

# Holsey Road and Its Families

## History of a Road

The story goes that Holsey Road was first settled in the early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by families formerly enslaved by Asbury Mullinix at his plantation on nearby Long Corner Road near the Howard County line. The road may have originated as an unnamed path leading to the plantation. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was an unimproved road connecting to Brown Church Road to the north and from there across the Patuxent River. These connections were lost by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Mullinix Plantation from James Rada, Jr., Exploring Forgotten History, Frederick County's (Md.) Last Slave, part 1, June 15, 2015 and part 2, June 21, 2015*

Census records show free African-American families living in the area by 1850, including Richard and Mahala Holsey and their children, and the families of Nace Magruder, and Edward Welsh. Remnants of this early settlement are found in the Inez McAbee House on Holsey Road, one of its earliest dwellings, perhaps with roots dating to the 1830s or earlier. Tradition holds that this dwelling was built on land conveyed in 1835 to John Holsey, a Black farmer, by the Mullinix family. Nearly two dozen free African Americans and former slaves and their descendants eventually settled in the vicinity of what would become Holsey Road.

Many of those living there were farmers, but a wide variety of trades were represented such as carpenters, stone masons, black smiths, and domestics.

Holsey Road is associated with the community of Friendship, which includes the Friendship United Methodist Church and Cemetery, first built in the 1880s. Burials

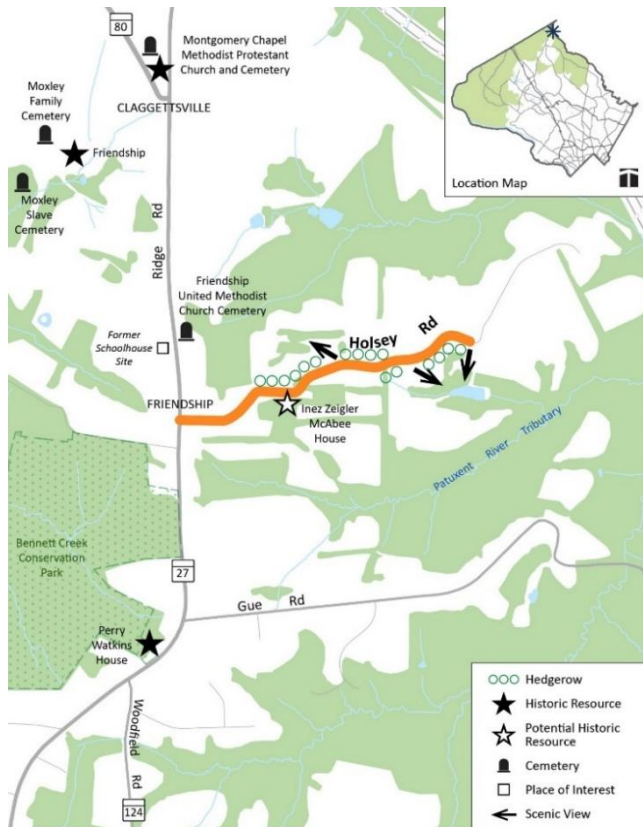
here date back to 1885 and include members of the Holsey family and other early settlers. The community was named for nearby Friendship Farm, home to many generations of the Moxley family. The Moxley property contains separate burial grounds for the Moxley family and those held in bondage on the property (see map below).

In 1958 the Park and Planning Commission named this path Bellison Road, but due to the determination of the African Americans who lived on this road, they

were successful in petitioning to have the road renamed Holsey Road after the Holsey family who first called the unnamed path home.

Today, Holsey Road is a mix of residential and commercial buildings. The gentle twisting road is narrow, 14-17 feet in most areas, with no center or edge markings.

Holsey Road has recently been recommended for designation as a Rustic Road.



*Holsey Road looking east*



*Holsey Road looking west*

## The House that Started a Community



The house that gave birth to a community was built by 1830, possibly as early as 1811. It may have been built by slaves to be used as a slave cabin. It was deeded to John Holsey around 1835 and has been in continuous use by his descendants.

Inez McAbee was born in 1914 in Damascus Maryland and married Alexander McAbee from Laytonsville, Md. They purchased the home in 1945 from Hattie Holsey the granddaughter of John Holsey. The McAbee's raised four children in the house and owned the house until the death of Inez in 2014 at the age of 99.

The structure of Mrs. McAbee home hasn't changed from the original diagram that was designed in the late 1700, but upgrades has been added to the windows, cement patio porch and roof. The home has the original two entrances that leads into the first level and a third entrance that leads to the basement were the original logs that were installed by slaves support the



*McAbee House Today*

current structure for this dwelling. One room was added to the structure in the early 1970's to accommodate a down stairs bath and living room. The home once resided two hundred yards from its current location and was moved during the early 1900's to Holsey Road after John purchased the home from the Mullinix Family. The first roof was made of tin and the McAbee's upgraded the roof to meet current standards. The age of the logs that support the home can be viewed by an opening in the ceiling in the basement. This home has been in the Holsey family since deeded to John Holsey. Inez McAbee is the great- great-granddaughter of John Holsey.



## Friendship Farm

We all know that early in Maryland's history, many large land patents were granted by the Lords Baltimore to encourage settlement within the area. One such grant of 1,575 acres went to Captain Henry Ridgely in 1760, fourteen years before Matthew Pigman obtained his grant for Pleasant Plains of Damascus. Captain Ridgely became one of the largest land owners in what was to become Montgomery County, eventually amassing more than 3,000 acres in what was known as the Sugarloaf Hundred. Typical of most large land owners of the day, Captain Ridgely never lived on his land. He lived in Annapolis at the time and would not have subjected his family to the rigors of building a home in what would have been the back woods.

Captain Ridgely chose "Friendship" as the name for his newly acquired land (Claggettsville would eventually be formed from a portion of Friendship). Captain Ridgely quickly began selling his new land. By 1761 Richard Reynolds had purchased a portion and almost immediately sold 300 acres to James Norwood who settled on the land to farm and set down roots. In 1795 Nehemiah Moxley purchased a portion of the land from Norwood's son and married Norwood's



daughter. Again, Mr. Moxley never lived on his land but his sons did. His son William established a farm which he called Friendship Farm located on the west side of Kemptown Road at its junction with Ridge Road (then known as Bucey's Road). (Deed BS 1-521).

*Friendship Farm*

*(from Upper Patuxant Area Historic Resources)*

A small piece of this land in the pines behind the Welsh farm was donated by the Moxley family to the local African-American community (free and slave) to build the original Friendship church. The year was around 1850 and the church members used lumber from the surrounding pine trees to build the church,

including the pews. The Taylor, Welsh, Hosley, Gaither, Gray, Zeigler, Potts, Lyles and Donnally families made up the original congregation of Friendship Church. The first two pastors were Reverend Benjamin Brown and Reverend Bradley Johnson.

### Friendship Church was Central to the Black Community

As the African-American community grew, possibly due to the end of slavery, the congregation outgrew the original church and a larger place was needed. In 1881 John H. Clagget deeded the land where the current church is now located to the Trustees who were Samuel B.F. Welsh, Greenberry J. Holsey, John W. Holsey, William H. Fisher, and Washington Bowie. Family members of those original trustees lived in the community and some continue to attend the church. The corner stone of the current church bears the date 1901. It took the members 20 years to clear the land and slowly gather the resources to complete the new church.



Just like the rest of Montgomery County, Damascus was segregated until the 1950s and the church became the primary source of fellowship and entertainment. Picnics, dinners, social gatherings, Tom Thumb weddings, plays, box dinners, and music were occasions to come together and enjoy the company of friends and neighbors. Many who attended the church were related by blood or by marriage and church events became family affairs. Holsey Road and

Friendship Church became their refuge: the place where they were nurtured and sustained by their people.

Many changes to the church have occurred over the years. The church was first built next to the road, it was moved back to its present location in 1942 and a basement was added. A small community hall stands next to the main building. In

1963 the church caught fire and the roof (originally tin) was damaged. When the church was rebuilt, the roof was lowered.

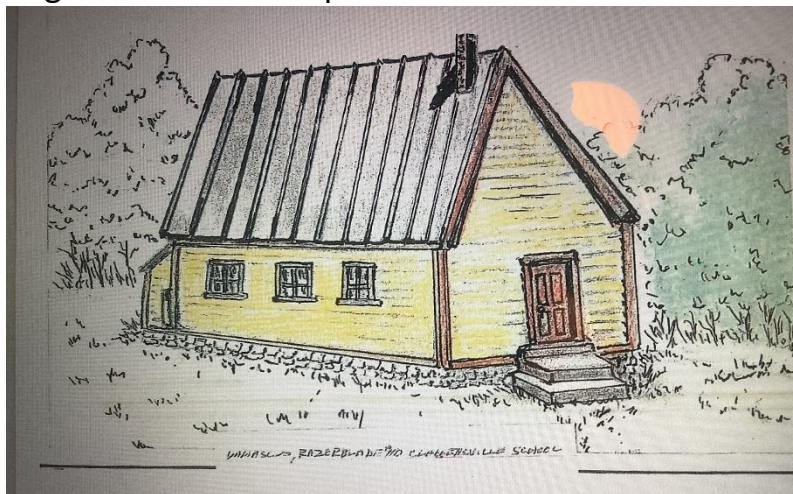
The church's graveyard has seen many additions but still visible are headstones bearing such names as Potts, Holsey, Lyles, Zeigler and Gaither, representing the families who attended and supported the church in its early days.

The once large congregation has dwindled over the years as we have seen in many houses of worship but the fellowship remains strong. The spirit of helping others still exists and its strong ties are evident at special events such as their annual barbeque and homecoming.

## Education

Black property owners including those living in and around Holsey Road paid taxes to support schools that could only be attended by white students.

In 1872, the Maryland State Legislature ruled that one school in each election district must be open for black children. Education for many black students began in a church or private home before a school house was built. This was



likely the case for the children living on Holsey Road who may have first attended school in the home of John Holsey and later at Friendship Church. A one-room school was not built until 1884, although the appointment of a teacher was listed in 1880.

*Drawing by Nathan Orem*

Some in the community referred to the school as Razor Blade, but it was also known as Clagettville or Damascus. It was located north of Damascus, opposite and a little south of Friendship United Methodist Church on what is Route 27 today. The building is no longer standing, but Nathan Orem was able to draw a picture from memory (above).



Black schools were poorly funded, resulting in shorter school years, frequent temporary closings, limited supplies including used and often unusable school books.



The school closed permanently in 1939 and the students went to Laytonsville school which became a consolidated school taking in Damascus, Etchison, Purdum, and Unity. The old Damascus schoolhouse and lot were sold to Clark Hagar, January 9, 1940.

*Laytonsville 1924 from Buglass's "The Segregated Schools of Mont. Co."*

The first high school for black children didn't open until 1927, a two-room school in Rockville called Rockville Colored High School. Lincoln High School on North Stone Street Avenue in Rockville opened in 1935 followed by Carver High in 1950. Although a bus became available to transport students to the high school, many students living on Holsey Road made other arrangements because the bus ride was long. Some like Inez Zeigler, arranged to work for a white family in Rockville in return for room and board and a small stipend. The separate but equal policy of education ended in 1954, but schools weren't fully integrated until 1961.

### Clagetsville 1930



*Photo provided by Harvey Zeigler*

**Row 1, L to R:** Thomas Biggus, Alfred Lyles, Doris Holsey, Frances Lyles, Ulysses Lyles, Harvey Zeigler

**Row 2, L to R:** Preston Dorsey, Cramer Brown, Fannie Biggus, Lottie Lyles, Sarah Flemings, Woodrow Carter, Paul Dorsey, Marlyn Drew, teacher extreme right

**Row 3, L to R:** Edwin Zeigler, Helen Biggus, Arthur Jackson, Bernard Holsey, Preston Gaither

**Row 4, L to R:** Inez Zeigler, Sarah Zeigler, Helen Jackson, Mary Carter

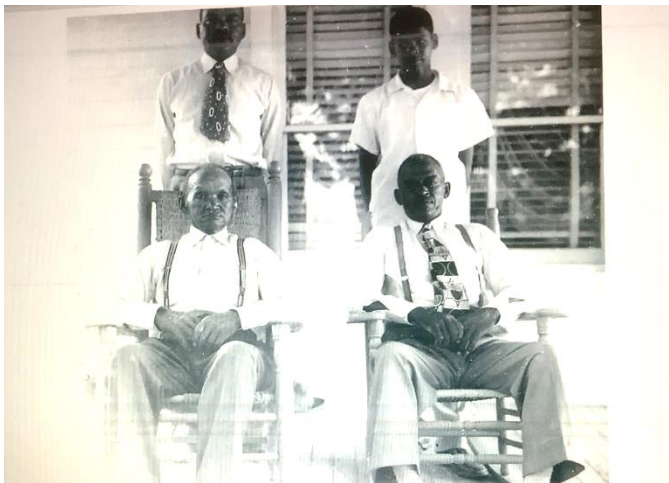
## Early Residents of Holsey Road

**John Richard Holsey** was born into slavery in 1814 on the Mullinix Plantation. The Asbury Mullinix farm/plantation was located off Long Corner Road in Damascus. It was part of a small community called Mullinix Mill.

Asbury Mullinix was born in 1810 on Windsor Forest in Howard then Ann Arundel County. Asbury was married to Elizabeth Fleming. He was very wealthy and owned a large amount of property and slaves in Montgomery County. By the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedule, he owned seven and nine slaves respectively. He died Oct. 21, 1884.

In 1835 Asbury Mullinix gifted his ex-slave, John Holsey a parcel of land containing what was probably a slave cabin built about 1811. This was the beginning of what became an African American Community along an old cow path that is now known as Holsey Road. The Holsey family was recognized as the first free black family in the Damascus area. Generations of Holsey's lived on Holsey Road, owned their homes, built churches, schools, and served the community as midwives, teachers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and cobblers.

Four generations of Holsey men were alive in 1956. Each marriage produced a single male offspring. John Holsey was born May 14, 1875, near Clagettsville. He was a life-long farmer on a small tract near Damascus on Holsey Road. John's son Linwood, born July 30, 1898 worked with his father as well as farming his own two



acres near Damascus. Bernard Holsey was born to John on July 13, 1921. After attending Maryland State Land Grant College and doing some farming, Bernard became a teacher at Carver High School. Bernard's son Ronald, was born on December 21, 1943 and graduated from Lincoln High School in 1938.

Four generations of Holsey men. The eldest John 82 seated left (1875-1969), next to him is his only son, Linwood, 57 (1898-1983). Standing left is Linwood's sole child, Bernard, 34 (1921-1989). Bernard's only son, Ronald, 12 is standing next to him. *Montgomery Sentinel, July 12, 1956*





**Inez Zeigler McAbee** was born on December 22, 1914, the third of thirteen children of Bertha May Lyles Zeigler and William Ellsworth Zeigler. She was born and raised on Moxley Road near Mullinix Mill Road in a small wooden

shack built by her grandfath Doc Zeigler. Giles Easton and Miles Smith conveyed land to Dock and Sarah Zeigler in 1884.



The family lived near aunts, uncles and other relatives in the African American Community of Moxleyville, also known as Zeigletown, located northwest of Clagetsville on the north side of Moxley Road. These buildings no longer stand. Members of the Zeigler family later moved to Holsey Road in Friendship.

Inez attended elementary school in a segregated one-room school house near Friendship and then went to the segregated high school in Rockville. Because of the long commute and lack of transportation, Inez provided domestic services in exchange for room and board in Rockville. After graduation, Inez met and married Alexander McAbee Jr. (1911-1998) of Laytonsville. They purchased their house on Holsey Road and raised four (4) children there (Rhudell C., Delores, Frederick E., and Eugene A.). Their house on Holsey Road was the original slave cabin that had once belonged to John Holsey, Inez's great great grandfather.



*Alexander and Inez Zeigler McAbee, Jr.*

Inez's father died when she was 10, leaving her mother and the rest of the siblings to fend for themselves during the 20s and 30s when times were tough. Inez was dedicated to fighting for justice and equality, in the Montgomery County schools, the Damascus restaurants, and movie theatres.

For her long history of community service, in 2004 Inez was inducted into the Montgomery County Humanitarian Hall of Fame that honors individuals who have made personal sacrifices in contributing to human and civil rights in Montgomery County. In 2021 the County Executive's Humanitarian of the Year Award was renamed the Inez Zeigler McAbee and William Harvey Zeigler Humanitarian Award to honor a sister and brother's lifetime of dedication.

Inez Zeigler McAbee died on July 24, 2014.



**William Harvey Zeigler** was born on March 4, 1920 and died at age 102 on April 5, 2022. He was the sixth of thirteen children of Ellsworth and Bertha Lyles Zeigler. He was born in the African American Community of Zeiglertown before his family moved to Holsey Road. His father was a musician and farm laborer and his mother was a domestic. He attended a one room Elementary

School in Friendship and graduated from Lincoln High School in Rockville in 1938. Mr. Zeigler's grandfather, Doc Zeigler, escaped slavery in Orangeburg, South Carolina in the 1860s through the Underground Railroad. His grandfather made his way to Damascus, where he helped build Friendship United Methodist, the church Zeigler attended his entire life. Growing up he was not allowed to eat at food counters, sit at the soda fountains, attend theaters, bowling alleys, public schools, doctor's offices or community clubs. What services he did receive came from the back door of these establishments.



On December 8, 1941, a day after Pearl Harbor and the day President Roosevelt declared war, Harvey enlisted in the U. S. Army at Fort George G. Meade, MD. He served as a private first class in the 329th segregated unit and protected supplies that soldiers needed on the front lines of Europe. On D-Day (June 6, 1944), he was a quartermaster at Fort Lee, VA (recently renamed Fort Gregg-Adams) awaiting orders to be shipped overseas. Private Zeigler served in France and England. His overseas tour began on January 7, 1945 and he returned to the United States on September 12, 1945. He received an honorable discharge on November 15, 1945.

When Zeigler returned to Maryland at the age of 25, he began his fight for Civil Rights. He had a glimpse of how different races could work and live together while serving in France and was determined to make improvement in the United States. His fights for equality were many including his work with the NAACP in Montgomery County, where he worked as a youth director to help young African Americans, participated in the March on Washington, and fought for integrated schools, organizations and places of work.

Harvey Zeigler married Bertha Bowins (July 30, 1930 – July 20, 1968). She was the daughter of Ralph and Rachael Bowins of Frederick, MD. They made their home at 9338 Holsey Road (Deed 1747-565) among a community of family and friends. Bertha was active in the Friendship United Methodist Church, Homemaker's Club, and furthering civil rights. The Zeigler marriage produced four (4) daughters, Rose, Zepharra, Sheila, and Keely.



*Bertha Bowins Zeigler*

He received numerous awards for his community service and activism including being inducted in the Montgomery County Human Rights Hall of Fame and having the County Executive's Humanitarian of the Year Award renamed the Inez Zeigler McAbee and William Harvey Zeigler Humanitarian Award to honor a sister and brother's lifetime of dedication and was selected as a Visionary Elder of the National Visionary Leadership Program of Howard University which can be seen at the Library of Congress.



*Zeigler Family*



**Neiper Elishius Lyles** was born on June 22, 1900, the son of Isabelle Steins and William Lyles. He grew up on a farm in Damascus. He enlisted in the U. S. Army in 1917 and was stationed in Des Moines, Iowa where he attended Medical Officer Training Camp before going to France as a Medic. He served in the American Expeditionary Force, Medical Corps, 303 Stevedore Regiment during World War I, receiving an Honorable Discharge on September 9, 1919. After returning home he worked as a farm laborer.



On December 10, 1921 he had a life-threatening accident when his motorcycle collided with a truck and he was thrown over the hood and through the truck's windshield. The accident resulted in permanent injury to his right arm that he had to keep in a sling the rest of his life.



*Grace and Neiper Lyles*

Neiper married Grace Savannah Simms on May 16, 1928. She was the daughter of William and Bessie Woods Simms. In August of that year, the couple purchased a piece of land from William Warthen at 9501 Holsey Road (Deed 464/377) for a farm. At the time it was an unnamed dirt road. The Lyles family lived on Holsey Road, next door to John and Ethel Holsey. Edith Throckmorton, principal of the two-room black school and Irma Crawford the school's first grade teacher rented rooms in the house.

The union of Neiper and Grace Lyles produced the following children: Charles, Mary Ann, Elsie, William, Roberta, Allison, Clara, Gloria, and several who did not survive.



*Charles (seated far left), Mary Ann (seated far right), William, Elsie, Bernice, Roberta (back row left to right)*



*Grace, Neiper and Gloria Lyles*



*Lyles Family*

Neiper Lyles was called “The Mayor of Damascus.” He was a community leader and liaison to the white community, securing jobs for black males. He was an advocate for education and for black families residing in upper Montgomery County working along side a young lawyer named Thurgood Marshall. The Lyles family was the first to have electricity and a phone on Holsey Road He was a trustee for the African American school on Route 27.

Mr. Lyles was a truck farmer and owned a truck he named “Blue Heaven.” It was often referred to as the Holsey Road Taxi as it was often used to make sure the



*Blue Heaven, Holsey Road Taxi*

residents of Holsey Road could get to appointments, stores, jobs, and voting polls. Each year on the Fourth of July, Neiper Lyles, piled all the neighborhood children into the back of his truck and drove them to the Tivoli Theater in Frederick to see a movie.



**Charles T. "Joe" Zeigler** was born on June 2, 1908 in Clagettsville to Samuel and Lyde Frye Zeigler. He married Allie Dorsey from Lewisdale. Allie was born

to Evie M Lyles and William H. Dorsey. Allie attended the African American school in Purdum. Joe and Allie purchased their home at 9330 Holsey Road in 1945 from Elisha and Ethel Warfield (Deed 970/228). Joe spent 20 years as a custodian for

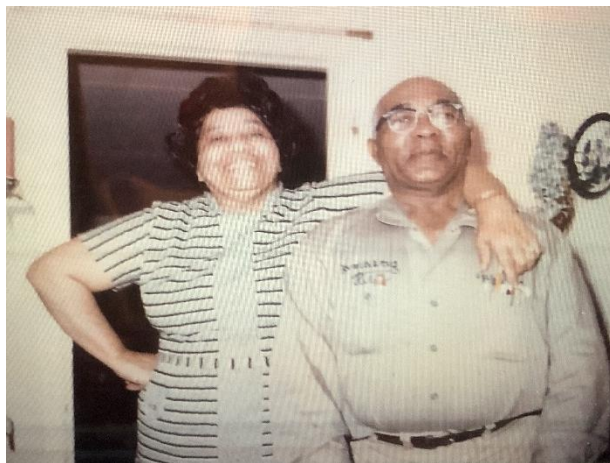


*Allie Elizabeth Dorsey Zeigler*



*9330 Holsey Road Today*

the Damascus High School. After retiring from the Montgomery County School system, he worked as a custodian and grounds maintenance worker for the Farmers and Merchants Bank.



*Allie E. and Charles "Joe" Zeigler*



*John Michael Zeigler*

Together they raised eight (8) children, Nellie, Charles, William, Anna, Evelyn, Joyce, Frances, and John Michael, in the community clustered around Holsey Road. They were members of the Pleasant Grove Christian Community Church.

Joe died on August 24, 1982. Allie sold the residence on Holsey Road in 1988. Allie died on December 14, 2004.



Others who lived on Holsey Road included:

**Forrester B. Butler** lived at 9430 Holsey Road. He was born in 1887 and married Emma Holsey (1890-1980), daughter of John H. Holsey before 1910. No children were listed in any of the census reports. He was a farmer and purchased land from John W. and Catharine Holsey on September 25, 1910 (Deed 216/22) for \$300. Two additional land purchases, both from William E. Warthen were listed for 1922 and 1926. He was a trustee for the African American school on Route 27. Mr. and Mrs. Butler both died in 1980 and are buried in the Friendship United Methodist Church Cemetery on Route 27.

**T. Edward Jones** was a physician in Washington, D.C. He had an office at 1505

**PUBLIC SALE**  
OF  
**PERSONAL PROPERTY & REAL ESTATE**  
Due to the death of my husband, Dr. T. Edward Jones, I, the undersigned will sell at auction on premises located on Holsey Road off Route 27, 1½ miles north of Damascus, Montgomery County, Md., on  
**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1958**  
AT 10:30 A.M.  
**36 — HEAD HOLSTEIN CATTLE — 36**  
28 cows in full flow of milk, 6 heifers about 14 mos. old, and 2 calves. Herd T.B. and Bangs accredited. Health papers will be available.  
**FARM MACHINERY**  
Farmall M tractor, F12 Farmall tractor and cultivators, McC. No. 20-C forage harvester with corn head and sickle bar (1 yr. old), McC. No. 3 blower with pipe for 50' silo (1 yr. old), McC. 3-disc plow, McC. 13-disc tractor drill, McC. heavy disc harrow, 1952 Ford tractor with plows, mower, cultivators and blade, Oliver tractor manure spreader, Oliver corn planter with fertilizer attach and 3 point hitch, cultipacker, 2 springtooth harrows, tractor wood saw, 2-wheel cart, Majonier 200 gal. milk tank, 3 unit McC. milkers, 2 20-gal. hot water heaters, wash tank, wheelbarrow, 2 pr. cow clippers, elec. fence control, forge, drill press, anvil, forks, shovels, and many other articles too numerous to mention, including some household goods.  
FEED—650 bales hay, 100 bales straw and ensilage in silo.  
**REAL ESTATE**  
At 12:30 P.M. I will offer real estate at the above location, consisting of 170 acres, more or less, 130 A. tillable and 40 A. in timber and woodland. Improved with 7-room house with basement and bath, 8-room house with bath, 20-cow Washington type barn, 52'x60' loading barn, 30'x12' silo, small barn, corn house and grainery, meat house and other buildings. This property has 2 streams and a good well and improvements are in excellent condition.  
TERMS—Personal Property will be CASH on day of sale. Real Estate will be \$1,000.00 on date of sale and balance within six months. Deferred payments to bear interest at 6% per annum. All cost of conveyancing, including Federal and State stamps to be paid by purchaser. Taxes to be adjusted to date of sale. For inspection of property contact Mr. W. O. Roberts, Farm Manager. Phone Clearwater 3-2506. JERRY T. WILLIAMS, Clerk  
Damascus, Md.  
**MRS. T. EDWARD JONES, Owner**  
ALBERT S. TABLET, JR., Auctioneer  
Lunch Will Be Served On Premises

12<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. He and his wife, Minerva purchased the property on Holsey Road in 1943 (Deed 923/498) from Charles and Marguerite Buck of Washington, D.C. The property had belonged to Asbury Mullinix and was sold to Grafton Watkins in 1861 (Deed JGH 8-478). Dr. Edward maintained a farm on Holsey Road until his death in 1958. He died in 1958 and his widow, Minerva J., sold cattle, farm equipment, and 170 acres of land (10/2/1958 Sentinel). The 1958 telephone directory has Minerva living at 9036 Holsey Road with William O. Roberts.

## Holsey Road Today

Today, Holsey Road is still considered “rustic”, although many of the small homes originally occupied by the black residents have been replaced by newer, larger homes. The street is still narrow, with many curves, and it lacks street lights for navigating after dark. The traffic on this narrow stretch of road has increased significantly since Neiper Lyles’ “Blue Heaven” was one of the only vehicles on it. It is no longer a community of descendants of slaves, knit together by family ties, racial bias and common beliefs. The Civil Rights Era began the end of many

historically black neighborhoods. Today, few if any black families remain on Holsey Road and the memories of life in the once vibrant community are fading as well. As black communities diversity and splinter, it is important to preserve and cherish the history of the past. The history of Holsey Road is an important part of the history of Damascus and should be preserved for future generations.