

# Nature Preserve: Ex-Slave's Legacy

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"I think Hugh Carr would approve," the woman said as she strolled around the old farm's overgrown fields and wooded hills.

Hugh Carr was a slave. In the years after the Civil War, sharecropping and raising six children, he managed to buy enough land to start a family farm that, in the next generation, became known as a model in Albemarle County for the agricultural methods used there.

Now it belongs to the people of Albemarle and Charlottesville. As the Ivy Creek Natural Area, a 215-acre preserve on Hydraulic Road, it will be left undisturbed, protected from encroaching development, forever.

Hugh Carr couldn't read or write. "He didn't have any education but he was determined that all his children would go to college, even though they had to work their way through," recalled Mrs. Evangeline Greer Jones, a retired administrator at Fisk University in Nashville, who is the last of Hugh Carr's descendants to have been born and raised on the farm. Her mother - Mary Carr Greer, Hugh Carr's daughter - was a longtime Albemarle school principal.

Mrs. Jones left Albemarle and the farm in the 1930s when she married, but came back often for visits until her mother died and the farm was sold in 1973.

In Charlottesville with her husband last week, she poked around the old barn, sampled the fruit of a heavily-laden pear tree and - carrying a camera and looking like any other visitor - walked along the trails that lead into the woods.

Hugh Carr's grave stands by the old house at the entrance to the nature preserve. Born in 1843, he was Mrs. Jones's grandfather.

Next to Hugh Carr's grave are the graves of Mrs. Jones's parents. Mary Carr Greer (1884-1973), for whom the nearby Albemarle elementary school is named, and Conley Greer (1883-1956), an agricultural extension agent who was eventually to make a showplace of the farm.

Faded documents in the Alderman Library manuscript room at the University of Virginia tell something of the story.

In a cardboard filing box, under a section labeled "Carr business papers, 1866-1907," among a handful of torn receipts for purchases from stores and mills, are scraps of paper signed with Hugh Carr's "X - his seal." They are for work done for various whites in the area in return for money, food and crops.

Less than four years after the Civil War was over: "The said undersigned agrees to labor for A.A. Sutherland for one year commencing January 1, 1869 and ending December 31, 1869." In return, Hugh Carr received shares of tobacco, wheat, oats, corn, hay, fodder and potatoes.

In one lengthy contract he is glimpsed working as a farm manager, in charge of all details of farm work for a J.R. Wingfield, and promising "to manage the hired hands, to have and require them to do their duty, to see that all hands are in place for work at the proper time and that they do their work well and faithfully."

By 1870 Hugh Carr had in hand a receipt for \$100 - representing "part payment for land sold him." He didn't stop there. By 1889, according to a title search filed among the Carr family papers, the one-time slave had bought more than 200 acres along Ivy Creek through a string of purchases of various tracts.

Nevertheless, Hugh Carr's family always "was a poor family. Sometimes they all went barefooted," Mrs. Jones said. "But they always had enough to feed the children and send them to school."

Hugh Carr's wife, Texie M. Hawkins Carr, died in 1899, leaving him with six girls to raise. Mary Carr - Mrs. Jones's mother and oldest of the six - had to help run the family.

Although her grandfather had no formal education, Mrs. Jones said he was determined that the six daughters go to college. They all attended Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, now Virginia State College, in Petersburg. To finance their education, they had to work at the college and in the summers as maids in places as far away as Atlantic City.

Mrs. Jones's husband, Hinton C. Jones, a retired English teacher at Tennessee State University, also heard the Carr and Greer family stories. One thing that struck in his mind, he said was that "Hugh Carr was a great disciplinarian. He was very strict."

Hugh Carr's daughters called him "Pa," Jones said. "And they always said, 'When Pa spoke - you listened.'"

Hugh Carr died in 1913. Mrs Carr, who married Conley Greer, an agricultural extension agent from North Carolina whom she met at college, inherited a portion of the land and the original house.

The house, expanded and covered with stucco today is occupied by the nature preserve's caretaker. Mrs. Jones, who has lived in Nashville since 1946, was the Greer's only child.

While Mary Carr Greer educated generations of black children as the principal of Albemarle Training School from 1930 to 1950, Conley Greer carried on Hugh Carr's farming tradition, buying additional land when he could and using the place to demonstrate the farming methods he taught in his job.

"In those days they worshipped the land," Jones recalled of his father-in-law. "They put a big value on the land. That's how they fed their children." As a county agricultural extension agent, Conley Greer "practiced what he preached," Jones said.

And although those were days of segregation, whites as well as blacks would often come to talk about farming with the black extension agent, Mrs. Jones recalled.

James R. Butler, a Keswick farmer who replaced Conley Greer when he retired as extension agent and who is now retired himself, remembers that Greer always carefully rotated crops and paid strict attention to soil and water conservation in planning his fields.

"He laid them out in strips so the soil didn't wash away. All of the things he did are still considered good farming practices," said Butler, who learned his job from Greer and often visited the farm.

"He was very proud of what he grew," said Mrs. Jones. "He always had a model garden. Sometimes Dad would say, 'Come on this evening, I want you to go over and see the corn.' He'd have a nice lot of corn or wheat or something, and he'd want you to go see it."

Her father was a tall man, Mrs. Jones said, but his corn always grew much taller than he stood. He

plowed the land with a horse uuit, I he go a tractor in the 1950s, only a few years before he died, she said.

The farm produced almost all the food the family needed, Mrs. Jones added. There were milk cows, hogs, chickens and an apple orchard in addition to vegetables and wheat, which went to the mill for flour.

Despite the prominent positions of her parents in the black community, times were not always easy when she was growing up on the farm in the 1920s and 30s, Mrs. Jones said. Her mother's pay as principal of Albemarle Training School in the early 1930s was about \$69 a month, she said.

And her father, in addition to traveling from farm to farm during daylight hours as extension agent, would often get up at 3 a.m. and drive a wagon several miles to downtown Charlottesville to earn money hauling garbage. He would work on his own farm until after dark. "Mama would look out and see Daddy coming with a lantern through the fields and say, "Well, I can put dinner on the table."

After her father died, Mary Carr Greer ran the farm with hired help for several years following her retirement in 1958, Mrs. Jones said. But eventually she was able to manage it less and less. "She would write and say she had to get rid of some of the hogs, or some of the chickens."

After Mary Carr Greer died, the Joneses sold the land they inherited. There was no one left in the Carr and Greer families who farmed anymore, Mrs. Jones said. Her own four children - the great grandchildren of Hugh Carr, the farmer who couldn't write his name - all were pursuing graduate degrees.

After a tangled court case between Albemarle County and a developer over whether a subdivision could be built on the land adjacent to the Rivanna Reservoir, Hugh Carr's old farm was eventually purchased by Charlottesville and Albemarle with the aid of a federal grant and the Nature Conservancy, a non-profit preservation group. (see next article).

Now fields have grown into trees, the orchards have all but disappeared. Now, at the city's expanding edge, the farm is home for a wide variety of wildlife, flowers and trees.

"I'm glad to see it like it is," Mrs. Jones said. "Even though I had to sell it, I think my parents would be glad to see that it's turned out as it has. I'm very much pleased to know that people can come and visit."