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## Land Trust Saves Historic Missouri Avenue Site From Proposed Town House Development

A non-profit land preservation group has saved a sliver of land significant in African American and Civil War history from a controversial, proposed town house project.

The less-than-one acre wooded site, located on Missouri Avenue near 13<sup>th</sup> Street was purchased by the National Park Trust (NPT) from its owner, the Washington Hebrew Congregation. The Congregation had a contract to sell the land to a townhouse developer. Residents and community leaders of the nearby Brightwood and Takoma neighborhoods opposed the project during recent hearings before the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment.

"The National Park Trust has given all of us an extraordinary opportunity to protect an area with enormous potential for historical and cultural research, education, tourism, and community outreach," said Charles Powell, President of the Military Road School Alumni Association.

The Military Road School Alumni Association is working to preserve and purchase the landmark Military Road School, located only about 100-feet from the NPT land. The school sits on land donated for the specific purpose of educating African-American students from 1864-1954. It is now owned by the D.C. Board of Education and is in deteriorated condition.

Powell noted that the newly purchased site is part of a little-known, historically rich and unusual "complex" of properties in the Brightwood community. Dating to 1820 when it was known as "Vinegar Hill," it was the oldest settlement for freed Negro slaves within the District of Columbia.

The Military Road Alumni Association worked with NPT to help bring about the purchase, an interim step before its acquisition by the National Park Service. The NPT purchase was also endorsed by D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, Ward 4 City Council Member Adrian Fenty, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4A, and Historic Takoma, Inc.

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We received an education of unequalled quality in an era of inequality. The academic standards were the best because we had teachers who excelled in excellence, challenging us to do no less than our best. Excellence was the required standard in everything we did.

Although Military Road was a public school, it also served as a community center for the residents of the area. Besides the constant awareness of learning the basics, we were exposed every day to beautiful arts and crafts to accent learning. Our trips to Capitol Hill to sit in on sessions of the Congress kept us attuned to the importance of our country and the nations of the world. Every season of the calendar was highlighted in our education, as well as special events. Some of the exciting events that occurred yearly were Negro History Week, May Day exercises that included the wrapping of the May Pole, Christmas plays, talent programs, and many educational and exciting field trips. The garden teacher taught the basic skills in gardening; the music teacher taught music appreciation; and the police and fire departments heightened our awareness of safety and respect.

The programs of the school included not only the school families, but the extended families of the children, the church, and the community.

We have a tremendous respect for the building and property, because it is the place where we received more than we could give. Our classroom time began with devotion to God and country. We were taught the importance of good manners, something many children lack today.

The Military Road School houses four large classrooms and two basement playrooms, cloak rooms, and closets. It has a playground area and land for gardening, as it was years ago.

The ornate design and structure of the exterior of the building is attractive as well as practical. Today, it can be operated efficiently on a very, very low cost budget. It is a building of regal stature with its white columns and steeple-type roof, beautiful stone work, and iron encasements. It was well insulated for warmth in the winter, and the beautiful outdoors beckoned us in the summer.

The Military Road School continues to be used to house educational programs for the community and city as a whole. At the present time, the Washington Urban League uses the facility for adult computer classes. We would like to see the building remain and restored as a most attractive facility used as an outreach center to the people of the community and the city. We would also like to re-create the atmosphere that we as alumni enjoyed to inspire others to "be the best they can be."

Children are our most precious commodity. We must do everything we can to give them a vision, direction, and conviction to equip them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This building can be an ideal facility for that purpose.