Background

For many years, the Wayne National Forest has been studying and preserving the vestiges of early African American history on public land in southeastern Ohio. The work has been accomplished through partnerships with the Friends of Freedom Society, the Multicultural Genealogical Center, and several Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU).

Research focused on two early nineteenth century African American settlements - Paynes Crossing on the Athens Ranger District, and Pokepatch on the Ironton Ranger District. Anyone willing to take the risk might have been a conductor: abolitionists, clergy, farmers, teachers, the rich, and the poor of all ethnicities.” Neither of them were “towns” per se, but each was rather a system of farmsteads spread out on a rural landscape.

These settlements existed primarily between the 1820s and 1880s. Both are now largely archaeological sites. Only a church and two cemeteries remain.

Website Information

The information the Wayne has collected, is located on the Forest website. (continued inside)

The Wayne has three offices open 8 - 4:30 Monday - Friday.

Forest Supervisor’s Office & Athens Ranger District
13700 U.S. Hwy 33; Nelsonville, OH 45764
Phone: 740-753-0101

Marietta Unit, Athens Ranger District
27515 State Route 7
Marietta, OH 45750
Phone: 740-373-9055

Ironton Ranger District
6518 State Route 93; Pedro, OH 45659
Phone: 740-534-6500

Federal relay system for the deaf and hearing impaired: 1-800-877-8339
website: www.fs.usda.gov/wayne

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
the information collected on Pokepatch and Paynes Crossing has created an ongoing need to develop innovative techniques to organize the information.

In 2003, Historic Black College and University (HBCU) students organized a considerable amount of Paynes Crossing data into a Forest website. A screen shot of this information is shown on the opposite side of this brochure. (Go to www.fs.usda.gov/wayne, select Learning Center, History and Culture, Early African American Settlements).

The website includes site and project history, historic land plat maps, birth and death records, cemetery and funeral records, census data, and individual family summaries. The website was developed in response to the public demand for detailed information on the Forest’s research, and offers a quicker and more effective way to disseminate these results.

Past collaboration with Ohio University’s Department of African American Studies has utilized students to organize archival collections and conduct oral history interviews of Paynes Crossing and Pokepatch family descendants.

The ongoing study and preservation of these resources helps the Forest fulfill its mission of “Caring for the Land and Serving People.”

Paynes Crossing exhibits many similarities to Pokepatch and years of comparative research guided by UR historians now indicates that it probably also served as a “station”. The Payne Cemetery (1852-1927) is the primary remnant of the settlement. The cemetery is shown below.

The individuals buried in the cemetery were freed from plantations in the Virginia territory in the early 1800s. Five of the men enlisted in the Ohio Regiments of the U.S. Colored Troops and fought in the Civil War. One of their stones is in the photo below.

The cemetery was restored and re-dedicated in 1995, and a historic marker was installed in 2010. Family members have been interviewed and their stories archived.

The entire Forest Service tract has been inventoried for archaeological resources.