

Press Release: A Series of Three Articles related to the “*Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester*”

Presented by the Harriet Tubman Organization and the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance
Date: Oct 13-14, 2017

Where: Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, Historic High Street Cambridge, Maryland and Handsell Historic Site, Vienna, Maryland

#1 Sleep Tight Historic Sites

You drive by them every time you travel about on an Eastern Shore country road. They are often located between barns and outbuildings or perhaps hiding at a woodland edge covered with vines. They do not stand out or call attention to themselves. The abandoned and neglected state belies the remarkable stories that they hold. Once they are gone, there will be no tangible evidence of their testament to history. These are the vernacular dwellings that once house the enslaved population of this peninsula. These buildings are quickly becoming extinct and need to be recognized and preserved.

The Slave Dwelling Project is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to identifying and preserving extant slave dwellings and bringing their history to life by staying overnight in these structures, no matter how dilapidated, cold or dirty they may be. The simple act of sleeping in these slave dwellings brings attention to the need to preserve, interpret and maintain these structures and serves to foster dialog on slavery and race relations. According to Joseph McGill, founder of the Slave Dwelling Project *“now that I have the attention of the public by sleeping in extant slave dwellings, it is time to wake up and deliver the message that the people who lived in these structures were not a footnote in American history.”*

Mr. McGill of the Charleston, S.C. area was with the National Trust for Historic Preservation until 2010 when he formed the Slave Dwelling Project. As a descendant of enslaved people, he has devoted his life to ensuring the preservation of these historic sites. He began by making his way around the Southeastern United States, sleeping in historic slave quarters. McGill has recently expanded his quest to the Mid-Atlantic States and has gone as far north as New York, carefully pointing out that there were indeed enslaved people in the Northern States. As he travelled, he met other historically minded living history interpreters and organized several people into a group he calls “Inalienable Rights” which includes storytellers, a cook, a blacksmith and other 19th century crafts people.

McGill and his troupe have journeyed to various historic sites, partnering with other non-profit historic organizations who heard his message and wished to be involved in telling their own stories of local enslaved communities. The Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance (NHPA), owners of the Handsell Historic Site in Dorchester County contacted Mr. McGill in 2016, wishing to promote both the preservation of Handsell and the Bayley Slave Cabin on High Street in Cambridge, as well as bring attention to other historic structures in the county that need restoration or maintenance. Midge Ingersoll, president of the NHPA, says *“no documentation has been done of the smaller utilitarian farm structures in this county and they are fading fast from our landscape just at a time when Dorchester is touting Heritage Tourism. With the new Harriet Tubman Visitors Center bringing tourists to our region, we are at a critical time to identify and preserve the structures that may include buildings that once housed our enslaved population or are part of Dorchester’s farming heritage.”*

Handsall plantation, owned by the Steele family in the 18th century had a large enslaved community. Research shows that after the Steele's sold Handsell in 1837, the subsequent owners, Jacob C. Wilson, John Thompson and Susan Emily Thompson (Mrs. Samuel E.) were enslavers. By the start of the Civil War, the Indiantown area around Handsell had become a predominantly African American community made up of both enslaved and free people. After the War many of these families remained and eventually became sharecroppers right up through the 1960's on the same farms where their ancestors were held as enslaved people. In spite of all this layered history, the brick house at Handsell is the only remaining structure of several dozen homes and barns which once dotted the Indiantown landscape.

It is most likely this story repeats itself in other areas of Dorchester County where there were larger plantations with populations of enslaved people. So one must ask "where are the buildings that once served these plantations and is it possible that any still exist, unrecognizable under asphalt or aluminum siding"?

To this end, NHPA reached out to Bill Jarman of the Harriet Tubman Organization , Dana Paterra from the new Harriet Tubman Visitors Center and Diane Miller of the National Park Service to begin discussion to bring Joseph McGill and the Inalienable Rights troupe to Dorchester. Together, these groups have agreed to join in the Slave Dwelling Project's task of "bringing historians, students, faculty, writers, legislators, organizations, corporations, artists and the general public together to educate, collaborate and organize resources to save these important collectibles of our American history." For over a year, they have been planning the "Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester," a two-day event scheduled for this October, and gathering sponsorships and participants from many fields. In preparation for this event, signs that say "This Place Matters" and "Sleep Tight Historic Site" will be seen dotted around the county in September.

In addition, the Dorchester County Historic Society is arranging public school tours for the 4th and 5th graders to visit both Handsell and the Bayly Slave Cabin during September to help county students understand more of the life and history of the African Americans.

Prior to this event, the charge to Dorchester County residents is to pay attention as you drive around this beautiful county and ask yourself how you would feel if that barn, that row of outbuildings, or that old house suddenly were to disappear from the rural landscape? What memories and stories would go with them forever? What of your own family's heritage would you lose? How would these demolitions affect our Heritage Tourism economy?

The "*Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester*" event is planned for Friday and Saturday October 13-14 and will be held at the Cambridge Court House, Bayly House on High Street, and Handsell Historic Site in Vienna. More information can be found at www.restorehandsell.org and www.slavedwellingproject.org.

#2 Coming to the Table – Enslavers and the Enslaved

The recent success of the Reflections on Pine Street events began a dialog in Dorchester about race relations, our history and how the events of the 1960's may influence our lives today. As the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance (NHPA) and the Harriet Tubman Organization plan the upcoming "Slave Dwelling Comes to Dorchester" event, we can reflect even further back in time to the 18th and 19th centuries when slavery was very much a part of the economic and social environment of this county. Well up into the 1960's, segregation was a part of everyday life for the black community as reflected in the NHPA's documentary film "Voices of Indiantown," a story of the African American families of the Indiantown community around the now Handsell Historic Site, just north of Vienna.

As part of the Slave Dwelling Project weekend and in keeping with one of the missions of the project, the sponsoring groups have invited Coming to the Table, a national organization founded by Will Hairston and Susan Hutchison. Hairston is descended from a dynasty that, at its height, controlled nine plantations—encompassing upwards of forty farms—stretching from the tidewaters of Virginia to the backwoods of Mississippi. Many thousands of African American people worked their lands as enslaved people, making them one of the richest families in the antebellum South. Susan Hutchison was a descendant of Thomas Jefferson and kin to a large number of Virginia slave owning families.

After learning more of their family's history Will and Susan were inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, spoken from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963: "*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*"

It was under Hutchison's and Hairston's leadership that a number of descendants of enslaved people and of slave owners came together to form Coming to the Table (www.comingtothetable.org). An experience was planned in which black and white descendants of ancestors linked by a slave/slave-owner relationship, a blood connection, or both could explore the history of slavery—its legacy and impact on their lives. They had a longer-term goal to create a model of healing to guide individuals and groups that continue to struggle with racism in the United States and throughout the world.

During the Slave Dwelling Comes to Dorchester event, representatives from Coming to the Table will join Joe McGill of the Slave Dwelling Project and together they will sleep in both the Bayly Slave Cabin on High Street in Cambridge and Handsell in Vienna, both known sites of enslavement. On Friday October 13 at 7 p.m. there will be a "Candlelight Remembrance" starting at the Cambridge Courthouse, former location of a slave auction block. Spiritual music, poetry and readings by descendants of both enslavers and those enslaved will enhance the recognition of those who once were held in bondage in Dorchester County during this inspiring candle lit evening. Open to the public, this event will conclude at the Bayley house, across the street from the Court House, where the living history interpreters and descendants of enslaved people, and enslavers will "sleep tight" in the slave cabin there.

On Saturday October 14 at the Handsell living history event, volunteers from Coming To The Table will be featured in the "History Tent" at 11:15 and 2:00 p.m. as they moderate a discussion and help to foster dialog on enslavement and the legacy of slavery. Other activities that day will include living history performances portraying the music, culture and contributions of little known individuals who helped build our nation. A bus tour sponsored by the Harriet

Tubman Organization will be available (registration to be made online). For bus tour information call 410-228-0401.

Partners and Sponsors of this important event include the Harriet Tubman Organization, Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, Slave Dwelling Project, Coming to the Table, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, Dorchester Arts Center, Elks Lodge #223, 106.3 The Heat WCEM FM, Healing Hands Animal Hospital and The Drug Store, Hurlock, MD. All info at: www.restorehandsell.org.

Article #3

Slave Dwelling in the Heart of the Historic District

In the heart of the Cambridge Historic District sits a historically important little building. It leans a bit from decayed sills but otherwise is remarkably original to the mid-18th century period when it was most likely built. In December 2014, Catherine Morrison purchased the historic Bayly House, which included an attached kitchen and smoke house, and this little building, which was described as a slave cabin. She immediately began the task of restoring the exterior of the “main house”, uncertain of what to do about the dilapidated slave cabin in the backyard. Her research revealed that the house was moved by the owner, Mr. John Caille (Caile) upon his appointment as a Clerk of the Court in Dorchester County. Although the popular oral history recounts that the house was brought “across the Chesapeake Bay from Annapolis”, Ms. Morrison learned that Mr. Caille and his siblings all resided in Oxford, and Mr. Caille was in fact a close friend and employee of Robert Morris, Sr. It is her belief that the house was more likely floated across the Choptank River to Cambridge, around 1750, and then shortly thereafter was moved from the current site of the Dorchester County Courthouse, across High Street, to its present location. The property was purchased by the prominent Bayly family around 1830, and occupied by Dr Alexander Hamilton Bayly (1814-1892) and his descendants until 2003.

Dr. Bayly’s father was Josiah Bayly, famous in the history of Cambridge, who lived in the house next door, where the law office in which he practiced still stands in the front yard facing High Street. Josiah Bayly was born on Halloween in Somerset County. He served in the Maryland House of Delegates (1803, 1804), was District Attorney in 1818, and was also Maryland’s Attorney General from 1831 to 1846. Josiah died at age 77 and was the oldest member of the Maryland Bar, but he is probably best remembered as the attorney who defended Patty Cannon, the famous ringleader of a bunch of ruffian kidnappers and slave catchers. Josiah Bayly and Dr. Alexander Hamilton Bayly are buried in the Christ Church Cemetery, but alas, the known burial places of their enslaved people are long ago lost.

It is well documented that both Josiah Bayly and Dr. Alexander Hamilton Bayly were slave owners. (*Dorchester County Slave Purchasers, 1823-1836 and William Still’s UGRR*) In fact, a “runaway” advertisement was placed in the papers by Josiah on October 21, 1857 seeking the return of his “negro woman Lizzie, age 28...she is medium sized, dark complexion, good looking...” Lizzie had run away with her husband, Nat Ambie who was held in bondage by John Muir. The combined reward offered for the two was \$800. According to William Still’s account, Nat and Lizzie successfully escaped to freedom and by June 10, 1858 were located near Auburn, New York.

Kate Larson, author of *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero*, has done extensive research on the enslaved on the Eastern Shore. In her records, she lists the following individuals held as enslaved people by Dr. Alexander Hamilton Bayly: Maria Cya [Kiah], daughter Hannah and other children (enslaved by wife Delia), Eliza Conoley [Connely], Joseph Conoley [Connely]], Louis Phillip Conoley [Connely], Ellen Johnson, John Wesley, Fayette, George, Lewis, Charles, Henry, George Edward, Edward, John Banks, Sarah, Sally Ann, Emily, Grace, Ellen, Fanny, Willie, Milly, Hester, Julia, Elizabeth (Lizzy Ambly), Louisa, Hagar, Chloe and Robert Elsey Kerr. This is only a partial listing of slaves held by Bayly.

Located directly behind the family home of Dr. Bayly, this previously described small cabin is believed to have housed some the enslaved individuals held by Dr. Bayly and his father.

It has been questioned whether this “slave cabin” was indeed a dwelling at all, since it currently has no fireplace. In her quest for more accurate information, Ms. Morrison contacted Joseph McGill, founder of the Slave Dwelling Project, in the late summer of 2015, and after hearing her story about the supposed slave cabin in her backyard, he agreed to visit Cambridge and see the structure for himself. In March 2016, trustees of the Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance and Mr. McGill accepted the invitation by Ms. Morrison to visit the Bayly Slave Cabin. They discovered what they consider to be clear evidence in the ceiling joists of a long-ago chimney. Further study of the building is merited and will likely reveal further evidence of human occupation. Ms. Morrison has plans to continue to pursue preservation and restoration opportunities for this important and increasingly scarce structure. Dorchester County Public Schools is planning to bring 4th graders to visit this site in September as part of their education about the history of Dorchester County. The Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, in following its mission of bringing public awareness to important historic structures in Dorchester has planned the *“Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester”* which will feature a *“Candlelight Remembrance”* on Friday October 13 at 7 p.m. at the Dorchester County Courthouse. Participants of this event will include descendants of both the slave holders and enslaved people of Dorchester and will include members of both Coming to the Table and the Slave Dwelling Project sleeping the night in the Bayly Slave Cabin. More information can be found at www.restorehandsell.org

(photo of Catherine Morrison and Bob Moffatt, attached to this article)

#4 About the “Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester” Event

In celebration of Dorchester County’s rich African American heritage, the “*Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester*” will bring attention to little known county historic structures that once served as dwelling houses, churches or other cultural and utilitarian uses in the lives of African Americans. This project will feature Joseph McGill of the *Slave Dwelling Project* and “*Inalienable Rights*,” a living history troupe representing enslaved African Americans of the 19th century. Groups of participants will sleep overnight at the Bayly House Slave Cabin in Cambridge and then in the Handsell Slave Chamber in Vienna. With an impressive group of partners, the project will also provide an opportunity for the public to have discussions guided by members of Coming to the Table about the history and legacy of enslavement in the United States. The weekend includes multiple events at various sites around the county, discussions led by members of the National Coming to the Table organization, living history re-enactors, music and other historic demonstrations suitable for visitors of all ages.

In advance of the event, the Dorchester County Historical Society will be coordinating with the Dorchester County Public Schools to arrange field trips for all 4th graders to visit either the Bayly Slave Cabin or Handsell. These trips will take place in the later part of September and hopefully will encourage children and their families to learn more of the history of African Americans in this county.

The event will begin Friday evening, October 13, with a “Candlelight Remembrance” at the Cambridge Court House and Bayly Slave Cabin. This event will include introductory presentations and live vocal performances based on Negro Spirituals by soloists Karen Somerville and Melissa Wise Slacum. Ms. Somerville has performed widely from New York through Maryland and is best known for her jazz interpretations and historical performances of songs relating to black history. Mrs. Slacum is local to Dorchester and has performed for many years at local events and venues, recently becoming interested in the genre of the music of 19th century African Americans. Guests attending the Friday evening event will be given “candles” to light as the names of once enslaved individuals are read by both descendants to those enslaved and enslavers. A procession of participants and attendees will proceed from the Court House to the Bayly Slave Cabin at the privately owned Bayly House on High Street, where the event will conclude with more songs and inspirational words. Refreshments will follow.

On Saturday, a living history event at *Handsall* will feature two presentations and discussions (morning and afternoon) led by members of Coming to the Table (see: www.Comingtothetable.org). Other planned activities for Saturday at *Handsall* include presentations by “*Inalienable Rights*,” an African American living history troupe, representing early African American crafts people, story tellers and food historians. The public will have the opportunity to see cooking demonstrations in the Handsell Kitchen over an open fire, where both free and enslaved people of color once worked and lived. Jerome Bias will be interpreting an African American cook and demonstrating his talents at the newly restored Kitchen fireplace. One reason Mr. Bias sleeps overnight in slave dwellings and cooks at the living history programs is so children and youth will see their ancestors—will see enslaved people—as human beings with fully rounded lives, not just suffering stereotypes. “*I want them to look at enslaved people as talented, life-living individuals who made quilts to sleep under, sewed clothes for their children, built cabins, grew vegetables and invented recipes for tasty meals using whatever was at hand,*” he says. Christine Mitchell will be the cook’s assistant and historian with the Slave Dwelling Project. She has been a historical interpreter with the Old Slave Mart Museum in

Charleston, South Carolina. Mitchell is a third-generation descendant of enslaved people who lived in the community. “*To be here and to help educate people who are coming here from all over the world, I am giving honor to the ones that never had a voice,*” she says. Other living history re enactments will include music, storytelling and a 19th century “laundress”, Roberta Perkins. Ms. Perkins began her interest in re-enacting when she retired. In 2005, she joined Laura Lee, then director of the Iron Hill School Museum in an oral history project, gathering the stories of former students who attended this one-room schoolhouse for African American children in Newark, Delaware. This led Perkins to begin portraying an African American laundress, Miss Jane, who worked at the Delaware Fort during the Civil War. In order to do Jane justice, she threw herself into researching enslaved and free African American women and the occupation of laundresses during that time period. Perkins has been sharing Jane’s story with Delaware State Park visitors over 4 seasons and this year is excited to come to Handsell. During the time at the fort she began to play the banjo, an instrument of African origin. The banjo is now part of the ‘equipment’ she uses to help share the stories of African Americans from that era and women like Jane.

Another highlight of the day at Handsell will be two presentations by Karen Somerville and her group “Sombarkin.” Karen Somerville is a recording artist and producer performing gospel, blues, jazz, R&B, folk, and the arrangements for the acappella trio “Sombarkin” (sum-bar-kin), a group she has organized. She worked as a background vocalist on the “*Songs in the Key of Life; Stevie Wonder 2014 Tour,*” and has also worked closely with New York’s Broadway sensation *Mark Bramble (42nd Street)*, and with the *Seamless Voice, Marlon Saunders* and was featured songstress at the *NYC Fringe August 2016*. Karen formed Sombarkin’ in 2002 with longtime friends Lester Barrett, Jr., and Jerome McKinney. The trio is known for their dynamic vocal instrumentation and the polyphonic technique in which they deliver explosive performances in genres from Negro Spirituals to contemporary jazz renditions.

Two Chicks Catering Truck will provide food and drinks at Handsell. The Chicone Village will be lively as representatives from the Pocomoke Indian Nation and Philip Goldsborough, a Nanticoke descendant, will demonstrate Native crafts. Dawn Manyfeathers of the Nanticoke Lenni Lenape will be making Native fry bread. During the day on Saturday, The Harriet Tubman Organization will escort a morning bus tour of Dorchester County African American historic sites which will begin and end at the Harriet Tubman Underground Rail Road Visitor Center and will include a stop at *Handsall* for the Coming to the Table discussion. The bus tour will help promote Dorchester County Tourism and highlight important African American historic sites.

Slave Dwelling Project Comes to Dorchester is considered an educational event, brought to the public to increase the community’s knowledge of our local history and heritage, historic preservation and the contributions made by little know individuals from the past. George Washington once said, “*our Country owes its life to heroes who for the most part will remain nameless.*” Both Friday evening and Saturday events are FREE and open to the public.

The event is brought to the public by the following Partners and Sponsors: Harriet Tubman Organization, Nanticoke Historic Preservation Alliance, Slave Dwelling Project, Coming to the Table, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, Dorchester Arts Center, Elks Lodge #223, 106.3 The Heat WCEM FM, NRG Energy, Healing Hands Animal Hospital and The Drug Store, Hurlock, MD and Cambridge Main Street. All information can be found at www.restorehandsell.org

