This screen-free field trip is a great way for learners of all ages to engage with local history at their own pace. Visit local historic sites to learn more about the struggles and contributions of African American people in our community.
Manassas City has a wealth of historic places and stories for everyone to explore. In honor of Black History Month the Manassas Museum and Manassas City Library have put together this booklet to provide an easy guide to visiting these important landmarks. Perfect for curious individuals or as a screen-free family field trip, this tour is made to provoke deeper thoughts and conversations about the struggles and societal contributions of African American people in years past.

This guide includes three important places to visit around Manassas City and provides family friendly activities and conversation starters for each location, plus a children's craft to do at the end. All sites are outdoors and can be visited at any time, making this a great socially distant activity. We suggest visiting one location each week of Black History Month (February) and making the craft for the final week, but everyone is welcome to participate at their own pace.

Questions or feedback? Please feel free to send comments to: haxt@pwcgov.org
Liberia House was built in 1825 by enslaved craftsmen on 1600 acres of land that was owned by William and Harriett Weir. Over time, Liberia plantation became a successful farming operation and by 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, the census shows that William Weir owned over 80 enslaved people, making Liberia one of the largest plantations in Northern Virginia with a school, post office, and mill on the property. Two generations of men, women, and children, regarded as personal property, lived and toiled on this land. Their labor, and mere presence as tangible assets, underpinned the success of the plantation.

Although not much is known about the majority of the enslaved people who lived and worked here, we do know a little bit about one family: the Naylors. Samuel and Nellie Naylor were among the 10-15 enslaved who came with the Weirs to the area in 1825. In the early 1860’s, Samuel bought his freedom along with 50 acres of land. His wife, Nellie, and their children remained enslaved at Liberia. When the Weirs evacuated to Fluvanna County in 1862 due to the war, they left Liberia in the care of some of their enslaved people, members of the Naylor family among them. Possibly intended as a gift for her service, Nelly Naylor was given 12.5 acres of land by the Weirs in 1865 “in consideration of the love and affection to our former servant”. After the war, the Naylors continued to live and thrive in the area, running a successful farm and managing a local mill. Descendants of Samuel and Nellie still live in the area today.
LIBERIA AND THE CIVIL WAR

On the eve of the Civil War, Liberia had grown into one of the largest and most successful plantations in western Prince William County, producing grains and vegetables that were sold commercially in Washington.

By July of 1861, Liberia became headquarters for Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard, and some reports also record its use as a hospital after the Battle of First Manassas. The house became headquarters of Union General Irvin McDowell in March of 1862, and it was during this period that President Lincoln came to Liberia to confer with his general. Nellie Naylor recounted that “...Abraham Lincoln came to Manassas, and that he shook hands with her at the Liberia mansion and talked with her…”

By the end of the Civil War, Liberia was one of the few significant structures remaining; however, the plantation never returned to its successful operation.

SEEK AND FIND

There are a lot of things to discover walking the grounds at Liberia house! See if you can find:

- The best, most uniform bricks were used on the front of the house--compare the bricks on the front of the house to those on the back. (Hint: the front of the house faces Mathis Avenue and the back of the house faces Portner.)
- Can you find the Springhouse (or dairy house) that sits over the creek? This small structure would have been used to keep dairy and other perishable foods cold, as refrigerators weren’t common until the early 1900’s.
- Look for evidence that the house may have looked different in some way. Notice the dependency that was once attached to the house in the 1861 picture above. This part of the house would have included a kitchen, a smokehouse, and laundry. Can you find evidence of the dependency anywhere on the house?
- The Weir family had their initials placed in brick on the house--can you find the W and I? (hint: look up!)
Located just west of downtown, this historic site tells the remarkable story of Ms. Jane “Jennie” Serepta Dean. Born enslaved in Prince William County, ca. 1850, Dean went on after the Civil War, to establish several churches and Sunday Schools in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. In addition to her missionary work, Dean was passionate about creating a school for young African Americans. Because she received a minimal education herself, Dean understood that a vocational school was desperately needed and decided to create one in Manassas. At a time when Virginia’s schools were segregated by race, Dean spearheaded efforts to purchase land to establish a private, residential school for Americans of African descent.

The Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth was chartered in October, 1893 and Frederick Douglass conducted the opening ceremonies in September of the next year. Thus began over 60 years of education that impacted the lives of more than 6,500 African American students. All students received instruction in academic classes such as math, geography and literature and vocational training was offered through courses such as shoemaking, animal husbandry, cooking, and laundry.
The public school systems of Fairfax, Fauquier, and Prince William counties did not offer high school level courses to Black students until 1937 when they jointly purchased the land and buildings from the Manassas Industrial School to establish a regional school for African American students. Until the 1950s, when Fairfax and Fauquier built their own, still segregated, schools, Manassas Regional High School was the only public school in the region offering Black students the opportunity to earn a diploma. In 1957, Prince William County became the sole owner of the original 100 acres of land and constructed a new school, named to honor Jennie Dean.

In 1992 the City of Manassas added this important historic site to its holdings, making it the only site in the City dedicated to telling the story of African American achievement. In 2020, the City erected a statue of Miss Jennie Dean in recognition of her seminal achievements.

Students in the Library at the Manassas Industrial School, ca. 1950.

**MANASSAS INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL VS. SCHOOL TODAY**

The Industrial School taught a wide variety of courses including math, geography, literature, shoemaking, animal husbandry, cooking, and laundry. Think about the classes you take today. Which courses are similar and which are different? If you had to decide what important skills students should learn today, what would you choose? List your ideas here:

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Liberty street was the heart of the African American community in Manassas after the Civil War, as it was one of few streets where people who had been enslaved were allowed to live. When this neighborhood and much of Manassas began to be developed, there was a clear dividing line between the white and black areas of town; the railroad tracks. African Americans were prohibited from erecting or occupying any property bordering any of the towns Avenues, Streets, or alleys, except west of Grant Avenue, and South of South Street (present day Prince William Street.)

In 1870, the Manassas Village Colored School opened as the first school for Black children and only the second school in the area on the corner of Prince William and Liberty streets. The school building was later moved to its current location at 9508 Liberty Street and was renamed The Brown School after a Quaker benefactor. Today, it is a private residence. A larger school, funded in part by the Julius Rosenwald Foundation which helped establish Black schools across the rural south, was built west of Grant avenue in 1926 and no longer exists.

One particularly notable resident of 9512 Liberty street was William Lomax (right). Mr. Lomax was born enslaved in southern Virginia in 1825 and later served as a substitute in the US Colored Troops during the Civil War. Earning $1000 for his service, William bought 8 acres of land on what is now Liberty street and settled there with his wife, Sarah after the war. William was a farm laborer, shoemaker, and blacksmith. The 1870 Census shows the head of the house of 9512 Liberty street to be William Lomax, a shoemaker, with a property valued at $1,300. William lived in the house he built at 9512 Liberty Street until he died in 1900.
SKETCH YOUR DREAM HOUSE

William Lomax built the house he and his family lived in for many years. If you were able to build your own house, what would it look like? What details would you include? How would your house be different from Mr. Lomax's house? Sketch your dream house here:
ALMA THOMAS

Alma Thomas was born 1891 in Georgia and later moved to Washington D.C., where she spent a significant portion of her life. Although she did not attend the Industrial School or the Brown School, education played an important part in her life. She earned a BA in art in 1924 from Howard University, an unprecedented accomplishment for a woman of color in the art field during that time, and later a Masters of Art Education from Columbia University in 1934. She taught art for over 30 years at Shaw Junior High School in Washington D.C., just 33 miles from Manassas.

ALMA INSPIRED ARTWORK

Thomas is well known for her mosaic-like paintings. You can make Alma Thomas inspired artwork by gluing small pieces of paper to a larger piece of cardstock. What feelings can you portray in a mosaic picture? What colors and patterns can you make to represent those feelings?
