

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Aaron Hilton Site
other names/site number VDHR Site No. 44CC356/ File No. 18-246

2. Location

street & number [redacted] not for publication
city or town Charles City vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Charles City code 036 Zip [redacted]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 12/20/96
Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date
Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is: _____ other (explain): _____
 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the _____
National Register Signature of Keeper
 See continuation sheet. Date of Action _____
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Aaron Hilton Site
Charles City County, Virginia

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| <u> 0 </u> | <u> 0 </u> buildings |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 0 </u> sites |
| <u> 0 </u> | <u> 0 </u> structures |
| <u> 0 </u> | <u> 0 </u> objects |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 0 </u> Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

 N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Single dwelling

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: vacant/not in use Sub: _____

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

roof N/A

walls N/A

other

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Archaeology/historic-non-aboriginal
 Ethnic Heritage/Black

Period of Significance ca. 1870-1920

Significant Dates 1870-1877
1920

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation Black Freedman

Architect/Builder unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .138 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|------|----------|----------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 17319890 | 4132550 | 2 | _____ | _____ |
| 3 | _____ | _____ | 4 | _____ | _____ |

See continuation sheet.

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Charles City County, Virginia

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Katherine E. Harbury; Robert L. Jolley; Margaret T. Peters; Keith T. Egloff

Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources date 12/96

street & number: 221 Governor Street telephone (804)786-3143

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Dr. F. E. Howard

street & number P.O. 431 telephone

city or town Providence Forge state VA zip code 23140

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1 Aaron Hilton Site

Charles City, Virginia

Summary Description:

The remains of the Aaron Hilton House Site (44CC356) in the Virginia Tidewater county of Charles City are concentrated on the edge of a wooded knoll [REDACTED]. The most prominent feature that can be seen on the surface of 44CC356 is a brick chimney fall. Test Unit 2, placed on the west edge of the chimney fall, revealed the remains of an intact root cellar. The artifacts recovered during the testing of the site indicate a late 19th- and early 20th-century date of occupation. The absence of a wide variety of vessel shapes and the predominance of undecorated white ware suggest that the occupants were of a low socio-economic standing.

Description (detailed)

Research questions were established before the field investigations were initiated. The research questions can be addressed by data obtained through the archaeological and historical records. Since little was known about the site, the research questions were general in nature: 1) Was the site occupied prior to 1870? 2) Can the length of occupation be determined from limited testing? 3) What can be learned about Aaron Hilton, his background and occupation? And 4) Can the site throw light on the inadequately documented lives of African-Americans in Virginia?

The first stage of fieldwork consisted of shovel testing to define the site boundaries. Thirty-three shovel test units were excavated at 20-foot intervals along six transects. Fifteen shovel tests were positive covering an area measuring approximately 60 feet by 100 feet.

The second stage of fieldwork consisted of the excavation of two larger test units placed on each side of the chimney fall, the most prominent visible feature on the surface of the site. Test Unit 1, placed on the east edge of the chimney fall, revealed the remains of the brick foundation (Figure 2). The brick foundation and an intact root cellar was encountered by Test Unit 2, excavated on the west edge of the chimney fall (Figure 3).

A stone-lined well is about 30 feet east of the chimney fall. A trash or privy pit is located approximately 40 feet northwest of the chimney fall (Figure 1). The site boundary on the west is marked by a line of shrubbery 20 feet west of the chimney fall and running parallel to the existing road. The site extends 40 feet to the east of the chimney fall, to the edge of a borrow pit (Figure 1). The Hilton site is approximately 60 feet east-west and 100 feet north-south.

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Aaron Hilton Site

Charles City, Virginia

A total of 1,280 historic artifacts were recovered from the testing of the Hilton site. A wide assortment of ceramic and glass household containers were identified. Structural nails, bricks, mortar, wood, window glass, and an agate porcelain doorknob were uncovered. Personal artifacts included clothing-related items and one 1917-D penny. A Civil War-era mini-ball, a whetstone, and hardware hint at farm activities. Food remains included animal bones and oyster shell.

The chronically sensitive artifacts recovered from the Hilton site indicate a late-19th and early-20th century date of occupation. The date range is consistent with the historical documentation. Although there was a wide range of ceramic and glass artifacts recovered from the site, the predominance of undecorated white ware suggests a low socio-economic standing.

Masonry vs non-masonry chimneys/foundations have been advanced as possible indicators for ethnicity and socio-economic status of site owners. Studies of masonry (stone, brick or stovepipe) and non-masonry (wooden or cotted) chimneys, as illustrated in photographic collections (N-500) at the Valentine Museum (Richmond), have indicated that 50% (N-8) of the African-American middling class had masonry chimneys. In addition, 70% (N-12) of the low socio-economic class of African-Americans had masonry chimneys. The Hilton site could contribute significantly to this type of study.

Archaeological testing at the Hilton Site demonstrated the length and date of occupation. Furthermore, it demonstrated that the uncovered features and the associated artifacts could shed light on the life of Aaron Hilton and his family and on the inadequately-documented lives of African-Americans in the post-Civil War years. In general, archaeological evidence from a wide selection of African-American sites is desperately needed to complement the existing historic and photographic research.

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Section 8 Page 3 Aaron Hilton Site
Charles City, Virginia

8. Statement of Significance

The Aaron Hilton Site in Charles City County, Virginia, is significant as a rare example of a residential site directly associated with a freedman in the period following the Civil War. The dwelling was constructed between 1870 and 1877 for Aaron Hilton, a former slave of Charles City County's prominent Lewis-Douthat and Selden families. Because written documentation of slave and freedmen's domestic lifestyles is uncommon, the extant papers associated with Aaron Hilton, accompanied by the public records are particularly important. They help to establish the basis and context for understanding the site. The configuration and extant remains confirm contemporary descriptions of houses constructed by freedmen following the war. The site, and its association with the freedman Aaron Hilton and his family, well illustrate the basic premise written at the time by A. Warren Kelsey, a Northerner dispatched to evaluate the resumption of cotton cultivation in the deep South: "The sole ambition of the freedman at the present time appears to be to become the owner of a little piece of land, there to erect a humble home and to dwell in peace and security at his own free will and pleasure.¹ The site is eligible under Criteria D for its potential to provide archaeological information that will document more fully a period in Virginia history which has been neglected--the position of the freedmen in a rural Tidewater county. The Aaron Hilton site includes the remains of the foundation of brick piers, a stone lined well, a chimney fall, an intact root cellar and a trash pit, all of which exhibit an unusual degree of integrity.

Historical Background

An anonymous writer in 1915 described Aaron Hilton as "Uncle Aaron Hilton, colored, one of the landmarks of Charles City County, Virginia. He followed his young master, Robert Selden, through the Civil War, and is naturally proud of it. He is an authority in his county on the care of sheep and the neighboring farmers send to him on all occasions for advice. There is an air about him which suggests his early associations with gentlemen of culture."² According to the 1900 census, Hilton was born a slave in Charles City County in August 1832.³ The plantation records of Fielding Lewis and Eleanor Douthat indicate that Aaron Hilton was "little Aaron," probably son of an older slave named Aaron who was age 36 in 1835.⁴ In 1847-8 Aaron and "little Aaron received blankets from Fielding Lewis, and by 1849, "little Aaron" was sold to William A. Selden.⁵ Aaron Hilton's personal reminiscences ca. 1916 recall "his master was Dr. William Selden," and that he followed "young Robert Selden" to war. In 1877 Aaron Hilton formally purchased his five acres of land.⁶

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Section 8 Page 4 Aaron Hilton Site

Charles City, Virginia

During the period after the Civil War, black freedmen bought small parcels of land from former slave holders with funds earned through sharecropping or contracting out their labor. Charles W. and Martha B. Floyd sold the triangular shaped lot to Hilton in return for Hilton's agreement to build them a tobacco barn valued at \$50. The small parcel had been part of a larger tract known as "Longwood," a name that Aaron Hilton retained. The land tax books for Charles City County describe the Longwood property as adjoined "Mrs. Ex-President Tyler" on the north.⁷

That Aaron Hilton was able to build a barn in return for much sought after land is not unusual. Many former slaves had experience in erecting structures, sheds, fences, etc. for their owners. A telling quote from a freedman near Richmond reveals the extent to which former slaves had those important building skills. "All is equal. I do hear it from de cotehouse [sic] steps . . . Besides, de kitchen ob [sic] the big house is my share. I helped built him [sic.]"⁸

Aaron Hilton, illiterate farmer, was listed as living in Tyler Township in 1870 with assets estimated at \$50 for real estate and \$25 for personal property. It cannot be determined if this is the same five-acre parcel legally acquired seven years later; however, the Census for 1870 shows Aaron, his wife Nelly, 30, and children Nancy, Anthony and Aaron, and a John Whiting residing in Charles City.⁹ The Land tax books for the county do not record any building on the parcel before 1885, probably a reflection of its low assessment. Only in 1910 was the property described in the tax books as being held "free (and clear)," indicating that it was not paid off in full until that year.¹⁰

After his death in 1916 at the age of 83 or 84, the land records do not reveal how the property was passed to his heirs; Aaron Hilton left no will. The 1920 Census does not show his widow or children living in the County. The "Hilton" surname appears in the County records again beginning in the 1930s, but no relevant entries appear until September 26, 1986, when Aaron Hilton and his wife Hattie sold for \$5,000 a triangular-shaped five-acre parcel with general warranty to Farrar W. Howard.¹¹ The Hiltons believed that the parcel was the same that had been sold to Aaron Hilton by the Floyds in 1877.

To understand the significance of identifying a specific freedman's homesite calls for comprehension of the importance of land and home ownership to former slaves in Post-Civil War Virginia. "The home place was a freedman's object," and a house "became a universal goal of a dispersed freed people," according to Edward Magdol, author of *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedman's Community*.¹² The Writers Program in Virginia, writing in the W.P.A.'s *The Negro in Virginia* in 1940 points out that "land ownership to ex-slaves was a most tangible assurance of freedom."¹³ Even more telling, a correspondent writing for the *Nation* after the Civil War described the homes of Negro laborers in some detail, a graphic indication of what Aaron Hilton's house might

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Aaron Hilton Site

Charles City, Virginia

have resembled.

"Not far from such houses (the plantation owners') were usually the cabins of the Negro laborers, huts, frame and boarded in some instance, in some instances built of unhewn logs . . . Very simple architectural rules govern the construction of these dwellings, and a description of one is a description of all. They are about fourteen feet in length and from ten to twelve feet in width. The height from the ridge pole to the ground does not exceed fourteen feet. The chimney, which is always at one of the gable ends of the building, and on the outside of it, sometimes just peers above the roof and sometimes stops a yard or so below it, and vents its smoke against the wall. The dwelling has two windows, unglazed but furnished with a shutter, which is closed when the rain comes, or when the wind is in such a quarter that there is difficulty in persuading the smoke to go up the chimney if there is any interference with the draft from the door. The floor may be of earth, trodden yard, or, as is more common, of boards; and there are also boards laid upon the cross beams which, terminating just below the eaves, separate the lower room from the space immediately under the rafters."

The description goes on to describe the interior room configuration, the fireplace and the furnishings. Such a description coupled with the archaeological evidence of artifacts from the Hilton Site have the potential to provide a valuable picture of African-American housing and life-styles in the Post-Civil War era.¹⁴

A surviving dwelling site associated with a single identified African-American family for a period of at least 90 years is extremely rare. According to the census figures for 1910, only about one-third [33.4%] of Negro homes were owner-occupied in those county in Virginia with the largest percentage of black residents, which include Charles City County. The article citing Aaron Hilton's 1915 interview is exceptional, making this documentation better than most for African-American slave or free black sites in rural areas. The investigations indicate that 44CC356 has substantial integrity, and future research potential for addressing site specific research questions relating to free black life ways--material culture, subsistence patterns and intrasite structures. The site also has the potential to address research questions relating to how late-19th-century free black life ways compare to those of early 19th-century slaves. Although the excavation work of the Hilton Site was limited, it successfully demonstrated that the length and date of occupation could be determined

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from that limited testing. Furthermore, it showed that the site could shed light on the inadequately-documented lives of African Americans from the period. The site and its owners are better documented in historical records than most other known African American rural sites. Its historical documentation coupled with relevant contemporary descriptions make the Aaron Hilton Home Site eligible for nomination under Criteria D for its potential to yield information significant in African American social history.

MTP

Endnotes

1. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: 1988), 109.
2. Anonymous 1915: 225.
3. 1900 U. S. Federal Census: 244.
4. Lewis: 1835: # 29514.
5. Lewis: various, # 29514.
6. Charles City County *Deed Book* 13: 259.
7. Charles City County *Land Tax Books* 1878:12.
8. Leon F. Litwick. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. (New York:1979), 399.
9. 1870 U. S. *Federal Census*: 530.
10. Charles City County *Land Tax Books*, 1885: 12; 1910 U. S. *Federal Census*: 64.
11. Charles City County *Index to Deed Books*: 171.
12. Edward Magdol *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedman's Community*. (Westport, CT: 1990), 13.
13. Workers of the Writers Program of the W. P. A., *The Negro in Virginia*. (New York: 1940), 219.

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- 14 . *Nation*, I: 239 [1865]; quoted in Alrtheus Ambrush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*.
Publications of the University of Virginia, Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Papers, Number Six (1921-23), 104.

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Aaron Hilton Site 44CC356/18-246

Charles City County, Virginia

9. Bibliography

Anonymous: "The Planter's Pride in His Slaves." *William and Mary Quarterly*. Volume 23, No. 4 (1), April 1915.

Bureau of Vital Statistics. Death Certificate of Aaron Hilton, 1916, # 518. Richmond, Virginia.

Charles City County
Deed Books CC
Indexes
Land Tax Books, 1878-1915.
Tax Map, Section 54 (1993)

Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (New York: 1988).

Harbury, Katherine E. and Jolley, Robert L. "Archaeological Investigations at the Hilton Site (44CC356), A report prepared for the Virginia Department of Forestry by the Department of Historic Resources, 1995.

"Hilton 44CC356 Catalogue," Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Lewis, Fielding, *Weyanoke Plantation Charles City County, Records, 1783-1900*. # 29514, Misc. Reel # 547. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

Litwick, Leon. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. (New York: 1979).

Magdol, Edward. *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedman's Community* (Westport, CT: 1990).

Taylor, Alruthus Ambrush. *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*. (Publications of the University of Virginia. Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Papers, Number Six (1921-23).

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Charles City County, Virginia

U. S. Federal Census, 1870-1910. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

Whittenburg, James P. And Coski, John M. *Charles City County Virginia: An Official History*. [Don Mills, Inc.]

Workers of the Writers Program of the W.P.A. *The Negro in Virginia*. (New York, 1940).

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. Located on the edge of a wooded knoll,
[REDACTED]. The wooded vicinity of the site is now
utilized [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Boundary Justification: The boundaries are based on the excavation of positive Shovel Test Units placed at intervals of 20 feet, the site dimensions measure 60' by 100', and include the house site, the trash pit, the well and the root cellar.

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Aaron Hilton Site 44CC356/18-246

Charles City County, Virginia

All photographs are of:
Aaron Hilton Site
Charles City County, Virginia
VDHR Site Nbr. 44CC356/VDHR File Nbr. 18-246
Photographer: Jackie Hernigle
Date: July 3, 1993

All negatives are stored at the Dept. of Historic Resources at 221 Governor St., Richmond, Va.

View of possible chimney fall at the Aaron Hilton Site., 44CC356/18-246; Charles City Co., Va.

Credit: Jackie Hernigle

Photo 1 of 4

View of excavation of possible root cellar/hearth at the Aaron Hilton Site, 44CC356/18-246

Credit: Jackie Heringle

Photo 2 of 4

View of possible root cellar/hearth, Aaron Hilton Site, 44CC356/18-246.

Credit: Jackie Hernigle

Photo 3 of 4

View of the well at the Aaron Hilton Site, 44CC356/18-246

Credit: Jackie Hernigle

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Plan of Site 44CC356.

Figure 2 Plan view and profile of Test Unit 1

Figure 3 Plan view and profile of Test Unit 2