The Brothers’ Spring and The African School

As early as 1821, the Brothers’ Spring, also known as the Brethren’s Spring, was documented by the Moravian botanist Rev. Lewis de Schweinitz. In the early 20th century, the spring served as a recreational and ecological resource for both the Moravian community and African-American community nearby. By the late 20th century, the spring became forgotten and lost in overgrown vegetation.

The Brothers’ Spring was an important resting place, a resource for clean water, and an overnight camp for travelers and visitors coming to Salem. It was also a campsite for military units during the Colonial period, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Accounts in the late 19th century state the spring also served as a “charming resort” made by the young Moravian men and boys in 1848.

Important botanical characteristics can be noted about the spring. Today, the spring serves as a resource for large hardwood trees and a wetland habitat for a variety of birds, mammals, and reptiles. The spring was rediscovered and determined to be healthy in April of 2013 by Old Salem Archaeologist, Dr. M.O. Hartley and his wife, Martha Hartley, Director of Research in the Restoration Division.

Near the spring, the Salem Congregation granted land to the Freedmen of Salem for the African School in 1867. The Freedmen originally planned to purchase a barn built by W. Winkler and convert it into a schoolhouse. However, Salem Congregation Board of Trustees determined that if enough funds were raised, then the Congregation would grant the Freedmen land to build a new schoolhouse instead. The African School was constructed south of the spring on a hill, east of Waughtown Road (Street), in an area known today as Happy Hill. The conditions on granting the land included that the building was solely to be used as a school and that the Congregation maintain ownership of the land. The school included both white and black teachers throughout its existence.