



Chapter Four *A Strategy for Interpretation*

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation is one of the key elements of heritage tourism. This chapter provides the framework for interpreting the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA)'s cultural and natural history, based on themes and subthemes, and describes the actions required to establish an interpretive system.

The Maryland Historical Trust's (MHT) brochure, *The Maryland Heritage Preservation and Tourism Program*, describes in question format what the Heritage Area management plan must contain and what issues must be addressed. This chapter of the management plan answers the following questions posed by the MHT regarding interpretation:

- ✿ What are the strongest threads or core themes to understanding the importance of the Heritage Area's people, places and events?
- ✿ What are the resources and programs presently available to residents and visitors to tell these stories?
- ✿ What are the key issues in strengthening or maintaining authenticity and continuity in interpretation?

DEFINING INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is defined as making sense of the facts; that is, providing the meaning and relationships that underlie these facts. Interpretation is carried out in a range of ways by museums, exhibitions, outdoor museum villages, and interpretive signage. Interpretation allows the visitor to gain a context in which to interpret the information presented. Moreover, the linkage of multiple sites is an important concept in interpretive planning. A good interpretive program can build public understanding of the cultural and natural history of a heritage area, and it can encourage public support for more preservation and conservation. Interpretation in heritage areas should also form the basis of a tourism development program.

INTERPRETATION FINDINGS

The following findings address the current condition of interpretation in ATHA:

- ✿ ATHA possesses remarkably diverse and well-developed heritage attractions and related resources. Attractions range in scope, funding, and interpretive focus from the National Wildlife Visitor Center to the Greenbelt Museum, from the College Park Aviation Museum to the Laurel Museum.
- ✿ Together with undeveloped heritage resources, ATHA can support a rich array of tourism experiences. The identified interpretive topics and other resources provide the Heritage Area with great potential to offer visitors a wide variety of experiences.
- ✿ Aside from actions of the Prince George's County Conference and Visitors Bureau, marketing, events planning, and resource sharing among existing attractions are not well coordinated. Improvement can be made especially in coordination and resource sharing.
- ✿ Existing attractions are not well linked, physically or interpretively. Few if any brochures are available, and other media focus only on individual sites in the Heritage Area. Sites presenting similar stories to the public are not linked interpretively.
- ✿ Many attractions are not open full time. Sites do not meet visitors' expectations for hours of operation in order to accommodate visitor scheduling and planning needs.
- ✿ There is no single facility or program for visitor orientation to the Heritage Area, although a number of existing facilities can potentially be adapted, including rest stops on I-95; three visitor centers maintained at federal facilities (National Wildlife Visitor Center, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center); and a visitor center at The University of Maryland. These sites could serve as key parts of a visitor orientation network together with the Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, the Laurel Museum, the Greenbelt Museum or Community Center, Riversdale, and the Mount Rainier Nature/Recreation Center.

THEMES OF THE ANACOSTIA TRAILS HERITAGE AREA

The recommended interpretive framework of ATHA is based on four primary themes, each of which has multiple subthemes.

Primary Themes

The four primary themes are:

- ✿ Linking the Nation: Transportation and Communication Firsts in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area.
- ✿ Settlement, Development and the Growth of Communities.

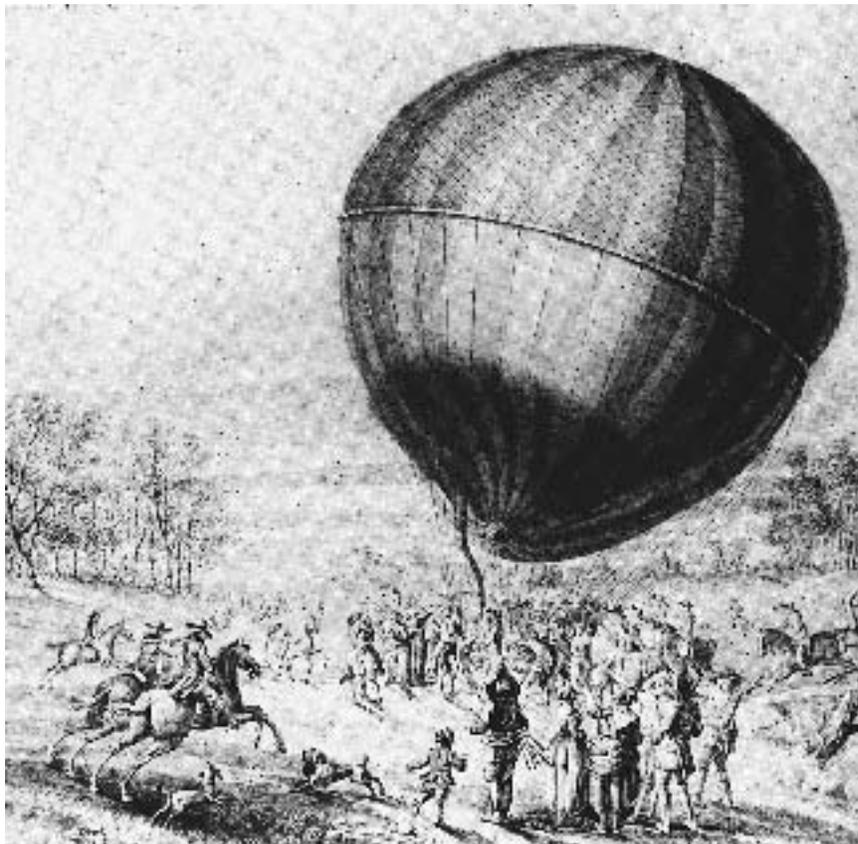
❁ The Bladensburg Races: The War of 1812 in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area.

❁ The Natural Environment.

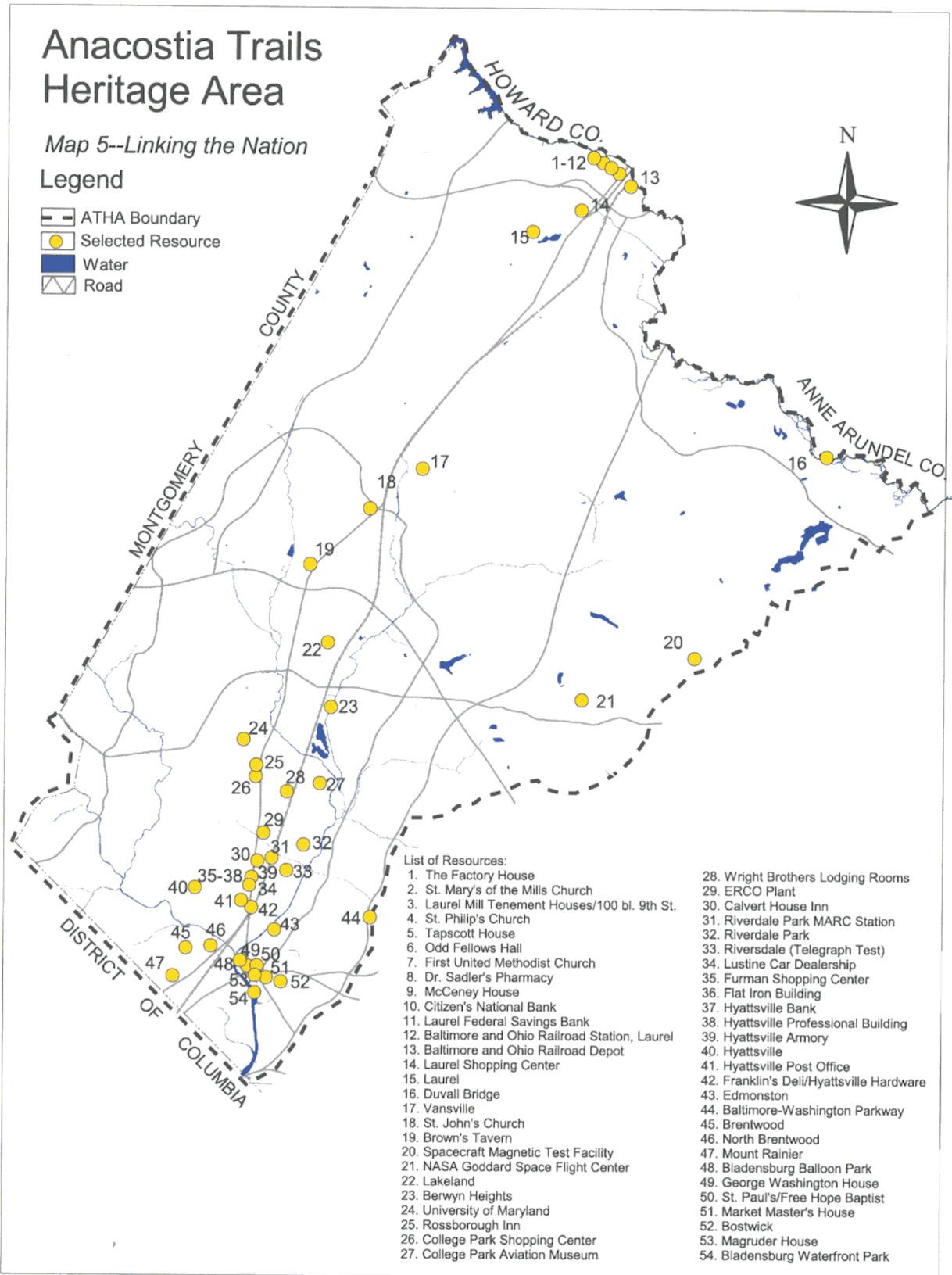
The following sections describe these primary themes and their subthemes, the resources available to support them, and the main interpretive goals of these themes.

Linking the Nation: Transportation and Communication Firsts in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

The Anacostia Trails Heritage Area is significant because of the remarkable number of intact historical and cultural resources that were developed as a direct result of the needs of the citizens and those of the surrounding areas for better means of transportation and communication. The sites connected with “Linking the Nation” and its subthemes are shown on Map 5. Since the settlement of this area at the end of the 17th century, each successive century has seen the development, perfection or production of a different mode of transportation or method of communication that has affected not only the local landscape but the national character as well. This is particularly true in the field of aviation, as the entire timespan of aerospace history is represented within the Heritage Area. In 1784, the first documented balloon ascension in



In 1784 Bladensburg was the site of the first unmanned balloon ascent in America.



America took place in Bladensburg when a local attorney and inventor sent aloft an unmanned aerostatic globe. The Wright brothers perfected their Wright B Flyer at the first United States Army Signal Corps airport in the nation at College Park, which is now the oldest continuously operated airport in the world. All journeys to the moon and beyond are monitored here at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

Nationally significant transportation and communication developments in ATHA also include the operation of the Baltimore to Georgetown Road, over what is basically present-day US 1, which in 1783 became one of the first stagecoach lines in the country. This roadway also became part of the first mail routes in the nation to be funded by the United States government in 1785 and one of the first turnpikes in the country in 1812. In 1835, the Washington branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which was one of the first railroad lines in the country and the first in Maryland, was constructed through this area and immediately brought about the development of new communities and trading centers. In 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first experimental telegraph test message into Washington from a point along the railroad line near the Riversdale plantation and began the means for nationwide conversation.



This passenger station was constructed in 1995 in Riversdale Park near the site of the original Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station.

Sites associated with transportation or communication and its subthemes are:

- ✿ Bladensburg Waterfront Park
- ✿ The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Station in Laurel

- ✿ Riversdale/Calvert Mansion (Telegraph Test Message) (Riverdale Park)
- ✿ College Park Aviation Museum
- ✿ Bladensburg Balloon Park
- ✿ Brown's Tavern (Beltsville)
- ✿ Rossborough Inn (College Park)
- ✿ Spacecraft Magnetic Test Facility (Greenbelt)
- ✿ Duvall Bridge
- ✿ Riverdale Park MARC Station
- ✿ Baltimore-Washington Parkway



Brown's Tavern, built in 1834, catered to the needs of travelers on the Washington and Baltimore Turnpike, now US 1.

Subtheme—Weary Traveler: The Turnpike System, Taverns and Inns

In 1812, the first turnpike system in Maryland was chartered to improve upon the earlier stagecoach line between Baltimore and Georgetown. Present-day US 1 had been part of the only government-funded stagecoach mail route from New Hampshire to Virginia in 1785.

At strategic points along the route, taverns were established to cater to the needs of travelers and to act as gathering places for the exchange of information, news and opinions. Several of these early inns still stand in ATHA.

- ✿ White House/Brown's Tavern
- ✿ Rossborough Inn
- ✿ George Washington House

Subtheme–The Nation’s Main Street: Baltimore Avenue (US 1)

As the popularity of the automobile increased during the 20th century, US 1 became the nation’s main street from Maine to Florida. Along its length in Prince George’s County, it is possible to track the evolution of buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries to a new type of 20th century-architecture oriented to the needs of automobile drivers. Several different tours can be developed using the historic sites below, all of which are associated with Baltimore Avenue/US 1.



Laurel’s Main Street exhibits 19th-century commercial architecture.

☼ Laurel Main Street, which includes:

- ❖ The Factory House
- ❖ St. Mary’s of the Mills Church
- ❖ Laurel Mill Tenement Houses (100 block of Ninth Street)
- ❖ Old Ladies of Main Street–Mill Supervisor’s Housing (700 block of Main Street)
- ❖ Trolley Terminal (531 Main Street)
- ❖ St. Philip’s Church
- ❖ The Tapscott House
- ❖ The Odd Fellows Hall
- ❖ First United Methodist Church
- ❖ Dr. Sadler’s Pharmacy
- ❖ The McCeney House
- ❖ Citizen’s National Bank
- ❖ Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Depot
- ❖ Laurel Shopping Center

☼ Beltsville Main Street, including:

- ❖ St. John's Church
- ❖ Vansville (on Old Baltimore Pike)

☼ College Park Main Street, which includes:

- ❖ The University of Maryland
- ❖ Rossborough Inn
- ❖ College Park Shopping Center



Although the uses of the individual units have changed, College Park Shopping Center still retains its handsome Art Deco facade.

☼ Riverdale Park Main Street/Town Center, which includes:

- ❖ Calvert House Inn
- ❖ Riversdale (the Calvert Mansion)

☼ Hyattsville Main Street, which includes:

- ❖ Hyattsville Armory
- ❖ Lustine Car Dealership
- ❖ Franklin's Deli/Hyattsville Hardware
- ❖ Hyattsville Post Office
- ❖ Furman Shopping Center
- ❖ Flat Iron Building
- ❖ Hyattsville Bank
- ❖ Hyattsville Professional Building

✿ Bladensburg Main Street, which includes:

- ❖ George Washington House
- ❖ Market Master's House
- ❖ Bladensburg Marina
- ❖ Balloon Park
- ❖ Bostwick
- ❖ Magruder House
- ❖ St. Paul's/Free Hope Baptist Church

Subtheme—Aviation Firsts, From the Balloon to the Moon

Remarkably, the entire timespan of American aerospace history is represented within the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: the first balloon ascension in America took place in Bladensburg in 1784, the first military airplanes were tested at College Park Airport in 1909 when Wilbur Wright established the first Army Signal Corps flight school there, and NASA Goddard Space Flight Center is where all communications with space flights are monitored. These sites are linked to this theme:

- ✿ Bladensburg Balloon Park
- ✿ College Park Aviation Museum
- ✿ NASA Goddard Space Flight Visitor Center
- ✿ The ERCO plant



The ERCO (Engineering and Research Corporation) plant was established in 1939. During the following year, and again after World War II, it produced the unique “Ercoupe” planes, shown here in 1946. The Art Deco building now houses federal offices.

❁ The Wright Brothers Lodging Rooms

Subtheme—Streetcar Suburbs

Electric railroad lines and streetcars appeared in the late 19th century in the Heritage Area, beginning with the construction of the Washington to Mount Rainier line in 1897. Considerable residential growth followed the rail lines, prompting the establishment or further development of:

❁ Mount Rainier

❁ Brentwood

❁ North Brentwood

❁ Hyattsville

❁ Riverdale Park

❁ Laurel

❁ Beltsville

❁ Berwyn Heights

❁ Lakeland, Calvert Hills, Old Town, Daniels Park and Berwyn (all in College Park)

❁ Edmonston



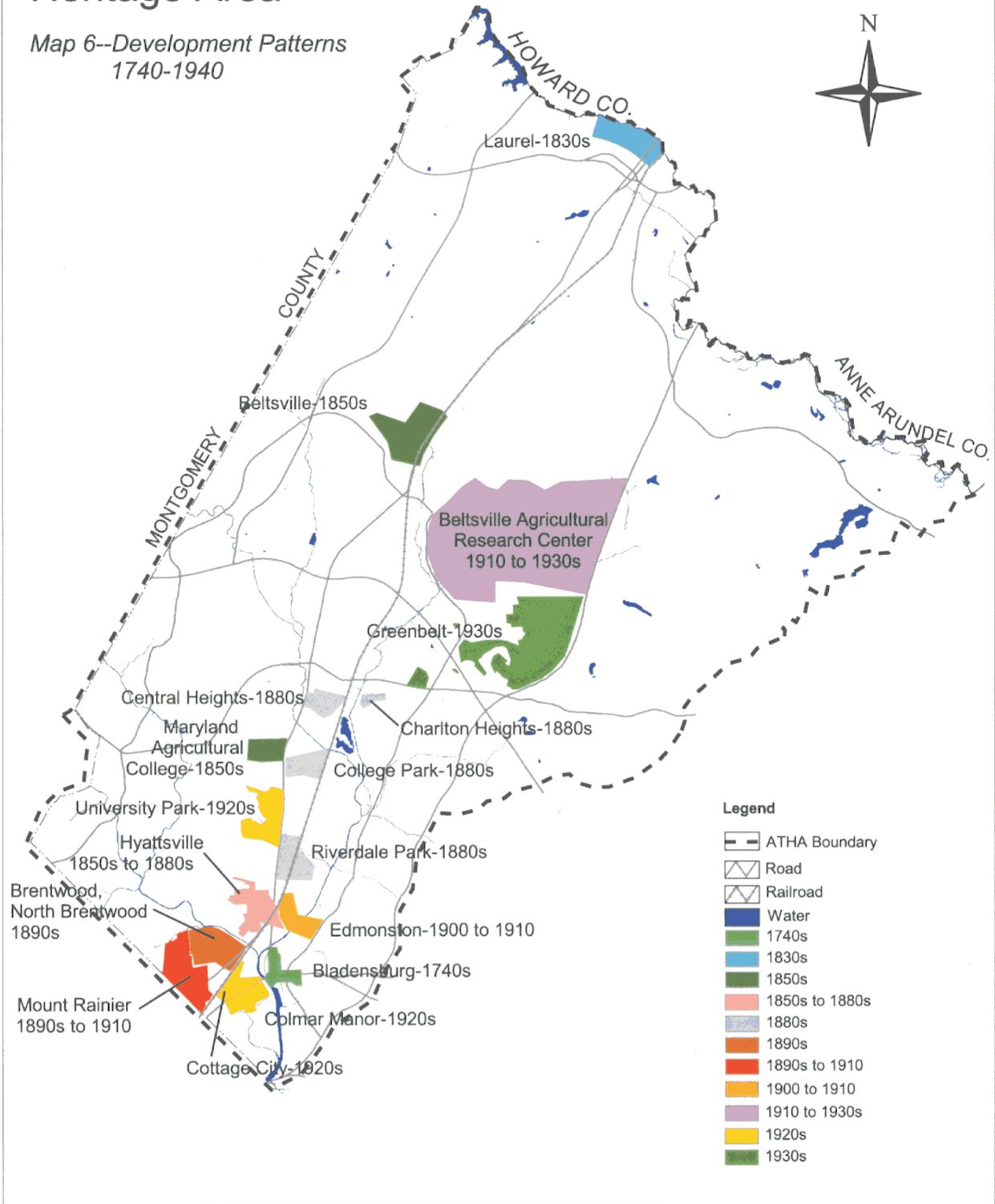
The Brentwood Town Hall (a mid-1960s building renovated 1990/91) is located in Bartlett Park, the center of one of the residential communities established along streetcar lines at the beginning of the 20th century.

Settlement, Development and the Growth of Communities

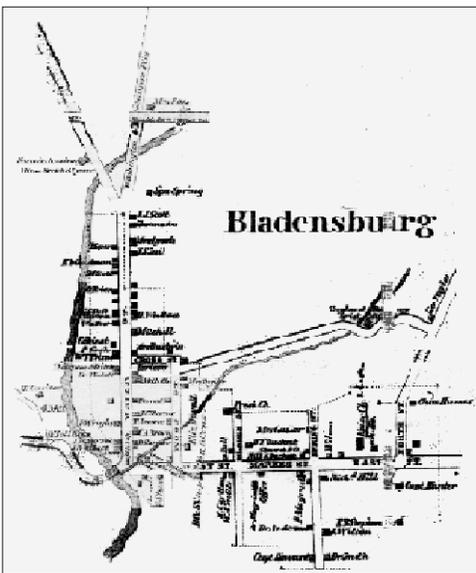
Settlement along the Anacostia followed, by about two generations, the settlement along the major rivers of the Potomac and the Patuxent. Map 6 depicts the sequence of development within ATHA. Bladensburg was established in 1742 just below the confluence of the Northeast and

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

Map 6--Development Patterns
1740-1940



Northwest Branches of the Anacostia. Largely because of the industry of Christopher Lowndes (merchant, town commissioner, court justice, and builder/resident of Bostwick), the new town of Bladensburg thrived. Within five years of its founding, the town was named one of the country's tobacco inspection stations, the only one on the Anacostia. Tobacco from plantations in this area, especially Riversdale, was shipped out of the port of Bladensburg. The tobacco economy created wealth that supported the construction of churches, the laying of new roads, and the development of large plantations with fine mansions, as well as the construction of taverns, inns and small industrial sites. During the 19th century, new towns began to develop at the intersections of the various arteries of transportation, and after the Civil War, several African-American communities began to form. Sites associated with "Settlement, Development and the Growth of Communities" and its subthemes are shown on Map 7.

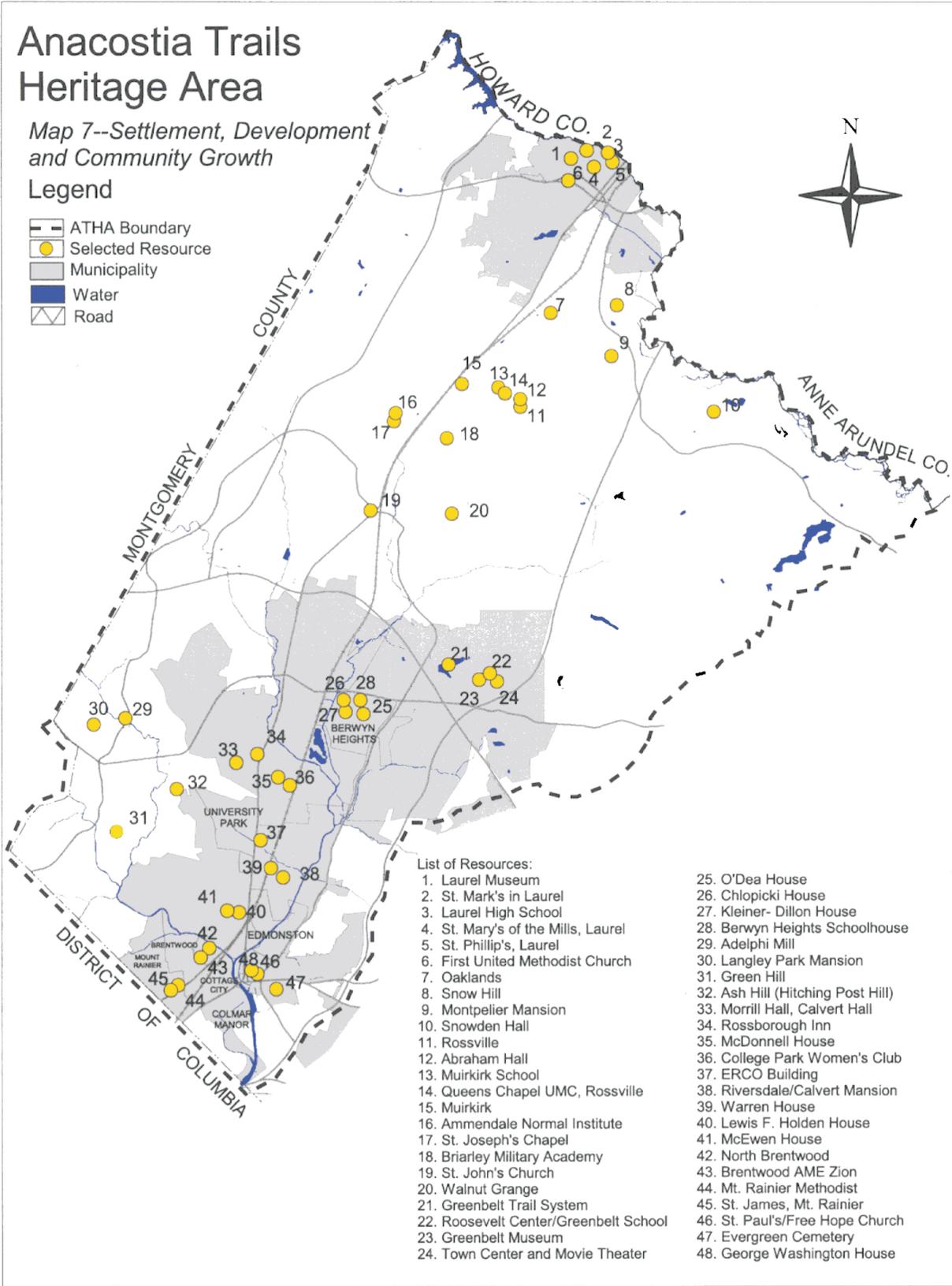


This 1861 map shows the Town of Bladensburg, little changed in plan from its establishment in 1742.

Subtheme—The Rise of the African-American Middle Class: African-American Community and Culture

African-American contributions to Prince George's County and to the Heritage Area have been considerable; several communities and a significant number of individual sites are illustrative of the rise of the African-American middle class beginning in the late 19th century. St. Paul's/Free Hope Baptist Church in Bladensburg illustrates the establishment of an African-American congregation after the Civil War. It also establishes the link with Riversdale, where the founder of the congregation had been part of the slave force. In contrast to Bladensburg, where a substantial black population before the Civil War had comprised a recognized part of the commercial activity in the town, Rossville (a small farming community near Beltsville) grew in the 1880s out of a community of freedmen, many of whom worked at the Muirkirk Iron Furnace. At the center of Rossville stands Abraham Hall, the 1889 benevolent society lodge that has served at various times also as church and schoolhouse, and is still the focal point of the community. Closer to the District of Columbia border, North Brentwood began as part of a late 19th-century subdivision planned by a developer who had commanded a company of black soldiers during the Civil War and who encouraged the sale of lots to black families. The North Brentwood community attracted families both from the District of Columbia and from outlying rural areas and in 1924 became the first African-American community to be incorporated in Prince George's County. St. Mark's Methodist Church in Laurel, a strikingly handsome landmark built in 1921, represents the religious center of a longstanding urban black community. Many of the parishioners of this religious institution worked at the Laurel Mills or Muirkirk Furnace. Sites associated with this subtheme include:

- ✿ North Brentwood
- ✿ Rossville and Abraham Hall
- ✿ St. Paul's/Free Hope Church





Abraham Hall, a benevolent society lodge built in 1889, has since that time been the focal point of the African-American community of Rossville.

- ✿ St. Mark's in Laurel

Subtheme—Notable Citizens

Many of the historic properties in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area are associated with notable citizens who left for future generations not only the physical legacies of their plantation and estate houses, but also their cultural, agricultural, political, and religious contributions. Sites associated with notable citizens include:

- ✿ Montpelier Mansion
- ✿ Snow Hill
- ✿ Walnut Grange
- ✿ Oaklands
- ✿ Snowden Hall
- ✿ Snowden Iron Works
- ✿ Green Hill
- ✿ Ash Hill (Hitching Post Hill)
- ✿ Langley Park Mansion
- ✿ Riversdale/Calvert Mansion
- ✿ Phelps Mansion
- ✿ McCeney House
- ✿ Gude Mansion
- ✿ R.S. Hill House

Subtheme–Education

Established in 1865, the Prince George’s County Board of School Commissioners (now the Board of Education) established and managed the primary and secondary public schools of the county, for both black and white students. The Maryland Agricultural College was founded in 1856 on part of the Riversdale acreage; its greatly expanded campus is now The University of Maryland at College Park. Other private and religious schools in the area represent all the various aspects of education in Prince George’s County:

- ✿ Ammendale Normal Institute
- ✿ Briarley Military Academy
- ✿ Rossborough Inn
- ✿ Morrill Hall, Calvert Hall
- ✿ Laurel High School
- ✿ McDonnell House
- ✿ Berwyn Heights Schoolhouse
- ✿ Abraham Hall
- ✿ Muirkirk School



An early aerial view (1940s) of the campus of The University of Maryland at College Park.

Subtheme–Pattern Book and Sears Mail-Order Houses

The Anacostia Trails Heritage Area includes a significant number of Victorian pattern book and later mail-order houses, built both by developers and by individual property owners. These houses reflect early suburban development around Washington. Starting in the 1880s with house plans that could be ordered from a catalog at very low cost, the phenomenon

was carried a step further in the early 20th century by such companies as Sears, Roebuck and Company, which offered for sale not only the plan but the prepared construction materials. Railroad lines radiating to and from the District of Columbia facilitated the shipping of these materials, and many models of mail-order houses began to appear in the street-car and automobile suburbs around the area. Today most of the early residential subdivisions in the Heritage Area exhibit examples of mail-order houses and one in particular (Berwyn Heights) has an unusual wealth of Victorian pattern book houses.

Three Victorian pattern book houses by R.W. Shoppell (the O'Dea House and Kleiner-Dillon House in Berwyn Heights and the McEwen House in Hyattsville) are listed by Prince George's County as historic sites; the Chlopicki House in Berwyn Heights is listed as a historic resource. Two other pattern book houses (designers unknown) are also historic sites: the Lewis F. Holden House in Hyattsville and the Warren House in Riverdale Park.

Examples of Victorian pattern book houses are:

- ✿ O'Dea House, Berwyn Heights
- ✿ Chlopicki House, Berwyn Heights
- ✿ Kleiner-Dillon House, Berwyn Heights
- ✿ McEwen House, Hyattsville
- ✿ Lewis F. Holden House, Hyattsville
- ✿ Warren House, Riverdale Park



This 1888 mail-order plan from R.W. Shoppell's Cooperative Building Plan Association was used to build one of the first houses in Berwyn Heights.

Mail-order houses have been identified in several communities. Sears, Roebuck and Company houses have been found in Bladensburg, Brentwood, Cottage City, Colmar Manor, College Park, Hyattsville, Laurel,



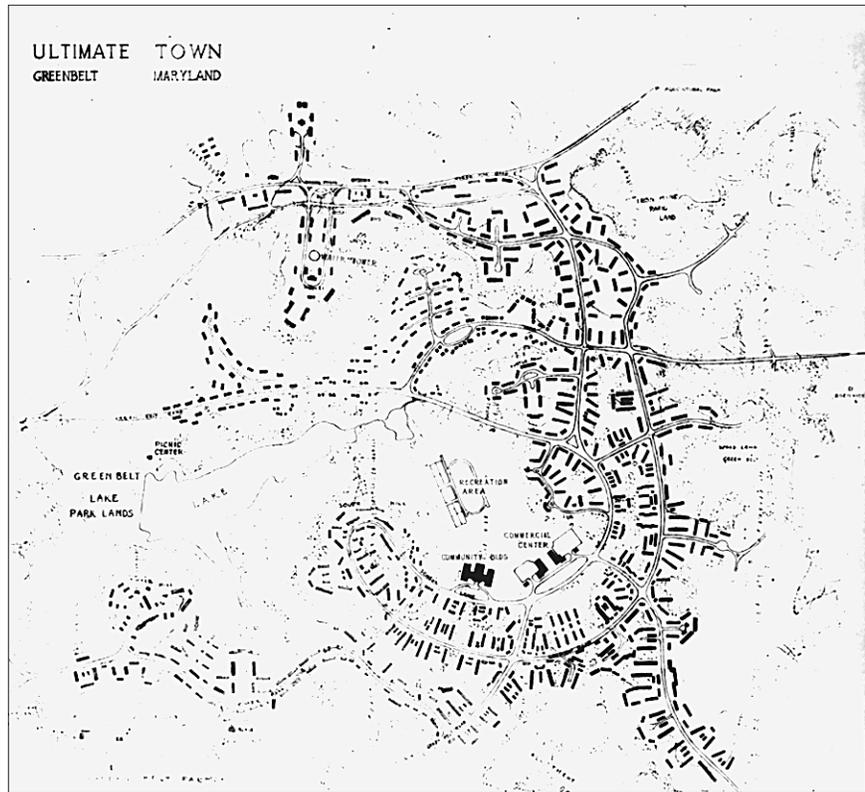
This Sears, Roebuck and Company mail-order plan, the “Alhambra,” was used in 1927 to build a house in College Park.

Mount Rainier, North Brentwood, Riverdale Park and University Park. One Sears “Alhambra” model (the Holbrook House in College Park) is listed as a Prince George’s County Historic Site, and one Garlinghouse plan house (the Rizzo House in West Hyattsville) is identified as a historic resource.

Subtheme–Greenbelt, A Planned Greentown

Greenbelt was established as part of the planned “greentown” program under the United States government’s New Deal Resettlement Administration, conceived in the 1930s for the purpose of addressing the nation’s shortage of low- to moderate-income housing. Greenbelt is the most successful and intact example of the government’s three completed greentowns, with superblocks that contain rows of single-family attached houses and multifamily dwellings in the minimally ornamented international style. Greenbelt has a town common with commercial buildings and a community center, as well as abundant open spaces with gardens, recreation areas, footpaths and pedestrian underpasses. Greenbelt was the first large-scale effort by the federal government to construct permanent housing for people in nondefense-related employment. The community is a model of garden city planning principles and is also significant for its attempt at social engineering with the selection of initial residents according to demographic data. The community has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior. Resources in Greenbelt include:

- ❁ Greenbelt Museum
- ❁ Greenbelt Trail System
- ❁ Greenbelt Community Center
- ❁ The Town Center and Movie Theatre



Greenbelt: the design for the planned "greentown."



St. Joseph's Chapel (1880), the fine Queen Anne-style Catholic chapel at Ammdendale.

Subtheme—Religion and Early Churches

At the end of the 17th century, the Episcopal (or Anglican) church became the established church in the Maryland Colony. This ended with the American Revolution and the Maryland Declaration of Rights, which put an end to the intolerance of Roman Catholic worship. Soon after that, traveling Methodist ministers encouraged the establishment of

Methodist places of worship. As small villages developed in the 19th century at industrial centers like Laurel and along the main arteries of transportation, a church was among the first buildings to be constructed, and usually became the focal point of each new community. The following are churches, buildings used as churches, or sites of churches from this early period:

- ✿ St. Mary’s of the Mills, Laurel
- ✿ St. Phillip’s, Laurel
- ✿ First United Methodist, Laurel
- ✿ Abraham Hall, Rossville
- ✿ Queen’s Chapel United Methodist Church, Rossville
- ✿ St. Joseph’s Chapel, Ammendale Normal Institute
- ✿ St. James, Mount Rainier
- ✿ Mount Rainier Methodist
- ✿ Brentwood AME Zion, North Brentwood
- ✿ St. Paul’s/Free Hope Baptist, Bladensburg
- ✿ Evergreen Cemetery, Bladensburg
- ✿ St. John’s Church, Beltsville
- ✿ College Park Woman’s Club (Old Parish House)
- ✿ St. Mark’s Methodist, Laurel

A number of congregations in ATHA may occupy newer buildings but be themselves “historic,” reaching back to these same religious roots; these should be documented as part of the area’s cultural traditions.

Subtheme–Industry in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

One mill from the 18th century remains in the area Adelphi Mill, powered by the small but swift Northwest Branch. In the 19th century, water power provided by the Patuxent River was the incentive for the establishment of several industrial centers in the northernmost part of the county, and it was here that the Industrial Revolution found its way into Prince George’s County. It started with the formation by the Snowdens of the Snowden Iron Works. By the 1830s, Laurel had become a booming mill town, and by the 1840s, the Ellicott brothers had established the Muirkirk Iron Works. The aviation industry of the early 20th century is represented in the Engineering Research Corporation (ERCO) establishment. Sites associated with the early industries of the area include:

- ✿ Laurel Mills
- ✿ Laurel Museum
- ✿ Adelphi Mill



The 1863 sketch by artist Alfred R. Waud of the ironworks at Muirkirk, an important producer of ordnance during the Civil War.

- ✿ Muirkirk Furnace Site
- ✿ ERCO Building

The Bladensburg Races: The War of 1812 in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

Bladensburg was the site of a battle during the British advance on Washington during the War of 1812. The battle, a British victory, is often called the “Bladensburg Races” because the poorly prepared and commanded Maryland Militia either fled the scene entirely (at the Anacostia River) or fell back twice, from the Anacostia crossing and then from the Dueling Creek crossing, before mounting a last-ditch effort on the hill in what is now Fort Lincoln Cemetery. Only one American commander, Commodore Joshua Barney, emerged with any honor, arriving overland late in the battle and fighting valiantly with his seamen before being captured by the British, who set him free in recognition of his valor. After this battle, the British invaded Washington. Although the United States lost the



Sketch of American troop positions at Bladensburg, 24 August 1814.

encounter and the Capital suffered badly, the Battle of Bladensburg caused enough delay to permit key documents to be removed to safety.

A replica gun barge based on those used in Commodore Barney's flotilla during the war was built at Bladensburg Marina in 1996 as a Tricentennial project in conjunction with the Living Classrooms Foundation in Baltimore. The barge is displayed at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park and is available for interpretive and living historic presentations.

The following resources are associated with the Battle of Bladensburg:

- ✿ Bostwick
- ✿ George Washington House
- ✿ Market Master's House
- ✿ Magruder House
- ✿ Fort Lincoln Cemetery
- ✿ Dueling Grounds

The Natural Environment

ATHA lies in the geographic area known as the Coastal Plain, a wedge-shaped region primarily composed of unconsolidated sediments such as gravel, sand and clay. Some of these materials came from upland erosion, but most are the deposits of successive advances and retreats of the sea over the last 50 to 100 million years. The corridor between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, which includes the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, is considered distinctive and significant because of its unusually high concentration of these sediments. It is known to geologists as the "Bad Lands." (In certain places, the iron-rich soil lacks other nutrients to support the ordinarily rich vegetation of the Coastal Plain, hence the name).

ATHA is primarily an urban area of municipalities and suburban communities, but the area does include several large tracts of parkland, natural settings and wildlife preserves. These are the 4,700-acre Patuxent Research Refuge, the 7,000-acre Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the 1,100-acre Greenbelt Park (part of the National Park System), and the 15-mile-long Anacostia Tributary Trails System. Resources associated with "The Natural Environment" and its subthemes are shown on Map 8.

Subtheme—Wildlife and Agricultural Research Centers

Several of the largest and finest federal research centers are located within ATHA. The Patuxent Research Refuge is a scientific and environmental education center that supports a wide variety of wildlife in the forest, meadow and wetland habitats. More than 200 species of birds, including the bald eagle, have been spotted at the refuge. The National Wildlife Visitor Center at the refuge is designed to provide



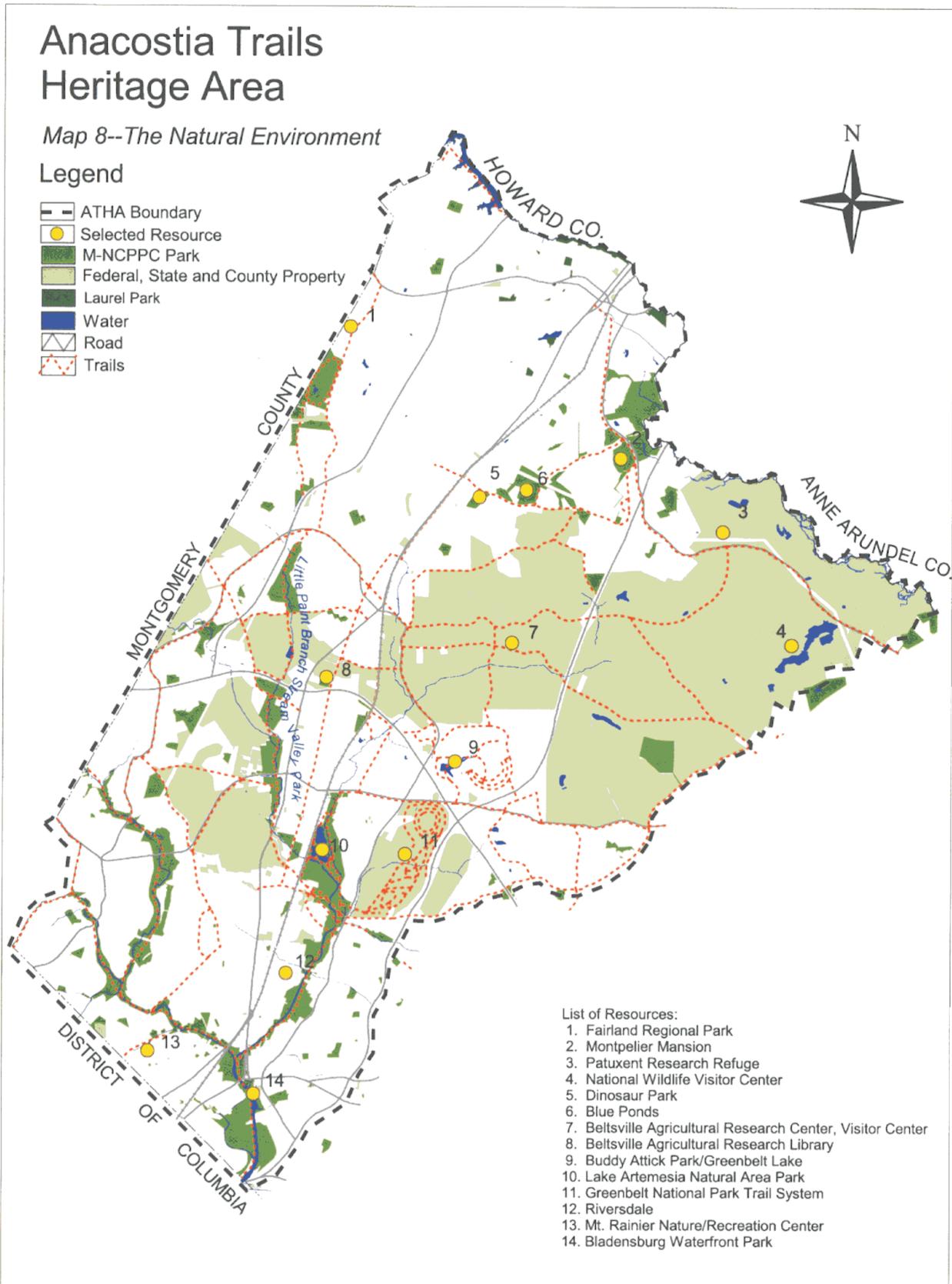
The elegant Common Egret is a familiar sight along the waterways of the Heritage Area.

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

Map 8--The Natural Environment

Legend

-  ATHA Boundary
-  Selected Resource
-  M-NCPPC Park
-  Federal, State and County Property
-  Laurel Park
-  Water
-  Road
-  Trails



- List of Resources:
1. Fairland Regional Park
 2. Montpelier Mansion
 3. Patuxent Research Refuge
 4. National Wildlife Visitor Center
 5. Dinosaur Park
 6. Blue Ponds
 7. Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Visitor Center
 8. Beltsville Agricultural Research Library
 9. Buddy Attick Park/Greenbelt Lake
 10. Lake Artemesia Natural Area Park
 11. Greenbelt National Park Trail System
 12. Riversdale
 13. Mt. Rainier Nature/Recreation Center
 14. Bladensburg Waterfront Park

visitors with knowledge and appreciation of the role of wildlife research in preserving the earth's vital resources, migratory bird routes, and endangered species recovery efforts.

The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center is one of the largest and most diversified research complexes in the world. Its research programs range from soil, water, and air resource conservation to human nutrition. The center has 47 laboratories and is a working farm.

The following facilities are key to this subtheme:

- ✿ Patuxent Research Refuge
- ✿ National Wildlife Visitor Center
- ✿ Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Visitor Center
- ✿ Beltsville Agricultural Research Library

Subtheme—"Let's Take a Walk": Trail Systems of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area

Within this area are a remarkable number of hiking and biking trail systems, as described more fully in Chapter Five. The Anacostia Tributary Trails System is a continuous, 18-mile-long greenway (15 miles in the Heritage Area) that traverses a variety of natural environments from woodlands to open fields. It is designed to wind through the stream valley along the several branches of the Anacostia River and is proposed for expansion to link Laurel to the remainder of the Heritage Area. Many of the trails in this system link community parks, recreational centers and historic sites. In addition, the East Coast Greenway and the shore-to-shore American Discovery Trail are national multiuse trails that cross through this area. More trails are proposed along the Patuxent River, the Anacostia River (to be a spur of the Potomac River National Scenic Trail), and the older streetcar line stretching from Mount Rainier to Laurel.

Nature trails for hiking and birding are located in the larger parks of the area. Many special hiking programs are offered by park rangers at Greenbelt Park and other parks and nature centers.

Key resources associated with this subtheme are:

- ✿ Anacostia Tributary Trails System
- ✿ American Discovery Trail
- ✿ East Coast Greenway
- ✿ Patuxent Research Refuge Nature Trails
- ✿ Greenbelt City Trails

❁ Greenbelt Park Natural Trail System

Subtheme–Nature Centers of the Heritage Area

Nature centers, community parks, and lakes in the Heritage Area offer places to enjoy fishing, boating, hiking, birding, picnicking, jogging, biking and nature programs. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), which oversees most of the nature centers and community parks in the area, has an award-winning parks system. M-NCPPC manages 18 neighborhood and community parks, Bladensburg Waterfront Park, Mount Rainier Nature/Recreation Center, and Lake Artemesia, all within the Heritage Area. Several of these facilities have been created using recycled land. The Colmar Manor Community Park was formerly a landfill. The creation of Lake Artemesia was a quasi-governmental project. The materials dredged from creating the lake area were used as the bed for the Metrorail Green Line. The result is a scenic 38-acre lake with abundant wildlife and opportunities for fishing, hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Places where nature can be interpreted include:

- ❁ Bladensburg Waterfront Park
- ❁ Blue Ponds
- ❁ Fairland Regional Park
- ❁ Greenbelt Park
- ❁ Lake Artemesia Natural Area Park
- ❁ Buddy Attick Park/Greenbelt Lake
- ❁ Little Paint Branch Stream Valley Park
- ❁ Mount Rainier Nature/Recreation Center
- ❁ Laurel Riverfront Park
- ❁ Various other neighborhood and community parks and other M-NCPPC and community sites.

Subtheme–Dinosaur Park

Twenty-two acres of land near the Muirkirk Furnace site were recently purchased by M-NCPPC in order to protect a unique deposit of dinosaur fossils. In 1858, the bones of several dinosaurs were discovered here in what would become known as one of the richest dinosaur fossil sites of the Lower Cretaceous period of North America's east coast. Additional important finds were made between 1887-8 and 1894-6. Plans for excavations and a dinosaur park at the site are being discussed.

Subtheme–A Natural History of Agriculture

Human interaction with nature includes agriculture, beginning with Native American use of resources in the area, and moving to European settlement and the creation of a tobacco-based cultivation economy.

Later there were agricultural reform efforts led by C. B. Calvert of Riversdale, who founded the Maryland Agricultural College and led the successful effort to create the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and ended with the creation of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

Sites where this subtheme can be interpreted include:

- ✿ Bladensburg Waterfront Park (tobacco port)
- ✿ Riversdale
- ✿ The University of Maryland
- ✿ The National Visitor Center at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center
- ✿ Beltsville Agricultural Research Library
- ✿ Montpelier Mansion



This handsome log lodge was built 1936/37 by the Civilian Conservation Corps on the developing Beltsville Agricultural Research Center; it now serves as the BARC Visitor Center.

CREATING AN INTERPRETATION SYSTEM FOR THE ANACOSTIA TRAILS HERITAGE AREA

Introduction

The interpretation system for the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area starts first and foremost with planning for support and linkage of the many existing interpreted sites throughout the area. The interpretation at these sites should be adapted to provide regional context and more content relating to one or more of the four primary themes. There is also a need for a visitor reception and orientation system as the first step in interpreta-



Interpretive signage like this at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park helps visitors enjoy and appreciate the area's historical and environmental attractions.

tion. (See further discussion in Chapter Six.) The actions discussed below also include provisions for the development of new, comprehensive and coordinated interpretive media at heritage sites, such as signage, guidebooks, a website and newsletters, plus provisions for coordination, technical and financial support for sites, opportunities for more research, and public outreach programs. All such programs should emphasize the diversity of the resources and the themes and cultural dynamics that shaped them, but also identify the commonalities and cohesive features that bring this region together.

Interpretation Planning

The realization of a system for interpretation is critical to the success of ATHA. Extensive interpretive planning is required to address the needs of individual sites both those existing and those that can be readily developed and to meld them into a comprehensive, and comprehensible, whole, supported by the interpretive (and recreational) trails. The following actions are recommended:

- ❁ Create a comprehensive interpretive plan under the guidance of the directors of all interpretive sites in the Heritage Area. The plan should:
 - ❖ Detail the strategic, programmatic and operating needs of each existing and new site, including addressing the issue of extending the hours of operation of existing sites.
 - ❖ Detail plans for adaptations to existing interpretation to provide visitor orientation, regional context, and added thematic content related to the Heritage Area's themes.

- ❖ Provide guidance for the detailed research and development required by the Anacostia Trails and their themes, including setting priorities for their phased construction.
 - ❖ Develop guidance for regionwide interpretive materials (brochures, postcards, videos, guidebook, website, kiosk information).
 - ❖ Develop guidance for regionwide and local events to support the themes, with accompanying agreements on methods for coordinating event schedules and marketing programs.
 - ❖ Address marketing issues to help implement the county's report, *Marketing and Management of the Historic Properties of the M-NCPPC*, January 1998.
- ✿ Facilitate increased public access, group use, and marketing and promotion for Heritage Area attractions and encourage partnerships with businesses and agencies involved in tourism and visitor accommodation.
 - ✿ Develop a program to enhance visitors' experiences in ATHA. The program should involve interpretation and hospitality training for docents, museum employees, and volunteers. The focus should be on providing the nuts and bolts of good interpretation and could include a docent certification program.

The natural, cultural and historic resources in the Heritage Area that are the most attractive for development and marketing for heritage tourism are listed below, and should be addressed in the interpretive plan. These choices are based on their appeal to the general public, their existing programs and accessibility, and potential for further development. Actual development and improvements in response to the interpretive plan will be the responsibility of partners in ATHA.

- ✿ Abraham Hall
- ✿ The National Visitor Center at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center
- ✿ Bostwick
- ✿ College Park Airport and Aviation Museum
- ✿ Dinosaur Park (in planning)
- ✿ Fairland Regional Park
- ✿ NASA Goddard Space Flight Visitor Center
- ✿ Greenbelt and the Greenbelt Museum
- ✿ Greenbelt Park
- ✿ Bladensburg Waterfront Park
- ✿ Laurel B&O Railroad Station

- ✿ Laurel Main Street and Laurel Museum
- ✿ Montpelier Cultural Arts Center
- ✿ Montpelier Mansion
- ✿ Mount Rainier Nature/Recreation Center
- ✿ National Archives II
- ✿ North Brentwood Museum (in planning)
- ✿ National Wildlife Visitor Center



The Art Deco style Cheverly Theater opened in 1947. It is now the Publick Playhouse, one of 21 natural, cultural and historic sites proposed to form the core of the ATHA interpretive system.

- ✿ Publick Playhouse
- ✿ Riversdale
- ✿ The University of Maryland at College Park

Visitor Reception and Orientation

The construction of new visitor centers in the Heritage Area is not a part of the overall strategy, which rather relies on the many existing visitor reception and interpretive sites already here. Independent and individual efforts are underway to provide new facilities and strengthen existing sites. Two new town-sponsored visitor centers are proposed at the southern end of the Heritage Area, in a 1930s gas station in Mount Rainier, ideal for interpreting US 1, and in the former Roy Rogers restaurant in Bladensburg, an ideal location for interpreting the Battle of Bladensburg. On the northern end of the Heritage Area, the I-95 rest stop can serve as one entry point. This rest stop is on the southbound lanes north of Laurel. Laurel city officials and the Prince George's Conference and Visitors Bureau presently coordinate with the personnel at the welcome center. The Montpelier Arts Center, also at the northern end of ATHA, and Greenbelt Park, which is more centrally located, are potential candidates for visitor orientation sites. Kiosks for visitor orientation should be installed at appropriate locations. Further discussion of the visitor reception system is in Chapter Five.

Actions here relate to the design of an overall signage system that includes wayfinding (directional) signs, outdoor interpretive signs, and distinctive kiosks at key locations to alert visitors to nearby sites and upcoming events. (Further discussion of the signage system is in Chapter Six.)

Proposed actions for visitor reception and orientation are:

- ✿ Develop and implement the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area graphic identity and design the signage system, including wayfinding (directional) signs, visitor reception kiosks and outdoor interpretive signs. Guidelines should relate trail amenities and streetscape elements to the overall look of the Heritage Area.
- ✿ Develop a guided tour program, including audio tape tours, in support of high quality and safe wayfinding and visitor orientation. This project would help to link interpretive and historic sites and ensure the safety of visitors.

Interpretive Trails

A primary feature of ATHA will be the creation of a large number of interpretive trails, and driving and cycling tours, as well as walking tours, that interpret or reinforce interpretation of the various themes and subthemes. These trails will link existing and planned heritage attractions that can be interpreted with outdoor signage. Chapter Six discusses trails as part of the overall linkage strategy. A key ingredient in the success of these trails is the interpretation itself the media chosen at each stop to convey the story and the strength of the story and exhibits themselves. Research, writing and exhibit design will be required.

Research

The recommended interpretive program, including the many Anacostia Trails suggested in Chapter Six, will require additional research. The following activities are recommended:

- ✿ Prepare studies, documentation and marketing of African-American communities and sites throughout the Heritage Area.
- ✿ Use academic institutions, libraries, the National Archives and educational centers in the Heritage Area, including the library of the National Trust for Historic Preservation at The University of Maryland, for research, classes, conferences and any other projects that focus on the Heritage Area.
- ✿ Develop an atlas of ATHA (including historic, interpretive and environmental maps). Using historical and contemporary information, the atlas would provide a perspective on the development of the Heritage Area and provide direction for additional research. The publication would also augment educational programs at interpretive sites. Historic maps of individual communities in the Heritage Area could be printed and displayed.

- ✿ Conduct research to identify, develop and interpret underground railroad sites in ATHA and incorporate the sites, where applicable, into the proposed National Underground Railroad Historic Trail.

Public Outreach and Education

Public outreach programs explain not only how and why to protect historic and natural resources but also spark enthusiasm for the resources themselves and the history and educational opportunities they represent. The interpretation program of ATHA thus takes on added importance, because it is a way of linking historic preservation to tourism and public education in the Heritage Area.

With regard to public education, schools within the Heritage Area are encouraged to create a student intern program to study regional and local history. Eleanor Roosevelt High School offers one of the nation's first high school programs on tourism and is encouraged to become involved in the development of these school outreach opportunities. The following actions are recommended:

- ✿ Publish and distribute an Anacostia Trails Newsletter, in English and Spanish, as an ongoing community outreach and interpretation project.
- ✿ Enhance and maintain the ATHA website with links to interpretive attractions in the Heritage Area, trail and touring itineraries, information on restaurants and lodging, a gift shop with Heritage Area publications and products, interpretive theme chat rooms, promotions information, and special events calendars.
- ✿ Create a welcome packet for new residents. Enlist the support of local businesses to develop programs in support of heritage sites by use of coupons, vouchers, validation schemes and other offers in the packet. Provide a copy of the quarterly guide to events to be held in ATHA.



To celebrate Prince George's County Tricentennial in 1996, a replica of Commodore Joshua Barney's 1814 barge was constructed; it is shown here with re-enactors at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park.

- ✿ Publish a guidebook and video to be sold at interpretive sites and attractions, municipalities, bookstores, and other businesses (including hotels and restaurants) throughout ATHA and the region. The guidebook and video should focus on the Heritage Area's history, purpose, economic opportunities, cultural heritage, interpretive sites, and trails.
- ✿ Create a transit rider's guide to ATHA that includes a map, fare information, and explanations of the attractions.

