

Marcella Chapel to the Dogwood Surplus Trail

Background Notes by John Brantley for the 2025 Granite Historical Society Spring Hike

Brice's (or Brice) Run It's a beautiful stream (*see Figure 1*) that forms on the old Wolf farm near Randallstown and meanders south about 5 miles to join the Patapsco just a bit upriver from Daniels. The stream is fed by Brice's Run Branch, which forms along Chapman Road south of Liberty Road. It's also fed by Mardella Branch, which forms in the King's Park area along Marriottsville Road. Brice's Run was named after John Brice, Jr, who served two terms as Mayor of Annapolis in the 1750s and also served as the Chief Justice of the Maryland Provincial Court. Brice, Jr. inherited a 900-acre tract of land named "Brice His Share" in 1713 from his father, John Brice Sr. That land lay south of Old Court Road and was traversed by the stream which became known as Brice's Run. Brice, Sr patented the property in 1703 specifically as an inheritance for his first son, John, who died as an infant. The 2nd John Brice, Jr then inherited the property and sold it to his half-brother, John Worthington, in 1733. This is the property that became the center of Worthington family activity in Granite after Thomas Worthington inherited it in 1765 (along with adjoining acreage) from his father. In more recent times (meaning the 20th and 21st centuries) the name of the stream, as it appears on maps, has been changed to "Brice Run", without a possessive "s". Apparently, the stream's link to its original owners has been lost to history.

Old Court Road Bridge The current concrete bridge across Brice Run dates to 1930 (SHA No. 3066). A plaque on the bridge carries the date of 1956 when the bridge was remodeled and the deck replaced. Before 1930 a single-lane wooden bridge crossed Brice Run about 10 yards south of the current bridge. A stone abutment from the pre-1930 wooden bridge still stands on the eastern bank of Brice Run (*see Figure 1*).

Thompson Saw Mill The 1877 Hopkins map of Baltimore County marks the "Jno A Thompson Steam Saw Mill" at a spot near Marcella Chapel. In his book, "A Guide to Patapsco Valley Mill Sites", James Peirce mentions this saw mill. If a saw mill did exist at one time, it likely would've been located along the small stream with runs behind the previous OT Gosnell and Griffith properties and feeds into Brice Run. However, none of the property owners in the area have ever seen any remnants of this mill. In writing his book, Mr. Peirce talked to Dick Stanfield and Dick said that he also had never seen any evidence. I've searched the census and land records for the 1860s, 70s and 80s and there's no evidence of a John Thompson living anywhere near Granite. It's a mystery.

Marcella Chapel In 1827 Rezin Worthington gifted an acre of ground along Old Court Road and donated money (said to have been a thousand dollars) towards the construction of a Methodist Episcopal Church. Five trustees for the church were appointed, including Nicholas Owings and Cornelius Howard (*see Figure 2*). The new church was named Marcella Chapel in honor of Marcella Worthington, Rezin's mother. Marcella's maiden name was Owings, the daughter of Joshua Owings. Owings was a close friend of Francis Ashbury, one of two founders (the other Thomas Coke) of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the US. Marcella's brother, Richard Owings, became a traveling Methodist preacher – in fact he died in West Virginia while doing his proselytizing work. And so it was that the Worthington family here in Granite turned towards Methodism.

After Mount Olive Methodist Church opened in Randallstown around 1858, some of the congregants of Marcella Chapel began attending church services there. The remaining congregants moved to the Methodist Church on St Paul Ave after that church opened in 1877. (Rezin Worthington's great-niece, Marcella Worthington Cross, was largely responsible for establishing the St Paul's Church.) That's when the trustees of Marcella Chapel allowed black families around Granite to use Marcella Chapel for their own services. That lasted until 1888 when the Cherry Hill Church opened and Marcella Chapel was abandoned for good. *Note that Cherry Hill was an AUMP church, not an AME church.*

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The only current image we have of the chapel is a drawing made by Betty Griffith in 2001 (see **Figure 3**). It's an imaginative drawing since no photos or earlier drawings of the church can be found. According to an article published in "The Jeffersonian" in 1947, the building was a "plain, oblong stone structure" measuring 30' by 50' with benches and a pulpit made from cherry. "A slave gallery extended across the entrance door". The article says that "only one wall of the chapel stands today, the western wall." Earl Griffith, Betty's son, remembers that in the 1960s the building's foundation was still largely intact, projecting 2 feet or so above ground. Unfortunately, what remained of the foundation was destroyed in 2001 after Bethel AME Church purchased the former Marcella Chapel site to enable building a 4-lane access road to the land-locked Chew property that had been purchased as a site to build a new Bethel AME Church complex in Granite. The Marcella Chapel foundation was excavated to create the cut-out along Old Court Road where the access road was to run. A pile of dirt and rubble and large blasted stone pieces from the Bethel excavation is still apparent on the Marcella Chapel site.

Marcella Cemetery Today there are four gravestones are still standing at the Marcella Chapel site and another six are either lying on the ground or propped against some trees. There are historical records for other burials at the site and it's thought that at least 20, maybe 30, gravestones were in the cemetery at one time, most of them located to the south of the original church building or just downhill from it, to the west. In fact, there are two other grave markers still visible in that downhill area along with the base of another marker. Earl Griffith remembers that more markers were visible in that area at one time and that they might still be uncovered given some probing and digging effort. It was in this area that a "foot-stone" was unearthed during the excavation undertaken by Bethel Church in 2001, and it was that unearthing which prompted a community-wide protest and vigil to stop the excavation (see **Figure 4**). In the end, Bethel abandoned their plans for a new church in Granite. In 2013 they sold the Chew property, along with the Marcella Chapel property, to Baltimore County. That property, known as the "Dogwood Surplus Site", is now reserved for hiking and biking trails.

Attached is a plat of the Marcella Chapel and Cemetery site prepared to show the planned route of the proposed Bethel AME Church drive (see **Figure 5**). You can see the assumed location of the unmarked graves on the property along with the location of two 2 crypts (see below).

In 2013 the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites was invited to perform an evaluation of the Marcella site. The Coalition's report includes photos and detailed drawings of the grave markers at the site. The report is stored in the GHS archive room at Granite Church. It's well worth a look.

The Marcella Crypts In addition to 20 to 30 graves at Marcella Cemetery site, two burial crypts were erected. One is still very much intact today (see **Figure 6**), a very impressive structure built with huge granite blocks which is said to have been the final resting place for six Worthington family members. An inscription on the crypt reads "John Worthington of John, November 1838." "John of John" refers to the son of the John Worthington, the oldest son of Thomas Worthington, who settled on his father's "Griffith Adventure" farm along Granite Road. The date of 1838 does not match either the date of birth or of death of the younger John Worthington. Presumably it was the date the crypt was erected. The identity of the other 5 Worthington family members laid to rest in the crypt is unknown. The remnants of a second crypt lie a little to the south of where the chapel stood. It appears that this crypt was built of "rubble stone", although a few large granite blocks among the rubble were probably lintels used in construction of a doorway and/or roof. There's no information as to who was buried in this crypt.

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The Samuel Walters Grave Marker One of the grave stones leaning against a tree in the Marcella Cemetery is that of Samuel Walters, died October 2nd, 1861 (see **Figure 7**). Samuel Walters was the son of Alexander Walters, brother of Samuel Wright Walters of Mount Welcome fame. In 1820 Alexander Walters bought the tract of land called “Murray’s Desire”, currently 3236 Granite Rd. Samuel Walters lived on that tract with his wife, Catherine Crooks, and Catherine’s children (she was previously married). There is a Walters family graveyard on that tract and all available information says that Samuel was buried there when he died in 1861. Why his gravestone was moved to Marcella, and who moved it, is a mystery.



Figure 1 – Brice Run at Old Court Rd and the original Bridge Abutment

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Indenture

Rezin H. Worthington

to

May 18, 1827

W.G. 188-513

May 18, 1827

Enclosure V

Cornelius Howard, Nicholas Owings,
Abraham Jessop, George Zimmerman
John Kelso

Cons. \$1.00

Baltimore County

Rezin H. Worthington has given, granted, bargained, sold, released, conveyed and confirmed to Cornelius Howard, Nicholas Owings, Abraham Jessop, George Zimmerman, John Kelso, their heirs and successors, all estate, right, title, interest, property claim and demand whatsoever either in law or equity.

Beginning at a stone the beginning of a tract called Pistole, thence S 74° W 7 Perches to stone, thence N 16° W 10 Perches to stone, thence N 74° E 16 Perches to stone, thence S 16° E 10 Perches to stone, by straight line to beginning. Containing 1 acre, more or less.

Together with all and singular the houses, woods, waters, ways, privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging.

To have to hold and singular the above described lot.

Together with unto Cornelius Howard, Nicholas Owings, Abraham Jessop, George Zimmerman and John Kelso, their heirs and successors in office forever in trust that they may erect a house of worship for the use of members of Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America according to rules and discipline which from time to time may be agreed upon and adopted by the ministers and preachers of said church at their general conferences in the United States of America and in further trust and confidence that they shall at all times forever hereafter benefit such ministers and preachers belonging to said church as shall from time to time be duly authorized by the general conferences or by yearly conferences by said general conference to preach and expound God's holy word therein and in further trust and confidence that as often as any one or more trustees hereinbefore mentioned or their successors shall die or cease to be a member or members of said church according to rules and discipline as aforesaid, then in such case it shall be the duty of the stationed minister or preacher authorized as aforesaid who shall have the pastoral charge of the members of the said church to call a meeting of the remaining trustees as soon as conveniently may be and when so met the said trustees shall proceed to nominate and by a majority of votes elect one or more persons to fill such vacancy or vacancies provided the person or persons so nominated shall have been one year a member or members of the said church immediately preceding such election and be at least twenty-one years of age in order to keep up the number of five trustees forever. And in case of an equal number of votes for and against such nomination the stationed minister or preacher shall have the casting vote, and the said Rezin H. Worthington doth by these presents warrant and forever defend all and singular the before mentioned and described lot of ground with the appurtenances thereto belonging unto them the said Cornelius Howard, Nicholas Owings, Abraham Jessop, George Zimmerman and John Kelso and their heirs and successors chosen and appointed as aforesaid from the claim or claims of him the said Rezin H. Worthington, his heirs and assigns.

Figure 2 – Deed from Rezin Worthington to Trustees of Marcella Chapel (Transcribed by Dave Griffith)

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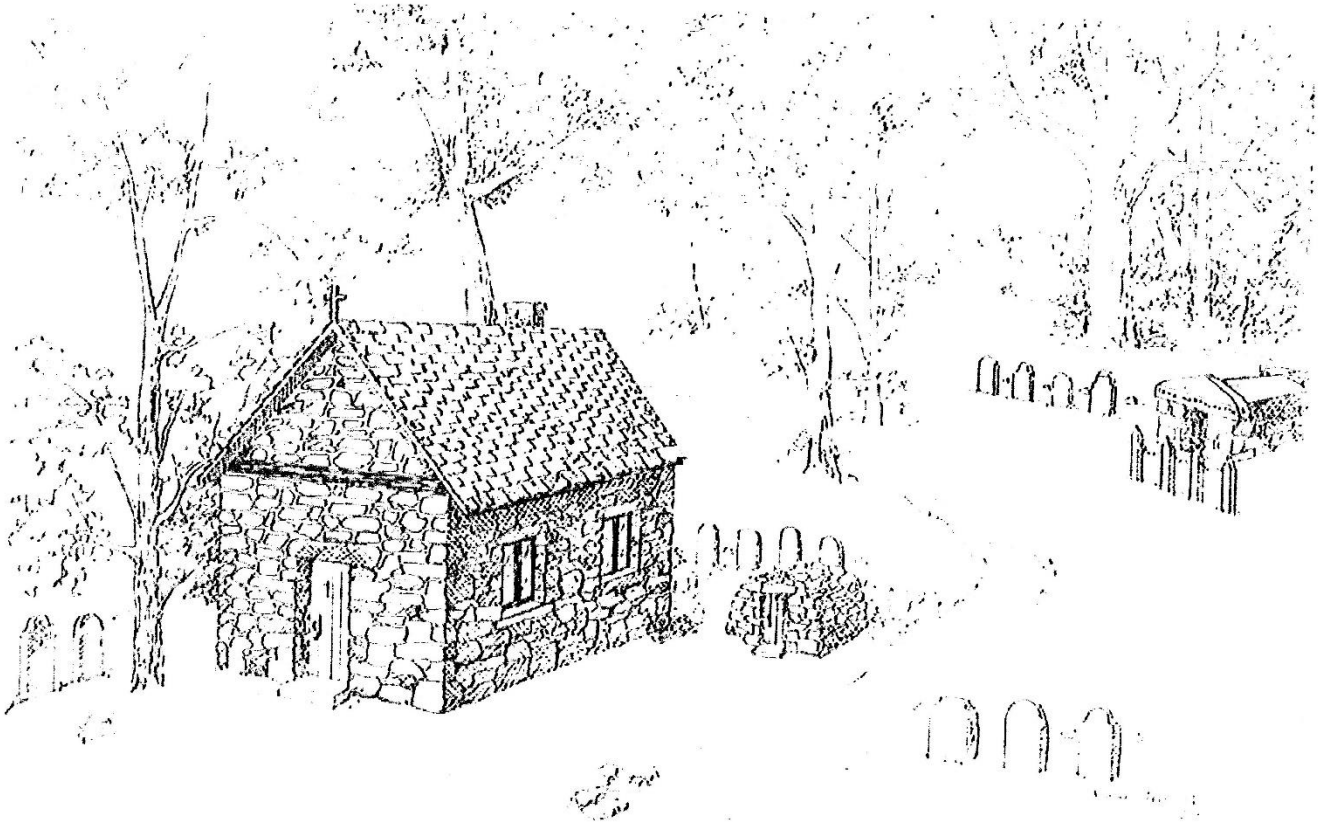


Figure 3 – Drawing of Marcella Chapel by Betty Griffith, 2001

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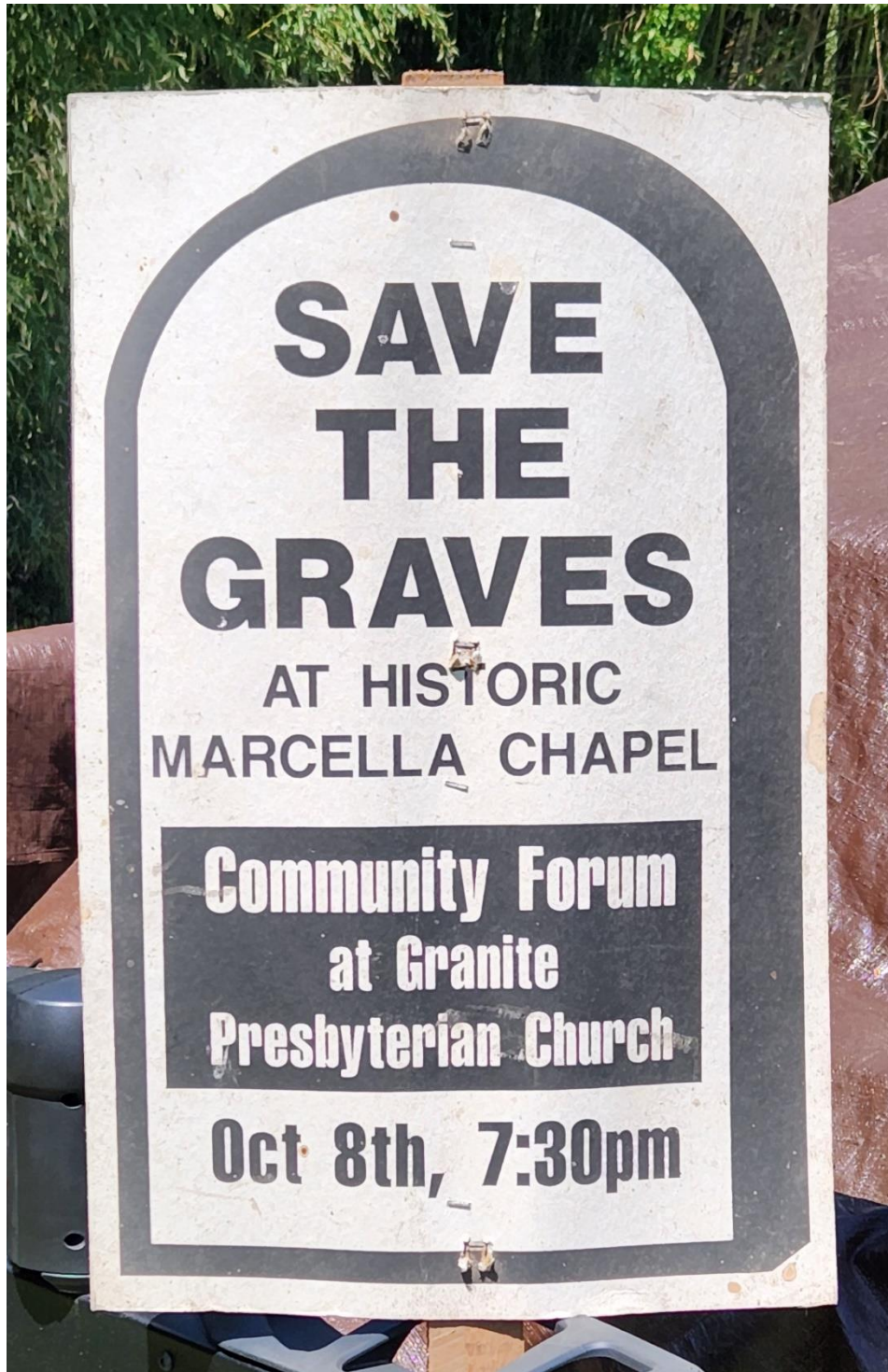


Figure 4 – Poster from the Community Protest Against the Bethel AME Excavation at Marcella Chapel

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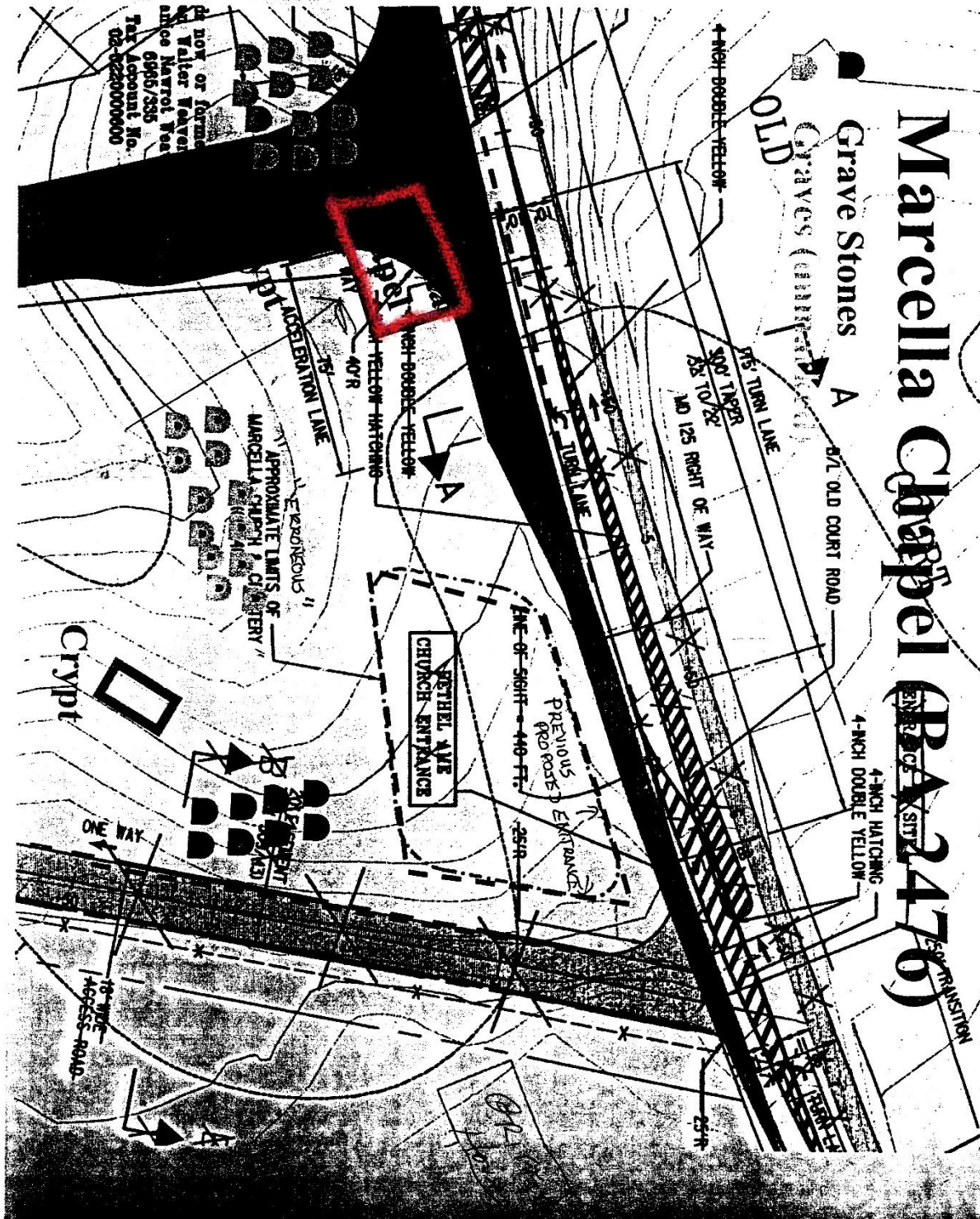


Figure 5 – Plat of Proposed Bethel AME Drive Through Marcella Chapel Site

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Figure 6 – John Worthington Crypt



Figure 7 – Samuel Walters Grave Marker