



Howard Chapel cemetery—and the nearby
restoring houses that sit on what was once fam-
ily property—is one of 150 African American
historical sites in Montgomery County recently docu-
mented in a study by the Lincoln Park Historical
Foundation/Society.

The cemetery is included in a map of the sites,
which were largely compiled by Anita Neal Powell,
founder and president of the grass-roots histor-
ical society. The society operates from her home in
the city's historically black Lincoln Park neigh-
borhood.

Compiling the map was necessary, Powell said, to
preserve the African American heritage and locate
many lost and overlooked historically black
communities of Montgomery County.

Powell, who works for the federal government,
spent five years compiling the sites, using a \$3,400
grant from the Montgomery County Historic Pres-
ervation Commission. Montgomery County govern-
ment printed the map.

Powell and family members hope the county will
designate Howard Chapel cemetery and the sur-
rounding land a historic site.

County officials say the process is ongoing and a
decision could be made by the end of the year. Pow-
ell also would like to see several other sites receive
historical recognition from the county and state.

"This area is unique because of the Underground
Railroad-Canada connection to these two families,"
Powell said. "When I think of Montgomery County,
I think of a lily-white area, but there are a lot of hid-
den black communities here, lots of history here.

"If we didn't have this history, we'd never know
the significance of this cemetery or these houses."

Because of sympathetic Quakers, Montgomery
County served as an Underground Railroad starting
point to Canada and other destinations, with stops
that included Sandy Spring and more than 20 other
locations in the county. The Underground Railroad
was the network of safe houses used to harbor
slaves seeking freedom in the North before the Civil
War.

Sites listed on the map include neighborhoods,
churches, parks and schools that stretch across the
county from Poolesville to Bethesda. It includes a
historic black district in Chevy Chase, Burnt Mills
Colored School in White Oak, Smith's Tavern in

Muncaster Mill and slave quarters and Under-
ground Railroad stops in Colesville, Whites Ferry,
Dickerson, Germantown, Rockville and Hyatt-
stown.

Many of the sites are indicated by name only on
the map because buildings and identifying land-
marks no longer exist.

Ross M. Kimmel, a supervisor with the Maryland
Department of Natural Resources, who first learned
of the Howard Chapel site about 20 years ago, said
researching Montgomery County's black history is
challenging but rewarding.

"It's great history and it's out here, you just have
to dig for it," Kimmel said.

Michele Naru, a preservation planner for the
Montgomery County Historic Preservation Com-
mission, started surveys of Howard Chapel in 1999
and began formulating a history of the property.

Howard Chapel, she said, is "an important Afri-
can American resource within the county," but one
of many significant historical sites Powell was able
to uncover.

"It's a wonderful evolution of where we've been
and where we are now," Naru said.