

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

VLR 12/11/2014  
NRHP 02/17/2015

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Newtown Cemetery

Other names/site number: Colored Cemetery; VDHR No. 115-5129

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: Roughly bounded by Kelley Street, Hill Street, Sterling Street, and row of houses along Gay Street

City or town: Harrisonburg State: Virginia County: Independent City

Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide   X   local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

  X   A     B     C     D

Julie V. Sargent 12/20/14  
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official: Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Newtown Cemetery  
Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia  
County and State

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**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

Newtown Cemetery  
Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>1</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>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY: Cemetery

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY: Cemetery

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Newtown Cemetery  
Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia  
County and State

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE: Marble, Granite, Limestone; METAL: Bronze; CONCRETE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Newtown Cemetery, located in northeast Harrisonburg, is a well-tended 3.9-acre lawn cemetery in Newtown, the historic African American neighborhood in the city. The site is the only African-American cemetery in Harrisonburg, and served as a focal point for the emancipated community that was established during Reconstruction on farmland once part of Hilltop Farm (DHR No. 44RM498). It has served the community since 1869. The four parcels that comprise Newtown Cemetery are situated on a northwest-trending slope of the plateau that bounds the city on its eastern side. Individual parcels purchased by Newtown Cemetery Trustees between 1869 and 1920 are divided by now-closed alleys that were connected to major streets in the neighborhood. The cemetery is one block south of the Lucy F. Simms School (DHR No. 115-5035), a Virginia Landmarks Register- and National Register-listed property, and five blocks west of U.S. Route 11. Not associated with a specific church, Newtown Cemetery has continuously served as a place of rest for community members since its origins and contains the burials of over 900 individuals, a number of whom were emancipated slaves. An independent trustee organization has overseen its management since the beginning. A one-story, ten-foot by ten-foot, cinderblock maintenance shed is the only non-contributing building on the site.

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#### Narrative Description

##### Site Evolution

The oldest parcel of the cemetery, purchased in 1869, is found in the northwestern corner by the intersection of Kelley and Sterling streets. This section consists of 0.64 acre. The cemetery increased in size as land and funds became available. Two parcels were purchased in

## Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

the south at different times (1898, 1907), which together cover 1.64 acres. The most recently acquired parcel (1920) is the northeastern part of the cemetery, covering about 1.21 acres. Alleyways bring the total area to 3.9 acres. The deeds for both the 1898 and 1907 sales refer to crops of wheat and barley that would be harvested by the seller, further identifying the parcels as farm land at the edge of town.

### Setting

The nominated property is bounded by three streets – Sterling (western boundary), Kelley (northern boundary), Hill (eastern boundary) – and an unnamed alley (southern boundary). The north section of the cemetery is divided north-south by an extension of Simms Avenue; the south section is bounded on the north by an east-west extension of Effinger Street. The Simms and Effinger graveled and grassed extensions once were alleyways and reflect the development of road infrastructure in Newtown. Both were vacated by the City in 2007, when they became the responsibility of Newtown Cemetery. Hilltop Farm was located one-quarter mile to the northeast, and 1937 aerial imagery of Harrisonburg reveals a farm road that led from what is now Hill Street, directly to this area through farmland.

### Design and Landscape

Newtown Cemetery is an example of a town cemetery and a lawn cemetery, as described in the National Register Bulletin, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*. A town cemetery is one whose “creation and continuity reflect the broad spectrum of the community’s history and culture.” A lawn cemetery “deemphasized monuments in favor of unbroken lawn scenery, or common open space.”<sup>1</sup> The gently sloping site is mostly open space with neatly trimmed grass and is divided into an irregular grid by the former alleys that cross it from east to west and north to south. Trees are clustered in roughly the center of the cemetery while the remainder of the site consists of open space and orderly rows of burials.

Three entrances provide access to the cemetery. The closed alley from Kelley Street (that once was an extension of Simms Avenue) borders the oldest section on the east. The alley that once was the extension of Effinger Street opens to both Hill Street on the east and Sterling Street on the west. The Kelley Street entrance is a concrete curb and gutter opening into the cemetery; it is marked with two concrete-topped non-contributing brick pillars on either side. The gravel and grass alleyway is bounded on both sides by a concrete slab and gutter configuration. Adjoining the cemetery on the eastern side of the alley is a concrete slab sidewalk. Both the alleyway and sidewalk terminate at the intersection with the Effinger Street extension, but the concrete gutter and curb continue west onto the Effinger Street alley. That alley, also graveled, runs the east-west width of the cemetery and is marked by a granite headstone monument at the Hill Street entrance. Reading “Newtown Cemetery Est. 1868,” it was erected in the recent past by community members Gary D. Martin Sr. and Arnold and Mary Washington Martin. The Sterling Street entrance is marked by a pair of cement-topped brick pillars that match those at the Kelley Street entrance.

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

Vegetation found in the cemetery today includes sugar maples, black maples, hackberry, and northern white-cedar, as well as some ornamental plantings. Periwinkle and English ivy are found most commonly in the northwestern and southwestern parcels of the cemetery. A large sugar maple in the southern section has grown around at least one headstone, which may have been placed against the tree by a caretaker after it was dislodged from its base. Names or other markings on the marble stone are not visible.

The agricultural history of the property is seen in the stumps of large trees that are found in the south section running perpendicular to the former extension of Effinger Street, at the point where it intersects the extension of Simms Avenue. Based on historic aerial imagery, these trees followed an old fence marking a parcel boundary. Such imagery also shows trees that were standing in the past and have been since removed from the oldest parcel. A large depression near the corner of Sterling and Kelley Streets most likely represents a tree removal. The 1907 deed for one of the southern parcels stipulates that the new owners would allow the previous owner to chop down and take two locust trees from the property.

A single-story, ten-foot by ten-foot, non-contributing, cinderblock maintenance shed stands near the intersection of the extensions of Simms Avenue and Effinger Street. In good condition, it has wooden gable ends and a galvanized steel roof. This small structure, well-maintained and painted white, is unobtrusive yet easily accessed in this setting.

Organization of Burials

Newtown Cemetery is organized according to sections and rows that are documented in records maintained by the cemetery trustees. On the western side of the cemetery, the sections are aligned with the original parcels (1869, 1898). The eastern side between the Simms Avenue alley and Hill Street is comprised of the two parcels purchased last (1907 and 1920) and is its own section. By tradition, individual and family plots are sold to owners who decide on the style and type of marker. Currently, there are 683 standing headstones and upwards of 120 depressions that may represent unmarked graves. Over 900 individuals are buried in the cemetery. Most headstones are oriented east to face the rising sun.

The oldest dated headstones (mid-1870s) are found in the northwest section. The most recent burials (present day) are largely found in the northeast section. Also in the northeast section, parallel to Hill Street, are several rows of military burials, with veterans from World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, as well as retired military personnel. A non-historic flagpole (non-contributing object) that flies the American flag is found in this section, along with sunken flag holders for military holidays. Contemporary burials primarily occur in the northeast section, where the largest area of unused plots is found.

Headstone styles include tablet (basic, shouldered, domed, and stylized), lectern, capstone (with bronze cap for veterans), and obelisk. The most common materials are marble, granite, and concrete, with some earlier stones made from limestone. Symbolic motifs are both religious symbols in the Christian tradition (cross, crown, Bible, wheat sheath, praying hands,

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

angel, eternal flame, Last Supper) and decorative elements (lilies, ivy, sunrise, leaves, star, flower, leaved branch, geometric design, heart, Mason, draped cloth). More recent graves without headstones still retain the metal identification markers placed by the funeral home. There are no crypts, mausoleums, or historic cemetery furniture such as benches or stools.

What are believed to be unmarked graves have been found in every section of the cemetery but are most prominent in the northwest and southwest sections adjoining Sterling Street. While the depressions vary in width, most conform to the size of at least one grave shaft and fall in line with a row of standing markers. For some, there is a recognizable vegetation change from lawn grass to slightly denser, greener growth overall. At this juncture, it is not known whether these burials ever had markers, or ones that did not last, or ones that fell over and were buried over time by the deposition of eroded soil. At some unmarked sites, probing suggests the presence of a stone lying beneath the soil at varying depths, depending on the location of the depression on the slope.

Family plot markers, the large majority of which are found in the south section, are made of a number of materials, including concrete, iron, marble, granite, and limestone. Some are engraved with surname initials. A few plots are demarcated by low metal pipe or chain fences attached to metal posts in the four corners. Many families have placed granite or marble family markers within the plots.

The members of the Board of Trustees of Newtown Cemetery have been diligent caretakers, retaining the integrity of the place and the organization. For almost 150 years – from Reconstruction through the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras until today – the Trustees, who were recognized as caretakers in the first deed, have shepherded the cemetery, maintaining its central role in the Newtown Community.

Significant historical local and regional figures are buried here: Lucy F. Simms, Ulysses G. Wilson, and George Newman, trailblazing African American educators; Roberta Webb, community childcare leader; Elon Rhodes, first African American Harrisonburg City Councilman; and Ambrose Dallard, businessman of the Reconstruction era. The cemetery is known, however, as a place of identity for Harrisonburg's African American community.

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

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## 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 grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



Newtown Cemetery  
Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: AFRICAN AMERICAN

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1869-1964

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1869

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Newtown Cemetery, a historically African American cemetery situated northeast from the downtown area of the City of Harrisonburg, Virginia, is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: African American because of the cemetery's role in the development of Harrisonburg's historically African American community, Newtown. The property meets Criteria Consideration D because its primary significance is derived from association with historic events and patterns of development. The cemetery represents several important elements of the African American experience in Harrisonburg, with a period of significance that begins with its establishment in 1869 during the Reconstruction Era and continues through 1964, representing the traditional fifty-year mark for properties where significant historic activities continue into the recent past. The origins of the cemetery represent the difficulties African Americans in the South had to overcome in the pursuit to establish free communities after the Civil War. Moving from Reconstruction through segregation, the cemetery exemplifies the segregated nature of the Newtown community from the rest of the city. As was typically the case for Southern cities during the era of segregation, the mostly-black community of Newtown was marginalized—literally and figuratively—in its relation to the majority white community of Harrisonburg. Adding to the community's struggle as a minority population during segregation, beginning in the late 1950s and through the early 1960s, city officials initiated urban renewal projects, which razed some dwellings in the Newtown neighborhood and uprooted many residents. While the Newtown Cemetery reflects the hardships of this African American community, it also represents the self-sufficiency and resilience of its members. Buried in this cemetery are individuals who greatly influenced not only the lives of those in the Newtown community, but also impacted the City of Harrisonburg and the larger regional discourse. As an active cemetery, Newtown Cemetery continues to connect the current community to the memory of the individuals buried there and the history of Newtown and the area's extended African American community.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Reconstruction - Origins of the Cemetery (1869)

In 1860, the U.S. Census for Harrisonburg enumerated 1,024 whites and 390 African Americans (277 enslaved and 113 free) in the city, reflecting a rather sizable free black community for a city this size.<sup>2</sup> After the Civil War, the African American population began to rise steadily as formerly enslaved people from mainly Rockingham County, but also other nearby counties, began to settle in the northeast section of the city, known as Newtown. In a period when property ownership was difficult for African Americans, one of the first tracts of land purchased by

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

African Americans in Zirkle's Addition—an area of farmland at the city's edge opened to residential development—were three lots that today comprise the oldest section of the Newtown Cemetery. This purchase by the original cemetery trustees is a testament to the necessity of African Americans in Newtown to establish their own cemetery during the Reconstruction Era, and coincides with the steady arrival of African Americans to the community. Through the formation of this cemetery, the trustees developed a communal resting place for the people of not only Newtown but for other African Americans in Harrisonburg and the surrounding Rockingham County area.<sup>3</sup>

The cemetery was first recognized in land transaction records, when Jacob Zirkle and his wife Nancy deeded the land for the first section of the cemetery—today's northwest section—to the Cemetery Trustees on May 18, 1869. In this transaction, the trustees purchased the three lots—48, 49, and 50—of Zirkle's Addition for \$250, with \$150 dollars cash in hand and the rest of the money due by May 18, 1870.<sup>4</sup> The deed laid out the wishes of the trustees and their goal in purchasing this land “to be held by them as a graveyard for all persons of color who shall or may come in and become part owners of the ground here in after mentioned by the purchase of them.” The trustees' words clearly establish that the cemetery, from its creation, was to be a shared place for the Newtown community and all people of color.<sup>5</sup>

This purchase also points to the power and advantages whites had over African Americans in business practices during the Reconstruction Era. While the first section included three lots, the total area of the land was less than one acre.<sup>6</sup> However, deed records indicate that white families purchasing three lots of a similar size in Zirkle's Addition received rather different treatment. For instance, a white man, Morris Keller, also purchased three lots of comparable size and was charged \$175.25 total and only \$58.90 cash in hand.<sup>7</sup> The testimony of Charles Douglas Gray in the *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction* further supports the likelihood that the trustees may have experienced unfair treatment during their acquisition of the cemetery's original lots. As a previous resident of Hilltop Farm, a portion of which later became part of Newtown, Gray's testimony indicates that during this period, property ownership was rather difficult for African Americans in Harrisonburg. Gray stated that immediately after the Civil War, “They [white citizens] do not like negro families to settle in the neighborhood if they can prevent it,” however, as he continued his testimony, Gray indicated that such resentment began to dwindle as whites sought black citizens for hiring as cheap labor. According to Gray, “...we can have the best peasantry in the world by securing the negro in all his civil rights,” a clear indicator that while many whites in Harrisonburg grew more tolerant of the presence of African Americans, they were less interested in making life easy for them.”<sup>8</sup> However, exceptions to this attitude did exist and can be found in the actions of the local United Church of Brethren and Mennonite churches as well as the Freedmen Bureau, all of which supported efforts by blacks to obtain land in Rockingham County (see Zenda/Long's Chapel [DHR No. 082-5264]).

As skilled and un-skilled laborers, the original trustees, George Hermon, Squire Pollard, Jessie Banks, Stephen Hughes, and Harrison Green would have been men of modest means, making this communal payment of \$225, a large sum that signifies the importance these men placed in the establishment of a black cemetery.<sup>9</sup> Although two of the original trustees, Squire Pollard and

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

Jessie Banks, were charter members of the John Wesley Methodist Church, whose members would later form the Historic African American Kelley Street United Brethren in Christ Church, there was no one religious denomination connected to the establishment of the cemetery.<sup>10</sup>

The difference in the development of the Newtown Cemetery and the Zenda Cemetery at Long's Chapel (DHR No. 082-5264) underscores further that the founding of the Newtown Cemetery was the result of community members' efforts. Zenda, also a historically African American community, developed about eleven miles northeast of Harrisonburg after the Civil War. Although several individuals, including the Dallard family and educator Lucy Simms, connected the two communities, the cemetery at Long's Chapel originated from and was operated by the Church of the Brethren. Long's Chapel, as a member of the Linville Freemason Circuit, also received sizable donations from the Freemasons, especially from the Harrisonburg Circuit.<sup>11</sup> Newtown, on the other hand, did not follow any of these trends. There is no evidence to indicate that the cemetery in Newtown received donations or was affiliated with any religious denomination or charitable organizations.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it appears that the creation and development of Newtown Cemetery began as an independent community effort.

Growth in the Segregation Era

While the initial establishment of the cemetery reflected the needs of the community circa 1869, the growth of the cemetery over the years coincided with Newtown's growth. The City of Harrisonburg annexed the Gray farmland in 1870, but because of segregation, Newtown developed on the fringe of Harrisonburg, away from the predominately white sections. During the era of segregation, both the African American population and Newtown Cemetery increased. By 1880, the African American population of Harrisonburg grew to 997, more than doubling in twenty years.<sup>13</sup> In November 18, 1898, the Trustees of the cemetery bought the second parcel of land for the cemetery in order to meet the burial needs of this growing community. This second plot, comprising one acre situated south of the original lot, was purchased from R.S. Switzer and Leannah Switzer for \$100 cash in hand with a remaining \$200 to come in four equal annual installments.<sup>14</sup>

Within a decade of this second purchase, the trustees found the opportunity to acquire another parcel of land. That addition to the cemetery was recorded June 11, 1907, and was situated directly east of the second section. The trustees purchased this parcel from C.L. Rogers and his wife Alice Rogers for a total of \$225.56 with \$100 cash in hand. The deed stipulated that Rogers be allowed to harvest a crop of barley, indicating the agricultural activity that continued adjacent to Newtown as the city developed.<sup>15</sup>

By 1920, the African American population of Harrisonburg reached approximately 1,200. The continuing increase coincides with the purchase of the fourth parcel of the cemetery.<sup>16</sup> On August 2, 1920, the trustees purchased the final section of the cemetery. This purchase from Bessie Gray and her husband H. Peyton Gray, consisted of Lot Nos. Two, Four, Six and Eight

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

from the Hill Top Addition to the City of Harrisonburg.<sup>17</sup> At \$1500, the trustees paid \$500 cash in hand with the remainder divided into annual payments of \$250.

Not only does this growth of the cemetery parallel the increase in the city's African American population, but it also reflects the continual development of Newtown's infrastructure from 1869 to 1920. During this period the trustees increased the cemetery's size through four separate transactions, purchasing lots as the land was incorporated into the City of Harrisonburg. Formerly farmland historically belonging to the locally prominent Gray family, the land that became Newtown slowly transformed into a residential area.<sup>18</sup> The cemetery began with the development of Zirkle's Addition in 1869; however, situated on the outer limits of the addition, the cemetery did not expand until the city's infrastructure reached the surrounding lots of land. The cemetery reflects these alternations to the infrastructure of Newtown, demonstrated in the Simms and Effinger Streets extensions that run through the cemetery. The cemetery slowly came together as this area became part of the City of Harrisonburg.

Cemetery and the Community

Although it is unclear when the name Newtown became the main identifier for the black community in northeastern Harrisonburg, records indicate its use soon after the establishment of the community.<sup>19</sup> Local historian Ruth Toliver believes the name originated from some of the initial founders of Newtown, former slaves Rueben and Ambrose Dallard, as "Newtown" was a common label given to areas where free blacks settled after the Civil War.<sup>20</sup> While the community's name existed around the time of the cemetery's origins, newspapers and city records referred to the cemetery only as a "colored cemetery" until the early 1900s. The 1920 deed is the first to reference the cemetery's connection to Newtown; the deed identifies the trustees as "Trustees of the Colored Peoples Cemetery commonly known as Newtown Cemetery in Harrisonburg, Virginia."<sup>21</sup> Although it appears that the local residents referred to the cemetery as "Newtown Cemetery" prior to 1920, it is around this time that sources begin to refer to the cemetery by its modern name. This is also when sources reveal the cemetery to be a central feature of the Newtown Community.<sup>22</sup>

Military Burials

Over the years, the Newtown Cemetery developed as a significant location in the celebration of Memorial Day. Although unclear as to when the community first turned to the cemetery as a gathering place for memorial programs, the earliest record appears in 1932. An article in the *Harrisonburg Daily News Record* that year announced a public memorial service would be held by the American Legion at the "hut"—a gathering place for blacks at that time—on Wolfe Street, which would be followed by a motorcade to the cemetery in order to decorate the graves of the soldiers, closing with a firing squad salute.<sup>23</sup> A similar procession of ceremonies continues to this day in order to honor over 100 veterans buried in the cemetery. In the northeast section, parallel to Hill Street, are several rows of military burials, with veterans from World War I,

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, as well as retired military personnel. Additionally, elsewhere in the cemetery are the graves of two confirmed United States Colored Troops (USCT). One burial is that of Pvt. John Cooper (1839-1902), a Civil War veteran who served in the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Co. K of the USCT, which participated in the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign (June 1864-March 1865). Cooper enlisted in February 1865 in Baltimore and mustered out in San Antonio, Texas, in January 1867. The other grave is that of James Cochran, who served in the 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry (Col), Co. H of the USCT. Cochran enlisted on January 5, 1863, and mustered out with the rank of Sergeant in Boston, Massachusetts. Local oral tradition holds that there is one other United States Colored Troops buried in the cemetery (James Goodloe); however, research has yet to confirm the same.<sup>24</sup>

Noted Burials

An additional component to Newtown Cemetery's significance as a community centerpiece is the large number of locally influential African American leaders buried there. Those of note include the founders of Newtown, Ambrose (1832?-1915) and Rueben Dallard (1832?-1906). Former slaves from the nearby Riverbank Plantation, Reuben Dallard came to Harrisonburg soon after the Civil War and purchased some of the initial lots of land in Zirkle's Addition. Both Reuben and Ambrose were carpenters by profession, building several of the homes in Newtown. They emerged early on as respected leaders in the community.<sup>25</sup>

A majority of Newtown's noted burials were educational leaders in Harrisonburg's and Rockingham County's African American community. George Ambrose Newman (1855-1944), born free, moved to Harrisonburg in 1875 to serve as principal of a "colored school" that was replaced by the Effinger Street School. From 1876 to 1908, Newman held the position of principal for twenty-eight years at the Effinger school, spending a large amount of his time educating his teachers, conducting workshops and seminars, and working to ensure teachers were prepared to pass the state examinations.<sup>26</sup> William Nelson Pendleton Harris (1881-1977) also had a large impact on the education of African-Americans in Harrisonburg. Through his efforts and leadership, in 1926 Effinger received from the Commonwealth of Virginia its junior high school accreditation (1926), its high school accreditation (1929), and its senior high school accreditation (1931). Harris served as the principal of Effinger School until it closed in 1939, when he then became the first principal of the new segregated African American school, Lucy F. Simms (see below). When he retired in 1951 as principal of Lucy F. Simms, Harris had spent thirty-four years as an educator.<sup>27</sup> Another individual of note is Ulysses Grant Wilson, half-brother of Lucy F. Simms. Wilson was a teacher, principal, and historian of African American education in the Shenandoah Valley. He received his education at Hampton Institute and taught in the local segregated school systems from 1882 to 1915, ending his career at Effinger Street School.<sup>28</sup>

Also buried in the cemetery is Elon Rhodes (1922-2006), the first African American elected to the Harrisonburg City Council, where he served from his election in 1976 until 1992. Rhodes was also the first African American to serve on the City's School Board. In addition to these

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

posts, and membership on several other commissions, Rhodes served as a Trustee to Newtown Cemetery for many years, and served as a leader in the Newtown community.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the most-well-known individual buried in the Newtown Cemetery is Lucy F. Simms (1857-1934). Simms was born into slavery around 1857 on the Gray family's Hilltop plantation, land that later became Zirkle's Addition and home to the Newtown community.<sup>30</sup> Simms began teaching at the age of 17, leaving the area from 1874 to 1877 to attend the Hampton Institute, making her a classmate of Booker T. Washington.<sup>31</sup> After graduating, Simms returned to the area and taught for about a year at Zenda, a community in Rockingham County established by blacks after the Civil War. She then moved to Harrisonburg and began teaching for the city. The first school where she taught was located inside a church; the school then moved and became the Effinger School. Simms continued to teach until the end of the 1934 school year, although she had been in poor health for some months prior. Simms passed away on July 10, 1934, and was buried in the Newtown Cemetery. Through her fifty-six years as an educator, it is estimated that Simms taught three generations in many of Harrisonburg's African-American families, with an estimated number of 1,800 students.<sup>32</sup> Simms's funeral "was the most largely attended colored funeral ever held in Harrisonburg" up to 1934, with a majority of the city's African American community and a large number of white citizens in attendance.<sup>33</sup> The City of Harrisonburg named its new segregated African-American school, which opened in 1938, the Lucy F. Simms School in remembrance of the community's beloved educator.<sup>34</sup> As many of the buildings associated with the life of Lucy Simms are no longer standing, her grave is an important landmark for people in the community. In 2011, Lucy F. Simms was recognized by the Library of Virginia as an "African American Trailblazer in Virginia History."<sup>35</sup> In order to preserve her memory, community donations made it possible for the current trustees of the cemetery to place a new headstone at Simms's grave in 2014, in order to ensure that visitors could honor the beloved Lucy Simms.<sup>36</sup>

Urban Renewal in the Early 1960s

After overcoming the struggles of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, Newtown Cemetery felt the effects of urban renewal in the 1960s. Harrisonburg Urban Renewal Projects VA-R-4 and VA-R-16 affected over thirty-two acres of land in the Northeast section of Harrisonburg, including the historically African American section of Newtown.<sup>37</sup> During this period, city streets in the community were widened and paved, an activity that impacted the western side of Newtown Cemetery. Based on aerial photographs, by 1966, Sterling Street was twice as wide as it had been in 1951. While it does not appear that any burials were disturbed by the widening, since that time the street abuts one grouping of headstones in the southwest section of the cemetery.

Archaeological Resources

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

In addition to the identified graves, roughly 120 depressions have been documented through a recent cemetery survey. While these are found throughout the cemetery, they are concentrated on the western side and especially in the northwest section where the oldest burials are found. Efforts to identify the depressions as graves using aerial photographs and earlier inventories have met with some success. However, a 1966 survey by the Daughters of the American Revolution indicates that many graves were already unmarked at that time, and the intervening 50 years has seen the loss of additional headstones.<sup>38</sup>

Non-invasive study methods such as ground penetrating radar are needed to gain a better understanding of burial locations in the areas where depressions are concentrated. Additional research into early cemetery records may also assist in identification. While the cemetery may not currently meet National Register Criterion D, field work indicates that future archeological studies in this section could be extremely beneficial in understanding the early history of Newtown Cemetery.



Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

#### Primary Sources

Dedication of the New Marker for Miss Lucy F. Simms Final Resting Place, flyer created by the Northeast Neighborhood Association. Harrisonburg, Virginia, June 22, 2014.

Langhorne, Orra. *Southern Sketches From Virginia (1881-1901)*. Edited by Charles Wynes. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964.

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*Daily News Record*

#### Collections

*Undocumented Deeds*. In Special Collections at James Madison University. Harrisonburg, Virginia.

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Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

Kendall, Kristie. "The Stereotypes Do Not Apply": Reconstruction the African American Community of Newtown in Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1945-1965, Honors Thesis. James Madison University: Harrisonburg, Virginia, 2008.

Potter, Elisabeth Walton, and Beth M. Boland. National Register Bulletin 41, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior 1992.

Siegrist, Phil. *Captured by Zenda: A Study of an African American Community in Rural Rockingham County*. EMU May 14, 1997. Unpublished paper in James Madison University Special Collections, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

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Toliver, Ruth. *Keeping Up With Yesterday*. Published by Author, 2009.

Wayland, John. *Historic Harrisonburg*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: C.J. Carrier Co., 1990.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Newtown Cemetery  
Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia  
County and State

Name of repository: Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA; Massanutten Regional Library, Harrisonburg, VA; Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, Dayton, VA; James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR No. 115-5129

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 3.9

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.453182 | Longitude: -78.858938 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundaries correspond to the tax parcels recorded as 033 12-20 by the City of Harrisonburg as shown on the attached *Location Map* and *Tax Parcel Map*. The nominated property is bounded by three streets – Sterling (western boundary), Kelley (northern boundary), Hill (eastern boundary) – and an unnamed alley (southern boundary) that separates the cemetery from a row of houses fronting on Gay Street. The north section of the cemetery is divided by an extension of Simms Avenue; the south section is bounded on the north by an east-west extension of Effinger Street.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic boundaries parallel the legal boundaries of Newtown Cemetery, which evolved through the purchase of four parcels between 1869 and 1920. The boundaries encompass all of the known historic resources associated with the cemetery as well as its setting within a traditionally African American neighborhood.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Dr. Carole Nash, Mary Ann Mason, and Ruth Toliver  
organization: Assistant Professor James Madison University, JMU Intern with Department of Historic Recourses, and Local Historian  
street & number: Department of Integrated Science and Technology and Department of History, James Madison University  
city or town: Harrisonburg state: VA zip code: 22801  
e-mail: nashcl@jmu.edu  
telephone: 540-568-6805  
date: September 1, 2014

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Newtown Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Harrisonburg

County: Rockingham

State: Virginia

Photographer: Dr. Carole Nash

Date Photographed: June 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 8: Newtown Cemetery, Lucy F. Simms Grave

View: Shows headstone at grave of Lucy Simms

Photo 2 of 8: Newtown Cemetery Entrance Marker

View: Shows Newtown Cemetery entrance marker; located at the Hill Street entrance on the east side of the cemetery.

Photo 3 of 8: Newtown Cemetery facing Northwest from Sterling Street

View: Facing northwest from Sterling Street, the image shows portions of the northwest and northeast sections of the cemetery, as well as Effinger Street running through the center of the cemetery.

Photo 4 of 8: Newtown Cemetery facing South, with Simms Avenue Extended

View: Facing south, this image taken from the northern side of the cemetery shows Simms Avenue dividing the northeast and northwest sections of the cemetery with the southern section in the background.

Photo 5 of 8: Newtown Cemetery, South Section facing Southwest

View: View of the cemetery's south section, facing southwest.

Photo 6 of 8: Newtown Cemetery, Northeast Section, Flag Pole and Military Burials

View: Northwest portion of the cemetery depicting main location of military burials.

Date: Photographed June 2014

Photo 7 of 8: Newtown Cemetery, looking West from Hill Street to Sterling Street

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

View: Looking west from Hill Street toward Sterling Street, showing the northeast and northwest sections of the cemetery.

Photo 8 of 8: Newtown Cemetery, Graves and Tree in Northwest Section

View: Northwest section of the cemetery, facing northwest to intersection of Kelley and Sterling Streets.

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Walton Potter and Beth M. Boland, National Register Bulletin 41, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registers Cemeteries and Burial Places* Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior 1992): 3, 5.

<sup>2</sup> “Chronology of African American History in Harrisonburg,” *Undocumented Deeds Collections*, in James Madison University Special Collections, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

<sup>3</sup> A History of Newtown Cemetery (Harrisonburg, VA), project Conducted by Dr. Douma’s Historic Preservation Class (James Madison University, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Rockingham County Court House Deed Book 20, pg 180.

<sup>5</sup> Rockingham County Court House Deed Book 20, pg 180.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Rockingham County Court House Deed Book 1, pg 3; The deed records of Garrett King Deed Book 1 pg 1, and Jonas Lowenback Deed Book 1, pg 57 also support this claim of unequal land pricing.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction at the First Session, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1866).

<sup>9</sup> 1870 and 1880 census records, acentery.com

<sup>10</sup> “One Hundredth Anniversary of the John Wesley Methodist Church,” church program, in *Undocumented Deeds Collection*, James Madison University Special Collections; Ruth Toliver, *Keeping Up With Yesterday* (Published by Author, 2009) 75; Phil Siegrist, *Captured by Zenda: A Study of an African American Community in Rural Rockingham County* (EMU May 14, 1997), unpublished paper in James Madison University Special Collections.

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

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<sup>11</sup> “Harrisonburg -Rockingham Historical Society Newsletter, African American Communities in Rockingham County Winter 1992, Vol 14 No. 1 pg 2” in *Undocumented Deeds Collection* (James Madison University Special Collections); David Glover, *Pictorial History of the Virginia Conference; the Church of the United Brethren in Christ from 1800 to 1946, and the Evangelical United Brethren Church from 1946, at which time the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church united to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1800-1964* (Staunton, Virginia: McClure Printing Co., 1965)

<sup>12</sup> Phil Siegrist, *Captured by Zenda*.

<sup>13</sup> Kristie Lynn Kendall , “*The Stereotypes Do Not Apply*”: *Reconstruction the African American Community of Newtown in Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1945-1965, Honors Thesis* (James Madison University, 2008) 25.

<sup>14</sup> Rockingham County Courthouse Deed Book 67, pg 236.

<sup>15</sup> Rockingham County Courthouse Deed Book 88, pg 433.

<sup>16</sup> Kendall, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Rockingham County Court House Deed Book 117, pg. 508

<sup>18</sup> John Wayland, 163.

<sup>19</sup> Orra Langhorne, *Southern Sketches From Virginia (1881-1901)*, edited by Charles Wynes (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964) 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth Toliver, *Keeping Up With Yesterday*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Rockingham County Court House Deed Book 117, pg 508.

<sup>22</sup> During this period, newspaper records begin to feature articles that note Newtown Cemetery outside of obituaries. For example a July 22,1927, *Daily News Record* articles notes that students at Effinger School partook in a beautification project at the cemetery. It is also soon after this that the cemetery began to play an important role in Memorial Day ceremonies.

<sup>23</sup> “Colored Memorial Rites Sunday Afternoon Harrisonburg,” *Daily News Record*, May 17, 1932, pg 8.

<sup>24</sup> Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census (1890) Enumerating Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans of the Civil War (National Archives Microfilm Publication M123, 118 rolls); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Toliver, *Keeping Up With Yesterday*, 19 -20.

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

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<sup>26</sup> “George Ambrose Newman,” The Harrisonburg- Rockingham Experience: African American Education During Segregation, published online at [http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web\\_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/gnewman.html](http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/gnewman.html). Accessed July 19, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> “W.N.P. Harris (1881-1977),” The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Experience: African-American Education During Segregation, published online at [http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web\\_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/harris.html](http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/harris.html). Accessed July 19, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> “U.G. Wilson,” The Harrisonburg –Rockingham Experience: African American Education During Segregation, published online at [http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web\\_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/ugwilson.html](http://www.heritagecenter.com/Web_Pages/Museum/Collection/blackedu/ugwilson.html). Accessed September 9,2014.

<sup>29</sup> “A Man of Commitment,” *Daily News Record*, April 10, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Bassford, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Teachers’ Burial: Lucy Simms Funeral Most Largely Attended Colored Rites Ever Held Here,” *Daily News Record*, July 14, 1934, pg 2.

<sup>32</sup> “Beloved Teacher Dies: Lucy F. Simms Taught Here for 56-Years- Funeral Service Friday,” *Daily News Record*, July 11, 1934, pg 5.

<sup>33</sup> “Teachers’ Burial: Lucy Simms Funeral Most Largely Attended Colored Rites Ever Held Here,” *Daily News Record* (July 14, 1934) 2.

<sup>34</sup> “Nielsen Awarded Contract to Build Colored School,” *Daily News Record*, June 30, 1938.

<sup>35</sup> “Lucy Frances Simms,” *African American Trailblazers in Virginia History*, Library of Virginia. Published online at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/trailblazers/2011/simms.htm> . Accessed August 30, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Dedication of the New Marker for Miss Lucy F. Simms Final Resting Place, flyer created by the Northeast Neighborhood Association (June 22, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Kendal, 56.

<sup>38</sup> “Rockingham County Virginia Tombstones “by Cemetery,” The Heritage Museum: Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society. Published online at <http://www.heritagecenter.com/cemeteries/cem/cem324.html>. Accessed June 2014.

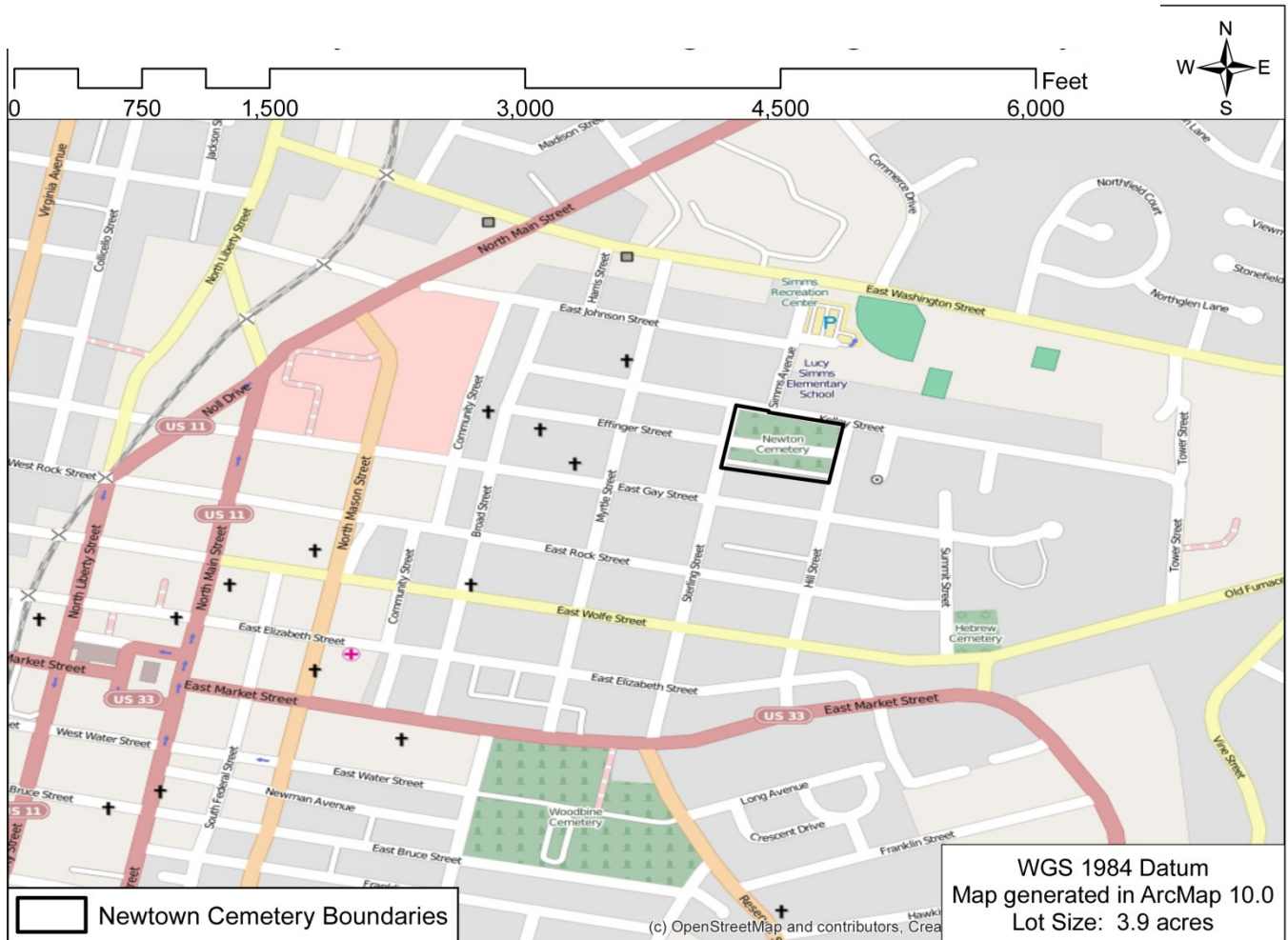


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Newtown Cemetery
Name of Property
Harrisonburg, Virginia
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs and Maps



Map 3: Location of Newtown Cemetery within City of Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Coordinates:

Latitude: 38.453182

Longitude: -78.858938

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Newtown Cemetery

Name of Property

Harrisonburg, Virginia

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs and Maps



Map 1: Sketch Map of Newtown Cemetery.

Non-Contributing Resource:

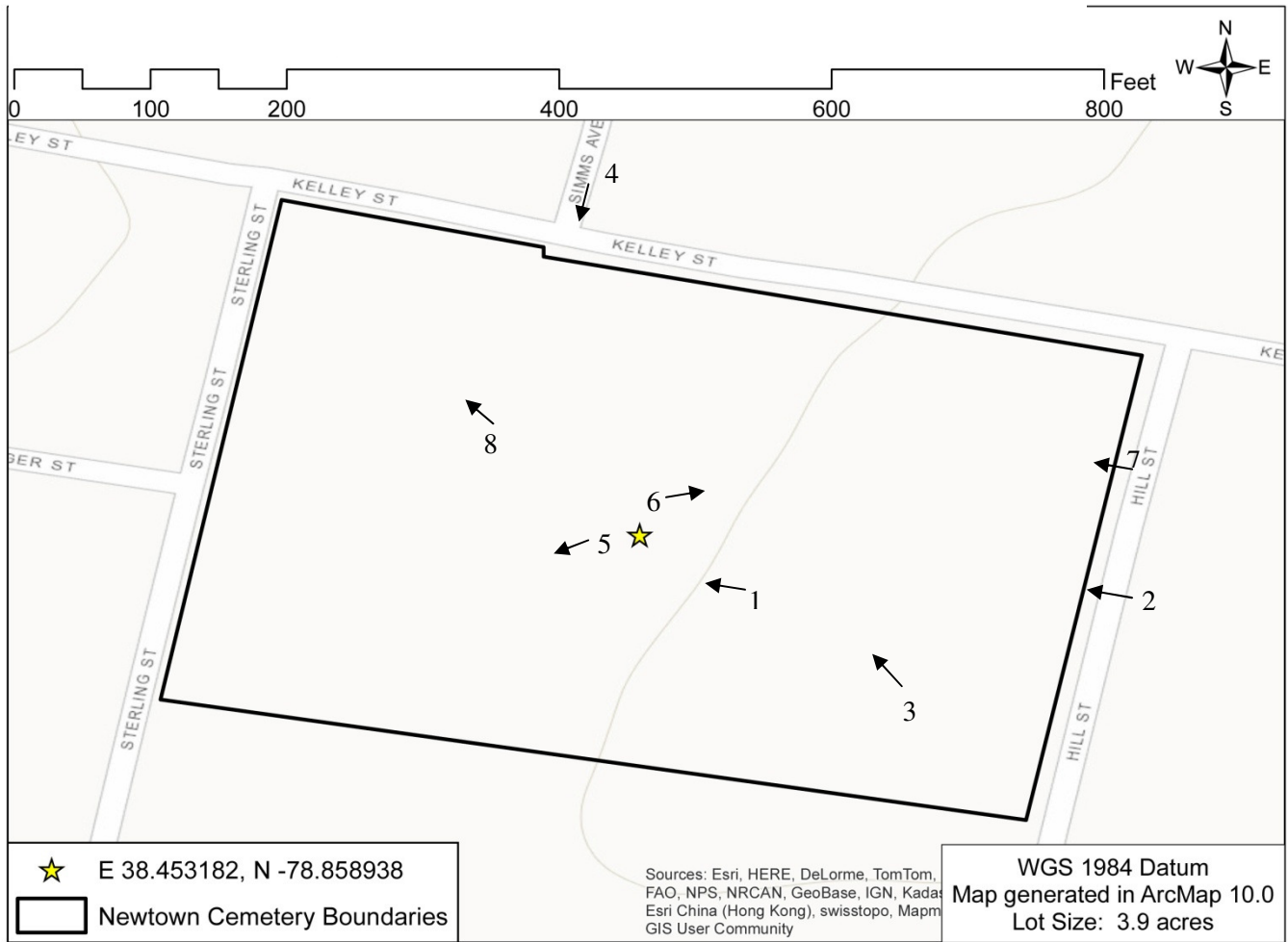
1. Maintenance Shed (Building)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Newtown Cemetery
Name of Property
Harrisonburg, Virginia
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Photographs and Maps



Map 2: Photo Key.

Tax Parcel Map  
Newtown Cemetery  
City of Harrisonburg, VA  
DHR No. 115-5129

