



Session Descriptions and Speaker Information

KEYNOTE

Montgomery Montage: A 250-Year Tapestry of Time, People and Place

Speaker: Ralph Buglass

To state the obvious, our county has undergone tremendous change over the course of its history -- once overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, then increasingly suburban and now itself highly urbanized in numerous spots. To provide perspective and set the stage for the semiquincentennial, our keynote address will sketch major themes of the county's evolution and development, lavishly illustrated by an array of vintage photos, maps and other images.

Ralph Buglass is a frequent speaker for Montgomery History as well as Peerless Rockville on varied aspects of our county's past. In 2020, he coauthored with Peerless Rockville *Images of America: Rockville*, a pictorial history of the county seat of government. A retired communications professional, he also teaches courses on local history at lifelong learning programs associated with Montgomery College, American University and Johns Hopkins University. He is a county native and graduate of Winston Churchill High School and earned a BA in American history from Cornell University and an MA in journalism from American University.

MORNING CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Montgomery County's Immigration Story: 250 Years of Belonging and Contradictions

Speaker: Maria Sprehn

One of Maryland's most enduring legacies is an openness to diverse immigrants. This welcoming ethos toward newcomers from around the world is most striking in Montgomery County. Often touted as one of the most diverse counties in the nation, it has twice the national average of foreign-born residents. This talk will include personal immigration stories and broadly address the County's 250-year-old immigration history, exploring its contradictions and the many ways people have created ideas of place and belonging.

Maria Sprehn, a D.C. and Maryland native with roots in Spain, is an anthropologist at Montgomery College who focuses on oral history, storytelling, immigration, and Latino culture in the Washington, D.C. area. She earned her Ph.D. and M.A. degrees from the University of New Mexico. With Montgomery History, she co-curated a virtual exhibit on the county's immigration story and co-founded the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive. She is currently working on the Gaithersburg History Project to document the city's Latino history.

Unity through Two Families: Gaithers and Howards of Unity, Maryland

Speaker: Bruce Moran

Much of the history of Unity, Maryland, can be told through the lives of two families, the Gaithers and the Howards. The Gaithers were the prominent settlers of the land around Unity. The Howards were Freedmen who acquired former Gaither farms and established a community of Freedmen with a church and school.

Bruce Moran is a retired nuclear nonproliferation analyst of the Federal Government and International Atomic Energy Agency. During his career, he led domestic and international groups and committees. Since retiring he has contributed to the Patuxent River State Park through work to uncover the history of ruins and structures within the park. Through this work, he has developed a new expertise with respect to the Gaithers, who established the

dominant farms in the Unity area in the 1700s, and the Howards who progressed from enslaved people to tenant farmers, to farmers with more than 500 hundred acres of land. The descendants of both families have contributed to Montgomery County as well as to the State of Maryland.

Montgomery County and the Battle for Freedom of the Press in an Age of Political Violence: 1812

Speaker: Sandra Heiler

During the highly contentious War of 1812, Alexander Contee Hanson published an opinionated Federalist newspaper within Republican-dominated Baltimore. When called to account for his views, Hanson steadfastly defended his right to protest the war along with his fellow Federalist supporters, leading to a standoff against a Republican mob bent on silencing them. Learn about the incendiary actions of the Federalists, the retaliation of a Republican mob, the authorities who attempted to quell the disruption, and the social chasm that led to political violence.

Sandra Heiler is Treasurer of Montgomery Preservation, Inc. (MPI), and a former member of the Board of Preservation Maryland. She is a Chapter Historian for the DAR and the Daughters of 1812. Sandra served for 13 years on Montgomery County's Historic Preservation Commission, including three years as Vice Chair and three as Chair. In 2014, she directed Brookeville's War of 1812 Bicentennial celebration and co-produced the movie "Capital for a Day." She co-produces and directs movies and slideshows for MPI's annual Historic Preservation Awards. Sandra has a BA in Mathematics and an MA in American Studies and Architectural History from Boston University. After a 38-year career as a computer science researcher, she retired from Verizon Laboratories as Principal Scientist and Director of Verizon's IT Lab.

Advocacy, Activism, and Citizen Participation: The Creation of Montgomery County's Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Program

Speakers: Bianca Serbin, Ellen Stanton

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Montgomery County grew and developed, local residents and activists realized that in order to expand housing opportunities to all Americans—regardless of their race or socioeconomic status—the county needed to

create affordable housing. The newly-formed coalition, led by the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, drafted and advocated for the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit law, enacting a program to build affordable housing units in new developments throughout the county. This presentation traces the League's efforts to draft, advocate for, and pass the legislation, creating the first inclusionary zoning program in the United States.

Bianca Serbin is an editor at the Center for American Progress. Her award-winning undergraduate honors thesis, "Not a Question of 'Whether or Not,' but 'Where' and 'How': Crises of Affordable Housing in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1968-1996," studied the creation of the MPDU program and was cited in *The New York Times*. She earned a degree in history with honors from the University of Pennsylvania.

Prior to her retirement, **Ellen Stanton** worked in the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center as an educator in charge of public programs and as lead historic interpreter at George Washington's Mt. Vernon. She was chair of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission and currently is a member of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County.

The Contributions of Elected Women of Color in Montgomery County

Speaker: Selena Singleton

The story of elected women of color in Montgomery County, Maryland is characterized by a glacial pace of transformation over time. It was not until 1982--more than 200 years since the founding of the County in 1776--that the first woman of color, Odessa Shannon, was elected to a policy-making position as a member of the Montgomery County School Board. Highlighted in this talk are the historic firsts achieved by women of color in Montgomery County in the last 50 years, including their elected service (in the U.S. Congress, the Maryland General Assembly, the Montgomery County Council, and local city and town councils); their advancement in local politics (such as government-affiliated Commissions, Boards, and Committees); and their accomplishments in the executive and judicial branches that represent Montgomery County.

Selena Mendy Singleton is the Racial Equity Manager for the Montgomery County Council. Her domestic and international work includes serving as an environmental justice attorney with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; serving on the Montgomery County Commission on Human Rights; chairing the Board of Directors of The Manna Food Center; serving as the first African American to clerk for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe; and founding a campaign at TransAfrica Forum – One Standard! – to ensure just immigration policies for Haitian refugees. Ms. Singleton earned a Juris Doctor degree from

Columbia University School of Law, and a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Leadership Certificate and Bachelor of Arts Degree from Tufts University.

AFTERNOON CONCURRENT SESSIONS

The Roots of Diversity: Montgomery County's Fair Housing Movement

Speaker: Ben Miller

In the mid-1960s, thousands of county residents mobilized to fight against housing discrimination, which excluded Black Americans from suburban neighborhoods. This talk explores the ideological and economic motivations that drove the fair housing movement, and how it transformed the county's demographics and self-identity.

Bennett Miller is a PhD student in U.S. History at Northwestern University. He studies race and liberal politics after World War II, with particular interests in housing, immigration, and education. Ben previously worked in fair housing policy and completed a B.A. and M.A. at the University of Chicago.

Towpaths and Highroads: Conservation leadership in Montgomery County, 1945-1969

Speaker: Rebecca Henson

Rebecca Henson will present on the consequential work and events in U.S. conservation history that took place in Montgomery County, highlighting the stories of residents and community organizations that worked to create a more sustainable world. The presentation will focus most extensively on the contributions of writer, biologist, and east-county resident Rachel Carson (1907-1964), whose writing brought attention to both the wonders of the natural world and humankind's short-sighted attempts to control it.

A Maryland Master Naturalist & mom to two nature-loving boys, **Rebecca Henson** founded Springsong Museum in 2021 with the mission of creating a museum that connects community and nature through the wonder and wisdom of Rachel Carson, bringing new life to a previously-vacant historic industrial building and site in Silver Spring. She is a current board member of Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, the watershed organization

stewarding the largest tributary of the Anacostia River, and enjoys serving as a finalist judge for Maryland History Day. Rebecca has degrees in History from Vanderbilt University and Politics, Policy, and Society, focused on comparative environmental policy, from the University of Bath (UK). She believes deeply in leaning in to wherever it is one lives.

The Early Slave Trade in Montgomery County

Speaker: Anthony Cohen

The African slave trade was firmly entrenched in Montgomery County by the time of its founding in 1776. Discover the European and African nations involved, the earliest enslaved arrivals, and learn of their customs and skills, and how they helped to transform the landscape of the region. This presentation will show how the international movement morphed into a domestic trade, from the Chesapeake to the Deep South after the Louisiana Purchase, and its lingering effects from the time of Revolution to Maryland emancipation in 1864.

Anthony Cohen is a historian, author, and explorer of the American past. An early purveyor of experiential history, he launched his career in the spring of 1996, embarking on a two-month journey to explore the Underground Railroad, the secret network that thousands of enslaved Americans traveled to attain their freedom. Cohen is founder and president of The Menare Foundation, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to “Preserving the Legacy of the Underground Railroad,” and operates the Button Farm Living History Center, a 40-acre farm that depicts 1850s plantation life in Maryland. In 2026, Cohen will retrace, by foot, his 1996 route to Canada once more to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Montgomery County, Maryland and our nation's founding.

Maryland's Gift to the Nation: A Capital City

Speakers: Kate Whitmore, Jim Johnston

In 1800, Maryland gifted sixty-seven square miles to the federal government for a capital. Roughly a third of that, now known as northwest Washington, D.C. and Georgetown, came from Montgomery County. It was an experiment in how the first constitutional democracy in history should go about creating a capital and a sometimes fumbling one at that. Despite nagging issues, such as voting representation in Congress, the beautiful city that resulted proved a very generous gift. Today, the District of Columbia generates taxes equal to about one-fifth of Maryland's entire income tax revenue. Kate Whitmore and Jim Johnston share

their story.

Kate Whitmore is a former economist and business owner turned writer, Georgetown native who lives part of the year in Salzburg, Austria.

Jim Johnston is a writer, lecturer, and retired lawyer who lives in Bethesda.

The Montgomery County Detention Center: Modernizing the Carceral State

Speaker: Theresa Lachin

Described as “everything a modern jail should have,” the Detention Center opened in July 1961, but over the next six decades, the facility struggled with modern standards for inmate care, such as rehabilitation services, overcrowding, and public funding, among other issues. Situated historically between the use of the 1930s segregated courthouse jail in Rockville and the 2003 sustainably-designed Montgomery County Correctional Facility in Clarksburg, the once-modern Detention Center now serves a temporary inmate referral center while awaiting its eventual demolition.

Teresa B. Lachin earned a Ph.D. and M.A. from the University of Maryland. She has taught at several universities in the Washington area. A former Research Fellow for the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, she has researched and published her work on National Statuary Hall and women artists of the Capitol arts collection, among other publications.