



ANACOSTIA TRAILS HERITAGE AREA



*Prince George's County
Maryland*

TRAIL BLAZING STORIES
of
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY
THROUGH THE
DOOR OF DISCOVERY



Anacostia Trails Heritage Area
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WELCOME

Welcome to the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA)—one of eleven certified Maryland Heritage Areas created to revitalize local communities by combining heritage tourism and small business development with preservation, recreation, education, and cultural and natural resource conservation.

Located in northern Prince George's County, ATHA encompasses 83.7 square miles and includes 14 towns and municipalities. The area is rich in black history. Follow the story of the African Americans who left their mark here and marvel at their legacy. Discover the first incorporated African American community in Prince George's County. And learn about the remarkable Plummer family, whose influence is seen throughout the region.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area—and the hospitality of our residents and businesses. We hope, too, that you will come away with a deeper appreciation for the courage and sacrifice of the African Americans who helped forge the area's character. Experience more of Maryland's cultural heritage by exploring other Maryland Heritage Areas.

For more information about ATHA, please visit anacostiatrials.org. If you would like to learn more about Maryland Heritage Areas, go to www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net/hb-1.html.



INTRODUCTION

African Americans have played a prominent role in the history of Prince George's County. Their legacy, which goes back to Maryland's beginnings, has been passed down through generations of residents and remains at the heart of what distinguishes this county from others in the state—and even the nation.

LIVING IN BONDAGE

Africans first came to colonial Maryland as indentured servants. When labor-intensive tobacco became the principal crop in southern Maryland, African slaves were brought in as replacements. By the time Prince George's County was established in 1696, the colony was importing large numbers of Africans; as Maryland prospered, the slave trade increased. Active slave markets in the port towns of Upper Marlborough, Queen Anne Town, Nottingham, and Piscataway sold Africans at auction, often separating family members.

Although Maryland's economy diversified, tobacco remained the main crop in Prince George's County, where slavery continued to expand. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Africans comprised less than one third of Maryland's total population—but they accounted for nearly 50 percent of the population in Prince George's. A century later, on the eve of the Civil War, the county was nearly 60 percent black and the number of free blacks had grown to about 10 percent of the total black population.

When the war began, many of Maryland's African Americans, both free and enslaved, enlisted to serve in the Union army and navy. In April of 1862, as the war entered its second year, Congress passed the Compensated Emancipation Act, which freed slaves in the District of Columbia, prompting an exodus from neighboring Prince George's County into the District.

The following year, President Abraham Lincoln issued two executive orders. The second, the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 stated that “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof

shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” The act did not apply to Maryland, however, because, despite wide sympathy for the Confederate cause, the border state had not seceded from the Union and was not “in rebellion against the United States.”

Maryland's slaves finally were freed with the enactment of an amendment to the Maryland Constitution in 1864, which took effect in January 1865—11 months before the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which outlawed slavery in all states.



BUILDING A LIFE IN FREEDOM

With the end of the Civil War, the fate of former slaves became a national issue. Emancipation brought an end to the old plantation system and saw the division of large landholdings into small farms. People who had worked closely together on plantations scattered, resettling in small, tight-knit pockets of newly freed blacks, held together by churches, schools, and fraternal lodges. They built homes and supported themselves by farming or working as laborers on the B & O Railroad or at the Muirkirk Iron Furnace in Laurel.



During the postwar period of Reconstruction, African Americans quickly aligned themselves with the Republican Party, the party of Lincoln. It wasn't until February 1870, however, with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, that blacks were given the right to vote. Almost immediately, 1500 black residents of Prince George's County registered to vote. One of them, William Beckett, the son of a free black, even ran for a seat on the Bladensburg Town Commission. Although he was not elected, his campaign marked an important milestone in African American political activism.

ADVANCING THROUGH EDUCATION

Education, virtually nonexistent for blacks under slavery, was critical to the development of African American communities after the Civil War. In 1865, the federal government established the Freedmen's Bureau to provide aid to former slaves in the areas of education, health care, and employment. The Bureau hired teachers and built schools, which often served as temporary places of worship. When the Bureau lost its funding in 1872, local school boards took over the management of the new African American schools.

The Freedmen's Bureau built 12 schools in Prince George's County, three of them in the communities of Bladensburg, Laurel, and Muirkirk. None of these schools survives today.

In the 1920s, many Freedman's Bureau schools were replaced by Rosenwald schools. Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, established a fund to build schools for African American children in the South. Twenty-three Rosenwald schools were built in Prince George's County, five of them in ATHA. Of these, just two still stand: Muirkirk and Lakeland, although both high schools closed in 1950. Today, the Muirkirk school functions as American Legion Post 235; Lakeland was converted to a junior high school in 1950, when Fairmont



Heights High School opened; it is now used as a Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

Schools in Prince George's County were strictly segregated, a policy put in place with the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision on "separate but equal" education. This practice of separating black and white students continued until after the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. There was, however, a court decision in the mid-1930s that eliminated one barrier.

In 1935, Donald Murray, an African American student, applied to the University of Maryland Law School. He was denied admission on the basis of his race. The NAACP filed a suit on his behalf, led by Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, and by Charles Hamilton Houston, a lawyer, the dean of Howard University Law School, and the NAACP's litigation director. They argued that the decision to deny Murray admission was in violation of Plessy v. Ferguson and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The NAACP won the case. As a result of Murray v. Pearson (Raymond A. Pearson was then president of the University of Maryland), blacks were allowed to attend the law school; however, the rest of the university remained closed to African Americans until after the 1954 Brown v. Board decision.

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

African Americans have fought for this country since the Revolutionary War. The Union first recruited African Americans in 1863.

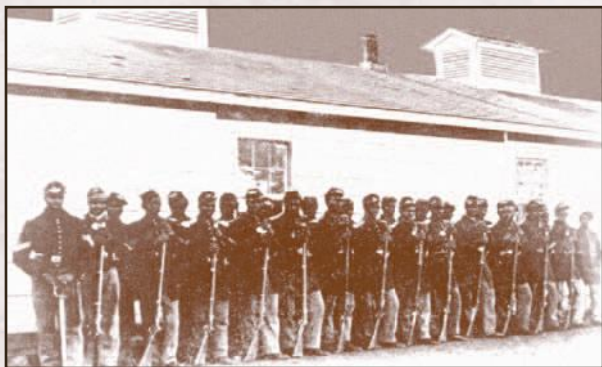
Historically, family members of black soldiers often paid a heavy price, more or less dictated by their geographical location and status. Blacks living in former Confederate states benefited from political opportunities not available in states that had remained in the Union, including Maryland. For example, in the South, under the occupying Union Army, the families of soldiers were eligible for assistance. Not so in Maryland. Those who managed to escape to contraband camps at Point Lookout or in Washington, D.C., were regarded as runaways and subject to arrest. It was not uncommon for free blacks to be evicted from their homes—or for enslaved family members to receive harsh treatment.

By the end of the Civil War, the U.S. had six black cavalry and infantry units, which were eventually consolidated into four units. These soldiers labored hard in the western territories, performing such demanding jobs as building roads and laying telegraph lines. With their distinctive black, curly hair and physical strength, the soldiers apparently reminded Native Americans of the bison that roamed the plains, inspiring the nickname, Buffalo Soldiers.

Henry Vinton Plummer, whose family played an integral role in the history of Riverdale Park (see p. xx), was chaplain in the 9th Cavalry Regiment of Buffalo Soldiers from 1884 to 1894. Around the same time, another Bladensburg resident, William Ford, also served.

At the beginning of World War I, 10,000 blacks—13 from North Brentwood—were enlisted in the four regiments of Buffalo Soldiers. These units were strictly segregated, and commanded, often incompetently, by white officers. Although these soldiers were regarded as the lowest rank in the army, they served with distinction.

Racial segregation in the U.S. military did not end until the enactment of President Harry Truman's Executive Order of July 1948.



Buffalo Soldiers

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SPORTS

Like other areas of life, sports and recreation were also segregated. Consequently, young black men formed their own teams in communities like North Brentwood. By 1928, sandlot baseball teams had become popular as outlets for talented black players, who were barred from the major league. Throughout the '30s, '40s, and '50s, sandlot teams, such as the Brentwood Flashes, Laurel Stars, and Lakeland Giants, competed against each other, traveling around the region, often accompanied by fans, to away games on Sunday afternoons.

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY TODAY

The 1960s and 1970s saw a veritable explosion in the population of middle-class blacks, who were drawn here by the county's open and affordable housing, as well as the proximity to government jobs in Washington, D.C. At the same time, the controversial policy of busing students prompted many whites to leave. By 1990, the county had a majority black population. Although there was some racial tension, Prince George's established a national reputation as an enclave of tolerance and diversity. In the last two decades, the county has seen a relatively smooth integration of blacks into higher political and economic positions, exemplified by the 1994 election of Wayne Curry as the first African American county executive.



GATEWAY ARTS DISTRICT

NORTH BRENTWOOD

The new Gateway Arts District is a corridor that runs through the towns of Mount Rainier, Brentwood, and Hyattsville. A planned community focused on the arts and entertainment, this revitalized area is fast becoming a center for arts-related activities, events, dining, and shopping—and the D.C. area's newest mecca for creative types and arts followers. In addition, the district offers services and resources that cater to artists of all types, providing an ideal community in which they can both live and work.

NORTH BRENTWOOD

North Brentwood was the first incorporated African American municipality in Prince George's County, as well as in the Washington metropolitan area. In the 1890s, Captain Wallace A. Bartlett, a white Civil War veteran who had commanded black troops in Company I of the 19th Regiment, sold a piece of property to a local realty company. The northern tract, called Holladay Company's Addition to Highland, was made available to African Americans to develop, lot by lot, as a new community. Unfortunately, the land lay in the floodplain of the Anacostia's Northwest Branch and experienced frequent flooding until the 1950s, when engineers finally alleviated the problem by grading and installing a system of levees. Whites, meanwhile, had established their own community in the neighboring community of Brentwood, just to the south.

North Brentwood's first residents were former slaves of local planters and Civil War veterans. The first lot was sold to an African American by the name of Henry Randall in 1891. Randall built a house on Holladay Avenue (now Rhode Island Avenue) and later operated a coal and ice supply company. Several family members moved in and, by 1905, the community had become known as Randall Town. Other prominent African Americans arrived, including members of the Plummer family (see pp. XX–XX). There was also William Conway, who helped found the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association in 1907, and Jeremiah Hawkins, a real estate developer and the community's first mayor.



BRENTWOOD FLASHERS

Courtesy Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC)

Sandlot baseball played a prominent role in the community's recreational life. One member of the Brentwood Flashers recalled, "It was all we had."

In 1898, a trolley line was completed through Randall Town. The City and Suburban Railway Company provided service into Washington, D.C., which resulted in an increase in population from 65 in 1905 to 315 in 1910. Randall Town became a desirable place for blacks to live, and attracted many who had served in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War. In 1902, the Brentwood Colored School was built, with Henry Randall, Peter Randall, and William Redd serving as trustees.

In 1924, the town was incorporated as North Brentwood. Independent businesses sprang up, including several grocery stores, coal and ice suppliers, a barber and a women's hairdresser, a plumber and carpenters, a doctor and a dentist, even a lunchroom and a tavern, where Pearl Bailey sang. The town also boasted a Methodist and a Baptist church, and a public and a private school.

Today, North Brentwood is a key part of the Gateway Arts District—notably as the home of the new Prince George's County Museum of African American History.

FAMOUS SONS AND DAUGHTERS:

Lillian K. Beverly became the town's first female mayor in 1991. She organized the North Brentwood Historical Society to record and document the town's history.

William Conway, a teacher, graduated from Howard University in 1898. Convinced of the effectiveness of voluntary collective action, he organized Randall Town residents and formed the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association. Under his leadership, the group worked to improve the community in every way, from health and education to streets and streetlights. Conway also worked at the Government Printing Office, served as the town's justice of the peace, and presided over the night court.

Jeremiah Townshend Hawkins, born November 25, 1862, was the first mayor of North Brentwood. Among his other political activities, he served as a juror on the local circuit court in Brandywine, and as a delegate for that town at the Republican Party's county conventions. He later became a member of the Republican State Central Committee.

Hawkins married Francis Emma Quander and the couple moved to One John Street in Randall Town, where he ran a dairy business. As leader of the town's civic association, he pushed for incorporation; in 1924, under his watch, Randall Town was officially recognized as North Brentwood. That same year, Hawkins represented Prince George's County as a delegate to the Republican National Convention. He was elected to serve two more times in 1928 and 1936.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church

The church congregation was established in 1913 by a group of Randall Town residents in the home of Henson Primrose. In 1920, a church was built under the leadership of the pastor, Chesterfield Jackson. The next year, five trustees, along with Rev. Jackson, pushed through the congregation's incorporation as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Brentwood, Maryland. 4037 Webster St., 301-927-7698. Not available for tours.

Peter Randall House

Completed in 1893, this is North Brentwood's oldest surviving house. An employee at the Government Printing Office, Peter Randall was elected to the town council after the community was incorporated. Both his house and that of his father, Henry Randall, long symbolized the town's past—especially after the City and Suburban Railway Company ran the streetcar line by them in 1898. The senior Randall's house was damaged by fire in 1994 and demolished in 1995. 4508 Rhode Island Ave. Not available for tours

ALSO VISIT:

BRENTWOOD (incorporated 1922)

Brentwood Arts Center

This 15,000-square-foot refurbished warehouse features an arts education facility, two galleries, and affordable artists' studios. 3901 Rhode Island Ave., 301-864-3860

HYATTSVILLE (incorporated 1886)

Franklin's Restaurant and Brewery, Hyattsville Hardware

Franklin's is a local favorite that offers something for everyone, including a hardware store. The décor features many of the store's original fixtures. 5123 Baltimore Ave., 301-927-2740

U.S. Post Office—Hyattsville Main (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

Built in 1935, this Colonial Revival-style brick building features murals with agricultural themes by Eugene Kingman. 4325 Gallatin St. Not available for tours

MOUNT RAINIER (incorporated 1910)

Artmosphere Digital Café

Meet friends, eat well, enjoy live entertainment, and more. 3311 Rhode Island Ave., 301-927-CAFÉ. www.artmospherecafe.com

H & F Fine Arts and Fountain Framing

H & F exhibits the work of local and international artists. The adjacent shop does custom framing. 3311 Rhode Island Ave., 301-887-0080. www.hffinearts.com

World Arts Focus and Joe's Movement Emporium

Enjoy a variety of performing arts traditions from around the world. 3806 34th St., 301-699-1819. www.worldartsfocus.org

THE PORT TOWNS

Situated along the Anacostia River, the communities of Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston serve as gateways between Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County. They share a history that goes back to the days when the Anacostia was a major east-coast commercial artery.

BLADENSBURG

The largest of the Port Towns, Bladensburg was established by Act of the General Assembly in 1742, making it one of the first communities in Prince George's County. The town's name honors Sir Thomas Bladen, the provincial governor from 1742 until 1746 or 1747. Its location on the eastern branch of the Anacostia River—which, in those days, was fully navigable—made it one of the county's most important shipping and commercial ports. But it wasn't all business: Washington's social elite regularly gathered here at the Bladensburg Spring and Spa, just one of the town's attractions.

Bladensburg always had a substantial African American population, although blacks made up a smaller percentage of the total population than in other parts of the county. Enslaved Africans and indentured servants grew most of the tobacco that was inspected and shipped from the wharves in colonial Bladensburg. They loaded the ships, built the houses, and performed much of the labor in this thriving town. By the end of the eighteenth century, some free blacks were engaged in successful commercial ventures—innkeeper Margaret Adams, for one. One happy client, President George Washington, referred to her as the “old black woman who keeps the best house in town.”

After the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau built a school here—one of 12 in Prince George's County—for African American children

FAMOUS SONS AND DAUGHTERS:

Margaret Adams was the black owner of a tavern here in the late 1700s, when the town was a popular resting stop for travelers. Adams encountered problems from local competitors due to her popularity and the fact that her tavern was a favorite of George Washington.

William Becket Jr., a miller, at age 36 was the first black man to run for public office, not only in Prince George's County but in the state of Maryland. He ran on the Republican ticket for a seat on the Bladensburg Town Commission.

William Ford served in one of the black cavalry and infantry units created after the Civil War. These soldiers were known as Buffalo Soldiers. (see p. TK).

David Harrington was Bladensburg's first black mayor, from 1995 to 2002. He now represents District 47 in the Maryland Senate.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

Bladensburg Waterfront Park

This area is thought to be the location of the Port O' Bladensburg. In 1742, 46 years after the founding of Prince George's County, a group of leading citizens selected the site to cater to the tobacco growers of the Eastern Branch of the Potomac River. Deep and wide enough to accommodate large ships, it was among the safest and most ample harbors in colonial America. The contemporary site, formerly the home of Bladensburg Marina, was revitalized in 2000 as Bladensburg Waterfront Park.

The park features a visitor center, a fishing pier, a picnic pavilion, and a public boat ramp. Visitors will find guided canoe tours, pontoon-boat rides, bike trails, and more. Watch for state markers highlighting Bladensburg history. 4601 Annapolis Rd., 301-779-0371. Open daily sunrise to sunset. www.pgparcs.com/places/nature/bladensburg.html.

Bostwick House (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

This brick Georgian mansion sits on eight acres above the Anacostia River. It was built c. 1765 by Christopher Lowndes, who made a fortune through his import-export business—and by importing and selling slaves from Africa in partnership with his brother-in-law, Benjamin Tasker Jr.

The house was the center of a 3,000-acre estate called Columbia, which stretched from the Bladensburg harbor to present-day Greenbelt. During the Revolutionary War, there were more than 50 enslaved Africans at Bostwick. They lived in small dwellings behind Bostwick House and labored in Lowndes' vast tobacco and wheat fields, around the shipyard and the ropewalk, and in the care of livestock and thoroughbred horses. A few individuals cooked and performed other domestic duties at the “big house.” The slave inventory, taken at the time of Lowndes' death, indicated a number of skilled workers among the group, including a carter, who would transport goods on a horse-drawn cart; a locker, who controlled access to locked rooms and buildings; and a carpenter.

The property was sold to Lowndes' son-in-law, Benjamin Stoddert, first secretary of the U.S. Navy. Stoddert owned slaves, and according to local folklore, he consigned disobedient individuals to a slave jail, which consisted of two rooms built into the buttress on the south side of the house. 3901 48th St., 301-927-7048. Call to schedule a tour.

Evergreen Cemetery

Formerly known as the Old Presbyterian Burying Grounds, the cemetery is the original site of Bladensburg Presbyterian Church. The oldest gravestone dates to 1749. It is believed that an African American burial ground lies on the east side of the property. Located near the intersection of 52nd and Newton St. Tours not available

George Washington House (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

Built by Jacob Wirt around 1760, the house originally served as a store and a stagecoach stop along the Old Post Road. Peter Carnes, the balloonist who launched America into the age of flight, lived here from 1774 to 1783. The building was used later as a combination store and a tavern-inn. In 1894, social reformer Jacob Coxey and his group of unemployed followers, known as the Coxey Army, camped here after their march from Ohio to Washington, D.C., to protest unemployment relief. The building also served as hotel from the mid-1800s until 1962. It now houses the Anacostia Watershed Society. 4302 Baltimore Ave., 301-699-6204. www.anacostiaws.org.

Magruder House (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

Aptly referred to as the Old Stone House, it dates to between 1742 and 1746. Built for William Hilleary, the house was purchased by Richard Henderson, a county judge and prominent merchant, with whom George Washington dined on May 9, 1787, according to the president's diary. The house was later owned by Dr. Archibald Magruder, a Southern sympathizer during the Civil War who was imprisoned for treating wounded Confederate troops. 4703 Annapolis Rd. Tours not available

Market Area and Market Master's House (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

Colonial Bladensburg's market, located near the waterfront, was a bustling center of commerce and an economic center for the region. Reportedly, slaves were sold at the market master's house, which was built c. 1765 by Christopher Lowndes. The stone used for the house—quartz and mica schist—is not local; it is believed to have been salvaged from discarded ships' ballast. 4006 48th St., 301-927-7048. Tours not available

Memorial Peace Cross

The cross was erected in 1925 to honor residents of Prince George's County who lost their lives in World War I. Nearby are memorials honoring the county's heroes from other conflicts, including World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Intersection of Baltimore Ave. and Annapolis Rd.



ST. PAUL'S BAPTIST CHURCH

present location and met there until 1873. According to oral tradition, the congregation, under the leadership of Rev. John Brackenridge, supported abolition and participated in the Underground Railroad, hiding slaves below the church floor.

In 1873, the church building was sold to an African American Baptist congregation, which was organized in 1866 by Sarah Miranda Plummer Clark, the eldest daughter of Adam Francis Plummer (see pp. TK-TK). St. Paul's was the nexus of the local black community. Reportedly, Frederick Douglass and Marcus Garvey both spoke here.

The church, renamed Free Hope Baptist, now stands in the midst of an industrial park near the railroad. One of the last remnants of Bladensburg's black community, it is also an important testament to the role that African American women played as community builders during Reconstruction. 4107 47th St. Tours not available

ALSO VISIT:

COLMAR MANOR (incorporated 1927)

Developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, Colmar Manor is a small, quiet community separated from Washington, D.C., by Eastern Avenue. The area played a significant role in both the War of 1812 (see below) and the Civil War. In the early 1900s, the community's growth was spurred by the single-track trolley line—the Washington, Spa Spring and Greta Railroad Company—which connected Bladensburg to Washington via the Bladensburg Road. The trolley operated from 1910 to 1923.

St. Paul's Baptist Church

The original church was built in the 1700s to house a white Presbyterian congregation. In 1818, the congregation moved the church, brick by brick, to its

Battle of Bladensburg in the War of 1812

In Fort Lincoln Cemetery, a state historical marker near the mausoleum marks the spot where Commodore Joshua Barney made a last-ditch defensive effort against British troops advancing towards Washington on August 24, 1814. The Battle of Bladensburg, and the subsequent burning of Washington, is significant as the first military action in U.S. history in which the president and other high-ranking government officials assumed an active role in the field directing troop movement.

Bladensburg Dueling Grounds

For those who were so inclined, this was a popular spot for dueling, which was outlawed in the District of Columbia. Washington gentlemen would come here to settle their political and personal differences, usually fighting to the bitter, bloody end. At least 26 duels were recorded to have occurred here during the 1800s. Perhaps the most famous was the 1820 battle between Stephen Decatur, a well-known naval officer, and James Barron, a former naval commander; the duel resulted in Decatur's death. 37th Ave., off Bladensburg Rd.; accessible from Melrose Neighborhood Park

Fort Lincoln Cemetery

The cemetery was established in 1921 and displays numerous state historical markers, including one for the cemetery itself. The 178.4-acre site is open to the public. 3401 Bladensburg Rd., Brentwood. Not available for tours

COTTAGE CITY (incorporated 1924)

A residential community developed in the early 1900s, Cottage City served as a campsite for Rochambeau's troops around the time of the Revolutionary War. It was later the home of Camp Casey during the Civil War. Archaeological findings indicate that several Potomac River Indian tribes once lived in the area. Cottage City is alleged to be the home of the main character in *The Exorcist*.

Carleton Mill Site

Because of its commanding view of Bladensburg and the bridge across the Anacostia River, this now-defunct 18th-century mill was an ideal site for American troops, who were stationed here during the Battle of Bladensburg. Corner of Bunker Hill Road and 43rd Ave.

EDMONSTON (incorporated 1924)

A twentieth-century “streetcar suburb,” Edmonston is noteworthy for electing the first mayor of Japanese descent, Kinjiro Matsudaira, in 1927.

Mount Rose Site

A state historic marker along the Anacostia Trail identifies the former home of the prominent Plummer family (see pp. TK-TK). Adam Francis Plummer built the house at the end of the Civil War. Over the years, the family built several houses on the 10-acre property, which also contained the family cemetery, relocated to Harmony Memorial Park in Landover. The house stood at Ingraham St. and 46th Ave.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON HOUSE****SARAH PLUMMER**

Sarah Miranda Plummer, or Sarah Miranda Plummer, founder of St. Paul's Baptist Church in Bladensburg

THE PLUMMERS OF PRINCE GEORGE'S

“As I listened from childhood to the story of my parents, eldest sister, and brother— (of their suffering and sorrow, their fear and anxiety, their loneliness, failure and disappointment, their doubt, darkness and torment) that the Sin of Slavery had caused them, I have ‘desired with desire’ to write it, that others, though discouraged from a different cause, might prove faithful by doing right, and thus overcome.”

– Nellie Arnold Plummer, from the Preface, *Out of the Depths*
or *The Triumph of the Cross*



THE PLUMMERS OF PRINCE GEORGE'S

If there's one name that stands out in the history of African Americans in Prince George's County, it's **Plummer**. The family's story, chronicled in detail by two generations, mirrors the lives of so many individuals and remains a unique record of the black experience here, from slavery through emancipation and the decades following the Civil War. It begins with the remarkable effort of one member: Adam Francis Plummer.

The third son of William Barney and Sarah Norris Plummer—and the grandson of Cupid and Milly Plummer—Adam was born in 1819 on George Calvert's Mt. Albion plantation. At the age of 10, George and Rosalie Calvert brought him to their Riversdale plantation (see p. xx). Reportedly, he served as the personal servant of their second son, Charles Benedict Calvert. Like Charles Calvert, Adam had a passion for farming, which was the basis for a supposed friendship between the two. He was also a skilled carpenter, as well as a talented shoemaker. And, he was literate, having been taught to read by John Bowser, a free black preacher.

In 1839, a young enslaved woman by the name of Emily Saunders Arnold came to Riversdale to nurse a sick aunt. A cook at Three Sisters plantation in Lanham, she and Adam met during her visit. After a two-year courtship, they were married at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.; however, they were forced to live apart. Every Saturday night for the next 10 years, Adam was permitted to visit his wife, who continued to live at Three Sisters, eight miles away. He would stay with her until work began on Monday morning.

By 1851, Emily and Adam had five children: Sarah, Henry, Elias, Julia, and Nicholas. That year, the owner of Three Sisters, Sarah Ogle Hilleary, died. Her heirs sold Emily and three of her children— Henry, Julia, and Nicholas—to Colonel Livingston Gilbert Thompson of Meridian Hill in Washington, D.C. At Thompson's request, daughter Sarah later joined them. Adam was allowed to see his family twice a week.

Over the next three years, the couple had two more daughters, Marjorie and Margaret, although Marjorie died in 1853 at the age of one. With the exception of Elias, who remained at Three Sisters, all of the children lived at Meridian Hill with Emily.



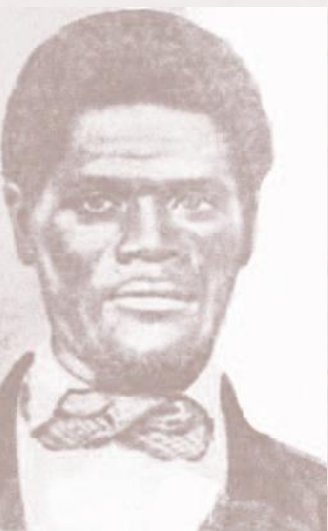
NELLIE & ROBERT

In 1855, Adam temporarily lost touch with his family after Emily and four children were transferred to Woodlawn, Thompson's family estate in Ellicott's Mills in Howard County. Adam reconnected with them in 1856, but because of the distance, he could only visit them at Easter and Christmas.

Twins Nellie and Robert, the Plummers' last two children, were born into slavery in 1860. In November of that same year, Sarah was sold to a merchant named Sheckells, an intermediary for traders. A few months later, he sold her to Hanson Kelly of New Orleans. On November 24, 1861, Sarah wrote her first letter to her mother expressing her grief at being separated from her family.

In 1862, when slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia, Elias escaped from Three Sisters to the safe haven of D.C. On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in Confederate states. Later that month, Henry ran away from Woodlawn to temporarily join his father at Riversdale plantation (see p. TK) before fleeing into the District as well. Shortly thereafter, he joined the Union forces in the Civil War, becoming the first African American chaplain for the U.S. Army. (He was dishonorably discharged under questionable circumstances in 1894, but his case was reversed in 2005, 100 years after his death. Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer was inducted into the Prince George's County Hall of Fame in April 2005.)

Not until 1863 did Emily and the five children still living with her gain their freedom—and only by sheer luck. After escaping from Ellicott's Mills, the six of them fled to Baltimore, where the runaways were captured and jailed. As it happened, their owner, Colonel Thompson, did not have the money to pay the required jail fees. Emily cooked and served the jailer and his





ST. PAUL BAPTIST CHURCH

wife for two months to repay their board and keep, so they were allowed to go free. After that, Adam and Emily lived together as husband and wife for the first time in their 22 years of marriage.

After the Civil War, determined to reunite his family, and with loans from family and friends, Adam asked his eldest son Henry to travel to New Orleans to search for his sister Sarah. On a Sunday morning in 1866, Henry found her, widowed and with a young son, Thomas Howard Jr. He brought them back to Riversdale. Out of joy for being reunited with her family, Sarah organized the original congregation of St. Paul's Baptist Church in 1867. In 1873, she purchased a church building from a white Presbyterian congregation in Bladensburg, and it became the new home of St. Paul's.

On July 14, 1868, Adam and Emily entered into an unusual real estate agreement with B. F. Guy of Hyattsville. Guy would sell them a 10-acre hilltop property adjoining Riversdale plantation if they could come up with a thousand dollars within 24 months. A big if, to be sure. But to Guy's surprise and dismay, the enterprising Adam paid the entire amount off in just 18 months and took ownership of the land. (The landowner had never really intended to sell the property to the Plummers, believing that they would never meet the deadline.)

On this land, the Plummers built a family compound, which they called Mount Rose, after the exquisite roses that Adam cultivated. The property consisted of several houses, as well as a family graveyard (which was relocated to Harmony Memorial Park in Landover). Mount Rose later became part of Edmonston, which was incorporated in 1924. Today, the houses are gone and the site has been developed with light industry. In 2008, a commemorative marker was erected here.

The day that Adam married Emily in 1841, he secretly began to chronicle, in meticulous detail, his experience as a slave for more than two decades, and later his life as a free man. He

also carefully documented family-related information and events. Adam continued his journaling up until his death in 1905, leaving behind a remarkable record of names, dates, places, and events, as well as personal challenges. His writings also offer a unique perspective on the Calvert family.

After his death and into the 1920s, his daughter Nellie continued to fill the empty pages of his diary with her own writings. On July 14, 1916, she wrote: "Forty-eight years ago tonight dear Father, Adam Francis Plummer, bought Mount Rose, our dear old homestead. . . . We still own and love the spot." (The original journal is preserved at the Smithsonian Museum and Center for African American History and Culture.)

Nellie was the first woman to attend Wayland Seminary (now Virginia Union University), a college for freed slaves. Among her classmates was Booker T. Washington. She went on to work as a teacher and a principal in the Washington, D.C., school system, to which she devoted 45 years.

In 1927, when she was in her sixties, Nellie published a family biography, "Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross." (The book was reprinted in 1997.)



CUPID
PLUMMER



NICHOLAS PLUMMER'S FAMILY

RIVERDALE PARK

The small town of Riverdale Park was carved from the subdivided Riversdale plantation (see below). Platted in 1889, Riverdale Park was a prototypical Washington suburb by the end of the nineteenth century, easily accessible by trolley, the Baltimore Turnpike, and the B & O Railroad. The town was incorporated in 1920, and today boasts many well-preserved Victorian houses.

Riversdale plays a significant role in the county's African American history. Adam Francis Plummer (see pp. TK-TK) worked on the plantation as a slave. A literate man, he kept a diary from 1841 until just before his death in 1905. His daughter Nellie Plummer later wrote a family biography, *Out of the Depths*, which was based largely on her father's writings.

In 1930, aerospace pioneer Henry Berliner founded Engineering and Research Corporation (ERCO) to produce metal aircraft and propeller tools. He and aeronautical engineer Fred Weick got together in 1936 to develop an experimental "safety" aircraft. The next year, Berliner purchased 50 acres of land in Riverdale, near the College Park airport, and built the ERCO factory and airstrip, where they produced 6,000 Ercoupes—a low-winged monoplane designed to be the safest fixed-wing aircraft produced at the time. The Ercoupe's first test flight took place at the College Park airport in 1937.

FAMOUS SONS AND DAUGHTERS:

Plummer Family (see pp. TK-TK)

POINTS OF INTEREST:

Calvert Memorial Park and Family Cemetery

Charles Benedict Calvert, a member of Maryland's State House of Delegates (1843–44) and a U.S. Representative from Maryland's Sixth District (1861–63), is buried here. The grounds are maintained and landscaped by the Riversdale Historical Society. Off Queensbury Road near Riverdale Park Town Center, opposite the train station. Not available for tours

Engineering and Research Corporation (ERCO)

Now vacant, you can see the site of the former Ercoupes factory. 6501 Lafayette Ave. Not available for tours

Riversdale House Museum (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

Flemish aristocrat Henri Stier began construction of the mansion, which was built between 1801 and 1807. It was completed by his daughter Rosalie and her husband George Calvert, a grandson of the fifth Lord Baltimore. Rosalie and George had nine children. Their son Charles Benedict Calvert, founder of the Maryland Agricultural College, now the University of Maryland, continued to live at Riversdale with his own family. In 1887, his sons deeded the mansion and 475 acres to John Fox, president of the Riverdale Park Company, a New York-based real estate syndicate. Today, eight of the plantation's original 2,000 acres have been preserved. The property is now owned and managed by the Maryland National Park and Planning Commission. 4811 Riverdale Rd., 301-864-0420, TTY 301-699-2544. www.pgparcs.com. Open for tours and special events; call or visit the Web site for information.

ALSO VISIT:

Restaurants

Calvert House Inn Restaurant

6211 Baltimore Ave., 301-864-5220.

www.calverthouseinn.com

CABIN AT RIVERDALE



COLLEGE PARK

LAKELAND

In 1892, Edwin Newman developed the community of Lakeland three years after John O. Johnson, another real estate developer, platted the original subdivision of College Park. Newman envisioned an exclusive, resort-type community oriented around a lake—the source of present-day Lake Artemisia—for white residents. As it happened, however, blacks were drawn to the area because of the employment possibilities at the University of Maryland; by the early twentieth century, Lakeland's population was predominantly African American. Today, it is still a diverse community, part of the City of College Park.

Lakeland's story underscores the history of African American education in a racially segregated environment. Black residents worked hard to make sure their children received a good education. In 1903, Pleasant Brown, Edward Carter, and John C. Johnson organized the community's first school. A one-room structure, it was located on the eastern side of the railroad tracks. A new school building was erected in 1917 and remained in use until 1925, when a more modern, two-classroom school was built with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund.



LAKELAND HALL

Lakeland Hall, courtesy Prince George's County Historical Society (PGHS)

In 1926, a delegation of black Lakeland residents petitioned the Board of Education to build a high school for African American students in the northern part of Prince George's County. Their effort was rewarded when Lakeland High School (also called Community High School) opened, with 45 enrolled students, in 1928—a major achievement considering that prior to this, the county had only one African American secondary school. The new school served black communities in Bladensburg, Brentwood, North Brentwood, Laurel, Elkridge (in Howard County), Ammendale, Muirkirk, and Lakeland. The PTA, chaired by W. J. Conway, reimbursed the Board of Education for construction expenses. Lakeland graduated its first class—which consisted of Lucille Crump Gilbert, John Chesley Mack Jr., and Dessie Randall Thomas—in 1931.

Until 1950, Lakeland's African American children completed their entire education, from first through twelfth grade, in the community. In September of that year, Lakeland students began attending Fairmont Heights Junior-Senior High School.

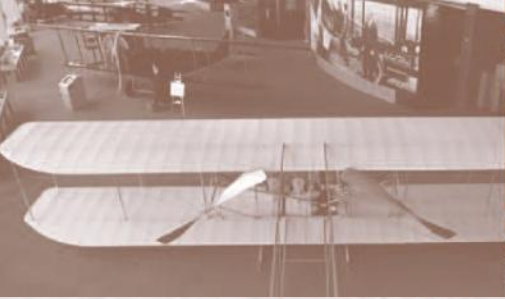
FAMOUS SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Donald Gaines Murray applied to the University of Maryland Law School and was denied admission on the basis of his race. The NAACP filed suit, launching the well-known case of *Murray v. Pearson* (see p. xx)

Edgar Smith Sr. was Lakeland High School's first principal. He held the position from 1928, when the school opened, until 1966.



LAKELAND HIGH SCHOOL



POINTS OF INTEREST

*College Park Aviation Museum, courtesy Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Lake Artemesia in College Park*

Lake Artemesia Natural Area

The lake is named after Artemesia N. Drefs, who donated the land and was the granddaughter of Edwin Newman, Lakeland's developer. In addition to the 38-acre lake, the park offers an aquatic garden, a birding trail, fishing, an accessible fishing pier, and more than two miles of hiking and biking trails that connect it to the Calvert Road Park and the College Park Airport and Aviation Museum. Enter the park via trails at 5200 block of Calvert Rd. in College Park, or Osage St. and Swarthmore Ct. in Berwyn Heights. Vehicles are not permitted on park grounds; parking available at Branchville Rd. and Ballew Ave. in Berwyn Heights. 301-927-2163, TTY 301-699-2544. www.pgparcs.com/places/nature/artemesia.html

Lakeland High School

Also called Community High School, completed in 1928, this was one of Prince George's County's first high schools for African Americans. The building, now home to the Brazilian Seventh Day Adventist Church, is one of the few surviving structures from Lakeland's early days. 8108 54th Ave., College Park. Not available for tours.



Lakeland Highschool Class Photographs

University of Maryland—College Park

Among the nation's top 25 public universities, the University of Maryland is nationally ranked first for the total number of degrees awarded to African American students. The Visitor

Center (1201 Turner Hall) is a great place to begin a campus visit. Don't miss the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, featuring over 1,000 performing arts events each year. Also visit the David C. Driskell Center, which celebrates the legacy of David C. Driskell, an African American artist and distinguished professor emeritus of art. 301-405-1000. www.cvs.umd.edu

ALSO VISIT:

College Park Airport and Aviation Museum (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)
1985 Corporal Frank Scott Dr.
301-864-6029
collegeparkaviationmuseum.com

Greenbelt Arts Center
123 Centerway, Greenbelt
301-441-8770
www.greenbeltartscenter.org

Greenbelt Museum
10-B Crescent Rd., Greenbelt
301-507-6582
www.greenbeltmd.gov

Greenbelt National Park
6565 Greenbelt Rd., Greenbelt
301-344-3948
www.nps.gov/gree/planyourvisit

NASA Goddard Visitor's Center
Soil Conservation Rd., Greenbelt
301-286-9041
www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard

National Archives at College Park
8601 Adelphi Rd.
301-837-2000
www.archives.gov/dc-metro/college-park

National Museum of Language
7100 Baltimore Ave., Suite 202,
College Park
301-864-7071
www.languagemuseum.org

Old Greenbelt Theatre
Roosevelt Center
129 Centerway, Greenbelt
301-474-9745
www.pgtheatres.com

ROSSVILLE-BELTSVILLE

Rossville originated with a community of freedmen. In January 1868, six black trustees—Henry Edwards, Knotley Johnson, Ferdinand Key, Thomas Matthews, James Powell, and Thomas Queen—bought a piece of land, in the area of Beltsville and Muirkirk, on which to build a place of worship. That same year, they erected Queens Chapel. Near the new church was a small burial ground, where enslaved and free blacks had been buried prior to the Civil War.

In 1886, a 25-acre parcel of land across the road from Queens Chapel was subdivided into 12 lots. These lots were purchased by local blacks, including church trustees Thomas Matthews and Knotley Johnson, to build homesteads. Many of them worked on local farms or at the Muirkirk Iron Furnace. By 1889, all but one lot had been developed. The little rural enclave was called Rossville, after Augustus Ross, one of these pioneers.

The largest lot in Rossville was sold to Rebecca Lodge No. 6 of the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a mutual aid society chartered in 1877—and one of only two black benevolent societies still operating in Prince George's County today. In 1889, the Lodge, which included members of Queens Chapel, built Abraham Hall. Rossville's grandest building, it was the site of camp meetings and other activities. When fire destroyed Queens Chapel in 1890, the Hall functioned as both a church and a school until a new chapel was built in 1901. Abraham Hall and Queen's Chapel Methodist Church remain the center of the historic community.



ABRAHAM HALL



CLASS OF ABRAHAM HALL

POINTS OF INTEREST:

Abraham Hall

Built in 1889, the two-story frame building is one of the few surviving examples of African American benevolent society halls built in the late 1800s. Churches within the Laurel Charge, a network of local churches, held camp meetings here. These social and spiritual marathons would last for days. Out-of-town participants would camp on the property for a week or more in August, when these meetings traditionally took place. The Hall was also used as a schoolhouse before the Rosenwald school was built in 1922. Not available for tours

The Hall was the first black historic site in Prince George's County to be restored exclusively with public funds. In 1991, it was rededicated for public and private use, and temporarily served as ATHA's headquarters in 1999. The building is now home to the Black History Program of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. 7612 Old Muirkirk Rd. Not available for tours

Colored School No. 2 in Election District 1 (Muirkirk/Rosenwald School)

In 1919, African Americans in the Rossville area began to pressure the county board of school commissioners to build a new community school. A building committee was appointed. It consisted of three well-known Rossville landowners: William Tolliver, Edward T. Gross, and Harry Ross. Rosenwald funds (see p. xx) were secured and the county school board purchased the land. In 1922, Colored School No. 2—a 20-by-36-foot, two-room schoolhouse—in Election District 1 opened its doors. It operated until 1950, when it was sold at auction, and later purchased by the American Legion Post #235. 7813 Muirkirk Rd. Not available for tours

**KILNS****MUIRKIRK WORKERS**

Muirkirk Iron Furnace Site

William and Elias Ellicott established the Muirkirk Iron Manufacturing Company in 1847. It's likely the brothers named it after the town of Muirkirk in their native Scotland. The Coffin family took over the furnace in 1853 and operated it until 1920. An explosion in 1888 destroyed the works, but the operation was immediately rebuilt. During its peak, the company annually produced 7,000 tons of pig iron. The iron was used to make cannons, gun carriages, and railroad wheels. The site of this important furnace is now hidden under an industrial complex, and archeologists have identified only one surviving charcoal kiln. 7011 Muirkirk Rd.

Muirkirk School

Charles Coffin, owner of the Muirkirk Iron Furnace, built the school in 1867 for his employees. White students would attend class in the morning, and black students in the afternoon. The students would meet together on Sunday. This was the first school in Rossville available to African American children. The exact site is unknown, although there is evidence that the school stood near the furnace.

Queen's Chapel Site and Cemetery

You can visit the historic cemetery at the site where the original Queen's Chapel stood. The church began as a small, log structure, built in 1868 on the south side of the road. Probably named after Thomas Queen, one of the original Rossville church trustees, it served the local black community for 30 years. In 1899, lightning struck the chapel, completely destroying it. Services were held at Abraham Hall until 1901, when the new church was built. Over time, to accommodate the growing community, members enlarged the chapel and purchased an adjoining acre of land for the cemetery. In 1956, a new church was built on the north side of the road and the 1901 chapel was demolished. The graveyard was expanded again to the east. 7410 Old Muirkirk Rd. (south side). Not available for tours

ALSO VISIT:

Beltsville Agricultural Research Station (BARC) and Visitor Center
10300 Baltimore Ave.,

Domestic visitors: 301-504-9403

International visitors: 202-720-6725

www.ars.usda.gov

Restaurants

Maurya Indian Cuisine

11436 Cherry Hill Rd.

301-595-2882

Sierras Grill

11619 Beltsville Dr.

301-572-7830

Peking Delight

11621 Beltsville Dr.

301-572-6018

TJs of Calverton

11607 Beltsville Dr.

301-572-7117



LAUREL

Laurel Factory, as the community was called, brought the Industrial Revolution to Prince George's County in the early 1800s. Unlike any other village in the county, Laurel's economy was rooted in cotton mills, foundries, and small industry, rather than tobacco or other crops. The mills attracted African Americans, both former slaves and freeborn individuals, whose population slowly grew through the nineteenth century as more mills went up along the Patuxent River.

Most blacks lived in a restricted section called the Grove on the west side of town. School No. 2, Laurel Colored School, was established there in 1884. According to a city directory, the Grove boasted 57 residents in 1894.

Laurel Factory was incorporated in 1870. Five years later, "Factory" was dropped from its name and the town, the county's largest, became known simply as Laurel.

In 1891, a group of African American Methodists, many of whom worked at the mills or the Muirkirk Furnace, got together and established St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church (see below), opposite a large grove of old oaks, from which the community took its name. St. Mark's was the focal point of the community, where members would gather for revivals, camp meetings, prayer services, and other activities, including the annual Emancipation Proclamation Celebration picnic.

One of the biggest events of the calendar year, the picnic traditionally took place on the first Saturday in September. People would begin arriving, many by horse-drawn buggy, the night before and they'd stay until Sunday. Sponsored by the church and the Grove's three fraternal lodges—the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham Lodge No. 22, the Calanthians, and the Knights of Pythians—the celebration still continues today.

Not long after the crash of 1929, Laurel's mills closed, but the community remained an economic and cultural center for the area.

FAMOUS SONS AND DAUGHTERS:

Frank Carter and **Sarah Hebron Carter**, both freeborn, established a Methodist Episcopal mission in their home at 618 8th Street (then Church Street) in 1890. The mission was part of the Bladensburg circuit within the all-black Washington Annual Conference.

James Hebron donated his dance hall to the congregation of the Carters' mission in 1891 for use as a church building. The simple frame structure housed St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church for 30 years (see below).

The Laurel Stars, an all-black, sandlot baseball team, were active from the 1920s to the early 1960s, when African Americans could not play for white minor or major leagues. The Stars drew players from a 10-mile radius, and their home games often drew crowds of 200 or 300. A thousand fans would cheer them on for the annual Emancipation Day game. They played teams from nearby towns and occasionally traveled to Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Home games were usually scheduled for after church on Sunday near present-day Emancipation Park and Stanley Memorial Library.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church

The spiritual heart of Laurel's black community, St. Mark's has a long history. Shortly after Frank and Sarah Hebron Carter organized their mission, the Methodist congregation moved to the dance hall that the Hebron family had donated. In 1891, three church trustees negotiated with the owners of Montpelier plantation to buy a lot at 601 8th Street, across from Laurel Colored School. They paid one hundred dollars. The former dance hall was put on logs and pulled by horses to the new lot, where it served the congregation for 30 years, with several renovations. In 1921, it was sold to Abraham Lodge, who moved the structure, for a second time, to 616 8th Street. Meanwhile, the cornerstone of the new St. Mark's was laid on the site it had occupied in the old hall and the church was completed in 1923. 601 8th St., 301-776-8885

School No. 2, Laurel Colored School, was built in 1884 for the Grove's African American children. One teacher taught seven grades in one room. As the number of students increased, an annex was added; later, the Board of Education rented another building for the black community. It was used until 1930, when Laurel Grove School was opened. The former school is now a private residence. West St. opposite St. Mark's

ALSO VISIT:

Attractions

Laurel Museum

817 Main St.
301-725-7975
www.laurelhistory.org/museum

Montpelier Arts Center

9652 Muirkirk Rd.
301-377-7800; 410-792-0664;
TTY 301-490-2329
www.pgparcs.com

Montpelier Mansion (Listed on the National Register of Historic Places)

9650 Muirkirk Rd.
301-953-1376; TTY 301-454-1472
www.pgparcs.com

Patuxent Research Refuge/ National Wildlife Visitor's Center

10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop
301-497-5580
www.fws.gov/northeast/patuxent

Restaurants

Captain Jerry's Restaurant and Crab House

143 Bowie Rd.
301-604-CRAB
www.captainjerryscrabs.com

India Gate

Boulevard Shops Cherry Lane
14605 Baltimore Ave.
301-490-9949

Pasta Plus Restaurant

209 Gorman Ave.
301-498-5100

Red Hot and Blue

677 Main St.
301-953-1943

Sidepockets Sports Bar and Grill

Laurel Shopping Plaza
904 Upper Fairlawn Ave.
301-604-1300

Sullivan's Steak and Beverage

9624 Fort Meade Rd.
301-498-7427