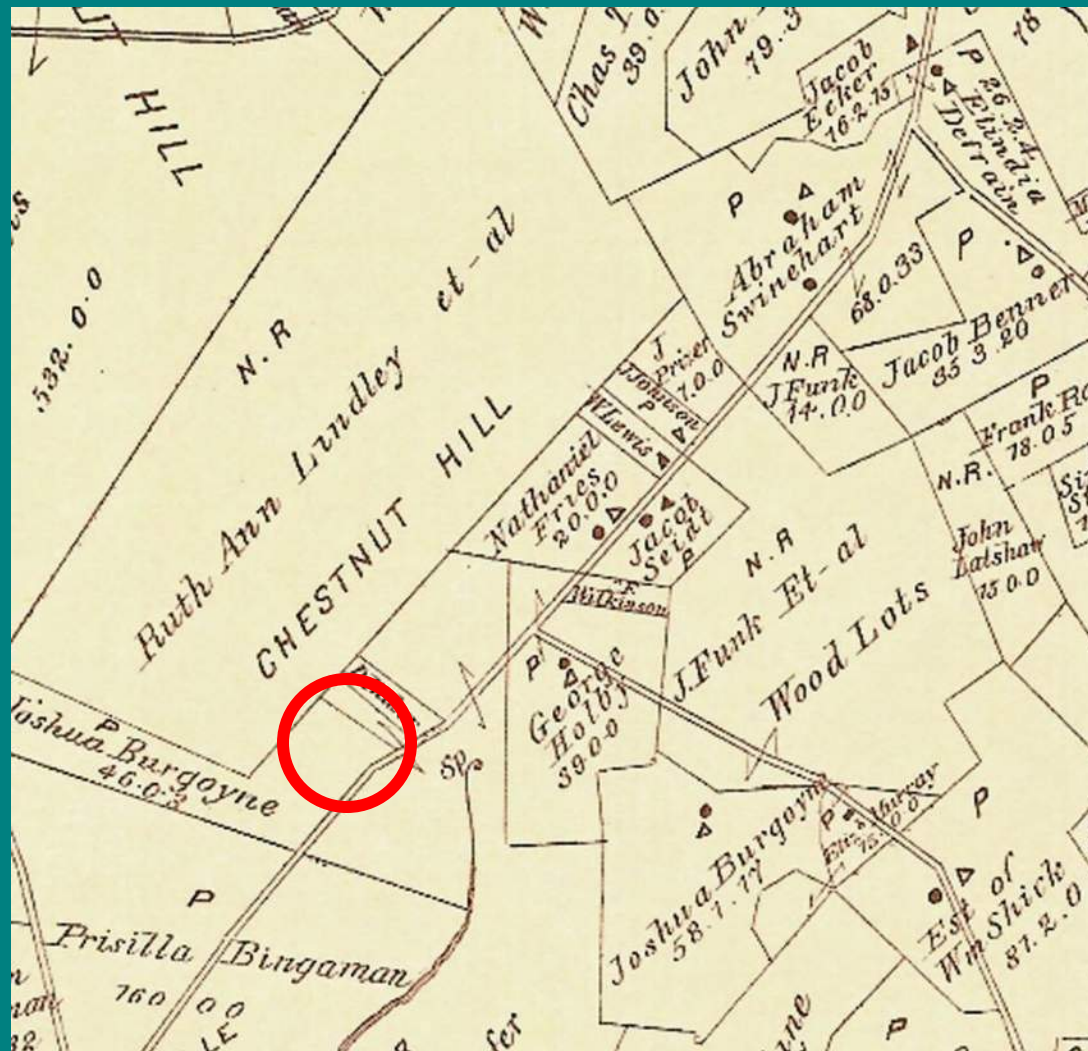


1873 Witmer's  
Site marked as Colored Union Meeting House





1883



1883

Site is not represented

# Examples of Census Data

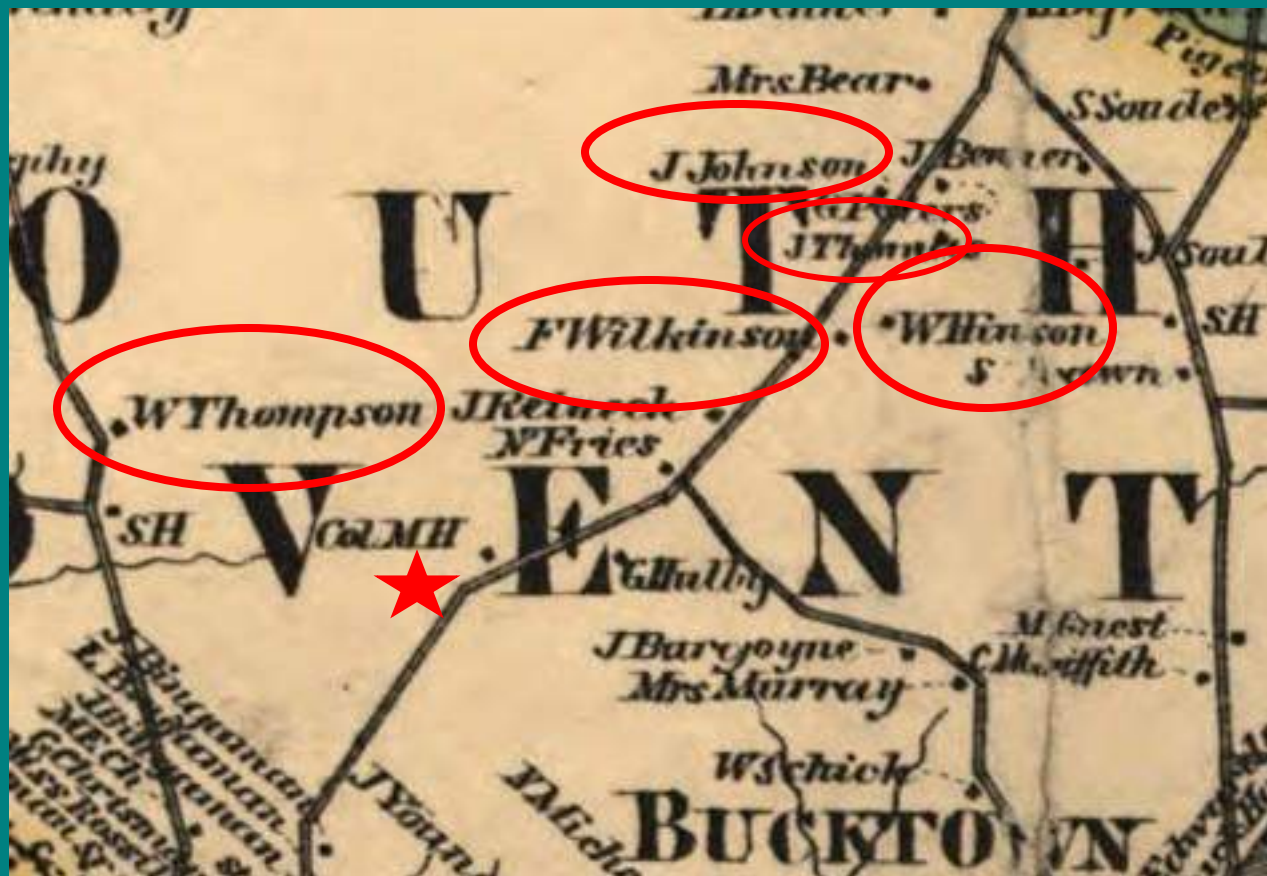
African American Households and Individuals  
Listed in the 1850 Census as  
Living in South Coventry

Year	State	County	Township	Surname	Given Name	Race	DOB	Age	Occup	P value	State of B	In School	Not R/W	Comments
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Isaac	Mulatto	1818	32	Laborer					
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Maria	Black	1818	32					X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Abner I.	Mulatto	1840	10						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Deborah	Mulatto	1843	7						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Rebecca	Mulatto	1846	4						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	ATTLEY	Clara	Mulatto	1848	2						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	COGGINS	Aaron	Black	1838	12						Part of George Freed household (laborer)
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	William	Black	1801	49	Laborer	100	Delaware			
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	Margaret	Black	1802	48			Delaware		X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	William Jr	Black	1828	22	Laborer				X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	George	Black	1829	21	Laborer			X	X	Burglary
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	John	Black	1830	20	Laborer				X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	Sarah	Black	1835	15						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	Edward	Black	1840	10				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HENSON	Elizabeth	Black	1843	7				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	HILSON	Jeffery	Black	1834	16						Part of John Young household (farmer, 12000) listed in family with Magdaine (76, white Fem)
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	JOHNSON	Ellen	Mulatto	1837	13						Part of Henry S. Smith household (farmer, 3500)
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MERYMANT	Mary E.	Black	1798	52		400	Delaware			
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MERYMANT	Levi	Black	1799	51	Laborer				X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MERYMANT	George	Black	1840	10				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MANN	John	Black	1842	8				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MILLER	Benjamin	Black	1843	7				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MILLER	Ruthanna	Black	1845	5						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	THOMPSON	William	Black	1785	65	Laborer	300	Delaware		X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	THOMPSON	Elizabeth	Mulatto	1795	55			Delaware		X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	THOMAS	John	Black	1800	50	Laborer	190				Birthdate of 1802 is listed on tombstone
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MATHERS	Anna E.	Black	1834	16						Possibly MATTHEWS
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	MILLER	Emily	Black	1836	14						Part of Judge Shaler household
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Elijah	Mulatto	1802	48	Laborer	200			X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Anney V.	Mulatto	1813	37					X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Hannah E.	Mulatto	1836	14				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Catharine	Mulatto	1840	10				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Isaac M.	Mulatto	1841	9				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Mary R.	Mulatto	1844	6				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Elijah W.	Mulatto	1847	3						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILKINSON	Anney M.	Mulatto	1849	1						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Richard	Black	1788	62	Laborer					
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Elizabeth	Black	1795	55					X	1798 poss DOB
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Joseph	Black	1832	18						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Elizabeth	Black	1838	12				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Lewis	Black	1839	11						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Mary	Black	1841	9				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Hannah	Black	1844	6				X		
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Sarah	Black	1846	4						
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Sanna	Black	1794	56					X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	William	Black	1799	51	Laborer				X	
1850	PA	Chester	South Coventry	WILLIAMS	Richard	Black	1828	22	Laborer					
1850	PA	Chester	Warwick	CHESTER	Benjamin	Black	1833	17						Possible relative of Susan Williams nee Chester buried in cemetery

Non-white households include: Attley, Henson [Hinson], Meryman, Thompson, Thomas, Wilkinson, Williams

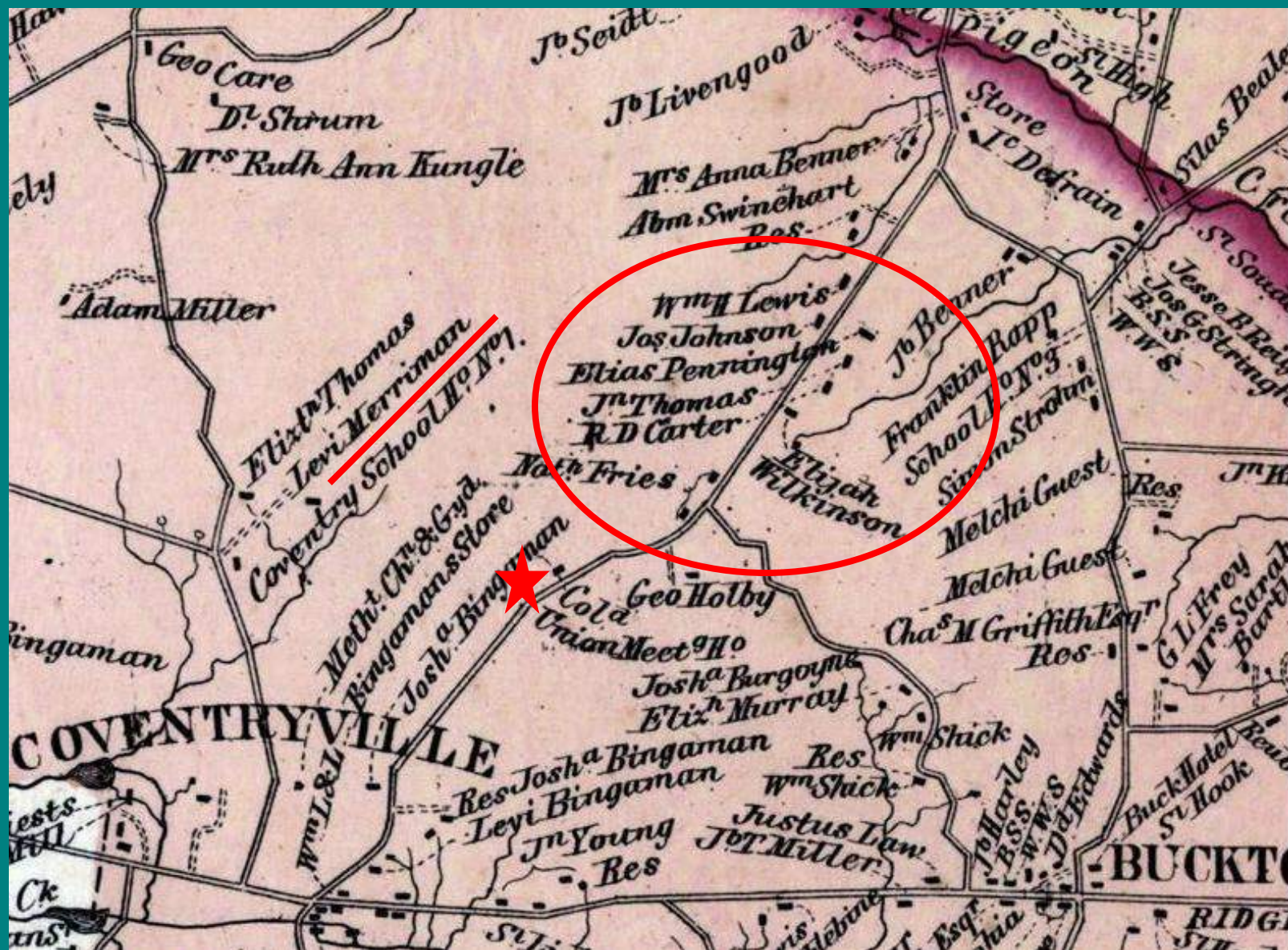


# Non-white households from 1850 census shown on 1860 map





## Non-white households from 1870 census shown on 1873 map



# Related History

- Camp Meetings
- Hinsonville
- Joseph Smith and the Ganges

# Camp Meetings

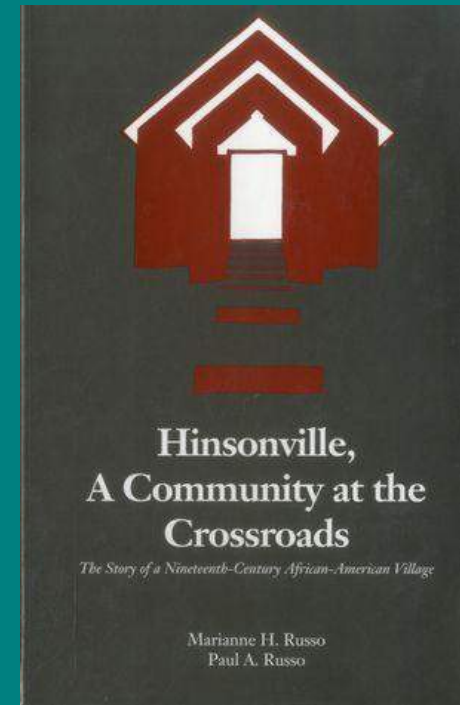
- Camp meetings were held each year – late August or early September
- The land known as “The Old Camp Ground” belonged to Levi Bingaman
- The meetings were organized by the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.)
- As many as 15,000 people were in attendance
- Stage coaches shuttle attendees to and from the trains that arrived daily in Pottstown
- Records indicate camp meetings were being held by the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and likely ended in 1881 when the land was sold for the wood to be cut
- A few summers saw no camp meeting due to “unruly behavior” the previous summer

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- The African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) held camp meetings on the same camp ground, usually following the M.E. meeting
- As many as 2,000 African-Americans attended these meetings
- The A.M.E. church in Pottstown (Bethel) coordinated these meetings



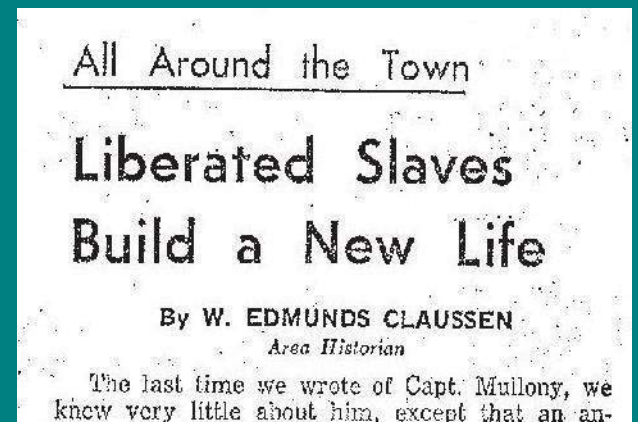
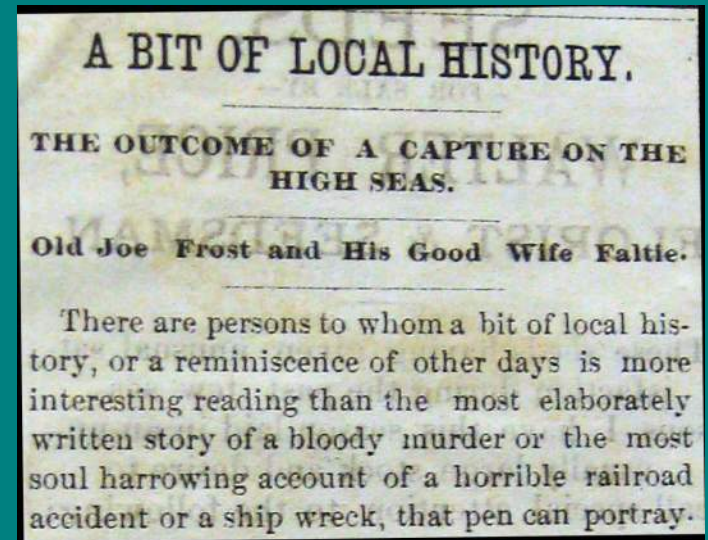
# Hinsonville



- Hinsonville was a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century African-American community in Chester County (Oxford)
- Also based around an African Union Church
- Named after the Hinson family – likely the family of William Hinson
- Founded later (1843), it became a much larger community
- Studied in-depth for academic research resulting in a book
- Tied to the founding of Lincoln University
- Amos brothers who had a farm in South Coventry later moved to Hinsonville and became an important founding family
- Although founding date for the church is 1843, the African-American community was already there and meeting on the land

# Joseph Smith

- One of the founding Trustees of the African Union Church of South Coventry
- Believed to be Joseph Smith of Pottstown
- Stories in the newspaper indicate he and his wife were freed slaves who would walk to South Coventry regularly
- Rescued from a slave ship by the Ganges
- Pottstown Ledger article of 3/31/1880 has been the source of several articles



# The Ganges

- U.S.S. Ganges was an early U.S. Navy warship
- July 19-21, 1800 the Ganges intercepted two “slave ships”
- Both ships were American and held 134 people from Guinea captive
- The ships – the Prudent and the Phebe – were headed to a slave trader in Havanna
- Captain John Mulloony ordered the ships to Philadelphia
- Not the closest place to send the ships, but city’s strong anti-slavery sentiment was well known
- Pennsylvania Abolition Society became guardians of the people from Guinea
- The Africans were housed throughout the Philadelphia region
- Indenture papers show that food, clothing, housing and education were given in exchange for labor
- Arrangements varied but adults were indentured for a few years, children until they were adults
- The goal of the Abolition society was to see that the Africans merged into the region’s growing population of free blacks

The perspective of at least some of the Africans, told later in life, was that they had been slaves. Taken from their homes, there is nothing to indicate any of them assented to the indenture agreements – which were signed by members of the Abolition Society. All were given first names and many used Ganges as their surname. Others adopted different names at the completion of their indenture.

# Preserving the Site

## Friends of the African Union Church of South Coventry

- Established in April of 2010 as a 501(c)(3) public charity with the mission to preserve the site of the church and graveyard
- FAUCSC goals are to:
  - Establish the location of graves and mark grave sites
  - Clear brush and trees, and establish walkways
  - Install fencing where required or desirable
  - Post signs and information boards
  - Raise community awareness and involvement
  - Maintain a Web site featuring historical information about the church and graveyard, and updates about preservation and upkeep activities
  - Continue research into the history of this site
- FAUCSC Accomplishments to-date:
  - Cleaned up the site and hold regular spring and fall clean-up events
  - Raised funds for fencing and historical marker
  - Sponsored Eagle Scout Project to install fencing
  - Added information kiosk and bench to the site





FAUCSC Volunteer  
Clean-Up Day  
(2010)





Recent Storm Damage





Historic Marker along  
Coventryville Road



# Information Kiosk and Bench Installation



# Thank you!

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## Get Involved...

- Come to our Quarterly Meetings
- Volunteer