

Rivers, Roads & Rails

Transportation
Montgomery County, Maryland



TRANSPORTATION HISTORY



Seneca School wagon



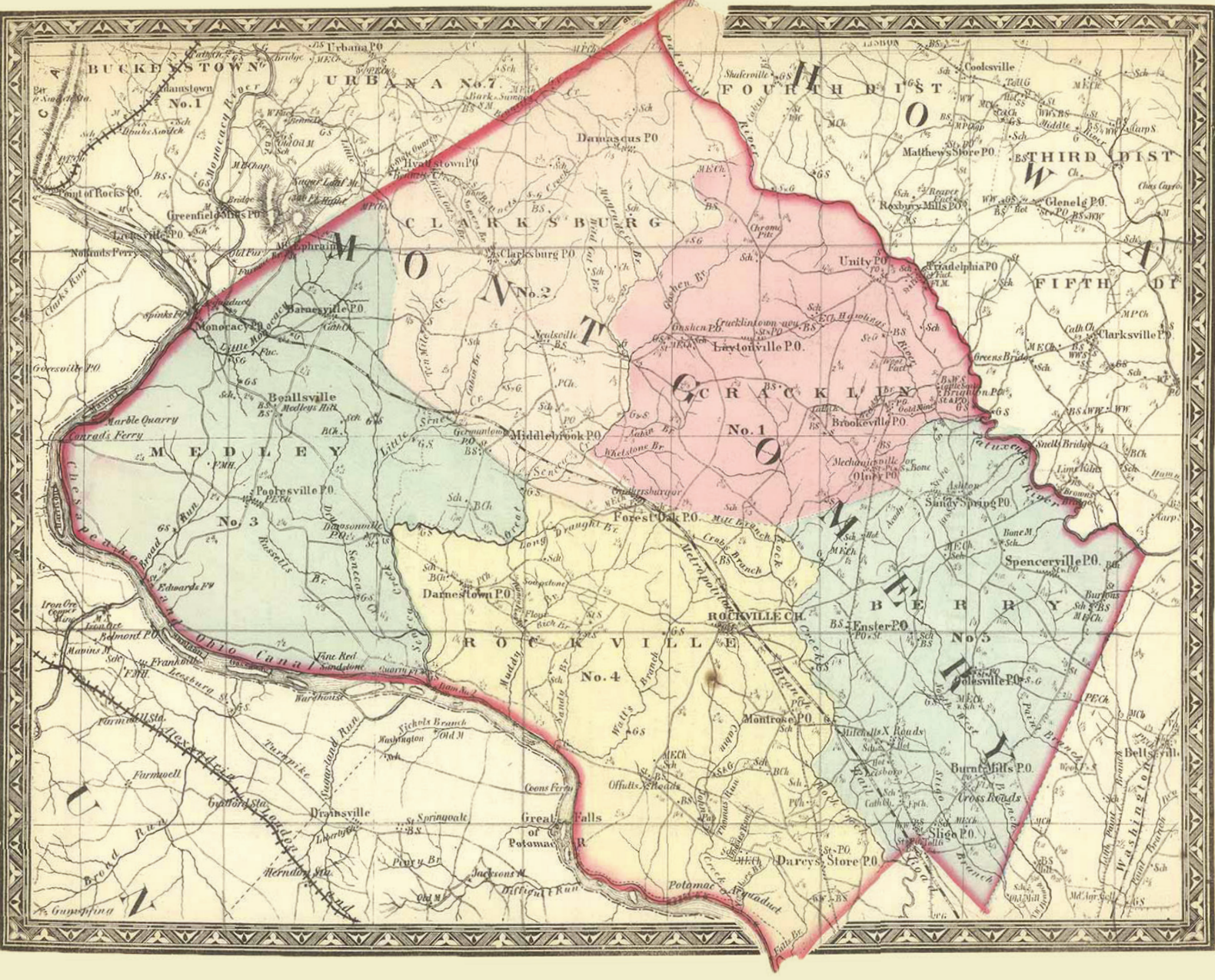
Cyclist

Transportation has shaped Montgomery County's history from Native American settlement to today's suburbs. As modes of transportation changed from canoe to horse to trains to cars, so did the routes, and the places and ways that people lived.

The county's size and geography has presented transportation challenges and inspired many innovations. Among the many sites to explore Transportation stories are the C&O Canal, the B&O Railroad stations, ruins of the old mills, and trails that follow long-forgotten roads. You can explore these sites by foot, bicycle, car, and some by boat.



Monocacy Aqueduct, photo credit NPS



Martenet 1865 map of Montgomery County showing the B&O RR and the C&O Canal

RIVERS



Piscataway ceremonial dancers

Bordered by the Potomac River to the west and the Patuxent River to the east, the land that is now Montgomery County was easily accessed by American Indians on foot or by water. They used the region for hunting, fishing, stone quarrying, and had agricultural settlements on several islands in the Potomac River, as well as along several major creeks.

By the time of European contact in the 1600s the American Indians in this area were the Piscataway of the Algonquin language group. Today, as you drive Route 355 or River Road, in some spots it is easy to imagine that these roads were once trails used by Native Americans; in many places a paddle trip on a waterway still provides a timeless window into this past.

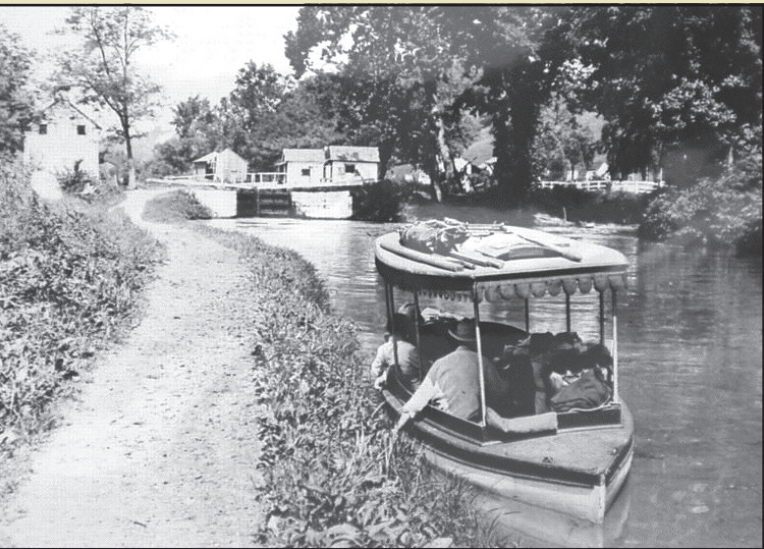
As Europeans sought land to grow tobacco—a crop so valuable that it was used as money—they found that the fall line in the Potomac Piedmont made navigating the river in cargo boats above Great Falls nearly impossible. Unable to replicate the large plantations common in other areas, in the 1700s land was settled by tenant farmers renting from land speculators who were often absentee landlords. Small independent farmers also found a place to settle here.



Historic White's Ferry, photo credit unknown

Trade and growth were slow due to the natural impediments of the river. So in 1785, George Washington founded the Potowmack Company with the intent of building a canal along the Potomac, thus improving the navigability of the river and connecting to the Great Lakes and established trade routes there. A canal would allow for the raising and lowering of cargo boats around water hazards such as falls, rapids, and shoals.

Build largely by Irish immigrants and rented enslaved men, the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal opened from Georgetown to Seneca in 1831, and ran all the way to Cumberland by 1850. The canal opened new markets, and mule-drawn boats carried a variety of grains, produce, and dairy products.



Pennyfield lock, photo credit NPS

The famous red Seneca Sandstone, quarried around Seneca, was shipped down the canal to construct many buildings in Washington, including the Smithsonian Castle. The trip from Georgetown to Cumberland took 5 days. The entire 184 miles of the C&O Canal is today a National Park, and a walk or bike ride along the old towpath offers views of the natural flora and fauna and feats of engineering such as the Monocacy Aqueduct, another National Treasure. At Great Falls Tavern you can ride on a canal boat, or take a short walk to observe the magnificent Falls cascading over giant rocks. Some historic lock houses can be rented for an overnight stay.

The Canal was soon overtaken as the prime mode of transport by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, closing in 1924. The tracks of this original line of the B&O RR from Baltimore to the Ohio River are still in use.



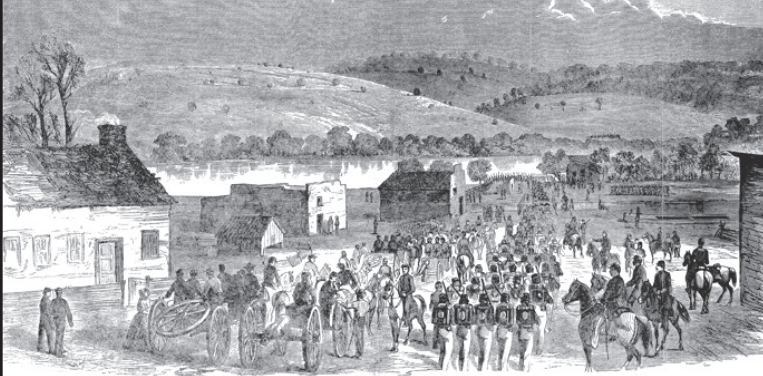
Great Falls Tavern, photo credit NPS

ROADS

As population and farming grew, so did the network of roads. Present day Route 355 (Frederick Road), evolved from a Native American trail to a colonial thoroughfare in the 1700s—moving stage coach travelers and goods from Georgetown to the booming town of Frederick, where it joined Route 40, the first National Road, going west from Baltimore.

Early thoroughfares were lined with ordinaries or taverns, and tradespeople offered comfort and services to travelers. Smaller roads were built to water-powered mills, or to connect churches served by the same pastors, or to ferry crossings along the Potomac. Where the smaller roads crossed larger ones a town often grew up. Many rural crossroads towns in the county retain their village character with historic buildings and simple street plans.

The first road built by the State was Baltimore Road from Monocacy east to cross the Patuxent River near Triadelphia, with a southern branch going through Brookeville. The town of Brookeville, founded in 1794, at the crossroads of two Post Roads, was a major Quaker settlement. Many African Americans freed by the Quakers by 1810 settled near Brookeville and its sister Quaker village of Sandy Spring, settled in the 1720s. It was in Brookeville that President James Madison took refuge when he fled the British attack on the Capital during the War of 1812.



Civil War troops at Edward's Ferry, image Harper's Magazine

During the Civil War, county roads were used by both Union and Confederate soldiers marching to the pivotal battles at Antietam and Gettysburg. Near the end of the war, Confederate General Jubal Early and 16,000 troops crossed the Potomac at

Williamsport and marched south to Frederick and Monocacy. From Courthouse Square in Rockville, they took the major roads to attack Washington DC at Fort Stevens, July 11-12, 1864.



Early gas station, photo credit unknown



Restored milk delivery truck at the MOOseum

In the 1920s, as the county grew, so did its residents' dependence on automobiles. New communities and suburbs sprang up, requiring new roads for residents commuting to jobs in DC, but many of the old roads have been preserved.

Today, the county features a network of protected Scenic Byways and Rustic Roads to travel while exploring the small rural communities, farmers markets, parks and historic sites by car or bike. In the up-county you can find old gravel roads, "politician's roads" with the concrete only one lane wide to save tax-payer money, historic bridges, and even a ford through a creek.



Silver Spring shopping center, photo credit MNCPPC

RAILS

After the Civil War a new railroad line changed the economy, the politics and the culture of Montgomery County. The Metropolitan Branch of the B & O Railroad ran from Washington, DC to Point of Rocks where it linked up with the old original B&O line to proceed west.

Farmers turned from growing grains to producing perishable apples, peaches, and milk that could be shipped to market quickly by train. By the 1890s, dairy farming had become a major industry. At its height, there were more than 400 dairy farms in the county. Transporting perishable products quickly was paramount. This need spurred a boom in road building connecting farms to the railroad, where many of the stations were "milk stops."



Train engine at the Gaithersburg Community Museum

Up-county towns were transformed. City dwellers used the train to come out to the country on weekends and holidays, creating resort areas in the sleepy villages of Boyds, Barnesville, and Dickerson. Germantown moved its town center to be next to the train. In Gaithersburg and Rockville, industries, stores, and residential subdivisions arose near the railroad.

Down-county the new phenomenon of the "Railroad Suburb" appeared as more folks decided to live outside of the Nation's Capital in a small-town atmosphere, while still working in the city. Takoma Park, Silver Spring, Kensington, and Garrett Park are examples of these suburbs. The historic train stations of Silver Spring, Kensington, and Gaithersburg, are open to the public.

Beginning in 1890, trolley lines became an easy way for commuters and sightseers to come and go from Washington. Street car lines offered more frequent service than the B & O Railroad from the county's budding suburbs to the Nation's Capital. Senator Newland's Chevy Chase Land Company chartered and built the Rock Creek Railway to connect his planned community along the boundary between Montgomery County and the District of Columbia. The Tenallytown and Rockville Railroad and the Glen Echo Railroad (both trolley lines) encouraged development along their routes through Bethesda and outward to Rockville and Glen Echo.



Restored trolleys at the National Capitol Trolley Museum

Two amusement parks, Bethesda Park and Glen Echo Park, promoted trolley patronage until 1896 and 1968, respectively. From 1913 until 1921, the Washington and Great Falls Railway and Power Company advanced further development of Bethesda and lured sightseers to Great Falls on the Maryland side of the Potomac River. Having set the pattern of suburban development, the electric trolley disappeared from most of Montgomery County by 1937. Only the route along the Potomac palisades to Glen Echo and Cabin John survived to the 1960s.

Trolley companies provided transportation services primarily, but they also sold their electricity to households and businesses. Eventually, the secondary business became primary as the modern companies Potomac Electric Power Company and Potomac Edison Company.

Glen Echo Park is now a part of the National Park Service. It is open to the public and retains its Art Deco architecture, rides—including a stunning restored 1921 Dentzel carousel—and offers artist shows and classes.



Glen Echo's carousel

If you'd like to ride a trolley and learn more about their history, visit the National Capitol Trolley Museum. Or explore the county's rail trails like the Metropolitan Branch or Bethesda Trolley trails.

Today, the County is home to miles of hiking and cycling trails along historic travel routes leading through parks and past heritage sites. Exploring the County offers a contrast in travel experiences from busy commuter thoroughways to restful Rustic Roads, thriving town centers to quiet country villages, farmers markets to ethnic cuisines, and museums sharing the County's rich history from its' earliest days to the present.



PLACES TO VISIT

1 Seneca Creek State Park

This 6,300 acre park offers outdoor experiences including boating, hiking, biking, fishing, and historical sites showcasing Seneca Creek as it flows to the Potomac River.
Dnr.Maryland.gov 301-324-2127
11950 Clopper Road, Gaithersburg



2 Patuxent State Park

This 6,700-acre park is on the head waters of the Patuxent River and includes a nature center, trails, fishing, hunting and rentals of kayaks and canoes.
Dnr.Maryland.gov 301-924-2127
23222 Georgia Avenue, Brookeville



6 Poolesville Historic District

This easily walkable late 1700s crossroads town features over 30 historic buildings. The John Poole House is open to the public as are several shops, local vineyards, and restaurants.
HistoricMedley.org 301-477-0777
19923 Fisher Avenue, Poolesville



9 C&O Canal National Historical Park

Construction of the 184.5 mile Canal began in 1828 and was used for transporting coal, lumber, and agricultural products along the Potomac River. Today, the towpath is host to hikers and cyclists exploring nature and history.
Nps.Gov/Choh 301-739-4200
142 W. Potomac St., Williamsport

10 C&O Canal Quarters

Spend the night in an historic lockhouse. Former lock keepers houses along the Canal have been restored for guests to enjoy.
CanalTrust.Org 240-202-2625
142 W. Potomac St., Williamsport



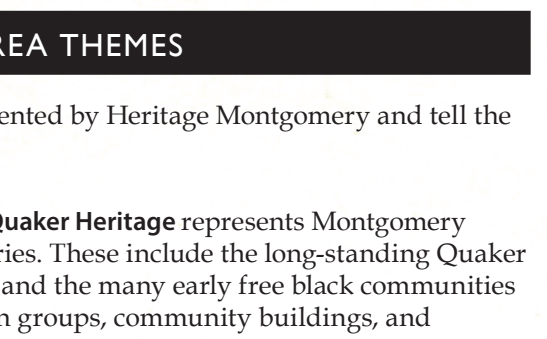
13 Glen Echo Park

An historic trolley era amusement park featuring a 1921 Dentzel carousel and Art Deco architecture. Today, it offers programs, tours, classes, exhibits, and visitor activities year-round.
GlenEchoPark.org 301-634-2222
7300 MacArthur Boulevard, Glen Echo



14 White's Ferry Landing

Established in 1786, the ferry carried passengers and cargo across the Potomac River for more than two centuries. Today, it features picnic grounds, water access, trails and a restaurant.
whitesferryinc@gmail.com 301-349-5200
24801 White's Ferry Rd, Dickerson



15 Silver Spring B&O RR Station (MPI)

The restored 1945 Station hosts community events and is home to Montgomery Preservation Inc. which promotes and assists in County architectural preservation.
MontgomeryPreservation.org 301-495-4915
8100 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring



16 Kensington B&O RR Station

To learn more about this historic community visit the Kensington Historical Society located in the Town Hall.
info@KensingtonHistory.org
3710 Mitchell Street, Kensington



TRAILS AND DRIVING TOURS

- **Rustic Roads**
<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/highway-planning/rustic-roads/>
- **Scenic Byways - Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and Antietam Byways**
<https://www.visitmaryland.org/scenic-byways>
- **Sugarloaf Trails**
<https://sugarloafmd.com/>
- **Civil War Trail**
<https://www.civilwartrails.org/mapguides.html>
- **Bike Trails**
https://montgomeryparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/MPTrails_MapBrochure_FINAL_a11y.pdf Heritagemontgomery.org/places-to-go/tours/

3 Brookeville Historic District

This historic town, founded in 1794, preserves the architecture of the early Quaker trade and commerce center. The town is easily walkable and close to many other historic attractions, breweries, and restaurants.
TownofBrookevilleMd.Org 301-570-4465



4 Dickerson Historic District

Founded in 1871, this historic railroad town features a number of shops, significant homes and nearby vineyards and markets nestled in the shadow of Sugarloaf Mountain.
poolesvillechamber.com



5 National Capital Trolley Museum

Discover trolley history through exhibits and programs at the Museum then hop aboard for a street car ride through the park.
DCTrolley.org 301-384-6088
1313 Bonifant Road, Colesville



7 Germantown Historic District

This mid 1800s crossroads town features local history, restaurants, sports, and entertainment. Visit nearby Blackrock Center for the Arts, the King Farm Dairy MOOseum, and Button Farm Living History Center.
germantownmdhistory.org 301-972-9707
19330 Mateny Hill Rd., Germantown



8 Boyds Historic District

A classic late 1800s railroad town, it is home to the Boyds Negro School, train station and a charming group of historic homes.
info@boydshistory.org
19510 White Ground Road, Boyds



11 Gaithersburg International Latitude Observatory

Established in 1899, it is one of six Latitude Observatories around the world built to measure the wobble of the Earth's rotating axis. Programs and events feature astronomy.
GaithersburgMd.gov 301-258-6160
100 DeSellum Avenue, Gaithersburg

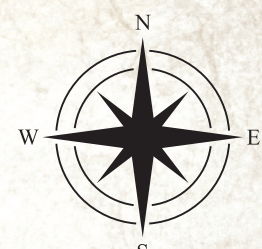
12 Gaithersburg Community Museum

Located in the 1884 B&O Railroad Complex, the Museum offers indoor and outdoor exhibits, community programs and events.
GaithersburgMd.gov 301-258-6160
9 South Summit Avenue, Gaithersburg



MAP KEY

- Agricultural Reserve and Parks
- Towns
- Rustic Roads
- Rivers, Roads, and Rails Sites



HERITAGE AREA THEMES

Over 160 parks, sites, and museums are represented by Heritage Montgomery and tell the county's stories using the following themes:

■ **Crossroads & Cultures: African American & Quaker Heritage** represents Montgomery County's many rich and diverse cultural histories. These include the long-standing Quaker communities of Sandy Spring and Brookeville and the many early free black communities represented by local churches and preservation groups, community buildings, and cemeteries.

■ The **Agricultural Reserve: Farms, Markets & Scenic Byways** encompasses 93,000 acres of protected farmland—one of the most successful countryside preservation programs in the U.S. The "Ag Reserve" showcases beautiful vistas, winding country roads, historic buildings, pick-your-own farms, and farmers markets.

■ **Rivers, Roads, & Rails: Transportation Trails** highlights the C&O Canal along the Potomac River and the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad that runs through communities dating back to the 1800s. Discover historic lockhouses and aqueducts along the canal towpath. Travel scenic byways and rustic roads to enjoy hiking, biking, canoeing, sightseeing, and more!

■ **Heritage Gems: Montgomery County's Past** features sites scattered throughout the heritage area representing the unique stories of history, culture, and nature found in Montgomery County, from historic houses to Civil War sites to parks, theatres, and historical societies.

AGRICULTURAL RESERVE

- Agricultural History Farm Park
- Black Rock Mill
- Blockhouse Point Conservation Park
- Brookeville Historic District
- Damascus Heritage Museum
- Dickerson Conservation Park
- Grusendorf Log House
- Hyattstown Mill
- John Poole House and Arboreum
- King Barn Dairy MOOseum
- Linden Farm
- Little Bennett and Black Hills Regional Parks
- Montgomery County Parks
- Montgomery Countryside Alliance
- Poolesville Historic District
- Poolesville Old Town Hall Bank Museum
- Potomac and Patuxent Rivers
- Rachel Carson Conservation Park
- Riverworks Art Center
- Seneca Historic District
- Seneca Schoolhouse Museum
- Seneca and Patuxent State Parks

HERITAGE GEMS

- Aspin Hill Pet Cemetery
- Clara Barton National Historic Site
- Glenview Mansion
- Kingsley Schoolhouse
- Latvian Museum
- Montgomery History
- Nature Forward
- Olney Theatre Center
- Peerless Rockville
- Sandy Spring Museum
- Red Brick Courthouse
- Rockville Cemetery
- Rockville Historic District

HERITAGE MONTGOMERY

Heritage Montgomery is one of thirteen certified heritage areas in the state of Maryland — areas where public and private partners make commitments to preserving resources for sustainable economic development through heritage tourism.

HM is a non-profit organization supported primarily through State and County grant funding and is dedicated to the mission of preserving and promoting local history, culture, and natural resources.

Each year, Heritage Montgomery awards State grants of up to \$100k each to local parks, museums, and sites as well as \$25k in HM Mini Grants. A 2019 Economic Impact Report shows a total of \$376 million contributed to the County economy through heritage tourism, 5,327 jobs supported, and \$50.4 million in State and local tax revenue.

Visit **HeritageMontgomery.org** to learn more about our organization and plan your next trip exploring the Montgomery County Heritage Area.

Heritage Montgomery
P.O. Box 10237, Gaithersburg, MD 20898
(301) 515-0753



We thank our contributing editors, and content experts—Eileen McGuckien, Susan Soderburg, Ken Rucker, and HM Staff.

While there are many Transportation heritage sites in the County, this guide focuses on those regularly open to the public.

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