

ANACOSTIA HISTORIC DISTRICT

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Frederick Douglass, The sage of Anacostia.
Courtesy National Archives

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Anacostia Historic District

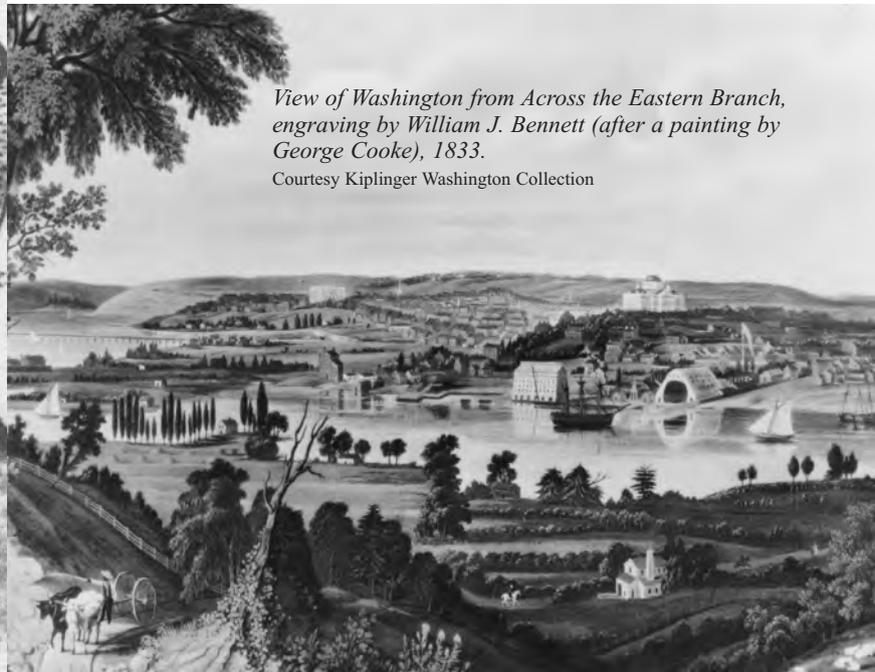
East Of The River

East of the Anacostia River, in sight of the U.S. Capitol, lies an area of unusual natural beauty and rich heritage. A narrow ridge of land 200' – 300' high parallels the river once known as the Eastern Branch of the Potomac. The ridge drops off abruptly to the broad bank of the Anacostia, its steep slope slashed by intersecting ravines. On the side away from the river, the ridge descends precipitously into Oxon Run, a small stream that flows into the Potomac about 3 miles below the mouth of the Anacostia. This isolates the ridge and the river bank from the countryside to the east as effectively as the Anacostia itself separates the community from the monumental center of the capital city. On a clear day the panoramic views from the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Roman Catholic Church and St. Elizabeths Hospital overlooks are breathtaking. They are rivaled only by those from the Washington Monument on the National Mall, yet they are not public views. They are the special treasure of those who live in Anacostia, glimpsed briefly by outsiders who travel along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue or visit the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.

*Territory of Columbia, 1794
by Andrew Ellicott with Benjamin Banneker.
Detail showing topography, drainage,
and existing roads of Anacostia and Alexandria
with plan of Federal City.*
Courtesy Library of Congress

*View of Washington from Across the Eastern Branch,
engraving by William J. Bennett (after a painting by
George Cooke), 1833.*

Courtesy Kiplinger Washington Collection



East Of The River

Native Americans were the first inhabitants of the area living along the river as early as 10,000 years ago. During his voyage of exploration in 1608, Captain John Smith visited the Indian village of Nacochtank on the river bank here. He found that Nacochtank was a large trading center, ideally situated for its purpose along two natural trade routes - east-west across the mountains and north-south along the fall line. Archaeologists tell us that the Necostins, called Anacostans by the English settlers, fished the river and farmed the rich river banks. They lived in small groups near their fields. The chief was housed inside a palisaded enclosure which was also the site of other important tribal activities. The Smithsonian Institution has thousands of artifacts collected from the surface in the late nineteenth century when the area was still agricultural. In 1897, a note scholar issued an alert that "the most important ancient village-site in the whole tide-water province is situated on the Anacostia River within the city and little more than a mile from the Capitol." Today, warnings ignored, the substance of Anacostian culture remains a largely unexplored mystery, the evidence of it destroyed or buried under the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant and the runways of Bolling Air Force Base.

English exploration soon led to settlement. Blue Plains, a 1,000-acre tract patented to George Thompson in 1662, was the first land grant in the Washington area. It included the river frontage that is now the site of the Blue Plains plant. The adjacent tracts of St. Elizabeth and Giesborough were also patented to Thompson in 1663. The land was planted in tobacco raised by tenant farmers, indentured servants, and African slaves. Although death, marriage, and land speculation led to frequent changes of ownership, land was still held largely by a few individuals. The descendants of Colonel John Addison, one of the earliest residents, owned much of Anacostia for 150 years. When the federal city was laid out in 1791 by Andrew Ellicott and Benjamin Banneker, a free African American, speculation redoubled in Anacostia. James Barry of Washington City purchased St. Elizabeth. His name is perpetuated today in the Barry Farm community. An active land speculator, William Marbury of Georgetown, purchased Blue Plains and several Addison properties. Marbury was appointed inspector of the Blue Plains tobacco warehouse in 1809, but his name is enshrined in American history as the plaintiff in *Marbury v. Madison*, the case that established the constitutional principle of judicial review of acts of Congress.

Background Image: Colonel John Addison, who earned his rank in the Maryland Volunteer Militia, was among the first colonist to establish a permanent residence in Anacostia. During the 1670's Addison obtained several land grants, purchased large holdings, and built his estate Colebrook (in present-day Prince Georges County) near the upper portion of the Giesborough tract.

Courtesy of Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts

Establishment Of The Federal City

The land east of the Anacostia River was included within the boundaries of the Federal City as a line of military defense and in order to claim the commercial and recreational potential of the river for the new city. Developers and land speculators in the 1790s anticipated the establishment of a port at the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. This, they believed, would inevitably lead to major expansion of the city to the southeast. As part of this speculation, a sugar factory and wharf were built on Greenleaf Point at the southern tip of the federal city and at the confluence of the rivers.

A canal that was planned through the city to connect Anacostia to a point 1.5 miles upriver to encourage industrial maritime growth, was eventually abandoned as the city faced opposition from the competing ports of Georgetown and Alexandria. Later, runoff from land cleared for agricultural purposes upstream of the city caused the Anacostia to silt up, forming wide marshes at its bank and further hampering construction of an active commercial port. In 1804, a wooden drawbridge was constructed through private enterprise to replace a ferry that crossed the river at Pennsylvania Avenue and connected Anacostia to the city. During the War of 1812, this bridge was burned by the Navy in a futile attempt to obstruct the advance of British troops after the Battle of Bladensburg (1814). The British simply crossed the Anacostia upstream at Benning Road and burned the Navy's ships in their docks before entering the city to burn the White House, the U.S. Capitol, and other public buildings.



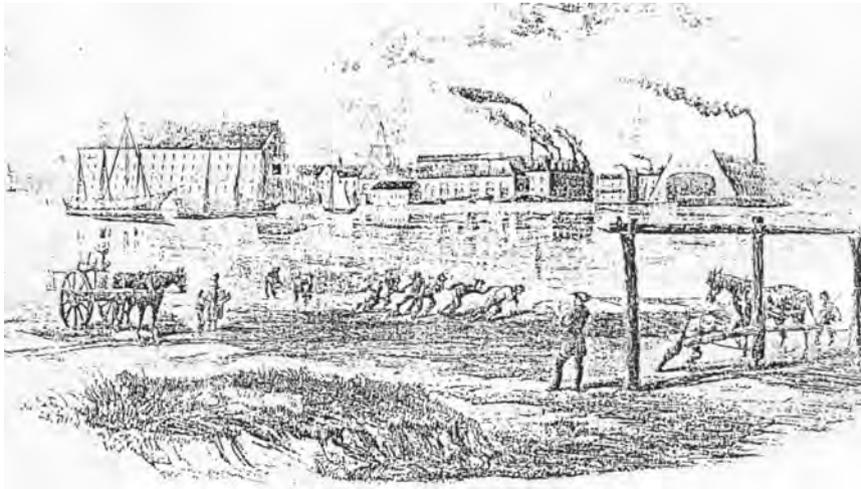
In 1874, after many years of wooden replacement bridges crossing the Anacostia at the Navy Yard, Congress authorized the construction of a wrought iron truss bridge (at left in photo). As the 1874-75 bridge became inadequate for motor and rail traffic, a new steel arch bridge, shown under construction in this 1908 photograph, was built to replace it. The present, twin-span Eleventh Street Bridge replaced these earlier bridges in 1965-70

Courtesy of the Division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering, Smithsonian Institution

The Washington Navy Yard was the new nation's first navy yard and its first home port. It was also one of the city's largest employers. It became a center of early 19th-century naval operations during a critical period of growing nationalism. The illustration on page three is an 1833 view of Washington from the Anacostia highlands. The romantic beauty of the Anacostia farmland and the river itself are seen in the foreground, with the Navy Yard shown to the right on the opposite shore. The early sailing ships of the U.S. naval fleet were built in the distinctive triangular, tentlike structure. The U.S. Capitol, still under construction, is on the hill above and the White House appears to the left. The Navy Yard Bridge at 11th Street is barely visible at the far right.



Dorothea Lynde Dix, a nationally renowned reformer, came to Washington in 1848 in what proved to be a successful effort to lobby Congress to establish a national hospital for the insane. Dix was particularly influential in convincing the reluctant owners of the St. Elizabeth tract in Anacostia to sell their farm on behalf of the suffering of the insane.
 Courtesy of St. Elizabeths Hospital



View of the Washington Navy Yard from eastern shore of the Anacostia River, with shad fisheries in the foreground. From Harper's Weekly, April 26, 1864.
 Courtesy National archives



The Center Building of St. Elizabeths (opened in 1855), shown here in an early photograph, was the first building to be constructed and is the last original structure standing on the hospital grounds today. In accordance with 19th century asylum design, the Center Building was arranged for maximum light and ventilation.
 Courtesy of St. Elizabeths Hospital

St. Elizabeths Hospital

In 1852 Dorothea Dix, advocate for the humane treatment of the mentally ill, persuaded the U.S. Congress to provide an asylum for the insane of the District of Columbia. The site chosen was part of the original St. Elizabeth grant lying along the Anacostia ridge on the Piscataway Road (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue). This remains today one of the most beautiful areas of Washington, with extraordinary views over the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. The hospital was planned as a campus with grounds designed and lavishly planted in the romantic rural landscape manner used by Andrew Jackson Downing on the National Mall and by Frederick Law Olmsted at the U.S. Capitol. This bucolic setting was considered a healthy and beneficial environment for treatment of the mentally ill - far different from the jails and workhouses in which they had previously been confined. It was, in fact, based on the same ideal which led to the development of early Washington suburbs such as Le Droit Park and the planning of the Gallaudet College campus.

The Subdivision Of Land: Uniontown

In the years before the Civil War, increasingly smaller parcels of land were subdivided from the original Anacostia holdings. Some were bought by speculators, others purchased by truck farmers. The earliest of several settlements - the town of Good Hope - developed in the 1820s around a tavern on the southbound road on the heights above the bridge to the Navy Yard. In *The Anacostia Story*, historian Louise Hutchinson documents the ways in which some Anacostia slave families were able to buy their freedom and become independent farmers, artisans, and craftsmen. Many of these African Americans settled in the Good Hope area.



Mrs. Alethia Browning Tanner, shown here, was born a slave, but through hard work and diligence she purchased her freedom in 1810 and later purchased that of 13 of her family members.

Courtesy Howard University

In 1854, Uniontown (Anacostia) - a whites-only residential subdivision north of Good Hope - was laid out immediately across the Anacostia River from the Navy Yard at the intersection of the Piscataway and Upper Marlborough Roads. Local Anacostia resident John Fox and his business partners, John W. Van Hook and John Dobler of the newly formed Union Land Association, laid out the new subdivision on a 240-acre truck farm purchased from Navy Yard blacksmith Enoch Tucker. The developers hoped that the subdivision, which was convenient to the Navy Yard Bridge and within walking distance of the Navy Yard, would appeal to Navy Yard workers. Dubbed Uniontown after the company's name, the suburb followed a seventeen-block grid pattern with approximately 700 lots measuring 24' wide and 130' deep. Each lot was priced at \$60.00 cash or \$3.00 a month for 25 months. Advertising in the Daily Evening Star, the developers proclaimed that the community was "situated in the most beautiful and healthy neighborhood around Washington. The streets will be graded, the gutters paved, and edged with shade trees, without charge to lot holders."



Although the residential subdivision was dubbed Union by its developers in 1854, the community has historically been known as "Anacostia," as indicated on this 1887 map.

Map of the District of Columbia, G.M. Hopkins, (1887).

Courtesy National Archives

A central marketplace one block long and forty feet wide was provided as a focal point of the community. The main street bifurcated to either side of this open space, suggesting the boulevard appearance of more affluent suburbs. The lots in the subdivision sold quickly - half in the first six weeks and the rest shortly thereafter. The easy terms were attractive to speculators, making it possible to assemble groups of lots cheaply.

The earliest dwellings of Uniontown were actually sizeable freestanding residences, including those of developers John Fox and John Van Hook. John Fox's house (demolished), which was built prior to the layout of the town, stood on Jefferson Street. In 1855, John Van Hook built his large rural residence, later the home of Frederick Douglass and named Cedar Hill, immediately adjacent to the newly platted town on a commanding site with views to the river. Similarly, the villa-like Italianate-style house at 1312 U Street, and the more vernacular 1342 U Street are also indicative of the early residents' preference for rural residential dwelling forms.



This frame house at 1312 U Street, SE is the oldest surviving house within the original Uniontown subdivision. Built by the early 1870s, this dwelling displays characteristic features of the Italianate style, including its picturesque cupola and Bracketed roof. A two-story stable still survives at the rear of the lot.

Courtesy DCHPO



This three-bay frame dwelling at 1342 U Street, SE began as a two-bay structure that was later enlarged by the entry bay. At the same time, it appears that the house was made more "fashionable" by Italianate-style detailing, including the full-width front porch, and bracketed door surround.

Courtesy DCHPO

Although the initial lot sales in the new subdivision sold quickly, Uniontown was slow to develop. Many of the town's 700 lots had been purchased by absentee landowners and speculators. As the city grew to the northwest instead of the southeast as initially envisioned, and as employment at the Navy Yard declined as the mission of the facility changed from shipbuilding to ordnance manufacturing, Uniontown remained largely a paper town.

As late as 1871, only 70 or 80 families had settled in Uniontown. In 1872, eighteen years after Uniontown had been established, entrepreneur and local Anacostia area landowner, H. A. Griswold chartered the Anacostia and Potomac River Railroad Company. Griswold recognized that a transportation system was the key to success in residential development. Thus in advance of subdividing his own land adjacent to Anacostia into what would become Griswold's Addition, he obtained the railway charter for a horse-drawn line to run between the Navy Yard Gate and Uniontown. This horse-drawn railway opened in 1875, over the newly erected Navy Yard Bridge (1874), with horse cars operating along the line. The streetcar ultimately became the lifeline to the community (although it came too late for the Union Land Company and company partner John Van Hook, who declared bankruptcy in 1877), as growth in the community picked up momentum in the 1880s.



This two-story frame house at 1518 W Street illustrates the quintessential cottage-style dwelling of Anacostia. Its front gable roof and full-width porch feature Eastlake detailing, including fishscale shingles in the gable and a ridge pole.

Courtesy DCHPO



When it opened in 1875 the Anacostia and Potomac River Railroad Company operated horse-drawn streetcars between the Navy Yard Gate at 7th and M Streets, SE and Anacostia.

Courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Beginning in the 1880s, due in part to the arrival of the streetcar and in part to declining lot prices that made the subdivision a good investment, development in Anacostia began to improve. Smaller, two-story houses with front porches emerged as the standard house form in the community. For the most part, these houses are modest sized, free-standing (or duplex) frame structures with side yards that give the area its cottage-like, rural charm. However, one long row of six attached frame houses located in the 1200 block of U Street and another row in the 2100 block of 13th Street are both more representative of the typical Washington, D.C. row house dwelling form.

According to the 1880 census, Anacostia was home to carpenters, blacksmiths, boilermakers, printers, plumbers, chainmakers, shipmakers, enlisted and commissioned Naval personnel, and laborers all suggesting Navy Yard employment. The 1880 census also reveals that despite the initial restrictive covenants prohibiting the sale, rental or lease of property to “any negro, mulatto, or person of African blood,” approximately 15 percent of the residents of Uniontown were African American.

Griswold’s Addition

In 1879 after the successful introduction of the streetcar into Anacostia, H. A. Griswold subdivided the periphery of his property, Mount View, for residential development, retaining the core of the land for his own house. This tract, bordering Uniontown on the hilly land to the southwest, is now bounded by High Street, Morris Road, Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Pleasant Street, and Valley Place, SE. As in Uniontown, development of Griswold’s Addition proceeded slowly.

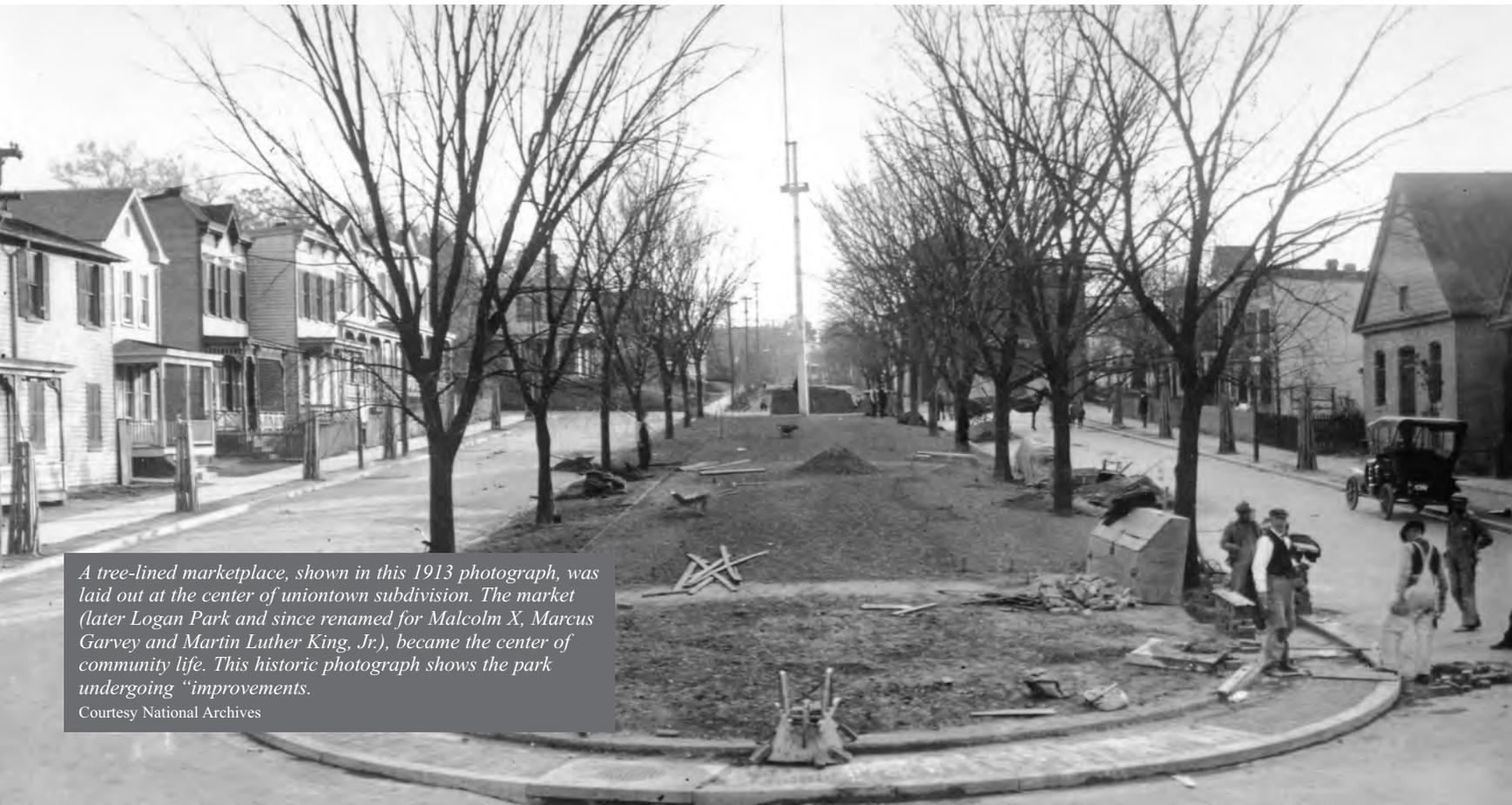
However, in 1898, a new and amended streetcar charter that provided for overhead electric trolley service and that extended the line into the new community of Congress Heights further east, propelled the development of Anacostia, including Griswold’s Addition.



This elegant Queen Ann-style house is located at 1340 Maple View Place, SE in Griswold’s Addition. Courtesy DCHPO

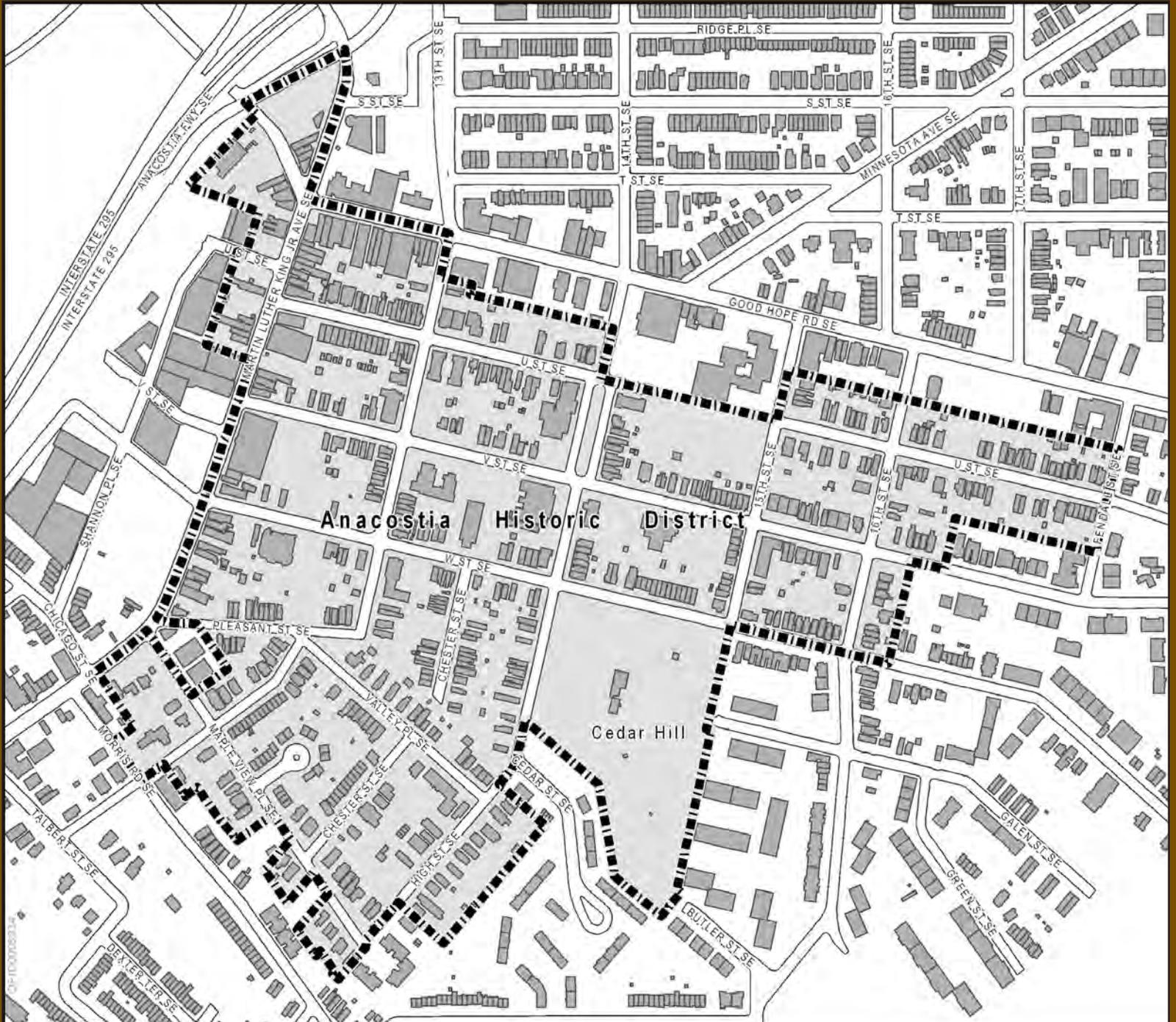
In 1898, overhead trolley service replaced horse-drawn streetcar service in Anacostia. This historic view, along Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, illustrates the emerging urban character of small town Anacostia.

Courtesy Anacostia Neighborhood Museum



A tree-lined marketplace, shown in this 1913 photograph, was laid out at the center of uniontown subdivision. The market (later Logan Park and since renamed for Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King, Jr.), became the center of community life. This historic photograph shows the park undergoing “improvements.”
 Courtesy National Archives

Anacostia Historic District



Commercial and Industrial Growth in Anacostia

Early on, business in Anacostia clustered around the intersection of Monroe Street (later Nichols Avenue, now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue) and Harrison Avenue (now Good Hope Road) at the north end of town. Duvall's Tavern and George Pyle's Grocery, as well as blacksmith and carriage shops catered to both residents and travelers passing through. The arrival of the streetcar and the location of the streetcar stop near this intersection spawned even more commercial activity. By the turn of the century, a thriving commercial district had developed as businesses extended down both streets beyond the intersection. Hardware stores, grocery stores, and drugstores all vying for business emerged to face the main avenues. Campbell's Hardware Store, originally located across the river near the Navy Yard Bridge moved to Anacostia, where it specialized in coal, wood, hardware supplies and implements for farming and homebuilding.

R.F. Martin's Grocery store did double-duty as the Anacostia Post Office, becoming a social center of downtown Anacostia, while the Anacostia Inn catered to out-of-town guests. Schools, churches and other institutions, including the Anacostia Bank, also found place in Anacostia, either along the avenues, or within the 17-block grid.



This circa 1919 photograph captures "Bury's Ice Cream" wagon in front of Bury's Drug Store. Despite the loss of its distinctive corner entry and storefront, the historic store building still stands at 2200 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



This long and intact row of Italianate-style dwellings in the 2100 Block of 13th Street, SE is unusual in Anacostia where most of the dwellings were built either individually or in pairs. Courtesy DCHPO.



The Anacostia Bank, (foreground), shown decorated for a parade in this circa 1919 photo, was built in 1906 and still stands at 2021 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Two churches in Anacostia that stand diagonally across from each other at 13th and V Streets represent the early history of religion in Anacostia. St. Theresa's Catholic Church, built in 1879, historically had a mixed race congregation. However when the white congregation wanted its black parishioners to worship in the basement, a group of black parishioners left and founded Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church around the turn of the 20th century. Emmanuel Episcopal Church, built in 1891 and originally founded as an all-white church, later became an all-black congregation as the racial composition of Anacostia changed from Caucasian to African American.



St. Theresa's Catholic Church, established 1879, began as a mixed-race congregation serving the religious needs of the white and black communities of Anacostia and Hillsdale.

Courtesy DCHPO

Although city services were slow to arrive in Anacostia, a strong, self-sufficient community eventually developed. Resident Charles R. Burr, in a speech to the Columbia Historical Society in 1919, noted:

"We have now all the conveniences the rest of the city affords, but will continue our efforts to make improvements wherever needed through Anacostia. We are only 30 minutes from the center of the city by street cars and are the best equipped of any of the outlying parts of Washington City. All of the principal business places in the heart of the city deliver goods here, while there are here stores of all kinds which supply one with anything he may wish in merchandise and other household necessities. "

Barry's Farm/Hillsdale

When slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862, many newly emancipated slaves sought the protection of the Union Army in a chain of military fortifications and encampments that had been built along the Anacostia River, while others joined earlier free black settlements such as the one at Good Hope. Following the war, Barry's Farm also attracted a significant number of freed slaves to Anacostia.

Barry's Farm, a community planned to enable freedmen to become homeowners, was the result of efforts by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, a government agency created in 1865 to assist the 4 million freedmen as they began their new life. General Oliver Otis Howard was placed in charge of the agency. A white abolitionist of strong religious convictions, Howard believed that education was essential to the success of the freedmen in their new lives as citizens. He made educational programs a priority of the Freedmen's Bureau, founding Howard University in 1866 and serving as its president from 1869 until 1874. Early efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau focused on public education.

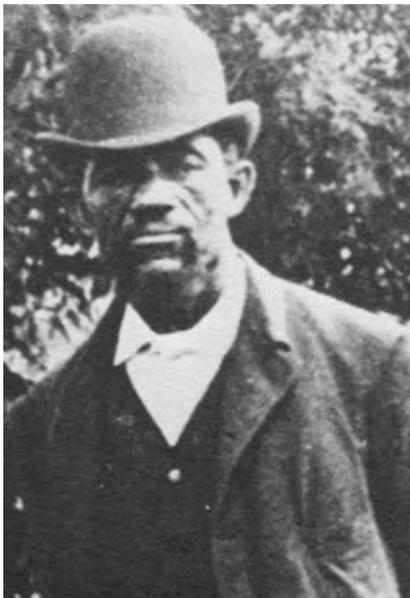
In 1867, with the agency's assistance, part of the Freedmen's educational fund was invested in a 375-acre tract of land purchased from the heirs of James D. Barry. This land was located on both sides of what is now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, between St. Elizabeths Hospital and Uniontown. To the east, it was hilly and densely forested. On the west, it reached over the cultivated flatlands bordering the Anacostia as far as Poplar Point.

Freedmen were hired to do the initial site-development work, clearing land and cutting roads for a daily wage of \$1.25. Part of these wages could be set aside toward purchase of a lot at a cost comparable to or less than the typical rent for housing in alley dwellings in the city. The cleared land was subdivided into one-acre lots which were sold to the individual purchasers together with enough lumber to build a small house. Carpenters were assigned to assist the freedmen with building. The cost was \$125 to \$300 for each family. Hutchinson notes that: "In order to purchase property, entire families worked in the city all day and walked at night to Barry's Farm to develop their land

and construct their homes by lantern and candlelight. As one man described it, “the hills and valleys were dotted with lights. The sound of hoe, pick, rake, shovel, saw and hammer rang through the late hours of the night.”

Within two years, 500 African American families owned homes in Barry’s Farm. The 1870 census shows that many of them were skilled workers whose occupations - blacksmith, carpenter, shoemaker, bricklayer, house painter - had been essential to the plantation economy which existed there before emancipation. By 1880, government clerk, teacher, midwife, dressmaker, grocer, sign painter, carriage maker, harness maker, and wheelwright had been added to the list of occupations represented among residents of Barry’s Farm.

In 1871, the first public school, Hillsdale School opened in Barry’s Farm. Three years later, legislation officially changed the community’s name from Barry’s Farm to Hillsdale.



Under the territorial form of government adopted for the District of Columbia in 1871, Solomon G. Brown, one of the first African American settlers of Barry’s Farm, was elected to the city’s House of Delegates. Brown, a highly regarded clerk at the Smithsonian Institution, was elected by both white and African American residents of Anacostia.

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution



This 1905 view along present-day Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue in Hillsdale captures many of the community’s institutions, including Howard Hall (at the edge of the photo on the left), the small, one-story Dyson’s Barber shop next door, and Bethel Baptist Church across the street.

Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Cedar Hill (the Fredrick Douglass National Historic Site)

In 1877, the eminent antislavery activist Frederick Douglass purchased the 1855 house built by John Van Hook, one of the original developers of Uniontown. Located on a hill overlooking the residential subdivision, Douglass called this house, with its mature trees, expansive lawns, and spectacular panoramic views of the Capitol, Cedar Hill. Douglass, born a slave, was one of the great American statesmen of his time. Although he never attended school, he recognized the importance of education early in his life, and was an indefatigable reader. He escaped to the north from his Maryland birthplace, becoming a brilliant speaker, writer, editor, and publisher, tirelessly battling “for liberty, brotherhood, and citizenship.” Douglass served as advisor to four U.S. presidents and was appointed Minister Resident and General Consul to the Republic of Haiti. He served with the District’s Territorial Council, as U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia under President Rutherford B. Hayes, and as the District’s Recorder of Deeds. He was a businessman as well. Connected with several banks, he was the first president of the Industrial Building and Savings Company. Douglass was widely known as the “Sage of Anacostia.” He was active in community affairs, and, from his aerie east of the river, protected the interests of the freedmen who were his neighbors. Cedar Hill is now a National Historic Site and is open to the public. It contains a large collection of memorabilia of the abolitionist movement and the career of Frederick Douglass.



Originally built in 1855 by Uniontown developer John Van Hook, Cedar Hill was purchased in 1877 by abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass. Douglass lived at Cedar Hill until his death in 1895.

Photographer, Larry Olsen, National Park Service



This 19½-foot high chair-a long-time community landmark-marks the former location of the Curtis Brothers Furniture Company, an important commercial concern in 20th century Anacostia. The original chair was erected in 1959 and constructed of Honduran mahogany weighing 4000 pounds. Having rotted over the years, the original chair was replaced in an April 2006 re-dedication ceremony with a brown painted aluminum replica. Photography by Lois Raimondo, The Washington Post

Anacostia Today

The Anacostia Historic District includes the original Uniontown subdivision, Griswold's Addition, Cedar Hill (the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site), and immediately adjacent areas, and recognizes the unique character of the unpretentious frame and brick dwellings constructed in this idyllic, semi-rural setting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

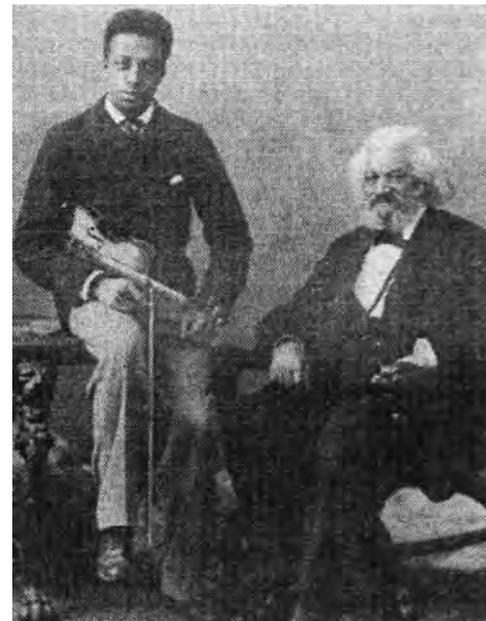
The Depression and World War II brought significant change to Anacostia. A large portion of the vigorous Barry's Farm community was demolished to make way for a low-rise public housing development. More homes were lost and the community was fragmented when the Suitland Parkway was routed through it. Although the construction of the Anacostia Freeway, the dual 11th Street bridges, and the Frederick Douglass Bridge helped to connect Anacostia to the rest of the city, the bridges, their ramps and ensuing traffic detracted from the semi-rural setting and historic character of the area. As urban renewal proceeded in other parts of the city, particularly the redeveloped Southwest neighborhood, large displaced populations were relocated in Anacostia in newly and often poorly constructed apartment buildings set down in what had been open fields. Much of this was public housing. The needs of the new residents far exceeded and overwhelmed the resources of the small community.

Today, after decades of neglect, Anacostia's citizens are working to revitalize their community. In 1978 the Anacostia Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986, as plans were made to route the Metro Green Line through the old Barry's Farm neighborhood, a team of archaeologists conducted a major excavation project as part of the environmental impact survey required by federal

law for the new construction. The historic preservation report included a detailed recording of the archaeological data recovered, the results of intensive historical research into Anacostia's past, and an architectural survey of the buildings that still existed in the proposed historic district. This material led to a better understanding of the life of the early residents of Barry's Farm. Unexpectedly, artifacts dating to 4000 B.C. were unearthed - expanding our knowledge of the Native American culture that had thrived in Anacostia for thousands of years.

The 1978 Anacostia Historic District listing was based largely upon architectural considerations. Barry's Farm/Hillsdale was not included because few structures survived, and those that still stood were not representative of the free black community which had existed there. Sadly, this fragility of infrastructure is often the fate of early African American sites. Today, historic preservation reaches beyond architecture to incorporate a broader cultural approach in an attempt to achieve a comprehensive understanding of American life and events. The history of Anacostia presents a nationally significant microcosm of the full range and vitality of African American experience.

Currently, there are several planned development projects in Anacostia, involving both new construction and the renovation of historic buildings. The Anacostia Gateway Government Center at Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue and Good Hope Road, SE, is a \$75 million project slated for construction in spring 2007 to serve as the District Department of Transportation Headquarters Building with commercial storefronts. The St. Elizabeths Hospital Framework Plan is a long-range plan for the redevelopment of the St. Elizabeths Hospital East Campus in an effort to incorporate new commercial and residential buildings within the historic campus. New federal offices are planned on St. Elizabeths West Campus.



Frederick Douglass with his grandson Joseph Douglass, c 1894.

Courtesy Mrs. Ann Weaver Teabeau

Four Generations of an African American Family in Anacostia

On February 23, 1973, John Henry Dale, Jr., and several members of his family shared their memories of almost a century of life in Anacostia in a videotaped oral history interview with historian Louise Hutchinson at the Anacostia Museum.

John Henry Dale's grandfather, Marcus Dale, was born in Ohio in 1832. He learned the cooper's trade at his uncle's shop in Detroit, and subsequently married the daughter of the pastor of his local A.M.E. church. He received a divinity degree at Oberlin College and, during the Civil War, enlisted in the 1st Michigan Infantry, which became the 102 U.S. Colored Troops Infantry.

In 1867 the Freedmen's Bureau sent Marcus Dale and his family to Cypremorte, Louisiana, to organize and teach in the first school for African Americans established in that community. He also founded an independent Methodist church. His son, John Henry Dale, Sr., was a teacher in Pass Christian, Mississippi, where John Henry Dale, Jr. was born. The lives of Marcus and John Henry Dale, Sr. were threatened with lynching many times in Louisiana and Mississippi by night riders who hoped to intimidate the freedmen.

The Dale family came to Washington in 1886 when John Henry Dale, Sr., a gifted self-taught man, obtained a position as clerk in the newly constructed Pension Bureau building at 5th and G Streets, NW. First they lived near 13th Street and Florida Avenue, NW, then moved to Howard Road in Anacostia. Dale built a house at 2619 Nichols Avenue, now Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, drawing the plans and supervising the construction. The Dales and only one other family lived in this solidly built house for 100 years before it was sold to a church group and demolished. John Henry Dale, Jr. attended Birney School and the M Street High School. He remembers his father as a powerful influence in the community. "Back in those days it meant something if you were a good person. A word from him to a parent about a child who didn't do what they were supposed to do was sufficient to have that condition corrected."

He also remembers that the three African American policemen in the community were highly respected. "Everybody knew each other. I knew practically everybody from the river all the way to where Sears is now." Anacostia's isolation from the rest of the city meant "you had to be more dependent on one another for survival. Everyone in the Negro community had to pool their resources, help one another. If some family needed something to eat, we shared what we had." The community acted as an extended Family to raise all of its children. Orphaned children were nurtured in the homes of friends and neighbors. Dale's brother Marcus, who lived at what is now 2607 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, delivered the mail with a horse and wagon and kept a cow, hogs and chickens.



Four generations of the Dale Family: (left to right) Hattie, John Henry, Sr., Almore Marcus, Dianne, Marie, John Ivan, Lucille, Adrienne, and John Henry, Jr.

Courtesy Dianne Dale

Dale was a life-long member of the Campbell A.M.E. Church. In 1924, when a new church was needed, the minister and congregation dug the foundation and built the new building themselves. Dale's brother-in-law, James Gillespie Patterson, a Philadelphia contractor, came to direct the work. The construction project was a true community effort. "Womenfolk came around and brought pig feet and chocolate and one stuff and another, strung up electric lights all around that lot and went there at night and dug out the foundation." Cooperative work was an integral part of life in this thriving community, and was taken as a responsibility by all civic organizations. Dale's son Almore followed his father's example. Almore Dale operated a grocery store which had been purchased by his father with the greater community benefit in mind. Almore supported a broad range of civic activities and was an early member of the Anacostia Historical Society and a founder of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (now the Anacostia Community Museum).

John Henry Dale, Jr.'s oral history included recollections of a number of Anacostians who had had a powerful influence in the community. Among these was John A. Moss, "the only colored lawyer in and around Anacostia and one of the few, maybe, in the whole city of Washington." Born a slave in 1853, Moss was a protege of Senator Charles Sumner. He graduated from Howard University Law School in 1873 and was immediately admitted to the District Bar. Hutchinson tells us that Moss was appointed justice of the peace by Presidents Hayes, Garfield and Cleveland. "Paid well by downtown clients, 'Lawyer' Moss often either took no fee or accepted payment in-kind when he represented community residents in legal matters."

THE ANACOSTIA HISTORIC DISTRICT
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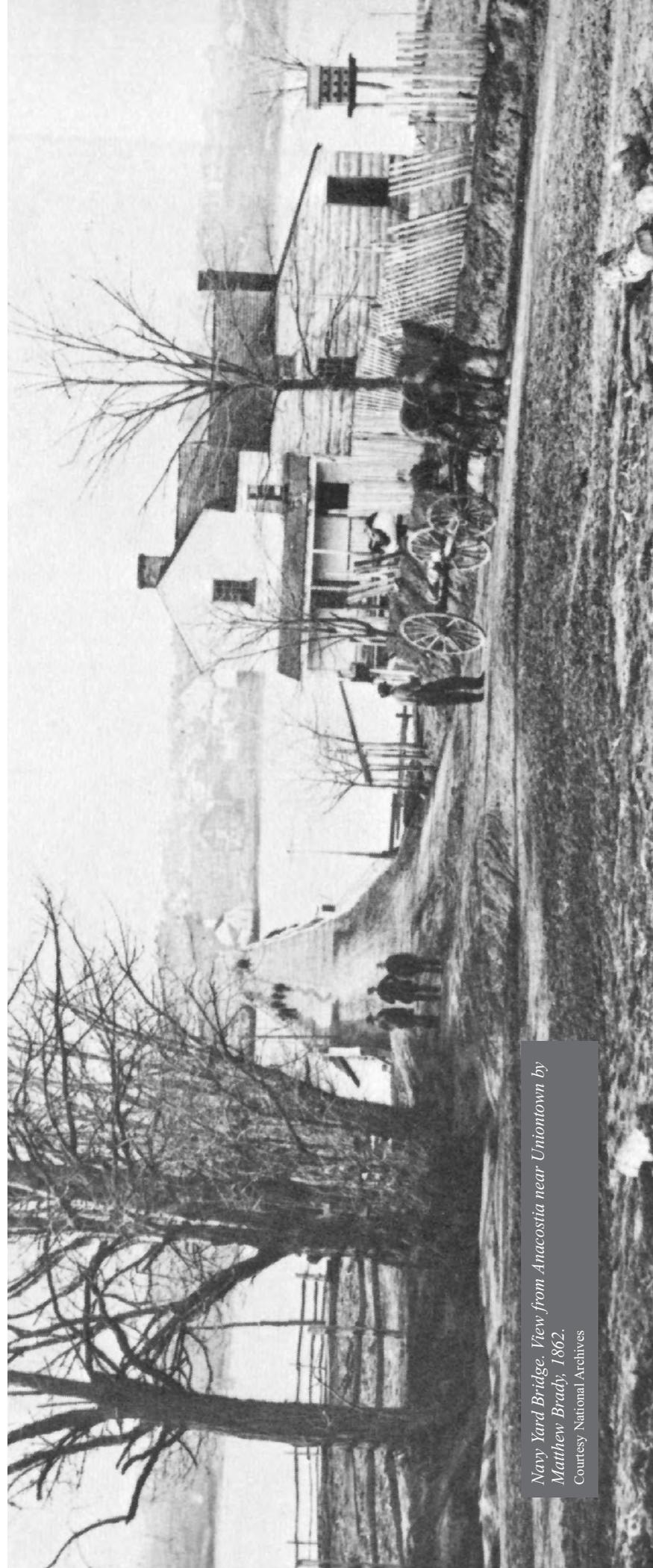
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History and Family Memorabilia Preserving the Past for Posterity

If you or someone in your family has a recollection of life in Anacostia in years past, remembers stories or has photos, letters, and other historic materials, please get in touch with the Anacostia Museum at 202-357-1300. You can contribute to keeping the Anacostia story alive.



*Navy Yard Bridge. View from Anacostia near Uniontown by
Matthew Brady, 1862.
Courtesy, National Archives*