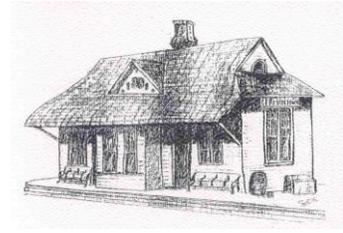


THE GERMANTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



Volume XXVIII Number 2

Spring 2019

“Grand Old Ditch”

the C&O Canal

Past, Present and Future



Paul A. Saunders/Corbis/VCG

Saturday, April 27

3-4pm

Germantown Library, Room A

Judith Welles, a local history author and C&O Canal volunteer, provides historic highlights and photographs of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, including the canal's role in the Civil War, historic structures, and unique engineering marvels in the mid-19th Century. The presentation also describes current-day challenges facing the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

*Co-sponsored by
the Germantown Historical Society, the Germantown
Library, and Montgomery History*

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal

If you are planning on visiting the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal this spring or summer, you might want to learn more about the Canal, which is one of Maryland's most interesting historic sites as well as a lovely place for hiking, bicycling and picnicking. It is a beautiful way to connect with nature, especially right now as the Spring Beauty and Virginia Bluebells dot the ground and the Redbud and Dogwood blossoms light up the understory while majestic ancient trees tower over the towpath.

History of the C & O Canal reflects the history of the County, State and Nation. All along its 184.5 miles, 37 of which lie in Montgomery County, there are sites relating to the Civil War and to the Underground Railroad, as well as sturdy lock houses, locks, turning basins, and aqueducts. From its beginnings in 1828 until its completion to Cumberland in 1850, the Canal was in constant competition with the B & O Railroad, becoming obsolete in the early 20th century, succumbing to commercial dominance of the railroad and the ravages of nature with the recurring flooding of the Potomac River. Up until that time, it was a mainstay of local farms and quarries, supplying Seneca red sandstone to Washington building projects, and produce from local farms to the city. It also brought fertilizer, finished goods, and building materials to the locals.

After the Civil War the Metropolitan Branch of the B & O Railroad was completed and took most of the central Montgomery County commerce away from the Canal.

The Canal lay dormant until the early 1950s when Chief Justice William O. Douglas led a campaign to save the “Grand Old Ditch” from demolition and conversion into a parkway, and it is now a National Historical Park for all to enjoy for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding and visiting historic sites. Many of the former lock-keepers houses are available for rent for a few days of stepping back I time.



African American Communities of Germantown *By Susan Cooke Soderberg*

Before they were freed by a new Maryland Constitution on November 1, 1864, there were about 130 enslaved people living in what is now Germantown. After emancipation some of them left the County and even the state, but most stayed to form small communities near the farms where they had grown up. Some of the names of their descendants can still be found in the area today; names such as: Brown, Deakons, Hoes, Warren, Diggs, Jackson, Noland, Prather, Duffin, Clagett, Joy, Walker, Smith, and Watkins.

Some of the Germantown communities, like the one called Pinetop on Riffleford Road or the one off Middlebrook Road, have disappeared. But one community was stable enough to have a church and a school and is still intact today, although with modern buildings replacing the original ones. This is Brownstown, located just west of the intersection of Blackrock Road with Germantown Road.

Unlike the forgotten communities, which had been built on land donated or sold on credit to them by their former owners, this one was built on land that once belonged to George Patterson, an African American who had been free long before the proclaimed emancipation. William and Clorisa Brown purchased 10 ½ acres in 1868. They had 7 children – 4 sons and 3 daughters, many of whom purchased land nearby to raise their families, so the little community became known as Brownstown. The daughters married into the Campbell, Thomas and Mason families.

The Browns built a 2-story 4 room house of logs on the land. They held Methodist religious meetings in their home, and donated about an acre of land for a cemetery and future church. After the County took this house off the historic preservation list in 1978, it was moved to the Smith Center in Meadowside Park as a representation of a pioneer home.

A frame church was built by the congregation in 1885, and another acre of adjacent land was purchased by the congregation in 1893. The church burned down in 1950 and after much hard work a new church was completed in 1962. Raymond Baker of Rockville was the architect and builder. The cornerstone of the old church was placed in the foundation of the new one, Asbury United Methodist Church. The cemetery on the west side of the building contains the graves of Brownstown residents going back to the 1870s.

There was a little one-room log schoolhouse on Germantown Road that had been built before 1860 to serve the white children of Darnestown and Germantown. In 1883 when new schools were built for the white children in those communities,

the old log building and lot was purchased by the School Board from William Brown for \$160 and made a



school for the Black children for miles around until 1910 when a new school was built for the white children and the 1883 white school was turned over to the Black community. Schools for the Black children were first established in the County in 1872 after the new Maryland constitution allowed a portion of taxes collected from Blacks to be apportioned to schools.

The old log school at Brownstown was turned into a residence and then abandoned in the 1950s. It was moved to the Smith Center along with the Brown's house in the 1980s.

Information for this article came from: "Brown Family Memorial Booklet," August 7, 1993; History of the Nineteenth Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C., Nina Honemond Clarke, 1983; History of the Black Public Schools of Montgomery County, Maryland 1872-1961, Nina H. Clarke & Lillian B. Brown, 1978; A History of Germantown, Maryland, Susan Soderberg, 1988; MHT Landmarks Inventory for Asbury United Methodist Church, 1972 and for Brownstown in 2007, "1868 ex-Slave Census of Montgomery County,"

NEWS & NOTES

Cider Barrel Update

Laura Richman has come to an agreement with the owner of the Cider Barrel, Elm Street Development, and is busy with her contractor getting permits for the renovation work – which should start shortly. No date has yet been set for the grand opening, but Laura has been talking to local organic farmers about selling their produce at the Barrel.

Zachariah Waters Cemetery Update

GHS President Soderberg attended the presentation by Symmetry at Cloverleaf on the cemetery to the Historic Preservation commission on April 14, and was asked by the Commission to speak. The HPC and the Planning Board staff have been working well with the GHS and so far we have been able to achieve:

- Retaining the cemetery where it is and having the property owner maintain it and keep it open and accessible to the public inside a “Waters Memorial Park.”.
- Making sure that a historic marker is correct and includes the most important information.
- Having the grave of Zachariah Waters and his two brothers Basil and William recognized by the DAR and SAR as Revolutionary War patriots.
- Leading to the discovery of more graves that might have been ignored and bulldozed.

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation is waiting for a response from Symmetry to their request to move the five graves found in the future Dorsey Mill Road by archeology to the Zachariah Waters Cemetery before they can exhume the graves. We are very anxious to discover just what kind of remains are in those unmarked graves.

Community Day Report

The GHS had a booth at the Community Day sponsored by Montgomery College, Germantown, to celebrate their 40th anniversary on March 30 was a whopping success with more than 1,000 people attending. We had many stop by our booth and view our aerial maps from 1968 and 1986 and our exhibit “Germantown in 1979.” Lots of our brochures and newsletters were handed out. Thanks to Board members Karen Adjei, Wayne Tobiassen and Susan Soderberg.

LOCAL HISTORY CALENDAR

Ongoing Exhibits

“**Threads of History**” – the art of sewing at the Damascus Heritage Museum, located behind the Damascus Library. Open Wed. & Sat. 12-4pm. 301-253-6150.

“**History Between the Pages: The Family Bible in Genealogy Research**” online exhibit by Montgomery History. Montgomeryhistory.org/Exhibitions/Bibles.

For a Calendar of History related events go to: www.heritagemontgomery.org

“THE HISTORY OF GERMANTOWN,”
tailored to your group or specific area, is being offered by the Germantown Historical Society.

This PowerPoint Presentation can be given to any group for a \$50 donation. Call 301-972-2707

Germantown Community Flea Markets 2018 SEASON

**First Saturdays starting April 6
8am-1pm**

The Flea Markets take place, weather permitting, at the MARC commuter parking lot, Rt. 118 and Bowman Mill Drive. Both adult and teen volunteers are needed. SSL hours apply. Hours to volunteer are 5:30-9:30am, or 9:30am-1:30pm. If you would like to help out with this fundraiser and fun event call 301-972-2707.

See more at: www.germantownMDhistory.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (1 year)

Mail to: The Germantown Historical Society, P.O. Box 475, Germantown, MD 20875

Single: \$20

Senior: \$10

Family: \$25

Corporate: \$100

Supporting: \$100

Non-profit organization: \$30

Additional tax-deductible contribution

Name _____

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We're on the Web!
www.germantonMDhistory.org

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