Residents work to cast a light on the burial ground for enslaved people beneath Chevy Chase homes

By Akira Kyles

The midcentury modern ranches and split-level homes lining Woolsey Drive are tidily landscaped, with house prices in the area starting at $1.5 million.

Yet buried below lie the bones of enslaved people who worked farmland and maintained households for white landowners in the mid-1800s in what's now the Rollingwood area of Chevy Chase.

Now, two neighbors who peeked into the area's bleak legacy are urging the community to acknowledge it. Chevy Chase residents Rachel Peric, 44, and Nadine Chapman, 55, hope to gain support for a statue to mark the site and to introduce local children to its history.

A couple of years ago, Peric says, she was looking into the Chevy Chase Historical Society archives out of curiosity about the neighborhood where she grew up. She discovered that enslaved Black people were buried only a few blocks from her home.

"That prompted me to start reaching out to the historical society to just try to learn more and see if this was a history that our neighborhood could learn more about and ultimately acknowledge and honor the lives of those buried there," Peric says.

Renata Lisowski, director of the archive and research center at the historical society, estimates that at least five enslaved people were buried in the area. The most likely location of the burial site is east of Brookville Road at the intersection of Woolsey Drive and Rocton Avenue,

according to Brian Crane of the Montgomery County Planning Department, who reached that conclusion earlier this year by studying land deeds from the time.

Peric shared her research with a neighborhood email list. Chapman added a 2021 MoCo360 story about the county's long history of racism. The two bonded over wanting to highlight that history in their community.

"It just piqued my appetite to make sure that we're not asleep, that we know what's going on where we live, and we know our history—the good, the bad and the ugly, and the in-between—and we're not afraid of it," Chapman says. "My concern is that if we don't know our history, we'll repeat our history."

Peric and Chapman held a webinar in May in conjunction with the historical society where they shared research findings and asked for help in learning more about the burial site. More than 100 residents, including author Mau VanDuren, participated in the webinar and decided to take part in the initiative to acknowledge the enslaved people.

"[Given] my own experience as a partly Jewish person growing up in a very strict Protestant environment in the Netherlands where I was also discriminated against, I just wanted to get involved," VanDuren says. "If we can…maybe put up a plaque or a sign or something that says, 'This is here and this is significant,' I think that would be a worthy project." VanDuren says his contributions to the initiative have included research into who was living on the farm and their conditions, an effort that proved difficult as there weren't names, but only numbers of the people who were enslaved.

Fellow community residents Bonnie and Joe Oppenheimer also decided to join the initiative to uncover more about where they live. “This is a neighborhood thing which requires neighborhood work,” Joe says. “If we’re not going to do it, it won’t get done.”

According to Lisowski, enslaved people likely maintained the farm by taking care of animals, cleaning the house and tending to crops. Census records indicate that this farm had 32 enslaved people in 1860, she says.

The fact that the county recognized the site as a burial ground in 2019 is a positive step, Lisowski says, as similar burial grounds usually are faced with disputes over whether they exist. For one thing, she says, African burials—of both enslaved and free people—did not generally have grave markers as we tend to think of them, whether for cost reasons or because the community used other means to mark graves, such as boulders or dirt mounds. Another reason is that many people migrated elsewhere after the Emancipation Proclamation and weren’t around to speak up about where their ancestors were buried, she says. Finally, even known burial grounds can be destroyed for the sake of new construction, but that’s even easier for developers to do without historical societies standing in the way.

Peric and Chapman also recruited at-large county councilmember Will Jawando in their efforts to get recognition for the burial site. He kicked off the webinar and has been “connecting this work to larger efforts in the county focused on racial healing and repair,” Peric says.

“We can’t address the problems of today if we don’t address how we got here and the history of our community,” says Jawando, a Democrat who has worked as a civil rights lawyer.

Chapman and Peric say they are not looking to dig up the remains of the deceased; the most important aspect to them is educating younger

members of the community. “In the next year, I would love to see that our local schools and just our community as a whole have access to this history and are using it,” Peric says. “Then our goal also is to identify a site where we can have some sort of space of remembrance and historical marker and information.” The women plan to contact Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and Chevy Chase Elementary School to see if they can hold a seminar or some sort of discussion to teach students about the history of the area.

Although the acknowledgment may seem small, the two neighbors say there’s no better place to start to make a difference than in their neighborhood.

“We start here in our community,” Peric says, “and this is the piece we can do.”

Rockville restaurant persevered through fire, offers window on Uyghur culture

By Akira Kyles

Through fire, a pandemic and what the United Nations last year called "serious human rights violations" against his fellow Uyghurs in China, a Rockville restaurant owner has carried on educating the community about his culture through food.

Eerkin Jan, 25, has run Eerkin's Uyghur Cuisine since 2019. Born in what is currently known as Xinjiang, a region in northwestern China, Jan and his family immigrated to the Washington, D.C. area when he was an infant. His dad started Eerkin's Uyghur Cuisine, in Fairfax, Virginia, in 2015.

Jan said watching his father chase the American dream and start a business from scratch was inspiring to him.

"For me [opening a restaurant] was almost like a calling," he said. "So, I made the deliberate choice of setting out and finding a space and I knew Rockville was such an up-and-coming spot."

It is through the Uyghur cuisine—which focuses on halal foods–and his restaurant that Jan is trying to appeal not only to his people but other members of the community.

"For us, what we say is food is the closest way to someone's heart," Jan said. "So, that's why we provide a space for people to enjoy our foods; to look at different artworks and pieces of clothing and music to see that culturally, we're not Chinese. We're Uyghur, we're Turkic. It gives them a

chance to witness us a people, us with our traditions and even us as portrayed as Muslims as well."

The day prior to Mother's Day last year, the Uyghur community temporarily lost that communal space when Jan's eatery caught fire at its former location of 1701 Rockville Pike #B1 in Rockville.

Of course, there's no suitable time for a fire to start but Jan said it was most terrible because they were fully booked and lost revenue. The business was able to recover financially thanks to the fire occurring after its annual Ramadan buffet.

The fire was mostly limited to the kitchen and the business was able to find a new location in Rockville, at 6 North Washington St., with most of the décor surviving the flames and reopen right before Mother's Day this year.

"[The Ramadan buffet] really helped us sort of pick back up because, we're still dealing with the aftereffects of COVID," Jan said. "It was a little slowdown on the restaurant industry, the food industry, so right after the Ramadan buffet, we were seeing more sort of pickup in activity and people coming in and then on that Mother's Day, we were fully booked."

The décor at the new location introduces diners to Uyghur culture before the food even hits their stomachs. The bright yellow walls are adorned with colorful clothing and accessories from Uyghur culture, small brightly colored figurines, ceramics, paintings, and various instruments.

Jan said it was the support of the loyal customer base that helped revive the business just in time for the next Ramadan buffet, which the business holds during the month of Ramadan from the end of March to beginning of April.

“We were extremely busy during [the reopening], which was good because for us it was like a blessing in disguise,” he said. “So many people were interested in our buffet option that we do for Ramadan that it sort of brought up all customers back and new customers to enjoy as well.”

In alignment with Muslim faith, Jan only offers halal meat and does not serve pork or alcohol. Halal meat is meat that adheres to Islamic law, as defined by the Koran.

The eatery does sell a vast selection of teas and cultural drinks, such as homemade dough, which is a cold blended Uyghur yogurt shake with mint.

Eerkin’s offers a variety of hand-pulled noodle dishes, with one of most popular being Gam Bian Soman, which includes sautéed vegetables and soy sauce, topped with sesame seeds, according to Jan.

Babur Ilch, 27, works as the program manager for the Uyghur Human Rights Project based out of Washington, D.C. The organization advocates for the rights of Uyghur people by publishing reports and analysis to defend Uyghurs’ civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights according to international human rights standards.

Ilch was born in the Uyghur homeland and his family moved to Canada when he was a toddler. To him, a communal space like Jan’s is important for people in his culture and beyond.

“It’s really nice to see that Uyghur food, which is such an important part of our culture, is kept alive and is being shared not only in the diaspora itself, but with people who live here, people who are not who are willing to take the time to appreciate the Uyghur culture through its cuisine,” Ilch said.

In 2017, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights began receiving increasing allegations by various civil societies groups that members of the Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim communities were either missing or disappeared in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.

According to a 2022 report from the U.N., the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed alarm over numerous reports of the detention of large numbers of Uyghurs and Muslim minorities by the Chinese government.

The overall assessment of the report was that "serious human rights violations have been committed in the [Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region] in the context of the government's application of counterterrorism and counter- 'extremism' strategies."

Jan said it's an oppressive genocide that's happening to his people in their homeland.

"For us to open these restaurants is tough, for us to sort of spread the awareness because a lot of times in media, you'll hear about these atrocities happening, that they're trying to portray us as Chinese Muslims," he said. "If anyone can come into our restaurant, look at the atmosphere, look at the designs, look at us as a people then there's a distinction because we're not Chinese, we're Turkic."

'Who better to support us than us?' Fayetteville rallies around Black-owned businesses

By Akira Kyles

In recent years, there has been a wave of support in the Black community for Black-owned businesses.

"We recognize these Black-owned businesses as safe spaces for consumers, not just Black consumers but all consumers," said Tyechia Paul, assistant chair of the Department of Management, Marketing, Entrepreneurship, and Fire & Emergency Service Administration at Fayetteville State University. "Black people supporting Black businesses make those interactions void of the racism that so deeply and painfully permeates nearly every aspect of American society."

But some outside the community may not understand the push.

Cornelius Breazeale learned this first hand recently when he posted on Facebook asking for references for a wedding caterer.

"Anyone know of a great Black owned catering business out here in Fayetteville or Hopemills NC...For a wedding about 80," he wrote in his Facebook post.

In addition to some suggestions, Breazeale received backlash.

Multiple commenters accused him of being racist for wanting a Black caterer as opposed to any caterer.

One commenter said, "it's called SEPERATISM; a soft word for RACISM."

The response was not what Breazeale expected.

"I only put that up there to see if I can get a good Black caterer, but it wasn't put up there on a malicious intent," he said.

In a second post, Breazeal tried to explain it was simply a preference for food preparation.

"I just wanted a black caterer because I'm from Philadelphia and I just wanted a taste of that good ol' down south cooking," he wrote.

Both posts generated more than 400 comments, and while some were negative, others offered actual recommendations for caterers.

Breazeale said he doesn't see any reason why Black people shouldn't support Black businesses.

"The main importance of supporting Black businesses, first and foremost, is because it's our future," he said. "Who better to support us than us, right?"

After moving to Fayetteville three years ago, he said, he found it to be even more important to support Black businesses in the South where the history of racism is still palpable.

"It's still a lot of racism that's in the forefront," he said. "Until we stand up for our own kind and be strong for our own kind and monopolize the same way (white people) monopolize, it's going to always be stagnant."

But Breazeale, who plans to marry in the fall, said he stopped reading the comments after a while because of the negativity.

He still hasn't found a caterer.

Building generational wealth: 'It's our future'

Anita Tucker, a New York native who owns Nita's Kitchen, said that she's seen firsthand the support from the community. Tucker's Cliffdale Road restaurant specializes in soul food.

"It's time that we support each other. We've been supporting everybody else except our Black people," she said. "That's the only way

we're going to make (is) it if we're supporting each other instead of turning our backs on each other."

Like Breazeale and Tucker, Jameelah Evans, the owner of Texture Hair Care Center, finds it important to circulate Black dollars within the Black community.

"If we don't make a conscious effort to do that, then our money (goes) completely out and we don't get the chance to really build up our community," she said.

Evans said keeping her money in her community helps not only those around her but her family, as well.

"I'm completely dedicated to making sure that I do everything in my ability within my family ... to create generational wealth," she said. "Because I'm so conscious of those things ... I do those things for other businesses."

Paul defines generational wealth as "assets that are passed from one generation to the next." Those assets can be something that's owned outright and not encumbered by debt, that holds value and can be exchanged for cash.

She said tools for generational wealth can include investments, real estate, life insurance and businesses.

Paul said Black people, for centuries, have been disadvantaged from achieving generational wealth and there are several reasons for that, especially as it pertains to real estate.

"Black people have been excluded through redlining, through Black land taking, where the tax evaluation of Black-owned properties would be artificially inflated in order to elicit a tax delinquency and effectively force out the owners," she said. "Predominantly white communities have been known to manipulate from tax delinquency laws in order to elicit those tax sales. Also, we see eminent domain being used disproportionately to target and rave through black-owned land."

Paul added that Black communities are also targeted by predatory lenders who charge Black homeowners higher interest rates.

When it comes to Black-owned businesses, the attacks on and the exclusion of Black businesses have prevented families from attaining generational wealth in the Black community, Paul said.

"We've seen black-owned businesses not considered for corporate and government large-dollar contracts or selected for those contracts to a lesser degree than white-owned businesses," she said. "At times when Black businesses thrive and are successful and those successful Black business districts emerge, we've seen white domestic terrorists,

attacking bombing and destroying those businesses in business districts, as in the case of Tulsa, Oklahoma's Black Wall Street."

Paul also attributed the Black community being excluded from attaining generational wealth to slavery and not earning wages.

"Black people in America have endured 400 years of slavery," she said. "At that same time, White American counterparts were capturing land via forced removal, genocide, homesteading, etc. while African American people were not even able to earn the cash value of their labor."

According to Paul, the same holds true today: There is still a race-based wage gap where on average Black men make 27% less and Black women make 35% less thanwhite men.

Unique needs in the community

Evans, whose salon on Bragg Boulevard specializes in natural hair care, said her clientele may prefer to patronize a Black-owned business because they may be more comfortable having their hair done by someone who looks like them.

"If you're going to anyone to get your hair done, ideally you want them to have experience with your hair and have hair like you," she said. "So, if we aren't doing it for ourselves, no one really is. Truly, our hair

type, in particular, is not one of those go-to hair types, or that's not the hair type that is in high demand."

Fayetteville-based photographer Brionna McKiver said she has had clients who specifically asked for a Black photographer.

"Just me being able to relate to them and actually able to take their vision and portray it in the way that they want to," she said. "Within our community a lot of individuals, they suffer with self-confidence (issues) but when they come into my studio, they come out another way."

McKiver, owner of BoujeeBri Photography, said that when it comes to taking photos of Black people, proper lighting is vital because of the different skin tones.

According to Paul, the support of Black businesses is the same support historically Black colleges and universities are experiencing.

"The potentially increased level of support that we have seen towards Black businesses over this p8ast year is occurring largely for the same reason that HBCUs are seeing extraordinary increases in enrollment," she said. "We're refusing to support organizations, that in turn, marginalize us because when we support organizations that mistreat us, then it's like paying for that mistreatment."

Support, not exclusion

Contrary to the way some commenters took Breazeale's post, Tucker said, Black people buying from Black businesses is not a way to exclude others but simply to support each other.

Aside from shopping Black, Tucker said, there are a variety of ways to support Black businesses, such as giving advice to aspiring business owners, giving a discount or donating.

"It don't have to be much, whatever we can (do) just to help that business out," she said.

Aside from helping each other, a lot of Black-owned businesses in Fayetteville have turned to the N.C. Center for Economic Empowerment and Development for support.

The Fayetteville-based center helps aspiring business owners start a business through traditional means like getting a bank loan.

"We are a host to several different programs, one of them being our Small Business Center, with programs that are involving not only women in business but then also disadvantaged businesses that we get support through the city of Fayetteville," said Suzy Hrabovsky, executive director of CEED.

Hrabovsky said that for more than 30 years, the organization has worked with minorities.

On a monthly basis, CEED hosts programs like their Jumpstart orientation, which teaches how to start a business, how to finance a business and how to market a business.

"When COVID started, we heard a cry from minority business owners and the City of Fayetteville and we partnered together to create the COVID Bridge Loan," she said. "Ninety-six percent of who we helped were Black-owned businesses here."

Hrabovsky said it's important to support the various cultures people bring to Fayetteville.

"We have people from, Africa, we have people from Jamaica, we have people from the Dominican. We have people from all over bringing their cultures to our area," she said. "We see it and it's so exciting; like you get to taste and feel, and that's what makes our culture here just so important. It's just that melting pot."

Fayetteville Explained: How the city got the nickname Fayettenam, and how it has changed.

By Akira Kyles

To some outside Fayetteville, the name "Fayettenam" fits. They see the city as crime-ridden with a heavy military presence. The user-generated Urban Dictionary's definition of Fayettenam even refers to Fayetteville and notes the city's dependence on Fort Bragg.

To locals, the name has origins from criminal activity that no longer represents what Fayetteville as a whole is today.

Dating back to around the start of the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the city of Fayetteville wasn't what it is today. According to city historian Bruce Daws, director of the Fayetteville Area Transportation and Local History Museum, the name was connected to a rough part of the city.

"Fayetteville was a different kind of place, Fort Bragg was a different kind of place at that time," he said. "It was a different kind of place, downtown was a rougher area which really transformed a lot from the '60s/'70s period," he said.

Daws said the 500 block of Hay Street was notorious for crime.

"It was a congregated area where a lot of people would come and there was certainly a lot of criminal activity during that period of time involving narcotics, prostitution, that kind of thing," he said.

According to former Fayetteville City Councilman Ted Mohn, some of those crimes were prominent in certain parts of the city especially.

"Downtown Fayetteville, Bragg Boulevard, there were a bunch of strip clubs, this and that," he said. "Then in the '70s and '80s, the drugs epidemic and everything, crime was pretty rampant, for a lack of a better term. You had your — we used to call him candy man — he'll sell you anything you want, drugs and stuff."

It was while crime was rampant during the Vietnam War when Daws said he started hearing the term "Fayettenam."

That negative connotation remained even following the demolition of the 500 block of Hay Street that was a hub for so much crime, according to Daws. Now, the downtown area is a place to shop, take in some art, grab a bite to eat and participate in community events.

"It's a shame things like that are hard to get rid of," Daws said. "It was a catchy name and it's hard to live that down but I'm hearing it a lot less. At one time, that was the thing, people always referred to Fayetteville as Fayettenam. I hear it now, very infrequently."

Mohn recalled when he came here in 1997, people were still calling the area Fayettenam, but he doesn't really hear it from people over the age of 40.

"What you see now in these cities, Fayetteville is nowhere near that, so I personally don't like the word Fayettenam," he said. "But you'll see how some of the younger generation think it's kind of catchy."

'The trenches'

According to Antoine Robinson, Fayetteville native and owner of the business Fayettenam Clothing,that term is something that is used not in reference toFayetteville in its entirety but more so the more dangerous parts.

"Fayettenam is really the trenches," he said. "Fayettenam is a whole different avenue or different way to look at Fayetteville."

When he refers to the "trenches," he recalls his childhood and seeing his friends follow a negative path.

"I had a lot of friends that died, a lot of friends that's in the system," he said. "We had to figure out a lot of things on our own because we didn't have the guidance and sometimes we turned to the streets. We turned to going out to Fayettenam and getting into trouble and doing different things."

Fayetteville rapper Morray was seen in Fayettenam attire while shooting the music video for his song "Trenches," where he sings and raps about his love for the hood and the people in it, along with the struggles he faced.

Fayetteville rapper J. Cole has also referenced Fayettenam, like in his song "Land of Snakes."

Robinson said Fayetteville refers to military and Fort Bragg but Fayettenam is Murchison Road, which he refers to as "The Murch," and Bragg Boulevard.

It is because of the negative connotation that Robinson wanted to turn "Fayettenam" into something more positive with his clothing business of the same name. For his business, Robinson transformed the name into an acronym which stands for For All Young Entrepreneurs Trying To Elevate Numerically And Mentally.

"It's more or less about a young kid coming from Fayetteville/Fayettenam, North Carolina trying to elevate in a certain way but using clothes to do it," he said. "... It's about getting out and putting a light on the city."

Robinson plans on opening a store for his clothing brand on Skibo Road in August called Fayettenam Over Everybody Clothing.

Even with the positive transformations, it is the negative connotations Fayettenam still carries that locals are trying to move away from.

"It's just been really turned around — and it was just a brief period in our history," Daws said. "The name just has stuck to some degree, but a whole lot less... It's not a name that's deserved, nor does it represent Fayetteville."