COMMUNITY
CORNERSTONES

A Selection of Historic African American Churches in Montgomery County, Maryland

MOUNT ZION M.E. CHURCH

Hm!

HERITAGE
MONTGOMERY

Heritage Montgomery would like to thank Eileen McGuckian for her invaluable contributions researching and writing this brochure.

Dear Visitor,

A treasure is "something considered exceptionally precious," and the churches in this "Community Cornerstones" guide are just that – precious structures that have provided strength, comfort and a spiritual foundation to generations of African Americans.

These houses of worship have left indelible impressions on the communities in which they are located, and their legacy of faith has sustained residents through the ages – in peace and war, good times and bad.

We are fortunate to have these amazing treasures in Montgomery County, and I encourage you to take time to learn more about the contributions of these enduring "Community Cornerstones."

Sincerely,

Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive

Introduction

As part of the Civil War Sesquicentennial, Heritage Montgomery produced a brochure and Emmy® award-winning documentary film, *Life in a War Zone: Montgomery County during the Civil War.* Research on this project progressed naturally to an examination of the growth of local, freed African American communities after the war. With newly won freedom, African Americans began to focus on establishing supportive social structures – schools, charity halls... and churches.

Community Cornerstones tells just part of the stories of selected historic African American churches in Montgomery County. Use this brochure as a guide, drawing your attention to sites you may have passed on a daily basis, unaware of their meaningful history.

In this brochure you will notice the use of the words "colored" and "Negro." Although jarring to the modern ear, historically these were commonly used terms and in many instances were part of proper names, e.g. the Boyds Negro School.

Please be respectful when touring these places of worship and burial. Some sites are open on a limited basis and all are privately owned and maintained.

Key

ME	Methodist Episcopal
AME Zion	African Methodist Episcopal Zion
MP	Designated on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation

A symbol of hope and faith, the church was typically the first institution established in a new black community, usually followed by a school and a charity hall.

Early History of Local African American Communities

Dramatic change came to Montgomery County 150 years ago, as Marylanders and Americans adjusted to new legal and social situations unimaginable before the Civil War and emancipation. Dozens of African American settlements were established by freed men and women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but today few remain intact. A symbol of hope and faith, the church was typically the first institution established in a new black community, usually followed by a school and a charity hall. Fortunately, many of Montgomery County's historic landmark churches still proudly stand as cornerstones of their communities. Heritage Montgomery hopes that this guide to historic churches and cemeteries will connect current County residents and visitors to our past.

Black men and women lived, worked, prayed, and died here long before Montgomery County was formed in 1776. Between 1790 and 1860, enslaved and free African Americans comprised about one-third of the total population. Roughly one-third of County landowners held slaves, most with fewer than ten. In 1860, slaves comprised 30 percent of the County's population, free blacks eight percent.

Gospel Train at Warren Church

Prior to the Civil War, masters were encouraged to instruct their slaves in Christianity, although as abolition voices rose, the State passed laws forbidding colored persons to assemble without an authorized white in charge. Most enslaved people attended church with their masters or not at all. Serving as local preachers and bible class leaders, Negroes took an active – though subservient – part in church affairs. The races met in prayer meetings, revivals, Sabbath Schools, and services. Rev. Josiah Henson was a slave on the Riley Farm in North Bethesda from 1795 to 1830 whose autobiography inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Henson wrote of hearing a white minister at Newport Mill and being called to preach in order to earn money toward his freedom. The largest settlement of free blacks was Sandy Spring, where most Quakers freed their slaves and in 1822 conveyed land for their church.

After Maryland slaves were emancipated in 1864, they focused on self-sufficiency and community building. In the next half-century,

African Americans established 40 settlements throughout the County. The first structure was typically a church that served as religious center, meeting place, and schoolhouse. Benevolent societies and fraternal organizations soon emerged. Methodism was strong in Maryland, so between 1870 and 1910 more than two-thirds of all new congregations in the County were of that denomination. Hardy circuit riders rode on horseback from church to church, taking as many Sundays as there were churches on the circuit to make the rounds. A circuit, or charge, consisted of a group of churches served by the same minister. Local preachers and class leaders helped to mark the passages of life when the circuit-riding minister was absent.

"An Humble Colored Church" pictured in 1912 study of Montgomery County by the Presbyterian Church

During the century of entrenched segregation – the mid-1860s through the mid-1960s – education provided the first civil rights arena. After Maryland established a school system for black students in 1872, class was often held in the church until a schoolhouse could be built. These "colored" schools were in a constant state of disrepair and open for a shorter term than those for whites. Black leaders met the challenge of Julius Rosenwald, an early partner with Sears, Roebuck and Co, to build Negro schools in the South; 15 one-, two-, or three-room Rosenwald schools were erected in Montgomery County in the 1920s. In the following decade, responding to constant appeals from blacks, the School Board consolidated smaller schools into larger ones, then repeated this with a building campaign in the early 1950s.

The peak construction period for African American churches was 1890 to 1930. Congregations replaced their original buildings with modest, 1½ story, three- or four-bay main block, one-room frame structures, usually with a front entrance in the gable end and often a bell tower. From this time, many public schools, benevolent societies, and fraternal organizations traced their origins to the black church.

By 1912, when the Presbyterian Church assigned a field team to study rural Montgomery County, there were 40 colored and 95 white churches. Most black churches were Methodist Episcopal, while others were Baptist and Methodist Protestant. With an average membership of 50, most buildings of one room, and sharing a total of 18 ministers, the Negro churches were described as not in "robust health." Nevertheless, the study noted, people supported their churches generously and "the county is more than adequately churched."

Between the World Wars, a new generation of churches appeared, of grander proportion and materials. Most churches built of this period are of wood; some congregations could afford brick. Although a few black carpenters and builders are known, most often craftsmen of the congregation were given a small budget with which to buy local materials and design the church.

These 1920s and 30s churches feature a central entrance under a gable roof and steeple, with Gothic arched windows, rows of pews, an organ and raised altar, and a choir loft. The sanctuary was above, with a social hall and rooms below for meetings of Methodist men, Ladies Aid Society, Sunday School, and other groups. On the grounds were cemeteries, schoolhouses, or meeting halls, and a few public open spaces. These all were put to special use during the month of May, when black communities celebrated Homecoming with reunions, picnics and parades, music and bands, and visiting at family graves. For many churches, this was the opportunity to raise funds for the coming year.

John Wesley M.E. Church in Clarksburg, 1970s. Courtesy MCHS

Scotland A.M.E. Zion Chapel

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, another generation of leadership emerged from the churches, even though the African American population had dipped below five percent of the total County population. With passage and implementation of civil rights legislation such as school integration, fair housing, and public accommodations, barriers to black economic and social mobility eroded.

Congregations in the Washington Annual conference, formed for Negro churches in 1864, merged with the white Baltimore Conference in 1965 and then became part of the United Methodist Church in 1968. In the past half century, younger generations relocated from these traditional African American communities, homes were replaced or abandoned, and church membership declined. Often, when smaller congregations merged, one property was rented to a newer group or abandoned. Sizeable congregations erected new, larger churches, some of brick and modernist in style. Lodge halls and segregated schools found other uses or were razed.

Today, we are fortunate that physical evidence of these black communities of the 19th and 20th centuries can be found in Montgomery County's historic churches. Capturing this history helps to maintain connections with family, land, and community. Each church is distinctive, whether a simple gable-front wooden structure or a newer building of more modern style and materials. On Sundays you will hear joyous sounds and beautiful music, and during the month of May you might happen upon a Homecoming celebration. During Heritage Montgomery's Heritage Days Weekend, held each year at the end of June, visit some of these historic sites that are often opened by groups that help document the past and preserve what remains.

SITE NO.

1

Present name:
Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church
10902 Seven Locks Road
Potomac
301-299-5226   MP

Scotland is a visible reminder of Montgomery County's rural past and of the challenges of changing times. It is one of six historic A.M.E. Zion churches established in the County.

Freed men and women – many named Dove, Mason, Crawford, and Simms – settled in "Snakes Den" in the late 19th century, soon convincing the County that they could support a public school. They also organized a church that by 1905 held services in a home. This front-gable frame church opened in 1924 as Scotland A.M.E. Zion Chapel.

Segregation allowed Scotland to stay self-sufficient. Its Rosenwald-built school met attendance standards, became a summer recreation center in 1948, and closed in 1951. However, many homes were crowded and without running water.

The congregation added a cinderblock section to the original building in 1967, the year a County urban renewal project razed deteriorated homes on the east side of the road, connected water and sewer, and began to build townhouses for Scotland residents and newcomers.

Volunteers from in and outside the community who formed "Save Our Scotland" protected it for decades. Today Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church faces challenges from increasing traffic encroachment and modern suburban development. Behind the church is the cemetery, with mostly unmarked graves.

Mount Calvary Baptist Church & Fishermen's Cemetery

Church: 608 North Horners Lane, Rockville
Cemetery: Horners Lane and Frederick Avenue
301-424-8717
www.MTCBC.org

A decade after the 1890 subdivision of Lincoln Park was recorded and African American families bought homes there, members of a religious community gathered under a large maple tree and established the First Colored Baptist Church of Rockville. In 1902, they purchased a plot of land and began to erect a church on Horner's Lane. Soon they changed the name to Mount Calvary Baptist Church.

Over the years, the congregation made numerous repairs and improvements to the original building, adding a choir loft and excavating the basement for kitchen and dining space, but more room was needed. In 1954, a building program began, and it would be seven years before the new church was completed. It is a substantial, handsome yellow brick Gothic Revival-style building, with a gable front featuring a large rose window above the pointed-arch entrance.

Organizations at Mount Calvary include the Sunday School, choirs, youth programs, men's and women's groups. In 1988 and 2001 large additions were built on the west side of the church. Today, within the largest African American community in Montgomery County, Mount Calvary has one of the most substantial congregations in the County.

Fishermen's Cemetery in Lincoln Park is the largest burial ground in the County established for African Americans. Before 1917, black families buried loved ones in church or backyard plots. Opened that year by Eureka Tabernacle #29, the Rockville chapter of the Order of Galilean Fishermen, this cemetery now contains more than a thousand graves. In the 1980s, Mt. Calvary assumed responsibility for maintenance of the two-acre community cemetery.

Jerusalem Methodist Episcopal Church

Present name:
Jerusalem-Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church
21 Wood Lane
Rockville
301-424-0464
www.Jmpumc.org

A Methodist Episcopal congregation has owned this site since 1835, with a church built by 1858. White members worshipped in the sanctuary; slaves and free blacks entered through a separate door and sat upstairs. Negroes served as local preachers and class leaders.

In 1863, in a schism over slavery, white members withdrew from the Rockville church to join the M.E. Church South. After the Civil War, with help from the Freedmen's Bureau office in Rockville, newly emancipated blacks won legal title to this property and the whites prepared to build anew on Commerce Lane. Taking the name Jerusalem, this church joined the Washington Mission Conference for Negroes. In the same year, some blacks left to form an African Methodist Episcopal Zion congregation.

In 1890, Rev. Daniel Wheeler became the first African American minister here. Two years later, the congregation tore down the old church, cleaned the bricks, and used them to build a brick Gothic Revival church with a square corner tower and pointed-arch windows.

Jerusalem held camp meetings on Middle and Martins Lanes. The Galilean Fishermen's Hall was located around the corner. When Rockville Colored Elementary School was destroyed by fire in 1912, classes moved to Jerusalem until a new school could be built. The 1914 parsonage next door withstood an arson fire in 1999.

The Civil Rights movement of Montgomery County began in this church. Spurred by William B. Gibbs, Jr.'s successful case for equal pay for black teachers in 1936-37, Jerusalem became the first headquarters of the County chapter of the NAACP. In 1959-60, protesters assembled here to receive instructions for picketing at the Hi-Boy restaurant and Glen Echo Amusement Park.

A major renovation in 1954 led to new front steps, dug-out basement, removal of the steeple, and exterior stucco. In 1989, Jerusalem merged with Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church (#18).

Pleasant View Methodist Episcopal Church

4

Present name:
Pleasant View Historical Site
11810 Darnestown Road
Gaithersburg
301-926-1798

On this three-acre parcel are the church, cemetery, and schoolhouse that represent Montgomery County's African American experience over 150 years.

Soon after the Civil War, the congregation was established and three acres of land purchased, but a building was not erected until 1888. In 1914, the families replaced it with a new church in the Gothic Revival tradition, with windows and an entrance tower similar to that of Poplar Grove (#5) on Jones Lane.

In 1968, the congregations of Hunting Hill, McDonald Chapel, and Pleasant View churches transferred membership to the new, integrated Fairhaven Methodist Church on Darnestown Road. Since then, the trustees have leased the old church to other congregations and the property has been maintained by the Pleasant View Historical Association, which hosts open houses and celebrations.

A public school served the Quince Orchard black community from 1874 to 1951. After the original one-room school burned in 1901, the School Board replaced it with an abandoned white school building. Nina Honemond Clarke, who wrote the histories of Montgomery County black public schools and churches, began her career here in 1937 by sharing the classroom with another teacher. After 1940, when 122 students in grades one to seven attended, more rooms were added.

The cemetery contains more than 70 graves, dating from 1890 to the present. Inscribed on stones are family names such as Green, Ridgley, Prather, Magruder, and Hallman.

Poplar Grove Baptist Church

5

14625 Jones Lane
Darnestown
301-330-5054   MP
www.PoplarGroveBaptistChurch.org

Starting in about 1883, black families in this area worshipped in a log building under the tall poplar trees and baptized in the creek behind the property. The first congregation of 18 members saved for a new building, Deacon Butler donated land, and Joseph and Henry Mobley erected this frame 20' by 30' church in 1893.

The handsome Poplar Grove Baptist Church is in the Gothic Revival tradition, with pointed-arch windows and a three-part central entrance tower crowned by a truncated steeple. Note its similarity to Pleasant View (#4) at nearby Quince Orchard.

Poplar Grove is one of just seven historic African American Baptist churches in Montgomery County. Its congregation often shared ministers with Jerusalem Baptist (#9) near Poolesville and with Round Oak Baptist in Spencerville. As did the others, Poplar Grove organized choirs, usher boards, a missionary society, Sunday School, and Willing Workers Club.

By the 1980s, the congregation had grown with the surrounding area. Rather than replace the beloved church, they chose to build a new structure and seek historic designation for the old. The new church, with seating for 250, was dedicated in 1998. Poplar Grove celebrated restoration of the historic church the following year.

The well-kept cemetery behind the church contains about 140 burials, dating from 1904 to the present.

Sugarland Forest Methodist Episcopal Church

Starting in 1871, freed slaves purchased land from local whites to establish "Sugarland Forrest." The deed specified that the land was to be used for religious worship, a school, and as a burial site for "people of African Descent." After the original structure burned in 1893, local white carpenter W. Scott Bell built the frame Sugarland Forest church with front gable, wainscoting, recessed pulpit, round-arch windows, and belfry for $1,000.

By 1900, more than 40 African American families lived on about 200 acres. The men worked on nearby farms, Seneca Quarry, and the C&O Canal. The women served as midwives and worked for local doctors and morticians. This self-sufficient township once included a well, post office, store, community hall, and a cornet band.

The school stood from 1880 to 1925, then was replaced by a one-room Rosenwald school that was used until integration. Sugarland residents buried their loved ones in the cemetery behind the church. With dates ranging from the 1870s to the present, there are more than 200 marked and unmarked graves.

Although the population of Sugarland has declined in recent years, interest in preserving the community has increased. In 1995, descendants of founding families organized the Sugarland Ethno-History Project to document the community and serve as a resource for others.
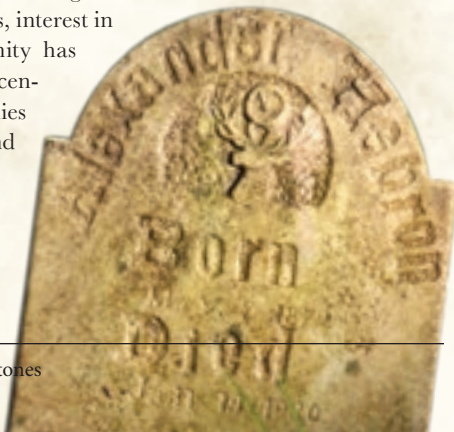
Warren Methodist Episcopal Church

The early crossroads settlement of Martinsburg was racially integrated, uncommon in rural Maryland. After free black Nathan Naylor purchased 97 acres here in 1866, other former slaves followed. By 1879 the population reached 75. Today, Martinsburg is a rare African American settlement that retains the three anchors of the historical community—church, school, and benefit society lodge.

First built about 1866, facing Martinsburg Road, were Warren Church and a small cemetery, now overgrown. A decade later, oxen pulled the church to the present site. In 1886 the one-room Martinsburg Negro School opened for 40 to 50 students in grades one to seven. After closing in 1939, the school became a church hall and community center.

In 1903, the congregation hired W. Scott Bell, a well-regarded white carpenter in the area, to build a larger church at a cost of $150. This handsome building features traditional lines with a touch of Gothic influence; the sanctuary has a vaulted ceiling and wainscoting. Bell also built Sugarland Forest Church (#6) in 1893 and Loving Charity Hall here in 1914.

The local lodge of Loving Charity Society, an organization that offered insurance benefits in segregated times, erected this community building to be used for plays, dances, lectures, and events. Playing here regularly was the Dickerson Cornet Band, formed in 1909 by men who taught music as well as performed "in concert and in harmony." Lodge members paid dues of 25 cents per month, receiving benefits during illness and at the death of a member.

Warren merged with nearby Mt. Zion Church (#10) in 1994. Seven years later, the Warren Historic Site Committee purchased this extraordinary piece of history. It has since begun to preserve the buildings and return energy to Martinsburg.

Elijah Rest Methodist Episcopal Church

This large community near Poolesville hosts some of the oldest African American institutions in the County. Jerusalem originated in 1861-62, when Federal troops established a camp for former slaves from Virginia. After the war, local freed men and women built Jerusalem and a smaller settlement known as Jonesville. Before the close of the 19th century, within a few miles were two churches of different denominations, a schoolhouse, benefit society lodge, and burial ground.

In 1868 five local men paid $150 "for the purpose of erecting a School House." Love and Charity Hall was erected by 1870; downstairs became a school and upstairs were meeting rooms.

The first Elijah Rest church served from 1871 until 1909, when a larger frame structure was built. It was likely named after Rev. Elijah Awkard, who was assigned to this early circuit of Negro congregations. Love and Charity Hall was razed in the 1930s.

In 1950, a fire destroyed the church and all of its records. Nearby Jerusalem Baptist (#9) opened its doors to Elijah members until the new church opened. Elmer Jones designed the church of cinderblocks (now covered with siding) with a large square tower. With support from the Poolesville community, it survived vandalism and increasingly closer residential developments. Elijah Church closed its doors in 2011 and merged with Mt. Zion (#10) and Warren (#7).

In the cemetery are about 200 settlers and their descendants, with twenty burials dated before 1920.

Jerusalem Baptist Church

The first Baptist congregation in the upper County sits in the heart of the Jerusalem community, established by former slaves after emancipation. Most owners acquired and cleared their land after 1876, but probably had resided earlier as tenants. After meeting in Robert Williams' log home, in 1888 Williams donated land and local carpenter George Dorsey built a two-story frame church.

In 1922, after the original Jerusalem Baptist burned, this new frame church was built on land donated by the Clarke family. Noah Clarke, whose parents came to the area in 1896, was a traveling salesman who played the church organ, directed the choir, and taught Sunday School. For decades he led efforts to improve black public schools, securing a high school in 1927, raising funds, and advising the Board of Education on integration in the 1950s.

The colored school serving Jerusalem and Jonesville was replaced by a Rosenwald school in 1925; today it is used as a County maintenance depot. An older cemetery is at the location of the original church (on Jerusalem Terrace), while the newer cemetery is behind the current church. More than 100 graves are dated from the 1940s to the present.

Jerusalem Church has experienced a number of renovations, including bricking the church and closing in the bell tower.

Damascus Area

Germantown Area

Gaithersburg Area

Poolesville Area

Rockville Area

Olney Area

Colesville Area

Potomac Area

Kensington Area

Bethesda Area

Frederick County, MD

Loudoun County, VA

Fairfax County, VA

Washington D.C.

Howard County, MD

Prince Georges County MD

1   Scotland AME Zion – Scotland, Potomac

2   Mt. Calvary Baptist and Fishermen's Cemetery – Lincoln Park, Rockville

3   Jerusalem ME – Rockville

4   Pleasant View ME – Quince Orchard, Gaithersburg

5   Poplar Grove Baptist – Darnestown

6   Sugarland Forest ME – Sugarland, Poolesville

7   Warren ME – Martinsburg, Dickerson

8   Elijah Rest ME – Jerusalem, Poolesville

9   Jerusalem Baptist – Jerusalem, Poolesville

10 Mt. Zion ME – Big Woods, Dickerson

11 St. Mark's ME – White Ground, Boyds

12 Francis Asbury ME – Brownstown, Germantown

13 John Wesley ME – Rocky Hill, Clarksburg

14 Pleasant Grove ME – Purdum, Damascus

15 Brook Grove ME – Goshen, Gaithersburg

16 Mt. Zion ME – Mt. Zion, Brookeville

17 Emory Grove ME and Camp Meeting – Emory Grove, Gaithersburg

18 Mt. Pleasant ME – Norbeck, Rockville

19 Sharp Street ME – Sandy Spring

20 Mt. Calvary – Spencerville

21 Good Hope ME – Good Hope, Silver Spring

A   Potomac Grove Colored ME – Seneca

B   Montgomery Chapel ME – Hyattstown

C   Howard Chapel ME – Unity, Damascus

Mount Zion Methodist Episcopal Church

Big Woods, the oldest black settlement in western Montgomery County, was founded in 1813 by former slaves and landowners of the Spencer, Lee, and Awkard families. After emancipation, other freedmen arrived to take jobs in industry and construction around Dickerson, Barnesville, and later, the railroad and quarries.

After trustees bought the land in 1867, the original Mt. Zion was erected and Rev. Elijah Awkard became the pastor. The "Old Meeting House" served as a school during the week, a hall for meetings and social gatherings on Saturday nights, and worship on Sundays.

The current church was built in 1888, with the vestibule and bell tower added in 1937. Renovations in 1971 included extending the front and bricking over the wood exterior.

Mt. Zion and Warren (#7) churches have worked together for half a century, often combining their Methodist Men's group, Ladies Aid Society, Usher Board, and marching bands. In 1994, the churches formally united, and in 2011 they joined with St. Mark's (#11) as the West Montgomery Charge.

The cemetery is in a wooded area half a mile from the church. Approximately 130 graves, ranging from 1909 to the present, are in marked and unmarked plots. Rev. Awkard is buried in the family plot on the hill behind the cemetery.

St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church

After emancipation, former slaves remained to work on the large farms and to live in "White Ground." As contractor Col. James A. Boyd laid rails in the 1870s, he called upon white and black residents to help build a new town.

In 1879, Boyd sold land to trustees "to have and to hold… for the colored people…for the purpose of holding a public school and meeting for religious worship in the building now thereon." One-room White Oak Chapel served as chapel and school for several years, but was blown down in a storm in 1892. With land, labor, and funds donated by local residents, St. Mark's was dedicated in 1893.

While this front-gable frame church has modernized over the years, it retains its original siding, pointed-arch windows, bell, and charm. Recently a time capsule from 1893 was found in rafters behind the cornerstone. Descendants of the former slaves who established the church are still active members.

The 130 gravestones here date from the 1870s.

The one-room Boyds Negro School opened nearby in 1895, operating for 40 years before students transferred to Clarksburg. Boyds Historical Society restored and now maintains this local treasure.

Francis Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church

12

Present name: Asbury United Methodist Church
17540 Black Rock Road
Germantown
301-540-2347

This settlement on the road connecting Germantown and Darnestown was named after William Brown, a free black who bought land in 1868. The new congregation, named for the preacher who brought Methodism to colonial Maryland, worshipped in Brown's home. The original Francis Asbury Church, built in the mid-1880s, was destroyed by fire in 1950.

The current church, with three telescoping gables, was completed in 1960. It was designed by Clarence B. Wheat and constructed by Raymond Leroy Baker, a black contractor who built a number of fine Rockville houses. Asbury is of cinderblock construction covered with stucco. Cornerstones may be seen on either side of the front vestibule.

In 1883, the Board of Education paid William Brown $160 for a lot and building. Local blacks began to petition for a new schoolhouse in 1900, meanwhile renting Asbury Church for $2 per year. Petitions were repeatedly denied until a Presbyterian Church study reported County colored schools in "dilapidated condition." In 1910, a new school for whites opened in "new Germantown" near the railroad line and the old white one-room school in "Old Germantown" was given to the blacks. In 1979 it was moved to the Lathrop Smith Outdoor Center.

Representing Brownstown today is Asbury Church and its cemetery, which contains about 100 burials from 1902 to the present.

John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church

13

Present name: Community of Faith United Methodist Church
22420 Frederick Road
Clarksburg
301-972-5520

This area south of the historic market town of Clarksburg is known as "Rocky Hill." Lloyd Gibbs bought 24 acres in 1884 and was soon joined by other families named Wims, Moore, Foreman, Mason, Snowden, and Lyles. They held jobs as cobblers, mail carriers, midwives, teachers, carpenters, and farmers. The church doubled as a school until one could be built in 1894. Clarksburg Negro School closed in the late 1930s, when 105 children in grades one to seven were consolidated with Germantown and Quince Orchard schools.

The stylish brick John Wesley Church was constructed in 1925-32 to replace an 1878 frame building destroyed by fire. It speaks to the relative prosperity of the African American families who settled around Clarksburg in the late 19th-early 20th century. Wesley's parapeted gabled façade, above-ground entrance, and variety of stained glass windows identified this landmark on what was the heavily traveled main road between Georgetown and Frederick.

John Wesley Church served as a social, as well as a faith center. The church hosted multiple choirs and singing groups, Sunday School, Flower Club, and Epworth League. Clarksburg String Band was organized around the turn of the 20th century by black musicians who lived nearby, on Stringtown Road.

Behind the church is a large cemetery with about 300 burials. They date from 1886 to the present.

Pleasant Grove Methodist Episcopal Church

14

Present name: Pleasant Grove Christian Community Church
11225 Mountain View Road
Damascus
301-253-0107
www.PleasantGroveCCChurch.org

Located in the agricultural area of Purdum, northwest of Damascus, this church is still the center of a small African American community.

In 1868, freedmen purchased an acre of land for $20 and built Pleasant Grove M.E. Church the following year. It was called the "White School House" because the seller was named White and, as in many communities, public school was conducted in the church.

The original small frame church was destroyed by fire in 1924, but was soon rebuilt. The school operated most years but occasionally closed for lack of attendance. The Board of Education paid $15 per year for use of the church building but was often in arrears for payments. The school was abandoned in the 1930s.

The front-gable church has been renovated over the years. In the 1960s, a cinderblock community house addition was attached which, with the original weatherboards, was sheathed in siding.

A cemetery on two sides of the church holds more than 75 graves, including Lyles, Dorsey, Mason, Hawkins, and Brown. Inscribed tombstones date from 1869 to the present.

Brook Grove Methodist Episcopal Church

15

Present name:
Agape A.M.E. Church
7700 Brink Road
Gaithersburg
301-924-8640

During slavery, blacks in this area sat in the gallery to worship with whites at Goshen M.E. Church, located less than a mile to the west. After emancipation, local freedmen purchased two acres from black farmer Vachel Duffin for $75. The group raised funds to complete Brook Grove Church in 1871.

Brook Grove has been constructed three times on this site. The original church was destroyed by fire in 1876, then rebuilt. The congregation added a parsonage in 1919 and organized a Sunday School, Usher Board, Women's Society of Christian Service, Flower Club, and Methodist Men. Brook Grove shared a horseback-riding minister and social activities with its sister church in Stewartown.

Another disastrous fire in 1952 required another capital campaign. Dedicated in 1955, the present church features a telescope of three gables and an open bell tower. Patterned cement-stone siding was added in 1960.

Facing declining membership, Brook Grove and Stewartown united in the 1990s to form Goshen United Methodist Church. The merger led to building a new facility at the Stewartown site. Worship services were held at Brook Grove until the new Goshen Church building was completed in 2001. Brook Grove is now the home of Agape A.M.E. Church.

The large cemetery adjoining the church contains about 550 marked gravestones. Dates range from 1865 to the present.

Mount Zion Methodist Episcopal Church

Mt. Zion is a crossroads settlement west of Brookeville. After emancipation, former slaves in this area worshipped at Sharp Street (#19) in Sandy Spring, but their numbers quickly grew to need a church of their own. Initially, Quakers Richard and Charles Brooke allowed freed men and women to meet in a log building. In 1872, with materials from the Christian Association of Baltimore City, the group bought an acre of land on Zion Road for $100, erected a building to be used as church and school, laid out a burial ground, and opened a public school for black children.

The racially integrated community thrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition to churches and public schools, Mt. Zion claimed two general stores, a post office, and 25 residences. Former slaves found day work and drove freight wagons. Over the years they remodeled and added to the church several times.

The original Mt. Zion burned down in 1968. Only salvaging the bell, this close-knit community met in the old schoolhouse and used nearby churches until they could rebuild. When Mt. Zion United Methodist Church re-opened in 1974, a new tower held the old bell.

The public school remained open through desegregation in 1957, then was converted to recreational use. Mt. Zion's cemetery holds 162 marked graves, with more unmarked sites, dated from 1875 to the present. Descendants of early families still attend Mt. Zion Church.

Emory Grove Methodist Episcopal Church and Camp Meeting

Emory Grove was settled by former slaves from nearby Redland and Goshen. They erected a church in 1874, started a Sunday School, and built a house for pastors who rode the Rockville circuit of the Washington Negro Conference.

The handsome building that commands this corner was completed in 1903 at a cost of $3,000. Maintaining the three-story bell tower, pointed arch windows, and overhanging eaves, the congregation extensively remodeled Emory Grove in 1960-62. Behind is the burial site of Rev. & Mrs. A. B. Dorsey, commemorating the beloved minister and his wife with an obelisk that reads "Dying is but going home." The cemetery on Washington Grove Lane next to Longview School holds more than 130 gravesites dating from 1912 to the present.

Camp meetings were held from 1877 to 1967. Convening each year in August, at first in Bowman's Woods and then on the Mineral Grove grounds, it was well known in Maryland. Families packed up horse-drawn vehicles and stayed in tents for weeks. Seasoned cabbage and potatoes, corn, fried chicken, cakes, pies, and ice cream were sold. On Sundays in an open pavilion, preachers exhorted and people sang and shouted when the spirit moved them. After the advent of the automobile, overnight camping was less popular. A church history observed "this was not a recreational festival but the end of a harvest in the open for saving souls."

Emory Grove Colored School operated from 1879 to 1950. Renamed Longview in 1950, it was the first consolidated elementary for black children, also the first with a kindergarten and a special education class.

Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church

African Americans arrived to work on local farms as whites began to open the commercial crossroads at Norbeck. Located five miles from Rockville, the population here climbed to 40 by 1879.

The former slaves placed improving the lives of future generations first. In 1872, the year Maryland established a school system for black children, Adrian Wadsworth sold one-half acre of land on the road to Muncaster's mill to the School Commissioners for $5. The school was built, rebuilt in 1895, and in the 1920s replaced by a two-room Rosenwald school. By 1939-40 there were 85 students in grades one to seven. The school remained open until consolidation in 1951 and is still used as a recreation center today.

Mount Pleasant shared a minister with Jerusalem Church (#3) and used the schoolhouse until about 1895, when additional land was bought and the church erected. A modest frame building that has endured few modifications over the years, it reads as a Gothic Revival-influenced rural church, with a gable-front entrance, pointed-arch windows, and metal roof. Stucco was added in the 1930s.

The cemetery behind the church contains about 33 headstones, ranging in date from 1893 to 1961. Three of the 1930s stones are triangular in shape.

In 1989, Mount Pleasant merged with Jerusalem United Methodist Church in Rockville, where the combined congregations hold worship services each week.

Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church

Sharp Street Church is the oldest African American congregation, and Sandy Spring is the oldest free black community, in Montgomery County. Quakers here openly preached against slavery before the American Revolution and, by the end of the War of 1812, most local slaves had been freed.

In 1822 Thomas and Sophia Brooke conveyed land to the Sharp Street trustees "as a place for interment of the dead and for erecting a house of worship." After Maryland emancipated all slaves in 1864, other blacks moved into the area, settling on Brooke and Norwood Roads and near the church. Local white teachers taught night school at Sharp Street, which became a religious, educational, social, and cultural center. By 1879 Sandy Spring, population 100, supported a school on Brooke Road and two black churches. A new frame church was built here in 1886 to serve the rapidly growing population.

Quakers helped the community to thrive and in 1908 collaborated with Sharp Street to open the Maryland Normal and Agricultural Institute. This school taught the three Rs as well as trade skills. The Institute soon closed, yet Sandy Spring hosted the Negro State Fair in 1909 and a trade program at the Colored Industrial School continued until 1922.

The present church opened in 1923, after the frame building burned. In Gothic Revival style, it maintains the traditional front gable and bell tower through enlargements and renovations. A burial ground located nearby was partially relocated to Brooke Road, where two cemeteries are still used by the community.

Next door is Odd Fellows Lodge Hall, a large wooden building from the 1920s. In addition to providing assistance for widows, orphans, and the poor, for 50 years the organization hosted dances, meetings, and social events.

Many descendants of early black families still live in Sandy Spring and attend Sharp Street Church.

Mount Calvary Church

Present name: Mt. Calvary
AUMP Church
16400 Batson Road
Spencerville
301-421-9560
www.MountCalvaryAUMP.org

Freed men and women, aided by local Quakers, settled in the Spencerville area before the end of the Civil War. Black men hired out as farm laborers and teamsters, while the women worked on area dairy farms and raised poultry.

The Mt. Calvary congregation was organized in 1872 through the efforts of George L. Bowen, a trustee who purchased land for the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant (AUMP) Church. Formed in 1813 with congregations in the Mid-Atlantic states, AUMP was an early African American independently controlled denomination. The first frame meetinghouse, located across Batson Road, was destroyed by fire in the 1950s. Within a few years, Rev. Robert Jones led construction of the current church, which was built of cinderblock covered with stucco, on two levels with a gable front entrance and vestibule.

A school for African American children opened in 1874 to serve nearby settlements known as Round Oak, Batson Road, Brogden Road, Oak Hill, and Good Hope. In the 1920s, residents donated money, materials, and land to match funds from the Rosenwald Foundation to build a new schoolhouse, which served the community until 1951. After being used as a recreation center for 20 years, the County demolished the building and kept the property as a local park.

Social activities in Spencerville centered around the churches and the school. Negro American Legion League baseball was popular, as were dances, horse shows, and games. Descendants of original families still reside in the area. A small graveyard behind the church contains about 20 marked burial sites dated from 1850 to 1975, with family names such as Carter and Dublin.

Good Hope Methodist Episcopal Church

Present name: Washington
Zion Presbyterian Church
14655 Good Hope Road
Silver Spring
MP

Good Hope was settled by newly emancipated slaves along the public road leading from Colesville to Spencerville. The new landowners at first traveled to Sandy Spring. By 1872 they erected their own house of worship and established a cemetery. The first church, of wood with a rear gallery, served residents of neighboring Holly Grove and Smithville as well as Good Hope. The congregation shared a minister with Sharp Street (#19), Brighton Church, and Steward Chapel at White Oak.

In 1914, this frame church replaced the original. The cornerstone can still be seen on the front of the building. While modest in size, the Gothic Revival building features stained glass windows and a bell tower. A parsonage was built in 1925.

Over the years, additions were made to the front and side of the church, and a brick façade was added. In 1967 the congregation of Good Hope merged with that of Steward Chapel. In 1999 Good Hope Union United Methodist Church constructed a new brick church just across the road.

The cemetery behind the church contains about 100 plots with a variety of grave markers, dating from the 1880s to the present. To the south on East Randolph Road, the two-room Smithville Colored School, built in 1927, stands as a reminder of the era of segregation.

In Name Only

Montgomery Chapel

Too many of the black communities and buildings noted by surveyors in the last quarter of the 20th century have since disappeared. These places now are only available through photos, oral histories, descriptions, and documentation. Here are examples of African American churches that today exist in name and grave sites only.

A. Potomac Grove Colored M.E. Church with schoolhouse, on Violet's Lock Road near the C&O Canal, Seneca

In 1941, the congregation rebuilt at the new Seneca Community Church on Berryville Road. On the old site remain graves of families whose livelihood depended upon nearby stone quarries and the canal. Church members plan to beautify and maintain the site.

B. Montgomery Chapel
Frederick Road just south of Hyattstown

The chapel, which doubled as meeting house and school, was abandoned in 1964, vandalized, then razed in 1981. The only reminder of this sizeable black community is a small burial ground, now part of Little Bennett Park.

C. Howard Chapel
Corner of Elton Farm and Howard Chapel Roads in Damascus (MP)

Howard Chapel was a settlement, church, and school established by a family that bought their freedom before the Civil War. Only graveyards of the church and the Howard family remain, now part of Patuxent River State Park.

Selected Bibliography

Places From the Past: The Tradition of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County, Maryland by Clare Lise Cavicci (on line at www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic)

History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C. by Nina H. Clarke

History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland 1872-1961 by Nina H. Clarke and Lillian B. Brown

Northeastern Montgomery County Black Oral History Study by Entourage, Inc.

A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1776-1976 by Richard K. MacMaster and Ray Eldon Hiebert

Black Historical Resources in Upper Western Montgomery County, Maryland by George W. McDaniel

A Rural Survey in Maryland by the Presbyterian Church in the USA (1912)

Montgomery County Historical Society (MCHS), Research Library collections and files at www.montgomeryhistory.org

WPA Church Records Survey for Montgomery County, MD, 1936-37 (at MCHS)

Montgomery County Cemetery Inventory (files at MCHS, on line at www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic)

Historic Preservation Office
www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic

Sugarloaf Regional Trails
www.sugarloafregionaltrails.org

Histories of individual Montgomery County towns and communities

Church histories and websites

About Heritage Montgomery

The Heritage Tourism Alliance of Montgomery County (Heritage Montgomery) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to developing Montgomery County tourism while promoting and protecting its cultural, historical, and natural resources.

Heritage Montgomery is one of 12 heritage areas in the state administered by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (mht.maryland.gov). Each area is defined by a theme or focus on the unique history, traditions, and natural landscapes of the region.

When planning your next day trip, visit our website, HeritageMontgomery.org, for inspiration. Discover Montgomery County's fascinating Civil War history in our "Life in a War Zone" video and brochure guide. Take a step-by-step driving tour of the Agricultural Reserve with our award-winning "Montgomery Rural Heritage Byways Tour." Use our list of heritage sites to find locations large and small awaiting your discovery and the calendar page to keep up with special events. And we offer dining and shopping tips, too! Heritage Montgomery encourages residents and visitors alike to explore Montgomery County!

Heritage Tourism Alliance
of Montgomery County

12535 Milestone Manor Lane
Germantown, Maryland 20876

301-515-0753

www.HeritageMontgomery.org

Scan this code to visit the Heritage Montgomery website.

Shop Heritage Montgomery

If you have enjoyed exploring Montgomery County heritage areas, take a look at the **Gift Shop page at HeritageMontgomery.org** where you'll find a number of unique items for sale that are perfect for the history lover!

Life in a War Zone Video DVD
A 60-minute documentary film that uses historic and contemporary images, written accounts from the 1860s, and a stirring musical soundtrack to tell the story of Montgomery County during the Civil War.

Map of Montgomery County in the 1860s
A striking 18"x 24" period-style map of Montgomery County showing Civil War trail markers and both Union & Confederate troop movements and encampments.

Hard Times Come Again No More CD
Beautiful music of the Civil War, heard in part on the *Life in a War Zone* soundtrack, performed by the Washington Revels.

Montgomery Rural Heritage Byways Tour DVD
An award-winning driving tour of the Agricultural Reserve.

Barns of Montgomery County Poster
A beautiful, full color, 24" x 36" poster of local barns.

Barns of Montgomery County Notecards
Striking photographs of twelve local barns are featured in this boxed set.

Explore

THE RICH HISTORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF Montgomery County's African American historical sites.

Welcome!

Montgomery County Maryland

Conference and Visitors Bureau of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.
111 Rockville Pike, Suite 800, Rockville, MD 20850 • (877) 789-6904

Scan this code to learn more about Montgomery County's African American historical sites.

WWW.VISITMONTGOMERY.COM