

AFRICAN ★ AMERICAN

Historic and Cultural Resources in Prince George's County, Maryland



Abstract

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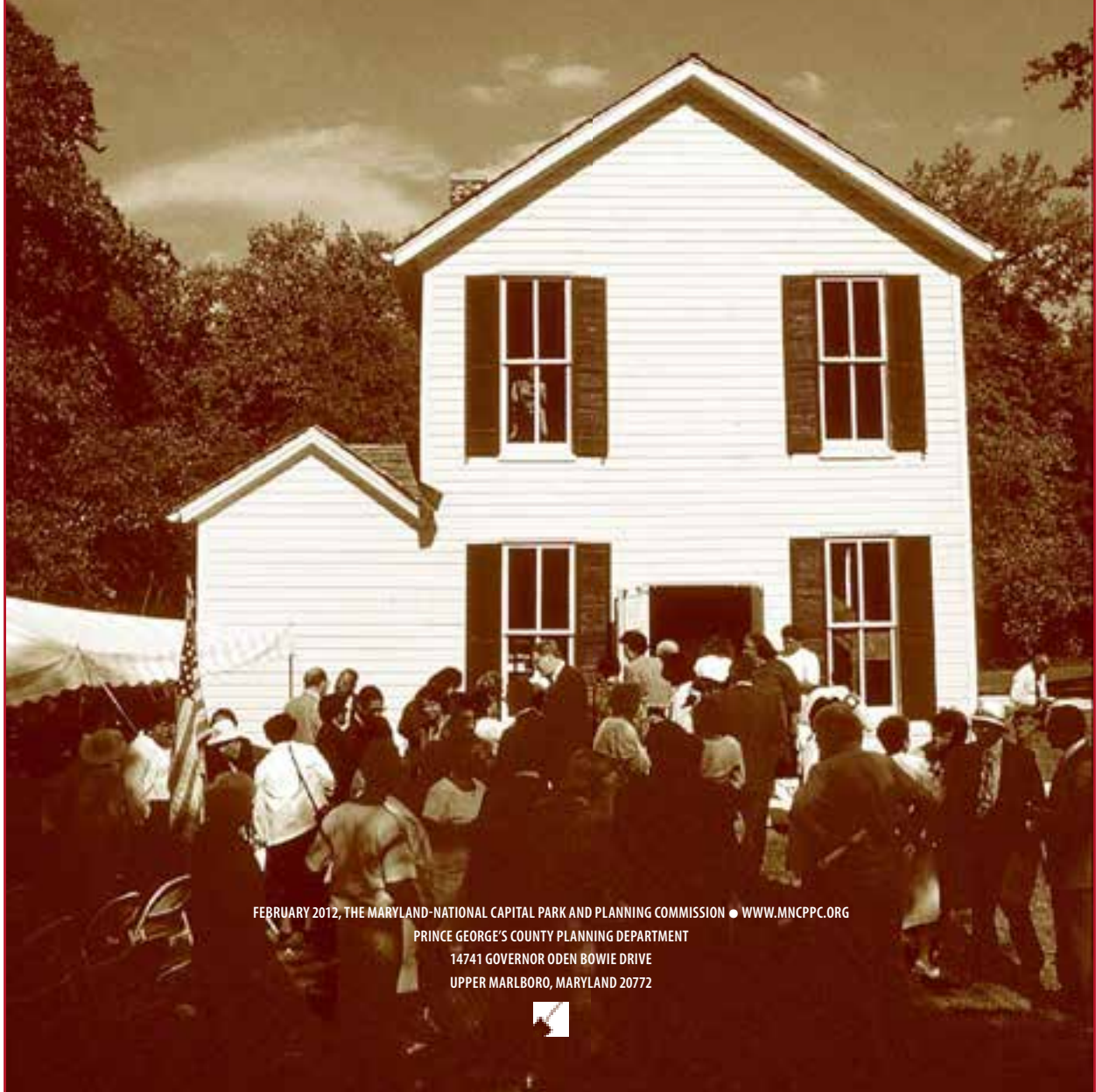
ABSTRACT: This book presents individual properties and communities that are significant to the African-American history of Prince George's County. The 181 properties include residences, churches and cemeteries, schools, fraternal lodges, a monument, an airfield, an amusement park, archeological sites, and commercial establishments; the 19 historic communities include both urban subdivisions and rural villages, as well as early towns and retreat communities. For most individual properties there is at least one illustration or photograph, an architectural description, and a summary of the resource's historic significance. For each community, there is a map, graphic illustrations, and a history of the community's development and significance.

The book is divided into three major sections: Introduction and Essays which provides background and context for the resources and includes essays on Black History, Significance, Education, Suburban Settlement, and Archeology; Historic Communities, which presents the 19 communities and the 119 properties within them; and Schools, Churches and Cemeteries, Dwellings, and Other Resources located Outside Historic Communities, that presents the remainder of the resources.

Following the three major sections are four appendices which enumerate the resources and organize them by type, community, and designation. The appendices are followed by a countywide map of many of the resources with color photographs of selected historic properties on the reverse.

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PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is a bicounty agency, created by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1927. The Commission's geographic authority extends to the great majority of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties: the Maryland-Washington Regional District (M-NCPPC planning jurisdiction) comprises 1,001 square miles, while the Metropolitan District (parks) comprises 919 square miles, in the two counties.

The Commission has three major functions:

- The preparation, adoption, and, from time to time, amendment or extension of the General Plan for the physical development of the Maryland-Washington Regional District.
- The acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of a public park system.
- In Prince George's County only, the operation of the entire county public recreation program.

The Commission operates in each county through a Planning Board appointed by and responsible to the county government. All local plans, recommendations on zoning amendments, administration of subdivision regulations, and general administration of parks are responsibilities of the Planning Boards.

The Prince George's County Department of Planning (M-NCPPC):

- Our mission is to help preserve, protect, and manage the county's resources by providing the highest quality planning services and growth management guidance and by facilitating effective intergovernmental and citizen involvement through education and technical assistance.
- Our vision is to be a model planning department of responsive and respected staff who provide superior planning and technical services and work cooperatively with decision-makers, citizens, and other agencies to continuously improve development quality and the environment and act as a catalyst for positive change.

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COVER: Rededication of Abraham Hall, 1991. (Historic Site 62-23-7. See page 55.)

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Myrtle Pinkney, Gloria Spencer and Frances Spencer at St. Simon's Church, Easter Sunday, 1959. (See Historic Site 86A-12, page186.) Photograph courtesy of Ms. Janice Diggs.

Introduction

This is a book about the material culture and the built environment in Prince George's County, Maryland, as it relates to African-Americans from 1650 to about 1960. Both standing structures and those no longer extant are explored, as well as archeological resources and neighborhoods. The term "historic and cultural resources" implies consideration of buildings still standing and those that have disappeared, but whose appearance can be recalled and significance interpreted. A series of essays provides a context for the resources that are described in detail.

This book builds upon M-NCPPC's 1996 *African-American Heritage Survey*. In 1994, the Prince George's County Planning Department of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) initiated the African-American Heritage Survey Project. Its purpose was to add to the documentation of African-American historic properties in Prince George's County and to increase understanding of their significance. As the county prepared for its 1996 Tricentennial celebration, it was clear that enough material

had been gathered to merit a publication on African-American buildings and community history. The publication of that book, therefore, became one of M-NCPPC's goals for the Tricentennial.

Between 1973 and 1975 M-NCPPC conducted a countywide windshield survey of historic properties. This survey provided the basis for the historic resource inventory in the Prince George's County July 1981 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. In 1981 the county's Historic Preservation Ordinance was enacted, protecting properties listed in the plan.

The Prince George's County 1981 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan* included over 500 historic properties, but the plan acknowledged the limitations of a windshield survey and the need for more survey and research work. The survey had included properties that, for the most part, were substantial and visible, but many others were in need of identification, research and protection. Over the next ten years nearly 400 additional properties were documented. Research focusing on African-American properties included an architectural survey of 60 properties undertaken in 1982–1983 by M-NCPPC's Department of Parks and Recreation. That survey identified 37 properties that had not been included in the 1981 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. The inventory has since been augmented by M-NCPPC's Planning Department's ongoing survey that revealed much more information about the history and architecture of early black communities. In 1992, the plan was amended and some of these newly surveyed properties were included. The 2010 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan* identified many more properties significant to African-American history, and elevated many of these, and other previously identified resources, to historic site/historic resource status.

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Properties that are listed as historic resources in the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan* are protected by the county Historic Preservation Ordinance (Subtitle 29 of the County Code). Historic sites are subject to a design review process if any alterations or new construction are planned; they are also protected from the potentially adverse impacts of proposed subdivisions or rezoning applications. Historic resources must be evaluated to determine whether they meet historic site criteria before they receive the full protection of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. The Historic Preservation Commission evaluates historic resources according to nine historical and architectural criteria. These criteria are enumerated on page 99 of the 2010 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*.

Listing in the National Register is largely honorary. However, if federal or state monies are attached to a given property, then any changes to the property have to allow the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to comment on the project.

Many properties included in this publication have no status under the Historic Preservation Ordinance and are not protected by it; some have been demolished, some have been altered to a great extent, and some are located outside the area covered by the Regional District Act. Of the 182 properties in this book, 95 are listed in the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, 61 are designated as historic sites, and 34 are designated as historic resources.¹

¹ These numbers do not include the 15 properties, some of which are historic sites, that are included in this publication for their archeological significance.

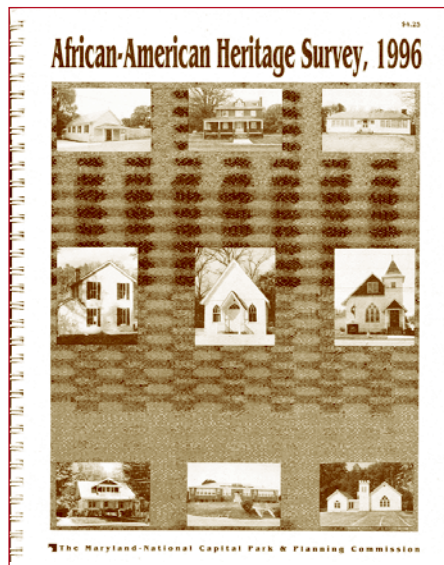
Designation as a historic site is only one form of recognition; it brings with it the responsibility to maintain and, ideally, to restore a building to its appearance during its period of significance. In many instances, alterations have permanently compromised the historic integrity of buildings. In those cases, other forms of recognition may be more appropriate, such as historic markers or street signage, walking tours or published histories, such as this one.

The list of properties and historic communities included in this publication was based on the African-American properties in the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, the 1982–1983 black history survey, and properties identified during the course of community studies and ongoing survey work undertaken by Historic Preservation Section staff and their consultants. In preparation for the 2010 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, a special survey of African-American properties and communities was undertaken. As a result of this effort, in 2010, designated African-American historic sites and historic resources more than doubled, from 36 to 95.

This publication explores 182 individual properties including dwellings, churches and cemeteries, schools, fraternal lodges, commercial establishments, a monument, two amusement parks, and an airfield. Nineteen historic communities are presented. Certainly,

more properties await identification and elaboration. Once readers become aware of the effort to document African-American historic properties, they may be able to identify more properties for which research can be undertaken.

The 1996 edition.



A Guide to This Publication

A few explanatory notes are included regarding the organization of this book. As with the 1996 edition, the publication is prefaced by an introductory history of African-Americans in the county contributed by M-NCPPC’s Black History Program historians. New to this edition are several essays on the African-American experience in the county and its effect on the built environment, past and present—

significance, education, suburban settlement, and archeology. Except for archeology, these essays are largely taken from the 2005 Multiple Property Documentation, “African-American Historic Resources in Prince George’s County, Maryland.” As a result of that documentation, five African-American properties were listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and additional listings are possible.

The sequence of the historic property inventory begins with properties within, closely associated with, or adjacent to historically black communities, followed by other historic properties located throughout the county. Properties not associated with historic communities are grouped as Churches and Cemeteries, Schools, Dwellings, and Other Resources. Historic properties are identified sequentially by the numbering system used in the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*,



A classroom door at the newly-restored Ridgeley Rosenwald School. See page 127.

i.e., the planning area number followed by the individual property number. Cherry Hill Cemetery (69-021), for example, is property number 021 in Planning Area 69. If the historic property is located within a documented historic community, a number identifying that community is inserted as a central number. Thus, Rossville (62-023) is historic community number 023 in Planning Area 62; and Abraham Hall (62-023-07) is property number 07 within that community. (For aesthetic purposes, extra zeros are omitted within the main section of this book.)

Regarding the use of photographs and other images, the majority of the properties consist of standing structures, and these are illustrated with recent photographs or with photographs that best capture the significant character of the building. For the sites of former buildings this edition uses vintage photographs whenever possible. Each historic community section includes a map of the community; each section listing other properties by type has its own map. A county map locating the communities and many of the properties is found at the end of the book, as well as selected photographs in full color. Appendices provide a comprehensive listing of properties by type and designation; these are followed by a bibliography and an index.

A note is also necessary regarding the historical information about schools and churches. Most of the early black churches were of the Methodist denomination, some Methodist Episcopal, and some African Methodist Episcopal. In 1968, the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, forming the United Methodist Church; therefore, all of those churches originally formed as Methodist Episcopal churches are now known as United Methodist churches. This publication uses the historic name (e.g., Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church) in describing the history of each, although each of these churches is now officially known as a United Methodist church.

The earliest black schools in the county were established under the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau), which operated from 1865 to 1872. Operation and management of the schools were taken over in 1872 by the Prince George's County Board of School Commissioners; this body was superseded by the County Board of Education in 1921, and this sequence is reflected in the individual school histories. Due to the increasing interest in the Rosenwald school program, all schools funded in part by this program are consistently labeled as such, even though they would not have been known by that name historically; e.g., the Clinton School is herein referred to as the Clinton Rosenwald School.

With regard to cemeteries, by far the majority included in this publication are associated with individual churches; in some of these cases, the church no longer stands, and only the

cemetery marks its site. Only one case, Cherry Hill, represents a private family burial ground. Two other large, quasi-public historically black cemeteries, Harmony Memorial and Lincoln Memorial, are included as well.

Prince George's County's antebellum plantations (Belair, Bacon Hall, Chelsea, Compton Basset, Concord, Montpelier, Riversdale, and Salubria, to name only a few) were, of course, partially built and worked by Africans and African-Americans, most of them enslaved laborers. This publication describes five known slave quarters in depth; the below-ground remains of countless others and the lifeways of those who inhabited them await discovery and analysis.

A note on terminology, i.e., the use of terms such as Negro, black, colored, Afro-American, and African-American. This publication uses the term which reflects the time period in question; for example, during the Rosenwald period, schools were referred to as "Colored Schools," and therefore that is the term used here to identify them. In general, following the convention of the American Heritage Dictionary, this publication uses "African-American" as both a noun and adjective, but frequently switches to the use of "black" to provide variety in the text. People identified as "mulatto" in early United States Census Records are herein referred to as biracial or mixed race.

Many resources herein are testaments to the success and achievements of African-Americans; many also, unavoidably, are reflections of slavery's dark legacy and its long shadow of oppression. It is worth remembering that the dissolution of once-cherished resources, such as the Rosenwald Schools, Wilmer's Park, or even St. Simon's Mission, also meant the end of segregation and the birth of our egalitarian society. In recalling them, it may feel right do so with the bittersweet solemnity accorded the site of a battlefield. These resources are presented with the understanding that their interpretation will be nuanced by the type of lens through which they are examined; the complex and important role they played in American history is, however, undeniable.

The study of African-American historic and cultural resources in the county has not concluded with this publication. It is hoped that this work will increase readers' knowledge of the county's history, and inspire further discoveries that can be incorporated into future editions. It is the wish of the editors and contributors that the study of these resources and history will enrich all readers' understanding of Americans'—and especially Prince Georgians'—shared heritage.