

*The Hill Community*  
**WALKING TOUR**



**A Free Black Community**

*Circa 1788*

*An Initiative of  
The Hill Community Project*

## THE HILL COMMUNITY

Easton's Hill Community has been home to free African Americans since the 1780s, more than 80 years before the Civil War ended in 1865. The history of this community was obscured by time until researchers began to unravel the mysteries of this extraordinary neighborhood.

Enslaved people on the Eastern Shore were manumitted as early as the late 1600s. This practice accelerated in the years before and after the American Revolution, driven by changing agricultural practices as a shift from tobacco to grain decreased summer labor requirements. Religious convictions among Quakers and Methodists who opposed slavery contributed to this dramatic shift, as did Revolutionary-era political ideals of liberty and equality.

Those who were enslaved continued to gain their freedom through the end of the Civil War by various means. Some bought their freedom. Others were freed by their owners or were manumitted at their master's death. Still others escaped to freedom along routes that eventually formed the Underground Railroad.

These factors allowed The Hill Community to take root and grow here. Free black people resided throughout early Easton, living side by side with white neighbors and with enslaved people. By the 19th century, the homes of most black people were



Mark Sandlin

*The Hill Community Walking Tour*

clustered along Hanson and Dover streets. After the Civil War, these hardened into segregated enclaves that grew together to form The Hill. Descendants of the original families still live here today.

The lives of the free black families of The Hill are rich and varied, and their stories are woven into the very fabric of the town. These are the people living in the shadows of history who invested their time and their passions into building families, churches, businesses, and civic organizations. You'll learn the stories of many of these courageous African Americans on The Hill Community Walking Tour.

**MANUMISSION** is the act of an owner freeing his or her enslaved people.

**EMANCIPATION** occurred when slavery was abolished.

## EASTON

The town of Easton sits at the meeting point of the two main geographical segments of Talbot County — the agricultural lands to the east and the tidal rivers of the Chesapeake Bay to the west. Beginning in 1659, the land that is now Easton began to be settled by Quaker planters. The Talbot County Court moved here in 1710 from York, a lost town between Easton and Wye Mills.

To expand from a crossroads of a few taverns and houses, surveyor John Needles laid out 118 new lots adjoining the already privately owned land. The town itself was established in 1787, and officially named Easton in 1788. The present courthouse on Washington Street, built in 1794, replaced the courthouse structure of 1710.

As the fledgling town grew in the 18th and 19th centuries, Easton Point became a shipping hub for the bounty of both the land and the water. Warehouses and canneries were built throughout Talbot County, providing year-round employment for residents. Port Street connected the town with Easton Point, where ships transported products to the burgeoning cities of Annapolis and Baltimore.



Talbot County Free Library

1908 T.M. Fowler Map

Free black people have been a part of Easton's social fabric from the very beginning, working as merchants, sailors, craftsmen, preachers, and midwives. In the 18th and most of the 19th century, the town was surrounded by a landscape dominated by small to medium farms with indentured servants,

enslaved persons, and free black people all working side by side. Many free black families living in town had relatives and friends who were enslaved. It was not

uncommon for free black individuals to purchase the freedom of a spouse or children.

Because of Easton's role as a political and mercantile hub for the Eastern Shore, black people here were connected with growing free black communities in other parts of the country, especially Baltimore and Philadelphia. Together they formed a network of resistance to slavery and mutual support for one another. Yet Easton's jail continued to house runaway enslaved persons, including at one time Frederick Douglass. The Talbot County courts had a conflicted history of upholding the rights of slave owners while also respecting the rights of those black people who had gained their freedom.

Easton's economic prominence as a shipping center for the regional economy continued into the 20th century. Depression brought steamboating to an end, while construction of modern roads and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952 sounded the death knell for the railroad. This caused many of the supporting businesses to decline.

U.S. Route 50 originally bypassed Easton en route to the beach, but the town has grown to encompass both sides of the highway. These developments shifted Easton's economy from small manufacturing and shipping toward finance, healthcare, and tourism. The Hill Community was largely left out of this economic change, leading almost all of the black-owned businesses located near the railroad to close. Still, the community remains.

## AFRICAN METHODISM

Today, The Hill Community is home to two historic black Methodist congregations — Asbury United Methodist Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Methodism began as a movement within the Church of England and in what became the American Episcopal Church. After the American Revolution, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury organized an independent American denomination called the Methodist Episcopal Church.

This movement took hold early in Easton and throughout the Eastern Shore during the era of the American Revolution, when Methodist ministers traveled the region to preach and recruit converts.

During this period, Joseph Hartley, one of these itinerant ministers, was imprisoned in the Easton jail for preaching contrary to the Act of Assembly and for failing to take an oath of allegiance to Maryland. A large crowd arrived to hear him preach through his prison bars despite this act of suppression by the establishment. Francis Asbury himself traveled in Talbot County as early as 1777, preaching in the Bayside.

Methodism attracted and welcomed people of all walks of life, especially poor whites and both free and enslaved black people, in ways that



Easton Star, August 1875

the established Anglican Church did not. According to Methodist theology, salvation is open to all who embrace God. Lively camp meetings, hymn singing, prayer, fervent preaching, and an emphasis on good works established greater equality in the church by breaking down many existing social hierarchies.

No one knows exactly why this community is called The Hill. It occupies the town's high point, but some believe the term may have religious significance.

Along with Quakers, 18th century Methodists also took a strong anti-slavery stance that enhanced this denomination's attractiveness to black people. Some Quaker families at Third Haven Friends Meeting had opposed slavery since

the 1650s, and Maryland Quakers officially banned slaveholding among their members by the time of the American Revolution. However, Quakers rarely admitted black worshippers as members, whereas early Methodists welcomed them.

By 1836, American Methodists were backing away from the anti-slavery position. Leaders of the national conference held in Cincinnati that year, worried about alienating Southern slaveowners, announced that Methodists would be permitted to own slaves.

Though many in the Methodist Episcopal Church believed in greater equality, African American worshippers continued to face discrimination in leadership opportunities, seating in churches, and full participation. As a result, many left to form their own congregations. Some of these independent black churches merged into the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination in 1816 to better support one another, while others continued either independently or within the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church.

For example, Asbury Church in Easton remained M.E. at the time and has had a predominantly black congregation since its beginnings in the antebellum period, though it had white ministers in the early years. Varying degrees of independence helped black Methodists to worship freely and equally. Methodism remains strong in Easton to this day.

## WALKING TOUR

### STOP 1 CORNER OF HARRISON STREET AND SOUTH LANE



Complete walking map on pages 30-31

When you arrive at the corner of Harrison Street and South Lane, stop for a moment and note the church at the end of South Lane. Asbury Methodist Church is one of the landmarks on The Hill, a beacon of freedom for African Americans throughout the centuries. You'll learn more about this church at Stop 10.

The survey stone marked XXIII that sits by the white fence at the corner of Harrison Street and South Lane was placed here in 1786 to mark the corner of Lot 23. This was the location of the Friends School which was operated by the Quakers.

The rose brick Hambleton House you see at 28 South Harrison Street was considered one of Easton's grandest homes when it was built in 1790.

Temperance Skinner lived here with her son Walter while employed by the Hambleton family. Like Temperance, many African American women throughout Easton's early history worked as domestics.

Temperance (1850) and her sister Ann Eliza (1843) were born to free parents and were raised with four



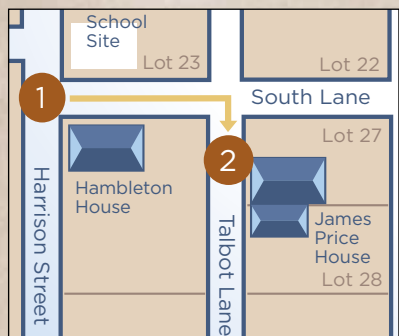
Survey Stone XXIII and Hambleton House across the street.

other siblings near Bloomfield Road outside Easton. The Skinner family was associated with the Joseph Bartlett family, steadfast anti-slavery Quaker elders.

While neither Temperance nor Eliza could read or write in 1870, they both negotiated for employment and living quarters from Easton's most prominent professional families. Both young women used these positions to better their families over time. Eliza retired to keeping her own house by 1880. You can find out more about her life at Stop 9. Walter became a successful Chicago maître d'hôtel and inherited real estate from his Aunt Eliza.

## STOP 2

### 18 TALBOT LANE



In 1794, when James Price purchased Lot 28, there was a wooden dwelling on the property. He erected the brick portion of the house in 1808 on Lot 27 to expand his residence.

Records show that he hired a black nurse named Grace in 1795 for an orphan in his care. It's likely this was Grace Brooks, a founding member of Easton's free black community. There is ample evidence that the lives of Price and Brooks were intertwined. Their paths crossed often, and she chose him to be the executor of her will.

By 1820, Price had married and owned several enslaved persons, most of whom worked on a farm he owned outside of town. After the Civil War, Mordecai Dawson's family bought this house. Enslaved domestic workers were replaced by paid African American servants in the house during this time period.



Price House at 18 Talbot Lane, photographed in 1936.

## DIGGING DEEPER

The house at 18 Talbot Lane is now home to the Talbot County Women's Club. This group acquired the property in 1946 and embarked on much needed renovations. The University of Maryland, College Park conducted an archaeological dig at this site in 2013 that focused on the yard area.

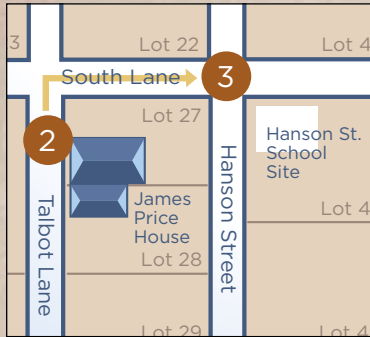
The excavation identified a kitchen that would have been used by both enslaved and hired black cooks. There was also evidence of cramped conditions that would have been experienced by tenant families between 1891 and 1946 when the property was rented to several white families. Children's toys including a toy fire truck, a toy gun, and numerous marbles were found among the household trash. This investigation has invited questions about how children were raised in different time periods. More details from this dig are featured on the **INTERPRETIVE PANEL** to the right of the house.



Archeology at Talbot County Women's Club

## STOP 3

### CORNER OF SOUTH LANE AND HANSON STREET



Grace Brooks, a founding member of The Hill Community, lived on Hanson Street just beyond the site of today’s standing water tower in the distance to your left. Though she was born enslaved in 1734, her skills in nursing and midwifery afforded her the opportunity to earn a personal income. In 1788, she bought her freedom, as well as that of her daughter Phebe and her granddaughter Priscilla, for £70. She later purchased her son David for £75 and granddaughter Nancy Walker for a sum of £40. Grace immediately gave them their freedom.

Known locally as “Granny Grace,” she became the first African American woman known to own land in the town of Easton. When Brooks died on March 12,

Yesterday, the 12th inst. Grace Brooks, of this town, and a native of Talbot county, departed this life, aged perhaps near seventy years, after a tedious and paining decline of some years, which she sustained with all the Heroism and Resignation of a patient christian, which the members of the society, to which she attached herself, are ready to bear witness to—although of *sable hue*, by her industry and economy, after emancipating herself, her children, and grand children, she has left decent property to her descendants—*Phillis Wheatley & Benjamin Danniker*, have left memorials of their talents, that while the page of history continues, will never be obliterated; and so Grace Brooks has left an impression on the hearts of all who knew her many virtues and services, that will never be forgotten while they possess recollection—white and black, are the offspring of the *Divine Creator*.

*Republican Star, March 13, 1810*

1810, the *Republican Star* newspaper published a detailed obituary about her remarkable life. At that time, women’s lives, regardless of race, were not typically memorialized in this fashion. Even after her death, she continued to care for family and friends by leaving specific bequests in her will.

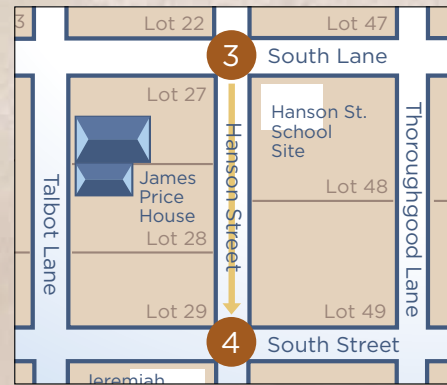
An enslaved woman named Sucky Bailey lived in a house that was also on Grace’s property. Bailey and many other enslaved people in Easton and throughout Talbot County were able to live on their own with a degree of liberty and freedom that those in other parts of Maryland and the South did not enjoy.

In 2019, one pound sterling would be worth approximately \$157 in U.S. currency. In 1788, Grace Brooks paid £195 for her freedom and that of her family. Today, she would pay \$29,045.

For many years, Easton Primary and High School, where the white children of Easton were educated, stood at the corner of Hanson Street and South Lane. Developer James Rouse, who is credited with popularizing the modern shopping mall, grew up on a farm just south of here off Hanson Street. He would have walked past his African American neighbors on the way to school. Rouse credited his childhood experiences in this integrated community with the inspiration for the racial and class integration in the planned community of Columbia, Maryland, which is considered his crowning achievement.

## STOP 4

### CORNER OF HANSON AND SOUTH STREETS



Look right along South Street to Talbot Lane. This row of houses sits on land once owned by Jeremiah Banning, also known as Jere. He was born a slave and was manumitted at age 21 on January 1, 1801, by the Reverend Joseph Telford of Easton. The

Bethel A.M.E. Church listed Jere as a trustee in 1827. He and his wife Cassie, along with their children, resided on Lot No. 30. Jere later bought the land from Samuel Yarnell's estate in 1837. Like most town residents, Jere had a garden and raised animals on this half-acre plot of land.

Continue across South Street and walk to 107 Hanson Street. James Freeman, a free black man, purchased Lot 31, where this more recent house sits today, when the town lots were originally auctioned in 1788. (You will see Lot 31 on map for Stop 5 on page 13.) He and his wife Henny had nine children and rented the rear portion of the lot to a free black man named Hercules. The family lost the land and house because of an unpaid 62¢ tax bill in 1828, when the country was enduring a tremendous depression. Freeman's descendants continue to live in Easton today.

## DIGGING DEEPER



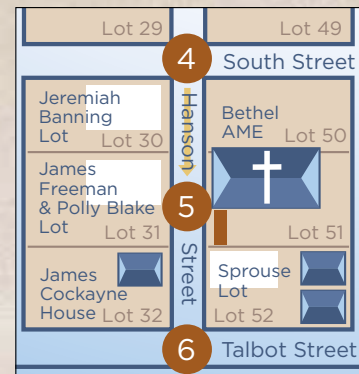
The garden or urban farm plots that the Banning and Freeman families established on their properties were much like those of other early Eastonians. Some enslaved people on plantations were able to grow kitchen gardens to fill gaps in their sometimes meager rations. Free black people planted gardens and held livestock on their own land in an effort to become self-sufficient.

Archaeological excavations on the Freeman site in 2017 and 2018 indicate the scale of these urban farms in early Easton. Here, several large planting beds were uncovered that would have supplied much of the family's diet. Tax records show that the Freemans also owned several hogs, horses, and cattle. A large barn door hinge recovered at the site testifies to the family's investment in facilities to house these animals.

Polly Blake purchased the house now standing at 107 South Hanson Street in 1881. She was born enslaved to the Hambleton family in 1804 at Emmerson Point outside St. Michaels. After the Civil War ended and she gained her freedom, Polly worked for James Parrott Hambleton, a white man she helped raise while enslaved.

After Hambleton married, Polly moved to Easton. When she died in 1887, her daughter and son-in-law Joseph H. Gray held the property until it was sold in 1908. During the Civil War, Joseph served in Company F, 2nd Regiment of the U.S. Colored Infantry. Polly's son Albert also served in the military and was a member of Company B, 7th Regiment of the U.S. Colored Infantry.

## STOP 5 IN FRONT OF BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH



Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest A.M.E. congregation on the Eastern Shore, was founded in 1818 when itinerant preacher Rev. Shadrack Bassett spoke from an ox cart nearby, inspiring believers to plant a church here. In 1820, the trustees of Bethel A.M.E. Church bought one acre of land, taking up most of the block.

The current building is at least the third house of worship upon this site and was completed in 1877. It was dedicated the following year by abolitionist, orator, and statesman Frederick Douglass, who had once been enslaved in Talbot County. The style is Gothic Revival, adhering to the standards of Methodist architecture for that time period.

During the 19th century, part of the property was sold and several houses were built here. One of those became the church parsonage for a time. By the turn of the 20th century, Bethel A.M.E. Church reacquired most of the northern half of their original lot, which they still own today.



Maryland Room, Talbot County Free Library

*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, c. 1950*

## DIGGING DEEPER

Archaeology here is beginning to piece together the changing uses of the church property and reveal how the community's needs changed over time. Excavations in 2014 and 2015 located several of the houses built on this lot while it was out of church hands in the middle of the 19th century, including one built in 1860 that later became the church parsonage.

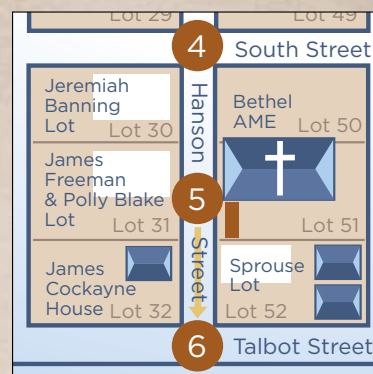
Artifact discoveries also included toys from a church playground that leaders built for an early childhood education program held here in recent years. Remnants of earlier church buildings lie undiscovered somewhere on the property. See the **INTERPRETIVE PANEL** to the right of the church.



University of Maryland, College Park

*Archaeology at Bethel A.M.E. Church*

## STOP 6 CORNER OF HANSON AND TALBOT STREETS



Free African American Peregrine “Perry” Sprouse purchased Lot 52 adjacent to the church in 1826 from his fellow trustees of the Bethel A.M.E. Church, and the land remained in his family until the early 1900s. The two houses at the back of the lot facing Thoroughgood Lane were built by Sprouse’s children. His youngest son Frisby served in the First Regiment of the Eastern Shore Colored Militia during the Civil War.

The house you see on Lot 32 at 113 South Hanson Street was built in 1805 by James Cockayne, son of Quakers Thomas and Sarah Kemp Cockayne. Both James and his father helped many freed slaves from Delaware become integrated into The Hill Community. A non-combatant passenger traveling aboard the sloop *Messenger*, James was among those captured by the British off Poplar Island in November 1814 during the War of 1812’s Chesapeake Campaign.

After his mother’s death in 1826, James and his second wife Elizabeth sold the house in Easton and moved to Wayne County, Indiana, where they joined the White Water Quaker Meeting. In 1923, Theodore Poney purchased the house at public auction. Kitchens were built at the rear of the house, where his wife Gertrude operated a successful African American-owned catering business for many years.

***Please use caution when crossing Aurora Street as you proceed to Stop 7.***



## ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

James Cockayne's house is a classic example of the Federal-style architecture that characterized the early development of Easton from the 1790s through the 1820s. Cockayne displayed his social standing by building in brick, with the front of the house in the more elaborate Flemish bond pattern, while the bricks on the side of the house are laid end to end in Common bond. Like other houses of the period, it has an off-centered door that opens onto a side hallway. The kitchen was originally a freestanding structure. The wooden addition was attached in the mid-1800s.



Cynthia Schmidt

Cockayne-Poney House

The Hill Community grew. Newly freed African Americans joined those already here, often taking employment in the factories, canneries, and warehouses supported by the railroad. Others worked in hospitality and construction.

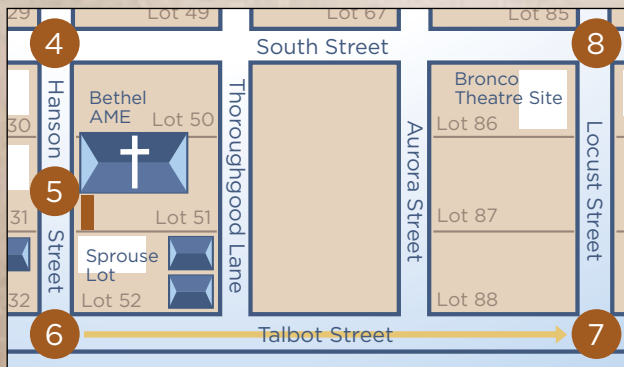
This influx of new residents created the need for more housing. The National Folk Style architecture that you see here became the dominant influence on the construction of new houses in the United States during the 1870s through the 1910s and formed the cadence of the expansion of The Hill Community.

These houses were built in three types — the railroad house with a gabled front, the matchbox house with eaves front, and the duplex. Typically built along railroad lines, these houses were constructed with inexpensive, mass produced materials as builders were no longer limited to local resources.

You will see many National Folk Style houses in The Hill Community, including Butlers Row, the duplexes that face Talbot Street and stretch down to Higgins Street. The houses were so named because many of the men living here worked as butlers at Easton's Tidewater Inn. These structures are two stories and are clad with wood shingles. Each unit is two bays wide.

Today, Easton's Rails-To-Trails pathway forms the eastern boundary of The Hill Community.

## STOP 7 CORNER OF TALBOT AND LOCUST STREETS



You are now entering the heart of the modern-day Hill Community.

Soon after the Civil War ended, the Maryland and Delaware Railroad came to Easton. The arrival of the new rail line in 1869 helped both the town and

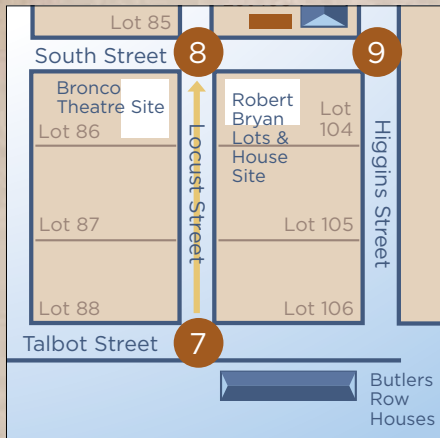


Talbot Historical Society

Many African Americans in Easton's Hill Community worked in the hospitality industry.

## STOP 8

### CORNER OF LOCUST AND SOUTH STREETS



Freed in 1822, Robert Bryan came to The Hill Community from Dorchester County. He purchased Lots 104, 105, and 106, where the vacated Masonic Lodge No. 6 was located. These lots span the entire block on your right as you walk from Stop 7 to Stop 8. After Bryan’s death, his widow Caroline divided the lots into parcels and sold them. The proceeds enabled her to retain her home until her death in 1872.

The Bronco Theatre stood on Lot 86, the empty lot at the southwest corner of Locust Street and South Street. It was built in 1884 as four attached two-story dwellings. The building later served as a funeral home, an apartment building, and home to the Knights of Pythias. The building was demolished in 2010, fueling the effort to preserve The Hill Community and its architectural landscape.

The house at 308 South Street is the first home to be restored and offered for sale through the Town of Easton’s Housing on The Hill initiative. A total of seven homes in The Hill Community — six purchased by the Town and another owned by Easton’s Housing Authority — are scheduled to be restored. This effort is helping revitalize this historically significant section of town.

### FAMILY TIES

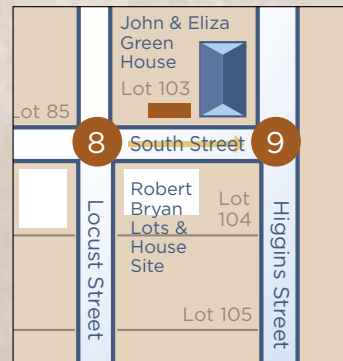
The family with the deepest roots in this community can also be found near this stop. The Stewart-Sprouse-Hines-Coxen-Sewell-Gale family land history in The Hill Community can be traced back to 1805 when Abram Stewart, a free African American and father of Peregrine “Perry” Sprouse, originally purchased Lots 64, 66, and 84.

Caroline Hines Coxen divided Lot 84 in 1912 so her daughter Elizabeth “Emma” Coxen Sewell could build a home at 29 South Locust Street. This house was the birthplace and lifelong home of Emma’s daughter, Lillian Rosalee Sewell Gale, who was born in The Hill Community on March 12, 1922, and graduated from Robert Russa Moton High School in Easton in 1941.

Rosalee married Charles Gale in 1944, and they had two children, Charles Samuel Gale and Catherine Anne Gale. Rosalee was the matriarch of The Hill Community and the Bethel A.M.E. Church until her death in 2016 at age 94. More than four generations of her descendants still live here today.

## STOP 9

### CORNER OF SOUTH AND HIGGINS STREETS



Residents of the house at 323 South Street have a long history of military service. John Green and his wife, Eliza Skinner-Green, purchased this house in 1879 from developer Robert Walker. Green served in

the 7th Infantry Division of the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War. Sgt. William Gardner, the nephew of Eliza's second husband, William Dobson, was a Buffalo Soldier in the U.S. Army. The house was owned and occupied by African Americans until 2002 when it changed ownership. In 2018-2019, the house was relocated to the center of two adjoining parcels within Lot 103 and completely renovated as part of the Town of Easton's Housing on The Hill initiative.

From this corner lot, look to the willow tree and Asbury Church beyond, which will be your next stop.



Mark Sandlin

The Eliza Skinner Green Dobson House, known locally as the Buffalo Soldier House, before restoration.

## DIGGING DEEPER



Sgt. Gardner's reenlistment papers describing his service in the U.S. Calvary and his excellent horsemanship were found when the house changed ownership in 2002. This discovery drew attention to the significance of the house's history.

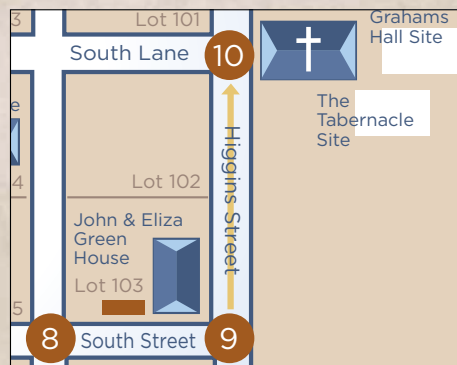
In 2012, this site became the focus of the first modern-day archaeological dig in Easton. The excavation by the University of Maryland, College Park showed that the ground had not been disturbed and that a part of the property's history remained intact below the ground.



University of Maryland, College Park

This dig became the start of several years of productive research on The Hill. Two U.S. Army buttons dated from 1860-1880 were recovered in the dig here. For more on the military history and archaeology of this site, see the **INTERPRETIVE PANEL** in front of the house.

## STOP 10 INTERSECTION OF HIGGINS STREET AND SOUTH LANE



Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1836 when black worshippers left Easton's Ebenezer M.E. Church where they had worshipped along side white church members. The national Methodist Episcopal organization's slipping support for abolition may have prompted this move. That year, the national M.E. conference in Cincinnati declared it would no longer bar church members from holding slaves, resulting in rising racial tensions within the denomination.

Original church members met at a carriage house before purchasing the property where the church now sits. The current Gothic Revival structure dates to 1876 and was dedicated by Frederick Douglass in 1878. The bell tower was added in the 1890s.

Grahams Hall, a two-story building once located on Grahams Alley behind the Asbury Church, was the heart of the African American community where many dances, wedding receptions, and social gatherings were held. On June 6, 1872, the Colored Republicans of Talbot County assembled at Grahams Hall to select delegates to attend the state convention in Baltimore. Asbury became a United Methodist Church in the 20th century.

## DIGGING DEEPER



Over the years, Asbury Church played a central role in black education in The Hill Community. Archaeologists have found several fragments of writing slates used to teach children to read and write.

During segregation, a wooden structure behind the church called the Tabernacle served as the gymnasium for the original Robert Russa Moton High School, which was located 10 blocks away on Port Street. African American students walking between their high school and their gym class had to pass the white high school on Hanson Street.

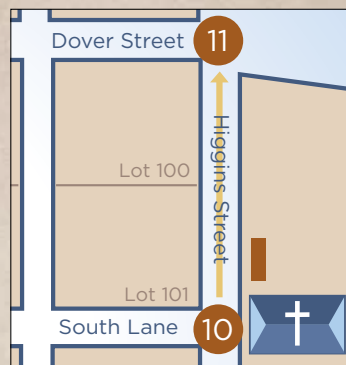
Residents recall that African American teachers who lived in The Hill Community attended Asbury, even when they lived closer to Bethel A.M.E. Church. In 2019, Asbury is home to both African-American and Hispanic congregations. See the **INTERPRETIVE PANEL** to the north of the building for a complete church timeline.



Asbury Church, c. 1950

Maryland Room, Talbot County Free Library, Easton

## STOP 11 CORNER OF HIGGINS AND DOVER STREETS



Dover Street, a main thoroughfare through the town of Easton from its earliest days, forms the northern boundary of The Hill Community. Free black people made their homes and founded businesses near this intersection before 1800, many decades before the Civil War started.

Once they had gained their freedom, former enslaved people often supported themselves with trades they had learned while enslaved. Though many worked as domestics or farm hands, others were midwives, carpenters, blacksmiths, and bakers. This section continues to be The Hill's commercial corridor today.

*Barney Brooks*



*Hill residents Mr. and Mrs. Barney Brooks in front of original Asbury parsonage on Higgins Street.*

One landowner, Abraham Gustis, was freed from slavery on March 25, 1793, when he reached age 21. He bought the freedom of his wife Frances for £25 and immediately manumitted her. Brister Nichols was freed on January 1, 1778. By 1798, he had purchased Lot 56 for £7.15. He purchased another half acre that included houses and tenants outside of Easton in 1798. Hatmaker Zarah Hall, freed in 1795, lived on Dover Street with his wife Leah, where they often housed young apprentices who were training as hatmakers.

## ON YOUR WAY BACK

Black people escaping slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries often encountered continued hurdles to their freedom. The Maryland legislature at various times tried to force freed slaves to leave the state and in 1832 took a census of free black people to facilitate their removal to Liberia.

Unpaid wages from labor during slavery meant that black people faced an uphill battle in acquiring land and building businesses to support themselves. Segregation took hold after the Civil War, and like other places, Easton experienced violence during integration. The Hill Community's history is that of a people working together for freedom in the face of these setbacks.

The people here bought land and built businesses to become self-sufficient. They formed their own churches so they could worship freely. They passed their cultures and traditions from generation to generation.

Free African Americans have contributed greatly to life in Easton since the town's beginning, but their stories were not included in earlier histories. In beginning to tell this story, we hope to encourage further discussion about how communities are formed and what stories are told.

*Think about your own hometown.*

**What untold stories are waiting to be revealed in your community?**

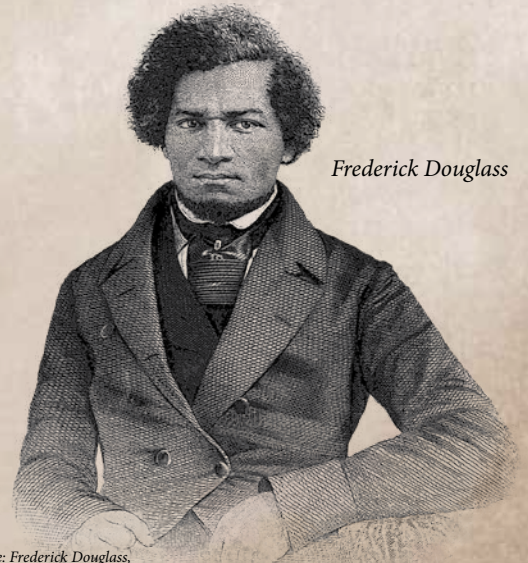
**How can you help to uncover these stories?**

**What obstacles remain in the way of true freedom for all and how can we work together to rise above them?**

## OFF THE HILL

In the 18th and 19th centuries, freed black people formed many small communities throughout the early United States, both in free and in slave states. The most prominent of these emerged in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Providence, Rhode Island. Famous early free black people include Philadelphia sailor and sailmaker James Forten (1766-1842), who fought in the Revolutionary War, Baltimore County scientist Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), and Paul Cuffee (1759-1817), who ran a merchant ship out of Rhode Island and led the first back-to-Africa effort with a colony of free black people in Sierra Leone.

Free black communities worked together against slavery and the racism they experienced even in freedom. They formed the backbone of the Underground Railroad. They printed and circulated their own newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides to form a free black press. They petitioned legislatures and organized their own schools, churches, and denominations. Beginning in 1830, representatives from many of these communities met periodically to discuss and work together to address the needs of free African American people. Some residents from Easton and ministers associated with their churches attended these "Colored Conventions."



*Frederick Douglass*

Frontispiece: Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1854

**Frederick Douglass** (1818-1895) was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey in Tuckahoe in Talbot County, Maryland. After his escape from slavery in 1838, he worked tirelessly as a public speaker, writer, and newspaper editor and went on to become one of the most prominent abolitionists of all time. His influence was felt throughout the world, and his words continue to resonate today.

Douglass' early interactions with free black people in both Talbot County and Baltimore influenced his desire to be free. After a failed attempt to escape in 1836, he was held in the Easton jail and watched waiters working at the hotel across the street, wishing they could give him some hint of his fate. In 1878, after achieving international prominence, Douglass dedicated the current buildings of both Asbury and Bethel churches in The Hill Community while returning to visit the county where he was born.

### **Bishop Alexander Wayman** (1821-1895)

was born free on the family-owned property, Wayman Wharf and Farm, in Tuckahoe Neck in Caroline County, Maryland. His father, Rev. Francis Wayman, taught him to read and write. At age 16, he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and three years later became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1864, after nearly 25 years of "filling stations" in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, he was elected the seventh bishop of that denomination. He served the church for 56 years.



*State Archives of Florida*

Wayman was a station master for the Underground Railroad, recorded the narratives of escaped slaves, and was instrumental in building and expanding churches and historically black colleges and universities throughout the United States. Bishop

Wayman preached at both Bethel and Asbury churches in The Hill Community. His younger brother, Rev. Robert Francis Wayman, was the seventh pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church.

### **Rev. Charles Wesley Pullett**



(1859-1948) was an early graduate of the Centenary Biblical Institute, now Morgan State University, and was the pastor at Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. He organized the negro fair in The Hill Community, where thousands of African Americans arrived by train from all corners of the Delmarva Peninsula. Rev.

Pullett served 57 years in the ministry, presiding over countless baptisms, marriages, deaths, camp meetings, and annual conferences.

*The photo above is from frostpollitt.org and was published in "Minutes to the Delaware Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church," c. 1910.*

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## RESEARCHING THE HILL COMMUNITY

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The Hill Community Project was prompted by Easton residents Carlene Phoenix and Priscilla Morris, along with members of Historic Easton, Inc., who were concerned with the condemnation and demolition of the town's historic African American sites. Early research hinted at a rich and unexpected history dating back to the 18th century.

On a walking tour in 2011, these concerned citizens introduced Dale Glenwood Green, a professor of architecture and historic preservation at Morgan State University, to the project. Recognizing his own family ties to these important sites, Professor Green took a leadership role and initiated The Hill Community Project the following year.

Professor Green assembled a team of researchers specializing in a range of fields to unearth the history and significance of The Hill Community. Researchers employed a transdisciplinary approach to uncovering the history and significance of The Hill Community, incorporating historiography, oral history, land records, genealogy, archaeology, and preservation to unearth the story of The Hill Community.

Project members included the following: historic researchers Cynthia Schmidt, Alexander Toprac, Tracy Jenkins, and Mary Robinson; genealogist Lyndra Marshall; oral historians Dr. Angela Howell, Morgan State University, Dr. Clara Small, Salisbury University, Dr. Michelle Zachs, and Yvonne Freeman; historical advisers Dr. Debra Newnam Ham, Morgan State University, Dr. Lavonne Leslie Jackson, Howard University, and Dr. Alexa Cawley, Delaware State University; preservationists Elizabeth Beckley and Alexander Toprac; advisors Patrick Rogan and Eric Applegarth; and a team of historical archaeologists from the University of Maryland, College Park led by Dr. Mark Leone and Tracy Jenkins, with support from Benjamin Skolnik, Stefan Woelke, Kathryn Deeley, and Madeline Laub, as well as Morgan State University student Brittany Hutchison and University of Edinburgh student Liera Redondo.

Community members and scholars on this project have led tours of The Hill Community since 2010, coinciding with The Hill Community Project. More than 1,500 people each year have been guided on tours through The Hill Community. The Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism, directed by Cassandra Vanhooser, has been instrumental in the implementation and enhancement of the tours.

The Talbot Historical Society provided many of the historic photographs that are used throughout this project. The writing and editing was completed by Tracy Jenkins, Cynthia Schmidt, and Cassandra Vanhooser. Patrick Rogan and Joanne Shipley provided direction on graphic design, while Brad Turner designed the website.

In addition to supporting the work of the project team, the Town of Easton is restoring a number of historic houses that will be sold to low- and moderate-income buyers. The goals for the project are twofold: to

maintain the historical significance of each house, thus preserving the historical significance of The Hill Community, and to provide workforce housing that meets

or exceeds minimum livability and modern energy efficiency standards. The Housing on The Hill initiative is an example of how a town can both invest in historic preservation and provide affordable homes for its citizens.

**Bethel A.M.E. Church was founded by free people of color in 1818, the same year Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Talbot County.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Projects like these do not come to fruition without the extraordinary contributions of many talented people.

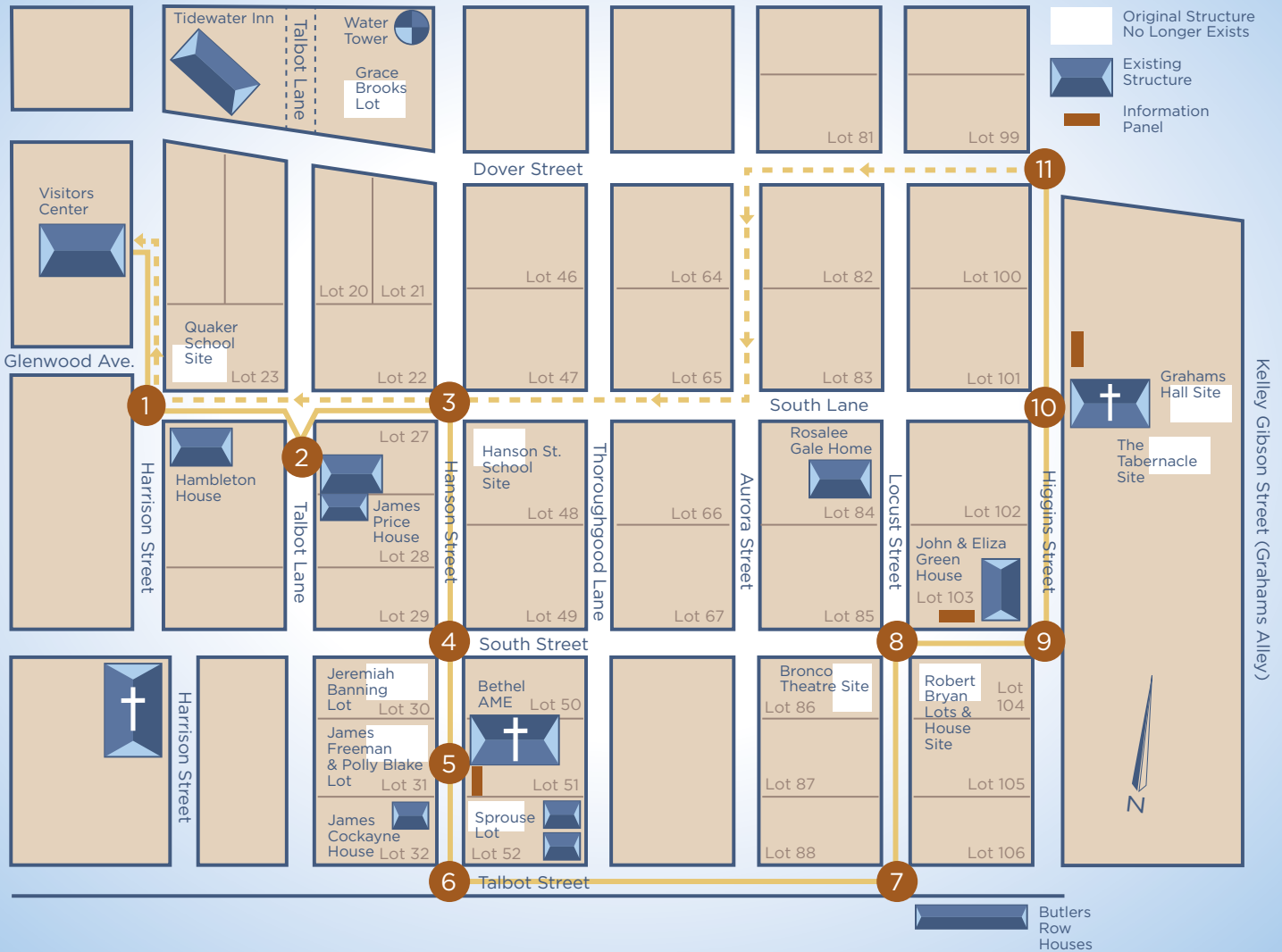
The historical and archaeological research, outreach, and interpretation on The Hill Community Project was made possible by East End Neighborhood Association, Easton Utilities, Historic Easton, Inc., Morgan State University, the Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism, and the University of Maryland, College Park, with support from the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

This project has been financed in part with State funds from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, an instrument of the State of Maryland. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

For more information about this community, log on to [TheHillCommunityProject.org](http://TheHillCommunityProject.org).

# THE HILL COMMUNITY WALKING TOUR MAP

Approximately 90 minute tour.







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