

Down by the Riverside: Burial Practices of the Enslaved

by Sarah Kohrs, director of Corhaven Graveyard

Good afternoon – thank you for taking the time to be a part of this important conversation and thank you to Friends of the North Fork for inviting me to speak on burial practices of the enslaved in their Seven Bends Lecture Series: How Water Shapes the Valley. My name is Sarah Kohrs, and I am the director of Corhaven Graveyard, historically known as Sam Moore Slave Cemetery in Quicksburg, VA. Corhaven Graveyard is an outreach ministry of Coracle, a non-profit whose vision is spiritual formation for kingdom action. I want to publicly thank local artist Carolyn Findler, whose artistic representation of Corhaven Graveyard is part of my virtual background.

For more information on Corhaven Graveyard, visit <https://www.corhavengraveyard.org>. And for more information on Coracle, visit <https://inthecoracle.org>.

Before I start, I want to issue a land acknowledgement, which is a traditional custom that dates back centuries in many Indigenous nations and communities. Today these are used by Natives and non-Natives alike to recognize Indigenous Peoples who are the original stewards of the lands on which we now live and work. Making this land acknowledgement is motivated by genuine respect and support for Indigenous Peoples in an effort to take the first step of recognition as an important part in creating collaborative, accountable, continuous, and respectful relationship with Indigenous nations and peoples within our communities.

For more information, or to find out on whose land you live and work, visit <https://native-land.ca>.

We begin by the riverside. Well before the arrival of settlers to the Great Valley in what would become known as Virginia, the waterway systems were central to the way of life for Indigenous Peoples, whose villages were situated along the banks of the rivers where soil was fertile and water was readily available for human needs and modes of transportation. Here, along the meanders of the North Fork, remnants of burials by these peoples still remain, albeit most have been plowed over by settlers or unstudied. I mention this, because in the United States both European and African American burials have sometimes occurred within or extremely close to Indian mounds, recognizing the sacredness of such sites.

The title of this series talk, “Down By the Riverside,” also exudes with this idea of sacredness as it is derived from the spiritual of the same name that dates back before the American Civil War. It was first published by the Rodeheaver Company in 1918 as part of the collection, *Plantation Melodies*. While the song is typically seen as describing a water baptism, which is a spiritual cleansing that occurs when someone is initiated into Christianity, the lyrics reveal another aspect of connection: the location of burials near rivers and similar water features, as well as the connection of water with a spiritual dimension and afterlife. Each stanza begins with a different line that intermixes with the repetition of “down by the riverside,” along with a chorus that repeats variations of “I ain't gonna study war no more,” and includes the following:

- Gonna lay down my burden
- Gonna lay down my heavy load
- Gonna try on my long white robe
- Gonna try on my starry crown
- Gonna put on my golden shoes

- Gonna talk with the Prince of Peace
- Gonna shake hands around the world
- Gonna cross the river Jordan
- Gonna climb the road to heaven

These verses shimmer with connections to water's role in burial practices for the enslaved, as much as religious symbolism and metaphor.

I invite you to follow me on this journey, as we consider folklore, West and Central African burial traditions, archaeological surveys, and burial sites such as Corhaven Graveyard to illuminate how the meander of the waterway systems in our Valley have impacted the burial practices of enslaved peoples in Shenandoah County.

When we consider the many West and Central African nations and tribes from which enslaved human beings were stolen, as well as the myriad customs adopted from various regions of the Americas, we ultimately need to recognize that there are no generalized burial rituals and practices we can claim for all enslaved Africans and African-Americans, who were forced to labor in the Americas. To do so would not respect or honor the memory of the people we hear about today; even the ones whose names are unknown apart from their connection with a collective burial location. Our journey instead is to look for individual or small group customs and experiences that highlight some of the practices that have been preserved in the archaeological, ethnohistorical, and anthropological surveys and studies over the years. So much more work needs to happen in order to continue affirming what is known and illuminating new understandings through future study.

Imagine, if you will, traveling downstream of the Shenandoah River to the Potomac, which empties into the Chesapeake Bay. Imagine your journey across the Atlantic Ocean, whose waters eventually lap at the western coast of Africa, where approximately 54 countries currently represent 1.36 billion people.

During the transatlantic slave trade, Africans were drawn predominantly from the tribes particular to Western and Central Africa and shipped from slave ports along this western shoreline. Slavery wasn't new to Africa.

Basil Davidson notes regarding Africans, enslaved by other Africans: “These 'wageless workers' ... were seldom or never mere chattels, persons without rights or hope of emancipation ... They were not ... outcasts in the body politic, On the contrary, they were integral members of their community. Household slaves lived with their masters, often as members of the family. They could work themselves free of their obligations. They could marry their masters' daughters. They could become traders, leading men in peace and war, governors or sometimes even kings” (Koslow 1995:93). Philip Koslow reminds us that this was not the same outlook for Africans sent in bondage to the Americas. Instead, “they suffered both the hardships of forced labor in a strange land and the added injury of being despised because of their race” (1995:93).

And it is these latter human beings we are hearing about today—those, whose life stories began in Africa and ended either unceremoniously buried in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean en route to the Americas or with mostly unrecorded and unremembered burials within the lands of foreign countries. How did they practice burial rites? Were these rituals or variations of them passed on to other generations of enslaved African Americans? Which ones might derive from African tribal traditions?

And which ones were a result of the geological landscapes where they were enslaved? Such as here, in Shenandoah County?

Today, there are at least 14 living, traditional religions in West Africa, alone. My purpose in sharing the following ritual practices is not to give a comprehensive list; however, to share those that resonate with later primary source accounts and may be visible in the ethnohistorical and archaeological records. Due to the greatest draw of enslaved Africans from West and Central Africa, my focus is on practices that would have occurred in those regions, because these traditional practices represent what many enslaved Africans would have carried with them from their homeland as mental awareness of and personal experience in burial rites practiced within their own respective cultural and tribal traditions. You'll also notice that I tend to draw out those practices that connect with this exploration of the importance of water in burial rituals.

Along these western coast regions of Africa, respect for ancestors and the deceased is an extremely important aspect of their religions. Ancestors are considered bridges between heaven and man (Van Beek 2001:129); among the Dogon in Mali, for example, ancestors are “kin and share the same values and interests of the living” - thus, they can intervene with the gods or keep their descendants in check, if traditional rules are not followed. In Ghana, for example, funerary rites were essential practices that enabled the soul of the deceased to become an ancestral spirit. Both funerals and even the items placed into graves with the deceased were based on his or her social status; while, clothing and food were typical funerary items that enabled the journey of the deceased into the other world (Salm 2002:43). In terms of the body of the deceased, some tribes wash it with water, others with traditional medicines or oil; some cover the body with cloth, leaves, or even leather. In some areas, the body of the deceased is placed in a river or set aside until the bones are exposed and then buried.

One practice common to most of the traditional religions is the distinction between the burial and the funeral, which often do not occur on the same day, and a parting ceremony that marks the spiritual departure of the deceased. This latter rite can be a time span of 40 days or 12 years. Among the Dogon, a funeral, lasting 3 days and 4 nights, follows the burial just after the death (Van Beek 2001:147). Then a mask festival (or *dama*) is performed roughly every 12 years or when a drought is broken by rainfall, which enables the deceased over that time to gain their proper status among the ancestors (otherwise they would be trapped between this world and the next (Van Beek 2001:141). In other religious traditions, this important ritual typically occurs at the first anniversary of the death of the deceased (Salm 2002:135). These ceremonies, like the *dama*, include wailing by women, drumming, and at the last stages of the funeral celebration, music and dance, which is known as *jongo* in Northern Ghana. These practices reveal the communal aspect of funerals and the important roles that participants play in them. For example, in many African traditions, before the burial concludes, everyone in attendance would often throw into the grave a bit of soil or flower petals to sprinkle over the shrouded body of the deceased. In Cameroon, they sacrifice a fowl and pour libations in honor to the deceased. And some offer food on the graves during various ceremonies throughout the year. Among the Edo people of Nigeria, the dead were buried with their feet facing west to Ughoton, a port city of Benin, where the soul was believed to embark in a canoe to cross the sea into the spirit world. Might the enslaved in the Americas have followed this practice – with feet facing east toward the coast their spirits longed for – or some of the other traditions mentioned here?

The sacredness of water, as seen in crossing the sea to the spirit world or in falling rain that signals a *dama* to transport the spirits of the recently deceased into the afterlife, continues in the way in which

West and Central Africans view the natural world. Geographical features, from mountains to caves, rocks to trees, oceans to rivers hold a source of supernatural wonder. Rituals often occur beside such places deemed as sacred (Lugira 1999:86-87). The Dogon of Mali, for example, are reverently leery of water due to its unpredictability and their fear of drowning. They associate sacred springs and pools, from which their people respectfully draw fresh water, with their water god Nomo (Van Beek 2001:75). Water also holds a cleansing aspect and is a symbol of purification physically, as well as spiritually. Purification of the community and family members left behind, as well as enabling the transition of the deceased's spirit into the ancestral world are central to burial rites that are practiced. Burial places were seen as connecting points where ordinary people could be in touch with the spirit world, just as they could in geographically wonderful sites deemed sacred.

African folklore and mythology are also useful in recognizing beliefs that influence burial practices. For example, in Ghana, there is a tale of Mawu (the supreme being) and Tsali (the deified ancestor of the Tsiamé clan). Tsali “sought to enter the life beyond without first dying” turning “back when he got to the bank of the river that separates the material world from the land of the dead” (2000:140). Other tales from various tribes in West and Central Africa reveal the following common threads: that burial often faced the rising sun; as well as the idea that death was a movement, a journey, a transition into the hereafter, which often looks very similar to the living world.

In addition to these practices, prayers or appeals are often said over burials. The Dogon, who often pray to their ancestors, share a farewell for a deceased mother:

*Greeted mother, greeted mother of a man
Greeted mother of many, greeted in your evening.
Your evening, the big evening has come,
Greeted from our grief, greeted into your grief.
It is not our fault, it is not your fault.
We shall leave it to God, the God who created us, who changed us.
Greeted mother. (Van Beek 2001:143)*

And a prayer among one of the West African tribes is as follows:

*Your children whom you have left here,
you should order money for them.
You should send them children.
You should send them everything
That is used in the world...
As they have lived to do this for you.
Let their children live to do it for them...
As you looked after your children
When you were in the world,
So you should look after them
Unceasingly. (Lugira 1999:49-51)*

Ultimately, the perspective of African religion noted in these words and practices is summarized as *Ubuntu*, which is described by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the following statement: “You know when it is there, and it is obvious when it is absent. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, it refers to gentleness, to compassion, to hospitality, to openness to others, to vulnerability, to be available for others and to know that you are bound up with them in the bundle of life, for person is

only a person through other persons” (Lugira 1999:107). Thus burial rituals practiced among their community would have been remembered by enslaved Africans and carried with them into foreign lands.

There is a heart-wrenching legend in Barbados that the Hurricane is actually Mother Africa, searching for her lost children. Folklore also incorporates features of African American burial practices, as well.

According to Leeming & Page in *Myths, Legends, & Folktales of America*, Africans forced to the Americas as enslaved individuals tended to reinterpret the rituals, myths, and religious traditions of their owners, many of whom followed Christian faith practices, and to weave these into the religious traditions they had carried with them from Africa. Further, due to the condition of enslavement and rejection by this country, African American religion became a deliverance religion, resonating with the myth of a promised land for people freed from bondage by a Father God aided by Moses-like heroes. Spirituals became a significant part of American folklore with the printing of *Slave Songs of the United States* in 1867, which preserved the spiritual songs that were created by enslaved African Americans as a way to express the grief and suffering they experienced.

The myth of Stagolee, which arose of a post-slavery African American, who refused to accept a second-place position in society, reveals the following about burial practices: “Come the day of the funeral,...Stagolee was laid out” in “a silk mohair suit and his Stetson hat...in his hand. In his right coat pocket was a brand new deck of cards. In his left, a brand new .44...And by his side was his guitar. Folks came from all over the country to Stack's funeral, and all of 'em put little notes in Stagolee's other pockets, which were messages they wanted Stagolee to give to their kinfolk...

“The funeral lasted for three days and three nights.

“After all the singing and crying and shouting was over, they took Stagolee on out and buried him. They didn't bury him in the cemetery. Uh-uh. Stagolee had to have a cemetery all his own. They dug his grave with a silver spade and lowered him down with a golden chain.” (Leeming 2008:179-80)

This account has some of the features seen in West and Central African traditions: grave goods, nice clothing for the deceased, favored possessions placed on or in the grave; as well as the connection with ancestors in the afterlife and the thin veil that existed at burial grounds. Community gathered to engage spiritual transition for Stagolee—recognizing his identity and re-establishing communal identity with one another and with their ancestors, at the same time.

We have been hearing about African traditions and myths, as well as African American folklore surrounding burial practices; but, what do ethnohistorical accounts share? What do the voices of the enslaved individuals have to say to us?

Andrew Ward's collection, *The Slaves' War: The Civil War in the Words of Former Slaves*, reveals that many enslavers buried the people they enslaved without marker or ceremony, and some even whipped other enslaved individuals that mourned one of their deceased comrades. Katie Darling's master sent a couple of enslaved individuals off “to bury the body and tell them, 'Don't be long.' There was no singing and praying allowed, but just put them in the ground, cover them up and hurry on back to that field” (2008:206). An account by Polly Shrine reveals, “when a slave died he was just drug down there to a hole in the ground and covered over with dirt” (2008:205); while another stated, “cart them down to the graveyard on the place and not bury them deep enough that buzzards wouldn't come circling around” (2008:205); although Byrd's master “would let the Negroes form a ring around that Negro

grave,” and “bow our heads whilst master would pray” (2008:206).

In *Slave Testimony* edited by Blassingame, Sella Martin shares, “My mother died in 1852...she was buried in unconsecrated ground, outside the graveyard for the whites, and her grave was walked over every day of the week by the beasts of the field” (1977:734). Catherine Beale reveals: “Every August they would have a Big Meetin' and all the Niggers that had died durin' the year, they would preach them a funeral that day. They would build a big Bush Arbor an' old Miss would give us this and that and we would cook it up and everybody would take dinner an' they would come for miles, all around in wagons an' carts an' spread a big dinner” (1977:579).

Sarah Fitzpatrick corroborates this account: “Back in de ole days we had buryin's, we didn't have no e'balms. When a purson died, we had to hurry an' put 'im in de ground right 'way. Den later on we had a big fun'el, we had big din'ers and' a whole lot'er preach'in” (1977:650). Another testimony shares, “In death, as in life, they are neglected, and their last remains are consigned to a hole dug under a hedge, with no winding sheet or coffin, save only a strip of cloth to keep the limbs together. Such is the end of the poor oppressed Negro” (1977:260).

Appalachian heritage, studied and preserved in a series known as *Foxfire* (1970), shares the burial customs practiced for many generations among black community members, many of whose ancestors had been enslaved. These anthropological studies reveal during a time when there were no funeral parlors, that the burials often occurred the next day. Burying clothes were whatever color, often the best that the deceased had owned. Family and community participated in a wake, during which they stayed up all night singing and praying. Coffins were typically homemade from rough-cut lumber, covered in cloth, and sometimes even padded with cotton. Neighbors dug and filled the grave, while the body was kept in a cool place. The house and bed of the deceased were washed and cleansed as soon as possible—they scalded everything, even walls. Attire for people attending the funeral included black dresses and a veil for a living mother, while men fashioned black crepe bands on their arms. Children wore white. The grave was sometimes covered with a holly or cedar wreath, often shaped as a cross.

According to Colman in *Corpses, Coffins, and Crypts: A History of Burial*, “straw was generally used to line slaves' coffins in the U.S, although sometimes cambric and lace were used” (1997:79). Colman confirms a common practice of typically digging graves for enslaved from east to west, with head in the west and feet in the east. And, in coastal places where seashells were placed on graves of enslaved, some believed these shells held the dead person's ancestral soul from Africa. From Virginia to Louisiana, South Carolina to Barbados, Colman notes that the enslaved would sit up all night with the dead, singing and praying through the night, often to ward off animals. Colman also mentions that some enslaved in the US practiced the West African custom of a second burial, which was a memorial service that marked when a dead person's spirit reached its destination and was at rest. At wakes and funerals, spirituals were commonly sung.

Orlando Patterson reminds us: “Slaves [sent to the Americas] differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory. That they reached back for the past, as they reached out for the related living, there can be no doubt. Unlike other persons, doing so meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen,

or patrollers, and his heritage.” (Jameson 1995:40)

This is where archaeology can help. Archaeology is the study of material remains, which give context and clues to the cultural activity of the humans represented by the artifacts and features of a site. Salvage archaeology, which is a quick excavation or study of a site due to its near immediate destruction by modern construction projects, has been a key practice associated with cemeteries for the enslaved, due to the fact that they are often unrecorded, unstudied, or even unknown to a community's current historical awareness.

Newton Plantation Cemetery in Barbados (studied in the 1970s by Handler and Corruccini) and the African Burial Ground in New York City (which was disturbed during building construction in 1991) are two of the more in-depth archaeological investigations that have occurred for enslaved burial grounds in the Americas. The African American Burial Ground in NY was placed outside the city limits on unconsecrated ground as early as 1712. Due to the disassociation of this burial space from the Christian church and based on primary source records – including a letter by Rev. Sharpe in which he mentions “the Heathenish rites are performed at the grave by their countrymen” (1995:47) – archaeologists assume that a mingling of funerary rites derivative of the religious practices of the tribes from which enslaved Africans came were enacted to some degree and based on access to cultural knowledge, communal roles, and oral tradition of those involved with the enactment of burial rites for the deceased. Certainly the exception of enslaved individuals to gather in small groups for funerals would make such an occasion particularly meaningful in an oppressive society. This was a time to celebrate together, as much as mourn a loss among them. Funerary rites expressed as much the socio-cultural context of the deceased among other enslaved, as much as it provided a way to express individual identities.

According to Jameson, in an article about African-American burial practices, some enslaved had taboos over who could touch the dead body; others allowed only the family to do so; and still others allotted blacksmiths to the job of placing and sealing the body into the coffin. The tradition of a blacksmith's role in burial ritual is also found in Africa, such as among the Dogon in Mali, where blacksmiths were integral to performing certain burial rites (2001:129). In some African cultures, the type of death can also indicate how the deceased is buried. Jameson mentions natural deaths are interred within a town burial space or even under the house of the deceased; those experiencing unnatural deaths are interred outside town limits; and drowning victims beside the riverbank where they died. Other forms of identifying the deceased included the incorporation of grave goods either within the burial or on top of the burial. And many African traditions reveal that pouring libations was an integral part of burial rites. The Barbados site revealed that until the 1820s, food and drink were placed on the graves after burial, along with often broken household objects. Items commonly found on graves included plates, pots, pipes, medicine bottles, and even items symbolic of water, such as mirrors and water jugs. The presence of such items reveals intentional connections between the burial site and ancestors, as well as those still living and the ancestors, into which realm the deceased transfers. Perhaps items once belonging to the deceased and placed onto the grave were a form of appeasement, so that all would go well with those that remained.

It is perhaps not surprising that with the Haitian Revolution that resulted between 1791 and 1804, there arose a more intentional teaching of modified Christian doctrine to enslaved individuals. The modified doctrine represented in what would become known as the Slave Bible, focused on submission and obedience of the enslaved to their masters. One result was for certain funerary practices, such as the

body's orientation in the supine position, as well as with west to east orientation associated with being ready for the coming of Christ, to become more prevalent in African American burial grounds in the late 18th/early 19th century.

In 2014, Lynn Rainville published *Hidden History* her exemplary study of African American burial grounds for the Central Virginia region. This resource provides several features common to burial grounds associated with enslaved individuals and paved the way for future studies that could corroborate her findings. Some of the main features she identified were the location of such sites on a hill in non-arable space, often near water, along fencerows or property lines, within one mile of a plantation house, and with fieldstones or lack of stones, as well as plants as memorial markers.

How does this compare with Shenandoah County? Including accounts by Duane Borden and William Good, there are approximately 17 burial places noted as potentially harboring the final resting places of enslaved people in Shenandoah County. To date, most of these sites have been little studied, save for visual observations. Of these observations, the following characteristics emerge: these sites are typically placed near a river or similar body of water. In some cases, that water separates the burial ground from white living areas or burial grounds, as if to either delineate some distinction or symbolize a cleansing separation. One of the sites uses the railroad in a similar fashion; and another places the African American cemetery in what at the height of its use would have been on the outskirts of town. A majority of the sites lack markers or incorporate crudely-shaped field stones or broken pre-manufactured stones to mark the burials, noted by their depressions. Many continued to be used for burials after the American Civil War; and for some of these, inscribed stones were then incorporated into the site. These sites are often in a designated area (meaning the land was used for more than one burial and thus seen as a space whose intention was for burial of the enslaved deceased). Often such a designation is near a boundary line or fence row. These burials are generally separate from European American cemeteries and ways of life, as I have mentioned. The burial site, itself, is typically on a hill and within one-half to one land mile away from the plantation manor that is associated with the burial plot. In a few instances, the burials appear to be close to structures. Nearly every burial ground is neglected, overgrown, or lost from community awareness and thus threatened by modern construction; similarly, they have largely been previously unrecorded or are currently unmarked as places for intentional preservation. The exceptions to this lack of preservation are the Kipps Cemetery near New Market, which appears to be maintained by the Kipps and Steptoe families; Corhaven Graveyard near Quicksburg, maintained by the Kohrs and Haley families, as well as members of the community; and Mt Jackson Colored Cemetery, maintained by the Warr family and the town of Mt Jackson. And here, allow me to take a moment to express my appreciation to current Massanutten Regional Governor's School students, who are currently working diligently to create an ArcGIS layer that demarcates the location of these sites in hopes that our community can make a stronger commitment to honoring these important ancestors, whom our historical governments did not recognize as anything more than property when they were alive.

Now, let's take a closer look at one of these burial grounds. Corhaven Graveyard, historically known as Sam Moore Slave Cemetery,

is located along the 1750 Fairfax grant line on a 420-acre tract of land originally deeded to Daniel Holman, one of the early settlers to the area in the 1730s, and denoted here by the red star, which I have added to this image from the Lake Atlas, so that you could visualize it's location.

The burial space holds approximately 2 dozen graves, noted by their depressions. Oriented west to east, most of the graves are 2 meters in length, with three being 1 meter in length and most likely denote the burials of children. Local historians Jeanette Ritenour and Linda Varney, under the aegis of the Shenandoah County Historical Society, conducted the first visual survey of the site in 1983-84 for Duane Borden's work, *Tombstone Inscriptions of Shenandoah County and Bordering Counties*. These historians noted two pre-manufactured bases, one with a broken headstone, and a couple of crudely-shaped fieldstones.

Allow me to also express my appreciation to Newman Surveying, whose surveyers helped by plotting points I marked into a map that reveals the layout of the site. This map reveals burials which are scattered into approximately two rows, and even show areas of past tree fall noted by their circular depressions. McGary and two of his JMU students verified the location of burials via remote sensing, using ground-penetrating radar.

Remember that mentioned uninscribed, broken headstone? Comparative analysis, which took into account the unique beveling, inseting of the headstone into the base, indentation along the side of the stone, as well as overall measurements, with other burial grounds throughout Shenandoah County have revealed an exact match. The matching stone is in the Union Church cemetery of Mt Jackson that is 5 miles away from Corhaven Graveyard and

identical, save the Union Church stone is intact, inscribed, and dated to 1865. Other stones with similar features date as early as the 1830s and as late as the 1890s. Before and during the American Civil War, the owner of the Holman property was Samuel Moore, who happens to also be buried along with his wife and many family members in the Union Church cemetery. This reveals a close connection and may represent a repurposed, albeit broken, stone placed in Corhaven Graveyard, when it was deemed no longer useful for other burials. Any burials during this time period in Corhaven Graveyard were likely related to the enslaved individuals once owned by the Moore family.

While grave goods placed on top of these burials (such as the last items owned by the deceased) have not been observed at Corhaven Graveyard, native plants – specifically *Viola striata* or cream violets – have been, and continue to grow in profusion over the grave depressions each year. It's likely these flora were used as memorials to mark the graves in the way words were not allowed (since state laws prohibited literacy among enslaved individuals). Over time the violets have spread and now provide a constant covering during the verdant months. Corhaven Graveyard reveals another practice: the use of crudely-shaped field stones and reused broken memorial bases. This may reveal that the enslaved in some areas were not given the time to form more elaborate markers, but were able to acquire something to denote the location of the grave. Since burials were placed together in this place over time, it demonstrates both the desire of the land owner to contain the deceased to a specific location, as well as a place of wonder for the enslaved individuals, who would have recognized the spiritual significance of such a site. Even with the filters of generational separation from Africa and thus a lack of witnessing African tribal customs associated with burials, imposed Christian practices, and varying permissions of plantation owners, perhaps the enslaved associated with the land where Corhaven Graveyard is located also saw this as a sacred space where they could draw closer to ancestral spirits, to the community they formed through mutual labor and social status as enslaved, or to God.

And with this, we return to where we began: by the riverside.

One of the key aspects about Corhaven Graveyard is that it is situated uphill in the riparian buffer of Holman's Creek, which flows 10.4 miles, emptying into the North Fork of the Shenandoah River near the I-81 S Shenandoah Caverns entrance.

For more information on local waterway systems, visit <https://modelmywatershed.org>.

In winter, the bare tree limbs allow visitors to Corhaven Graveyard a view of the shimmering silver water; and year-round, you can hear the soft babbling of the waters over rocks nearby. It's a peaceful location, where you can almost imagine the bittersweet gatherings of enslaved people mourning the loss of one among them, but grateful for an opportunity to connect with their ancestors and with one another during a difficult part of America's history. I consider the people whose names I know from records associated with past plantation owners and wonder which ones participated in burials beside Holman's Creek and which ones may actually be buried here.

I remember: Tom, James, John, Reuben, Old Jack, Toby, George, Sam, Old Nan, Mary, Sall, Ann, Nan and her child Lydia, Doll, Sue, Jenny, Boatswain, Winney, Serena, Coraline, Ferrel, Margaret, and the many whose names we still do not know.

But, we do know that without the rivers in our Valley located where they are, burial spaces for the enslaved would likely have been in completely different arrangements than they are now. Whether seen as creating a spiritually significant space closely connected with ancestors, offering a cleansing buffer from the heartless practice of enslavement, or providing a mode for transition to the afterlife, water played an important part in the lives of enslaved people in our community and continues to play an important role in our own lives, today.

Thank you for spending your time with me down by the riverside. If you or someone you know has an archaeologically significant site or burial on your property in this region, I encourage you to put away your metal detectors, which are never useful tools for the preservation of context, and contact your regional archaeologist through the Department of Historic Resources.

To connect with Virginia's DHR: <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov> or the **Northern Region Preservation Office** (serving the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Virginia) at 5357 Main Street, Stephens City, VA 22655, call (540) 868-7029.

Even though the rights of early Native Americans and enslaved African Americans were not protected during their lifetimes, their burial spaces are protected today. I am happy to point you in the direction of the next steps to ensuring the history you have been honored to steward well is indeed preserved for the good of all.

I invite you to visit Corhaven Graveyard, which is open to the public from dawn to dusk, each day. Please let me know if you, your family or friends, or other small group, would like a free tour of this sacred site. Throughout the year, I offer Community Work Days at Corhaven Graveyard in association with the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners, as well as other events.

For more information visit, <https://www.corhavengraveyard.org/events.html>. You are welcome to contact me, Sarah Kohrs, with questions or to schedule a free tour, corhavengraveyard@inthecoracle.org.

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