



Bertha Levi Moore arrived in Laurel at 11 months old. She attended the first “Colored School #2”, located at 803 West Street, with 54 other children and a single teacher. When she became of high school age, Laurel High School was open to white students only. Bertha boarded with a family in Washington, DC to attend high school classes offered by Howard University.

Bertha would herself become a school teacher and teach at the “Colored School #2” where she was first educated. She settled in Laurel, eventually marrying. She and her husband built a house on 10th Street and were considered “Blockbusters”, as the first African Americans to reside on that block. They farmed their plot of land and sold their produce, while raising 13 children.



Laurel Historical Society Celebrates Black History Month and Salutes Contributions and History Makers in Our Community

Bertha’s accomplishments were significant, as she was the daughter of slaves. Her father escaped slavery and eventually joined the Union Army to fight in the Civil War. Her mother would have been considered fortunate, at the time, learning to read and write from white teachers traveling from the northern states to give free lessons to black children. Her mother’s last name was Hall, suspected to be named after the Hall family, to whom she was enslaved. They lived in a small African American town off Rte.197 in Laurel called Halltown. In the 1890s, Bertha’s parents were among the earliest members of St. Mark’s church, still thriving at 601 8th Street.

During an interview in the 1970s, Bertha shared memories of the Laurel Sanitarium for mental illness and the Keely Institute for the treatment of alcoholism as being the primary employment for African Americans at the time. Prior to its relocation to the grounds of the Laurel Sanitarium, the Keely Institute was located at 5th and Talbott Streets, which was the dividing line between the black and white communities. She recalled memories of the local chapter Ku Klux Klan burning crosses at Ivy Hill Cemetery and near St. Mary of the Mills Church on 8th Street.