



AFRICAN AMERICAN

Heritage Guide
HAGERSTOWN & WASHINGTON COUNTY, MD

Visit
HAGERSTOWN
& Washington County
Convention and Visitors Bureau

Download the App!
It's FREE!
Get info on things to do!
GET IT ON Google play
Download on the App Store

16 Public Square | Hagerstown, MD 21740
301-791-3246

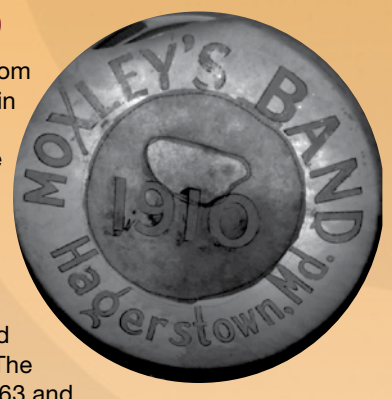


Special thanks to the Washington County Free Library, Washington County Historical Society, African-American Historical Association, Ron Lytle, and the Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau for their help in collecting information and pictures.
Designed by Icon Graphics.

Key Figures

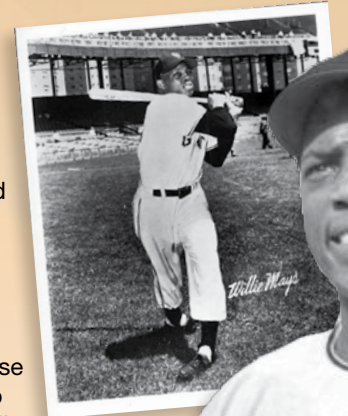
MOXLEY'S BAND

More than 250 Black men from Washington County served in the U.S. military during the Civil War. Among them were the members of Moxley's Band, a group of free and enslaved musicians who performed together before the war. The three Moxley brothers—Robert, Perry, and Joseph—were the leaders. The band enlisted together in 1863 and formed the First Brigade Band, used for recruiting as well as military purposes. They served for a time in Virginia, before being sent to Texas at the end of the war. After mustering out, most of the band members returned to Hagerstown. The Moxleys were leaders in the Black community, and the band continued to perform at civic and social events well into the twentieth century. *Photo Contributed by Carolyn Brooks.*



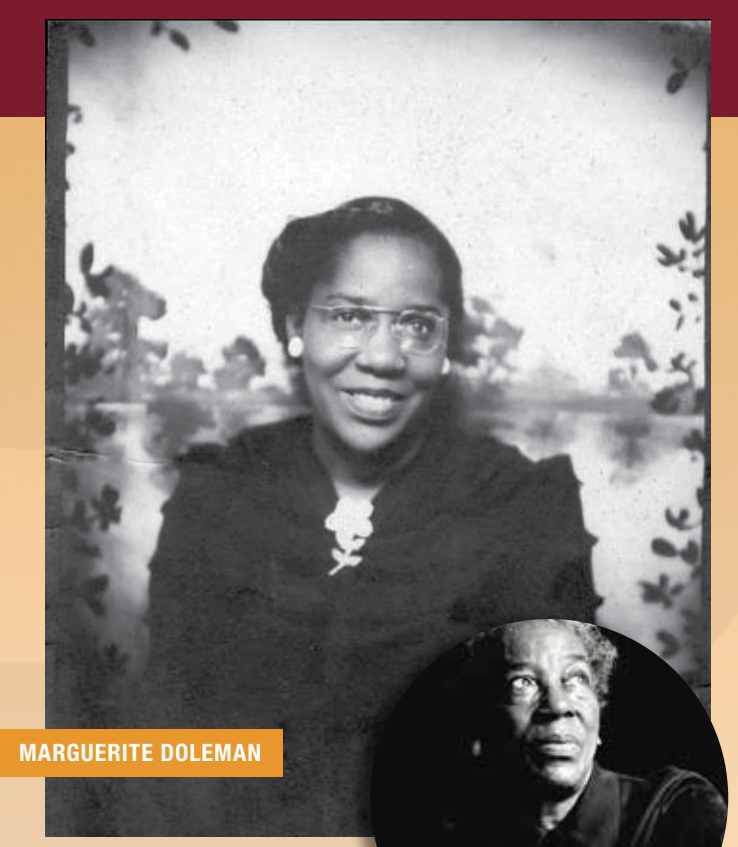
WILLIE MAYS

As a rookie, baseball great Willie Mays played his first minor league game in Hagerstown in 1950, for the Trenton Giants, a New York Giants farm team. The crowd hurled racial abuse at him when he came to bat; he would later recall it as some of the worst treatment he ever received from a crowd. And because Hagerstown was segregated, he wasn't allowed to stay in the same hotel with his white teammates; instead he was welcomed at the Harmon Hotel on Jonathan Street. In 2004 Mays accepted an invitation to return to Hagerstown, where the city honored his achievements and finally apologized for how it treated him half a century earlier.

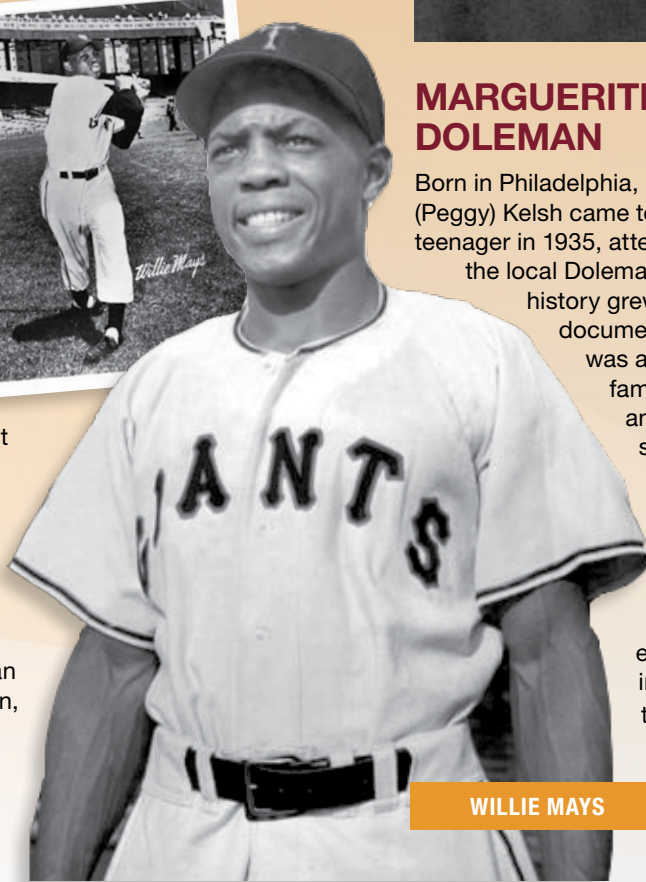


MARGUERITE DOLEMAN

Born in Philadelphia, Marguerite (Peggy) Kelsh came to Hagerstown as a teenager in 1935, attended high school here, and married into the local Doleman family. Her lifelong passion for Black history grew into a vast collection of artifacts and documents, as well as a research program that was ahead of its time. She preserved Black family papers, Black memorabilia, photos, and the archives of Black organizations; she also collected oral histories, investigated the records of slavery, and pursued and recorded the African American past wherever she could find it. Not only do visitors to the Doleman Black Heritage Museum benefit from her life's work, but everyone who researches Black history in Washington County today follows in the footsteps of Marguerite Doleman.



WILLIE MAYS



From the 1740s onward, the lives, sacrifices, and contributions of African Americans have helped to shape the history and character of Washington County, Maryland. In 1820, 14% of the county's population was enslaved. By 1860, there were more free African Americans than slaves in Washington County. Slavery was abolished in Maryland in November 1864.

Hagerstown and Washington County are rich in significant and fascinating Black history sites. Those described in this publication represent some of the highlights and stories that we hope will engage you and encourage you to further explore this important history.



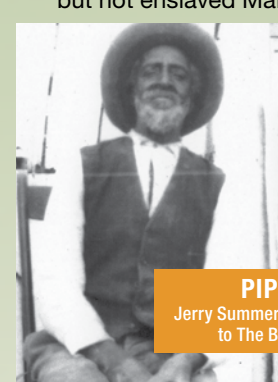
LIZZIE KING

ERWIN SAMON'S WIFE

THE SHARPSBURG / ANTIETAM AREA

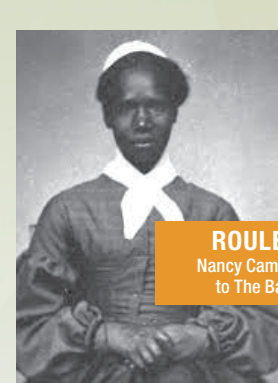
Slavery, Civil War & Emancipation Sites

1 The Civil War's single bloodiest day took place on **Antietam National Battlefield**, and the Union victory in this 1862 battle enabled President Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. It freed southern slaves but not enslaved Marylanders. More than 400 African Americans lived on and around the battlefield during the Civil War. Ask at the **Visitor Center** (5831 Dunker Church Road, Sharpsburg; 301-432-5124; www.nps.gov/anti) for a map of the battlefield. The Center, renovated in 2022, has exhibits on themes including Freedom.



PIPER FARM

Jerry Summers, enslaved eyewitness to The Battle of Antietam



ROULETTE FARM

Nancy Camel, free eyewitness to The Battle of Antietam

On the battlefield, you can see several sites where Black eyewitnesses lived. Hilary Watson, whose story of the battle was later published, was enslaved on the **Otto Farm**. Jerry Summers, who testified about damage done by the army, was enslaved on the **Piper Farm** with his mother and brother. Georgeann Rollins was a 14-year-old free servant at the **Pry Farm**. Nancy Camel, whose belongings you can see in the Visitor Center, was a free servant on the **Roulette Farm**.

TOLSON'S CHAPEL



2 In the town of Sharpsburg itself, don't miss **Tolson's Chapel, Sharpsburg** (111 E. High Street). Built immediately after the Civil War by the Black community of Sharpsburg, this Methodist church also served briefly as a Freedman's Bureau school and then as a county school for Black children. Meticulously restored to its original appearance, it is now a National Historic Landmark. Formerly enslaved people and Black veterans are buried in the cemetery, which is always open. A **historical marker** outside summarizes the history. The chapel interior is open occasionally or can be toured by appointment. (See <https://tolsons.chapel.org/>, contact tolsons.chapel@gmail.org, or contact the Sharpsburgh Museum of History.)

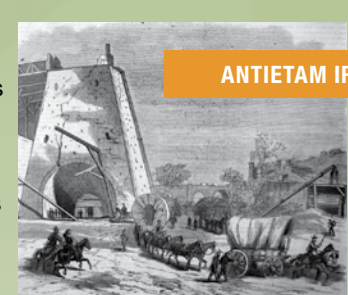
3 The **Sharpsburgh Museum of History**, 106 E. Main Street, has nineteenth- and twentieth-century artifacts from local Black families, and it offers tours of Tolson's Chapel. The Museum is open Monday-Saturday, 9-4. Contact 301-800-6877 or loveshistory.1866@gmail.com.

FERRY HILL PLACE PLANTATION



4 Between Sharpsburg and the Potomac River lies **Ferry Hill Place Plantation** (16500 Shepherdstown Pike, Sharpsburg). Typical of western Maryland's larger slave-worked farms, Ferry Hill had an enslaved workforce of up to twenty people at times. Owner John Blackford kept daily records of farm activities, showing how closely he supervised the farmworkers, as well as the enslaved operators of his Potomac River ferry. Blackford beat the enslaved workers for minor and accidental misdeeds, yet they found ways to resist his constant demands, for example by drinking, traveling, and setting their own pace of work. Visitors here can walk the grounds and understand how the plantation master oversaw the workers from his house.

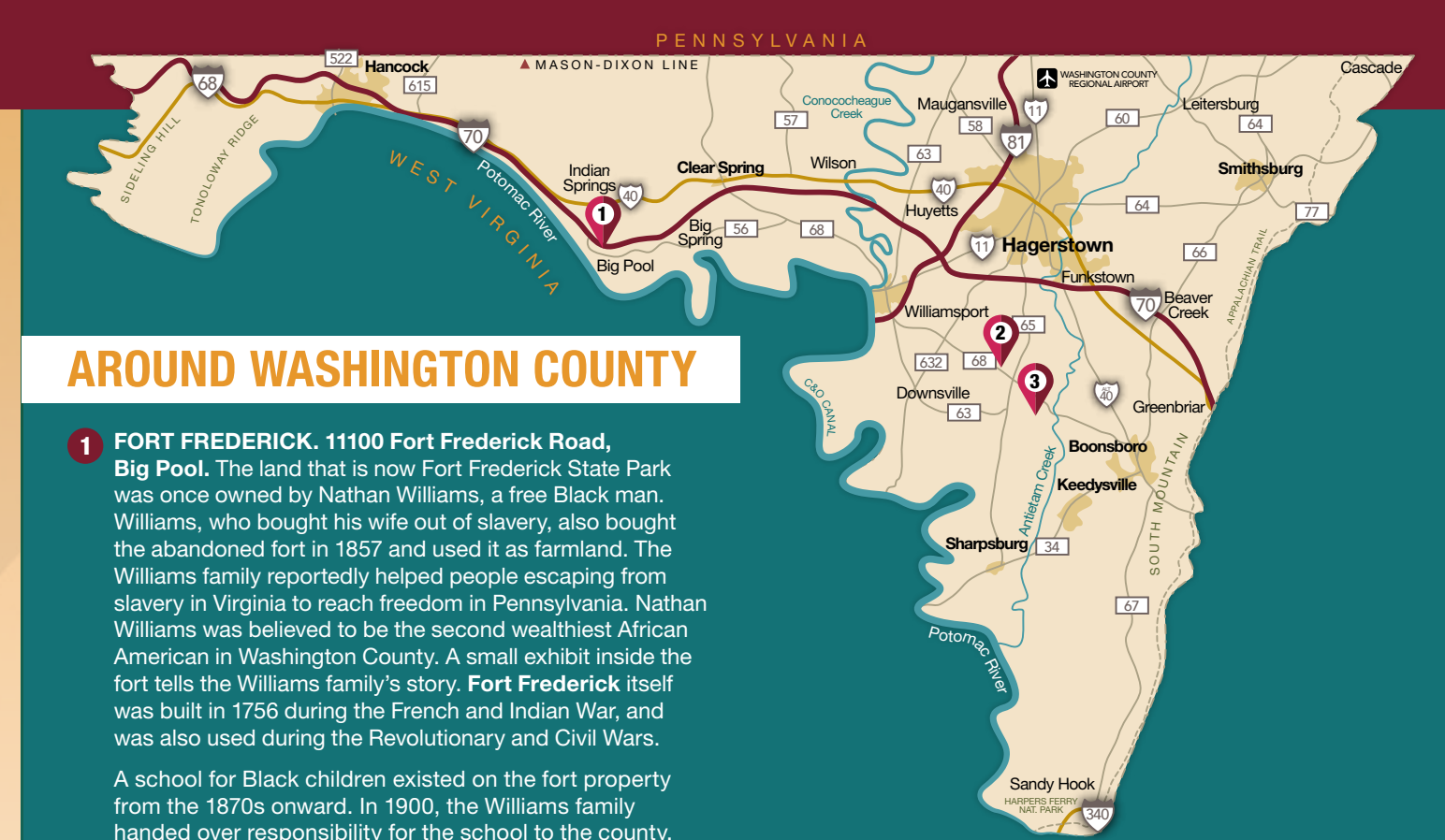
5 South of Sharpsburg lie the ruins of the **Antietam Iron Works** (3768 Harpers Ferry Road, Sharpsburg). Iron furnaces throughout western Maryland used large enslaved workforces as well as free white labor. The Antietam Works, founded in the 1760s, produced armaments for the Revolutionary War. Simmering tensions here erupted in 1835 when the white workers rioted against the Black men, who resisted with force. Decades later, when the furnace closed, the enslaved workers were sold, but some of their descendants still live locally. At this outdoor site on Antietam Creek you can view lime kilns, mill ruins, and the company store building.



ANTIETAM IRON WORKS

6 Further east is the **John Brown Raid Headquarters**, also known as the **Kennedy Farm** (2406 Chestnut Grove Road, Sharpsburg). Abolitionist John Brown hid out and trained his followers here in 1859, before their raid on the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry. The raid helped spark the Civil War. Because of its history, the farm was acquired in 1950 by the IBPOEW, or Black Elks, who owned it until 1966. The multi-purpose property featured a musical venue, where performers included Chuck Berry, James Brown, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, Etta James, and Little Richard, drawing audience members from Hagerstown's Black community. Open by appointment, info@johnbrownraid.org, but can also be seen from the road. See www.johnbrown.org.

7 To the west of Sharpsburg you'll find **Red Hill Cemetery** (across from 5703 Red Hill Road, Keedysville). The stone foundation of a tiny African Methodist Episcopal church can be seen near the road. This and the cemetery are all that remain of an early 19th-century Black and mixed-race community that flourished on Red Hill. Several Black Civil War veterans are buried here; the cemetery is currently being restored.



AROUND WASHINGTON COUNTY

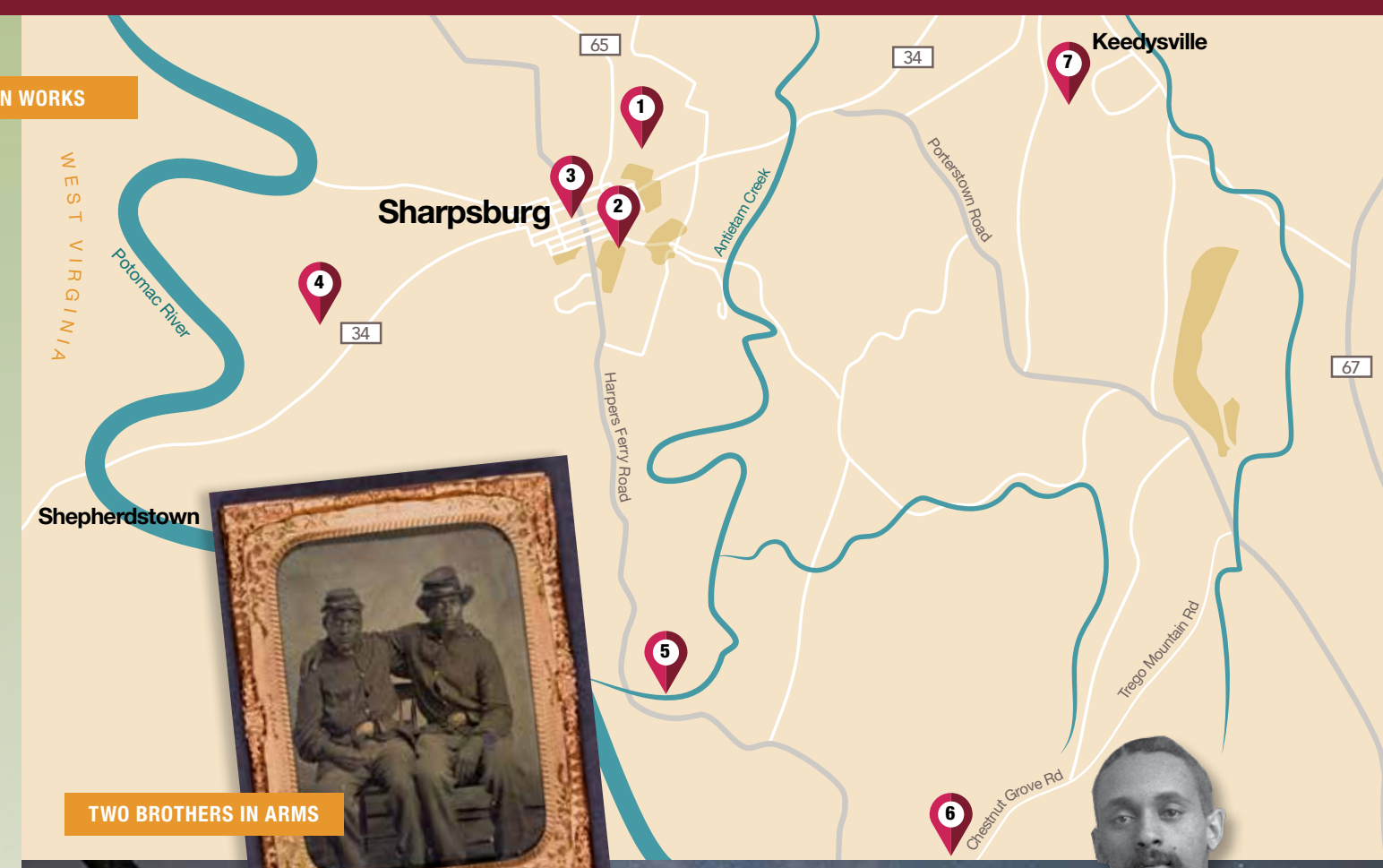
1 **FORT FREDERICK.** 11100 Fort Frederick Road, **Big Pool.** The land that is now Fort Frederick State Park was once owned by Nathan Williams, a free Black man. Williams, who bought his wife out of slavery, also bought the abandoned fort in 1857 and used it as farmland. The Williams family reportedly helped people escaping from slavery in Virginia to reach freedom in Pennsylvania. Nathan Williams was believed to be the second wealthiest African American in Washington County. A small exhibit inside the fort tells the Williams family's story. **Fort Frederick** itself was built in 1756 during the French and Indian War, and was also used during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

A school for Black children existed on the fort property from the 1870s onward. In 1900, the Williams family handed over responsibility for the school to the county, who built a one-room schoolhouse, **Fort Frederick Colored School** (11347 Big Pool Road, Big Pool), that is still standing, on land donated by the Williamses. The school operated until 1914. It is now being restored by the Department of Natural Resources.

2 **ROCKLAND ESTATE.** 9030 Sharpsburg Pike, Fairplay. This early 19th-century slave-worked plantation is where the great abolitionist James W.C. Pennington grew up in slavery and then escaped at the age of 19, in 1827. Pennington then attended Yale University, became a Presbyterian minister, presided at Frederick Douglass's wedding, and welcomed the Amistad rebels to his church. He wrote an autobiography, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, that describes the horrors of enslaved life at Rockland. The farm is not usually open to the public, but can be seen from the road and is an event venue. <https://ninetythirtyevents.com/>



ROCKLAND ESTATE

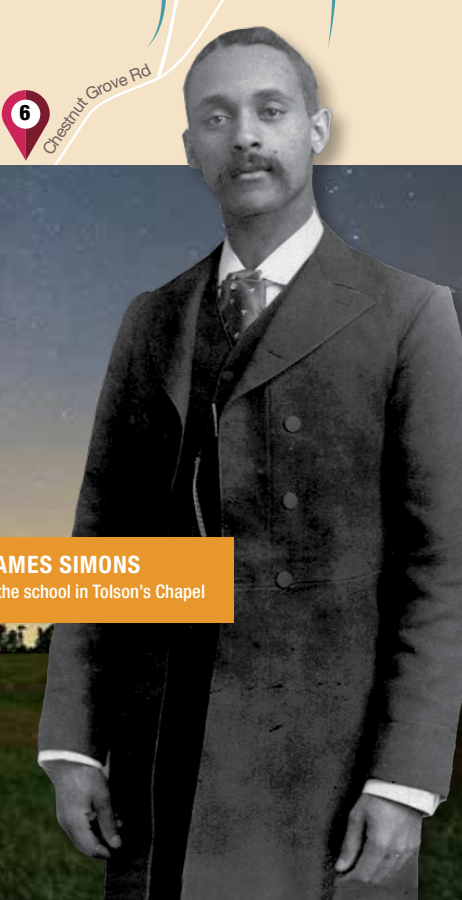


TWO BROTHERS IN ARMS



JAMES SIMONS

Teacher at the school in Tolson's Chapel

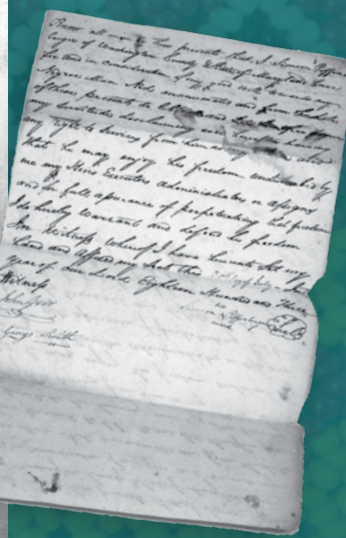
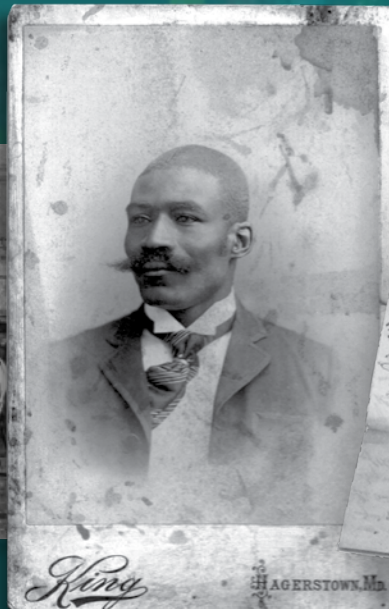
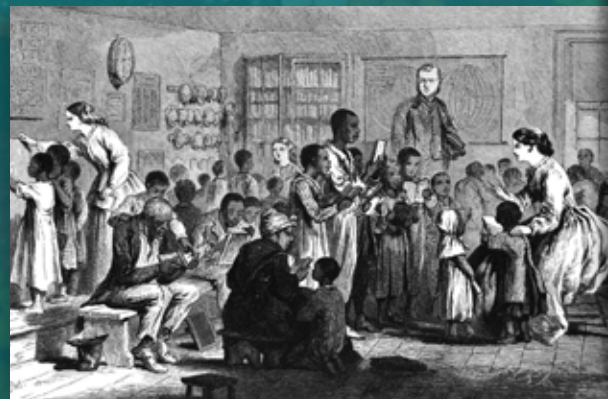


THE JONATHAN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD

Black Leadership and Community

Jonathan Street is the living and historic core of Hagerstown's African American community. In the early 1800s, when the city's Black residents began to build institutions and businesses, they did it here. When enslaved people fled to freedom, Jonathan Street was a route north to Pennsylvania. Black homes, churches, schools, and organizations all clustered in the blocks around this street, especially in the post-Civil War years.

There is also a painful history here. The old county jail, where enslaved people were sold, sat on Jonathan Street. In the twentieth century the discriminatory practice of "redlining" confined African Americans in Hagerstown to this neighborhood. Yet Black leadership and community have always been found here, from the earliest times through the civil rights era to the present day. Some important buildings are gone and some remain; historical markers help tell the stories.



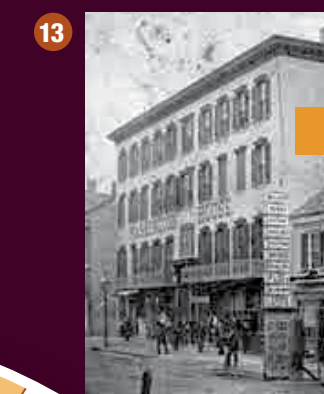
OTHER HAGERSTOWN SITES



DOLEMAN BLACK HERITAGE MUSEUM

33 W. Washington Street, Room 210, Hagerstown. The Museum preserves and exhibits a unique collection of artifacts, photographs, and documents chronicling the rich African American history of Washington County. One of the most popular Black history sites in Washington County, the Doleman Museum tells both local and national stories. Exhibits here focus on local Black families, Black businesses and culture, and the Jonathan Street community. The Museum is currently in temporary space while the permanent building is being prepared. There are knowledgeable docents and a small gift shop. Open several days a week; call or check website for current hours. <https://www.dolemanblackheritagemuseum.org/>. 301-797-5019.

12 DOLEMAN BLACK HERITAGE MUSEUM: FUTURE SITE. 465 Pennsylvania Avenue, Hagerstown. Hagerstown's Black history museum acquired this former Coca-Cola bottling plant in 2019 and is renovating it to serve as a permanent home for the collection and research center. The mural was painted in 2020.



WEST WASHINGTON STREET. Just west of the Doleman Museum lie two other noteworthy Black history sites. Abolitionist John Brown and his sons stayed at the **Washington House Hotel** in 1859, a few months before their famous raid on Harpers Ferry. The site is now University Plaza but is indicated by a **historical marker**. In 1880, Frederick Douglass visited Hagerstown and spoke on the steps of the **Washington County Courthouse** (95 West Washington Street, Hagerstown).



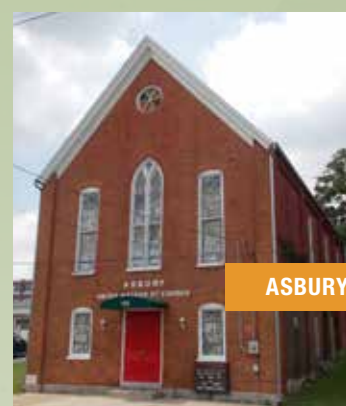
WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

15 ROSE HILL CEMETERY. 600 South Potomac Street, Hagerstown. Created in 1865, Hagerstown's public cemetery has always included both Black and white burials. Among the prominent Black citizens buried here are voting activist and officeholder Jacob Wheaton; Medal of Honor recipient William O. Wilson; and farmer Thomas Barnum, reportedly the wealthiest Black man in the county when he died in 1895. Rose Hill also has a monument to the Lyon Post, the local Black branch of the Grand Army of the Republic, the national organization of Civil War veterans. The cemetery is open daily from dawn to dusk; office open weekdays by appointment. Call 301-739-3630 or contact info@rhcemetry.org, <https://rosehillcemeteryofmd.org/>.



JACOB WHEATON

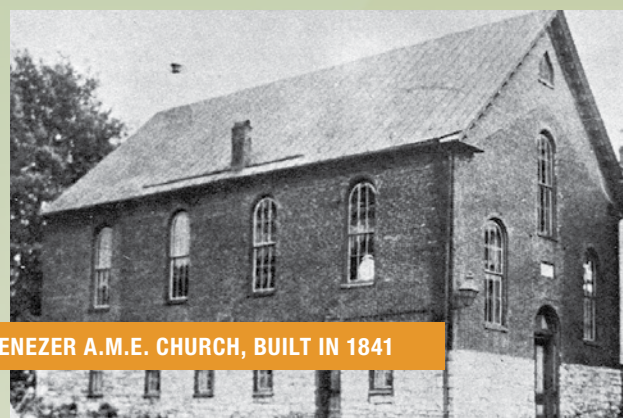
1 ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. 155 Jonathan Street, Hagerstown. The first Black church in Hagerstown and the oldest Black congregation in the county, Asbury was founded in 1818 under the supervision of St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church (now John Wesley United Methodist Church). It was the first church named for Bishop Francis Asbury.



ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The present brick building was begun in 1864 and completed in 1879. The building was severely damaged by fire in 1973; only the balcony remains in its original state.

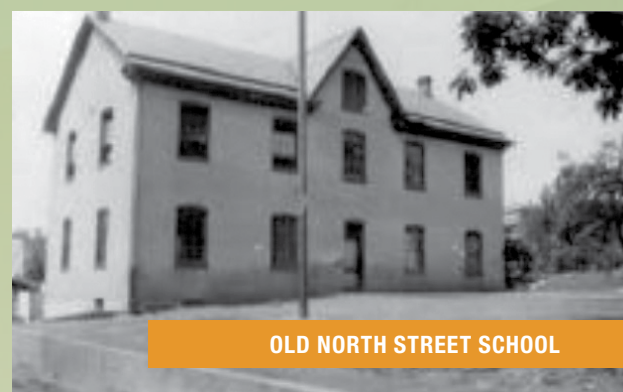
4 AMERICAN HALL. 132 West Bethel Street, Hagerstown. This modest house has great significance for Hagerstown's Black history. Built in 1883 by the local Black branch of Odd Fellows, a fraternal order that emphasized mutual assistance, this building quickly became an important community center. Among the Black organizations that met here were a school, a bicycle club, Civil War veterans, the local branch of Black Masons and their women's auxiliary, and other civic and social groups.



EBENEZER A.M.E. CHURCH, BUILT IN 1841

5 EBENEZER A.M.E. CHURCH. 26 West Bethel Street, Hagerstown. Founded in 1820, and first known as Bethel, this is one of the oldest A.M.E. congregations in the United States. Several early members are linked to Underground Railroad activity. The brick Civil War-era church building (formerly located on the southeast corner of the block) served as a smallpox hospital for Black citizens during the War; the elaborate building that replaced it was torn down in the 1990s because of structural concerns. Ebenezer's historic cemetery was covered by the Bethel Gardens housing development in the 1970s. The parsonage is on the site of a late nineteenth-century Black school. A **historical marker** tells the story of the Rev. Thomas Henry, a key figure for local Black history.

6 OLD NORTH STREET SCHOOL. 109 W. North Avenue, Hagerstown. Until 1888, African Americans in Washington County had no access to education beyond the eighth grade. That changed with the opening of the North Street School, where, for the first time, Black students from across the county could earn a high school diploma. The original building was replaced by the present one in the 1940s. Head Start began here in 1968. Later, the present building became the Black YMCA, and the Memorial Recreation Center, renamed in 2013 for Robert W. Johnson (1926-2009), a longtime teacher and coach at the North Street School.



OLD NORTH STREET SCHOOL

7 NEW NORTH STREET SCHOOL. 131 W. North Avenue, Hagerstown. In 1947, this school opened to replace the school at 109 North Ave. The new school also housed county education offices. The school was eventually closed and the building became the Martin Luther King Center.

8 JONATHAN STREET CABIN. 417 Jonathan Street, Hagerstown. One of the oldest surviving buildings in Hagerstown, this log cabin was built in the 1830s, re-using timbers from trees that were felled in 1739-41. The property was owned for years by the city's founding Hager family. In 1882 it was purchased by its first Black owner, Annie Bentley, a real estate investor who owned several properties in the city. In 2018 the house was hit by a police car and slated for demolition, but a coalition of citizens and preservation groups rallied to save and restore it. It is now an owner-occupied home.



9 MEDAL OF HONOR TRIANGLE. Intersection of Jonathan Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. This tiny park honors William O. Wilson (1869-1928), Hagerstown's only Medal of Honor recipient. Wilson was a "Buffalo Soldier," one of the African Americans who served in the U.S. Army's wars against Native peoples in western states. Wilson rose to be a corporal in the Ninth U.S. Cavalry; he was honored for his personal bravery in helping rescue a supply train that was under attack by Sioux warriors in 1890. (Contrary to some accounts, Wilson did not participate in the Wounded Knee massacre.) Wilson lived at 220 Jonathan Street in 1910, and at 341 Jonathan St. in 1920. His grave can be seen at Rose Hill Cemetery.



WILLIAM O. WILSON

10 WHEATON PARK. 120 Charles Street, Hagerstown. This city park is named for Jacob Wheaton, born in 1835, who was hired by Hagerstown to nurse Black citizens in a smallpox outbreak during the Civil War. After the war, Wheaton was the first Black man to vote in Washington County, and possibly in Maryland. He was active in local and state politics, was the first African American to serve on a trial jury in the county, and was bailiff of the grand jury from 1899 until his death in 1924. **Historical markers** honor him at the park, at Memorial Park (583 S. Potomac Street, Hagerstown), and outside Rose Hill Cemetery, where he is buried.



WHEATON PARK

Photos of James Simons, child on cover, and the unidentified man in the Jonathan Street image montage are courtesy of The Sharpsburg Museum of History. Photos of Mrs. Doleman and the girls on the swing set in Wheaton Park are courtesy of The Doleman Black Heritage Museum.

2 OLD COUNTY JAIL. Northwest corner of Jonathan and W. Church Streets, Hagerstown. The nineteenth-century jail that stood on this site saw not only slave auctions but the imprisonment of freedom-seekers from Virginia. It also held local free people awaiting trial and enslaved people awaiting sale and transport. The building is gone, but **historical markers** tell the story.

3 HARMON HOTEL. Next to 222 Jonathan Street, Hagerstown. No longer standing, the Harmon Hotel was one of Black Hagerstown's finest locations. Black entrepreneurs Walter and Florence Harmon owned more than 40 buildings in the city, including a restaurant, a bowling alley, a pool hall, and a shoe shine parlor. The Harmon Hotel featured in the Negro Motorist Green Book, a national listing, first published in 1936, of places where Black travelers could safely stop in segregated America. A historical marker on the site tells the story.



THE HARMON HOTEL



INTERIOR OF A STORE ON JONATHAN STREET



LOOKING FOR A GOOD MEAL?



Click here for a list of local Black-owned eateries



BIKE ROUTE



Click here for a guided route through Fairgrounds Park and Jonathan Street

With many thanks to:

Researched and Written by Dr. Emilie Amt, Emeritus Professor of History at Hood College. She blogs at emilieamt.com.

Ron Lytle and Rick Kline, African American Historical Association of Western Maryland

Wendi Perry and Janice Kelsch, Doleman Black Heritage Museum

Reggie Turner and Tereance Moore, Western Maryland Development Corporation

Brochure Design by IconGraphics.com
Kim Kukiela, Designer
Keith Baumbach, Art Director