

2004 Evaluation of St. Louis Historic District

The St. Louis Historic District (053-5099) in Loudoun County was identified in 2004 and recommended eligible for the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) by the Evaluation Committee of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). The historic district was recommended eligible under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: African American and Criterion C in the area of Architecture, with a period of significance of c. 1870-c. 1955.

At its meeting in March 2005, the State Review Board (SRB) recommended that the historic district is eligible for the VLR and NRHP. SRB member Warren Hofstra suggested that a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPD) for Loudoun County's historic African American communities "would allow for a more integrated interpretation and better draw public attention to an important historic resource in the region."

Current Evaluation of St. Louis Historic District

An MPD often is a useful tool for preservation planning and for streamlining nominations of historically or thematically related resource types. It is a common misconception that an MPD allows for the listing of a property that could not, on its own, meet VLR/NRHP eligibility criteria. In fact, each individual property, site, structure, object, or historic district that is nominated under an MPD must be eligible for the VLR and NRHP in its own right.

Because a considerable body of research on historic African American communities has accumulated over the past twenty years, and preservationists' collective understanding of these historic places has advanced, as of this writing, *an MPD is not recommended as necessary* for the St. Louis Historic District to be nominated successfully to the VLR and NRHP.

Since 2004, a greater understanding of the significance of post-World War II architectural resources and historic trends and activities has also led preservationists to re-evaluate resources, such as the Ranch and Cape Cod dwellings found in St. Louis, as contributing to African American historic districts.

The historic district originally was surveyed in 2002 and a Preliminary Form for its VLR/NRHP eligibility was prepared in 2004. Since then, the previously recorded historic-age resources within the district were resurveyed in 2023. A proposed boundary increase for the historic district was submitted to DHR in 2020. The area included a historic road trace, a cemetery, and two house sites. DHR staff recommended that the area be included in the historic district. The proposed boundary change was not evaluated by the SRB because the SRB does not typically weigh in on historic district boundaries, but rather, focus on a property's VLR/NRHP eligibility.

Field survey in May 2026 documented that the St. Louis Historic District is experiencing pressure associated with suburban sprawl development in rural Loudoun County. Newer architectural resources are adjacent to multiple parts of the district's boundary, and some lots on the edges of the district have new construction. Consequently, CPG recommends careful **reconsideration of the boundary** to remove resources that are noncontributing from the district. Concerning noncontributing resources that postdate a district's period of significance, National Park Service guidance is to exclude from the boundary such resources that are located at district edges. Newer infill construction within the district is residential, and the resources are compatible with the overall scale, massing, setbacks, setting, and streetscapes that characterize St. Louis. The district boundary as it is currently mapped in VCRIS is attached here. A second map, entitled Preliminary Survey Findings, shows the locations of resources and their construction date by decade, based on online Loudoun County GIS data. Resources that postdate 1989 that are on the edges of the district boundary are proposed to be removed from the boundary. Resources constructed up to 1989 are at historic age or will be within thirteen years, and their retention within the boundary is anticipated to facilitate ongoing preservation planning for the district as a whole.

Field surveyors noted three resources where an existing historic building was engulfed by much more recent additions, and where possible, these resources are recommended to be excluded from the boundary. The locations of these three resources are identified on the attached map entitled Preliminary Survey Findings.

Finally, a major addition to Banneker Elementary School is currently underway. The addition is located on the rear elevation of the historic-age, contributing building, preserving the visibility of its original form, massing, and footprint. Because of the addition's placement and its purpose to continue use of the resource as a public elementary school, the building is recommended to continue to contribute to the historic district.

Based on the historical information currently available about the St. Louis Historic District, CPG recommends that the district is **locally significant** under **Criterion A** in the areas of **Ethnic Heritage: Black, Community Planning & Development, Education, and Social History**. Eligibility under **Criterion C** in the area of **Architecture** is also applicable because St. Louis is a representative example of a rural, African American community founded during the Reconstruction Era and continuously occupied since then, and therefore, is representative of a type, period, and methods of construction that are distinctive to such communities. Finally, the historic district is recommended to be **locally significant** under **Criterion D** in the area of **Archaeology: Non-Aboriginal: Historic**. The historic district's **period of significance** is recommended to be **1876-c. 1968**, beginning with the acquisition of the 17.5-acre Hibbs tract by the Howards, Nancy Corbin, and Edith Jackson, and ending with the desegregation of Loudoun County's public schools, which represented a sea change in the

dissolution of legally mandated racial segregation in Loudoun County. Research conducted during the course of this project may lead to changes in the start and end dates for the district's period of significance.

Historical Overview

St. Louis was founded by Emancipated people during the 1870s. William H. and Sallie Benton sold several parcels of land to Wormley Hughes (DB 6W:461) and to Garner Peters (DB 6R:434) and others. Benton was a well-known builder whose work included Oak Hill and Huntland. It is not currently known if Bentley enslaved Hughes and/or Peters. At least some of the Emancipated people who settled in St. Louis appear to have been enslaved by William Seaton. In 1876, Seaton purchased approximately 17.5 acres of land from William Hibbs, then sold the tract to Charles H. Howard, Theodore Howard, Waneford (Winfield) Howard, Joseph B. Howard, Nancy Corbin, and Edith Jackson less than two weeks later. In rural Virginia during the Reconstruction Era, Emancipated people often pooled resources to purchase as much land as they could, then subdivided it among themselves, thus creating small communities where they could establish community institutions such as a church, cemetery, and public school. Loudoun County was home to approximately 32 rural Reconstruction Era communities. Many of these persisted into the late 20th century, overcoming obstacles imposed by the Jim Crow era of segregation and benefitting from the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, such rural communities are increasingly threatened by suburban sprawl, infrastructure projects, and redevelopment.

Architectural Overview

When evaluated in 2004, the St. Louis Historic District encompassed approximately 91 acres near where Hamlin School Lane, Snake Hill Road (Route 714), and Training Center Lane intersect with St. Louis Road (Route 611). In 2021, tax parcel 72-10-1, consisting of approximately 10 acres, was added to the proposed boundary for the historic district. The district included approximately 30 buildings in 2004, the majority of which dated to the early 20th century. In addition to residential dwellings and outbuildings, four significant community resources were extant: a church, a former store, and two schoolhouses. Mt. Zion Baptist Church, located on Snake Hill Road, was completed in 1893 and expanded with a one-story addition in 1929 and a second addition in 1957. The former store was recorded at 35285 Snake Hill Road (053-5099-0009) as a representative example of a rural, turn-of-the-20th-century commercial building. The former St. Louis School (053-5099-0006), at 35430 Hamlin School Lane, has been

converted to residential use. The Modern Movement, brick, one-story Benjamin Banneker School (053-5099-0010) at 35231 Snake Hill Road was constructed in 1948 (Figure 1). St. Louis continued to grow during the 1950s and 1960s, and a number of late-20th century Ranch and Cape Cod dwellings were noted within the district. As noted above, professional understanding of such resources within a rural African American community has advanced since 2004, and such resources that retain integrity are now generally considered contributing to these communities.



Figure 1. Banneker Elementary School, constructed in 1948 (Image Source: Loudoun County Department of Planning & Zoning).

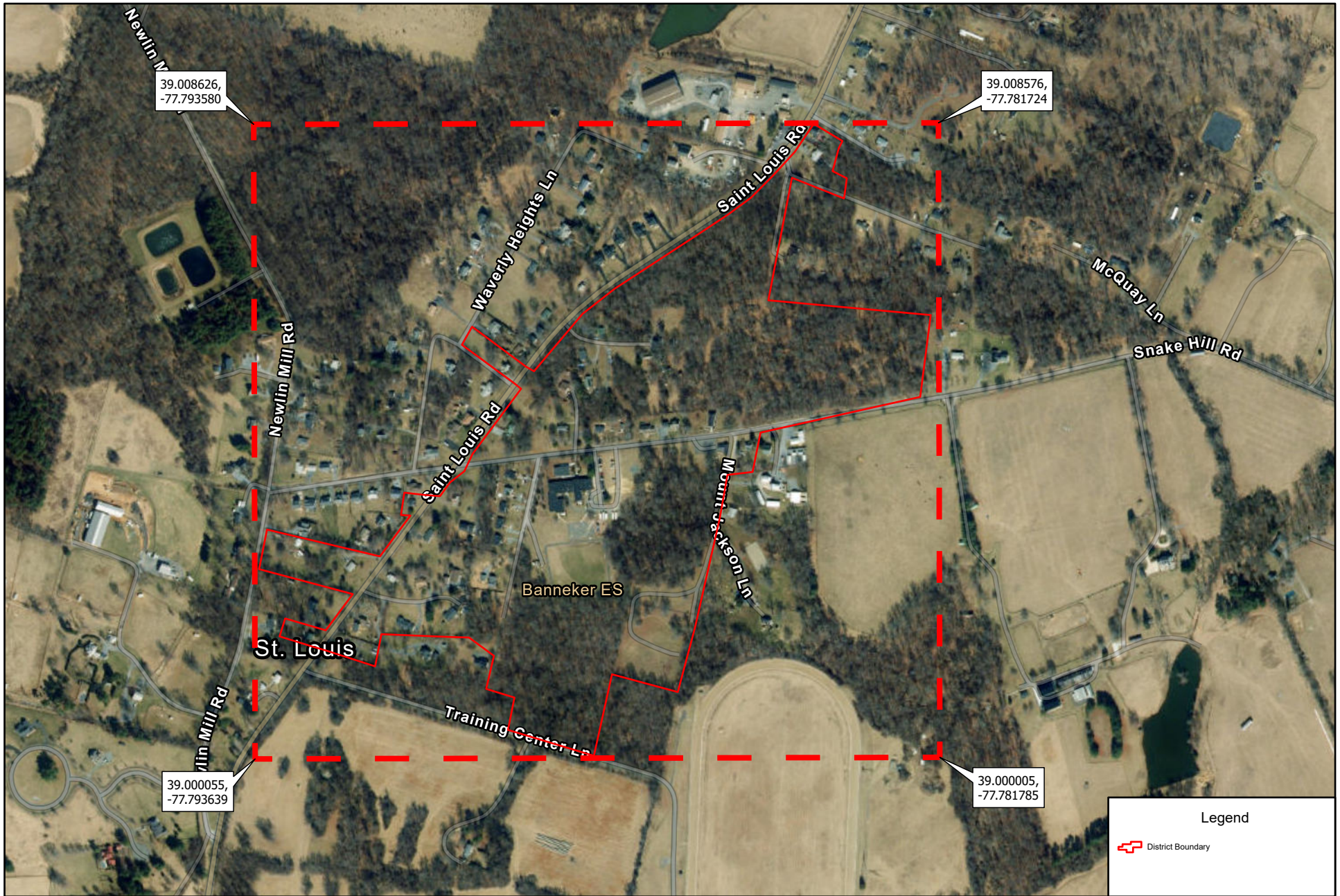
Archaeological Overview

Within the historic district, parcel 72-10-1 includes a large cemetery, two home sites, and a historic road. This property was one of the earliest acquisitions of land in the present-day village of St. Louis, having been purchased by members of the Howard family (and related families), Emancipated people who had formerly been enslaved by William Seaton. Shortly after acquiring the land, the Howards built two houses on this property (and a third nearby, outside of this parcel), established a cemetery, and contributed to the overall development of the village. The Robinson-Howard Cemetery is the historic burial ground of Emancipated people and their descendants, and was in active use between c. 1870 and c. 1940. Due to the parcel's importance for its role in the development of the Reconstruction Era village of St. Louis, which eventually became one of the largest African-American communities in Loudoun County, it was added to the district's boundary in 2020. The property remained in the hands of the Howard family from 1876 until it was sold in 2017.

Sites 44LD2038 and 44LD1278 are within the district's boundaries. In 2023, Site 44LD2038, a dwelling site, was recommended eligible for the VLR and NRHP under Criteria A and D in a report prepared for Loudoun County's Department of Planning & Zoning. A total of 113 artifacts were recovered during Phase IB field investigations, all late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century in date and related to Site 44LD2038. "Four features were identified or reidentified, including a standing stone chimney, a cellar, a foundation wall, and a stone fence."¹ Site 44LD1278 has not been evaluated for eligibility as of this writing.

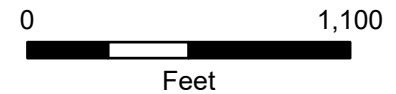
¹ Colleen Betti and Samantha Mathias, *Phase IB Cultural Resource Survey of the Banneker Elementary School Project in Loudoun County, Virginia*, prepared by Dovetail Cultural Resources Group, prepared for TNT Environmental, Inc., October 2023, p. 41-42.

To address the historic district's research information potential under Criterion D in the area of Archaeology: Historic: Non-Aboriginal, the nomination for the Howardsville Historic District will include a set of research questions relevant to the general post-Emancipation context will be drafted. This research design can also be used to guide future collection and research of archaeological data.



Location Map

St. Louis Historic District (053-5099)
St. Louis, Loudoun County, Virginia
2026





Sketch Map

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