

Historic Rockville

Take a Walking Tour of Rockville's African American Heritage

The Historic District Commission welcomes you to Rockville! We hope you enjoy this glimpse of African American history in and around the Town Center.

All sites on the tour are within walking distance of the Rockville Metro Station. Public parking is available at street meters, at the Montgomery County parking garage on Fleet Street, and at the Rockville Metro Station.

Rockville's African American Heritage

Since Rockville's foundation, African Americans have figured prominently in the history of this city, the seat of Montgomery County. From the earliest tobacco plantations, farmed by hundreds of able-bodied African men, women, and children to today's multicultural suburban families, African American citizens are part of the continuing growth and success of the Rockville community.

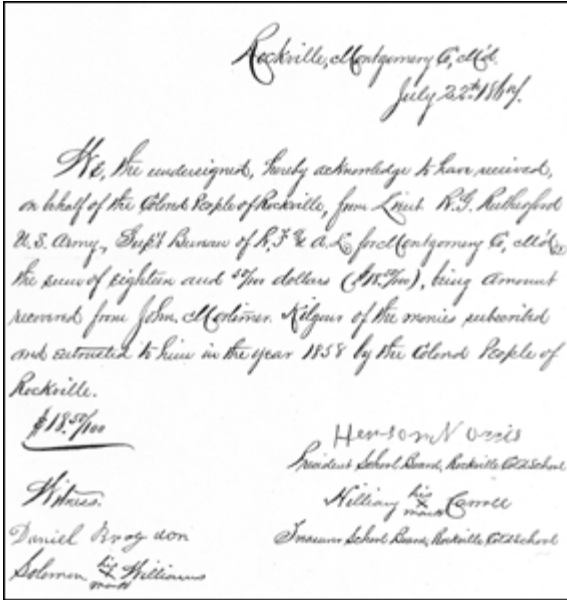
This walking tour documents the people and places in the city's downtown core that played significant roles in black history from the 18th century through the 20th. The tour touches on the historic themes common to the African American experience, such as slavery, emancipation, religion, education, commerce, and civil rights.



Take a walk through history on the City's African American Heritage Walking Tour. [Watch as Rockville 11 covered the opening of the 18-site tour](#) and got the reaction of some of the participants.

Although some of the sites mentioned on this tour were demolished for new development in the 1950s and during Urban Renewal efforts in the 1960s, their stories remain even if physical traces do not. These accounts of Rockville's African Americans are filled with tragedy, conflict, and struggle, but also with hope, determination, and community pride. They tell not only Rockville's African American history, but of the shared experiences of Rockville's growth as a community.

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Site 1 - Red Brick Courthouse

29 Courthouse Square

The Red Brick Courthouse was built in 1891 and is the third courthouse to stand in this location. While this building saw many cases involving African Americans' legal rights, the previous building, built in 1840, was where the Freedmen's Bureau worked with the Montgomery County courts to protect the rights of Rockville's African Americans immediately following the Civil War.

In one notable case, the Freedmen's Bureau succeeded in recovering funds that had been raised by Rockville's African Americans to construct a church. In 1858, freedmen and possibly slaves had raised subscriptions for the church and entrusted the money to John M. Kilgour. Soon after, Kilgour left Rockville to join the Confederate army and did not return. The Freedmen's Bureau tracked down Kilgour, who had moved out of state, and recovered the money. The funds were returned to the black community in 1867 to pursue construction of a church and school.

The receipt for the return money is signed by Henson Norris and Daniel Brogdon of the Rockville Colored School Board. Their signatures indicate the ambition among newly freed slaves to learn to read and write, rights that had been denied to them during slavery. Hilliary Carroll, like most other recently freed slaves, was illiterate, but by his mark, endorsed the school so that future generations could be educated.



Site 2 - 1931 Courthouse

27 Courthouse Square

The Montgomery County Courthouse was built in 1931 by the construction firm J. J. McDevitt Company, based in Charlotte, N.C. using local labor. The project provided an opportunity for African American laborers in and around Rockville to find employment during the initial years of the Depression, when such prospects were becoming more and more scarce.

Skilled and unskilled laborers like the ones seen in these photos built the courthouse. Rockville's black carpenters, masons, welders, electricians, plumbers, machine operators, and others contributed to the completion of the building. Black artisans helped install the beautiful terrazzo floors, marble accents, and birch and walnut courtroom interiors.



In addition to its construction, the courthouse is significant in African American history as the site of many important events and trials in Rockville and Montgomery County dealing with segregation, civil rights, and equal employment opportunities. One case demonstrates the fight African Americans had on their hands achieving some of these basic rights.

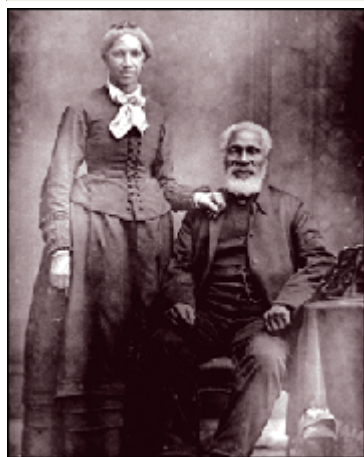
Gibbs v. Broome, et al.

While Montgomery County claimed to have a "separate but equal" approach to education for its black and white students, there were obvious inequities in the system. In the 1930s, issues regarding disproportional teachers' salaries came to a head. At that time, black and white teachers had to meet the same standards for hiring, yet white teachers

received on average double the salary of equally qualified black teachers.

With support from the NAACP and the Maryland Teachers' Association, William B. Gibbs, teacher and principal of Rockville Colored Elementary School, took on the task of demanding equal pay. In December 1936, he petitioned the Montgomery County Board of Education to pay all teachers equally, regardless of race. The Board denied the petition, so with representation from NAACP attorneys Thurgood Marshall (later a Supreme Court Justice), Charles Houston (Vice Dean of Howard University Law School) and others, Gibbs sued the Board of Education in Montgomery County Circuit Court.

Rather than fight what would surely be a losing battle, the Board settled the case out of court through School Superintendent Edwin Broome. The Board agreed to increase the salaries of its African American teachers to equal those of white teachers by phasing in a salary increase over two years. The battle for equal pay, however, was not without its casualties. Although not plainly stated to be a result of the lawsuit, Gibbs was fired the year following his case against the Board of Education on a technicality.



Site 3 - Adam Robb's Tavern

Site marker on West Jefferson between South Washington and Maryland Avenue

The site marker here indicates the location of Robb's Tavern, a popular overnight stop for travelers on the road between Georgetown and Frederick. The tavern was owned by Adam Robb, a prominent Rockville citizen and slave owner. One of his slaves was the young Josiah Henson. Henson lived in the Rockville vicinity for over thirty years before escaping to Canada. In 1849, he published his autobiography, upon which Harriet Beecher Stowe based her groundbreaking novel Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Born in Charles County, Maryland in 1789, Henson was five years old when he was sold at auction to Adam Robb and brought to Rockville. His siblings were sold to various owners and his mother went to Isaac Riley, whose farm was south of

Rockville along Old Georgetown Road.

Henson was a sickly child and did not thrive away from his family in the log slave cabin on Robb's farm. When it appeared certain that he would die, he was sent to live with his mother at Riley's farm. But Henson survived and Riley agreed to pay Robb his value in horseshoeing services.

Henson served Isaac Riley for over 30 years and Riley's brother in Kentucky for another five years before he was able to save enough money to purchase his freedom by preaching. But Riley cheated Henson by claiming Henson owed him more than their agreed price. This betrayal and the threat of being sold away from his family drove Henson, his wife, and their four children to flee to Canada via the Underground Railroad.



In Canada, Henson founded a cooperative settlement in Dawn, Ontario, where fugitive slaves found a supportive community and learned various trades and successful agricultural practices in order to support themselves. Henson provided technical education to people of African descent, lectured at abolitionist events in the U.S. and Canada, and traveled extensively to promote the Dawn Settlement and speak against the injustices of slavery.

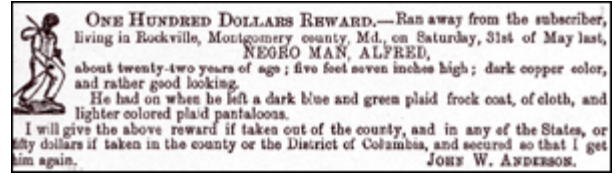
Surviving a harsh and often cruel youth as a slave in Montgomery County, Henson was able to rise above his humble beginnings and set an international example to all people as an abolitionist, educator, and humanitarian.



Site 4 - Dr. James Anderson House

100 South Washington Street

On May 31, 1856, Alfred Homer, escaped from the bondage of slavery at the house on this property. The 22 year old Alfred was owned by Dr. James Anderson, who had a medical practice and resided here on South Washington Street (the present building was constructed in 1893 by Anderson's daughter). When Homer escaped, notice was published in the Montgomery County Sentinel seeking his return with a \$100 reward. He was described as "rather good looking" and was wearing a dark green and blue plaid coat and lighter plaid pantaloons.



In escaping, Homer risked significant punishment and the possibility of being sold into far worse conditions in the deep south. Because Rockville was neither a shipping port nor on a railroad line at the time, escape was very difficult. The brave slaves who escaped from Rockville or passed through on their way north had to travel through forests, following creek beds, or on the roads at night, constantly at risk of being recaptured. Alfred Homer traveled by foot to Pennsylvania, where he found refuge with the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee and from there escaped to freedom in Canada.



Site 5 - Hungerford Tavern

Site marker at Northwest corner West Jefferson and South Washington Streets

Hungerford Tavern was a meeting place for area tobacco planters and lawyers to socialize and conduct business. In 1777, it was officially designated as the county courthouse while a permanent court building was being constructed.

Although each of the successive tavern operators owned slaves, the role of slaves here is largely undocumented. Women slaves likely would have done the cooking, cleaning, and possibly the serving. Men would have seen to the stabling

and feeding of horses, providing firewood, and running errands.

Slaves traveling with their owners were expected to care for their masters if they became rowdy or too inebriated. Those staying overnight were likely housed with the tavern owner's slaves (probably the kitchen for women and the stable for men). They exchanged gossip and passed news of family among the slaves working at the tavern and those owned by others.

A small jail built here when the tavern served as the county courthouse held those serving short sentences or awaiting trial, hanging, or other punishment. Slaves who had been caught trying to escape or were convicted of a crime such as stealing food were often held here until their time for whipping or the stocks came up. Free blacks were at risk of imprisonment if they did not carry papers identifying them as free. In such instances, they were often sold back into slavery to pay off their debt for being jailed. White Montgomery County residents were also punished if they were convicted of selling alcohol to slaves.



Site 6 - Prettyman House

104 West Jefferson Street

The Prettyman House was constructed in 1841 and remained in the white Johnston-Prettyman family for five generations. During their ownership, the family transitioned from owning household slaves to hiring and paying employees. Doubtless this process was difficult for former owners and freed slaves alike in terms of arranging terms of employment, living quarters, and pay.

Because education was largely forbidden to them during enslavement, African Americans found employment in jobs where literacy was not required. Many black women in Rockville worked in domestic service to white families. The c.1890 photograph of the Prettyman family with their servant holding the family's baby depicts a situation common for African American women.



The work of Rockville's black women from the mid-19th century into the 20th would have included cooking, childcare, housework, and shopping. Often the women lived with their employers, or they walked the few blocks to residences in Haiti, Middle Lane and later, Lincoln Park. Other women opted to work at home, taking in the laundry of white families for washing and ironing.

While not ideal, jobs in domestic service provided a steady income and allowed former slave families to unite in a single household and begin to build self-sufficient lives that included homeownership, freedom of religion, and access to education, possibilities which had been denied to them for so long.



Site 7 - Beall - Dawson House

103 West Montgomery Avenue

The Beall family was prominent in Rockville and became one of the largest slave owning families in Montgomery County. Upton Beall, a wealthy landowner and Clerk of the Court, built this house in about 1815. When he died in 1827, he owned 25 slaves, who worked here at the city house, at one of his mills on Watts Branch, or on his rural property Beallmont.

His wife (and later, their three daughters) continued farming operations in the country and on their 67-acre parcel here in Rockville. Their slaves worked the land, cooked, cleaned, tended kitchen gardens, canned, washed, ironed, and cared for

livestock.

The Beall daughters inherited their mother's and grandfather's slaves, bringing their total to 40 slaves by 1853. The 1860 census shows that the Bealls owned 52 slaves in that year, indicating that many children had been born into their ownership. The sisters apparently never bought or sold any slaves, save one. In 1850, Jane Beall sold John Henson to Josiah Henson for \$250. It is presumed that John is the brother that Josiah mentions purchasing from Maryland in his autobiography.

The majority of the Beall slaves were housed in three slave quarters on the different properties. Rooms for the household slaves likely were located above the kitchen wing over the archway, where they had the luxury of three rooms with windows and fireplaces. Field slaves at the Rockville property likely lived in quarters at the north edge of the property near Martins Lane. In addition, the Bealls hired out slaves for service in Washington D.C., many of them residing there with the families they worked for.

In 1862, the Beall sisters freed the 17 slaves who worked in D.C. and received \$9400 for them under a federal compensation program. The rest were not freed until emancipation was granted in Maryland on November 1, 1864.

The Bealls sold numerous small parcels of their land to the freed slaves and other African American families, notably along Martins Lane and Middle Lane, which became two of Rockville's black neighborhoods.

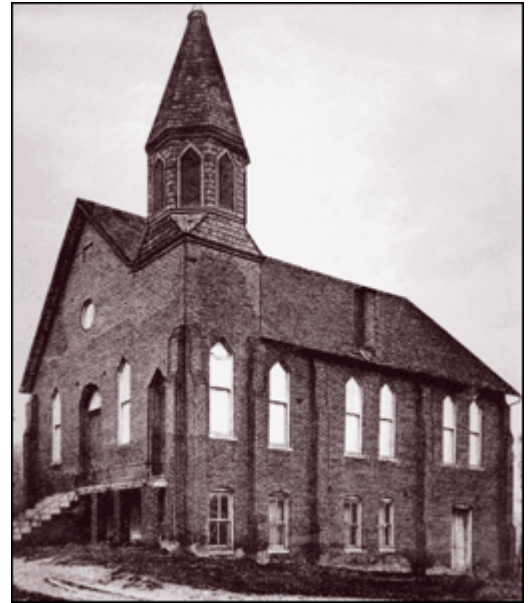


Site 8 - Jerusalem - Mt. Pleasant Church and Parsonage

21 and 17 Wood Lane Church

In 1834, the Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church purchased this lot on which to build a church, but funds for construction were limited. The congregation continued to meet in private homes with occasional visits from a "circuit rider," a traveling minister. The Rockville Circuit was established in 1845 to serve 527 black and 715 white Methodist members in the County. The Rockville M.E. Church incorporated in 1852 and erected a church here in about 1858.

The original church building was segregated. White worshippers entered the front door and sat in the main sanctuary while free blacks and slaves were relegated to the gallery upstairs and may have entered through a separate entrance. Communion was offered first to white parishioners and only when they were finished and had left the church were blacks offered communion. Some black church members refused to participate in such an outwardly racial system. Rather than attend church, they listened from outside the windows.



Tensions at the church reached a peak in the period immediately preceding and during the Civil War. Proslavery parishioners joined the M.E. Church South in 1863 and, after some legal disputes, relinquished ownership of this building to the predominantly black, anti-slavery M.E. Church North congregation in 1868. It was renamed Jerusalem M.E. Church in 1881 and merged with Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church in 1989.

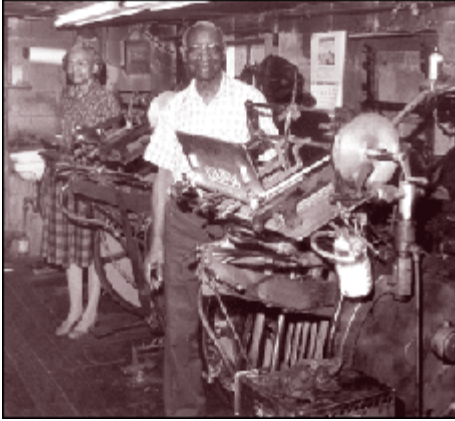
The church was substantially rebuilt in 1892 and for several years housed Rockville's black students after the elementary school burned in 1919. It was the site of graduation ceremonies for Rockville Colored School through the 1950s and is also where the Montgomery County chapter of the NAACP was founded in 1937.

Parsonage

Methodist churches worked hard to provide housing for their ministers. Rockville's M.E. congregation harvested trees on a church-owned lot in Poolesville, cutting them into lumber, and hauling them to Rockville to construct this dwelling. It was completed in 1912 and served for many years as the home of Reverend James Cole, his wife Lila, and their nine children. It continued as a parsonage until 1986 when the church purchased a new parsonage in a different location. It then became Cordelia House, a women's resource center. On February 14, 1999, the parsonage was damaged by arson but has remained standing.

These two buildings are among the few remaining church and parsonage units left in Montgomery County. The traditional vernacular style of the parsonage is the last example of this house type in central Rockville. Both the church and parsonage are protected as part of the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.





Site 9 - Hebron House and Print Shop

11 Wood Lane

Jesse and Celestine Hebron operated a printing business for over 50 years at this location. It was one of the most successful black business ventures in the County. Jesse Hebron started the printing business in a shop on Falls Road in 1932. He and Celestine married in 1938, just a few years before Jesse left to serve in the Army in World War II. In 1945 he received an honorable discharge and returned to Rockville. The Hebrons then moved their home and business to this location on Wood Lane.

Mr. Hebron built the house himself from concrete blocks he cast in a mold on site. He hand tinted the blocks a warm yellow terracotta color but the color varied from batch to batch. The Hebrons set up printing operations in the basement, providing services to corporations, individuals, churches, and other entities throughout Montgomery County and beyond.

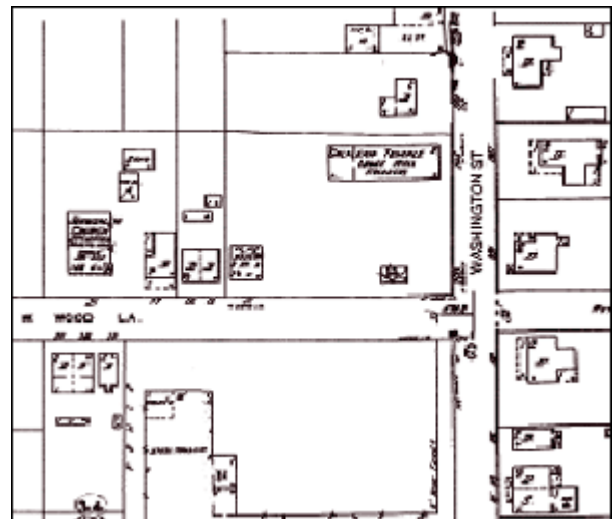
The Hebrons were long-time members of the Jerusalem-Mt. Pleasant Church next door. Jesse served as treasurer for almost 52 years and Celestine participated in many charitable efforts and fundraising events. Jesse was also well known in the community for his love of music. After the Hebrons died in 1997, Jerusalem Church purchased the house. It is currently used by the church for administrative offices.



Sites 10 - 15 - North Washington Street

Between Middle Lane and Beall Avenue

Both sides of North Washington Street were filled with African American residences and businesses by 1910. But as the 20th century progressed and automobiles became standard for Rockville families, the town began to suffer from lack of parking and modern, car-oriented shopping. Private redevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the purchase of lots along both sides of North Washington between Middle Lane and Beall Avenue for the construction of several strip shopping centers. In order to build these shopping centers, developer Hill and Kimmel Construction Co., bought individual lots and razed many structures that had been important centers of African American cultural life, but were in various states of disrepair and abandonment. Among the demolished buildings were the Rockville Colored School, Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church, the Galilean Fishermen's Temple, and many residences.



Site 10 - Galilean Fishermen's Temple

200 North Washington Street

By the turn of the century, Rockville's African American population had established various social, fraternal, and charitable organizations. The Galilean Temple was built around 1903 where Hickman's Exxon is today.

The Galilean Fishermen was founded in Baltimore and incorporated in 1869. This benevolent society furnished health benefits and burial costs at a time when such insurance was commercially unavailable to blacks. It became one of the largest African American organizations with over 5,000 members in Maryland by 1890.

The Temple was a center of black social life for decades where dances, concerts, lectures, and plays were hosted by Rockville's many social organizations like the Pythagorean Lodge No. 74 of the Free and Accepted Masons, the Odd Fellows,

and the Lincoln Emancipation Club. The Elks had their own lodge building on East Middle Lane.

Rockville's chapter was the Eureka Tabernacle Number 29 of the Order of the Galilean Fishermen. Some of the most prominent names in the Rockville's black community were officers and members. In 1917, the organization bought a lot in the Lincoln Park subdivision to establish a cemetery, which is still in use today.



Site 11 - Mr. T's

200 North Washington Street

Mr. T's tavern was one of the most popular eating and drinking spots in Rockville. The small restaurant occupied the site of the Exxon here until it was demolished in the 1960s. Mr. T's tells the story of segregation in Maryland and of one man's contributions to the African American community.

Black community leader George "T." Johnson opened Mr. T's as a store catering to black clientele. His decision to open the establishment came after he had to wait while five white patrons who came in after him were served first at another Rockville shop.

Mr. T's initially sold ice cream, lunches, and candy and in the evening was popular as a local drinking establishment. Taverns in Rockville were the only businesses that were allowed to remain segregated as an exemption to the 1962 City law against discrimination in public places. But George Johnson opened the doors of Mr. T's to customers of all races. This open policy was due, in part, to Mr. Johnson's enigmatic style, popularity, and his participation in Rockville politics. He is remembered by patrons for the knickers he always wore.

During World War II, Johnson was instrumental in erecting a plaque honoring soldiers serving overseas in the armed services. Funds for the plaque were raised by the Colored Businessmen's Association of Montgomery County with assistance from the Rockville Elks and Galilean Fishermen. Johnson later became the first black member of the Rockville Chamber of Commerce.



Site 12 - First Rockville Colored School

246 North Washington Street

(Now Snowden Funeral Home parking lot)

Education was one manner in which newly emancipated slaves could assert their independence and plan for the future. In March of 1867, twenty black Rockvillians pledged to support a school by taking responsibility for money "as may be necessary to pay the board and washing of the teacher and to provide fuel and lights for the School-house." This indicates that a school for black students in Rockville was likely opened soon after.

In 1872, Montgomery County began to provide public education to black students. The Rockville Colored Elementary School was built in 1876 and accepted students in grades one through seven. The two-room schoolhouse burned in 1919 and students moved into the basement of Jerusalem M.E. Church. The school was rebuilt in 1921 on the opposite side of Washington Street. (See Site 14).

Site 13 - Snowden Funeral Home

246 North Washington Street

Snowden Funeral Home was the first and today is the only black-owned funeral service in Montgomery County. George Russell Snowden started the family business in Howard County in 1918. In 1926, he brought it to this location in Rockville. Mr. Snowden's duties included embalming, laying out the deceased for viewing (usually at home), hanging black crepe paper on the house to indicate a death in the family, and driving to the funeral service and cemetery. Snowden gave funerals a stately air by driving a hearse drawn by four white horses.

In 1936, Snowden's son Robert (known to friends as Mike) and his wife Alma took over the business. This second generation of the family business demolished the original frame structure and built the current brick edifice in 1947. Robert was active in community affairs and participated as a coach, player, and sponsor of Rockville's black baseball team.



Robert and Alma's children Irene and George took over the business from their parents in the 1970s. Today, the fourth generation of Snowdens operates the business. In 1985, the Snowden family received a NAACP award for "community awareness, citizenship and human kindness," and in recognition of the family's achievements.



Site 14 - Second Rockville Colored School

East side of North Washington Street

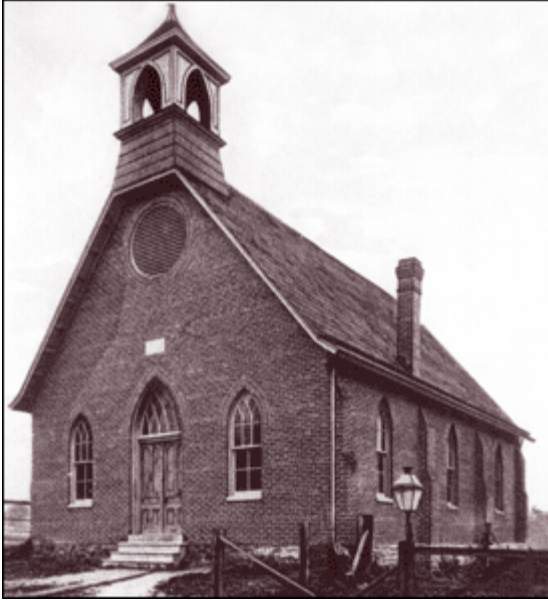
After the first school burned, Rockville Colored School was rebuilt in 1921 on the east side of North Washington Street, opposite where the original two-room school had been. Like its predecessor, it served grades one through seven only.

Black students who wished to continue their education had to commute into Washington D.C. on the streetcar or board with

family there during the school term.

In the mid-1920s, Noah E. Clarke and other black parents petitioned for the County's first black high school. In 1927, the School Board voted to construct a high school in Rockville. The black community supplied \$6,700 towards construction and the rest came from the philanthropic Rosenwald Foundation. Rockville Colored High School was located adjacent to the elementary school on North Washington Street. It housed grades eight through eleven in two classrooms and had a small library. Students utilized the bathroom facilities in the basement of the elementary school. This was the only high school in the entire county for black students, and many had to ride for hours by bus to get to and from class. In 1934, the School Board purchased land in Lincoln Park for the new Lincoln High School.





Site 15 - Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church

Southwest corner of North Washington Street and Beall Avenue

In 1867, several of Rockville's African American families left Jerusalem M.E. Church to found an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church under the leadership of Reverend Charles Pipkins. The A.M.E. Zion church had split with the Methodist Church in the late 18th century over the issues of racism, segregation, and black participation in church meetings. The A.M.E. Zion Church was founded by free blacks with virtually no white members.

The members of Rockville's A.M.E. Zion Church initially held services in the homes of its members or in rented spaces. In 1890, Pipkins and his congregation cut timbers and erected a frame church on Middle Lane. In 1904, they moved to the brick church seen in this photograph, located on North Washington Street and today's Beall Avenue. The church was named Clinton A.M.E. Zion in honor of Reverend George Wylie Clinton (1859-1921), a highly respected member of the A.M.E. Zion Church and editor of the church's periodical *Star of Zion*.

The congregation sold the property here in 1955 to make way for a shopping center. They dedicated their present church on Elizabeth Avenue in Lincoln Park in the fall of 1956.

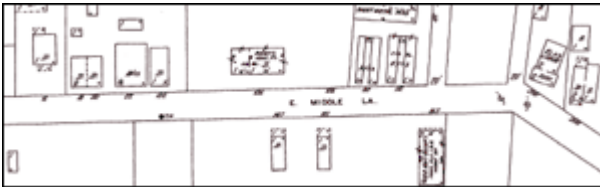
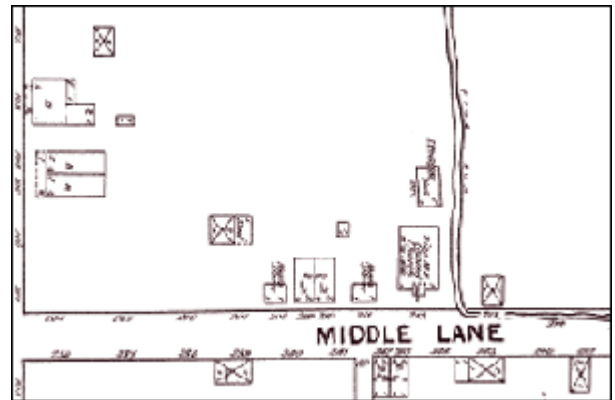
At the first location on Middle Lane, the church had an auxiliary building identified as the Ethiopian Hall as early as 1892. This early reference to Ethiopianism shows Rockville's connection to the larger religious picture. The Reverend Edward Blyden (1832-1912) is recognized as the founder and spreader of Ethiopianism, but the movement did not receive wide notoriety until it was publicized by Marcus Garvey beginning around 1915-1920.



Site 16-17 - The Lane/Monkey Run Neighborhood

East Middle Lane area

This area, known to blacks as "The Lane" or "The Back Lane" and to whites as "Monkey Run," was initially settled by freed slaves. The land was sold to African Americans because it was unsuitable for planting or for white development due to its marshy, low-lying soil. A small stream called Frog Run ran in a ditch alongside East Middle Lane. The side streets, with names like Cairo Street and Alley to Egypt Row, were home to many freed slaves and their descendants.



Middle Lane was the site of the first Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church in 1890 and many residences, identified as "Negro shanties" on an 1892 map. Homes and businesses continued to sprout up on the surrounding lots, providing living quarters, goods, and services to African American citizens when they could not obtain them elsewhere.

As early as the 1930s, the City began to consider downtown revitalization projects. Discussions initially revolved around improving housing conditions for residents on the Lane. Into the 1950s and '60s, however, the focus shifted towards commercial revitalization of the entire downtown area. The result was the removal of the remainder of the African American community in the downtown core. In the 1960s, "slum clearance" efforts obliterated the last traces of the black neighborhood on East Middle Lane and its side streets.



Today, it is difficult to imagine the African American community teeming with life that once existed in the heart of Rockville. But despite the loss of physical structures, the history remains. The Lane was a historical center for African American people, buildings, and events. It was the birthplace of Father Divine; it was the home field for Rockville's colored baseball team; it was the site of community gatherings at the Elks Lodge; it was where black folks could grab a sandwich at Mr. Kelly's; and it was home to many citizens who lived in the single-family homes and duplexes along Cairo and Sarah Streets.



Site 16 - Father Divine Birthplace

Middle Lane

Father Divine was an influential and charismatic religious leader and founder of the International Peace Mission Movement. While the early years of Father Divine's life are shrouded in mystery, one creditable theory is that he was born George Baker, Jr. in Rockville, Maryland.

Baker was born at his parents' home on Middle Lane in 1879 and attended the Rockville Colored School and Jerusalem M.E. Church. He relocated to Baltimore and later New York calling himself Reverend Major Jealous Divine, or Father Divine. He believed he was God manifest and took his message on the road, preaching in churches, houses, and on street corners.

While Father Divine's religious views were rather radical, his efforts at supporting the needy and challenging racial barriers were successful. He was an early proponent of racial equality, pushing for anti-discrimination legislation in Congress in the 1940s. His interracial marriage was one confirmation of his refusal to recognize the concept of differing races.

The Peace Mission Movement is still in existence and strives to help people in need by providing food, shelter, jobs, and services. At one time, the Mission operated grocery stores, barbershops, gas stations, lunchrooms, and other stores where those without much money could purchase goods and services at reduced prices. They also operated a number of model farms and hotels throughout the country, some of which still exist.

The Peace Mission moved its headquarters to the Woodmont estate in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, where it is located today. In 1998, Woodmont was declared a National Historic Landmark in recognition of Father Divine's contributions to the religious, social, and economic development of America through his Peace Mission Movement.





Site 17 - Baseball Field

North Washington Street and Hungerford Drive

Between between North Washington Street and today's Hungerford Drive was an open field which served a number of purposes for Rockville's black families. It was the site of camp meetings and revivals, athletic field days, and the practice field for Rockville's African American baseball team.

The team played around the county and in Washington, D.C. from the early 1900s through the 1950s, later moving to Lincoln Park. One of Rockville's most famous players was Clarence "Pint" Isreal. Isreal went on to play professionally in the Negro National League for the Homestead Grays and Newark Eagles, helping his teams win multiple Negro World Series championships.



Site 18 - Rockville's Movie Theatres

199 East Montgomery Avenue

Rockville has had several theatres over time; the SECO opened 1912 a few blocks to the west and the Milo, which was located across from the Regal, was built in 1935. The Milo had 600 seats on the main level for white patrons, and 150 in the balcony for African Americans. Black patrons had to enter a separate door that led directly up to the balcony without passing through the rest of the theatre.

Signs hung over the entrances and at the restrooms denoted "White" or "Colored." Signs like this were all over Rockville, including the theatre, courthouse, and railroad station. It was understood at many area restaurants that black patrons would come to the rear to pick up food to go, but were not allowed to eat inside or use the front door.

Through the efforts of the Montgomery County chapter of the NAACP, which staged protests and sit-ins at local establishments, and with mounting national pressure to desegregate, Rockville adopted a public accommodations law in 1962.

As you look at the Regal Cinema, where people of all races are welcome today, you can reflect on the struggle that African Americans faced only 40 years ago, just to be allowed to walk through the front doors of places like this. The efforts, pride, and achievements of Rockville's African Americans from the 18th century through today are important in understanding Rockville's history.



For More Information

The following organizations offer guided and/or group tours by appointment and have research facilities available to the public for further research:

Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, Ltd.

29 Courthouse Square, Room 110
301-762-0096
www.peerlessrockville.org

Tours of Rockville and the Red Brick Courthouse

Montgomery County Historical Society

103 West Montgomery Avenue

301-340-2825

www.montgomeryhistory.org

Tours of the Beall-Dawson House and the Stonestreet Museum of 19th Century Medicine

Montgomery County Archives

29 Courthouse Square, Room G-09

301-340-2974 by appt.

www.montgomeryarchives.org

Montgomery County Public Library

Rockville Branch

99 Maryland Avenue

240-777-0140

www.mont.lib.md.us

Lincoln Park Historical Foundation

Lincolnparkhist@aol.com

www.lincolnparkhist.org

City of Rockville Historic District Commission

The Historic District Commission was created by the Mayor and Council of Rockville in 1967 to protect the character of the city's historic districts. The Commission acts as an advisory panel on issues relating to the history, culture, archaeology, and architecture of Rockville.

The Commission is also charged with promoting the use and preservation of the City's historic resources for the education, welfare, and pleasure of the residents of the community.

Historic District Commission commissioners serving during this project were Anita Neal Powell - Chair, Craig Moloney, Andrea Hartranft, Jeff Broadhurst, Beth Rodgers, and Max van Balgooy.

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This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to Office for Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C. Street, N.W., Mail Stop 2255, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Credits

Historic District Commission staff Anne Brockett and Judy Christensen developed this walking tour. Sylvia Hourihan managed the graphic design. The City of Rockville would like to thank Peerless Rockville and the Montgomery County Historical Society for providing access to their files and photographs for use in this brochure.

[Historic Rockville African American Heritage Walking Tour \(.pdf\)](#)

Copies of this brochure are available at the Department of Community Planning and Development, Rockville City Hall, 111 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland, 20850.

