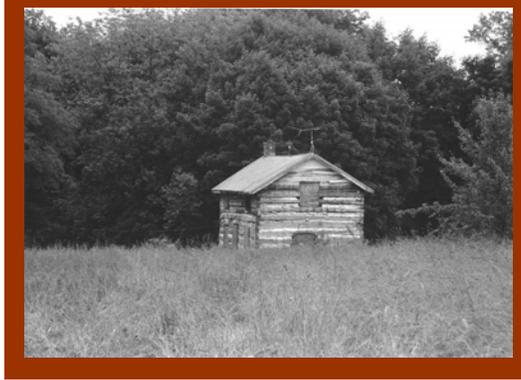


Occasional Papers in
Baltimore County History



MAPPING A PARADOX:

***The African-American
Cultural Landscape
in
Antebellum
Baltimore County
Maryland***

Kimberly R. Abe

Landmarks Preservation Commission
Baltimore County Office of Planning
Towson, Maryland

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P R E F A C E

This report is the first in a series of Occasional Papers to be published by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Our purpose is to make available more conveniently – both in hard copy and on the County's website – works of scholarship on the more than three centuries of Baltimore County's rich history.

The Commission is particularly pleased to present this document, completed just before the 140th anniversary of the emancipation of all slaves in Maryland, on November 1, 1864. The study's author, Ms. Kimberly R. Abe, currently serves the Commission as a Preservation Planner, focusing primarily on research and especially on the history and preservation of the County's forty-some African-American communities.

This report is adapted from Ms. Abe's thesis approved in 2004 by Goucher College as part of the graduate program through which she received an additional Master of Arts degree, with honors, in Historic Preservation. As readers will discover, the study is not only a work of keen, insightful scholarship but is also grounded in exemplary ethical sensibilities. Moreover, it is not simply an academic exercise; as a work on this subject should do, the study inspires and challenges readers to become more involved and more effective in protecting the scarce physical resources – archeological sites as well as standing structures – surviving from this tragic period of American history. The Commission invites readers to learn from Ms. Abe's research, and to join in this endeavor.

Landmarks Preservation Commission

James E. Matthews, Chairman



RESOLUTION

FOR RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF
SITES RELATED TO SLAVERY

WHEREAS, during the first two centuries of Baltimore County's existence, until November 1, 1864, it was a legal and routinely accepted part of the culture in Maryland for some persons to hold other human beings in absolute involuntary servitude; and

WHEREAS this absolute deprivation of liberty, and sometimes even of life, had manifold horrendous consequences – often destroying the sanctity of family relationships, with children and spouses heartlessly sold forever away from one another; and

WHEREAS slaves were also ruthlessly deprived of the fruits of their own brutally hard labor, without which Baltimore County's economic prosperity could scarcely have been achieved; and

WHEREAS slaves were regarded as mere chattels, perhaps to be treated with some modicum of decency, perhaps to be shockingly abused and defiled – solely depending upon their owners' degree of humanity, and with no recourse to appeal for justice; and

WHEREAS untold thousands of slaves were held captive on properties throughout Baltimore County, some lucky few in the attics or cellars of a master's home or outbuilding, but mostly in crude, wretched shelters, virtually all of which have disappeared during the last century and a half; and

WHEREAS, as the amazing archeological discoveries at Fort Garrison have proven, slavery sites are likely still to hold the potential for yielding remarkable information about the survival of African culture among the inhabitants of slave "quarters" from which the County's culture was so immeasurably enriched through subsequent generations; and

WHEREAS heartrending accounts by and about the slaves with the inspiring courage to risk the perils of fleeing from their bondage have been linked to specific properties still existing in Baltimore County; and

WHEREAS a deep sense of common humanity compels this generation of Baltimore Countians to honor the memories of these tens of thousands of slaves for their lifetimes not only of quiet desperation, enduring scarcely-imaginable suffering, but also of

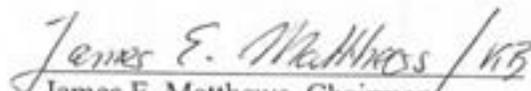
courageous resistance to their oppression, striving continually to assert their humanity;
and

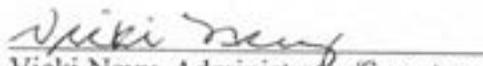
WHEREAS no memorial to these victims could be more fitting or more compelling than the few remaining buildings and places associated with their personal tragedies and triumphs;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Baltimore County Landmarks Preservation Commission that, for the purpose of recognizing and protecting the buildings, structures and potential archeological sites which are so intrinsically associated with these events of transcending historical importance and which constitute the mute, physical legacy of slavery in Baltimore County:

1. The Commission will, as rapidly as research is completed, move to achieve Landmark listing or other suitable measures for the permanent protection of the buildings, structures, and sites that are reasonably believed to have been associated with this tragic era of our County's history; and
2. The Commission requests its staff to treat slavery-related properties among its highest proprieties for research, Landmark nomination or other protective measures.

DULY ADOPTED by vote of the Commission
this 10th day of March, 2005.


James E. Matthews, Chairman


Vicki Nevy, Administrator/Secretary

*Mapping a Paradox:
The African-American Cultural Landscape
in
Antebellum Baltimore County, Maryland*

by

Kimberly R. Abe
Preservation Planner

Landmarks Preservation Commission
Baltimore County Office of Planning
Towson, Maryland

ABSTRACT

Slavery sites and other cultural resources associated with antebellum African-American life in Baltimore County, Maryland, and nationally, have historically been under-researched. Thus, many of these buildings and sites are unrecognized as historically significant and are needlessly demolished or neglected. The losses are particularly tragic because these resources are some of the only remaining records of lives that were largely undocumented in writing. Consequently, the failure to document America's slavery sites is indirectly resulting in the destruction of history itself.

This thesis presents historical geography as an innovative research approach for identifying and protecting Baltimore County's slave past through the partial construction of an atlas to portray the county's antebellum African-American experience. This research approach extends recognition of resources beyond the slave cabin to the larger cultural landscape that included the farmstead, towns, and other types of physical environments. This Baltimore County cultural landscape is one of the country's most complex and intriguing. By 1860 this county had the largest free black population in the country living within in a slave society, and bordering on the free state of Pennsylvania.

An antebellum African-American atlas illustrating the paradoxical nature of slavery in Baltimore County provides a comprehensive geographic perspective for efficient study and presentation of the locations of, and relationships between, sites of slavery, runaway slaves' sites of origin, free black communities, and other resources. Foremost, this prototype map strengthens the case for protection of these sites as both records and as monuments to convey the country's largely untold story of slavery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several sets of support teams that assisted in producing this study. Dr. George McDaniel, Dr. T. Stephen Whitman, and Dr. Dale Gyure, my three advisory committee members, provided valuable expertise. My two colleagues, Tim Dugan and John W. McGrain, not only shouldered a great deal of my workload during the last several months, they also provided excellent editorial assistance, research assistance, and emotional support. Additionally, Jean White and Jen Meacham, computer and Geographic Information Systems experts, provided flawless technical support.

Kimberly R. Abe
Towson, Maryland
June 2004

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INTRODUCTION

*The geographer cannot study houses and towns, fields and factories, as to their where and why without asking himself about their origins.... He cannot treat the localization of activities without knowing the functioning of the culture, the process of living together of the group, and he cannot do this except by historical reconstruction.*¹

Carl O. Sauer

Joshua Johnson was an early nineteenth century Baltimore portraitist, famous for his bold colors and his emphasis on the fine details of his clients' clothing. Joshua Johnson was born a slave, and his white father purchased Joshua's freedom when he became an adult. Ellin Moale, a Baltimore city resident, was one of Johnson's clients.² Ellin Moale also owned eleven slaves at her Greenspring estate in Baltimore County, Maryland.³

Jack Cox was a body servant for both John and Richard McGaw. Richard McGaw granted freedom to Jack in 1845 and gave him a small farm and an annuity of ninety dollars a year.⁴ Jack Cox's house is still used as a residence.

In the middle of a summer night in 1861, three female slaves belonging to M. Worthington and one to a man named Hugh Horner, attempted to escape with the Ninth New York Regiment of the Union army as the soldiers returned home. Two of the

¹ Carl O. Sauer, "Forward to Historical Geography," Transcribed, "Geographers on the Web," Fall 1997, <http://www.colorado.edu/geography/giw/sauer-co/sauer-co.html>. First published in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 31 (1941): 1-24.

² J. Hall Pleasants, "Joshua Johnson, The First American Negro Portrait Painter." *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 37 (June 1942): 141.

³ Maryland State Papers, "Federal Direct Tax of 1798" (Annapolis: Maryland State Archives, Microfilm M 3469). Hereinafter, this source is identified as "1798 Federal Tax List."

⁴ *Maryland Journal* (Towson, MD), December 5, 1868.

women were captured in Bosley's Swamp, but one of Mrs. Worthington's slaves escaped.⁵

In the middle of another night in May 1844, James Watkins, using the North Star as a guide, headed north in his second attempt to escape from Luke Ensor's estate called "Young Jacob's Choice." James Watkins' narrative about his dehumanizing experiences on that farm, and his harrowing escape, reads like a modern suspense novel. The slave "quarters" that had barely housed him were "a kind of shed, where male and female slaves were huddled in together for the night without any bed but a sloping platform inclining to the fire."⁶ The slave quarters no longer exist at Young Jacob's Choice, but the main house, a spring-house, and a barn still stand as unmarked monuments to James Watkins' phenomenal, scarcely-known life.

Young Jacob's Choice is listed on the county's historic sites inventory,⁷ but not because of its association with James Watkins. To date, if the history of slavery in Baltimore County is studied at all, it is only researched as an ancillary aspect of the history of a site or other resource, rarely as the focus. Baltimore County is not alone in this practice. A recent article in the National Trust's magazine posed the challenge that "when it comes to this country's deepest trauma, the American landscape is still largely silent."⁸

The silence in the contemporary landscape is all the more paradoxical in light of the increasing accessibility of information about slavery. The spectacular growth in recent years, however, in the number of internet sites and literature about slavery only partly addresses the challenge. Images and words about the long-gone participants in the national trauma can be conveyed eloquently by books, articles, and web pages. Meanwhile, as travelers pass unknowingly by, the buildings and sites associated with this past are steadily disappearing.

⁵ *Baltimore County Advocate* (Towson, MD), August 17, 1861.

⁶ James Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a "Chattel" in Maryland, U.S.; Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, Together with an Appeal on Behalf of Three Million Such "Pieces of Property," Still Held Under the Standard of the Eagle*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, "Documenting the American South," transcribed, 2001, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/watkins52/watkin52.html>.

⁷ The Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), in cooperation with the Baltimore County Office of Planning, is conducting an on-going survey to inventory historic properties. In this thesis, the files on the districts and individual sites are identified (in parentheses) by the "BA" reference numbers. The "Young Jacob's Choice" property is (BA 00373).

⁸ Adam Goodheart, "Facing the Slave Past: Historic Sites Grapple with America's Greatest Shame," *Preservation*, 53, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2001): 36.

The irony is that the buildings and farms where the slaves lived and toiled, suffered and perished, are some of the few records of slavery that remain. Slavery was largely undocumented in written records, so the structures and landscapes associated with slavery remain as significant, largely-unrecognized records. The stone walls and the soils at slave sites may still hold beads, tools, cooking utensils, and other artifacts. Study of these artifacts by professional archaeologists may say as much as the written records, but it could certainly say different things about the people who inhabited the land and buildings. What are the possibilities, for instance, that the Young Jacob's Choice site may hold artifacts that can help in writing other chapters of James Watkins' story? Slave sites and landscapes should be preserved for this reason alone, and this thesis proposes a means by which the preservation needs and opportunities can more readily be pursued.

Buildings and landscapes associated with slavery in Baltimore County should also be recognized for protection because they reflect the county's unique history of slavery within this northernmost slaveholding state. Baltimore County was a border county, within the border state that in 1860 had the largest free black population in the United States.⁹ Maryland state historians describe slavery in Baltimore County and in the city of Baltimore as paradoxical, since both areas were hubs for free blacks and yet also bastions of slaveholding.¹⁰ These conditions created a unique African-American society in this region, whereas in most of the deep South, African-American slaves probably never encountered a free African-American person in their entire life.

This distinctive slave culture is partially a result of the county's geographic location in the Mid-Atlantic region, as well as the county's unique geography within the Chesapeake Bay Tidewater region. Logically, maps from that era should reveal clues about how the geographic conditions may have affected and created the county's paradoxical African-American society, as well as how slavery and freedom, in turn, shaped the development of the land and communities.

This thesis proposes a new approach to documenting and protecting the county's slave past by beginning to reconstruct a cultural landscape map of the county's antebellum African-American population. Historical geography, an under-used resource in preservation, will direct the work towards a comprehensive analysis of the entire panorama of the antebellum experience. This reconstructed atlas of the county's African-American history will allow researchers to study a wide array of issues, including the various spatial relationships among slave sites and free black communities, and how both kinds of sites are patterned across the county's landscape.

⁹ University of Virginia, "United States Historical Census Data Browser." Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, 1998, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>. Unless otherwise cited, all population the data in this thesis attributed to the decennial U.S. Censuses were obtained from this source and are cited as "Historical Census Data Browser."

¹⁰ Maryland State Archives, "Beneath the Underground: The Flight to Freedom, and Communities in Antebellum Maryland; Baltimore County Study" <http://mdslavery.net>.

This new atlas of the county's African-American cultural landscape will include seventy-four farmsteads and homesteads still existing that were inhabited by slaves in the early- or mid-nineteenth century. The slavery data will be extracted from tax lists, wills, inventories, and the 1850 U.S. Census. For ten of these slavery sites, the history of slavery is documented in the years 1798,¹¹ 1823,¹² and 1850.¹³ The atlas will also include eighteen farms that were points of departure for fugitive slaves; the county's pre-Civil War free black neighborhoods; antebellum African-American churches; and Quaker-owned farms and buildings representing white, non-slave-owning residents who may have been involved in the Underground Railroad.

This atlas includes extant sites and structures since this thesis seeks to demonstrate how historical geography can be employed for preservation. An atlas of African-American cultural resources produces great new research insights, while at the same time the atlas strengthens the argument to protect the resources constituting the places on the map.

Chapter I begins the development of this atlas with a broad overview of slavery in Baltimore County, tracing its evolution through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and emphasizing geographical factors that influenced its development.¹⁴ Chapter II begins with an examination of slave housing within the Chesapeake region over the course of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The discussion of slave housing sets the stage for an analysis of fifteen extant slave quarters in Baltimore County. When presented in the context of each property's history, the significance of these slave quarters to the complexities and extensions of the cultural landscape of slavery in Baltimore County should become apparent.

Chapters III and IV together comprise the centerpiece of the thesis. Chapter III focuses on slavery sites within the landscape, whereas Chapter IV introduces the sites of free African-Americans. Chapter III presents the slavery study sites within the context of the African-American Cultural Atlas, considers the analytical use of fugitive slave advertisements and slave narratives, and describes the methodology used to compile the

¹¹ 1798 Federal Tax List. (See footnote 3.)

¹² Baltimore County Commissioners of the Tax, "Assessment Record" (Annapolis: Maryland State Archives, Microfilm CM1203); herein cited as "1823 County Tax List."

¹³ U.S. Census of Population, 1850 (Washington: National Archives, Microfilm Publications, Microcopy 432, Roll 484, Maryland, Baltimore County, Schedule 2; accessed on CD-ROM disk published by Heritage Quest, 2001); herein cited as "1850 Census Slave Schedule."

¹⁴ The City of Baltimore was incorporated in 1796, but remained partially under the jurisdiction of Baltimore County until 1851. This thesis focuses on the area that currently constitutes Baltimore County, but, to the extent that city data are not separately available, some pre-1851 countywide data reported in this thesis may include the city.

data and develop the atlas. Chapter III also explores the relationships between soil conditions and slavery in the agriculturally significant Worthington Valley. Chapter IV investigates fugitive slave advertisements as records of slave resistance, and provides summaries of the county's pre-Civil War free black neighborhoods, antebellum African-American churches, and Quaker-owned farms and buildings, as well as a brief study of German-American settlement patterns.

These chapters work collectively as a thesis that explores largely un-chartered research territories. The journey begins in the first chapter with a summary of the parallel development of both a free and an enslaved African-American society in Baltimore County.