

Ivy Creek Natural Area: An African-American Legacy

The following is excerpted from an article Copyright © 1990 by David Maurer, published in The Daily Progress newspaper (Charlottesville, Virginia) on Sunday, August 19, 1990. "Natural Area Home To Family Remembrances"

An old, gnarled apple tree stands like a sentinel next to the graves of ex-slave Hugh Carr and his wife Texie Mae. Just as the tree dug its roots into the fertile Virginia soil, so too did Carr. Each in his own way, gathering nourishment from the earth and giving back much.



The granite tombstones stand near the asphalt walkway that leads into the Ivy Creek Natural Area on the outskirts of Charlottesville. Beyond is 215 acres of meadows and woodland flourishing with wild cherry, hickory, scarlet oak and many other trees and plants.



More than 100 years ago, around 1870, Carr chose this tract of land to make his stand and carve a dream out of the rocky soil. Little is known about Carr's early life other than he was born into bondage in 1843. Some faded documents and withered receipts in a cardboard filing box held in the Alderman library at the University of Virginia give a little information.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, Carr agreed to work for a man named A.A. Sutherland for one year. In return for his labor, he received "shares of tobacco, wheat, oats, corn, hay, fodder and potatoes." He later worked for J.R. Wingfield as a manager of his farm hands. Apparently Carr was a frugal man because by 1870 he paid \$100 as partial payment for some land that is now part of the natural area. Within 20 years he had amassed more than 200 acres along Ivy Creek.

Carr could neither read nor write - he signed all his documents with an X. He had an unwavering faith and respect for the importance of education. Although the six girls and one boy he and his wife raised often went without shoes, they always went to school.

"From what I've heard about him he was a stern man, quite a disciplinarian, yet the children loved him dearly," said Benjamin C. Whitten, a grandson of Carr. "They called him Pa and when he spoke they moved. "He was completely devoted to the girls and insisted they get a good education," he said. "Everyone around these parts knew no matter how bad the weather was, the Carr children would be in school."

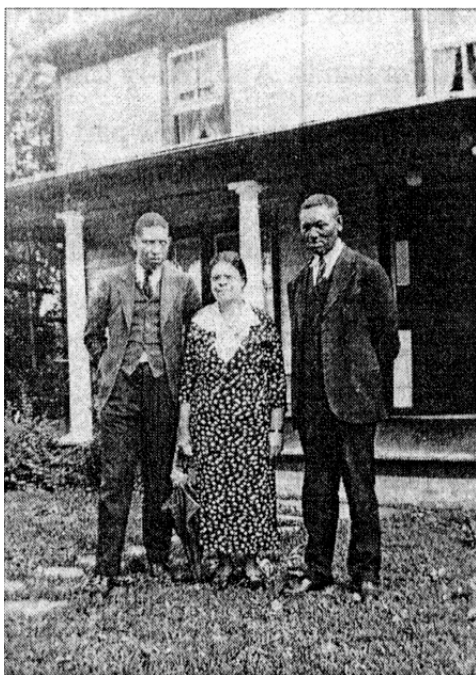
Charles Whitten, a pediatrician who now lives in Detroit, is also a grandson of Carr. At a reunion of family members at the old farm, he told this story, which also illuminates how important education was to his grandfather.

"Grandfather was visiting his brother-in-law, Cain Hawkins, who had a farm in Whitehall, and 13 children, " Whitten said. "Grandfather said, "Why don't you get these kids to school?" Cain said 'I can hardly feed them,' " Whitten said. "Grandfather said, 'I don't care whether they eat or not, they gotta get an education.' "

Carr was a man who practiced what he preached, seeing to it that all six of his girls attended Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, now Virginia State College, in Petersburg. His reverence for education also took seed in his grandchildren. Benjamin Whitten, who now lives in Baltimore, has received three degrees from Penn State, and before his retirement, he was the assistant superintendent of vocational education in Baltimore.

Carr's wife, Texie Mae, died in 1899. When Carr died in 1914, he left each of the children a portion of the farm. In addition to some land, Mary Carr - the oldest - was also willed the farmhouse. "As each of the children got married and left, they sold their portion of the land to Mary and the man she married, Conley Greer," Benjamin Whitten said. "Conley was the first black extension agent in the state and he turned the farm into a model of modern farming techniques."

When Mrs. Greer died in 1973, the farm was willed to her only child, Evangeline Greer Jones. Because all the offspring of Hugh and Texie Mae Carr were either working in professions outside of farming or pursuing graduate degrees, the land was sold. At one point, the old farm came close to being the



site of 200 homes, but after a complicated court case the land was bought jointly by Charlottesville and Albemarle County and became the Ivy Creek Natural Area. Today the land is held in perpetuity for the enjoyment of the public as an unspoiled natural area. The relatives of Hugh Carr said they think he would have been pleased.

Mary Carr Greer (center) and Conley Greer (right) stand in front of the farmhouse at Riverview Farm (now ICNA)

Mary Carr Greer was a prominent educator in the black community and served as principal of the Albemarle Training School until the 1950s. Greer Elementary School on Lambs Rd. is named in her honor. The gravesites of Hugh Carr, Texie Mae Carr, son Marshall Carr, Conley Greer and Mary Carr Greer are located at Ivy Creek across from the kiosk.