

2015 PETITION FOR HISTORICAL MARKER FOR THE COFFER AND PEARSON FAMILIES BY THE BURKE/WEST SPRINGFIELD SENIOR CENTER WITHOUT WALLS (BWSSCWoW)

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<http://fairfaxstories.sharepoint.com/Documents/140704CofferHomeHistoricMarkerProposalwithDocumentation.pdf>

COFFER AND PEARSON FAMILIES (Burke Centre Library)
Near Burke Centre Library is the 1728 land grant by Lord Fairfax to the Coffey family, prominent early settlers in the Burke area. Thomas Withers Coffey (ca 1713 – 1781) was Vestryman of Truro Parish with George Washington and George Mason. His son Francis Coffey III (ca 1748 – 1817) helped establish Providence (now Fairfax City). His grandsons Thomas Coffey (ca 1770 - 1859) served as Captain in the War of 1812 and Francis Coffey IV (ca 1783 – 1861) willed his land and freedom to five slaves on the eve of the Civil War. The emancipated Pearson Family became leaders of the Burke black community for many years, donating land and labor for the Little Zion Baptist Church, Cemetery, and the Pearson Colored School.

The Coffey Family and The Two Black Communities of Burke, Virginia:

- 1. Francis Coffey IV (ca 1783 – 1861)** in a will dated 30 March 1861 provided for emancipation, along with 374 acres of his land, to the slave woman Phyllis Pearson and her four sons – William, John, Charles, and Joshua. William Pearson testified to the Southern Claims Commission in 1871 that “Coffey was a white man who recognized him and his brothers as his children.” John Pearson donated land on **Burke Lake Road** on which Little Zion Baptist Church was founded in 1891; it has grown into the Greater Little Zion Baptist Church. He donated land in 1874 for the Pearson Colored School that operated until 1945. The Pearson family helped build/maintain church/cemetery/schoolhouse. Edgewater (residence of Corazon Foley) was once part of property owned by Francis Coffey IV.
- 2. Hulda V. Coffey (ca 1840 – 1903)** sold 37 acres of land on the **Zion Drive** area to David R. Pinn in January 1887 (remarkable for that was a time when many freed blacks were being denied access to land ownership). David R. Pinn donated land for a cemetery and Little Bethel Church that later joined with Greater Little Zion Baptist Church. The property in 1973 was granted to Sideburn Community Association that leased it to Fairfax County’s David R. Pinn Community Center – the headquarters of the Burke/West Springfield Senior Center Without Walls (BWSSCWoW) since 2009. Hulda V. Coffey’s husband, Joshua Coffey (ca 1814 – 1862) died in Richmond as a prisoner of the Confederates during the Civil War.
- 3. Reverend Lewis Henry Bailey (ca 1842 – 1936)** was the Founding Pastor of Little Zion Baptist Church from 1891 – 1931. He was born in Dranesville and was sold and sent to Texas from the Franklin and Armfield Slave Office (1315 Duke Street) now renamed The Slave Pen Freedom House and dedicated to Reverend Bailey’s Honor. After the Civil War, he WALKED from Texas back to Alexandria where he found his mother. He learned to read and write and was a founding preacher for five churches that remain active today, including the Little Zion Baptist Church.
- 4. Jennie Dean (ca 1852 – 1913)** was Reverend Bailey’s sister-in-law and was Manassas’ “Woman of the Century” for having founded the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth in 1894 that served over 6,500 black students (**many from Burke, VA**). Those black students were from northern Virginia counties, including Fairfax County that refused to build a high school for black students until after the May 17, 1954 Supreme Court decision in “Brown v. Board of Education.” Fairfax County did not integrate its schools until 1965.

