In 1837, Daniel Alexander Payne came to Gettysburg as the first African-American student to attend the Lutheran Theological Seminary. While he was forced to stop his studies at the seminary because of failing eyesight, Payne would later go on to become a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the president of Wilberforce University.

While in Gettysburg, Payne was granted permission to use a building on the Pennsylvania College campus to hold religious meetings and Sunday school for the local African-American children. As Payne remembered, “So gathering in all the colored children in the neighborhood, I opened the school, having for teachers such persons as I could obtain from the town and the seminary.” Payne’s meeting led to a revival of religious spirit among Gettysburg’s African-American community and the desire for an African Methodist Episcopal church in Gettysburg.

In February 1841, five members of St. Paul’s founded the Slaves’ Refugee Society with a resolution that proclaimed: “We feel it our indispensable duty to assist such of our brethren as shall come among us for the purpose of obtaining freedom, and to aid them in the means of our power to effect our object, which is to give liberty to our brethren groaning under the tyrannical yoke of oppression.”

The original St. Paul’s Church (formerly the Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church) was erected in 1840 and was a wooden frame structure located on the corner of Long Lane and Breckenridge Street (today the site of the New Life Outreach Ministries, also known as the House of Prayer). Many organizations met at the location, which also housed a library. After the battle, two dead Confederate soldiers were buried in the churchyard.

Due to a growing African-American community, in 1850 the trustees of St. Paul’s purchased a lot one block to their left on Long Lane to build the present church on the corner of Washington and Breckenridge Streets. The cornerstone was laid on June 27, 1854. The current structure was built in 1857 and is the third St. Paul’s Church. St. Paul’s Church serves as the center of the African-American community in Gettysburg, as the meeting place for both its members and other local groups and organizations.

In 1828 on the east side of town on York Street. In 1867, after the Civil War, the Sons of Good Will (a local African-American organization) purchased land on the hillside to serve as a cemetery. Since the Soldiers’ National Cemetery (the site of Abraham Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address) was segregated, forty-two local black veterans of the U.S. Army are buried in this cemetery. These local veterans are buried on the hillside in a small plot of land associated with the Soldiers’ National Cemetery.

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The idea for the National Cemetery was conceived out of the destruction wrought by the battle. Thousands of shallow graves littered the countryside around Gettysburg. Samuel Weaver, who had worked on behalf of the contract from the government to exhume the bodies of the Union dead and reinter them in the National Cemetery, subcontracted Basil Biggs to assist in the removal of the bodies. Biggs was an African-American farmer and veteran who was born in Maryland in 1819 and moved to Pennsylvania in 1860 so his children could receive an education. He was reported to be active in the Underground Railroad. He lived as a tenant farmer at the John Crawford farm, about two miles west of the battlefield. He was one of the first African-American custodians of the National Cemetery.

Agricultural Hall
Site of the former Agricultural Hall
Frederick Douglass, an outstanding lecturer, was a slave from Talbot County, Maryland. He was educated in the belief that education was necessary for African Americans to improve their lives. He even advocated desegregation of schools. Douglass spoke to President Abraham Lincoln about the treatment of black soldiers in 1863, and to President Andrew Johnson about black suffrage.

Frederick Douglass spent his life working for human rights. He was an abolitionist, women’s suffragist, speaker, editor, author, reformer and statesman. He is a prominent figure in United States history and African-American history. He believed that all people were equal, regardless of color, sex, or immigration status.

Frederick Douglass spoke here at the Agricultural Hall. In 1896 the Frederick Douglass Townhouses were built as an affordable housing project.

The site of the Franklin Street “Colored” School 1884 – 1932
Corner of West High and Franklin Streets
After the State of Pennsylvania began funding public education in 1835, many African-American societies began to appear in the Gettysburg area. The first “colored school” in Gettysburg was established at 210 North Washington Street, with Elizabeth Keetch serving as the first teacher, from 1834 to 1839. “St. Sibbs, a colored man” was hired to succeed her and the school was moved to St. Paul’s African Methodist Episcopal Church. At the time of the Civil War, forty-six percent of the town’s African-American children were enrolled at the school, whose curriculum emphasized the reading and mathematical skills that would be needed for economic advancement. The Franklin Street “Colored” School opened here in 1884. Lloyd F.A. Watts, a veteran of the U.S.C.T., returned to Gettysburg after the war and became the principal of the school. He was a member of the Pennsylvania Farmers’ Association, whose house is also on this street, was a teacher and janitor at this school from 1894 to 1910.

For more information on Old Gettys Place, contact Elm Street Manager Stephanie McClellan at 717-334-1518 or smcclellan@adamschga.org.
Gettysburg was a town of 2,400 inhabitants at the time of the great battle in 1863. Of this number approximately 200 were African Americans. Living only a few miles from the Mason-Dixon Line, Americans in Gettysburg were preparing to flee the town ahead of Lee's army, and this was undergoing a transformation.

Welcome to Olde Getty Place……Where History Hides

Olde Getty Place

were to write.”

when they were standing so near that we spoke to one of the cellar windows we saw some of our men who'd been taken prisoners, and they were standing there, and on the floor the battle itself proved a relief.”

Confederate army. Catherine and her family, Catherine.

155 South Washington Street

The James and Catherine Foster House

when Robert E. Lee’s Army

When Robert E. Lee's Army

1859, Hopkins's family fled town prior to the battle to avoid capture by the Confederates. The June 30th meeting of the College's Board of Trustees resolved that “Mr. Garber be ordered to ring the College bell in the absence of the janitor”.

He was also a Gettysburg lawyer and business man, and an early trustee of Pennsylvania (now Gettysburg) College for many years.

Myers recorded in her diary, “the Darkies made such a racket up and down by our house that we could not sleep.”

The Gettysburg Female Institute Building

When the battle erupted, wounded soldiers began streaming past the Stewart House, and into the line of fire at the nearby St. Francis Xavier Church. Sallie volunteered as a nurse, and for the next few weeks spent almost all her waking hours nursing the wounded in the church as they lay in the streets and on the floor.

She was also serving as a nurse at the large hospital established at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Of the first day of the battle Sallie later remembered, “Corporal [Alexander] Stewart [of Pennsylvania infamy] was the first wounded man brought into our house, but others followed, and it was used in continuous action under the same control as the two churches [St. Francis and the Presbyterian Church]... We had weaved in and out, and two deaths. The sight of blood never again affected me and I was among wounded and dying men and night.

Sallie later worked at “sisters of charity”, who arrived in town, including Clara Diggs, Elizabeth Butler and Richard Monroe, who moved here after the war.

In 1838 Mary Virginia "Jennie" Wade, the only civilian killed during the Battle of Gettysburg, was struck by a stray bullet and was killed at the age of 20, some 150 years ago.

The Gettysburg Female Institute Building

66-68 West High Street

Before public education was funded in Pennsylvania, most schools were established through private efforts. The Gettysburg Academy, was the first publicly funded school in Adams County.

At the time of the battle, the structure housed the Gettysburg Female Institute, operated by Mrs. Rebecca Eyster. Class was in session when Jubal Early's Confederate division arrived in town on June 26th.

One of Eyster's students, Tillee Pierce, later remembered, "Rushing to the door, and standing on the front porch, we beheld in the direction of the Theological Seminary the dark heads of the Union soldiers marching down the town." She also remembered Rebecca Eyster telling the students, "Children, run home as quickly as you can.”

An artillery shell embedded in the building's 2nd story wall bears silent witness to the fact that for much of the battle the town was in the crosshairs of the Union and Confederate armies. The area in which you are walking, the southern portion of town, was the scene of significant sharpshooter activities; a few blocks from here Jennie Wade was killed, the only civilian to die in the battle.

On July 3rd, the final day of the battle, a massive cannonade echoed across the battlefield. Confederate artillery located on Oak and Seminary Ridges north and west of town fired over the town to Union positions to the south. Several structures in town still show remnants of artillery shrapnel. Like Eyster's school served as a hospital after the battle. She continued to operate a young women's academy here through the 1870's. Around 1892, the property was sold to a Gettysburg attorney who turned the building into a private residence, which it remains today.

The John "Jack" Hopkins House

219 South Washington Street

From 1851 until his death in 1868 at age 62, John "Jack" Hopkins owned this dwelling. His wife Julia lived here until her death in 1891. John Hopkins served as a junior at Pennsylvania (now Gettysburg) College beginning in 1847. As part of his compensation, Hopkins was provided with a home on the college campus, and so he rented out this home. Known as "Jack the Janitor," he was immensely popular with the students and faculty alike, as attested to by the presence of the entire college staff and student body. In 1854, Hopkins is reported to have worked closely to help runaway slaves passing through Gettysburg. His status as a leader in the town’s African-American community is confirmed through a report from the Star and Sentinel newspaper that "Fancy Ball given at the residence of John Hopkins on July 4th, 1860." Like most of Gettysburg's approximately 200 African-American citizens, the Hopkins family fled town prior to the battle to avoid capture by the Confederates. The June 30th meeting of the College's Board of Trustees resolved that "Mr. Garber be ordered to ring the College bell in the absence of the janitor". His home on the college campus was located by the Confederates. Following the battle, Hopkins filed a claim with the state government for damages in amount of $345.35 incurred during the Confederate occupation.

The experience of the Confederates was not at all different. Of this number approximately 200 were African-American citizens, the Hopkins family fled town prior to the battle to avoid capture by the Confederates.

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