

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A TRADITION OF STRUGGLE: PRESERVING
SITES OF SIGNIFICANCE TO AFRICAN
AMERICAN HISTORY IN PRINCE GEORGE'S
COUNTY, MARYLAND, 1969-2007

Courtney Elizabeth Michael, Master of Arts, 2007

Directed By: Professor David Sicilia
Department of History

This thesis examines efforts by the citizens of Prince George's County, Maryland to protect and preserve local historic sites significant to African American history. Since the early 1980s, preservationists in Prince George's County have recognized the importance of -- and made specific efforts to find, document and preserve -- sites that tell the story of African American life in the county. Using three case studies, Abraham Hall, Rosenwald Schools and the Butler House, this thesis demonstrates how preserving African American historic sites became a priority in Prince George's County, due to both a shift in local demographics and to changing practices in the field of historic preservation nationwide.

A TRADITION OF STRUGGLE: PRESERVING SITES OF SIGNIFICANCE TO
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY,
MARYLAND, 1969-2007

By

Courtney Elizabeth Michael

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Advisory Committee:
Professor David Sicilia, Chair
Professor Elsa Barkley Brown
Professor Angel David Nieves

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So we come to the end of this moment of our struggle
But it is the beginning of a new dimension of the tradition of struggle
Never forgetting that tradition is not something you inherit
You don't gain access to it by means of osmosis
If you want it, you've got to fight for it
It depends on the depth of your love and commitment and conviction to the foremothers
and forefathers who came before
Who gave so much love and sacrifice
So that we could be who we are and what we are
Situating ourselves in a story bigger than us
Remaining true to the blue note the black people injected into human history
A note of defiance that calls into question the unjustified suffering
A note of dissonance that shatters the superficial harmony
A note of dignity that allows us to dig deep into the depths of our souls and call into
question the attacks on our beauty, our intelligence, our moral capacity[...]

- Dr. Cornel West, "Finale," Sketches of My Culture, May 2001.

Introduction

In 2006, the National Register of Historic Places featured Prince George's County, Maryland, on its special African American History Month web site. Citing the "wealth of historic places" that "convey how integral African Americans are to the history of this area," the site went on to describe four historic resources with significance to African American history in Prince George's County that were accepted into the National Register in 2005.¹ Prior to 1981, this wealth of historic places of significance to African American history in Prince George's County went largely unrecognized. Preservationists in Prince George's County focused on architecturally significant homes built by wealthy white elites, many of them former plantation homes. These properties were initially preserved through the actions of private citizens and community groups. By the time the local county government got involved, and passed a historic preservation ordinance in 1981, the demographics and politics in Prince George's County demanded that African American history rise to the top of the preservation priority list.²

This thesis examines efforts by the citizens of Prince George's County to protect and preserve local historic sites significant to African American history. Since the early 1980s, preservationists in Prince George's County have recognized the importance of --

¹ National Park Service, "African American Historic Places in Prince George's County, Maryland." National Register of Historic Places, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2006/PGcounty.htm>.

² Many of the more traditional historic home sites in Prince George's County have made efforts to include the history of African Americans who lived and/or worked on the property. Riversdale has devoted a dependency building to the story of Adam Francis Plummer, a former slave whose memoirs were published by his granddaughter. The interpretation of Poplar Hill on His Lordship's Kindness centers on the various families, white and black, who lived on the property. Exhibits at Mount Welby at Oxon Cove Park provide detailed accounts of slave transactions, cultural melding, and manumissions. For a detailed examination of interpreting slavery at plantation sites, see Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

and made specific efforts to find, document, and preserve -- sites that tell the story of African American life in the county. This thesis will demonstrate how preserving African American historic sites became a priority due to both a shift in local demographics, and to changing practices in the field of historic preservation nationwide.

Today visitors to Prince George's County can tour Riversdale, an early 19th century plantation home, and learn about the life of Adam Francis Plummer, who lived on the property both as a slave and as a free man. They can experience North Brentwood, a town founded by veterans of the Civil War's U.S. Colored Troops and the first African American incorporated town in the county. They can stroll through the hand-carved cemetery stones at the Historic Ridgely Church, originally built in 1871 for a new community of freed people. African American history is heavily represented on the physical landscape of Prince George's County in the form of these and many other preserved, protected, and cherished historic structures and sites.³

The contrast with the earlier period of indifference is striking. The county once boasted of a history that revolved around grand federal-style homes and their illustrious white owners, and the origins of thoroughbred horseracing, "the sport of kings," in America. Today, Prince George's County showcases its African American historic sites alongside or even within, the very same plantation properties.⁴ Between 1969 and 2007, within the field of historic preservation, the people of Prince George's County made

³ Ann Ferguson, "A Proud History that Happened Here," Town of Riverdale Park, <http://ci.riverdale-park.md.us/News/CrierIssues/i0105/mayorsReport.html>. North Brentwood was incorporated in 1924. Town of North Brentwood, "History" Town of North Brentwood, <http://www.northbrentwood.com/townhis.asp>. Susan G. Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Planning Department, 1996), 121.

⁴ See, for example, Prince George's County Board of Education, *A Research-Action Project Devoted to Aspects of the History of Maryland and Prince George's County*, (Upper Marlboro, MD: Board of Education of Prince George's County, 1967).

significant and innovative efforts to preserve and interpret a *full* and *inclusive* history of their county. The factors that influenced the move to include African American history as a major priority for historic preservation in the county are the subject of this thesis.

At the beginning of the 21st century, demographers and politicians cite Prince George's County, Maryland, as the most affluent "majority-minority" county in the United States. African Americans currently make up more than 60 percent of county residents. The African American population, after reaching its lowest point in 1960, (8 percent of the total population), increased rapidly over the next thirty years until it became the majority (51 percent) in the 1990 census. By 2000, that majority had increased to 63 percent.⁵ This thesis will demonstrate that the timing of this demographic shift had great significance for the preservation of African American historic sites in the county.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the accompanying social changes, resulted in increased opportunities for women and minorities in all spheres of American life. These changes also affected the field of historic preservation. In the latter half of the twentieth century, preservationists and their allies worked to revise the historical landscape by preserving historic sites with significance to a more diverse America.

Beginning in 1981, in Prince George's County, both private citizens and the county government took an increasingly active role in the preservation of black history sites, working to democratize the preservation process and more accurately reflect the

⁵ In 1790, African Americans made up 62% of the population of Prince George's County. This number began to decline after the Civil War and Emancipation, dropping sharply in the mid-20th century. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Planning Department, "County is Majority Minority," *Emerging Trends: The Many Faces of Prince George's County* 1, no 1 (September 2004): 7.

history of the county. While many localities in the United States have made similar efforts to include previously excluded African American historic sites on their local historic registers, Prince George's County's efforts were especially swift, systematic and far-reaching, in large measure because of the dramatic shift in the county's demographics.

As a backdrop to the preservation activities in Prince George's County, I will first give a brief history of the broad movement in the United States, outlining the public and private activities that built the modern historic preservation movement and established the legislation on which most preservation activity in this country is founded. I will then show how Prince George's County fits into this larger context by giving a history of the County's preservation ordinance and outlining the structure of its preservation activities.

With a clear context for understanding preservation in the county, I will show how preserving African American history came to be a focus of preservation activities in the early 1980s and has been sustained and supported, despite setbacks, into 2007.

While the words "black history" too often invoke only images of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, public presentations of black history in Prince George's County include a richer story. To illustrate the diversity of preservation issues and efforts in the county, I have chosen three case studies through which to examine the process of saving and preserving historic sites of significance to African American history. These case studies highlight the richness of history to be interpreted through the preservation of African American historic sites, and provide support for an analysis of Prince George's County's preservation program. Abraham Hall, a benevolent society hall constructed in 1889, was the first black history site to be preserved in the

county using public funding. Its story illustrates the cooperation of a small community with a government agency for the preservation of a once vibrant community institution. Efforts to preserve Prince George's County's remaining Rosenwald Schools, built in the 1920s and 1930s for the education of black children, are an example of a preservation movement built on broad public and political support, with the added backing of state and national preservation organizations. Finally, the Butler House, completed in 1853 by a free black man and still owned by his descendants, presents a cautionary tale. Here the financial and land-use pressures that often work against preservation, may prevent a unique site from being saved.

Previous scholarship on the African American history of Prince George's County in the latter twentieth century has focused the political consequences of the majority black population and on the history of desegregation in the Prince George's County schools.⁶ This thesis will illustrate how the demographic changes in Prince George's County changed the face of historic preservation and public history in the county. In addition, this paper will provide a history of one locality's struggle to create a more racially inclusive inventory of historic sites. I argue that the efforts of the county government, preservation organizations and agencies, along with a handful of passionate and dedicated individuals in Prince George's County, resulted in a well-supported, local African American public history program that can and should serve as a model for other American communities.

Before I analyze Prince George's County's historic preservation programs, some background on the county itself is necessary. Prince George's County's current "majority-

⁶ Howard Kohn, *We Had a Dream: A Tale of the Struggles for Integration in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998). Valerie C. Johnson. *Black Power in the Suburbs: The Myth or Reality of African American Suburban Political Incorporation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

minority" status is significant, but also not without historic precedent.⁷ Founded in 1696, Prince George's County hugs the eastern borders of Washington, D.C. Today it is considered part of metropolitan Washington, and contains both suburban and rapidly disappearing rural areas. For the first 200 years of its existence, however, the county was almost entirely agricultural, with a tobacco economy dependant on the labor of enslaved African Americans.

From the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries, Prince George's County's enslaved African Americans outnumbered both the free white population and the enslaved populations of every other county in Maryland. During the same time period, the free black population increased from 164 people in 1790 to 1,138 in 1850, comprising an additional 5 percent of the total population in 1850.⁸ With the emancipation of slaves in the District of Columbia in 1862, the area became a destination for African Americans fleeing the slave states. During and after the Civil War, free blacks founded communities in Prince George's County, as roads were built and railroad track laid connecting D.C. with newly forming suburbs.⁹

Some of these communities continue to thrive today. Aging residents, and the increasing mobility of younger generations threaten the continued existence of many others. Real estate and land development demands put these communities under continual pressure. Two of the historic sites I will discuss later, Abraham Hall and Ridgeley School, were built by African Americans around the turn of the last century to

⁷ Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Planning Department, "County is Majority Minority," 7.

⁸ Barbara Jeanne Fields. *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 12-13.

⁹ National Park Service, "African American Historic Places in Prince George's County, Maryland." National Register of Historic Places, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2006/PGcounty.htm>.

support the historic communities of Rossville and Ridgely, in present day Beltsville and Capitol Heights, respectively.

Tensions between developers and champions of historic preservation are frequent in United States, and numerous examples of these clashes have been researched, studied, and debated. But how do the stakes of these debates change when the sites at issue represent markers of African American history in a locale where a once-enslaved population has now become a middle-class majority? To begin answering this question we need to start by examining the larger context of historic preservation in America during the last two centuries.

Chapter 1:

Historic Preservation in America

In the United States, the preservation of historic sites and structures as an organized community endeavor began in the mid-19th century with Ann Pamela Cunningham and the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association's (MVLA) preservation of George Washington's home. The MVLA established chapters across the country, soliciting funds from its members to save the home of their nation's founding father. Funded through private donations and spearheaded by women who embraced their role as patriotic educators, the MVLA became a model for the preservation of significant buildings that would last into the twentieth century. Various other organizations sprang into existence, organizing efforts to save the homes of prominent military and political figures. Historic preservation remained largely a private endeavor, in the MVLA mold, until the 1930s.¹⁰

While the Antiquities Act of 1906 marked the federal government's entry into preservation, a series of programs and laws implemented during the Depression really established federal leadership in the field. In 1933, the federal government established the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), hiring unemployed architects to document historic buildings. Other Depression-era preservation projects included the establishment and maintenance of parklands by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the documentation of cultures by the Federal Writers Project, and the excavation of archeological sites by the

¹⁰ Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 33-35. See also William Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Pittstown, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1988), 29-30.

Works Progress Administration. These programs had a democratizing effect in that they did not limit themselves to the preservation of architecturally significant structures erected by white elites. Historian Mike Wallace argues that the experience of these New Deal programs introduced a populist leftist element into the emerging core of preservation professionals.¹¹

In 1935, the Historic Sites Act declared the preservation of nationally significant sites, buildings, and objects as a national policy, legitimizing the trend toward government responsibility for historic resources. The Act put primary responsibility for the management and oversight of government preservation activities in the hands of the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service. This enabled the Secretary to survey and research historic and archeological sites, buildings, and objects for their illustrative value for American history, and to establish the National Historic Landmark program. Thus, the federal government officially entered the business of protecting and interpreting historic resources “for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.”¹²

After the Second World War, rampant suburban expansion, new transportation projects, and the urban renewal program threatened to crush preservationists’ limited progress. In response, a coalition of architects, historians, planners, National Park Service staff members and representatives from Colonial Williamsburg formed the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings in 1947. Their efforts resulted in the Congress chartering the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949. The National

¹¹ Mike Wallace *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 184-5.

¹² *Historic Sites Act of 1935*, Public Law 74-292, 49 Stat. 666, 16 USC 461.

Trust, a private, non-profit organization, became a central voice for preservation and a clearinghouse for information for local preservationists.

By the 1960s, support for preservation broadened in the face of rampant development, a result of coalitions between those who valued preserving older communities and those who sought to market and make a profit from the past. Urban renewal projects created a crisis in many American cities as efforts to revitalize urban centers resulted in the destruction of historic and vital communities, stirring preservationists' sense of urgency. At the same time, increasing interest in historic tourism proved that preservation efforts had the potential to raise a profit.¹³ While much progress had been made in preserving sites of national significance, the field remained largely focused on the homes of prominent, white leaders, largely male. Yet change would come in the latter half of the century with the introduction of “new social history” and the politics of the New Left. A growing concern for history viewed from the “bottom-up” would change both the focus of preservation activities and demographics of preservation activists themselves.

The National Trust and Colonial Williamsburg commissioned a study, *With Heritage So Rich*, whose authors argued that unrestrained growth threatened America's national identity. As a result, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, now seen by many as the most significant piece of legislation directly applicable to the preservation of historic structures. The NHPA requires the federal government to consider the effects of their actions on historic resources listed in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Proposed federal actions

¹³ Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 186-190.

must be reviewed by the proper state or federal preservation advisory board. Most significantly for local preservation efforts, the NHPA set up state-level entities -- State Historic Preservation Offices -- to review proposed changes to properties listed in or eligible for the National Register. In Maryland, the NHPA led to the creation of the Maryland Historical Trust.¹⁴

At an even more local level, the passage of the NHPA inspired preservationists to pressure their counties and municipalities to pass historic preservation ordinances that would allow the local government to designate historic properties, districts, or areas, and to regulate changes to them. From the early 1970s into the 1980s, the number of local historic preservation ordinances exploded as communities found it to their advantage to preserve their historic resources.

Local preservation ordinances enable communities to survey and designate sites and districts as historic, thereby protecting them from demolition and alteration. They set up local historic preservation commissions who review designations and proposed alterations to designated sites and grant permission for changes deemed appropriate or necessary. Commissions and local preservation organizations undertake survey and documentation projects to seek out and inventory their locality's historic resources for designation and protection. In addition, state historic preservation agencies have their own designation process and often, as in Maryland, serve as the channel through which sites are nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Each level of designation (local, state, and national) requires that a site meet certain criteria and offers its own level of protection. The designation of a historic site to

¹⁴ Ibid., 190, 198.

a local, state or national register represents a validation of the significance of the site and the history it represents to the local, state, or national community. Listing in the National Register is the most prestigious level of designation, but it offers limited practical protections. As the National Register of Historic Places inventory becomes increasingly diverse, it validates ethnic history in a way that is meaningful and nationally visible, both among preservationists and in the eyes of the public.

Preservation values and the establishment of preservation laws laid the groundwork for the current climate in historic preservation. Historic preservation historian Antoinette Lee argues that although *With Heritage So Rich* and the NHPA virtually ignore ethnicity in their stated preservation goals, the federal government -- by focusing not only on national but on state and local preservation -- unknowingly created a space for minority and ethnic groups to participate and democratize preservation.¹⁵

Like many other local governments in the 1970s and 1980s, Prince George's County established a historic preservation ordinance. Once the ordinance passed, the demographic reality of the region demanded that the county look not only at the "great houses" of white elites but also at sites of significance to African American history.

¹⁵ Antoinette J. Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 386-388.

Chapter 2:

Historic Preservation in Prince George's County

The first formal preservation activity in Prince George's County occurred in the 1930s, when the Historic American Buildings Survey documented ninety-seven structures. From 1936 to 1996, thirty-two of these structures were lost, and others were neglected or endangered. In response, citizens began to organize to preserve the county's history.

Local interest in historic preservation grew in the 1950s and 1960s, as evidenced by the organization of groups like the Prince George's County Historical Society, founded in 1952, and the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust, founded in 1968. In the early 1970s, citizens in Prince George's Country began to organize for the celebration of the national bicentennial in 1976. Other groups coalesced to save specific historic sites. For example, in the mid-1970s, the Prince George's County Jaycee's became involved in the preservation of the George Washington House in Bladensburg, and, in 1977, Ann Ferguson organized the Riversdale Historical Society, which focused on preserving the Calvert Mansion, or Riversdale. At the local government level, preservation activities also began around this time, as the local planning agency, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) began to take notice of its acquired historic resources.¹⁶

¹⁶ "Reclaiming the African-American Past in Prince George's County, An Update," *Passport to the Past*, (Newsletter of the History Division, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission), 1, no. 4, (September/October 1990). John Walton, interview with the author, February 15, 2007, Clinton, Maryland. Records of the Riversdale Historical Society, Riversdale, Maryland. Susan Pearl, in conversation with the author, April 10, 2007, via phone. Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust, "Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust" <http://www.pgchct.org/>. Gail Rothrock

The M-NCPPC serves both Prince George's County and Montgomery County. Together, these two counties form the northern and eastern borders of the District of Columbia. In 1927, the Maryland General Assembly established the agency in an attempt to control the booming development of the D.C. suburbs and to provide careful planning for open space and livable communities. The Commission faced quite a challenge in meeting this mandate: from 1927 to 1964, the population of Prince George's County alone grew 835 percent.¹⁷

One of the major strategies of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and its initial focus, was to protect stream valley parks from development by acquiring the land and creating parks and parkways. In 1930, the M-NCPPC had jurisdiction over thirty-four acres in Prince George's County. By 1965, that number had grown to 3,540 acres. Today, the M-NCPPC operates parks, community centers and historic sites on 25,240 acres of land in Prince George's County.¹⁸ In addition to land use planning and park land acquisition, in 1970, the Prince George's County Council voted to move the county's Department of Recreation under the auspices of the M-NCPPC.¹⁹

Along with managing and maintaining park land, the M-NCPPC soon found itself playing the role of custodian to several historic resources located in acquired park lands. By the late 1970s, the historic resources managed by the Commission included five

"A Heritage to Preserve" in *Landmarks of Prince George's County*, ed. Jack E. Boucher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 11.

¹⁷ Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *About Parks and Recreation in Prince George's County*, (Riverdale, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1965), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, "Prince George's County Parks & Recreation FACTS," Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation, <http://pgparks.com/>.

¹⁹ Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Facts About the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in Prince Georges County* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1983), 12. John Walton, interview with the author, February 15, 2007, Clinton, Maryland.

historic homes, an historic airport, and a mill building.²⁰

In 1969, the M-NCPPC surveyed Prince George's County and identified 186 historic resources. In 1973, with a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust, the M-NCPPC's park historians -- Michael Dwyer for Montgomery County and Christopher Owens for Prince George's County -- formalized and expanded the 1969 survey as a step toward the implementation of a historic preservation plan and with a view to the creation of a preservation ordinance. Driving around the county, they took a "windshield survey," listing as many historic resources as possible, and published their results in 1974.

In 1975, the Commission hired John Walton to replace Christopher Owens. One of Walton's first tasks was to help Dwyer complete the initial survey and push it forward into the planning process. Prince George's County, working with Walton and the M-NCPPC, hired Susan Pearl to further the work of Dwyer and Owens by including documentation and further research. The M-NCPPC formed a Citizen's Advisory Committee that worked alongside M-NCPPC and county staff to address specific questions regarding legal issues, tourism in the county, a final selection of sites, and issues surrounding historic districts.²¹

In 1980, the Advisory Committee completed its preliminary Historic Sites and Districts Plan and held hearings for the public to comment. They revised the plan and submitted it for comment again in 1981. The Prince George's County Council finally approved the plan on July 17, 1981. Shortly thereafter, on November 24, 1981, the

²⁰ Properties included Adelphi Mill, the Calvert Mansion, College Park Airport, Marietta Manor, Montpelier Mansion, the Surratt House and the White Mansion. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *A Guide to Parks and Recreation in Prince George's County, Md* (Riverdale, MD: Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation, 1978), 5.

²¹ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland. Rothrock "A Heritage to Preserve," 12.

county passed legislation suggested by the plan, including the establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission to oversee historic resources in the county, and the creation of a tax credit program to provide incentives for preservation.²²

However, preservation at the county level did not begin simply with the passage of the ordinance. The M-NCPPC was already engaged in preservation activities for a number of years, most notably on their own properties. One of John Walton's first major projects was the restoration and interpretation of the Mary Surratt House. The Surratt House opened in 1976. It was the first restoration project undertaken and completed from start to finish by the M-NCPPC.²³

In 1979, building on the success of the Surratt House project and the pressures of the ongoing historic sites and districts survey, Walton advocated for increased staffing and established the History Division of the M-NCPPC. The History Division had its own budget for history projects and historic preservation in the county. The existence of a division devoted solely to historical research and programming within a planning agency was striking, and somewhat unique; local planning agencies often struggle financially to employ enough planners, let alone historians. The programming instituted by the History Division was, therefore, all the more innovative.

Both before and after the passage of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the

²² Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Historic Sites and Districts Plan, Prince George's County, Maryland*, (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1981), 6-12

²³ The Surratt House Museum, a modest plantation established in 1852, interprets the history of Mary Surratt and the Confederate underground in Southern Maryland during the Civil War. Mary Surratt was found guilty of conspiring to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln with John Wilkes Booth and was the first woman executed by the U.S. government. Today, the Surratt Society, co-founded by John Walton, is one of the most successful volunteer organizations dedicated to preserving an historic site in Prince George's County. John Walton, interview with the author, February 15, 2007, Clinton, Maryland. Surratt House Museum, "Welcome to the Surratt House Museum," Surratt House Museum, <http://www.surratt.org/>.

History Division served as the county's clearinghouse for heritage programming. Within the division, Walton and his staff initiated five new programs: a black history program in 1982, an archeology program in 1988, and a local history clearinghouse, an interpretive theme tours program, and a historical research program in 1989. In 1995 the M-NCPPC dissolved the History Division in an M-NCPPC re-organization, but preserved most of the innovative programming established by Walton and his staff.²⁴

During public review of the 1981 Historic Sites and Districts Plan, the M-NCPPC recognized that the plan for historic preservation in the county did not include sites that represented their fastest growing constituency, the African American population. In 1981, the History Division embarked on a new survey of African American historic resources in the county to augment the preservation plan. This survey quickly grew to become the funded "Black History Program" within the History Division.

Unlike the later projects of the History Division, the Black History Program did more than just satisfy the needs for public educational programming. In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and urban riots that so marked the Washington, D.C., area in the 1960s and 1970s, for a local government commission to take on the duty of publicly validating African American history had implications that were both personal and political. The fact that Prince George's County boasted numerous established black communities and the fact that it was experiencing a demographic shift toward a larger African American middle class made it a locale uniquely suited for such developments. John Walton and his team therefore had a groundswell of community support and

²⁴ John Walton, interview with the author, February 15, 2007, Clinton, Maryland. John Walton, "Message from the Manager," *Passport to the Past* (Newsletter of the History Division, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission) 1, no. 1, (March/April 1990). A. Elizabeth Watson, AICP, Executive Director, Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc., in conversation with the author, March 5, 2007.

resources to draw from.

The Black History Program at the M-NCPPC may have been unique to the region in terms of available funding and official government sanction, but it shared a common mission of educating the public on the importance of preserving sites of significance to African American history with numerous other organizations. Churches, historical and genealogical societies, fraternal organizations and other civic entities already had a history of preserving their own legacies. In fact, organized community efforts to preserve sites of African American history in the United States date back to the 19th century.

Chapter 3:

Preserving African American History Sites

Historic preservation comprises only one aspect of American memory-making. As Americans we seek to define our identities by defining our past through public celebrations and commemorations, museum exhibitions, and historic preservation. By preserving sites with historical significance, we shape our public spaces to emphasize certain stories from our past, consequently deemphasizing others. The endeavor to create a useable past often is a process of consensus building or consensus-imposing. Until the late twentieth century, white elites, who generally held authority over public funds, public spaces, and public history, conceived, directed and funded the majority of American memory projects.

The social, political and class revolutions of the mid-twentieth century resulted in a re-thinking of much of American historical scholarship and the questioning of established public history projects. Historians trained in the “new social history” era of the 1960s and 1970s raised new questions and made use of new sources, seeking to write inclusive, multi-cultural, and multi-dimensional histories. As a result, not only has the historiography of the American past been greatly revised, but public presentations of the American past have also changed drastically.

This is not to say that the histories of underrepresented communities have been completely absent from the public landscape prior to the 1960s. On the contrary, African American and other minority communities struggled to make a place for themselves in American public memory from the moment they began to identify themselves as a

distinct group. At the same time, the act of creating public memories often played a strong part in the formation of that group identity. By reinforcing a sense of shared history, African Americans have long created and shaped their own sense of community from within while resisting white efforts to portray and define them.²⁵

Historian Joan Marie Johnson illustrates this point using a particularly dramatic moment in historic preservation history. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the white South embarked on numerous memory projects to preserve their “lost cause” ideology and to perpetuate the segregated society that had existed under slavery. Meanwhile, newly freed African Americans worked to define themselves as a people and to legitimate their claims to basic civil rights, also through public memory projects. Johnson juxtaposes the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s efforts to create a memorial to the “Black Mammy” with black club women’s work to preserve Cedar Hill, the Washington, D.C., home of Frederick Douglass.

Johnson argues that African American club women fought the construction of a mammy monument because it would have forever enshrined their history as one of happy passivity and subordination. Their efforts to preserve Cedar Hill represent the construction of an alternative identity for themselves as respectable women, and for their race as deserving of equal status with whites. They recognized the power of public

²⁵ The work of Kathleen Clark, Mitch Kachun and Genevieve Fabre illuminates both free and enslaved African Americans’ use of commemorations and celebrations to claim their rights to civic participation and public space in the antebellum period through the early twentieth century. Slave festivals and free black emancipation celebrations prior to 1863 functioned as crucibles in which a sense of collective political identity took shape. By both mimicking white rituals of oration and parade and inventing new traditions involving African and slave folk expressions, African Americans, from Georgia to Maine, created their own traditions and, in so doing, fostered a group mentality. This contributed to the development of a distinct identity as African Americans which was otherwise suppressed or challenged by the limitations of enslavement and, in the case of free black communities, isolation and limited access to civic space.

memory projects to define the future, and sought to define that future by preserving Cedar Hill and combating negative images like the black mammy.²⁶

While historic preservation and other public memory projects are tools in a larger effort to create a useable past, they simultaneously represent opportunities for civic participation and, frequently, for a lasting representation on the physical landscape.

Like the preservation of Frederick Douglass' home at Cedar Hill, other national-scale African American preservation projects in the twentieth century mirrored the mainstream model of preserving sites that possessed either architectural significance or carried an association with great historical figures. Since Harriet Tubman's death in 1913, the A.M.E. Zion Church has maintained the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged, founded by Tubman at the turn of the 19th century. In 1943, George Washington Carver's childhood home in Diamond, Missouri, became a National Monument, as did the birthplace of Booker T. Washington, in 1956. In the 1970s, the National Council for Negro Women preserved Mary McLeod Bethune's home, which also served as the Council House of the National Council for Negro Women, and is now maintained by the National Park Service. In 1976, "Villa Lewaro," the home of successful beauty business mogul Madam C.J. Walker, received National Historic Landmark designation.²⁷

²⁶ Joan Marie Johnson, "'Ye Gave Them a Stone': African American Women's Clubs, the Frederick Douglass Home, and the Black Mammy Monument," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 1, (2005): 62-86.

²⁷ Fath Davis Ruffins, "Four African American Women on the National Landscape," in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, ed. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 63-71. Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," 386. National Park Service, "Villa Lewaro" and "Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged," *National Register Information System* <http://www.nr.nps.gov/>. National Park Service, "About the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House," Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site, <http://www.nps.gov/mamc/historyculture/places.htm>.

Although some representation of important black historical figures became part of the national landscape in the early 20th century, it wasn't until the 1960s that efforts to designate and preserve sites of significance to African American history began to accelerate. As mentioned above, the new social history and social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s brought a new focus on the preservation of “vernacular architecture,” and on the material culture of every day lives. In addition to the preservation of extant structures, archeological investigations into African American life under slavery and the period immediately following emancipation increased.²⁸

Project Weeksville in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, New York, provides an early and frequently cited example of these archeological efforts towards preservation. In 1968, archeologists uncovered the remains of this historically black community, the discovery of which led to the formation of the Weeksville Heritage Center. In 1838, James Weeks, a free black man, founded the community of Weeksville, which survived through the 1930s. Today, the preserved remnants of historic Weeksville are listed in the National Register of Historic Places and have become the center of community programming around preservation, education, and research.²⁹

The increased preservation of African American historic sites and artifacts seeks to fill a major gap in both the history and public memory of the African American past. Preserved material culture provides both evidence for scholars and a visible representation of past lives lived for the American public. George McDaniel, in his investigation into 19th century slave and tenant farmer homes, cites the restoration to the

²⁸ Patricia Samford, “The Archeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (January 1996): 87-114. Theresa A. Singleton, “The Archeology of Slavery in North America,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24. (1995): 119-140.

²⁹ Lee, “The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation,” 387. Weeksville Heritage Center, “Historic Weeksville,” Weeksville Heritage Center, <http://www.weeksvillesociety.org/node/3>.

historical record of every day African American lives as his goal, stating: “The exclusion of black people and their contributions to the built environment fosters a false picture of the historical reality of blacks and whites.”³⁰

As the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s amplified the demand for more equal access for women and minorities to political power, efforts to preserve a more representative sample of historic sites reflected similar civic values. On a local level, Prince George’s County’s efforts to find, designate, and preserve black history sites was an effort to present a more accurate historical reality and to reflect the every day lives of Prince Georgians, black and white. As other local history and historic preservation organizations and agencies nationwide made efforts to address racial and ethnic imbalances in their historical landscapes through special projects and initiatives, Prince George’s County’s systematic and lasting focus on African American historic sites was the result of the aforementioned shifts in preservation priorities, but also was made all the more urgent by dramatic changes in the county’s demographics.

³⁰ George W. McDaniel, *Hearth & Home: Preserving a People's Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), xvi.

Chapter 4:

Preserving African American History Sites in Prince George's County

African American historic sites often are particularly vulnerable, as their significance has historically been overlooked or is unknown to all but the few community members who are closest to the history of a site. In Prince George's County, the passage of the Historic Sites and Districts plan in 1981 led to increased public discussion of preservation and sites of significance. Local historians, preservationists and community members came to recognize that the escalating development of the county threatened fragile historic resources significant to the county's African American heritage. While it is unclear what or whom exactly sparked the M-NCPPC to undertake a survey of African American historic resources, the urgent threat of losing Prince George's County's African American history sites and their associated community stories, at the very moment that the sites' most direct constituency was growing, surely loomed large.³¹

Although Prince George's County's 1981 Historic Sites and Districts plan included some sites of significance to the county's African American history, it became clear that the original 1973 windshield survey from which the 1981 list had grown did not take into account much of the lesser-known and less visible sites. Because many sites of significance to the African American heritage of the county are not necessarily large or unique architecturally, their discovery took more in-depth historical and community investigations. The initial lack of black history sites on the 1981 plan raised questions about the historic preservation process. Some suggested that the designation process

³¹ Gail Thomas, interview with the author, November 15, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland. John Walton, interview with the author, February 15, 2007, Clinton, Maryland.

discriminated against the more "ordinary" or smaller sites with significance to African American history. Officials realized a survey of African American History sites in the county would answer many of these concerns, including accusations that the standards for historic preservation in the county should be re-evaluated or examined for bias. As a taxpayer funded agency, the M-NCPPC quickly recognized that their efforts should represent the diverse history of their constituency.³²

With a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust, the Prince George's County Council funded the initial survey of African American historic sites. Mirroring a 1979 survey, *Black Historical Resources in Upper Western Montgomery County*, also funded by the MHT, the goals of the survey included not only documentation and research of historic resources, but community participation and outreach, and proposals for further black history projects, tours and sites. The M-NCPPC charged the History Division and the Historic Preservation Commission staff with the task.³³

Susan Pearl worked as a staff member of the Historic Preservation Commission in the Planning Department of the M-NCPPC at the time. As the principal investigator for the historic sites and districts survey, Pearl had researched and documented hundreds of Prince George's County historic sites. Based on this previous work, John Walton tasked her with the Black History Survey. However, as white woman with a degree in classical archeology, Pearl did not feel qualified to take on the project herself and insisted that a specialist in African American history be hired to work with her on the project. In 1982, the M-NCPPC hired Bianca Floyd.

Both John Walton and Susan Pearl recall Bianca Floyd's interview as an exciting

³² Gail Thomas, interview with the author, November 15, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland.

³³ M-NCPPC, *Historic Sites and Districts Plan, Prince George's County, Maryland*, 101.

moment for the fledgling black history project. As a native of Prince George's County, Floyd had the community contacts and local knowledge they sought. With a degree in Afro-American Studies from the University of Maryland, she also had the skills necessary for the kind of documentary research required, and a contagious enthusiasm for the project. Floyd and Pearl worked together in 1982 and 1983, compiling an inventory of sixty sites with significance to the history of African Americans in Prince George's County.³⁴ This initial survey represents the first systematic effort by the M-NCPPC to identify black history sites. Pearl recalled they had to go a bit "out of the way" to find them:

For this survey, we had to start essentially at the beginning, searching out places important to the county's black history. We started by making contacts with various church, fraternal and community groups, and through a network of oral history, land and probate records, were able the first year to document 60 significant African-American historic places. We found that almost nothing is left of these fragile resources from the 18th and 19th centuries, and in many cases, we could identify them only through their 20th century replacements.³⁵

In the process of surveying sites, the History Division accumulated records, photographs and documentation which would later be used to develop further black history products and projects, including a book by Floyd on early black history in the county, published by the M-NCPPC in 1988.³⁶

At the beginning of the project, Susan Pearl and Bianca Floyd met with various African American community leaders to gain their support and gather information. Pearl

³⁴ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, November 18, 2006, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

³⁵ Susan G. Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland" (paper presented at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Reclaiming Rosenwald Schools: Preserving a Legacy* conference, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, May 21, 2004), 3-4.

³⁶ Gail Thomas, interview with the author, November 15, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland. Bianca Floyd, *Records and Recollections: Early Black History in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1988).

recalled one instance where community representatives expressed some discomfort with the M-NCPPC searching out and documenting their history. Perhaps they were wary of a white woman telling their story, or perhaps it was the reputation of the M-NCPPC as a government agency. Pearl succeeded in reassuring them, emphasizing that her plan was to document historic sites and structures, and that she did not intend to interpret their full history. Floyd echoed this experience, recalling that some people she spoke with during the course of her research were initially suspicious because she was from the M-NCPPC, an agency known more at that time for zoning restrictions than for culturally sensitive history projects. Floyd clarified that she was working for the History Division and this calmed their fears.³⁷

The survey functioned as both a documentation project and also as a measure of community interest in the preservation of African American historic sites and in further history projects. Interest was indeed high as the success of the initial survey led to the establishment of a fully funded Black History Program within the History Division.

Bianca Floyd stayed on as the Program's first manager. Early projects of the Black History Program (BHP) included a walking tour of Fairmont Heights (an historically black community), support of the active historical society of North Brentwood (an historically black community founded by Civil War veterans), and Black History Month exhibits and celebrations.³⁸

Having completed an impressive list of projects and programs, Bianca Floyd left the program in 1989 and was replaced by Marsha Brown. Brown was a local historian

³⁷ Bianca Floyd, interview with the author, December 13, 2006, Clinton, Maryland. Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

³⁸ Gail Thomas, interview with the author, November 15, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland. Bianca Floyd, interview with the author, December 13, 2006, Clinton, Maryland.

from Rossville who had fought hard to preserve Abraham Hall, the first black history site to be preserved by the M-NCPPC, discussed later in this essay. When Marsha left the position in 1990, John Walton hired Gail Thomas as the new program manager.³⁹

By 1990, the Black History Program had participated in the restoration of Abraham Hall, an African American benevolent society hall, and in the preservation of the ruins of two slave quarters at Northampton Plantation. Other projects were in the works at several historic churches and cemeteries.⁴⁰

In the early 1990s, the M-NCPPC underwent a re-organization and dismantled the History Division. The hierarchy of the M-NCPPC moved the various History Division programs under different sections of the organization and placed the Black History Program under the Arts and Cultural Heritage Division of the Parks and Recreation department.

As a result of this move, the program has focused more on cultural and public programming than on historic site preservation, although Gail Thomas and her staff continue to advise and collaborate with the Planning Department and with the staff of the Historic Preservation Commission whenever expertise in African American history is needed. Today the Black History Program principally focuses on education and exhibition development while the Planning Department and Historic Preservation Commission maintain primary responsibility for the physical protection and preservation

³⁹ John Walton, "Message from the Manager," *Passport to the Past* (Newsletter of the History Division, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission) 1, no. 1, (March/April 1990). Gail Thomas, interview with the author, November 15, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland.

⁴⁰ "Reclaiming the African-American Past in Prince George's County, An Update," *Passport to the Past*, (Newsletter of the History Division, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission), 1, no. 4, (September/October 1990).

of properties of African American significance.⁴¹

For the Prince George's County Tricentennial in 1996, for example, every department in the M-NCPPC contributed a project. Gail Thomas put together a popular exhibit on the history of the Negro baseball leagues in Prince George's County. Independently, Susan Pearl and the Planning Department expanded the Black History Survey and published a more extensive survey of 107 African American historic resources and fourteen communities in the county:

There has been more and more interest in the county's African-American history and historic places, and more encouragement from the county government to document and preserve resources that are significant to that history. It was clear that for the historic preservation program to operate fairly and effectively, more documentation of African-American resources was necessary, and accordingly, my principal efforts during the early and mid-1990s were toward the research and publication of a new survey of these resources.⁴²

John Walton's History Division made the M-NCPPC's initial efforts toward the documentation and preservation of African American historic sites, and their success outlasted the division itself. By the early 1990s, black history was now integral to the cultural heritage work of the Commission and no longer depended solely on Gail Thomas and her staff.

Through her extensive research and long career at the M-NCPPC, Susan Pearl has become an expert in African American history in Prince George's County. After the passage of the ordinance in 1981, Pearl moved from the History Division to the staff of the Historic Preservation Commission. There she and her colleagues continued to work toward the preservation of the sites originally surveyed and researched by Pearl and

⁴¹ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, November 18, 2006, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

⁴² Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 5-6.

Floyd in the 1980s and 1990s. Between 1982 and 2004, 20 sites of significance primarily to African American history in the county were added to the list of county-designated and -protected historic resources.⁴³

In 2003, the Planning Department of the M-NCPPC hired Betty Bird & Associates, a historical consulting firm, to prepare a Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) of “African-American Historic Resources in Prince George’s County, Maryland.” The MPD nominated five sites to the National Register of Historic Places and, in addition, outlined the historic context of African American history in the county. The MPD listed “Associated Property Types” into which future nominations can be more easily plugged to encourage and facilitate community efforts to register African American resources.

The MPD creatively addresses National Register criteria and suggests exceptions and variances to the guidelines when considering African American historic resources. For example, Bird & Associates pointed out that while a property’s National Register eligibility normally begins at fifty years of age, younger resources in Prince George’s County should be considered. The MPD argued that African Americans in the county faced significant segregation and isolation until at least 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was passed. Therefore, certain historic resources, younger than the fifty-year guideline -- such as schools and other community institutions -- reflect the unique condition of life for African Americans in Prince George’s County and should be considered for the National Register.

In addition, the MPD argued that although the National Register criteria requires a

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

comparative analysis with similar structures, that type of analysis was not as valid for African American historic resources in the county in determining a structure's significance:

In rural Prince George's County, African American churches and schools may well possess greater significance as locations of settlements than they do as churches and schools, per se. Moreover, because these buildings are invested with aspirations and strategies that have no outlet under segregation, they rise to a level of individual associative significance not present in more mainstream resources.

In short, the MPD proposed that the criteria be applied to African American Historic resources carefully and flexibly.⁴⁴ In this way, the MPD pushed the envelope and challenged the National Register to think creatively about designation criterion.

Today, under the direction of Gail Thomas, the mission of the Black History Program is to research, interpret, and document African American history and culture in Prince George's County. Its major efforts have focused on public programs because, according to Thomas, public programming easily justifies the taxpayer dollars invested in historical research. It is easier to approach community members to ask for their oral histories, artifacts, photographs, and so on, if they know they are contributing to a public product. In addition, public programs bring visibility to the Black History Program and to black history in the county, and can be used as a motivator for participants. Such programs give back to the community and to participants by providing greater visibility and importance to their community stories, and by contextualizing them and relating them to larger historical themes.

In the case of historic preservation in Prince George's County, demographics

⁴⁴ National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, "African-American Historic Resources of Prince George's County, Maryland" prepared by Betty Bird & Associates, 2003.

mattered. The county-level Black History Program created a space within local government for broader citizen participation in preservation endeavors. Activity in Prince George's County was in line with the rest of the nation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, ethnic and minority preservation efforts came to the forefront in the preservation movement as minority groups both organized for themselves and began to feel welcome participating in what had once been perceived as a majority white, elitist group. For example, between 1979 and 1982 there were annual meetings of the "Conference on Historic Preservation and the Minority Community."⁴⁵ By 1992, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual conference focused on the preservation of sites relating to underrepresented communities with the theme "Cultural Diversity" as its organizing principle.⁴⁶

The following examples highlight both the successes and shortcomings of preservation of African American historic sites in Prince George's County. These three case studies demonstrate the way in which the county's efforts can be seen as a model for other local governments to follow, but they also clearly show the limits of what governments and community organizations can do when faced with daunting fiscal and legal realities.

⁴⁵ Antoinette J. Lee, "Discovering Old Cultures in the New World: The Role of Ethnicity," in *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage*, ed. Robert E. Stipe and Antoinette J. Lee (Washington, DC: United States Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1987), 198.

⁴⁶ Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," 389-90.

Chapter 5:

Abraham Hall: A Prince George's County First

The first black history site to be fully restored using public funds, Abraham Hall set a precedent for preservation collaborations between the M-NCPPC and a small but dedicated community.

After the Civil War, a community of freedmen formed a religious congregation that later became Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. In January of 1868, six black men, Henry Edwards, Thomas Quinn or Queen, Thomas Matthews, Ferdinand Key, Knotley Johnson and James Powell, purchased three-tenths of an acre of land for \$5 in order to build "a substantial building to be used as a place of worship and schoolhouse for the colored people." The small plot was already the site of a graveyard being used by residents of the area. They built a small log chapel that burned down in the 1890s. Subsequent chapels were built on or near the site in 1901 and 1956. The 1956 structure is still in use today.⁴⁷

Queen's Chapel served as a center for the free black community of farmers and workers from the nearby Muirkirk Iron Furnace who lived in the area. In 1877, members of Queen's Chapel chartered Rebecca Lodge Number 6, a chapter of the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a fraternal organization. Members of the lodge paid dues and were guaranteed financial benefits should they become sick or face an emergency.⁴⁸

In 1886, the land immediately adjacent to Queen's Chapel was subdivided into

⁴⁷ Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey*, 1996, 18, 22.

⁴⁸ Abraham Hall, Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form, prepared by Susan G. Pearl, Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission, September 1986, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings File: Abraham Hall.

twelve lots and sold to local black families, most of whom worked at the iron furnace, and two of whom, Johnson and Matthews, were among the six founders of Queen's Chapel.

Augustus Ross also was one of the original buyers. Born a slave in 1855, Ross gained his freedom in 1864. He found employment at the iron furnace and was able to purchase a lot for \$76.78. Ross was one of the first owners to build on his land, constructing a two-story log home. In his honor, the neighborhood came to be known as "Rossville."⁴⁹

By 1889, ten more lots held structures, leaving one empty. The remaining lot had been purchased by Rebecca Lodge Number 6. That year, the organization erected a two-story wood frame building to serve as their meeting place. The building would become known as Abraham Hall. It still stands today.

Abraham Hall would become a focal point for the community of Rossville. When Queen's Chapel burned in the 1890s, the hall served as a worship center. It also served as a schoolhouse until 1922, when the Muirkirk School was built by the county with the help of the Julius Rosenwald Fund.⁵⁰

Over the years, the hall would lose its position as a central institution in the community and fall into disrepair. In the mid-twentieth century, younger generations became more mobile, aging Society members passed on, and employers began to offer insurance and health benefits, negating the financial needs for the organization. The dwindling members of Rebecca Lodge began to meet elsewhere. Abraham Hall was left

⁴⁹ Ibid. Gail Pastula, "Oh, the Memories of a Town Called Rossville," *Prince George's Journal*, February 14, 1984, A1, A6. Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey*, 1996, 18.

⁵⁰ Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey*, 1996, 18-21.

to deteriorate and stood vacant from the 1970s through the mid-1980s. Visitors in 1984 described drooping shutters, vines clogging the entryway, broken window panes, and society records exposed to the elements due to holes in the roof.⁵¹



Figure 1: Abraham Hall, prior to restoration, c.1985. Courtesy of the Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

The story of Abraham Hall's preservation is one of a community effort to save a local landmark and preserve the history of a community institution. Working with the M-NCPPC, community members advocated to nominate the building to the National Register and to raise the funds to restore it.

Abraham Hall stands on Old Muirkirk Road in Beltsville, Maryland. It was included in the 1974 windshield survey of historic sites but did not make it into the final list of county designated sites in 1981. Susan Pearl and Bianca Floyd revisited the site for the Black History Survey in the early 1980s, and filed the paperwork to nominate the

⁵¹ Pastula, "'Oh, the memories' of a town called Rossville" A1, A6. Chris Guy, "Abraham Hall Gets \$200,000 Rehab," (alt. title "Heart of Community Gets Lift"), *Prince George's Journal*, July 11, 1986, A1, A7.

site to the county list in 1983.⁵²

In November 1985, the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission designated Abraham Hall as a county historic site. With the designation in hand, members of the Society of Abraham, local residents, and M-NCPPC staff members met with County Councilman Frank Casula to advocate for funds to stabilize the endangered building.⁵³

That same year, Christine Jones, a delegate to the Maryland Assembly, introduced the "Prince George's County Black Historic Site Restoration Loan" bond bill to the Assembly. The language of the bill was general, but the funds, if granted, would go to the restoration of Abraham Hall. The bill was defeated because of a technicality, but a similar bill was approved by the assembly in 1986, with support from local historical and preservation groups.⁵⁴

As a result of the 1986 bond bill, the Sons and Daughters of Abraham received a \$100,000 capital improvement grant to be administered by the M-NCPPC. Using these funds, they replaced the roof in June of that year, and commissioned architectural drawings. Soon, planning for the restoration of Abraham Hall was underway.⁵⁵

By September of 1986, Susan Pearl had completed a more thorough documentation of Abraham Hall, its structure and historic significance, and in the following summer, additional funds from the county were approved to complete the

⁵² Abraham Hall, MHT Inventory Form, PGCHS Clippings Files: Abraham Hall.

⁵³ *Friends of Preservation*, (newsletter of the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust), Winter, 1985-1986, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings Files: Abraham Hall.

⁵⁴ Susan G. Pearl, "Abraham Hall Restored, Rededicated," *Friends of Preservation*, (newsletter of the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust), Fall, 1991, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings File: Abraham Hall.

⁵⁵ Guy, "Abraham Hall Gets \$200,000 Rehab," A1, A7.

restoration of Abraham Hall.⁵⁶

The restoration of Abraham Hall was completed in 1991. On Sunday, September 22, 1991, the hall was rededicated in front of a large crowd of enthusiastic community members and supporters. As the recipient of \$100,000 from the State Bond Sale Grant, \$272,000 from Prince George's County and the M-NCPPC, and \$30,000 from a Maryland Historic Trust Preservation Grant, Abraham Hall was the first black Historic Site in Prince George's County to be fully restored using public funds.⁵⁷



Figure 2: Abraham Hall, after restoration. Courtesy of the Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

In 2003, Abraham Hall was successfully nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the “African American Historic Resources in Prince George’s County, Maryland” Multiple Property Documentation process. In early 2007, the Society

⁵⁶ Abraham Hall, MHT Inventory Form and "Funds to Complete Abraham Hall Project Approved," *Friends of Preservation*, (newsletter of the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust), Summer, 1987, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings File: Abraham Hall.

⁵⁷ Pearl, “Abraham Hall Restored, Rededicated,” Fall, 1991 and Rededication Program for Abraham Hall, September 22, 1991, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings File: Abraham Hall.

of Abraham granted ownership of the building to Prince George's County because the Society lacks the means to maintain it. The M-NCPPC now serves as the building administrator and intends to use the space for community meetings and for black history exhibits.⁵⁸

Though a long process, the preservation of Abraham Hall set a precedent and served as a model project for the M-NCPPC to point to later. Abraham Hall is a success story also because of the high level of collaboration between community members and the M-NCPPC. Once at risk of falling apart, Abraham Hall will soon serve as a public space for educational programming on black history in the county.

⁵⁸ Barbara Funk, interview with the author, December 5, 2006, Riverdale, Maryland. Susan Pearl, in conversation with the author, April 10, 2007, via phone.

Chapter 6:

Rosenwald Schools: A Broad Coalition

From 1912-1932, philanthropist Julius Rosenwald funded a program to provide schools for black students in the South. Rosenwald was president of Sears, Roebuck and much of his philanthropy, of which schools were only one part, addressed barriers to full citizenship for African Americans. With the assistance and cooperation of Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald set up his school program following Washington's ideals of racial uplift and self-help. African American communities applied to the Rosenwald Fund for seed money and were then required to match any funds allotted as well as have the support of their local government. Rosenwald would give \$4.4 million to the construction of schools for black children over the course of the program, but \$23.6 million more would be contributed by the communities and local governments through direct donation, labor, supplies, and taxes.⁵⁹

Most schools were constructed from a catalog of plans provided by the Rosenwald Fund and are thus recognizable by their shared architectural characteristics. Common features include window placement for maximum light, paint colors designed with young eyes in mind, and a simple colonial revival or arts and crafts exterior design. Many Rosenwald schools functioned as community schools well into the 1970s. The structures ceased to be used as schools for several reasons including the size and age of the facilities. In addition, Rosenwald Schools were designed to serve isolated, largely rural

⁵⁹ Diane Granat, "More than Blue Skies," *Preservation*, July/August 2003, 36. Peter M. Ascoli, "Julius Rosenwald: The Man Behind the Giving" (paper presented at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Reclaiming Rosenwald Schools: Preserving a Legacy* conference, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, May 21, 2004, <http://rosenwaldschools.com/>.

black communities. As the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision desegregating public schools slowly took effect, integration nullified the necessity for separate school buildings.

Many Rosenwald Schools have been demolished, however some remain standing and a few have been marked or are being preserved by dedicated alumni and community members. As community-funded institutions, Rosenwald Schools were sources of pride for the African American communities they served. As such, community interest in preserving the schools and interpreting the story of black education is often strong.⁶⁰

Rosenwald Schools have recently become a hot issue for preservationists. In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation included Rosenwald Schools on its “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places” list and then began an educational and networking initiative to help local preservationists identify and fund the preservation of their local Rosenwald Schools. In May 2004, the Trust held a conference at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, home of the Rosenwald archive.⁶¹ The conference, “Reclaiming Rosenwald Schools: Preserving a Legacy,” included sessions on preservation in general, on the history of the Rosenwald Schools program, and on local case studies of school preservation. Susan Pearl presented a session on the countywide effort to preserve Rosenwald Schools in Prince George’s County.⁶²

At one time, Prince George’s County had twenty-seven Rosenwald Schools. By the early 1980s, eleven remained standing. Since then, two more have been lost. The

⁶⁰ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Preserving Rosenwald Schools* (Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2003), 12.

⁶¹ “Rosenwald Initiative Moves Forward,” *Southern Preservation News*, (National Trust for Historic Preservation) 1, no. 1, (December 2002), Prince George’s County Historical Society Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools.

⁶² “Reclaiming Rosenwald Schools: Preserving a Legacy” Conference Program, May 21-22, 2004, Fisk University, Prince George’s County Historical Society Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools.

nine that remain are in various conditions and are used for diverse purposes. One is a used car sales office, one is a small apartment home, one is a retail shop, two are American Legion Posts, and two are churches. The remaining two, Highland Park and Ridgeley, are owned by the Prince George's County Board of Education and used as an elementary school and as a bus management depot, respectively.⁶³

The history of African American child education in Prince George's County has been tumultuous. Prior to the establishment of several schools by the Freedman's bureau, black communities organized their own schools, often in homes, churches or community lodge buildings. The Freedman's Bureau model presaged the Rosenwald Funds' requirements. Communities provided a site for the school, \$200 for construction, and \$15 per month for a teacher's salary. The Freedman's Bureau was disbanded in 1872, and Prince George's County took over administration of the "Colored Schools."⁶⁴

Post-Civil War black settlements in Prince George's County continued to grow in the early twentieth century as the children of original settlers built homes and expanded the boundaries of each community. As a result, demand for public education for black children increased. The Rosenwald School program was used in some cases to replace Freedman's bureau schools and in some case to establish brand new school buildings. The twenty-seven schools in Prince George's County were constructed between 1921 and 1930.⁶⁵

⁶³ Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 4-5. "Rosenwald School List, Prince George's County," no date, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools.

⁶⁴ National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, "African-American Historic Resources of Prince George's County, Maryland" prepared by Betty Bird & Associates, 2003.

⁶⁵ Schools existed in the communities of Bowie, Brandywine, Camp Springs, Capital Heights, Chapel Hill, Clinton, Collington, Duckettsville, Dupont Heights, Fletchertown, Forestville, Glenarden, Highland Park, Holly Grove, Lakeland (2), Laurel, Lincoln, Meadows, Mitchellville, Muirkirk, North Brentwood,

Until 1921, African American students seeking a high school education had to travel to the District of Columbia. In 1921, the Board of Education established a high school for black children in Upper Marlboro, but this school was more accessible to the southern part of the county. Seven years later, responding to increased demand, the Board constructed two more high schools, both with Rosenwald funds, at Highland Park in present day Landover and at Lakeland, now part of College Park.⁶⁶

Racial desegregation in Prince George's County's public schools came late. From 1954 to 1973, under the guise of a "freedom of choice" program, the county ran a segregated school system, continuing to build separate new schools for blacks and new schools for whites. A 1972 lawsuit resulted in a desegregation plan that included massive busing to balance the racial diversity in the county schools. Schools were consolidated while smaller neighborhood schools were closed or re-purposed. Years of dissention followed and, as the demographics of the county changed drastically, the busing program was essentially ended in 1998.⁶⁷

The preservation of Rosenwald Schools thus invokes memories of a time before desegregation and busing, when the individual black communities raised the necessary funds to educate their children, often constructing the school buildings with their own hands.

Rosenwald Schools appeared on the M-NCPPC's radar screen as a result of Susan Pearl and Bianca Floyd's research for the initial Black History Survey in 1982. They

Oxon Hill, Ridgely, T.B., Upper Marlboro and Westwood. "Rosenwald School List, Prince George's County," no date, PGCHS Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools. Susan Pearl, in conversation with the author, April 10, 2007, via phone.

⁶⁶ Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 10-11.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Black Power in the Suburbs*, 108-110, 148. Lisa Frazier, "Judge Ends Busing in Prince George's," *Washington Post*, September 2, 1998, A1.

found that none of the original twelve Freedman's bureau schools, built in Prince George's County between 1867 and 1869, were extant. Related to this find, however, they discovered that six of the Freedman's Bureau schools had been replaced by new buildings, funded in part by the Rosenwald Schools program in the 1920s. Further research eventually revealed the twenty-seven Rosenwald Schools, representing the work of as many black communities to educate their children.

As noted, in 1982, eleven schools remained standing and none were protected by any kind of designation. By 1992, Highland Park School was designated a county historic site, and Ridgeley School would follow in 2004. Two others, Mitchellville and Fletchertown, were lost to the bulldozer before they could be protected. The additional loss of the Chapel Hill Rosenwald School in particular sparked preservationists to take note and begin to organize to save the remaining structures. Chapel Hill had been identified on the 1973 survey of historic sites and districts but was destroyed just as preservationists were beginning to recognize the existence and preservation needs for Rosenwald Schools in the county.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ In 1922, in the community of Chapel Hill, (now part of the Fort Washington area), a Rosenwald School was constructed to replace the aging and overcrowded Freedman's Bureau School. In 1924, an additional building, also partially funded by the Rosenwald Program, was attached to the 1922 building to provide additional classroom space. The Chapel Hill school functioned until the early 1950s when it was closed and reopened as a community center until the 1970s. Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 7-10.



Figure 3: Chapel Hill Rosenwald School, no longer extant. 1923 building on the left, 1926 addition on the right. Courtesy of the Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

Today, several community organizations have preserved, or are in the process of preserving and marking the sites of the county's Rosenwald Schools. Two in particular are good examples through which to examine the process of preserving a community institution. Highland Park in Landover was the first school to be designated and restored. Ridgely School, also in present day Landover, is in the process of being preserved by a coalition of community and government groups. The preservation of extant structures and the marking of former Rosenwald School sites are the most visible and largest black history project currently underway in the county.

The preservation of Highland Park can be considered a "poster child" project, according to Susan Pearl. Thanks to the organized efforts of dedicated alumni led by Clement Martin, Highland Park's preservation won broad community support and was saved from the wrecking ball in the early 1990s.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, November 18, 2006, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

Highland Park was one of the two large brick buildings, the other being Lakeland, designed by Linthicum and Linthicum and constructed in 1928. At its inception, Highland Park had seven teachers and provided education for children in grades 1-12. When Fairmont Heights High School opened in 1950, Highland Park became a junior high school and later served as an elementary school.⁷⁰ In part due to the desegregation busing plan, Highland Park School was closed in 1973. The building was used as offices and a staff development center for the school system until 1993, and in the early 1990s the Board of Education considered demolishing it.

Clement Martin led the effort to save Highland Park. Martin graduated from Highland Park in 1939, and later taught at Lakeland, another Rosenwald supported facility. His wife, Barbara Fletcher Martin attended the Rosenwald School in Fletchertown, Maryland, which was demolished in the late 1990s. Their children also attended Highland Park.⁷¹

Under threat of demolition, the local civic association made a request that the M-NCPPC evaluate the building. They completed their study of the building and recommended that the school be designated a county historic site. The Board of Education, the building's owner, was initially wary of possible restrictions imposed by the designation but were soon convinced by the enthusiasm of the local community. In 1992, Highland Park was designated as a county historic site and protected by the preservation ordinance. In 1994, the Board of Education applied to the Historic Preservation Commission for permission to renovate Highland Park and the request was

⁷⁰ Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996*, 124.

⁷¹ Eugene L. Meyer, "Doors Opened to Learning: During Segregation, Philanthropist Helped Fund Schools for Blacks in Pr. George's," *Washington Post*, March 24, 1999, M4. Susan Pearl, in conversation with the author, April 10, 2007, via phone.

approved. They replaced the roof, rebuilt much of the interior of the building, and re-opened the facility as a head start center in 1995. Since then it has been extensively renovated and expanded and now serves, once again, as a neighborhood elementary school. The 1999 rededication of the school brought out many alumni who helped recognize Clement Martin for his advocacy work. In 2002, to great fanfare, the Prince George's Historical and Cultural Trust installed a bronze marker at Highland Park, recognizing the historical significance of the building and the community.⁷²



Figure 4: Highland Park Elementary School. Courtesy of the Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

The restoration and re-dedication of Highland Park School laid the groundwork for the preservation of other Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County. It serves as an example of the power of the preservation ordinance, together with strong community activism, to protect a site of significance to one African American community. Building on the relationships and interests fostered by the work at Highland Park, the Ridgeley

⁷² "Highland Park Rosenwald School, Prince George's County, Maryland," no date, Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools. Susan Pearl, "A Philanthropist's Legacy in Prince George's," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2002, B8.

School is likely to be preserved in the very near future. Like Clement Martin at Highland Park, Ridgeley School has its standard bearer in Mildred Ridgley Gray, an eighty-six year-old woman with an immense passion for the preservation of local history.⁷³

Susan Pearl recalls meeting Mildred Ridgley Gray for the first time at a public hearing for the preliminary Historic Sites and Districts Plan in 1980. Gray came to the hearing to advocate for the inclusion of the Ridgely Church as an historic site in the proposed plan. The church was built on land deeded in 1871 to Gray's grandfather, Lewis Ridgely, and two other church trustees. The M-NCPPC staff members who carried out the original 1973 survey and the 1980 revisions had been unaware of the structure and now, impressed with Gray's presentation and knowledge of the historic community surrounding the church, they jumped at the chance to preserve it. It was included in the final 1981 Historic Sites and Districts Plan with the help of Gray.⁷⁴

The preservation of Ridgely church was Gray's first foray into historic preservation. In the late 1980s, the church was threatened by the widening of Central Avenue. When the congregation suggested that the State Highway Administration (SHA) move the church to avoid the negative affects of the highway on the structure and site, they were told that the SHA was "in the business of building roads and not moving churches." Gray reported this comment to her state senator, the late Decatur Trotter, who assured her that she had his support, even threatening to see the SHA in court. Heartened by this enthusiasm, Gray and the members of the historic congregation began to gather support for the preservation of the church. Gray especially credits Gail Rothrock,

⁷³ In researching the historic Ridgely community, Susan Pearl discovered that the name was spelled various ways. The church is referred to as Ridgely Church, the school is Ridgeley School, and Mildred Gray's maiden name is Ridgley.

⁷⁴ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

Howard Berger and Susan Pearl at the M-NCPPC and Ruth Scott Brown of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society with helping her advocate for Ridgely Church. In the end, the SHA moved the church a safe distance away from the highway. It was renovated and rededicated in 1990.⁷⁵



Figure 5: Ridgely Church. Courtesy of the Prince George’s County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

The success of the Ridgely Church preservation effort, together with the enthusiasm building around Rosenwald Schools in the county, spurred Gray to extend her activism; her next target would be the Ridgeley Rosenwald School which stands a short distance from the historic church and cemetery.

Ridgeley School was built on land purchased from Mary Eliza Ridgley, Gray’s mother, in 1927. The two-room building housed six grade levels from 1927 until the

⁷⁵ Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland. Pearl, *Prince George’s County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996*, 121-2. Ridgely Methodist Episcopal Church merged with Seat Pleasant Methodist Church in 1980 to become Gethsemane United Methodist Church in Capitol Heights. The historic Ridgely Church structure no longer holds regular worship services but is available for educational and special events. Gethsemane United Methodist Church, “A Brief History of Our Church,” Gethsemane United Methodist Church, <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/gethsemane/history.htm>.

1950s, when it became a Special Education center of which Gray served as principal. It has served as a bus management office for the county schools since the late 1960s.

Prior to the construction of the Ridgeley School in 1927, children in the community attended school in a lodge building associated with Ridgely Church. The area surrounding Ridgeley School, Ridgely Church, and the associated historic graveyard is now heavily developed. This center of a once thriving and self-sufficient African American community is now surrounded by trucking, light industry, and highways. To combat the loss of historical memory of the Ridgely community, Gray has set up a trust. Begun in 2001, the Mildred Ridgely-Gray Charitable Trust, Incorporated, originally was conceived to protect the remainder of Gray's land from development and preserve it for public use. Today the Trust seeks to maintain the Arthur and Mary E. Ridgely house in which Gray lived in with her late husband, William Gray, and to support the preservation of remaining Ridgely community institutions. In addition, the Trust lists as its goals promoting local history, providing educational scholarships, and supporting the preservation of Prince George's County's heritage.⁷⁶

Mildred Ridgely Gray was born in 1921, the youngest of thirteen children. Her mother, Mary Eliza Ridgely somehow saved enough money to purchase the land on which the Ridgeley School was eventually constructed. Gray was educated at Ridgeley School through the seventh grade. From there she attended Highland Park High School. Gray went on to the Maryland State Teachers College at Bowie, the first post-secondary school in the state open to African Americans, (now Bowie State University) and became an educator herself. She taught at various schools in Prince George's County, including

⁷⁶ "The Mildred Ridgely-Gray Charitable Trust, Inc.," brochure, Personal Papers of Mildred Ridgely Gray. Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996*, 120-122. Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 13.

Highland Park, but her proudest professional work occurred as principal of the Ridgeley Special Education School in the 1950s.⁷⁷



Figure 6: Interior, Ridgeley School, c.1950. Courtesy of the Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC and Mildred Ridgley Gray.

Like Clement Martin, Gray is extremely proud of the education she received at Ridgeley. Her elder sister taught there, and she is eager to list the accomplishments of fellow graduates. At their inception, Rosenwald Schools were considered state of the art and evoked great pride from the communities in which they were located. Historian Mary Hoffschwelle discusses the unique experience the Rosenwald School program helped provide for black communities:

Going to a Rosenwald school initially meant being in the vanguard of education for African-American children. The architecture of the schools made a visual assertion of the equality of all children, and the activities at the school made it a focal point of community identity and aspirations.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland. National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, "African-American Historic Resources of Prince George's County, Maryland" prepared by Betty Bird & Associates, 2003.

⁷⁸ Hoffschwelle, *Preserving Rosenwald Schools*, 12.

Gray recalled the portrait of Julius Rosenwald which hung in the foyer of the Ridgeley School:

When I was growing up, we just thought the Rosenwald Fund was next to the Bible... Every school had a picture of Julius Rosenwald.⁷⁹

In the late 1990s, Gray, her nephew Wilbert Ridgley, and Jane Eagen Dodd, then president of the Prince George's County Historical Society, met with County Executive Wayne Curry and Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Iris Metts, gathering public support for the preservation of Ridgeley School.⁸⁰ This work continued as the Historical Society, with the leadership of Susan Pearl, and the Prince George's Historical & Cultural Trust, of which Gray is a member, worked with the Board of Education to impress upon them the significance of the building and ask them to perform some routine maintenance to avoid complications down the road.

In the early 2000s, an adjacent development threatened to compromise the historic setting of the Ridgeley School even more than it already had been compromised. Advocates for the school's preservation met with the developer to communicate the historical significance of the school. Their presentation was impressive, as the developer contributed \$10,000 to the Board of Education toward the preservation of the school. In May of 2004, the M-NCPPC conducted a structural analysis of the building. This analysis was used to help the Board of Education understand the issues at stake in the preservation of the building. That same year, Ridgeley School was designated as a county historic site.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Meyer, "Doors Opened to Learning," M4.

⁸⁰ Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland.

⁸¹ Pearl, "Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County, Maryland," 14-15.



Figure 7: Ridgeley School. Courtesy of the Prince George’s County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

A coalition of individuals and organizations has come together to further the preservation of Ridgeley School. Staff of the M-NCPPC, including Gail Thomas of the Black History Program and Gail Rothrock of the Planning Department, representatives from the Prince George’s County Historical Society, the County Executive’s office, the Board of Education, the Mildred Ridgley-Gray Charitable Trust, and members of the Prince George’s County chapter of Delta Theta Sigma, meet regularly to monitor progress, raise necessary funds, and gather support for Ridgeley School. The current strategy includes a land swap that will allow the Board of Education to construct a new bus depot on a piece of M-NCPPC park land. The M-NCPPC would then acquire Ridgeley School, restore it, and the Delta Theta Sigma sorority would use it as an

educational center and museum.⁸²

This broad coalition is a powerful one, representing agencies, politicians, civic groups and interested individuals. Calling itself the “Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative,” the group has secured \$1.12 million for the project as part of the Capital Improvement Plan funds available from the county. In addition, they have raised \$10,000 from the developer, \$5000 from Preservation Maryland, and \$120,000 as the result of a state bond bill.⁸³

Present obstacles include delays in the implementation of the land swap agreement and a lack of funds for the Board of Education to construct their new depot. The members of the Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative, led by M-NCPPC staff members, were scheduled to present before the Board of Education in April of 2007, and hoped to communicate some of their frustration with the delays.

Beside the restoration of the school, the group intends to conduct extensive oral histories with alumni of the school. They are working with the Board of Education to procure the necessary records in order to locate alums, and will most likely use some of their grant money to conduct the interviews.

It is apparent that none of the activity around the Ridgeley School would have come to fruition without the determination of Mildred Ridgley Gray and the cooperation and active support of people like Susan Pearl and Gail Rothrock at the Historical Society and the M-NCPPC. Addressing the process of preserving black history sites in the

⁸² Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland. Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland. The author also attended a meeting of the Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative on March 14, 2007.

⁸³ Meeting Synopsis, Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative, January 10, 2007 and Memorandum, Marye Wells-Harley, Director of Parks and Recreation, M-NCPPC to Samuel Dean, Prince George’s County Council, February 15, 2007, Records of the Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

county, Black History Program Manager Gail Thomas pointed out that each successful project usually starts with an individual who refuses to give up on an endangered memory site. This person usually serves as a standard bearer or “wedge” by refusing to let the door close on her or his heritage.

In the case of Ridgeley School, Mildred Ridgley Gray has been a significant “wedge.” Recalling a meeting she attended where representatives from the Board of Education and the developer were considering re-purposing the Ridgeley School property, Gray tried hard to understand their perspective:

I could understand when the Board of Education needed larger space for parking. I could understand that. But I just could not accept the fact that my mother gave up this land for public education ...why were they going to use it for something else? Get rid of it? ...and I just couldn't understand, I just couldn't *understand*. So they got tired of my not understanding and the meeting closed down. And then later [the developer] gave the Board of Education 10,000 dollars for Ridgeley School! ...and I'll never forget the day I said "I am a third generation Prince Georgian and I just cannot understand why this is going on - getting rid of or swapping with the storage group - whomever wanted to buy - so that they could have a larger parking lot. ...I could see the Board of Education's point of view. Schools have never really had enough money to run them properly and with the consolidation of schools and the like, you know, they needed more space, and I could understand that as a taxpayer, but then, as a woman whose mother, with 13 children, on her own, owned property, I felt that was a very important fact.

In addition to her persistence, Gray is adept at gathering the support and resources necessary for her chosen cause. She repeatedly cites or credits the help of numerous community members and organizations who have assisted her in becoming educated about preservation protocol and to feel empowered to speak up for her family and community legacy. Gray recognizes that the preservation of the past is for the benefit of the present and future. She cites both the education and hope of young people as her personal motivation for making sure the Ridgeley story is told. She is proud of her

family's history as founders of lasting community institutions, but Gray is also focused on providing young people with "something to look up to." Finally, when asked if she had any advice for people looking to save an historic site she responded:

Number one you have to believe in yourself that it can be saved. If you think that it's something worth saving then you have to present yourself in such a manner that other people will believe also - you can't be timid. And the areas that I didn't know, I leaned very heavily on other people. It wasn't just about Mildred Gray, it was to save something of history.⁸⁴

The success of Highland Park and the groundswell of support exhibited for the preservation of Ridgeley School have both contributed to and fed off of the increasing interest in Rosenwald Schools in Prince George's County. At the local level, Rosenwald schools were listed on the local list of endangered historic places compiled by the Prince George's County Historical Society, the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust, and Prince George's Heritage, Inc., in 2006.⁸⁵ That same year the Historical and Cultural Trust announced a program to fund historical markers for the nine extant Rosenwald Schools in the County as part of their African American Education Heritage initiative.⁸⁶ In February 2007, Susan Pearl and the Prince George's County Historical Society, in collaboration with several other organizations, invited Julius Rosenwald's grandson, Peter Ascoli, to lecture on his recently published book, *Julius Rosenwald, The Man who built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*. The lectures took place at Highland Park Rosenwald School and at Lakeland, and were well attended by alumni of both schools. Gray's Trust used the

⁸⁴ Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland.

⁸⁵ "2006 List of Historic Places," Prince George's County Historical Society Clippings Files: Rosenwald Schools.

⁸⁶ Alfonso A. Narvaez, "A New Vision for the Trust," *Friends of Preservation* (Newsletter of the Prince George's County Historical and Cultural Trust) 22, no. 1 (Winter 2006).

opportunity to raise awareness of the plight of Ridgeley and gather names in support of its preservation. Finally, in March 2007, Preservation Maryland and *Maryland Life Magazine* named the Ridgeley Rosenwald School to their list of “Endangered Maryland” historic sites.

For several reasons, the Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative is a success story in the making. Broad-based community interest in the project, represented by the participation of multiple county agencies, civic organizations, and interested individuals, ensures that the project is not dependent on one persistent agency or advocate for its success. Related to this, the simple fact that the property is owned by the Board of Education, as Highland Park was, works to the projects’ advantage because, unlike a private property owner, the Board must listen to its constituents, including its preservation-minded constituents.

In addition, the national and state declarations of Rosenwald Schools as a preservation priority by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation Maryland infused the project with a combination of validity and urgency, allowing Ridgeley’s advocates to point to the agendas of prominent preservation organizations as an indication of their support.

The preservation of Rosenwald Schools offers the chance to tell many stories. Not only do the sites represent a story of black education in the segregated South, they can communicate the history of progressive ideas about education in the early twentieth century, of philanthropy, of community activism, and public education in general. There are both local and national stories to be told.

In Prince George's County, the history of Ridgeley is especially poignant given the long period of segregated public education, the controversial busing for integration, and current concerns about the state of the county's school system. Today the concept of a neighborhood school is once again an ideal to be attained. Both Highland Park and Ridgeley Rosenwald School represent the original neighborhood schools for the black community in Prince George's County. These two Rosenwald schools were built with a high level of community investment, not in mere tax dollars but in physical labor and sacrifice. This legacy is one that Gray and her supporters would like to preserve.

Finally, when it comes down to it, preservation happens because of people, not because of legislation, designation, or protocol. Mildred Ridgley Gray, as a dedicated and passionate advocate for her historic community, and with her skills at networking and gathering support, serves not only as a "wedge" but as the heart and soul of the initiative. For all of these reasons, the Ridgeley Rosenwald School Initiative, currently the largest black history project in the county, is an extremely compelling and supportable project.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, November 18, 2006, Glenn Dale, Maryland. Both the budget and the level of public support and government involvement contribute to this superlative.

Chapter 7:

Butler House: Preservation or Profit?

Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm National Park is located on a hill overlooking Alexandria, Virginia and Washington, D.C. Established in 1959, the park consists of a working farm and a historic house. The house, known as Mount Welby, was built by the DeButts family around 1811. Today, exhibits in the home interpret the journey of the Samuel DeButts and his wife, Mary Welby DeButts, from England to Maryland, their life at Mount Welby, the drama of the 1814 burning of Washington, (which the DeButts witnessed first-hand,) and the lives of the enslaved people who lived and worked at Mount Welby. School children come to Oxon Cove to learn about life on an 19th and 20th century farm, and about the families that lived and worked on the property.⁸⁸

In 2002, the park created a “development concept plan” and revised its interpretation of the Mount Welby story to include the stories of enslaved peoples who lived there. In the process of re-interpretation they made a particularly dramatic find when they discovered the story of Jacob Shaw, a man who escaped enslavement in 1840 from what was then the Berry Plantation on the southern part of the current park property. In 2005, citing the cross-plantation communities of enslaved African Americans that probably aided in such escapes, the park was listed as a part of the Park Service’s

⁸⁸ National Park Service, “Dr. & Mrs. DeButts,” Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm, <http://www.nps.gov/oxhi/historyculture/the-debutts.htm>. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Illustrated Inventory of Historic Sites, Prince George’s County, Maryland*, (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, July 2006), 118-119.

National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.⁸⁹

Adjoining the park are nine parcels of land owned by the Butler family. Since 1999, the National Park Service has been in negotiations with the Butler's to acquire their land, including the family's historic home. Little progress has been made, however, as the family, various members of which own various parcels, are not in agreement about what to do with the property, and the Park Service is not interested in acquiring less than the total nine parcels.

Just across the capital beltway, which borders Oxon Hill Farm, developer Milton Peterson is constructing "National Harbor," a \$2 billion development that includes a convention center, entertainment facilities and luxury housing.⁹⁰ This ambitious 300-acre property can be seen as the pinnacle of development in Prince George's County.

The Butler House is located at 6403 Oxon Hill Road in Oxon Hill, Maryland. Built around 1850 as the local post office, the house faces an abandoned road that once served as a main thoroughfare to the Capital City. Around 1853, Henry Alexander Boteler, a free black man from Charles County, MD, completed the house and moved into it with his family. It was legally deeded to Henry Alexander "Butler" in 1873. The Butler family made their livelihood by farming and the property at one time included a chicken house, meat house, barns, and other outbuildings. The main house, still standing, has been passed down through the family over the years and remains in their possession today.⁹¹

⁸⁹ National Park Service, "Jacob Shaw," Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm, <http://www.nps.gov/oxhi/historyculture/jacob-shaw.htm>.

⁹⁰ Ovetta Wiggins, "National Harbor's Housing Boon: High-end Homes May Bolster County," *Washington Post*, October 19, 2005, B1.

⁹¹ Pearl, *Prince George's County African-American Heritage Survey, 1996*, 130.



Figure 8: William Butler in front of the Butler House, 1977. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust

In the late 1970s, George McDaniel, employed by the Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Commission on Afro-American History and Culture, documented the Butler House. McDaniel had been researching ante-bellum nineteenth century slave and post-Civil-War farm tenant homes for his graduate work and as an intern at the Smithsonian. He interviewed William Butler several times in 1976, 1977 and 1978 as part of his study and later prepared a MHT nomination of the property. The Butler house -- the only known surviving dwelling of an antebellum free black family in Southern Maryland -- was included in his book, *Hearth and Home: Preserving a People's Culture*.⁹²

A couple of years later, Susan Pearl and Bianca Floyd also interviewed William Butler for the Black History Survey and included the Butler House on the first survey of sixty sites. The Butler House was included on the 1981 Prince George's County Historic

⁹² McDaniel, *Hearth & Home*, xviii.

Sites and Districts list, as a designated county historic resource.

In the late 1990s, during the planning process for the planning area 76-A, known as “The Heights,” in which both the Butler property and the Park Service property both fall, it was proposed that the Butler home be preserved. One possibility put forth was that the National Park Service acquire the site and interpret it as a small museum about antebellum free black life in Maryland. The M-NCPPC did not have the financial resources to acquire the property themselves and so turned to the Park Service for their assistance. The State of Maryland wanted to build a salt barn for highway maintenance close to Oxon Cove. The NPS cooperated with the state, with the understanding that the M-NCPPC would help them acquire and interpret the Butler property. The salt barn is in operation, but the Butler property has not changed hands.⁹³



Figure 9: Mount Welby. Courtesy of the Prince George’s County Planning Department, M-NCPPC.

⁹³ Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland. Vanessa Molineaux, in conversation with the author, March 11, 2007, Oxon Hill, Maryland.

The Park Service launched a major push to acquire the Butler property in 1999. They recognized the unique opportunity to acquire and interpret Prince George's County's only known surviving antebellum free black homestead. They hoped to integrate it into Oxon Cove Park and to tell a parallel story to that of the DeButts and the enslaved peoples of Mount Welby:

The comparison of the free black antebellum farmstead next door to a major plantation provides an absolutely unique interpretive opportunity. The Butler House represents an important side to the story of the evolution of American life along the Potomac Valley; a side, which has been much neglected in our chronicling the various mansions and plantations up and down the river.⁹⁴

The Park Service also recognized the tenuous position of the property. In 1999 the house was in a state of disrepair, and the roof had major damage. The owners had not maintained the home in several years. The Park Service also recognized the development pressure which could easily swallow up the property. The ten-acre property owned by the Butler family potentially can be converted into twenty home sites. With the construction of National Harbor next door, development pressure would only increase with time.

In addition, the property shares an access road with the park and is surrounded by the park on three sides. Acquisition of the property would allow the Park Service to control use of the land and the road and avoid interruptions of the Park's historic environment.

Recognizing the urgency of all of these issues, and with the potential for a cooperative administration and interpretation of the property with the M-NCPPC in mind,

⁹⁴ "The Butler Property – Exploring National Park Service (NPS) Acquisition" June 21, 1999, Records of Oxon Cove Park & Oxon Hill Farm National Park.

the Park Service approached each of the landowning family members with a request to appraise their property for its market value in the fall of 1999, thus commencing a near-decade long negotiation which today seems to be at a standstill.⁹⁵

The youngest of the Butlers who own the land is holding out. While the elder relatives seem to be interested in having their family history preserved and interpreted for the public, the youngest recognizes the financial potential of the family's land and is not in favor of accepting the NPS offer.⁹⁶

Should the Park Service acquire the home before its destruction, their plan is to restore the property and create a venue dedicated to the interpretation of African American history at Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm. The Park Service would fund the restoration and, jointly with the M-NCPPC, would interpret it as a free black antebellum family homestead.

In 2003, as part of the Multiple Property Documentation prepared by consultants Betty Bird & Associates, the Butler House was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and listed. Usually, when a property is nominated for designation, the property owner either initiates or is in some way involved in the nomination as a willing participant. In the case of the Butler House, the M-NCPPC notified the Butler's that it was nominating the property; the Butler family did not respond to their communications. In a case of "not to decide is to decide," the M-NCPPC was successful in its nomination; the Butler House is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Today the condition of the property is deteriorating rapidly. The roof of the house

⁹⁵ "Butler Property Land Acquisition Ranking System report" and Letter From the National Park Service, National Capital Region to William S. Butler, October 6, 1999, Records of Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm National Park.

⁹⁶ Vanessa Molineaux, in conversation with the author, March 11, 2007, Oxon Hill, Maryland.

has completely caved in and the threat of demolition by neglect is imminent. The only protection for the house was recently erected by Pepco, an area power company, which put up a protective fence around the house as part of their construction of high-security power lines to the nearby Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The failure to preserve the Butler House potentially is a great loss for the physical evidence of African American history in Prince George's County. As the county's only known surviving free black antebellum dwelling, the Butler House represents a unique opportunity for the preservation of African American history in the county and on a national scale. Paired with the stories of slavery and the Underground Railroad interpreted at Mount Welby, the interpretation of the Butler House and the life of a free black family would provide a rich historical lesson for visitors to Oxon Cove Park.

It seems in this case, however, that preservationists' hands are tied. Because Butler is privately-owned, its fate rests entirely with the Butler family. When the house first came onto the radar screen of the M-NCPPC, they did not have the resources necessary to acquire or protect the building and thus turned to the National Park Service. However, because the Butler family will not sell their property, this potential partnership between the M-NCPPC and the NPS has not been tested.

The listing of the Butler House in the National Register is a possible complication for the Butler family. Although listing puts the family under no obligation to restore or even preserve the structure, potential buyers will have to consider the effects of the listing on their proposed development projects. Because the Butler House is a National Register property, any federal permits required for development will trigger a state review of the proposed developments effect on the site. This is not to say that developers will not be

able to demolish the house, but they most likely will need to go through significant bureaucracy in order to do so.

The M-NCPPC is not the only entity focused on the preservation and interpretation of black history in Prince George's County. The National Park Service experienced similar pressures to revise its inventory of historic resources in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the growth of African American history as a discipline. Efforts to acquire the Butler House are part of the Park Service's larger focus on interpreting the full range of American history for its diverse public. However, in this case, development pressure, for the time being, appears to have overwhelmed the abilities of either the M-NCPPC or the NPS to save the Butler House. The Butler House represents a lesson which has been learned many times over in Prince George's County: that intense development threatens historic resources, and that the appeal of preservationists to property owners is often no match for the lure of potential profit.

Conclusion

Bianca Floyd, the first manager of Prince George's County's Black History Program, now works as Museum Director for Poplar Hill on His Lordship's Kindness, one of Prince George's County's historic house museums and a National Historic Landmark. She works to interpret the history not only of the property's succession of owners, but also the history of the African American families who were enslaved on the property or who later worked there as free laborers. Floyd encourages her visitors to "think mathematically" about the history of Poplar Hill, pointing out that 165 African Americans lived and worked there in 1865, compared with just fifteen white people. She urges visitors to consider the whole picture and to recognize that a true history of Poplar Hill must include *all* of those whose lives shaped and were shaped by the historic place.⁹⁷

Floyd's mission reflects the philosophy adopted by preservationists in Prince George's County in the late twentieth century: to represent the full range of spaces and places deemed significant to the county's heritage on the historic landscape. The M-NCPPC initiated the first black history survey in response to the county's changing demographics, but the enthusiastic community response sustained the program. That community response was itself sparked by the methodology that M-NCPPC staffers Bianca Floyd, Marsha Brown, Gail Thomas and Susan Pearl have utilized in their research and documentation projects. Unlike the initial historic sites surveys, Black History Program and Historic Preservation Commission staff took the time to consult with members and leaders of various African American communities and organizations,

⁹⁷ Bianca Floyd, interview with the author, December 13, 2006, Clinton, Maryland.

and to conduct thorough oral history interviews. In addition, community-centered studies of African American settlements and towns solicited stakeholder investment for the M-NCPPC's programs from community members. Whereas mistrust among members of minority and ethnic communities sometimes resulted from the feeling that their extant structures and their rich heritage are not appreciated as significant to preservationists, the M-NCPPC's methodology avoided this pitfall.⁹⁸

From the very beginning, Bianca Floyd and Susan Pearl did not necessarily start out surveying for sites, but surveying for stories, and for the people behind those stories. In time, the people and their stories led them to a site.⁹⁹ As a result, the staff of the Black History Program and the Historic Preservation Commission built relationships with key constituents and engendered trust from the communities whose history they sought to preserve. The M-NCPPC, in instituting the Black History Program, created the space for public discourse on the preservation of black history. When asked if preservation had changed in the county over the past 30 years, Mildred Ridgley Gray reported that she felt like there are more opportunities for black history in Prince George's County these days.¹⁰⁰

Another key component to the success of the preservation of African American historic sites in Prince George's County was the holistic approach of the M-NCPPC in surveying and documenting the sites and placing them within larger historic contexts. The work of Susan Pearl to outline historic themes for African American history in the county contributed to the Multiple Property Documentation prepared by Betty Bird in

⁹⁸ Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," 397.

⁹⁹ Bianca Floyd, interview with the author, December 13, 2006, Clinton, Maryland. Susan G. Pearl, in conversation with the author, March 9, 2007, Glenn Dale, Maryland.

¹⁰⁰ Mildred Ridgley Gray, interview with the author, March 10, 2007, Mitchellville, Maryland.

2003. The MPD functions as a basic outline of African American history in the county, and future site designations can be plugged into that structure as appropriate. On a more basic level, the M-NCPPC has completed extensive documentary research and recognizes the long and broad history of African American contributions to the county. The historic contexts provide, at the very least, a safeguard against the loss of further sites. At most, the M-NCPPC's institutional knowledge of African American history in the county bodes well for future site preservation.

The three case studies I selected reaffirm the idea that broad-based community support for preservation is key to any successful project. Abraham Hall and the Rosenwald Schools projects utilized the legal and financial tools of historic preservation but have been even more heavily dependent on the personal dedication of a few key people and the general support of many more. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the fate of the Butler House confirms what many preservationists already know: that the legal protections offered by designation are not as strong as they could be, and that preservation often gives way to private financial incentives and development pressures.

The case studies also illustrate the richness of historic content to be revealed through the preservation of African American historic sites. In the Multiple Property Documentation, Betty Bird pointed out that while black history sites in Prince George's County do not necessarily differ in structure and architecture from their white-American constructed counterparts, their significance is unique:

Slavery and segregation limited the places and buildings that African Americans could inhabit. The role and symbolic function these resources played in the community with which they are associated can ultimately be very different from similar purpose-built structures erected for the white community. While other Americans had access to a variety of buildings designed for different purposes and could move easily within society,

African Americans possessed fewer options. Faced with a hostile and often dangerous environment, the places and buildings that African Americans claimed became the vessels for their collective life, providing venues for public assembly and community expression.¹⁰¹

Clearly, slavery and segregation in Prince George's County produced a unique material culture through which to understand the history of African Americans.¹⁰²

Prince George's County continues to innovate in the field of historic preservation and to take into consideration the preservation of sites of significance to the history of their diverse communities. In a landmark action in 2005, the County Council changed their subdivision regulations to require developers to conduct archeological surveys before they are allowed to begin construction. Prior to 2005 this was recommended but not required. The purpose of this legislation, which was suggested by the Historic Preservation Commission, is to stop the loss of archeological evidence of the county's Native and African American history to development.

Further research is needed to address questions left unanswered. A comparative study of Prince George's County with another majority black county would be useful, especially if the other county did not have a funded black history program within its planning agency. Other variables need to be analyzed, such as the fact that the black majority in Prince George's County is largely middle class. How do class and income levels affect both preservation values and the political power behind preservation in the county? Future scholars of historic preservation could undertake an in-depth analysis of the funding opportunities available at the county level for preservation in general and for

¹⁰¹ National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form, "African-American Historic Resources of Prince George's County, Maryland" prepared by Betty Bird & Associates, 2003.

¹⁰² Lee, "Discovering Old Cultures in the New World: The Role of Ethnicity," 186.

black history preservation specifically. In addition, a closer look at the interpretation of preserved African American historic sites would reveal interesting information about what stories are being preserved within local black history and what stories are left untold.

For Prince George's County, the preservation of African American historic sites is a major step toward a fully inclusive historic landscape. The recent archeological legislation will go further to help protect and preserve sites of Native American heritage, and future surveys will likely include the history of the county's more recent ethnic populations as they continue to grow. In 2003, Preservation historian Antoinette Lee declared:

More than any other force, even beyond that of financial resources or regulatory advances, race and ethnicity will shape the cultural heritage programs of the United States in the next century.¹⁰³

This is particularly true in Prince George's County, where demographics have demanded that cultural heritage programs be revised and expanded.

In the 21st century, other American communities can look to Prince George's County as an example of what happens when local government makes it a priority to recognize the diversity of its constituents and acknowledges the importance of representing that diversity on the physical landscape.

¹⁰³ Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," 404.

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