

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: RECLAIMING FORGOTTEN HISTORY: PRESERVING
RURAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL RESOURCES IN
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MARYLAND

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Historic buildings and their settings are important physical links to reclaiming forgotten history. The material remains of historic communities inform us about the social context within which buildings and communities were constructed. This is especially important when documenting African-American history, particularly during the period of enslavement and early post-emancipation, where the memory is difficult both to confront and to uncover. Despite its difficulties, documentation and preservation of African-American history and culture enrich the historic perspective of all Americans.

Maryland was one of the last states in the Union to free her slaves. While slavery in the eastern and southern counties is well documented, few Americans are aware that slaves also labored in the wheat fields of the western counties of the state. Following

emancipation in 1864, western Maryland freedmen faced the same barriers to citizenship and economic security as those in the South.

African-Americans, both slave and free, were significant contributors to the social and economic fabric of nineteenth century Washington County, one of Maryland's western counties. In the twenty-first century, few African-Americans remain in the rural districts of the county. There, the memory of the African-American presence has been all but forgotten. That memory remains, however, in the slave quarters still standing on farms and in the freedmen's community groups found in the rural towns and on the hillsides throughout the county.

This thesis is a demonstration of the process of identification and documentation of the material record of this nearly forgotten cultural group in rural Washington County, and its impact on the preservation value of the resources associated with them. It is an analysis of several approaches to preservation that address the particular needs of rural African-American cultural resources and the larger communities around them. When successfully applied, these preservation strategies may result in the increased value of the historic property, not only monetarily, but valued also as a source of memory and education, and as useful contemporary resources. While grounded in specific places, the strategies are representative of both methods and results that have national implications for historic preservation, for the reclaiming of "forgotten" histories.

This thesis seeks to widen our historical horizons by recognizing the diverse people who have played significant roles throughout our history. It demonstrates how the preservation of the tangible and intangible resources associated with African-American culture warrant inclusion among the preservation priorities of Maryland and the nation.