MSU scholar traces history of blacks in Maryland:

Slave revolts, civil war, secret societies, also played a role in State's history

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Part One: An Afro - American Community Takes Root.

On the occasion of Black History Month, 1982, approximately three and a half centuries after the first blacks arrived in the area now called Maryland, it goes almost without saying we celebrate in Maryland a connection with Africa that is historic, that is long, that is evolutionry, and that thrusts itself full-force into the future.

Long before either Africans or Europeans arrived, Maryland had been discovered, explored and settled by American Indians, ancestors of groups such as the Yoacomacos, the Piscataways, the Nanicokes, the Pocomoke-Assateagues, and the Susquehannocks, also known as the Susquehannas.

These groups were residents in the eastern part of the state when non-Indians were making occasional coastal stops early in the 17th century.

We have no evidence of any permanent non-Indian settlement in Maryland until 1631, when an English-speaking Capt. William Clairborne led a small group of settlers from the Virginia Colony to Maryland's Kent Island.

It may never be known whether or not Africans were among those first non-Indian settlers, but it is known Africans had been residents in Virginia since 1619, the year before the Pilgrim's Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock and 12 years before the settlement at Kent Island was founded.

Even if Maryland's African connection did not begin until 1631, as it well might have been, at the latest the African connection began March 27, 1634.

On this date two boats, the Ark and the Dove, landed at Clement's Island, on the Western Shore where St. Mary's City now is located.

On board were Leonard Calvert, later to be the first governor, and two Afro-Americans, John Price and Mathias Desousa.

Though Africans had been resident in England itself for the better part of two centuries before the departure of the Ark and the Dove, the blacks on board had not come from England, they had been picked up in Barbados, when those ships stopped in the West Indies in route to Maryland.

Though some of Maryland's early African residents were indentured servants, as were many European residents, they were not slaves. Price and DeSousa initially were indentured, solely to pay for the cost of their passage.

It was perhaps in 1635 this group was triumphal in a naval engagement with the Clairborne group. In any case, it was in 1635 that the arrival of another black, Francis Peres, occurred.

That Maryland's earliest black residents did not arrive as slaves is underscored by the fact Anthony and Mary Johnson, orginally from North ghampton County, Va., settled in the Manokin section of Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1661, two years before slavery was first provided for in the statutory law of Maryland.

Even after such laws began to be enacted, they sired a whole clan of free blacks named Johnson, who were resident in and around Somerset County in Maryland.

Although according to a 1663 law establishing slavery in Maryland, the wives and children of slaves automatically became slaves, it is noteworthy in the 1680's, certain laws passed which provided the white wife of a slave did not automatically become a slave and the child of a slave and a white woman was to be free.

Miscegenation never was absent from the colony and such laws underwent frequent changes. According to a 1692 law, the child of a white woman and a black man, slave or free, became a servent for an extended period.

Already by the 1680's, enslaved blacks were in cases here and there attempting to undo by whatever means at their disposal the forces which kept them enslaved and the laws continued to change.

A 1715 law forbade the marriage of a white person to a slave, but permitted a white to marry a free mulatto. Other changes in the laws regarding miscegenation occured in 1717.

Hence, well before Baltimore was first laid out in 1730, Maryland already was home to an evolving multi-racial society where many blacks were free and where miscegenation was not uncommon.

It is not surprising that Benjamin Banneker, who was born in 1731, was the grandson of Molly Welsh, an English-woman, who married one of her two black slaves named Banneker and took his name at his insistence.

Benjamin Banneker, later to be an eminent scientist, was born free.

Although Maryland whites outnumbered blacks two to one in the middle of the 18th century, the struggle for freedom was ongoing.

In the 1730's, we learn of blacks breaking into a jail in Maryland's Prince George's County and of 200 slaves attempting to capture the magazine in Annapolis so they could retreat to backwood areas as maroons.

MATTHEW DE SOUSA, from historical accounts, was first black man to step foot on what is now the state of Maryland. He was a navigator.

In 1735, we learn of slaves attempting to poison their masters and in the 1760's, we learn of slaves burning the homes, sheds and tobacco houses of their masters.

Quaker influence was quite strong in 18th century Baltimore and by the 1760's, the Quakers were counceling their members to free their slaves. In their 1784 Christmas Conference, even the Methodists at Baltimore condemned the institution of slavery.

It only can be imagined the fact Maryland authorized slaves enlistment in the army and navy during the Revolutionary War and by 1781, subjected free blacks to the draft actively fed their appetites for freedom.

Some Maryland blacks also fought for the Loyalists, but this was not incompatible with a thirst for freedom from whatever forces.

By 1790, when the U.S. Government undertook its first National Census, so much miscegenation had occurred in southern Maryland between Piscataway Indians and free blacks, their descendants already were in the process of being transformed from Piscataways to Afro-Indian Wesorts.

For a state so far south, Maryland always had been outstanding for the large number of free blacks in her population and the Census of 1790 revealed some 8,000.

Though Baltimore had laid out a mere 60 years before the Census, it is noteworthy it had become the city with the largest black population in all of the United States.

Alongside its many enslaved blacks were numerous free blacks and many of these free blacks used their freedom in agitating for more freedom and improved conditions for all blacks, including themselves.

On one occassion, Benjamin Banneker sent a copy of his annual almanac to Thomas Jefferson with a plea for the ending of slavery and th the mitigating of racist stereotypes about blacks.

Jefferson, no abolitionist, although he fathered a good many mulatto children in his 38-year relationship with the black half-sister of his deceased wife, forwarded the almanac on to de Condorcet, gsecretary of the French Academy of Sciences, as proof of what olack people could accomplish when not enslaved.

Another outstanding achiever at the turn of the century was Joshua gjohnson, a man who though born a slave in what now is the Dominican grepublic, actually won his freedom in 1796 in Baltimore a d went on to become an outstanding portrait painter of wealthy Baltimore families.

He maintained an art studio in the middle of Baltimore's downtown on German Street, between Hanover and Howard.

Alongside the individual achievements of persons such as Banneker and Johnson, and alongside the continuing struggle for freedom on the part of blacks, both slave and free, there began to occur an organized strug e by blacks to found a network of associates, societies and institutions to benefit their community both educationally and socio-economically.

The oldest and largest continuingly operating black church in Baltimore is Bethel A.M.E. Church, which was founded in 1797 by Daniel Coker.

Coker had been born a slave on Maryland's Eastern Shore, but he escaped to New York where he eventually was ordained.

When Coker first returned to Baltimore as a bishop, he still found it necessary to conceal his identity until his freedom could be purchased by friends.

Another important religious and educational force in black Baltimore of the early 1800's was the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a religious society which had been founded in Santo Domingo.

Five or six small schools of the period had been founded by black women trained by this particular Convent. A black Baltimorean named Nelson Wells used $7,000 of his own money to found the Wells School in 1800.

Sharp Street Methodist Church, founded by a group of free blacks in 1802 was another important influence in the community building which was taking place at that tim. It also ran a school.

When in 1829, the Convent of the Oblate Sisters of Providence opend St. Frances Academy for Colored Girls, educational options for blacks in Baltimore were greatly enhanced.

It can not be overlooked in 1824, William Levington, a free black from New York founded St. James First African Protestant Episcopal Church in a room.

Two years later, when the cornerstone was laid for a proper edifice, provision was made for a day school for black children.

From around 1820, there also began to emerge in Baltimore's black community numerous self-help organizations designed to assist members through difficult times associated with sickness, burials or financial difficulties.

These organizations typically assessed their members about 50 cents per week. Alongside these kinds of organizations, there also gradually began to emerge a number of secret societies, some founded in Maryland and some with only branches in Maryland.

As the century progressed, this network of organizations came to include such groups as the Union Star of the Rising Generation, gthe Friendly Beneficial Society, The Barbers' Society - in the Baltimore of the 1800's, most barbers for the entire city were black - The Masons, The independent Order of Odd Fellows, The Samaritans, The Nazarites, The Galilean Fishermen, and the Wise Men.

In 1885, there even was incorporated in Baltimore, the Mutual Beneficial Association entirely managed by blacks. Within five years, it had a membership of more than 2,000. 1880, Baltimore's blacks had founded 10 churches or religious institution and some 30 to 40 benevolent institutions for mutual self-help.

There also were a number of sabbath schools and several churchs had some type of lyceum or literary society.

Alongside this community building, the struggle for freedome continued. In the late 1820's, a black Baltimorean of means, Hezekiah Grice, was associated with such abolitionists as Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison in the publication of "The Genius of Universal Emancipation." 9Part Two: Toward Freedom For All

The last 35 years of slavery in Maryland extended from 1829 to 1864 and it was a period of considerable confrontation between partisans of slavery and abolitionists.

In the 1830 census, Maryland was shown to have about half as many free blacks as it had slaves. These demographic facts are important because during this period, free blacks had come to be viewed throughout th slave states as the major threat to slaveholding interests.

It is not surprising that throughout this period of confrontation, th Maryland State Colonization Society continued to function lith its major goal being the deportation of Afro-Americans from Maryland to Africa.

The threat to the status and well-being of free blacks in mid-Atlantic states from 1830 through 1861 caused them to convene some 12 conventions known as Annual Conventions for the

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THE EASTSIDE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE, INC.

CHRONOLOGY

Under the jurisdiction of Baltimore City's Department of Social Services, the Eastside Community Committee, Incorporated, was originated in July 1944 as Area Project 1 (one of seven citywide programs). Throughout its tenure, this non - profit organization has been dedicated to the objective of providing educational, cultural, recreational, health and religious experiences for young people that might curb or eliminate their delinquent habits and activities.

A sub committee composed of the "Eastside" Women's City Wide Committee for juvenile delinquency, sponsors an annual commemoration of their work with youths entitled, "The Blue Ribbon Tea." Proceeds from this event provide the major funds to implement several programs designed to give children wholesale, enriching experiences.

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Maryland's Black History: blacks banded together to survive, build churches, schools and businesses

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mprovement of Free eople of Color.

From 1833 to 1843, here was a period when he annual metings were ot held. A noteworthy ccurence in the 1832 onvention

From 1833 to 1843, here was a period when he annual meetings ere not held. A oteworthy occurence in he 1832 Convention las altimore's Hezekiah Grice, trying to convince he group to dopt a rogram to seek broad egal redress modeled fter the Legal Rights ssociation which he had ounded in Baltimore the revious year.

Another incident of nterest at the 1833 Convention was the roup's formal attack on he goals of the olonization societis hich were trying to eport Afro-Americans free or about to become free) outside of their ountry, sometimes nvoluntarily.

Nat Turner's insurrection, in Southampton County, Va. in the late summer of 1831 sent shockwaves throughout slaveholding areas of the country, including Maryland.

One result in Maryland was the Act of 1831 which imposed restrictions on the importation of slaves, the use of firearms by blacks, and the immigration of free blacks. Another reaction las that the Maryland Colonization Society became a state agency.

Some blacks were all too glad to leave the United States whether under the auspices of the Colonization Society or on thir own. The rathr well to do and socially prominent activist, Hezekiah Grice, voluntarily left for Haiti in 1832.

During its first 10 years as a state agency, 1831 to 1841, the Maryland Colonization Society spent in excess of $66,000 transport some 627 Afro-Americans to the Liberian coast of West Africa and some 25 Afro-Americans to Haiti.

It is significant on each transport so used, there always were more places than people on board.

The U.S. Congress had in 1816 chartered the American Colonitation Society to carry free Black Americans to Africa and between this organization and the Maryland Society, Marylanders were rather well represented among those who went to Liberia as colonial "prisoners" to establish a national govrnment.

One of the 15 administrative or political districts into

Still, thre was never a time when vast masses of Afro-Americans from Maryland, or from elsewhere in the United States, voluntarily left the country for permanent resettlement overseas.

The confrontation between slaveholding interests and blacks reached a new stage when in Jan. 1841, a state-wide convention of all slaveholders was held in the House of Delegates for the purpose of protecting their interests.

It cannot be overemphasized that by this time, not only was slavery being maintained but a direct assault was being specifically levied on free blacks.

By the late 1840s, free blacks in Maryland began to oe pushed out of a number of occupational niches which they traditionally had occupied, or in some cases, their positions were severely restricted within these areas. However, black Marylanders were not passive in the face of such onslaughts.

Josiah Henson, born a slave near Port Tobacco in Maryland's Charles County, served not only as the model for Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom," he also helped to develop a colony for blacks in Dawn, Ontario in Canada.

In 1849, he wrote his autobiography detailing his commitment to freedom.

Harriet Tubman had been born on the Broadas plantation in gdorchster County about 1820 and by mid-century, this womtn called Moses, had already began her estimated 19 trips into Maryland and other slaveholding areas to lead hundreds of men, women and children to freedom...and she never lost a passenger.

When in 1850 the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, Mrs. Tubman las forced to extend her underground railroad even into the colony of St. Catherine across the Niagara River in Canada.

By this time, the bounties on her and on her passengers were astronomical. This was the same Moses, incidentally, who was to serve bravely as a scout for the Union forces during the subsequent

It was only after his escape to freedom in 1837 that he took gcivil gwar.

In Talbot County, barely 50 miles from where Harriet gross (later Tubman) first dwelled, there also lived a young boy called Freddy Bailey. Slave children had serious work to do and it was at the age of nine that Freddy was first brought to live in Baltimore, in the Southeastern quarter known as Fells Point.

It was only after his escape to freedom in 1837 that he took his better known name of Frederick Douglass. Douglass became on of America's most famous abolitionists and prolific author and editor.

During the Civil War, he served as an dvisor to President Lincoln on the black troops in the Union garmy.

Continued next week

Benjamin Banneker

More Black History Month events

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February 24: A culminating city-wide program on black history sponsored by the department of social studies of Baltimore City Schools and featuring the Dunbar High School Choir. Details to be announced.

February 24: "Black Business and Black Employment," and "Black Workers and the Labor Unions," two lectures beginning at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church, Druid Hill Avenue and Lanvale Street, Coker Hall dining room, second floor. Speakers include Richard Womack and Raymond V. Haysbert, of H.G. Parks company.

February 25

February 25: Dr. William Calderhead, professor of history at the Naval Academy speaks at 7:30 p.m. on prominent black families of Annapolis of the Nineteenth Century in the Asbury United Methodist Church lounge, 67 West Street, Annapolis.

February 26

February 26 and 27: "Black Dance On Film" featuring: Little Sammy Davis Jr., The Nicholas brothers, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Archie Savage and Marie Bryant, The Four Step Brothers, John Bubbles, Whitey's Lindyhoppers, Katherine Dunham, Baby Laurence and others at Gallery 409.

February 27

February 27: "Black Folk Art in America," an exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Washington, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Transportation arranged for a small fee by the cultural arts program, Urban Services Agency.

February 28

February 28: "Music of the Harlem Renaissance," a program of works by J. Rosamond Johnson, Margaret Bond and other black composers sung by tenor Alburtt Rhodes. Dr. Dominique de Lerma of Morgan State University will precede the performance with a brief talk on the life and times of the featured composers. Performed at 5 p.m. at Gallery 409, 409 N. Charles Street.

February 28: Kuumba, a dance company, will perform at 1:30 p.m. at the Cloisters. The Paul Laurence Dunbar High School Chorus will perform at 3 p.m. at the Cloisters.

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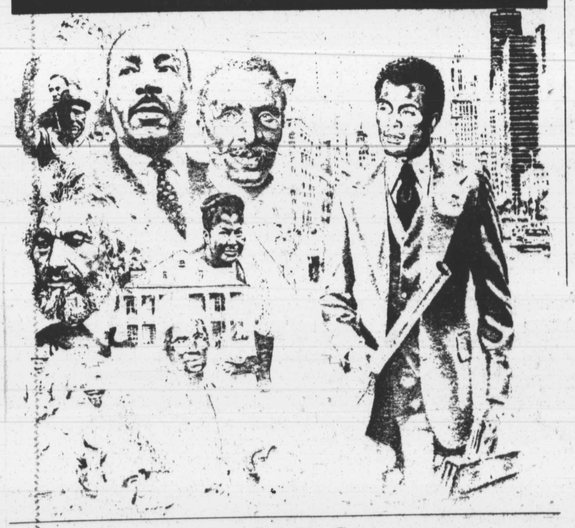

Looking back is one way to find Black History. The past is full of the richness and glory of achievement. But Black History is also a thing of the present. It is made every day as people work to accomplish their goals. Their successes are the foundation for the Black History of the future. Black History lives—Black History is you.
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