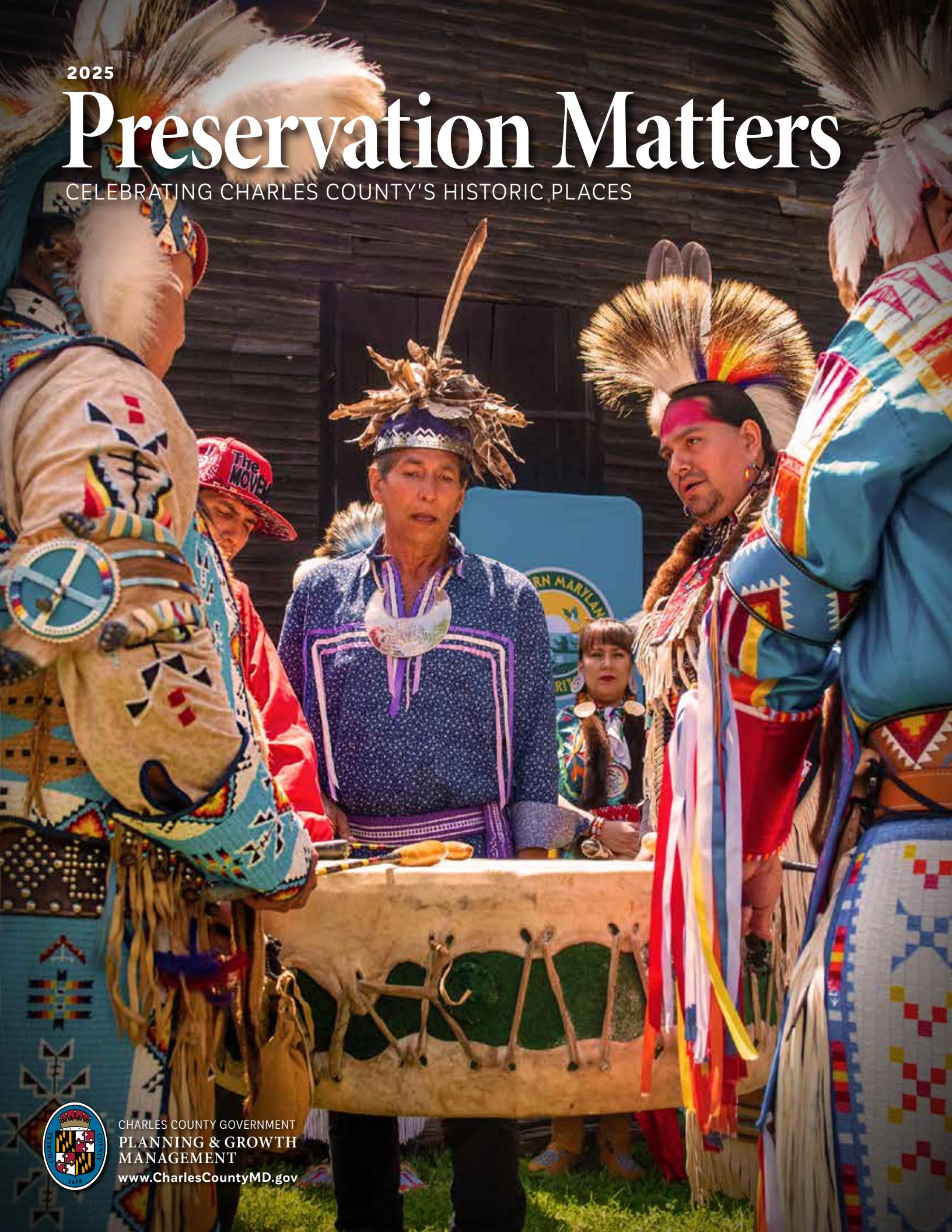


2025

Preservation Matters

CELEBRATING CHARLES COUNTY'S HISTORIC PLACES



CHARLES COUNTY GOVERNMENT
PLANNING & GROWTH
MANAGEMENT
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2025

Preservation Matters

Celebrating Charles County's Historic Places

A Planning and Growth Management Publication

The information contained in this annual publication, "Preservation Matters," has been brought to you as a public service by the Charles County Department Planning and Growth Management to support historic preservation in Charles County.

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About the Cover

Photo Credit: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

May 25, 2023 Piscataway honor song opens the launch of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area at Piscataway National Park in Accokeek, Maryland. Read the article on pages 4-9.



Stories of Preserving Charles County's Rich History

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

Chair, Charles County Historic Preservation Commission

Welcome to the 2025 issue of Preservation Matters, the Charles County Historic Preservation Commission magazine.

What a difference a few years make. The last time I wrote we were experiencing the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Life has changed, the way we go about our daily tasks has been altered. My hope is that you, your family, and community persevered and came through it to face another day.

One hopeful example that life has returned to some normalcy is the Historic Preservation Commission reinstituting their annual preservation awards. We continue to grant awards for Preservation Service, Preservation Projects, Awards of Merit, and when occasion warrants our Louise Booth Webb Award for consistent service to Charles County preservation and the preservation community. Cal Carpenter's article in this issue highlights the work being done by individuals and organizations within Charles County to preserve our history, our stories, and historic places.

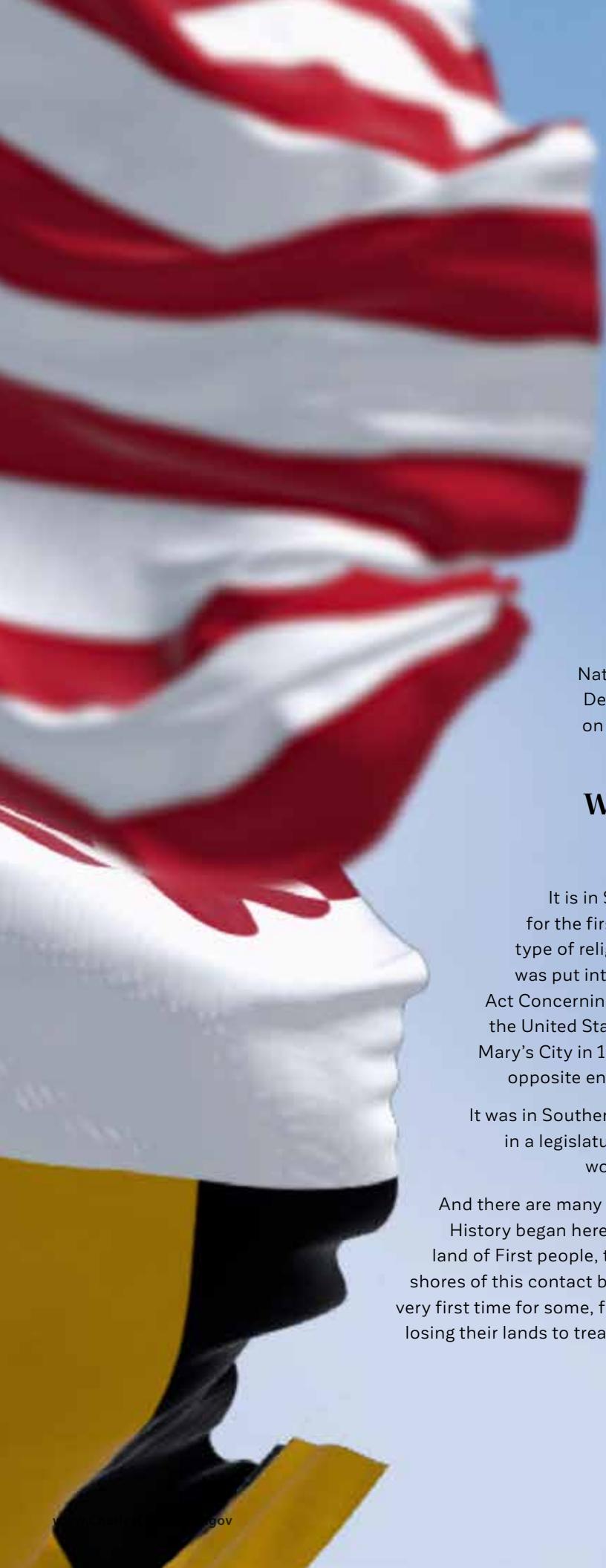
During the pandemic The Southern Maryland Studies Center at the College of Southern Maryland in La Plata closed. While it technically reopened to researchers after the pandemic ended, staffing was short-handed and there was no trained archivist on duty. All of that changed this year with the arrival of Mallory N. Haselberger, the new archivist. In addition, on September 17 the Southern Maryland Studies Center, where the archives reside, officially reopened. Part of the value of archives is as a place to discover the past through primary sources so that history may be written truthfully using the words of those who lived it. It is incumbent on all of us who value history and the stories of our many and varied ancestors to support the continued efforts of the Studies Center.

In May 2023, we celebrated the creation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area (SMNHA), one of only two national heritage areas in the state. Thanks to the efforts of many state and national elected officials, organizations, and Lucille Ward Walker (executive director of the SMNHA) the bill creating the national heritage area was drafted and approved, passed by the US Congress, and signed into law by President Joe Biden in record time.

Preservation does matter. As we approach the semiquincentennial (250th) of the founding of our nation, I ask the same questions of you as I did in 2020. What is that favorite place of yours to get away from it all? Beach, mountains, historic place, or a drive down a country road? Is that place protected? What are the ramifications of local and statewide development policy on a place you treasure? What does the world look like that you want to leave behind for those coming after you? Your engagement is key to the preservation and documentation of these places and stories.

Many volunteers and professionals keep our county historic sites, parks, and archives open to the public, cared for, and moving forward. The next time you see one of them, say "thank you." Finally, it is a pleasure for me to serve the Commission as its Chair. I want to extend a public "thank you" to our staff support; Cal Carpenter, Amy Coombs, Cathy Hardy Thompson, and archeologist Esther Doyle Read. Without them and their expertise, the Commission would be sorely handicapped. I also extend a thank you to our County Commissioners and my fellow members on the commission who voluntarily give of their time and expertise. The Charles County Historic Preservation Commission continues to be a tool for documenting, protecting, and advocating for our history, ensuring its existence and survival for those to come.





NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA DESIGNATION

By: Lucille W. Walker (Executive Director, SMNHA)

Southern Maryland is one of the newest national heritage areas in the nation. This includes Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's counties.

The United States Congress passed the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act (included in the Heritage Areas Act) on December 22, 2022, and it was signed into law by President Biden on January 5, 2023. Our region is now designated as the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area. It's a really big deal!

Why Southern Maryland? Why National?

Southern Maryland is not only where Maryland began; it is where the foundation of our nation began.

It is in Southern Maryland that religious freedom was codified into law for the first time in the entire Western world. The first time, ever, that any type of religious toleration, this founding principle, this basic human right, was put into law, and it was here. The Maryland Toleration Act of 1649, the Act Concerning Religion, provided the foundation for religious freedom within the United States Constitution, and for the world to model. In establishing St. Mary's City in 1634, the settlers even placed the church and the statehouse on opposite ends, a physical testament to this separation of church and state.

It was in Southern Maryland that the first person of African descent ever served in a legislature in America: Mathias de Sousa, 1641. It was here that the first woman ever petitioned for the right to vote: Margaret Brent, 1648.

And there are many more firsts. But with freedoms gained, freedoms were also lost.

History began here long before Maryland was established. Southern Maryland is a land of First people, the Piscataway, and we are standing on their shores, and on the shores of this contact between worlds. While religious freedom was established for the very first time for some, faith was also broken with the Indigenous people, who ended up losing their lands to treaties that were not honored, along with much of their way of life.

— Continued



National Heritage Area Designation — Continued from previous page

Mathias de Sousa, who arrived as an indentured servant and became a leader in the community, and went on to serve in the Legislature and to vote, this history is juxtaposed with what happened in just a couple decades (1664) when a law was passed that allowed for the enslavement of those of African descent, and their families, in perpetuity.

Our region is criss-crossed with national trails, we have a national religious freedom byway, national network to freedom sites, places impacted by early wars, sites and people that helped this nation defend itself in later wars.

Southern Maryland has a thousand miles of shoreline, and you can still find a fossil on the beach. We still work the land and the sea, with our maritime and agricultural heritage essential to who we are.

It's not all ancient history.

We are where the first astronauts trained, and this region continues to be an absolute center for innovation and discovery. And when mentioning discoveries, there is Matthew Henson, a noted explorer and African American from Southern Maryland, who along with explorer Robert Peary and four Inuit guides, became the first to set foot on the North Pole in 1909.

And, of course, Southern Maryland is the location of the Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary. The very first national marine sanctuary to be located on a river. It also has the

Freedoms gained, freedoms lost, freedoms fought for.

THIS IS A NATIONAL STORY.
Southern Maryland has a UNESCO (United Nations) slave route site of remembrance, honoring that resistance, liberty, heritage.

largest collection of historic shipwrecks in the entire Western Hemisphere, spanning more than three centuries of American shipbuilding.

Southern Maryland is so fortunate to have the heritage of the Piscataway, who are creating a new legacy, and who were recognized by the state of Maryland in 2012.

Additionally, throughout our region, descendants of those enslaved, and descendants of those who did the enslaving, are sharing histories together, building new connections.

In short, we inform our nation's story in numerous and vital ways. And, although some of the stories are hard, painfully difficult, there is also so much beauty and courage, so much to be proud of. All of this is really about the human spirit. And that is a story worth telling.

So, for all these reasons and more, we are designated as the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.

What does this mean?

Being a heritage area is about the power of place: about the people, stories, landscape, art, language, of a place. It is about what makes that place unique and important.

National Heritage Areas connect communities through activities that promote awareness and foster interest in and stewardship of our heritage and natural resources. This increased programming and awareness lead to more tourism and overall economic growth. National Heritage Areas leverage federal funds at an average of \$5.50 in economic activity for every \$1 of federal investment to create jobs, generate revenue for local governments, and sustain local communities through revitalization and heritage tourism. As a National Heritage Area, Maryland's waters and landscape will see more restoration projects, for example, benefiting all of us.

Before the passage of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act on December 22 there were only 55 National



Heritage Areas in the United States. Now there are 62. It is not easy to become a National Heritage Area. It's quite hard. It requires an Act of Congress.

We started by reaching out to the community, to historical and educational organizations, museums, local and county representatives, state representatives, the Governor's office, local business leaders, military leadership, environmental and land trust organizations, all to gauge the interest and support.

And, seeing not only interest but great enthusiasm, we then reached out to our federal representatives, who would ultimately be responsible for creating and shepherding any legislation through the United States Congress and the complex legislative process for passage.

Our federal representatives, Senator Ben Cardin, then Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Senator Chris Van Hollen, all saw the opportunity to bring this legislation to us, and they appreciated the unique coalition of partnerships: community-based, bi-partisan, private, public. They drafted the legislation to establish this new national heritage area in St. Mary's, Calvert, Charles, and southern Prince George's counties.

This is the legislation that ultimately resulted in passage of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area Act sponsored by Senator Cardin, Congressman Hoyer, and Senator Van Hollen, and we are very grateful. Additionally, the legislation, as part of the National Heritage Areas Act, was one of the most bi-partisan pieces of legislation in the Congress.

It usually takes 10, 15, 20 years to be designated a national heritage area, if it happens at all. This region was designated in just 2 years. So much of this is due to the support of the community, the hard work of our federal representatives, and the power of the story itself.

As Senator Cardin noted in his March 2021 press release when he renewed his push for this legislation: "A Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will boost awareness

and federal support of a part of the state whose resources need to be better protected, whose story needs to be comprehensively told, and whose beauty needs to be more widely appreciated." And as Congressman Hoyer noted in the same press release: "This legislation will provide the federal funding needed to enhance conservation efforts, fuel local economic growth, and support our communities...."

So, yes, importantly this designation comes with an initial \$10 million appropriation.

What are the next steps?

First, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area launched on May 25th at the National Park Service site of Piscataway Park in Accokeek, Maryland, with support of the Accokeek Foundation, the Hatcher Group, and numerous regional partners. We were honored to have Governor Wes Moore as the keynote speaker, and to have the official welcome by Francis Gray, Tribal Chair of the Piscataway Conoy, and Chief Mark Tayac of the Piscataway Indian Nation. We were also honored by the remarks of Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller and Assistant Secretary of the Department of Interior (Fish, Wildlife, and Parks) Shannon Estenoz.

It was a beautiful day, begun with a Piscataway honor song and ending with the Maryland Dove sailing back home to St. Mary's.

Second, we have begun the Management Plan process, as required by the legislation, to determine exactly what this new entity will be and how it can best serve the goals of the region. During this process, we will be reaching out for engagement across the region, with community forums and conversations. Once a draft of the plan is complete, we will then post it for public comment before the National Park Service review.

A question that guides this entire initiative for the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area: Whose heritage are we talking about? Who tells whose story? How do we make sure voices are heard?

Becoming a national heritage area puts this unique region on the national map and raises the profile, both nationally and internationally. Your new Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is hoping to inform who we are, who we were, and, most importantly, who we want to be. ■

Photo Credit: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

WANISHI!

"Greetings" from Chief Mark Tayac

Chief Tayac is the 29th generation of Hereditary Chiefs of the Piscataway People. These are remarks that he delivered at the kick-off event of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.

My name is Mark, Chief Tyack. We're here today from the Piscataway Indian Nation. Four hundred years ago, we welcomed people to our land and to our shores. And it's four hundred years later and our hands are still extended in friendship to welcome everyone here today where we are located. Many people know this place as Piscataway National Park. We are in the ancestral homeland of the Piscataway people. We are in the principal village that was known as Moyaone. Our seat of government, like Annapolis, is the seat of government for the state of Maryland and Washington, D.C. is the seat of government for the United States. We are here at the seat of government of the Piscataway people. Our people have lived here on this land for 15,000 years. For 15,000 years what is known today as the Chesapeake Bay Area has been our home and we are still here; we have survived as a people. Each time that we touch this soil, we are touching the generations of the generations of the generations before us.

In 1978, our 27th generation of hereditary chiefs passed away to the spirit world. As one of his last and final wishes, he wanted to be buried in the ancestral homeland of our people. In 1979, the United States Congress passed a federal bill to allow Chief Turkey Tyack, our 27th generation, to be buried in the ossuary area. He was the first American Indian to be buried on what is known as federal parklands. It was a very historical moment for American Indian people. It was a very historical moment for all citizens of the United States. And as part of our history as Marylanders today, we should all be proud of where we are located.

There was a period in time during our history that it was not socially acceptable to be a Piscataway Indian. It was not socially acceptable to be an American Indian in 1970. Where we are located today – at the principal capital village – a movement began, a revitalization, so that we as American Indian people can stand with pride and with dignity and hold our heads high, for we have lived and survived. Even though there were policies of assimilation and genocide perpetuated on us,

we are still here today, and we are asking that all county and state politicians, the Maryland state governor, the Maryland legislation support this.

For almost 100 years the remains of our ancestors have been held captive in storage facilities.^[1] We want to see our ancestors come back home. We want to see our people be able to have the opportunity to fulfill their original instructions, to go back to the Mother Earth. And when that happens, we want to see the unification of all native people here in this state.

We're standing here today in the line holding hands together. This line is to represent unity. We have all come together as Piscataway people today. We've all come together as American Indian people today. And we want to show the United States, we want to show Maryland, that we are a united front, that we are a united voice. We are asking that our tribal leaders come up to join in. We want to hold hands now to represent and unify, to validate our people. ■

WANISHI "Thank You"

[1] Chief Tayac is referring to human remains excavated by archaeologists from the late 19th century through the 1980s, and specifically to those from Moyaone, that are held by museums and universities. In 1990, the United States Congress passed NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. NAGPRA mandates the return of human remains, funerary and sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony from museums and other institutions that receive federal funding to the descendant Native American communities. This is an ongoing process.



WANISHI!

"Greetings" from Elder Francis Gray

Francis Gray (Bear Clan) is the Tribal Chairman of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe. Gray delivered the following message at the kick-off event of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.

I ask the creator: As the day begins with the rising sun we ask that you help guide our steps, and give us courage so that we are able to see truth and hope through this circle of life and on the path we have chosen so we may do so with honesty, dignity, and respect.

It has been said, before you can travel forward or even truly understand why we are here today, one must at least understand its past. History is our mechanism to connect our past to the present. It provides us with a sense of purpose for who we are, a sense of being. Our worlds once again have converged, and it is here that we have the opportunity for all Marylanders to obtain knowledge.

Today we are all here collectively to celebrate our new Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, our history. To go from a concept, to boots on the ground, to knocking on doors, to having a congressional law signed by the president in less than five years is astounding. I would be remiss by not acknowledging Ms. Lucille Walker for her tenacity, persistence, and unwavering vision to have this completed. Yes, a National Heritage Area, not a state or local program, however the beauty here is both the state and local governments are a part.

I am truly honored to be here on this stage with all the distinguished guests and speakers.

The designation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is a positive step in the right direction and will put into motion an extremely

important and long overdue effort to record, document protect and raise awareness about our history from a cultural perspective that will convey the proud heritage of our Piscataway people.

The Piscataway Conoy people are excited to have the opportunity to invert the narrative of Maryland's colonial story and to tell our stories through the eyes of Piscataway — to speak of our past, the resilience and purpose of a people who have had to continuously overcome challenges throughout many decades, resulting in changes that dramatically affected the way of life of our people. Yes, Maryland is the first to provide the right of religious freedom, but to whom and at what cost and who shall pay that cost. It is well known that my ancestors have lived here for more than 15,000 years. You cannot walk or touch any earth in this area that my ancestors have not been previously.

Yes, we are here today at the capital of the Piscataway people known as Moyaone. And yes, a piece of recent history, a place where Turkey Tayac is laid to rest hopefully into perpetuity with our ancestors.

However, I am not here today to speak only of our past, I am here in the present to begin a way to move into tomorrow. To speak today with hope, excitement, and visions of the future. To assure my culture at least has a path for the next seven generations. To create not just avenues, but partnerships that have enduring lifecycles. To create collaborative programs that enhance our rich history and policies that have teeth.

To have our ancestors brought back home so that they may complete their natural, rightful journey of going to ashes to dust. To build a coalition to enhance our government-to-government relations so we can ensure that the institutional knowledge has a continuous way through this administration and to the next. ■

At the end of the speeches, tribal leaders from across Maryland gathered with Chief Tayac and joined hands in unity. It was a powerful and emotional moment. I witnessed many people in the group wiping away tears.

— Esther Doyle Read

WANISHI
"Thank You"

Photo Credit: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

"In the Midst of These Plains"



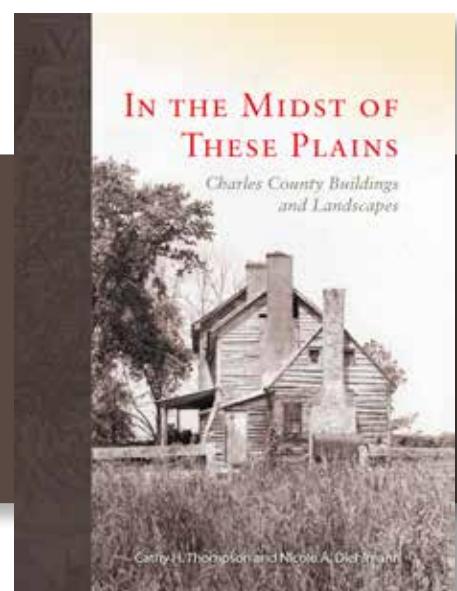
Cathy Hardy Thompson is the Deputy Director of Charles County Planning and Growth Management. Before becoming the Deputy Director she administered the County's historic preservation program for more than a decade. From 1999 to 2005, she worked as the Historic Sites Surveyor for Charles County under a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust to update and expand the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties.

Nicole A. Diehlmann is a Senior Architectural Historian for RK&K in Baltimore, where she is responsible for documenting historic sites throughout the mid-Atlantic region. She previously served as a freelance architectural historian, editor, and historic preservation specialist. In this role, she documented various historic sites in Maryland, including many buildings, sites, and structures in Charles County.

A new publication on the architectural history of Charles County, Maryland is now available from the MHT Press.

Consisting of almost 500 pages, *In the Midst of These Plains* documents nearly four centuries of settlement in Charles County, describing in detail its shift from a rural agricultural community to an exurb of Washington, D.C. The result of many years of historic research and survey funded by the Maryland Historical Trust, the book highlights the history of the county through its historic buildings and landscapes. From iconic tobacco barns and substantial dwellings to the buildings of everyday life, such as schools, churches, and stores, the authors paint a picture of Charles County's built environment.

Rich in detail and illustrations, the book includes a wealth of historic and modern photographs, maps, and floor plans.



"In the Midst of These Plains" — Nestled in the southwestern corner of Southern Maryland, Charles County remained rural and remote for much of its history. First inhabited by various indigenous groups, English settlers arrived in the early 17th century. Many were Catholics seeking religious freedom, while others were of various Protestant faiths. Jesuit priests established a commanding mission at St. Thomas Manor in 1741 and continued to be major landowners.

By the 18th century, the wealthiest settlers had established a level of stability that allowed for the construction of substantial brick and frame dwellings in a distinct regional vernacular style, while the majority of residents, both black and white, lived in rudimentary log and frame houses. In the early 19th century, a distinct planter class had evolved, fueled by tobacco profits and enslaved labor. The Civil War brought a period of economic and social instability, but the arrival of the Popes Creek Branch of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad and establishment of the Naval Proving Ground in Indian Head at the end of the century brought a new wave of prosperity and led to the development of distinct town centers, including the future county seat of La Plata.

Many residents continued farming tobacco as well as crops such as wheat and corn, while others exploited the riches of the region's abundant waterways through fishing, oystering, crabbing, and even trapping fur, that was sent to Baltimore's lucrative garment market. Construction of Crain Highway in the 1920s, provided a convenient link to Baltimore and Washington, D.C., but proved to be the downfall of the local steamship lines that had serviced the county rivers for nearly a century. The highway

brought new residents and tourists to waterside communities such as Cobb Island and carried agricultural products to urban centers. Passage of legalized gambling in 1949 brought a post-war wave of tourists who came to frequent the flashy casinos and hotels with neon signs that appeared along Crain Highway, earning the strip the moniker "Little Las Vegas." Gambling was outlawed less than twenty years later, but the county continued to grow as a bedroom community of Washington, D.C., with new suburban communities constructed on former tobacco fields. By the end of the 20th century, the previously rural county had become inextricably drawn into the Washington metropolitan area.

Departing from the narrower focus of earlier survey work, the book includes chapters on Tobacco and Charles County's Working Landscape (Chapter 4), Domestic and Agricultural Outbuildings (Chapter 5), and the Industrial Landscape (Chapter 9) as well as chapters on sacred, civic and commercial buildings. Together, they round out our understanding of the true breadth and diversity of the Charles County built environment and cultural landscapes. ■



The tobacco barn at the Exchange (CH-357) is believed to have been built about 1780 and employs traditional building features of the era, including vertical riven roof sheathing and tilted false plates. The sheds are later additions.



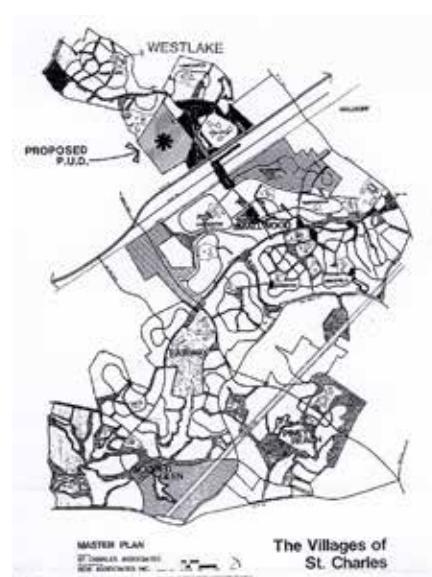
The Mulco spoon factory opened in Pomonkey in 1945. It produced coffee stirrers, Popsicle sticks, ice cream spoons, tongue depressors and plant markers. It employed 50 to 70 employees including many women.



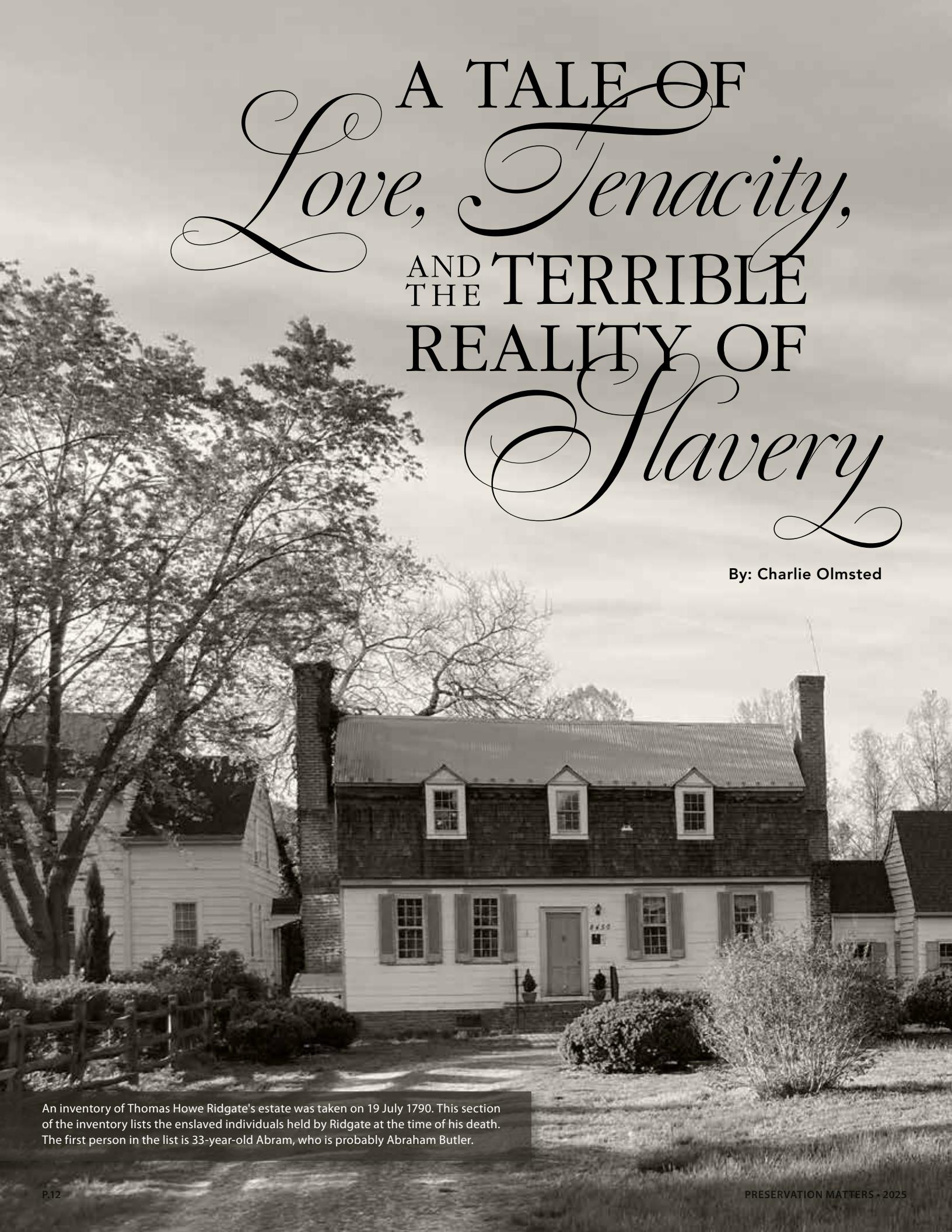
St. Thomas Manor (CH-6), erected in 1741 is one of the County's most sophisticated examples of 18th century Georgian architecture.



La Plata Train Station is located on Charles Street. The station hosts an elaborate museum for visitors to learn more about this unique feature.



The St. Charles Master Plan first prepared in 1969, called for a series of five villages that provided housing and services for families of a variety of income levels.



A TALE OF
Love, Tenacity,
AND THE TERRIBLE
REALITY OF
Slavery

By: Charlie Olmsted

An inventory of Thomas Howe Ridgate's estate was taken on 19 July 1790. This section of the inventory lists the enslaved individuals held by Ridgate at the time of his death. The first person in the list is 33-year-old Abram, who is probably Abraham Butler.



The story of how ABRAHAM BUTLER got his freedom is one in which a slave defied the odds and won a suit for freedom against a white woman managing the estate of her wealthy husband.

It begins in 1681 when Eleanor Butler, known colloquially as 'Irish Nell'^[1], a white indentured servant, fell in love with and married an African American slave named Charles^[2]. The 3rd Lord Baltimore, Charles Calvert, warned her against it because under existing Maryland law, she would be enslaved for the rest of her life to Charles' master^[3]. They married anyway. In 1681, after they married, key provisions of the new law would have outlawed the marriage between a slave and a white servant, so they were just in the nick of time.

Their great grandson, Abraham Butler, was enslaved by Thomas Howe Ridgate, who owned Stagg Hall and later Chimney House. Abraham was the son of Monica Butler, who was the daughter of Jenny Butler, who herself was the daughter of Eleanor (Irish Nell) Butler^[4]. Thomas Ridgate died in 1790, and in 1792, Abraham filed suit against Elizabeth Ridgate, who was managing the estate^[5]. Because several other Butlers throughout Maryland had sued for their freedom and won^[6], the judge focused on whether Abraham actually was a descendant of 'Irish Nell', and in doing so, relied on the testimony of free blacks who knew him and his mother, Monica^[7]. After concluding that Abraham was in fact Eleanor Butler's great grandson, he ordered that he be set free because he was entitled to his freedom, being descended from a white woman^[8].

After this case, the testimony of free blacks was prohibited in Maryland courts^[9], and so, had Abraham waited to sue for his freedom, he might not have gotten it because the testimony of those who knew his mother, like Elizabeth 'Betty' Butler^[10], wouldn't have been admissible. A certain amount of luck and tenacity combined to make Abraham's suit successful. The strong documentation of his great grandparents' marriage was key. Many interracial relationships were not well documented for fear of social reprisal. For example, Thomas Jefferson vehemently denied having an affair with Sally Hemmings. It was confirmed only centuries later with DNA testing.

The conviction that Eleanor and Charles had to be public about their marriage, despite misgivings from the highest levels of Maryland government, helped make Abraham's suit and those of the other Butlers successful. ■

[1] Irish Nell was the nickname given to Eleanor Butler.

[2] Archives of Maryland (Biographical Series): Irish Nell Butler MSA SC 5496-000534 Indentured Servant, St. Mary's County, Maryland. Copyright July 27, 2011. Retrieved 5/2/2023 from <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/000500/000534/html/00534bio.html>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Bloodlines to Freedom, <https://www.lewismuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Butler-Family-Tree5.pdf>

[5] *Abraham Butler vs. Elizabeth Ridgate*, In *O Say Can You See: Early Washington D.C., Law and Family* edited by William G. Thomas III, et al. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Accessed May 3, 2023. <https://earlywashingtondc.org/doc/oscys.mdcase.0014.124>

[6] Maryland Archives, Irish Nell Butler, MSA SC 5496-000534. Indentured Servant, St. Mary's County, Maryland. Copyright July 27, 2011. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5400/sc5496/000500/000534/html/00534bio.html>

[7] *Abraham Butler vs. Elizabeth Ridgate*, In *O Say Can You See: Early Washington D.C., Law and Family* edited by William G. Thomas III, et al. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Accessed May 3, 2023. <https://earlywashingtondc.org/doc/oscys.mdcase.0014.124>

[8] Ibid.

[9] Archives of Maryland Online: Proceedings and Acts of General Assembly, 1796, volume 105, pgs. 249-250. Chapter 67, sec. 5. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000105/html/am105-249.html>

[10] *Abraham Butler vs. Elizabeth Ridgate*, In *O Say Can You See: Early Washington D.C., Law and Family* edited by William G. Thomas III, et al. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Accessed May 3, 2023. <https://earlywashingtondc.org/doc/oscys.mdcase.0014.124>

Sarah's voice sounded from the other side of the house,

"I found a thimble!"

The crew and I rushed to her excavation unit to gaze at a tiny plastic thimble, the kind you could buy in a five-and-dime store during the mid-20th century.



SARAH'S TALE

By: Esther Doyle Read

It wasn't a spectacular archaeological find, but it was a find that resonated with the women on the crew. Here was evidence of another woman who had lived and worked on the farm where we were working. It can be difficult to find women in the archaeological record and they are often glossed over in the reports. The thimble made me stop and wonder, who were the women that lived at the Simpkin Coatback site? What were their lives like? And more importantly, how was I going to extract that from the artifacts that we recovered during the excavation, a few dates taken from the framing of the house, and a handful of historic documents?

As I began artifact analysis, a small collection from a unit in front of the house caught my attention. There were fragments of dinner and tea dishes, part of red tea pot, a glass dessert bowl, the base of an olive green wine bottle, kitchen mixing bowls and a milk pan. The dining and tea dishes were imported from England between 1795 and the War of 1812. There was also a piece of a teacup, with a style of cobalt blue decoration known as China glaze, which was made in England between 1775 and 1810. The milk pan fragment was made anytime between 1680 and 1780. Ceramics, unlike modern disposable paper plates, are intended to be cleaned and reused multiple times, and sometimes even handed down from generation to generation. The amount of time between purchase and a piece's final deposit in the trash can be decades. I needed narrower dates to start digging into the historic documents to find out who lived in the house.

To do this, I used dendrochronology, a type of dating that uses a tree's annual growth rings to establish a date. A tree grows a ring every year, the width of which is dependent on the amount of annual precipitation. Variations in ring

sizes produce patterns that can be matched to dated regional wood samples. This is a specialized science that I can't do in the Charles County archaeology lab. Instead, Oxford Tree-Ring Lab took samples from framing inside the house. The samples came from the two sections whose architectural style indicated that they were older than the kitchen wing on the rear of the house. The original house (as labeled in the photograph, below), was small, measuring 13 feet, 10 inches by 11 feet, 4 inches. It had one room on the main floor with a loft area above. The dendrochronology indicated that lumber used to build it was cut during the winters of 1801 through 1803. The dates for the adjacent part of the house placed its construction in the spring and summer of 1820.



Using dates from the ceramics and dendrochronology, I was able to narrow my research focus to the years 1800 through 1820. What unfolded in the historic documents was the story of Sarah Dent one of the daughters of Joseph Manning Dent and Mary Magdalene Edwards. Sarah was born about 1779, probably in Trinity Parish. Her father died circa 1795, leaving Mary with a farm to run and seven children ranging in age from infancy to 18. Both Sarah and her sister Elizabeth were of marriageable age when their father died. And because their father had died without a will that gave specific portions of his land to his children (generally the sons), both young women had inherited a share of the farm. This made them attractive to suitors, who, should they marry either sister, would then own that share. Once married, a woman lost all legal rights to her property, regardless of whether it was real estate or personal property. Unless a marriage contract was made before the wedding, her property became his as soon as she said, "I do."

The young man who courted and wed Sarah was her second cousin Thomas Dent, the second son of William Barton Dent and Margaretta Smoot. In 1800, at the age of 28, Thomas purchased 50 acres of "Simpkin Coatback" from Henry Cooksey. He built the original small house in early 1803, probably around the time he married Sarah. In July of that year his father gave him another 50 acres of "Simpkin Coatback" and 100 acres of "Smith's Reserve." Later that year, Thomas bought 325 more acres of land from his father and brother Alexander.

The choice of a husband was extremely important. If a young woman chose the right man, she was assured a secure future. If she chose poorly, for instance a man who gambled or drank heavily, she would suffer the consequences for the rest of her life. In an age where divorce was rare, this could mean living in dire poverty or at the mercy of handouts from disapproving relatives. While mutual respect and perhaps love between marrying parties was important, the economic relationship was primary.

Initially, it appeared that Sarah made a good choice. Thomas owned a 525-acre farm and he had provided her with a new house. As was customary, Sarah contributed material goods to the marriage as attested to by the fragments of the red tea pot, creamware dishes, China glaze teacup, and the milk pan, all of which were common goods in households of the early 19th century. A successful marriage also meant children and in late February 1804, Sarah and Thomas became new parents with the arrival of their daughter Sallie. She was joined by a brother, William Barton Wade Dent, in September 1806 and sisters Ruth Ann (1808), Mary Jane (1809), and Eleanor (1810).

Sarah and Thomas were, to all appearances, living a life typical of most middling Maryland planters. As the children arrived, they expanded the house with a shed addition. They purchased fashionable polychrome painted dinning and tea ware, fragments of which were found in the unit by the house. Documents indicate that they also owned four feather beds, 12 chairs, and a looking glass. The dishes, the tea ware, furniture, and mirror were marks of gentility and economic success.

But something was wrong. In 1804, less than a year after purchasing land from his father and brother, Thomas sold it back to them. This was either part of a land speculation scheme by the Dents, or Thomas was unable to make the payments. In August 1809, Thomas sold the remaining 200 acres of the farm along with a horse, a heifer, and most of his household goods to his father. He was insolvent and about to lose everything to his creditors. His family was able to stay on the farm only because his father purchased it.

What happened to Thomas is a mystery. His financial problems began during the Napoleonic wars, a period marked by trade embargoes that resulted in financial ruin for many planters. But Thomas's problems may have been greater than that. His father appears to have been very angry with him. When William Dent died in 1816, he gave land, cattle, household goods, and slaves to all his children except Thomas. Thomas received one dollar. Whatever Thomas had done, his father realized that anything he gave to Thomas or Sarah would quickly disappear. Instead, William bypassed them and left the 200-acre farm comprising "Simpkin Coatback" and "Smith's Reserve" to his grandchildren. They were also given a cow and calf, and an enslaved woman named Nell.

— Continued

Photograph of Elsie Picky, Linda Talley, and Carol Cowherd (Charles County Archaeological Society of MD) at one of the test pits at Simpkin Coatback.



Fragments of Sarah's dishes found in front of the house. The top piece is the portion of a teapot where the spout joins the body. The two sherd below it are parts of dishes used for daily meals. On the bottom row, the small piece on the lower left with the blue line is part of a stoneware bowl. The brightly colored sherd on the right, were fragments of tea cups and saucers. A hostess's tea set and the manners associated with serving and drinking tea were signs of gentility during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.



The will placed their inheritance under the care of their Uncles Alexander and Nathan Dent, with the provision that if Thomas decided to move to one of the new states, the uncles were to sell the property and buy a new farm at the new location for the children.

Thomas Dent left Maryland shortly after his father died and settled in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. The two youngest Dent children, Judith and Joseph, were born there. Thomas never completely recovered from his financial woes. The family stayed on the Virginia farm until most of the

daughters were married. Then in the late 1840s, Thomas and Sarah relocated to Georgia. Thomas's poor financial choices had an impact not only on his ability to own property, but also on his daughters. While Ruth Ann married in her early 20s, which was the average age of marriage by the 1830s, Sallie, Mary Jane, and Judith were well more than 30, and Eleanor never married.

Another tragedy related to Thomas's poor financial behavior was Nell. Given as a slave to Thomas's children, she was forced to leave the community of enslaved individuals centered around William Dent's farm in Maryland. Not only was she separated from this community, she was probably isolated without a family of her own on the new farm in Virginia. The 1820 and 1830 censuses for Thomas Dent's Pittsylvania County household list one enslaved woman, who presumably was Nell. By the time the family moved to Georgia, there were no enslaved individuals in the Dent household.

The follies of one man had consequences for everyone associated with him, especially in terms of the loss of family and community. It appears Sarah did not choose wisely. ■

I give and bequeath to the children that is now born to my son Thomas or may hereafter be born of Sarah his wife one hundred acres of land more or less lying and being in Charles County State of Maryland known by the name of Simkin Coatback, but if my son Thomas wishes to remove to any of the new states, his Executor or Executors is hereby authorized to sell the aforesaid land and purchase land there for the aforesaid children - I also give and bequeath to the aforesaid children one negro woman named Nell to them and their heirs

Lydia Davis	2	0	0	4	1	0	1	0	0	9	0	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0
Ann Dent's Servt	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ruth Ann Dent	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
John W Dent	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thos Dent	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
William Dent	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Henry Dent's Servt	2	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jacob Dent	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frances Dent	2	3	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Top Image: Portion of William Dent's 1816 Last Will & Testament leaving Simpkin Coatback and the enslaved woman, Nell to his son Thomas Dent's children.

Bottom Image: The Virginia census for 1820 indicates that Thomas Dent's household comprised two males (Thomas and their infant son Joseph) and seven females (Sarah and their daughters Sallie, Ruth Ann, Mary Jane, Eleanor, Judy, and another unknown), two of the members of the household were engaged in agriculture, and in the furthest, right hand column there was one female enslaved between the age of 14 and 26. This woman was Nell.

To the
Ladies

*WIFE and servant are the same,
But only differ in the name:
For when that fatal knot is ty'd,
Which nothing, nothing can divide:
When she the word obey has said,
And man by law supreme has made,
Then all that's kind is laid aside,
And nothing left but state and pride.
Fierce as an eastern prince he grows,
And all his innate rigour shows:
Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,
Will the nuptial contract break.*

Like mutes, she signs alone must make,
And never any freedom take:
But still be govern'd by a nod,
And fear her husband as a God:
Him still must serve, him still obey,
And nothing act, and nothing say,
But what her haughty lord thinks fit,
Who with the power, has all the wit.
Then shun, oh! shun that wretched state,
And all the fawning flatt'lers hate:
Value yourselves, and men despise:
You must be proud, if you'll be wise.

— LADY MARY CUDLEIGH • 1703

ARE YOU A HISTORIC PROPERTY OWNER?

You may be eligible for the Heritage Structure
Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program.



Homeowner Tax Credit Program

Administered by Maryland Historical Trust (MHT)

Did you know homeowners can earn a state income tax credit for renovating historic homes? The tax credit offers homeowners of single-family, owner-occupied residences up to 20 percent of eligible rehabilitation costs. Tax credits may be used for repairs such as: roof repair and replacement, chimney repair and lining, window restoration, new storm doors/windows, masonry repointing, and floor refinishing.

Eligibility: Buildings must be certified as historic, defined as having at least one of the following designations:

- Individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- A contributing resource within a National Register Historic District.
- A locally designated structure or contributing resource to a local historic district that MHT determines to be eligible for the National Register.

The credit is capped at \$50,000 in a 24-month period, and projects must have a minimum of \$5,000 of eligible expenses to qualify. Applications are accepted year round; MHT review runs approximately 30-45 days.

Details: Megan Klem — Megan.Klem@Maryland.gov • 410-514-7688. Additional information is available online at: https://mht.maryland.gov/taxcredits_homeowner.shtml.

MHT also administers a Small Commercial Tax Credit for income producing properties.

NATIONAL REGISTER PROPERTIES

Rose Hill	Mt. Air
La Grange	Mt. Aventine
Habre de Venture	Pleasant Hill
St. Thomas Manor	Rosemary Lawn
Friendship House	Cedar Grove
The Retreat	Compton House
Araby	Mt. Bleak
Stagg Hall	John Reeder House
Chimney House	Dr. Mudd House
Sarum	Rich Hill
St. Mary's Catholic Church Newport	Locust Grove
	Oakland
Truman's Place	Maxwell Hall
Burch House	Timber Neck Farm
Ellerslie	The Exchange
Waverly	Spye Park
Crain's Lot	McPherson's Purchase
Linden	Bryantown Tavern
The Lindens	Evergreen
Thainston	Old Waldorf School
Mt. Carmel Monastery	Bel Alton High School
Acquinsicke	Eugene Chaney House
Oak Grove	
Green's Inheritance	

CHARLES COUNTY CELEBRATES Historic Designations A Commitment to Preservation

By: Cal Carpenter

In 2024 Charles County celebrated another milestone in preserving its **RICH HISTORICAL LEGACY** with the designation of three local landmarks and two National Register Properties.

Newly Designated Landmarked Properties —

- **J.C. Parks House** (p.18-19)
- **St. Nicholas Creek Burial Ground** (p.20)
- **Twiford's Store** (p.21)

National Register Properties —

- **Bel Alton High School** (p.23)
- **Pomonkey Historic District** (p.23)

These properties offer a unique glimpse into the region's past, reflecting both its cultural heritage and its historical significance. The decision to elevate these sites to landmark status and their inclusion in the National Register highlights the importance of preserving local history and ensuring that future generations can appreciate the stories that shaped our shared community.

A Commitment to Preservation

The designation of these three new landmarks, in addition to the two new National Register listings are part of Charles County's broader commitment to preserving its historical and cultural heritage. As the county continues to grow and evolve, these historic sites offer a tangible connection to the past, fostering a sense of identity and continuity within the community.

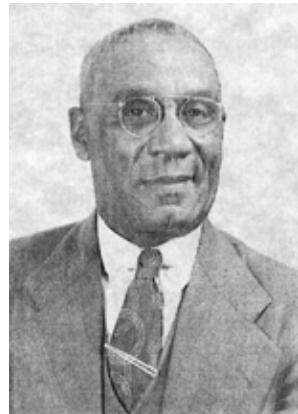
Because these historic sites are preserved for future generations, they offer opportunities for education, reflection, and community engagement. They remind us all of the shared history that connects us and the importance of maintaining a link to the past as we move forward into the future.

J.C. PARKS HOUSE One Man's Dedication to Education

The J.C. Parks House, located in the heart of Bryans Road, has stood the test of time as a testament to the region's 20th century architecture. Built in the 1927, this historic home was once the residence of Joseph Christopher Parks, a prominent local figure whose contributions to the community were significant.

Joseph Christopher (J.C.) Parks (pictured, right) was born in Lexington, Kentucky. He studied education at the Hampton Institute, Penn State University, Morgan State College, and Catholic University. His teaching career began as principal of the Centerville Colored Elementary School in Queen Anne's County, Maryland. After serving in the U.S. Army during World War I, Parks worked for 42 years as the Supervisor of Colored Schools for Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) from 1919 until his retirement in 1961.

During his early years as supervisor, he was engaged in many activities that were essential to the welfare of both teachers and pupils. He became the "Mr. Fix-It" when items needed to be repaired, or the "realtor" in negotiations to purchase land for schools and the housing of teachers. He was also directly responsible for the construction of many schools in the county supported by the Rosenwald Fund between 1922



— Continued



Pictured: Miss Lillian Parks, daughter of J.C. Parks, with Ms. Dorothea Smith, President of the African American Heritage Society of Charles County, holding the landmark plaque for the J.C. Parks House during the Historic Preservation Commission Awards Ceremony on June 23, 2024.

and 1930. During the Jim Crow era, Mr. Parks supervised the operations of thirty-five or more elementary schools and two high schools (Bel Alton and Pomonkey). Working with parents and friends, he purchased a bus that was sorely needed to transport students of color to Pomonkey High School, one of the two high schools for these students in the county.

Parks later became the executive secretary of the Maryland State Teachers Association. There he advocated for equal salaries for teachers statewide. In 1963, he was appointed by Governor Millard Tawes as chairman of the newly established Commission on Human Relations for Charles County. Parks was responsible for securing the funding needed to build J.C. Parks Elementary School which opened in 1967 and was named in his honor.

Designating the J.C. Parks House as a local landmark ensures that its historical value is protected. The designation also assists in highlighting the immense dedication that Mr. Parks had for the children, parents, and community members of Charles County. The property stands as a symbol of the enduring legacy of one dedicated individual. ■





Pictured: Franklin A. Robinson Jr. (Owner)
& Esther Doyle Read (CCG Archaeologist)

ST. NICHOLAS CREEK BURIAL GROUND

Honoring Enslaved African Americans

The St. Nicholas Creek Burial Ground, a sacred site in Charles County, has been designated as a landmark, recognizing its significance as the resting place of some of the region's early enslaved inhabitants. Located near the banks of Smith Creek (formerly known as St. Nicholas Creek), the burial ground has served as an important site for local families dating back to the 18th century.

The Serenity Farm Burial Ground holds the remains of at least 23 African Americans who were interred between 1790 and 1810. The burials were dated from 14 sets of coffin nails and the buttons recovered from Burials 13 and 14.

The location and dates of the burials suggest the individuals interred here were African Americans enslaved by the Smith family. The dates of the burials coincide with Henry Arundel Smith's inheritance of the property in 1781 and his death in 1809. Census records reveal that in 1790, the property was supported by the labor of at least two dozen or more enslaved African Americans. Although the federal population census does not mention names, enslaved families were enumerated and included men and women ranging in age from 1 year up to 70 years of age.

The landmark designation honors the memory of these men, women, and children. It serves as a reminder of the deep roots of the community and its commitment to honoring those who came before.



St. Nicholas Creek Burial Ground, Benedict, MD



Pictured: Robert Ryce (Owner) & Cal Carpenter (CCG Planner)

TWIFORD'S STORE A Hub of Community & Commerce

Twiford's Store, a cornerstone of local commerce in the early 20th century, was also granted landmark status in 2024. Originally established as a general store in 1916, Twiford's served as a gathering place for Marbury Village residents, offering goods, supplies, and a sense of community in an era when rural stores were often the heartbeat of small towns. The store is also the oldest documented building within the village.

The store's historical significance goes beyond its role as a commercial center. It was also a place where residents came together to exchange news, stories, and ideas. The store was the location of the U.S. Post Office from 1917 until at least 1948. Twiford's Store represents a time when communities were more interconnected, and local businesses played a central role in shaping the identity of Charles County.

By designating Twiford's Store as a local landmark, the county ensures that this important part of its commercial history is preserved. The store, though no longer operational, remains an iconic structure that represents the spirit of the region's past.



Twiford's Store, Marbury MD

— Continued



BEL ALTON HIGH SCHOOL

Education for the Underrepresented

Bel Alton High School was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 1, 2024. The school operated from 1938 to 1966 as a school for African American and Native American students during the Jim Crow era of segregation in the United States. The school was spared demolition in the late 1980s in part by work of the Bel Alton High School Alumni Association, which rehabilitated the school building as a community center from 2008 to 2015. Currently, the building is the home of the Bel Alton High School Alumni Association and county and state agencies. “Placement on the NRHP is significant for us as it enables us to further our mission of preserving, promoting, and sharing the cultural history of Bel Alton High School and the Black community it served for 27 years,” stated Matt Wills, Chair of Bel Alton High School Alumni Association in a release by the organization.

POMONKEY HISTORIC DISTRICT

A Community Built by African Americans

The Pomonkey Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 22, 2024, and encompasses a significant concentration of buildings and sites associated with the development of this predominantly African American community. Pomonkey has functioned as a commercial, educational, social, and religious center in the community for more than 100 years. In addition to Walton's Market, which still operates to this day, the Pomonkey National Register Historic

District includes an Elk Lodge, a Masonic Lodge, Pomonkey High School, the Metropolitan United Methodist Church, and Thornton's Funeral Home. All these institutions served as shared community centers for the African American population in the region, creating a tight-knit network with broad family ties. The community holds great meaning to those who grew up there,



A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lillian Virginia Parks

JULY 10, 1944 – MAY 14, 2025

Lillian was a lifelong resident of Bryans Road, Maryland. She was born on July 10, 1944, at Freeman's Hospital, now Howard University Hospital in Washington, D.C. Lillian was the only child of Joseph Christopher and Carleza Clayton Parks of Bryans Road, Maryland. In 1928, Lillian's father, Joseph Christopher Parks, purchased three acres of land on Matthews Road in Bryans Road. With his expertise in architectural design and construction, he designed and built a two-story Colonial Revival home with a wrap-around porch. This was the home that Lillian was raised in and where she lived for most of her life.

Lillian graduated from Pomonkey High School in 1962 with honors. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in education from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and in 1978, Lillian was awarded a Master of Arts degree in education from George Washington University.

She had a thirty-two-year career in education as an employee of the Charles County Public School System and later the Prince George's Public School System, where she retired as a Guidance Counselor. During her later years, she was slowed by a physical disability, but she continued to be active in the community she loved.

Lillian's father, J.C. Parks had a profound influence on her life. He was the Supervisor of Colored Schools in Charles County from 1919 to 1941, and a leader in various community organizations. He and his family attended Metropolitan United Methodist Church in Pomonkey where Lillian became a life member belonging to and leading a myriad of ministries including becoming an honorary member of the United Methodist Men. As an excellent leader and an example of Christian fellowship, she taught Sunday School classes. County Commissioner President Reuben Collins and Vice-President Ralph Patterson were in her class and have fond memories of her. Lillian was a no-nonsense person but always helped others in any way she could.

In the 1920's, while visiting a school in La Plata, Mr. Parks witnessed a third grader in a class of sixth graders fervently raising her hand. Mr. Parks told the teacher to call on her. The third grader,



Hildegard Johnson responded with the correct answer to the teacher's question. This first interaction led to Hildegard becoming his unofficially adopted daughter, and she called him "Daddy Parks." When Mr. Parks married Carleza Clayton, she encouraged him to continue to aid Hildegard. As a result, Hildegard called her "Mommy Parks." In 1951 when Lillian was seven years old, her adopted sister drove her to Freeman's Hospital where Lillian's mother was admitted. Her mother, who was very ill, waved to her from the window. This was the last time that Lillian saw her mother, as she died shortly thereafter. Hildegard remained in Lillian's life even after she married Martell Adams of Aquasco, Maryland. Later both women worked for the Prince George's County school system.

Lillian lived with her father until his death in 1969. After his death she continued living at the home on Matthews Road in Bryans Road. Her home is now a designated Charles County Historic Landmark. Lillian's wisdom, warmth, generosity, determination, radiant smile and her love for education and her community will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved her.

— **Dorothea Smith**
President, African American Heritage Society of Charles County

Historic Preservation Preservation Project Award

The Preservation Project Award recognizes excellence in the preservation and restoration of historic buildings, as well as the adaptive reuse of historic structures.



Left to Right: Abigail Kennedy (UMBC), Steve Lohr (S.D. Lohr, Inc.), Franklin Robinson (HPC), Esther Doyle Read (County Archaeologist), Tim Lessner (Lorenzi, Dodd, and Gunnill), Mike Mazzeo (Friends of Rich Hill), and Carol Donohue

CHARLES COUNTY 2024 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

The Historic Preservation Awards are presented by the Charles County Historic Preservation Commission to an eligible individual, business, organization, or project that deserves recognition for outstanding achievements in historic preservation. Awards are presented in two categories — **PRESERVATION PROJECTS** and **PRESERVATION SERVICE**. In 2024, there were two recipients for the Preservation Service Award and one recipient for the Preservation Project Award.

The Historic Preservation Commission continues to seek nominations for outstanding achievements in Historic Preservation in Charles County. If you or someone you know has been a part of a historic preservation project within the past year and would like to nominate an individual or project, please head over to the Charles County Government Historic Preservation webpage to submit a nomination for the next award year.

The 2024 recipient of the award included the many groups that worked together to relocate and restore a 19th century corn house. The corn house was originally part of the Dyson Farm in White Plains, which was recently developed as a commercial property. The mid-19th century corn house is a heavy timber frame structure that, in its original location on the Dyson Farm, sat on brick piers. Based on its age and overall construction, it is a relatively rare surviving building type that is fast disappearing from the county landscape. Corn houses were the location of feed corn that not only fed the livestock but was also used as chicken feed. Ideally, historic buildings would remain in situ, that is, in their original location and setting. However, the nature of the site development made it impossible for the corn house to remain in its location in the center of the property. As part of the development process, archaeological and standing structures surveys of the property were done and reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). One of the conditions the HPC placed on the site development was the removal and restoration of the extant corn house. This multi-year project, which began in 2021 and was completed in 2023, was made possible by the combined efforts of Jacqueline Dyson/ BHT Properties Group (property owners), Tim Lessner of Lorenzi, Dodds & Gunnill, Expert House Movers, Steve and Tina Lohr of S.D. Lohr (the restoration company), the Friends of Rich Hill who provided a new home for the corn house at Rich Hill, and the Charles County Public Archaeology Program and students from the Ancient Studies Department of UMBC who did the archaeological survey of the new location. This project is truly an example of what a dedicated community of preservationists and commercial interests can achieve together. See page 26 for further reading.

Historic Preservation Preservation Service Award

The Preservation Service Award recognizes outstanding achievement in and support for furthering the aims of historic preservation in Charles County, including: education, research, development, planning, advocacy, and community leadership.



Left to Right: Ned Edelen, Denise Chesledine, Joe Cheseldine, Esther Doyle Read (Charles County Archaeologist), Evie Lavorgna, Carol Cowherd, Elsie Picyk, Claudia Kuhn, Linda Talley, and Doug Talley

The Charles County Archaeological Society of Maryland, Inc. (CCASM) was presented with the Service Award at the 2024 Charles County Historic Preservation Awards. CCASM is the local chapter of the larger state avocational Archaeological Society of Maryland, Inc. (ASM). Based in Charles County, the group comprises individuals interested in the archaeology and history of our county. Since 2010, CCASM has been involved in many county archaeological projects. CCASM assists the county archaeologist and Recreation, Parks, and Tourism with their school programs in Port Tobacco and also helped to create an educational scavenger hunt for young people that is loosely based on the National Park Service Junior Ranger Program. CCASM staffs the Burch House in Port Tobacco during the annual Holiday Trail. They also participate at county events, such as Market Day at Port Tobacco. Their efforts have promoted archaeology in Charles County for more than a decade and have resulted in at least one young Charles Countian receiving her master's degree in Anthropology, as well as providing mentoring for a host of people, young and old.



Left to Right: Dorothea Smith, Franklin Robinson, Julie King, Lucille Ward Walker, Francis Gray, Brandon Rosario, and Doria Fleisher

Lucille Ward Walker and others were presented with the Service Award for their work in spearheading the creation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, one of two National Heritage Areas in the state of Maryland. Ms. Ward Walker received the second Preservation Service Award for her tireless efforts in the creation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area. She is pictured with the group that helped her guide the National Heritage Area through Congressional Hearings. Charles County is now included in the recently designated Southern Maryland National Heritage Area. National Heritage Areas are places where historic, cultural, and natural resources combine to form cohesive, nationally important landscapes. Recognizing Southern Maryland's exceptional place in the nation's history, the United States Congress authorized the creation of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area in 2022. Contained within Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's counties, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area brings federal, state, and private resources to promote heritage tourism, conserve natural landscapes, preserve the environment and cultural traditions, and enhance the local economy. The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area is one of 13 certified heritage areas in Maryland, and one of 62 Congressionally designated national heritage areas across the country.

*Congratulations
To Our 2024 Award Recipients*



The Relocation & Restoration of the Dyson/Rich Hill Corn House

The landscape along U.S. 301 has changed dramatically since the 1960s. The slot machines, night spots, and many of the motels and restaurants associated with “Little Vegas” are gone, and replaced by shopping centers, fast-food places, car dealerships, and offices.

Farms along the corridor have also disappeared. One of the farms in White Plains was replaced by the National Guard Armory and an automobile auction site. Before construction of the latter began, the remaining farm buildings on the site were razed. That is all but one! A 19th century corn house was saved through the joint efforts of BHT Properties Group (site owner), Lorenzi, Dodds, and Gunnel, Inc. (LDG) (site developer), S.D. Lohr, Inc. (restored the cornhouse), the Charles County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), the Friends of Rich Hill, the Charles County Archaeology Society of Maryland, Inc. (CCASM), and students from the Ancient Studies Department at UMBC.

In early March 2021, plans for the development of the White Plains property were presented to the HPC. Documentation of the standing structures, as well as an archaeological investigation of the property, was completed that year. All but two of the

structures were in extremely deteriorated condition – a tobacco barn and a corn house. The HPC recommended stabilizing these two structures and retaining them on site. Unfortunately, it wasn’t possible to retain the structures on site, but instead of demolishing the corn house, BHT, LDG, and the HPC developed a plan to move the corn house to a new site. Rich Hill, a former plantation near Bel Alton, was a perfect match. Because all the former outbuildings associated with farming activities at Rich Hill are gone, the addition of the corn house to the landscape expands the historic interpretation of the site.

However, it wasn’t as simple as just placing the corn house on a truck and hauling it over to Rich Hill. The house standing at Rich Hill today was built in 1729, but people were living on the property long before that date. Archaeological excavation around the property has recovered evidence of Native American occupation of the property extending back some 6,000 years. Although many families, including the Lomax, Brown, Cox, and Garner families, have lived at Rich Hill since the late 1600s, only the main house is still standing. By 2016, all the barns and other outbuildings were gone and the location of only a few were known.



Because of the long history associated with Rich Hill and the high probability to encounter intact archaeological deposits, the County Archaeologist was tasked with finding a space where the corn house could be placed. Between May and July 2021, CCASM and students from UMBC volunteered their time to help survey the space available for the corn house. After excavating multiple units across part of the property, a spot for the corn house's new home was found.

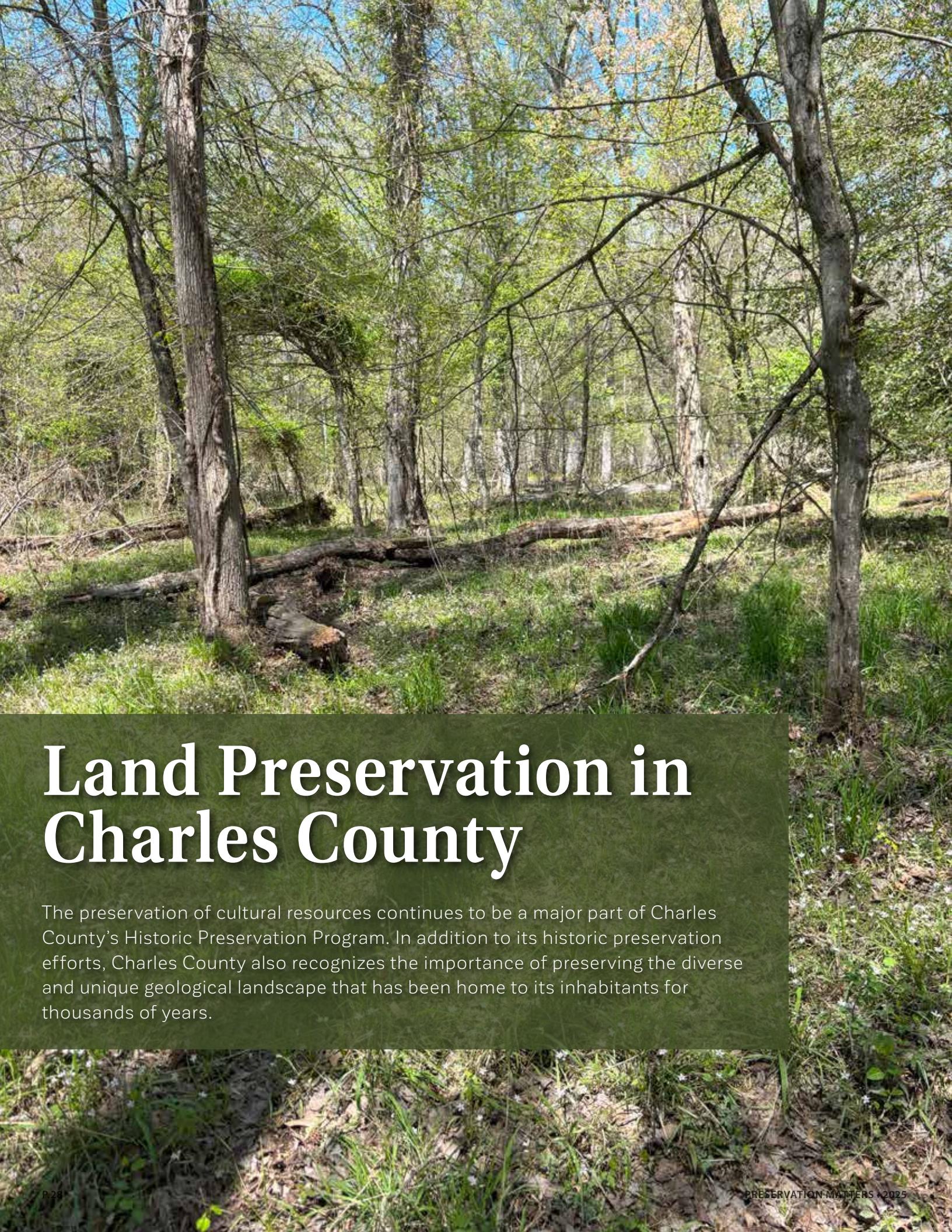
During the autumn of 2021, new brick foundation piers for the corn house were built at Rich Hill. Finally, in the early morning hours of a day in late March 2022, Expert House Movers lifted the corn house from its original brick piers in White Plains, placed it on a truck, and drove it down U.S. 301 and through back roads to Rich Hill. Within a few hours, the corn house was set on its new piers.

The last stage of the project was completed by S.D. Lohr, Inc. Lohr and Amish carpenters stabilized the building, replaced rotted exterior boards, and rebuilt the roof.

While the park will not officially open until restoration of the house is completed sometime in 2026, the corn house can be viewed by visitors walking the Rich Hill grounds. The successful completion of this project is the result of hours of work by public and private institutions and individuals. It is a first in Charles County and an accomplishment that should be celebrated by the community.

Congratulations to all of the participants in this project who received the 2024 Preservation Service Award from the HPC! ■





Land Preservation in Charles County

The preservation of cultural resources continues to be a major part of Charles County's Historic Preservation Program. In addition to its historic preservation efforts, Charles County also recognizes the importance of preserving the diverse and unique geological landscape that has been home to its inhabitants for thousands of years.

From the sprawling forests in the Nanjemoy-Mattawoman woodland area, to the ecologically rich wetlands of the Zekiah Valley Watershed, Charles County is home to a vast amount of environmental wonders.

In addition to these forests and wetlands, Charles County also has acres upon acres of prime agricultural farmland. You cannot discuss the history of Charles County without mentioning its prominence in agriculture. From the time of this area's original Native inhabitants, most notably members of the Piscataway-Conoy Tribe, to the European colonists and enslaved African Americans who would continue the tradition of working the land for sustenance and profit, Charles County has always had deep roots in farming and agriculture. To ensure that future generations have the chance to learn and appreciate the diverse landscape, the county has sponsored and promoted a wide variety of land preservation programs.

Land preservation programs are very active in Charles County, with continued growing landowner interest in preserving their farm and forest properties. Charles County has a bold but achievable goal to preserve 50% of the land, or approximately 147,000 acres in open space. The total amount of land preserved through 2024 has reached 107,125 acres. Charles County also continues to be the third most forested county in Maryland.

Several options are available for property owners to permanently preserve their land in open space for future generations. Most programs offer tax reductions or payments for preservation and are often specific to the intended use of the property as agricultural or forest land. Under these programs, the land typically remains in current ownership, with a preservation agreement recorded in Maryland Land Records. However, there are some cases where the land is purchased by, or donated to, an entity for preservation. The two main state programs that the county utilizes for its land preservation efforts are the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), through Maryland's Department of Agriculture (MDA), and the Rural Legacy Program, through Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

MALPF was one of the first programs created in the United States and has become one of the nation's leaders in agricultural land preservation by preserving more agricultural land than any other state in the country. Created by the General Assembly in 1977, MALPF purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties, representing a public investment of more than \$1 billion.



Since 1980, MALPF has purchased easements on more than 2,500 acres, permanently preserving more than 350,000 acres.

Maryland's Rural Legacy Program provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resources, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource-based industries. The program creates public-private partnerships and allows those who know the landscape best, land trusts and local governments, to determine the best way to protect the landscapes that are critical to our economy, environment and quality of life. The program encourages local governments and land trusts to work together and determine how best to protect their vital working landscapes. Land conservation investments are targeted to protect the most ecologically valuable properties that most directly impact the Chesapeake Bay and local waterway health. There are two established Rural Legacy Areas in Charles County.

The Zekiah Watershed Rural Legacy Area is home to the largest natural hardwood swamp in Maryland, and encompasses numerous historic sites and scenic vistas.

The Zekiah Watershed Rural Legacy Area consists of 60,000 acres and was established to protect the unique environmental, agricultural, and cultural resources. To date, more than 4,000 acres have been permanently protected through the voluntary purchase of conservation easements worth more than \$18 million. In 2020, Charles County expanded the Rural Legacy Area to encompass the Cobb Neck region.

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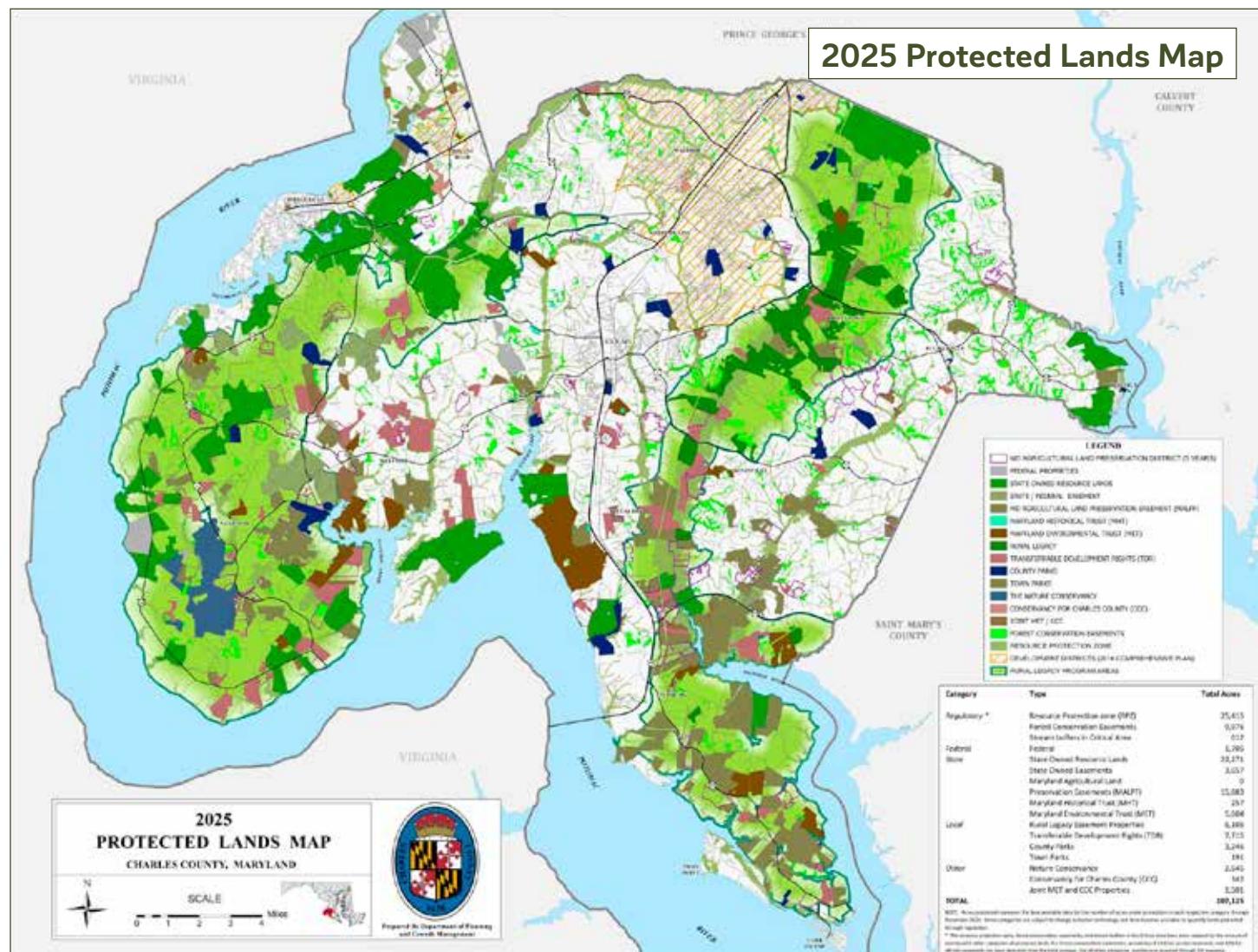
In 2021, Charles County coordinated with the State of Maryland to establish a second Rural Legacy Area in western Charles County. The Nanjemoy-Mattawoman Forest Rural Legacy Area encompasses more than 65,000 acres and doubles the amount of Rural Legacy Areas in the county.

In Charles County's 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Priority Preservation Areas were adopted. The adoption reflected a local desire to maintain and support active agricultural activities in the County. Priority Preservation Areas include the most productive farm and forest land base in the County based on soils data and local knowledge. Three Priority Preservation Areas totaling 132,741 acres have been established in Charles County. These areas are in Cobb neck, predominantly row crop farming and forest land. This area is also home to a sizable Amish community, whose culture is tied to agriculture. Mattawoman Creek is the second area which is home to forested wetlands, floodplains, and agricultural land. The third area is the Nanjemoy Peninsula which is home to large, forested tracts.

The amount of land protected in the calendar year 2024 reflects this increased interest in land preservation, with a net increase of 1,240 acres. The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation

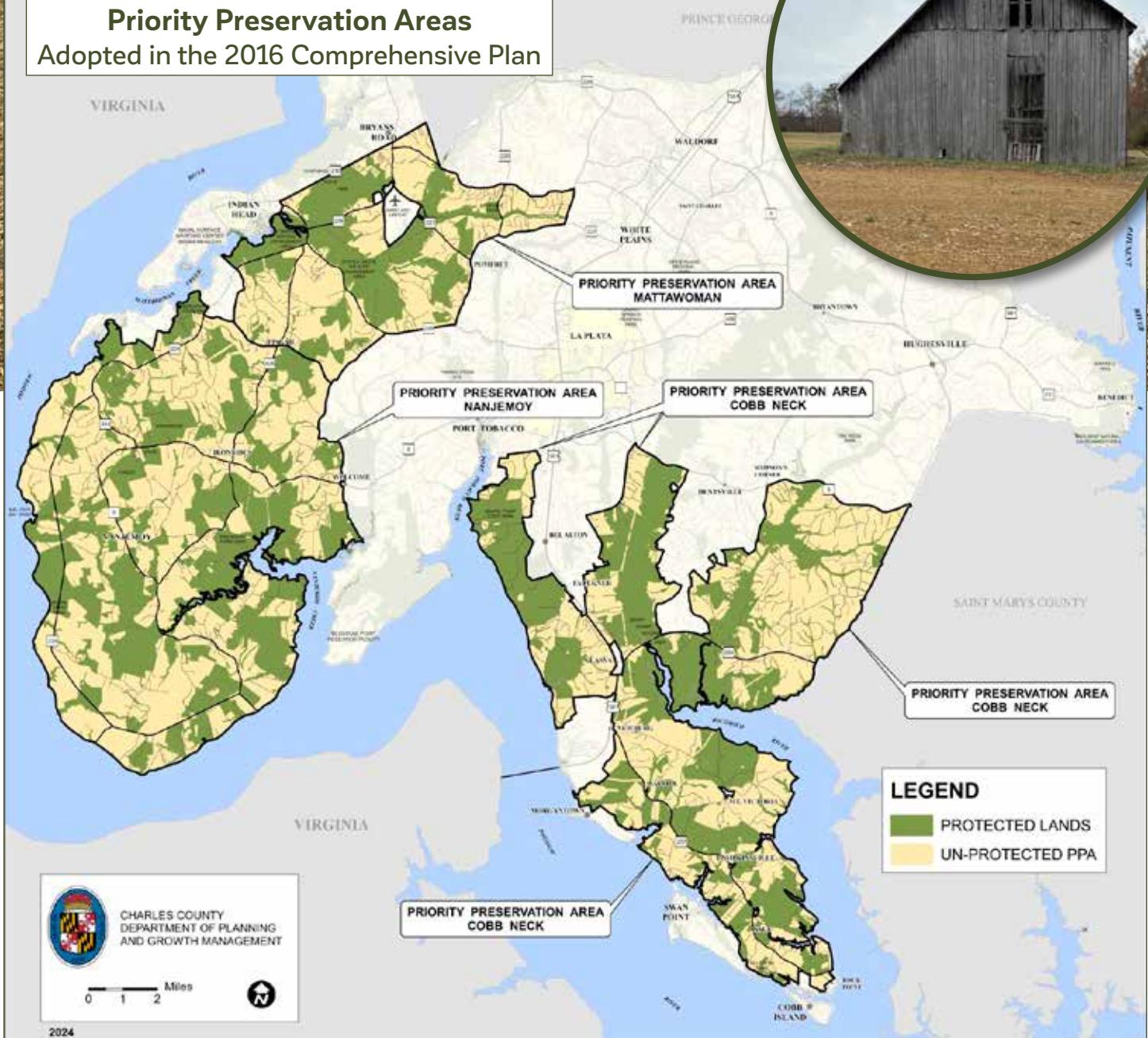
Foundation (MALPF) and the Rural Legacy Program contributed 839.93 preserved acres in 2024. These two programs rely heavily on a strong partnership with the County Government that includes staff time and local matching fund contributions. The County's Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program and Forest Conservation Act requirements contributed 222.53 acres of protected land in 2024.

Charles County will continue to be a leader in land preservation, ensuring that all who live, work, and visit can take in the rural sights and feel connected to its past, present, and future. ■





Priority Preservation Areas Adopted in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan





About Charles County Government

The mission of Charles County Government is to provide our citizens the highest quality service possible in a timely, efficient and courteous manner. To achieve this goal, our government must be operated in an open and accessible atmosphere, be based on comprehensive long- and short-term planning and have an appropriate managerial organization tempered by fiscal responsibility. We support and encourage efforts to grow a diverse workplace. Charles County is a place where all people thrive and businesses grow and prosper; where the preservation of our heritage and environment is paramount; where government services to its citizens are provided at the highest level of excellence; and where the quality of life is the best in the nation.

It is the policy of Charles County to provide equal employment opportunity to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religious or political affiliation or opinion, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity or expression, or any other status protected by law.



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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING &
GROWTH MANAGEMENT

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