

FHD-1301

Laboring Sons Cemetery

circa 1851

Frederick City

public

Laboring Sons Cemetery was originally established in 1851 as the cemetery of the Beneficial Society of Laboring Sons of Frederick. It occupies most of a block-long tract along the west side of Chapel Alley between Fifth and Sixth Streets in the northeastern part of downtown Frederick. As many as 1,500 burials were made in Laboring Sons Cemetery, including at least five soldiers of the United States Colored Troops; however, no apparent traces of the cemetery exist today. By the 1940s the Society was no longer active, and the cemetery was in disrepair. Instead of maintaining the lot as cemetery grounds, in 1949 the city converted it into a whites-only park and playground. In 2000, in response to an inquiry sparked by local black community leaders and the local newspaper after nearby construction efforts uncovered several graves, the city government found files in the Frederick Engineering Department detailing the names and locations of gravesites. The Laboring Sons Memorial Committee and the City of Frederick dedicated the cemetery as a memorial garden in 2001, now called Laboring Sons Memorial Ground. The land was rededicated as the Laboring Sons Memorial Ground in 2003 with a granite monument listing the names of 117 of the people buried there.



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## 7. Description

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### Condition

excellent       deteriorated  
 good             ruins  
 fair               altered

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Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Laboring Sons Memorial Ground, originally established as the cemetery of the Beneficial Society of Laboring Sons of Frederick, occupies most of a block-long tract along the west side of Chapel Alley between Fifth and Sixth Streets in the northeastern part of downtown Frederick. The Laboring Sons Memorial Committee and the City of Frederick dedicated the cemetery, which was established in 1851, as a memorial garden in 2001; however, no apparent traces of the cemetery exist today. The park-like setting is bordered by sidewalks on the north and east perimeters with a decorative metal archway forming an entrance portal from the narrower Sixth Street side. A brick-paved area defines the entrance transitioning to a concrete walkway leading into the center of the grounds. Near the center of the plot, a raised rectangular area enclosed with a rock-faced grey stone retaining wall forms the memorial's focal point. An intersecting sidewalk entering from Chapel Alley also leads to the central raised area. An upright granite monument centered within a rectangular area inside the larger rectangular walled space is inscribed, "Laboring Sons Memorial Ground" and carries bronze tablets identifying the names of those who are buried in this cemetery, commemorating the memorialization efforts by the Laboring Sons Memorial Committee and the City of Frederick, and providing a brief history of the cemetery, which was established by the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick in 1851. Shade trees and park benches complete the memorial garden.

## 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____
<b>Specific dates</b>	N/A	<b>Architect/Builder</b> Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick		
<b>Construction dates</b>	1851 -1852			
Evaluation for:				
<input type="checkbox"/>	National Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maryland Register	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

The Beneficial Society of Laboring Sons of Frederick was formed in 1839 by a group of African-American residents. It is a remarkable early example of collective action taken to claim a measure of self-determination and social place. Somewhat overlapping with the functions of fraternal organizations, benevolent associations sometimes had a component of leisure or educational social interaction, but they were generally more specifically focused on providing members some form of cooperatively funded life insurance. Although not much is known about the original dynamics of the group, by 1851 Laboring Sons had accumulated enough funds from member dues to purchase an open Frederick city lot. In 1852 about 1/4 of the lot was subdivided into 12' x 16' burial lots marked by numbered white marble corner posts. Lots were assigned to members who had paid all their dues and individual ownership was recorded on a plat map. The remaining ground was also sold as burial plots with the proceeds added to Society funds. An internal disagreement resulted in half of the forty members withdrawing to form a separate Workingmen's Society in 1862.

In the immediate post Civil War years when African American residents attempted to claim rights to education and citizenship, the original Laboring Sons group was officially incorporated by an act of the Maryland General Assembly in 1867. Members used the assigned lots as family burial plots. Nicholas Thompson, who sided with the Workingmen's faction, used his plot to bury his aunt (1858), a relative of his wife (1862) and his mother (1864). In 1880 he sued a member of Laboring Sons who buried a child on Thompson's lot without his permission.

As many as 1,500 burials were made in Laboring Sons' cemetery, including at least five soldiers of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) who fought during the Civil War are buried in Laboring Sons. W. H. Brown, a farm laborer from Libertytown, served in the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment, USCT, Company K. In 1870, he was 35 years old and working as a day laborer in Uniontown, living with Sarah Brown, 30, and Fran L. Brown, 13.<sup>1</sup> Henry Lee served in the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Company I. Thomas Lanzell served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Company F. William Powell served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Company D. Finally, Nicholas Nichols, a farmer, served in the 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *United States Federal Census Records*: 1870, Uniontown, Carroll County, Maryland.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Name Laboring Sons Cemetery  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Regiment, Company B. He was born in March 1835 as a slave for life of William Eader, a citizen of Frederick City classified as "loyal" by recruiting agents when Nichols enlisted in the army. The enlistment process included Eader granting Nichols his manumission from slavery. Nichols enlisted on December 8, 1863, and suffered a stint of smallpox in April 1864. He mustered out of the military on 15 January 1867 at Brownsville, TX, as a Sergeant.<sup>2</sup> Besides these, as many as 1,500 burials were made in Laboring Sons' cemetery.

By the 1940s the Society was no longer active and the cemetery was in disrepair. The city of Frederick took over the block-long lot, and apparently family descendants had some graves moved to other local cemeteries. Instead of maintaining the lot as cemetery grounds, in 1949 the city converted it into a whites-only park and playground. In 2000, in response to an inquiry sparked by local black community leaders and the local newspaper after nearby construction efforts uncovered several graves, the city government found files in the Frederick Engineering Department detailing the names and locations of gravesites. The playground equipment was promptly removed and the grounds redesigned as a memorial park. The land was rededicated in 2003 with a granite monument listing the names of 117 of the people buried there.

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<sup>2</sup> *U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1861-1865*, <<http://www.ancestry.com/>>

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Blackwell, Pat. "Laboring Sons Cemetery - Frederick County, Maryland." *Cemetery Records Online*. Web. 29 July 2009. <<http://www.interment.net/data/us/md/frederick/laboring/>>.

Martin, Keith L. "This is hallowed ground: Five years after rededication, cemetery needs attention, some say." *The Gazette* [Frederick] (Feb. 14, 2008): A1+.

Stone, Hardy. "America's Forgotten Slave Cemeteries." *The Frederick News-Post* (Feb. 15, 2009): C1+.

Tourism Council of Frederick County. "African American Heritage Sites in the City of Frederick and Frederick County, Maryland," Frederick: Tourism Council of Frederick County, 2001.

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	<u>1.17 acres</u>		
Acreage of historical setting	<u>1.17 acres</u>		
Quadrangle name	<u>Frederick City</u>	Quadrangle scale:	<u>1:24000</u>

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

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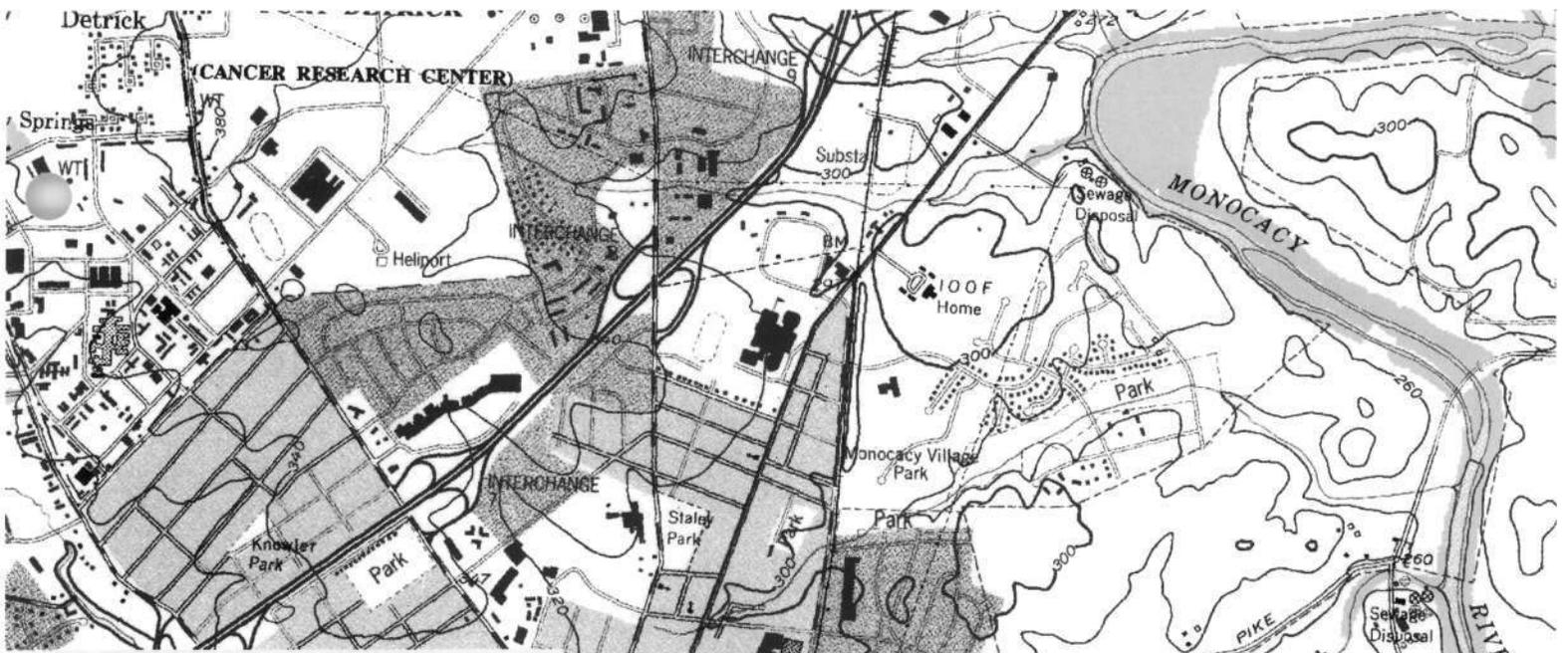
## 11. Form Prepared by

name/title			
organization	The Catoctin Center for Regional Studies	date	7/31/2009
street & number	7932 Opposumtown Pike	telephone	301-624-2773
city or town	Frederick	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Maryland Department of Planning  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600



**FHD-1301**  
**Laboring Sons Cemetery**  
**Frederick City**  
**Frederick County**  
**U.S.G.S. Map, Frederick, MD**  
**1:24000 Scale**





FHD-1301

Laboring Sons Cemetery, 122 E. 5th Street

Paula Reed

6/09

MDSHPO

SW View

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FHD-1301

Laboring Sons Cemetery, 122 E. 5th Street

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Central monument, West view

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