

# HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

## Happy Hill

Alder Street

The origins of Happy Hill date back to the early 19th century, to Dr. Friedrich Heinrich Schumann, a physician living in Bethania. In the fall of 1813, Dr. Schumann asked the Moravian Church's permission to move to Salem and serve as a town doctor. The Church was amenable to the move, but was unhappy that Dr. Schumann kept slaves. Eventually Dr. Schumann and the Church finally came to an agreement, whereby Schumann could keep his slaves.

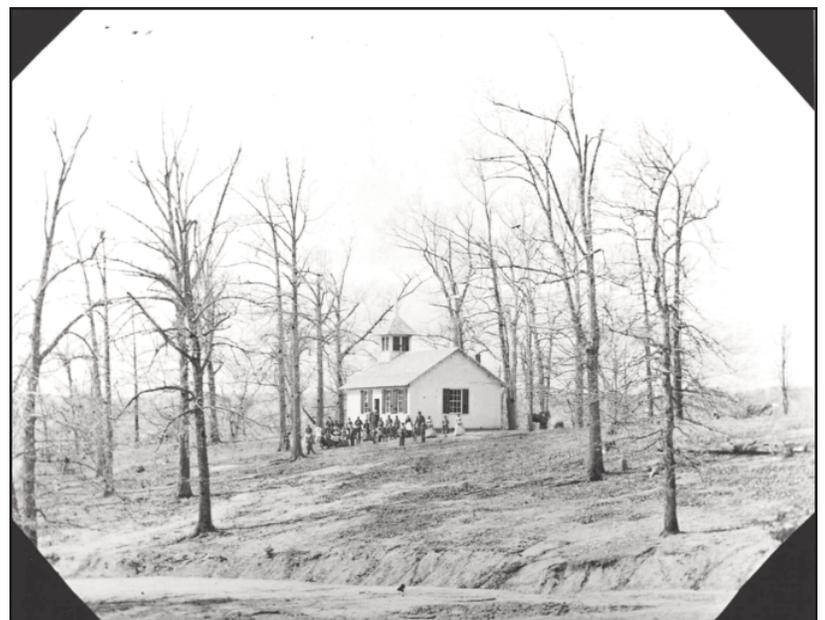
However, to do so, he would have to live on plantation land south of Salem, across Salem Creek. Dr. Schumann's time at Salem was spent basically as a thorn in the side of the Church. He continually wanted to expand the size of the plantation; he often cleared land without permission and extended his activities across borderlines. In 1836, Dr. Schumann decided to free his slaves and allow them passage to Liberia, in west Africa, an action the Church approved. Eventually Schumann and his family moved out and the Schumann House stood vacant for many years. The house was demolished in 1940.



*Happy Hill settlement*  
Courtesy of Old Salem Museums and Gardens



Prior to establishment of the neighborhood, the African-American community started its own school in 1867 on the plantation site. It was formed with the help of the Friends (Quakers) Association for Relief of Colored Freedmen. Land for the school had been given to the Association by the Salem Board of Trustees. The school, long demolished, is significant because of its early date and because of what it reveals about the initiative and ambitions of the African-American community so soon



*African-American school near Salem, built 1867*  
Courtesy of Old Salem Museums and Gardens



dollars each. African-American freedmen were denied the ability to build within Salem limits, but eventually a compromise was reached that would allow freedmen to settle on the outskirts of the town in what is today Happy Hill. By 1874, construction was already occurring. Throughout its early history, the neighborhood was known as both Happy Hill and Liberia; early maps show both names. However, the name Happy Hill began to be the sole name used for the neighborhood during the first years of the 20th century. It is unclear exactly why, when, or how Happy Hill got its name.

Around the turn of the 20th century, the Happy Hill neighborhood began to experience changes. In 1892 the school moved to a new location on N. Liberty Street downtown. Meanwhile, the neighborhood of Liberia, or Happy Hill, continued to thrive through the 1920s. Several churches were located in the neighborhood; the Happy Hill Cemetery remains today as a significant historic resource in the neighborhood. Early 20th century maps also show a theatre and dance hall in the neighborhood as well as many residences.

after the Civil War. It is also a key component to the establishment of the Happy Hill neighborhood. In 1860, 90% of the slaves in the South were illiterate.

After the Civil War, there was a strong desire by the freed people to obtain an education. From 1831 to 1865, state law had prohibited education for slaves. The law did not prohibit education for free African-Americans, yet the lack of funds and opportunity often had the same effect. Although that law was revoked in 1865, white racial attitudes toward African-Americans after Emancipation continued to limit their educational opportunities. Many members of Salem's white community did not want their former slaves to live in town. Therefore, the location for the school and later, the Happy Hill neighborhood was acceptable because it was "across the creek" and outside of town.

Happy Hill is the city's earliest outlying neighborhood, recorded in Moravian records as "Liberia" starting in 1872 when streets and lots were laid out on the former Schumann plantation site. The initial plat laid out 38 lots, each measuring 100 by 200 feet and which sold for ten

Many residents of Happy Hill worked at Salem College, just across Salem Creek, as maids, cooks, janitors, and gardeners, as well as at R.J. Reynolds and other tobacco factories. Because there was no bridge access to the neighborhood, the residents placed rocks in the creek to form a crossing, creating the only access to the college or anywhere else in town. Around 1936, a metal foot-bridge was placed across the creek on the Liberia Street right-of-way.

During the 1950s, the City of Winston-Salem's first public housing development was created in Happy Hill. Approximately half of the houses in the neighborhood were demolished to make way for the housing development. Through the ensuing years, a majority of the remaining buildings have been razed. However, there has been a degree of new single-family residential housing constructed in recent years and the public housing development has been completely rebuilt as a mixed-income residential community.

**WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

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<http://www.kenilworthmedia.com/cv/ourstate/salem.html>



This information is also available  
at the Forsyth County  
Historic Resources Commission's web site:  
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>