Archaeology on The Hill

Archaeological research, outreach, and interpretation on the The Hill Community Project is made possible by Historic Easton, Inc., the East End Neighborhood Association, Talbot County Office of Tourism and the Maryland Heritage Area Authority, in partnership with the University of Maryland and Morgan State University and with support of Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area.

Please consider a donation to help Historic Easton, Inc. preserve our heritage at www.historiceastoninc.net

For more information on The Hill’s history and archaeology, or to find out how to get involved, please contact Tracy Jenkins at thjenk@umd.edu or (703) 862-7137

Walking Tour

Explore one of America’s oldest free black communities.

Tour Distance: 3/4 mile
Time: 30 minutes

Our questions include:

- How old is the free black community on The Hill?
- How do people come together to form communities?
- How have members of this community shaped life in Easton and beyond over the past 200 years?

Find out how to get involved

The Hill Community Project was initiated by Easton resident Carlene Phoenix and members of Historic Easton, Inc. concerned with the condemnation and demolition of historic African American sites. Early local research hinted at a rich and unexpected history dating back to the 18th century.

Since 2012, archaeologists have joined the effort to document and preserve The Hill’s heritage and to use the past as a meeting place to talk about the importance of The Hill Community as Easton pushes into the 21st century.

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Cover photo by Tim Poly
The Talbot County Women’s Club has been a private residence for two families (1795-1891) and a tenement (1891-1946). Excavation in 2013 identified a kitchen used by both enslaved and hired black cooks, some evidence of early blacksmithing, and the cramped conditions of tenant families, where children’s toys lay among household trash. This investigation has invited questions about land tenure and renter’s rights.

The congregation of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1818 and bought this lot in 1820. The current church building was dedicated by Frederick Douglass in 1878. Archaeology here is beginning to piece together the changing use of the church property and reveal how the community’s needs changed over time. Excavations in 2014 and 2015 located several former houses and dated the recent parsonage building to 1860. Artifact discoveries also included toys from the Head Start playground located here in recent years. Archaeologists are working to find evidence of an earlier church building.

The so-called Civil War and Buffalo Soldier Home was built by black Civil War veteran John Green and his wife Eliza Skinner Green. It was later owned by relatives of Sergeant William Gardner who served as a Buffalo Soldier in the U.S. Army. Owned by African Americans from 1879 until condemned in 2002, the house stands as a testament to military service as a path to citizenship and civil rights. A U.S. army button dated from 1860-1880 was recovered here by archaeologists in 2012, influencing the name of the house.

Asbury United Methodist Church (formerly Methodist Episcopal) formed in the early 19th century as a Class Meeting within the Ebenezer Methodist church organization of the Talbot Circuit. By the 1840s, black Class Meeting members desired their own place of worship and pastors. The white Methodist Trustees of Ebenezer assisted in buying the land for the new church’s use. Asbury Trustees owned their property mortgage-free by 1888. The present structure was built in 1877 and dedicated in 1878 by Frederick Douglass. It contains a time capsule from that time. An earlier frame structure called the Tabernacle was used as a school gym during segregation. Excavation in the future may document other uses of church property.

Archaeological Sites on The Hill

As you walk around The Hill, think about the pasts that have been buried, both literally and figuratively.

Look also at the houses. Most structures here are historic, including many covered in vinyl siding.

Generations of African Americans who were freed from slavery, long before Emancipation, lived in this neighborhood. These buildings housed families, their institutions and the local businesses they founded. Many still do.