

# the Preservationist

Summer 2006



U.S. Army 1st Lieutenant Robert Gould Shaw described Muddy Branch as "the worst camp we have ever had."

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## Blockhouse Point Conservation Park and the Camp at Muddy Branch

by Don Housley, Vivian Eicke and James Sorensen

A team of archaeologists and volunteers from Montgomery County Park and Planning has begun excavations at Blockhouse Point, a conservation park owned by M-NCPPC. Documentary research and a new non-invasive archaeological technique – gradiometric surveying – are helping to uncover the fascinating history of the site.

At the beginning of the Civil War, the nation's capital and its approaches were virtually unprotected. As a result of Confederate raids across the Potomac and the Union disaster at First Bull Run, Washington became one of the most fortified cities in the world. In addition to forts ringing the city, blockhouses were built to serve as early warning stations along the Upper Potomac to protect the canal and the river crossings. From 1862 to 1865, the blockhouse at Blockhouse Point, along with two others at Pennyfield and Seneca Locks, served as outposts for the camp at Muddy Branch.

The camp at Muddy Branch was first occupied by Colonel Fletcher Webster's (son of Senator Daniel Webster) 12th Massachusetts Infantry in September of 1861. A brigade under General Alpheus Williams moved to Muddy Branch after the Union defeat at Ball's Bluff (October 21, 1861), just north of the camp on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. Serving in one of the regiments, 1st Lieutenant Robert Gould Shaw, later a colonel in the 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment, wrote "We are in the worst camp we have ever had. It is a hallow, where the dampness collects. . ." The brigade was followed by the 19th Massachusetts Infantry which built three blockhouses during the winter of 1862.

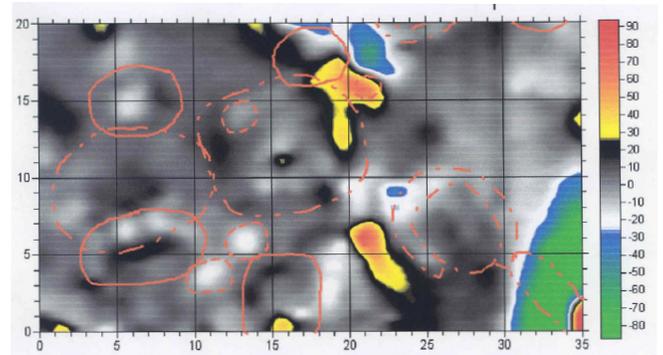
Each blockhouse was in the form of a Greek cross, 48 feet each way, with loopholes for infantry arms. While no major battles were fought at Muddy Branch, the Union forces reported on Confederate troop movements before and after the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg. For nearly a year after Gettysburg, a battalion of the 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry at Muddy

Branch was preoccupied with stemming the raids of Confederate partisan units led by Colonel John S. Mosby and Lieutenant Elijah Viers White.

The most significant event associated with Muddy Branch and the blockhouses was the result of General Early's attack on Washington in July of 1862. With Early's forces on the doorstep of D.C. and all the Union forces recalled to the defense of the Capital, Mosby took advantage by burning the temporarily-vacated blockhouses along the Potomac. On July 12, Mosby found the camps at Blockhouse Point and Muddy Branch abandoned and burned their equipment and supplies.

Gradiometric mapping of shovel test pits on the site of the soldiers' camp at Blockhouse Point in the fall of 2005 showed the location of disturbances in the soil of the earth's magnetic fields. Magnetic field gradient data measure deviations from a field of zero. Those areas which have archaeological or geological anomalies deviate from the uniformity of the hypothetically smooth magnetic field. The map below shows the southwest quadrant of the camp with solid lines indicating pit and berm features visible on the surface. Dash-dot lines indicate mounds and trenches. The concentrated light colored areas indicate naturally igneous dykes (hard rock formations) or possible fire pits.

It is hoped that modern technology will help us to learn more about this important piece of Montgomery County's Civil War history. Information and artifacts that are unearthed will be included in future exhibits that will help all our citizens learn more about the region's rich heritage.



# Historic Preservation News and Notes



*A child discovers Montgomery County history at Archaeology Camp. For the 2006 summer workshop schedule for both children and adults, see the calendar on page 4.*

## Montgomery County Heritage Days

Montgomery County Heritage Days continues to grow every year. This year, 37 historic sites will be open from 12 noon to 4 PM Saturday, June 24 and Sunday, June 25. Under the musical performance theme, many the sites will offer musical presentations in addition to their usual tours and demonstrations. From Blues guitar to Latvian folk dancing, you will be sure to find a musical genre that appeals to your melodic senses. Afternoon tea (by reservation only) will be held at the Gaithersburg Inn and at Woodlawn Manor.

Never seen before as part of this annual heritage event will be:

- Boyds Negro School
- Clarksburg 2-Room School
- Latvian Museum, Rockville
- Lock House #8, C & O Canal , Cabin John
- Olney Theatre, old and new
- Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard, Comus
- St. John the Evangelist Church, Forest Glen
- Uncle Tom's Cabin in Bethesda – the late 18th century house and attached kitchen of the Riley plantation where Josiah Henson, the model for Uncle Tom lived for 35 years

For more information call 301-515-0753 or go to [www.heritagemontgomery.org](http://www.heritagemontgomery.org). Maps of this year's tour can be found at libraries, parks and recreation centers, or at participating sites.

## Celebrate County's Founding

Attend the big celebration of Montgomery County's 230th birthday from 2 to 5 PM on Sunday, September 10, 2006, at the Beall-Dawson House Historical Park, 103 West Montgomery Avenue in Rockville. Explore the county's history through exhibits by local historical groups, living history presentations, videos, an archaeological dig, tours of the house, and historical games. There will be historical music and, of course, a birthday cake. Come enjoy a fun and educational experience for the whole family. This annual event is co-sponsored by the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission and the Montgomery County Historical Society. For more information call 301-762-1492 or go to [www.montgomeryhistory.org](http://www.montgomeryhistory.org).

## 2007 Historic Preservation Grants Available

The Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission administers a Historic Preservation Grant Fund of \$30,000 that will be available for disbursement in fiscal year 2007. These grants are given to non-profit groups or municipal governments for non-capital historical activities and must be matched with local funding or in kind services by the group. These grants cannot be used for capital projects or staffing.

### 2007 GRANT FUND SCHEDULE

**Early August 2006:** Applications mailed to interested parties, advertisements placed in newspapers.

**September 30, 2006:** Deadline for completed applications.

**September/October:** Applications processed.

**October:** A committee of Historic Preservation Commission members reviews applications and makes recommendations to the full Commission, who then votes on the proposals.

**October 31, 2006:** Applicants notified of awards. Notice to proceed with the respective project(s) is around January 1 depending on completion of executed documents. Completed projects are due the end of December 2007.

If you would like to receive an application for an HPC Historic Preservation Grant please call: 301-563-3400

## the Preservationist

The Preservationist is the official publication of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Phone: 301-563-3400. Statements herein do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Commission. Created by the Historic Resources Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 24A, Montgomery County Code) the Commission is responsible for identification, designation, and regulation for purposes of protection, preservation, continued use, and enhancement of sites and structures of historical, archeological, architectural, or cultural value. Commission members are appointed by the Montgomery County Executive and confirmed by the Montgomery County Council.

### Commission

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Historic Preservation Coordinator Gwen Wright

Requests to be on the mailing list and content information should be directed to the Commission.

# The Jesup Blair House and the Underground Railroad

**Attempted escape from slavery ended in shootout and arrest of noted abolitionist in front of Blair family's Silver Spring retreat.**

Originally known as "The Moorings," the distinguished Jesup Blair House in Silver Spring was built by the Blair family in 1849 as a summer retreat. The square, two-story frame house incorporates elements of the Federal and Greek Revival styling. For many years the residence was home to Mary J. Blair, daughter-in-law of Francis Preston Blair, whose Silver Spring estate, located on the opposite side of Georgia Avenue, became the source of the community's name. Mrs. Blair maintained a Washington residence in addition to this summer home. Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, brother-in-law of Mary Blair, resided at the Moorings in the 1860s. The property remained in the family until 1937 when Violet Blair Janin, grandchild of Francis Preston Blair, dedicated the property to the State of Maryland as a memorial to her brother, Jesup Blair. The state then turned the property over to Montgomery County in 1939. This was the first Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Park in Montgomery County.

Although the Blairs were probably unaware at the time, an important incident involving the Underground Railroad occurred right in front of the house on August 8, 1850, when a hired carriage was forcibly stopped by a Sheriff's posse from Washington, D.C. and a shoot-out ensued. The carriage was driven by William Chaplin, who was unarmed, and was carrying two men attempting to escape from slavery: Garland White, belonging to Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia, and Allen, belonging to Senator Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. The posse consisted of six men led by John Goddard who were heavily armed and shot into the carriage after stopping it by ramming a fence rail through the wheel spokes. At least one of the fugitives returned fire before jumping from the carriage and running away. Mr. Chaplin was hauled from the carriage and beaten. Both African Americans were slightly wounded as was one of the members of the posse. Allen was returned to his owner, and Garland White turned himself in three days later. White later escaped and served as chaplain for the 28th regiment, U.S. Colored Troops in the Civil War.



William Chaplin was a leader of the Liberty Party and active in the Albany Vigilance Committee. He had come to Washington from New York four years earlier to take the place of Charles Torrey, an abolitionist and operative on the Underground Railroad, who died in prison in 1846. Chaplin was the mastermind behind the ill-fated flight from Washington, D.C. of 77 enslaved people aboard the ship *Pearl* in 1848.

*Above: Artist's rendering of the arrest of abolitionist William Chaplin near the District Line. Below: The Moorings (now known as Jesup Blair House) in Silver Spring.*



Since there was originally some dispute over whether the arrest took place in D.C. or in Maryland, Chaplin was imprisoned in Washington for six weeks and released on \$6,000 bond, and was subsequently imprisoned in Maryland for thirteen weeks and released on \$19,000 bond on December 24, 1850. The bond money was raised by fellow abolitionists. Chaplin left the area when released, forfeiting the bond, and never came to trial.

The site of the arrest is now #1 on *The Underground Railroad: Maryland's Network to Freedom*, a map published by the state. Copies can be ordered by calling 1-877-663-UGRR (8477), [www.visitmaryland.org](http://www.visitmaryland.org).

# Calendar

## Archaeology Summer Workshops

Responding to the popularity of this annual program, the Montgomery County Department of Parks Archaeology staff will be offering four workshops for children and also two workshops for adults this summer. All sessions are at the Needwood Mansion in Derwood. For registration information, please call 301-840-5848.

## Archaeology Camps for Children Ages 10 - 15

Additional Session .. June 19–23

Session I ..... June 26–30

Session II ..... July 10–14

Session III ..... July 17–21

Hours: 9 AM – 3 PM; Extended Session 3–5 PM

Fee: \$226; Extended Session \$55

## Archaeology Field Sessions for Adults

Session I ..... August 7–11

Session II ..... August 14–18

Hours: 9 AM – 3 PM

Fees: \$30 a day/\$80 for 3+ days (each session)

## Through August 30

Exhibit: *Barns of Montgomery County.*

Photographs of barns by Mike Dwyer and Don Burgess. Waters House, Milestone Manor Lane, Germantown. Wednesdays 2-9 PM, Saturdays 10 AM-4 PM. Call 301-762-1492. [www.montgomeryhistory.org](http://www.montgomeryhistory.org)

## June

21 HPC Meeting, 7:30 PM, MRO Auditorium, 8787 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring. Call 301-563-3400. [www.mc-mncppc.org](http://www.mc-mncppc.org)

24 & 25 Montgomery County Heritage Days 12 noon-4PM. Countywide [www.heritagemontgomery.org](http://www.heritagemontgomery.org). 301-515-0753.

## July

12 & 26 HPC Meeting; see June 21 listing.

## August

16 HPC Meeting, 7:30 PM, MRO Auditorium, 8787 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring. Call 301-563-3400. [www.mc-mncppc.org](http://www.mc-mncppc.org)

## September

13 & 27 HPC Meeting; see June 21 listing.

10 Happy Birthday Montgomery County Celebration, Beall-Dawson House, 111 West Montgomery Ave., Rockville. Call 762-1492. [www.montgomeryhistory.org](http://www.montgomeryhistory.org)

## October

7 Harvest Festival at the Agricultural History Farm Park in Derwood. 11 AM. to 4 PM. Call 301-670-4661. [www.montgomeryparksfnd.org](http://www.montgomeryparksfnd.org)

11 HPC Meeting; see June 21 listing.

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