

# The African American Heritage Preservation Program: Cemetery Conservation

## Program Background

The African American Heritage Preservation Program (AAHPP) was created during the 2010 session of the Maryland General Assembly. The Program is administered as a joint partnership of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC), a unit of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI), and the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP). This Program provides grant funding to encourage the identification and preservation of buildings, sites, and communities of historical and cultural importance to the African American experience in Maryland.

## Program Eligibility

Eligible applicants for Program funding include non-profit organizations and local jurisdictions. Business entities and individuals may also apply for Program grants when seeking funds for a preservation or development project that serves a high public purpose.

Eligible properties are buildings, sites, or communities of historical or cultural importance to the African American experience in Maryland.

Eligible projects include acquisition, construction, and capital improvement. Pre-development costs directly associated with a capital project are also eligible, and may include such work as conditions assessments, preparation of construction documents, or necessary archaeological investigation.

## Capital Cemetery Projects

Eligible cemetery projects may include such work as acquisition of an African American cemetery, repair and cleaning of grave markers by a professional cemetery conservationist, repair or installation of pathways, and installation of permanent signage. Pre-development work that will lead to a physical conservation project may be eligible, including creation of a cemetery conservation plan, use of ground-penetrating radar to identify unmarked burials, or mapping of a cemetery to determine its boundaries.

Following are examples of cemetery projects funded through AAHPP.



*St. Stephens AME Church and Cemetery, Talbot County –  
FY2017 and FY2018 AAHPP grant recipient.*



## Mutual Memorial Cemetery, Montgomery County

The Cedar Mount Cemetery, now known as the Mutual Memorial Cemetery, is a unique burial ground that links the history of Sandy Spring's 19<sup>th</sup> century freed African American community and the local Quaker community. The local African American community, freed by the Quakers prior to Emancipation, was one of the first in Maryland and attracted formerly enslaved individuals from other parts of the state. The land for the cemetery was purchased parcel-by-parcel, beginning in 1869.

Many of the cemetery's markers were hand-made of unique materials, requiring the careful hand of a professional conservator to repair. In 2009, a small group of committed individuals formed the 501(c)13 Mutual Memorial Cemetery Foundation to care for the cemetery. They were awarded a FY2017 AAHPP grant and their project is now in the third and final phase. The first phase of work included a professional cemetery conservation plan and map of the cemetery denoting boundaries and unmarked burials. The second phase of work included cleaning and repair of the cemetery's grave markers. The third phase included fabrication of permanent interpretive signage that was installed in the cemetery.



*Above: Conservation crew resetting a stone.*



*Above left and center: Before and after resetting of Margaret Waters's marker.*

*Above right: Handmade marker with decorative inset marbles and pebbles.*

*Bottom left: Before and after cleaning and re-attaching the urn to Evan Snowden's marker, which was found lying on the ground near the marker.*



## Laboring Sons Memorial Ground, Washington County



This property was purchased in 1851 by the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons to be used as a cemetery for African Americans. Over 1,500 African Americans were interred on the site between 1851 and 1949, when the Society disbanded and the property was given to the City of Frederick. A portion of the site was paved as an alley and the remainder became a playground for use exclusively by white children. The grounds were re-dedicated in 2003 as a place of remembrance for those buried there and for the history of African Americans in Frederick County.



The City of Frederick received a FY2012 grant to replace paths with permanent hardscaping, add site furnishings, and install permanent interpretive signage.



*Top left: Laboring Sons Memorial Ground before work began.*

*Center left: Laboring Sons Memorial Ground path and planters after work was completed.*

*Bottom left: Roelkey Myers (City of Frederick), Tony White (GOCL), Ted Mack (MCAAHC), Rose Chaney (AARCH), David Key (AARCH) at the Laboring Sons Memorial Ground.*

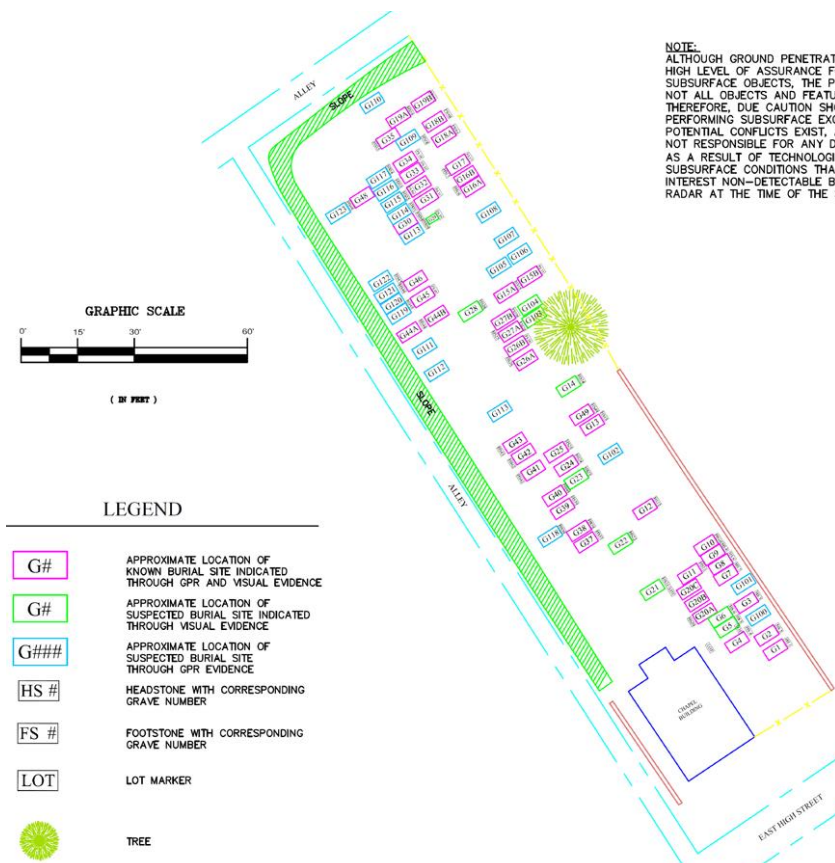
*Above right: Interpretive signage installed as part of the grant project.*



## Tolson's Chapel Cemetery, Washington County

A stone's throw from the site of the Battle of Antietam, in Sharpsburg, a small congregation of African Americans joined hands in 1867 to build a house of worship they called Tolson's Chapel. The one-room log structure also served as a school. The teacher was provided first by the Freedmen's Bureau and later by Washington County; around 1900 a dedicated school for African American children was constructed nearby. The cemetery, which was active since at least the 1880s, contains the graves of approximately 80 individuals. From the cemetery and local records a compelling portrait of the African American community emerges: men who were enslaved on farms that bore the brunt of the Battle of Antietam; an original trustee of the church who was born in slavery in Virginia and served in the U.S. Colored Infantry; a woman, already free before Emancipation, who donated a Bible to Tolson's Chapel.

A FY2013 AAHPP grant funded a cemetery conditions assessment and conservation plan, as well as restoration of grave markers requiring gentle cleaning, patching spalls and cracks, and resetting leaning stones.



Top left: Map of the cemetery at Tolson's Chapel. Courtesy of the Chicora Foundation and GEL Engineering of NC.

Top right: Conducting ground-penetrating radar.

Below: Grave markers before and after conservation.





## Catoctin Furnace African American Cemetery, Frederick County

The African American cemetery located near Catoctin Furnace is thought to be the most complete cemetery of its kind associated with the early industrial history of the United States. Over one hundred free and enslaved individuals are buried here, having labored at the iron furnace and in the surrounding settlement. Many were skilled artisans, some of whom may have been taken directly from Africa for their skill at iron-working.



*Above: Memorial platform with view toward the cemetery.*



*Above: New interpretive panel near the trailhead at Catoctin Furnace.*

The Catoctin Furnace Historical Society plans to purchase and preserve the cemetery, which is located on private property adjacent to Cunningham Falls State Park. The historical society received a FY2016 AAHPP grant to construct an ADA-accessible trail leading to an overlook of the cemetery and to install permanent interpretive signage about the cemetery and local African American community.



## Ongoing Cemetery Projects

### St. Stephens AME Church, Talbot County

Eighteen African American veterans returned from service in the Civil War to found an African American settlement they named Unionville. St. Stephens Church is one of the oldest buildings in the village, and all eighteen of the founding veterans are buried in its cemetery, which is still in use today. The church received AAHPP grant funds to repair the church steeple, make repairs to markers in the cemetery, and add permanent interpretive signage to the cemetery. Church members and MHT staff are working to finalize conveyance of the preservation easement on the property, and grant work will begin as soon as the easement is in place. The church and cemetery are part of the locally designated Civil War Trails, and will continue to be focal points for sharing Unionville's African American heritage with the public.



*Above: Grave markers of eight of the veterans who founded Unionville.*

### Sotterley Plantation: African American Cemetery, St. Mary's County



*Above: Graves identified using ground-penetrating radar.*

While clearing fallen trees after a storm, museum staff at Sotterley Plantation discovered evidence of a previously unknown burial ground near the last extant slave cabin on the property. Using ground-penetrating radar, an archaeologist identified unmarked burials within the cemetery, which contains the graves of individuals enslaved at Sotterley Plantation. FY2019 AAHPP grant funds have been used to construct a trail to the cemetery. Remaining funds will be used to install permanent interpretive signage and benches at the perimeter of the cemetery.

### Ellsworth Cemetery, Carroll County

Six African American Union Army veterans established the Ellsworth Cemetery in 1876 to provide a burial place for the African American residents of Westminster. The cemetery was named after Colonel Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth, the first Union officer to die in the Civil War. A cemetery conservation plan has been completed, and the Community Foundation of Carroll County, Inc. will use their FY2020 AAHPP grant to conserve the grave markers and mark unmarked burials identified during mapping.



*Above: Ellsworth Cemetery.*