HERITAGE MONTGOMERY
African American Heritage Self-Guided Tour
(West County)

COVID NOTICE

Please download the Heritage Montgomery brochure, "Crossroads and Cultures: African American Heritage," for an overview of Montgomery County's rich African American history.

INTRODUCTION:

The landscape looks much as it did when European settlers first arrived here in the late 1600s. With them came Africans from the Gold Coast and Senegambia regions of Africa, and later from the Caribbean. Many cultures merged in Maryland bringing skills from their homelands in agriculture, animal husbandry, metalworking, and domestic trades.

Montgomery County was host to both free and enslaved Blacks. On the eve of the Civil War, the county was home to approximately 5400 enslaved and 1500 free Blacks, nearly one third of the County population. In Maryland, a border state between North and South, slavery continued until after the Civil War. While a number of free black communities were built in the early 1800s, the time immediately following Emancipation in 1864 saw the greatest increase in community building. By the early 1900s, over 40 self-sufficient rural African American settlements had been founded in the county.

The legacy of African Americans here can be seen in the remains of houses and churches, mill ruins, roads, fields, woodlands, and waterways. These are the places where people worked and prayed, hunted, fished, farmed, and raised families.

This tour offers stories of home and community life as well as experiences of African Americans interfacing with large institutions during times of restriction and segregation – all while pursing the promise of freedom. The sites included are organized geographically rather than in the chronological order of their histories.

While there are many significant Black history sites in the county, we are focusing on those that are open to the public or visible from the road. Most have limited hours, so please check the websites provided before you go.

This project has been financed in part with State Funds from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, an instrumentality of the State of Maryland. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

BUTTON FARM LIVING HISTORY CENTER
16820 Black Rock Road, Germantown
ButtonFarm.org (Please check for hours and programs.)

"I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs." Frederick Douglass

Button Farm

Heritage breed pigs

THEME: Slave plantation life during the 1850s
and the heroic story of the Underground Railroad

BACKGROUND: Set on 40 rural acres, the Center interprets the period when enslaved labor shaped the landscape and modern agricultural technology had not yet been developed. This unique project revives the sensory experiences of the 1850s to provide a tactile understanding of slavery and the lives of enslaved Marylanders.

Visitors play an active role in the daily operations of the farm by helping cultivate crops, trying their hand at a trade, or helping out with plantation-era chores. The heritage breed animals program helps preserve local, historical livestock types, and heirloom vegetables and herbs are grown as part of an edible history lesson. The farm's premier program interprets the story of the Underground Railroad, and was designed by Menare to prepare Oprah Winfrey for her role in the film Beloved.

THE FARM: Originally established on a 270-acre land grant patented in 1767, the farm now rests inside the 6,300-acre Seneca Creek State Park, and is part of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Resident Curatorship program. Dubbed "Barren Hills" this tract has seen more than two centuries of ownership and is now home to The Menare Foundation, Inc. a non-profit preserving the legacy of the Underground Railroad. The farm features a farmhouse, barn, museum garden and animals' pens, along with a suspected slave burial ground.

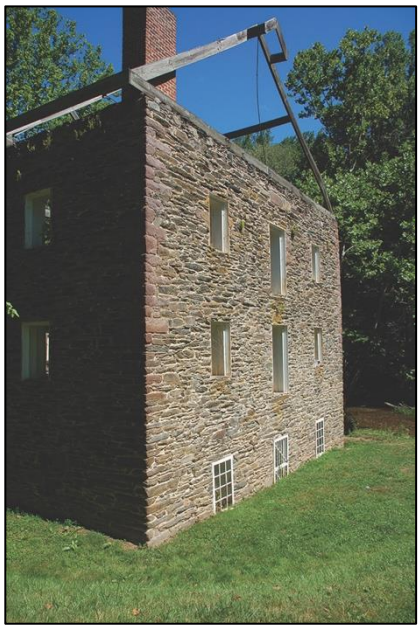
AMENITIES: The farm is open seasonally from April-November. Activities include living history tours and events, school programs, recreation and trails, a general store and rest rooms.

BLACK ROCK MILL in Seneca Creek State Park
16500 Black Rock Road, Darnestown
(Open during park hours)

"…my occupation being to superintend the farming operations, and to sell the produce in the neighboring markets of Washington and Georgetown …"

"Gradually the disposal of everything raised on the farm, the wheat, oats, hay, fruit, butter, and whatever else there might be, was confided to me, as it was quite evident that I could, and did sell for better prices than any one…"

Josiah Henson an enslaved Montgomery County man and later as a free man the founder of the Dawn community in Canada

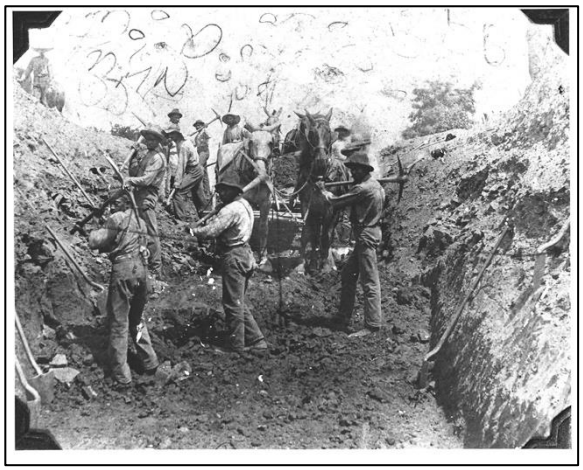


Black Rock Mill

THEME: Farming, mills, and day work and rural Black communities.

BACKGROUND: This area was dotted with mills and quarries. The mills used the abundant waterways for power and the quarries relied on veins of local stone. Mills were also gathering places for the local communities where workers and farmers often shared the news of the day. This created the opportunity for Black farm laborers to exchange information, learn news of the larger world, and stay connected with local happenings.

After the Civil War, men from nearby African American communities along Black Rock Road and nearby Brownstown often took jobs at flour, lumber, and grist mills. Work at the mills included unloading raw materials, operating milling equipment, and packing products for shipment. Pay for these jobs often supplemented seasonal income earned from farm labor.



Dickerson Mill

THE MILL: Maryland grain was milled into baking flour at mills like Black Rock. Some of the wheat flour ground at Black Rock was returned to the farmer or sold locally to bake bread, but the majority was packed into barrels and sent to seaports like Georgetown and Baltimore for export around the world.

Black Rock Mill opened in 1816 and closed in the 1920s.

AMENITIES: Interpretive panels in the mill and Seneca Creek State Park hike and bike trails.

ST. PAUL COMMUNITY CHURCH
SUGARLAND ETHNO HISTORY PROJECT
14730 Sugarland Road, Poolesville
SugarlandProject.org (Please check for hours and programs.)

"I was born down on the river bottom about four miles below Edwards' Ferry, on the Eight Mile Level, between Edwards' Ferry and Seneca. I belonged to ole Doctah White. He owned a lot o' lan down on de bottom…Yes sah, Doctah White was good to his slaves. Yes sah, he had many slaves. I dunno how many. My Missis took me away from de bottom when I was a little boy, 'cause de overseer he was so cruel to me. Yes sah he was mean. I promised him a killin if ever I got big enough." Phillip Johnson former slave and a founder of Sugarland Forest from 1937 WPA interview

St. Pauls

Sugarland Well

THEME: African American community history.

BACKGROUND: Founded in 1871, shortly after Emancipation, Sugarland Forest was home to over 40 African American families whose homes were surrounded by garden patches, orchards, and livestock pens on about 200 acres. At the center of the community stood the church, a school, a community hall, cemetery, well, store, and a post office.

During the Jim Crow and segregation eras, close knit Black communities provided a sanctuary from the racist rules and policies found in the outside world by offering housing, land ownership, education, and worship to people who were actively denied such basic things outside the community.

Houses here were built close together with large vegetable gardens and orchards to the back. The men from Sugarland worked on nearby farms, at Seneca Quarry, and on the C&O Canal. The women, when not raising children and tending their own homes, worked as midwives or with local doctors and morticians.

For several years, school was held in the church building until funds were raised to build a separate school in 1884. During segregation, black and white children by law attended separate schools.

THE CHURCH: This building was built in 1893 to replace the original church, at a cost of $1000. The church stands as the last structure reminding us of the Sugarland Forrest community. The church records offer great insight into the lives of community members and the surviving cemetery stones preserve the names of generations of families who lived here.

The history of this settlement has been gathered and preserved by descendants of the original inhabitants and has recently been turned into a book titled I Have Started for Canaan.

AMENITIES: Interpretive panels and programs by appointment.

EDWARD'S FERRY LOCKHOUSE

A free Negro, ***"the ferryman at Edwards' Ferry, on the Potomac was the underground agent of these organized thieves . . . and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal [bordering the Potomac in Maryland] was a part of the route which received, on certain boats, fugitives brought over by the ferryman."*** Samuel Ellzey, of the Leesburg area

Edward's Ferry Lockhouse

Barge on canal

THEME: work along canal and escape

BACKGROUND: The C&O Canal operated from 1831 to 1924 along the Potomac River running 184.5 miles from Washington, DC to Cumberland, Maryland. Long, narrow boats plied its waters carrying produce, grain, lumber and coal. Lockhouses were built to shelter lock keepers who raised and lowered water in the locks and guided passing boats along.

Small villages often sprang up at the river. At Edwards there was a ferry which ran across the river to Virginia, a general store, a granary, and assorted outbuildings.

Many of the workers who built the canal were English, Welsh, Scots and Irish indentured servants and enslaved men contracted from local landowners. Due to the canals' remoteness and ease of travel along the river and towpath both indentured and enslaved workers used it to relocate.

The Underground Railroad is often associated with the canal, and records show that freedom seekers used the waterway and towpath to flee north to Pennsylvania finding aid and shelter along the way.

AMENITIES: Water access, interpretive panels, towpath trail and restroom.

WARREN HISTORIC SITE
22625 White's Ferry Road, Dickerson
WarrenHistoricSite@weebly.com (Please check for hours and programs.)

"We took care of ourselves and everything we needed came from here. When we went to town to buy flour or anything we couldn't grow, we did not linger."
Former Resident

Warren Historical site

Gospel singers

THEME: African American community

BACKGROUND: The historic African American community of Martinsburg was founded in 1866. One of the rare, racially integrated Black settlements in the county, it retains the three anchor buildings of the community – church, school, and benefits society hall.

Unlike nearby Sugarland, the houses here were built somewhat farther apart, but like Sugarland, they were surrounded by garden patches, orchards, and livestock pens. The town of Martinsburg, spread out along both two stores, a post office, and over X homes.

Over time, the young people of most historic African American communities moved away to better jobs and more modern homes. By the early 1980s, most of these communities had very few residents and nature took back the buildings. In a way, these places were victims of their own success in providing the building blocks on which generations could better their lives in the larger world.

CHURCH: The original church was located on Martinsburg Road. In about 1876, that church was moved, pulled by oxen, to this site on White's Ferry Road. In 1903, the congregation had the present church constructed.

SCHOOL: The one-story Martinsburg Negro School was built in 1886 and served 40 to 50 students a year in grades 1 through 7. The school closed in 1939 and is currently used as the community center and church offices.

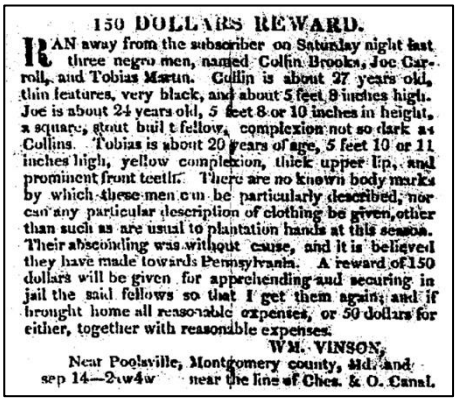
BENEFIT HALL: The local lodge of the Loving Charity Society (LCS) built the community hall here in 1914 to be used for plays, dances, lectures, and events. The Dickerson Cornet Band, formed in 1909 by men who taught music as well as performed "in concert and harmony," played here regularly. Sock hops, movies, and dinners were common community events.

The Loving Charity Society was founded by African Americans after the Civil War to offer members burial and medical insurance during segregation when they were barred by White companies. The LCS officers kept their offices on the second floor of the building. Records show that members here paid 25 cents per month for benefits.

AMENITIES: interpretive panels

POOLESVILLE – town, bank, store
Poolesville Historic District mht.maryland.gov

Historic bank building



150 DOLLARS REWARD.

RAN away from the subscriber on Saturday night last three negro men, named Collin Brooks, Joe Carroll, and Tobias Martin. Collin is about 27 years old, thin features, very black, and about 5 feet 8 inches high. Joe is about 24 years old, 5 feet 8 or 10 inches in height, a square, stout built fellow, complexion not so dark as Collins. Tobias is about 20 years of age, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, yellow complexion, thick upper lip, and prominent front teeth. There are no known body marks by which these men can be particularly described, nor can any particular description of clothing be given, other than such as are usual to plantation hands at this season. Their absconding was without cause, and it is believed they have made towards Pennsylvania. A reward of 150 dollars will be given for apprehending and securing in jail the said fellows so that I get them again, and if brought home all reasonable expenses, or 50 dollars for either, together with reasonable expenses.

WM. VINSON,
Near Poolsville, Montgomery county, Md. and
sep 14—2tw4w near the line of Ches. & O. Canal.

Escape ad

THEME: African American town life

BACKGROUND: The town of Poolesville was founded in 1793 in an area occupied by Native Americans. It is listed on the National Register of Historic places. This early crossroads settlement served the surrounding farms and community. By the mid 1800s, Poolesville was a thriving commercial and farming center served by the C&O Canal and the nearby B&O Railroad. available.

In addition to working as farm laborers, African Americans provided skilled labor to most local businesses. In its heyday, Poolesville was home to a skilled workforce of blacksmiths, cobblers, wheelwrights, coopers, tailors, barbers, and carpenters. Livery stables, taverns, general stores, and a hotel were among the services available. While African Americans likely worked in such businesses, these institutions would not serve them as customers or had rules for separate treatment.

On the outskirts of town, Black communities began to thrive supporting schools, churches, and benefit halls which served residents.

CIVIL WAR: Both the Union and Confederate armies occupied Poolesville and surrounding areas. During these occupations' men, both Black and White, were conscripted, or compulsorily signed up for military service.

Patrick Warren, enslaved by James Davidson, was recruited in Poolesville in November 1864, just two weeks following Maryland's abolition of slavery under a new state constitution. Warren served in 4th United States Colored Infantry (pictured) in the waning months of the war; an African-American unit which took part in William Tecumseh Sherman's Carolinas Campaign, and featured Congressional Metal winners in its ranks. After the war Warren returned to civilian life as a farm laborer, making his home in Poolesville with his wife and daughter.

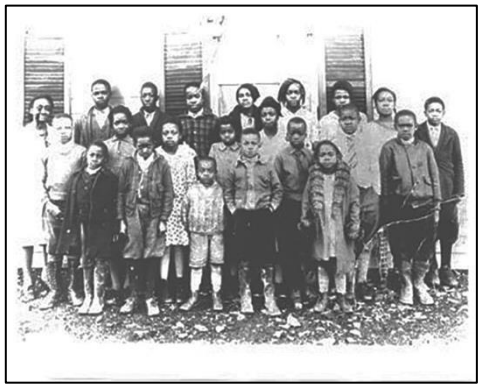
LYNCHING: George Washington Peck was the first recorded of the three known Black men who were lynched in Montgomery County in the 1800s. Born into slavery, Peck lived in the Poolesville/Beallsville area his entire life, which was about 22 years. In January of 1880, he was accused of attempted assault of a White girl and arrested by the constable. Before he could be transported to Rockville for a trial, a crowd of local men seized him in the night and hanged him from a tree in downtown Poolesville until he died.
The victims of lynching in Montgomery County are being memorialized by the Equal Justice Initiative of Alabama's nationwide Remembrance and Reconciliation Project.

AMENITIES: Food, restrooms, interpretive panels,

BOYDS NEGRO SCHOOL
19510 White Ground Road, Boyds
BoydsHistory.org (Please check for hours and programs.)

"Equal means getting the same thing, at the same time, and in the same place."
Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall

Boyds Negro School



School children

THEME: Segregated school

BACKGROUND: Boyds was classic railroad boomtown. It sprang up in the late 1860s, after the Civil War, to house workers building the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad. When railroad service began in 1873, a station was built, followed by a mill, stores, and other businesses.

The coming of the rail line also brought jobs. African American families living in the area had increased employment opportunities, which provided economic stability. In XX a school was built to serve the workers' children.

SCHOOL: The one-room, 22' x 30' wooden building was heated by a wood stove. It served as the only public school for African Americans in Boyds, Turner Town, Black Town, and White Ground from 1895-1936. The schoolhouse served students in grades 1-8, many of whom walked for miles to attend classes.

At the time of its operation, schools were segregated with white children attending one school and African American students attending another. Segregation was applied to many areas of daily life such as eating in restaurants, riding public transit, using restrooms, attending public gatherings, as well as schools.

There was systemic inequality between White and Black segregated schools. In Black schools, teachers were paid about half the salary of teachers in White schools, books and furnishings were given to Black schools second hand from White schools, and buildings were used far beyond their prime.

In the early 1950s, Black schools were consolidated from scattered locations to larger, centrally located schools. The Edward U. Taylor School, located across the street from Boyds Negro was one such school. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme court ended legal segregation in American schools.

In 1937, Civil Rights attorney and future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall representing William Gibbs sued for equal pay for Black teachers. The case, filed against the Board of Education was tried at the courthouse in Rockville and ultimately resulted in equal pay.

AMENITIES: Interpretive panels and programs.

GLEN ECHO PARK
7300 MacArthur Boulevard, Glen Echo
GlenEchoPark.org (Please check for hours and programs.)

"If you don't know your history and don't know your past, it's going to come back and bite you. I'd tell [those protesting today] be aware of what formerly was and what is." Glen Echo Amusement Park protester Dion Diamond.

Dentzel Carousel

Glen Echo protestors

THEME: Civil Rights

BACKGROUND: Glen Echo Park was first developed in 1891 as a National Chautauqua Assembly. By the early 1900s the site had become Glen Echo Amusement Park – the premier amusement park serving the Washington area until 1968, when it closed.
In 1971, after the federal government obtained the land, the National Park Service (NPS) began managing a new park on the site. NPS collaborated with artists and arts organizations to create a rich arts program in the spirit of the original Chautauqua movement. The Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture was established in 2002 as a nonprofit organization to oversee the Park's arts and cultural programs and maintain the historic facilities, including the 1921 Dentzel Carousel and the 1933 Spanish Ballroom, in collaboration with NPS and Montgomery County, Maryland.

CIVIL RIGHTS: In the summer of 1960, Howard University students led protests at Glen Echo Amusement Park, a privately operated and segregated entertainment venue. The Howard University protesters rode the carousel and were arrested for doing so in violation of the amusement park's segregation policies that barred African Americans. The Howard University students and residents from the neighboring Bannockburn community formed an unprecedented interracial alliance to confront the privately-operated amusement park's owners, Maryland's Jim Crow laws, the American Nazi Party, and the Supreme Court. Their protests led to the amusement park's desegregation, opening the venue to everyone for its 1961 season and beyond. In 1968, when the amusement park closed, the site became the property of the federal government and is now jointly owned by our entire community and presents arts and cultural programs that inspire and educate.

AMENITIES: NPS tours by appointment, arts classes and camps, children's theater performances, exhibitions, social dance events, concerts, interpretive signage, café, picnic area, playground, and restrooms.