

28. 210 High Street

The Prince Theatre, now the Garfield Center for the Arts, was originally The Lyceum, the first movie theatre in Chestertown. Segregated from its 1928 opening until the early 1960s, the theater allowed blacks to sit only in the balcony.

29. Court Street and Church Alley

Home to African American residences through much of the 20th century, this neighborhood is thought to have started on both sides of upper Court Street in the 1880s. By 1910, there were 12 households with a population of 42. Those residents were largely gone by 1965, but around the corner on Church Alley, black ownership or occupancy of several houses lasted through the 1980s.

30. Foot of High Street

The Custom House, once residence and offices of Thomas Ringgold, a white merchant, attorney, and slave dealer, is now owned by Washington College. It is home to Chesapeake Heartland: An African American Humanities Project at Washington College, and community partners.

A book of the African American Heritage Walk, complete with a map, many illustrations, and more detailed descriptions of the sites, may be purchased at the Bordley History Center or may be downloaded without cost at the Society's website, www.kentcountyhistory.org, or by accessed without cost with this QR code.



Cover photo:
Charlie Graves, owner of the legendary Uptown Club #16, ca. 1988.

Afterword

The vitality and creativity seen during this Walk continue in the businesses African Americans have founded more recently. These include the ultra-modern (a unisex hair salon; strategic business consulting; and drone photo and video production) and the timelessly valuable—a bus service that served generations of schoolchildren, a popular downtown BBQ restaurant, and a professional accounting service (based outside Chestertown, as many Kent County black-owned businesses are now).

Civic leadership by successful African Americans lives on today, too. Their roles are many, but they include, to name only a few:

- **Election** to the County Commission, Town Council, and School Board and as Clerk of Kent County Circuit Court;
- **Appointment** to the Chestertown Planning Commission, the Historic District Commission, and Chestertown Equity Advisory Committee;
- **Service** in the Chestertown Police Department, Kent County Sheriff's Office, and State's Attorney Office and as teachers, principals, and superintendent in Kent County schools and in many county government offices;
- **Creating** nonprofits like the Bayside HOYAs and Minary's Dream Alliance;
- **Founding** citizen coalitions like the African American Heritage Council and for projects like the "Black Lives Matter" street murals, saving Sumner Hall, Chestertown Unites Against Racism, and Chesapeake Heartland.

The good life in Chestertown and Kent County owes much to these modern African American business and civic leaders.

A Special Thank You to the Following Supporters:



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Introduction

Your walk starts at the waterfront neighborhood of Scott's Point, where some African Americans arrived as slaves and many others spent their working lives and owned property. It continues on a route that suggests, roughly, the growth of the free black population in the 18th and 19th centuries and its economic and residential expansion away from the waterfront, including, at different times, Cannon and Calvert Streets, Philosopher's Terrace, and Court Street.

You will visit thirty notable sites across two centuries. Some stops bear witness to the evil of racism, while most sites on this Heritage Walk mark the success that 19th and 20th century free black men and women found in the enterprises they pursued in Chestertown. They shine a light on the spirit, vitality, and creativity behind their stories.

The tour also recognizes the prominence of two churches, Janes United Methodist Church and Bethel A.M.E. Church, with roots in the Colored People's Methodist Church in 1831. Both churches have continued to be important in African American life in Chestertown.

Several watershed events in the life of the town in the 20th and 21st centuries are included as well. Among these are the founding of Garnet School, the economic development of Cannon Street, organization of the Grand Army of the Republic, and the arrival of the Freedom Riders.

1. Foot of Cannon Street at Scott's Point

This early heritage site is where some African Americans arrived as slaves and other free blacks worked and owned property, with a Town historical marker recognizing them all.

2. 202 & 210 South Water Street (Private Residences)

Isaac Boyer and Levi Rodgers, free blacks, bought these houses in 1849. Rodgers opened his (202) as the Cape May Saloon, an oyster house restaurant that thrived through the 1850s.

3. 104, 106, & 108 Cannon Street (Private Residences)

Thomas Cuff purchased 108 in 1819. This free black businessman and community leader eventually owned most of Scott's Point. His daughter, Maria Bracker, opened an ice cream, cake, and lemonade saloon at 104.

4. 105 South Queen Street (Private Residence)

Peter Jones, a sailor from Barbados, settled in Chestertown in 1800 and operated a hotel at this location into the 1850s.

5. 107 South Queen Street (Private Residence)

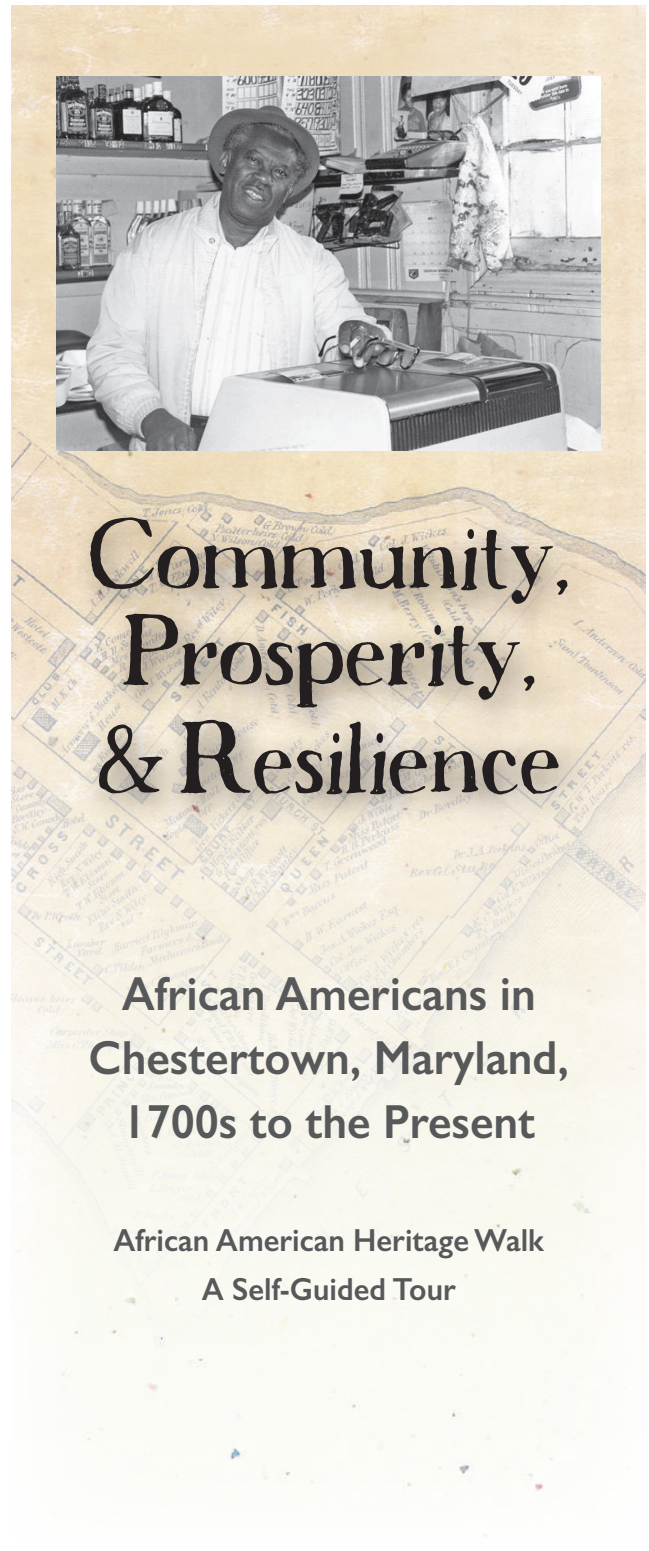
Henry Philips, a former slave, bought the house here in 1796 and used it as both residence and store. The house is not visible; later owners attached a newer one to the front of it.

6. Sumner Hall, 206 South Queen Street

A non-profit educational organization and museum listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Charles Sumner Post #25 of Grand Army of the Republic, chartered in 1882, is one of only two African American Civil War veterans' halls left in the U.S.

7. 102 South Cross Street

Now the side entrance of the Bordley History Center was once Williamson Brothers, a black-owned, full-service jewelry store serving both blacks and whites. After fire destroyed most of Cross and High Streets in 1910, the Bordley family purchased the site and made it part of their rebuilt haberdashery at the corner of Cross and High Street.



8. Janes United Methodist Church, 120 South Cross Street

Local African Americans founded their own Methodist church in 1831 and worshiped at two previous locations before erecting this church in 1914. Members of the church designed and built it using handmade concrete bricks.

9. 300 block of Cannon Street

This block was home to nearly twenty thriving black-owned businesses for much of the 20th century.

10. Southeast Corner of Mill and Cannon Streets

Free black James A. Jones famously devised a legal way to enable 51 local black men to vote, selling them a single one-foot-square plots of this corner, thus satisfying the law requiring voters to be property owners. He was born one block northwest, at 111 South Kent Street.

11. Hilda Hopkins Way

Northwest of Mill Street, Hilda Hopkins Way was named by the Town in honor of "Miss Hilda," the last African American homeowner and resident of Water Street.

12. The Faith Life Church, 434 Calvert Street

One of several predominantly African American churches in Chestertown, this church is well-known for its outdoor services.

13. 204 North College Avenue (Private Residence)

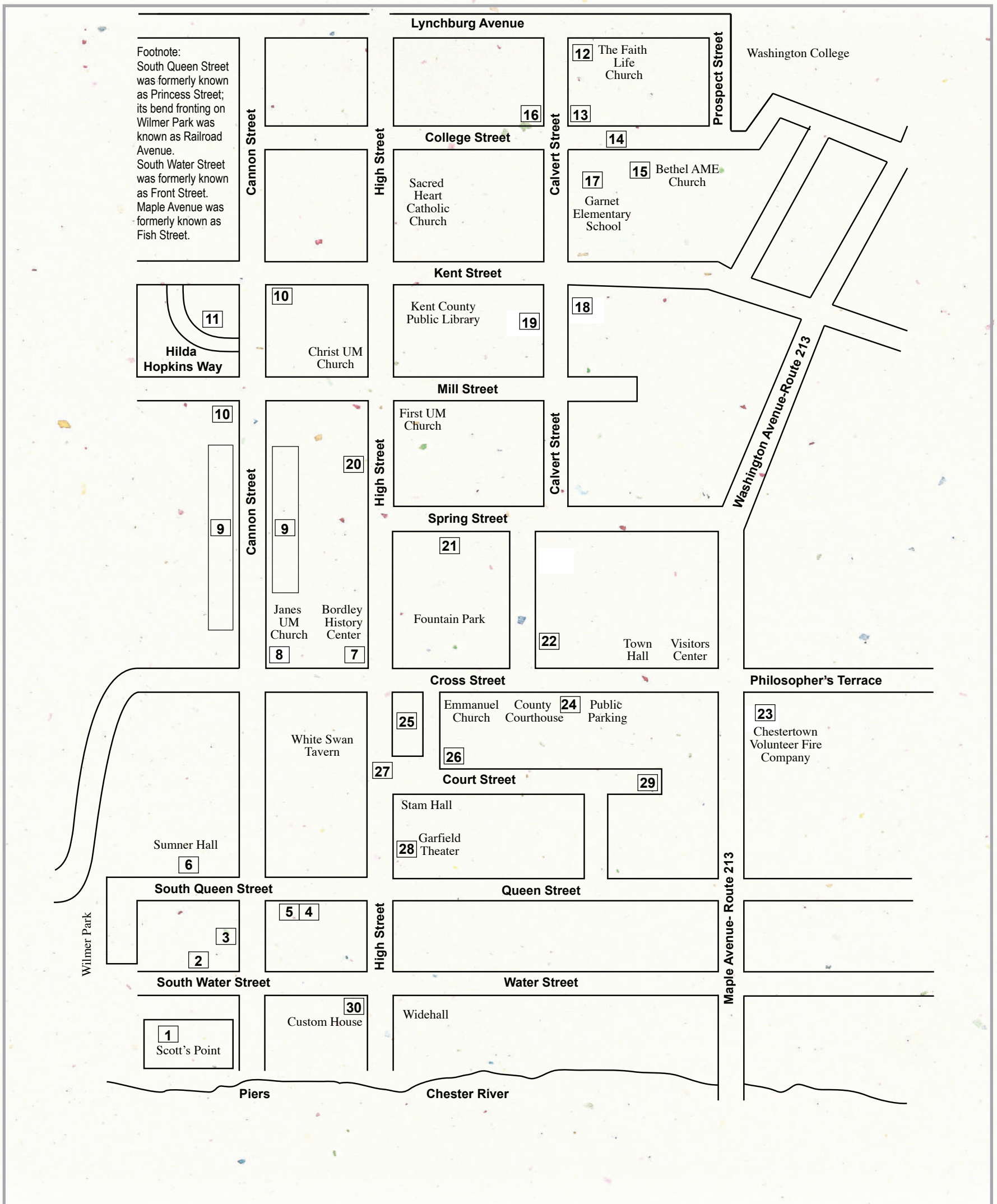
The original Garnet Elementary School, a school for black children, opened on this site in 1916, and seven years later added adolescents to become Kent County's first and only high school for African American students. The original building is now gone.

14. 200 block of North College Avenue: Street Mural

The Town authorized painting of this street mural "We Can't Breathe" in August 2020, as part of the Chestertown Unites Against Racism program.

15. Bethel A.M.E. Church, 237 North College Avenue

Important in uptown African American life since 1878, Bethel invited the Freedom Riders to Chestertown in 1962 and to use the church as their base.



16. College Avenue and Calvert Street

Charlie Graves's Uptown Club operated here from the late 1940s through the 1970s, headlining numerous stars of the famous Chitlin' Circuit and drawing visitors from all over.

17. 320 Calvert Street, Henry Highland Garnet Elementary School

Replacing the original Garnet school (#14), this 1950 building continued as Garnet High School until 1971 when a new integrated Kent County High School opened. The elementary students remained here with the school reclassified as integrated.

18. 222 Calvert Street (Private Residence)

Janes United Methodist Church first met in this house, which stood on South Queen Street in the 1830s. It became the parsonage when a new Janes Church was built and finally was moved to this location in the early 20th century.

19. 200 block of Calvert Street

Originally Kenneth Walley's funeral home, which served the local black community, this building is known informally as "The Yellow House." Kent County Public Library owns it and allows community groups to use it for meetings.

20. 339-341 High Street

A restaurant, opened by Abraham Robinson and his wife, Nettie here in 1907, serving oysters and ice cream to both blacks and whites—with blacks served on one side and whites on the other.

21. 320 High Street

(adjacent to Fountain Park, corner of Spring Street)

This was the first Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in the 1700s with both black and white parishioners, and the parent church of today's First United Methodist Church, Christ United Methodist Church, and Janes United Methodist Church. Today it is the Nearly New shop, a thrift store.

22. 302-304 Park Row

This building was a Jim Crow-era doctor's office. The door on the left was for white patients; the door on the right was for African American patients.

23. Corner at Maple Avenue, Philosopher's Terrace, & Cross Street

This triangle was once waterfront on Barroll's Bight, an inlet from the Chester River that brought boats with fish and oysters behind where the fire station now stands. There, William Perkins's hugely popular Rising Sun Saloon served both black and white customers for about 30 years starting in 1857.

24. 100 block of North Cross Street

On May 17, 1892, a masked and armed mob of about 60 white men dragged a young black man, James Taylor, from the Kent County jail (which stood in front of the Cross Street entrance to the Kent County Courthouse) and lynched him nearby. He was accused of, but never tried for, assaulting the daughter of his white employer. Reportedly, some 500 citizens witnessed the atrocity and members of the mob were known, but no prosecutions resulted.

25. Memorial Park Road

This Monument to Colored Troops of Kent County in the Civil War recognized more than 400 local African Americans, including some enslaved, who joined the Union Army. Parker White Post #143, the first Kent County American Legion post started by African Americans, was instrumental in placing this monument in 1999.

26. 100 Memorial Plaza

The first Masonic Hall was built in Chestertown in 1828. An original occupant leasing space on its first floor was free black Samuel Perkins, who operated an oyster hall here. His son, William, followed in his father's footsteps with the Rising Sun oyster saloon on Maple Avenue. (#23).

27. 200 block of High Street

In August 2020, the Town, as part of its Chestertown Unites Against Racism program, authorized the painting of this street mural "Black Lives Matter."