

Brookeville One-Room Schoolhouse Proposal

SUMMARY:

This proposal would provide an interpretive program for the schoolhouse, focused on the early 1800s history of the town's Quakers, especially as it relates to slavery, abolitionism, and the free black population. The program would be an integral part of a larger effort involving Woodlawn's (stone barn) Visitor Center and Oakley Cabin and geared to educating school groups. Heritage Montgomery would develop the program, materials, and signage; provide funding for making the lot attractive; and assist with recruiting volunteers and collaborators as needed.

BACKGROUND:

The one-room schoolhouse is located in the town of Brookeville in Montgomery County Maryland. The town is significant in part because it was settled in the late 18th century by members of the Society of Friends. The Friends built houses, businesses, mills, and roads connecting the town and its wares to Georgetown, Washington, Baltimore, and Frederick, making the town a successful hub of commerce and transportation for more than a hundred years.

In the early 1800s the Friends, who had openly questioned the right of one man to own another, faced the dilemma posed by Maryland law, which was hostile to manumission. By prohibiting a black person to own a gun or a dog or to buy land without help from a white person, it made it nearly impossible for free blacks to earn a living. By 1820, Brookeville's Quakers had responded by freeing the handful of local slaves shown in the 1810 census and helping them to acquire education and housing in the town or nearby. As a result, a number of the newly freed people, who were skilled workers, settled in the area, as it was close to jobs and provided a welcoming environment.

The new Woodlawn Visitor Center touches on this story but does not go into depth. This program would provide an opportunity for Brookeville and the county to explore its Quaker history, especially the area's history of abolitionism and the local free black population.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

- The historic schoolhouse measures 2400 square feet.
- It was restored in 2002.
- It has heat and electric power; however, it has no water or toilet facilities. (It is located near the water lines serving North Street properties.)
- It is sited on a corner of North Street, approximately 200 feet from the southern end of the partially wooded lot. It has two entrances, one ADA accessible.

- There is a small amount of parking across a gravel road from one entrance. (The town also has access to parking behind the church on High Street.)
- The historic Methodist Episcopal Church archaeological site is also across North Street, next to the small parking lot.

SITE INVENTORY:

- Historic one-room schoolhouse
- Partially wooded front lot
- Parking lot for three cars or a large van
- Historic church archaeology site
- Gravel road
- One interpretative Panel and one sign referencing the restoration
- Two entrances, with brick ADA-accessible walkway at one and brick steps and walk at the other

BUILDING SIGNIFICANCE:

- The lot on which the schoolhouse sits was part of a larger parcel of lots on the east side of North Street that were purchased in 1833 by trustees for a planned Methodist Episcopal church.
- The schoolhouse was built sometime between 1833 and 1864, when the church lot was divided and the building and lot on which it sits were sold by the church to the Montgomery County Public Schools.
- The building was used as a school until the 1920s, when it was sold for use as a house. It was later abandoned until it was donated to the town in the 1990s.
- It is now unused, except that in the past it was opened on one afternoon each year for the annual Montgomery County Heritage Days.
- Like all Montgomery County Public Schools, it was racially segregated, attendance limited solely to white students. (Montgomery County did not desegregate its public schools until 1955.)

GOALS:

- Preserve the building and make it a viable resource
- Put the building into use as an educational site, primarily as part of package school tours
- Connect Brookville to Woodlawn, Oakley Cabin, and the Sandy Spring Slave Sites as the site telling the Quaker and the African-American story
- Make building accessible by cleaning up the lot and providing signage
- Make site attractive by landscaping and providing a bench
- Preserve the site by making it a bird sanctuary

VISITOR EXPERIENCE GOALS:

The visitor will:

- Explore the history of abolitionism and the Society of Friends in Brookeville/Sandy Spring area and Underground Railroad
- Explore the personal and professional relationships among the Quakers and enslaved and free African Americans in the early 1800s
- Learn about crafts and trades plied in Brookeville
- Learn about Brookeville's place in statewide trade and transportation during the 19th century
- Explore a reasonably intact 1800s Maryland town
- Link to and explore MNCPPC trails and Oakley cabin
- Experience an environmentally-friendly bird sanctuary/wildlife area
- Explore a historic building in an attractive park-like setting
- Find resources to learn more

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stabilize and mold-proof the building. (done)
- A challenge to site use is that at present it is not visible from the Market Street sidewalk and it is not visitor friendly in that a visitor must walk down what appears to be a private road to access the site. Clean the narrow front lot, putting in a path, and planting native and bird-friendly plants along the path. This would open up the view to the schoolhouse from the entrance to North Street, provide an addition to a walking tour, and demonstrate the Town's interest in conservation.
- Install an interpretive panel at the site and a bench in the wooded lot to further encourage visitors.
- Install a simple panel exhibit inside the schoolhouse. The panels should tell the story of the town in the early 1800s and the relationship between its Quakers, enslaved residents of the area, and the free black population who settled in Brookeville and the surrounding area. The panels should be a collapsible style so that they can fold and the floor of the building opened up to accommodate slightly larger groups or other activities if needed.
- Provide toilet facilities enclosed in an attractive fence.
- Install a small site identification sign at the corner of North Street and Market Street, telling visitors what the building is called and what the exhibit in the schoolhouse will explore. The sign should also make note of the bird sanctuary path leading to the building.
- Demarcate the archaeological area and during annual "discovery days" rent a tent and exhibit the artifacts that were uncovered at the

site. (The artifacts are currently stored by the county's archaeologists at their headquarters at Needwood.)

- Visitors to the site may park in the Academy parking area, thus maintaining the sites integrity as an 1800s story. In bad weather for a very small number of vehicles, or for handicapped visitors, parking opposite the schoolhouse is appropriate.
- With help from Heritage Montgomery, the town should organize a Friends of the Schoolhouse group of volunteers to assist in maintenance and lead the educational program for student groups.

SUPPORT:

- Heritage Montgomery
- Audubon Naturalist Society
- Eagle Scouts
- Master Gardeners program

ALLIES:

- Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
- Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
- Maryland Historical Trust
- Preservation Maryland
- Society of Friends
- Sandy Spring Friends School
- Maryland Historic Trust African American President