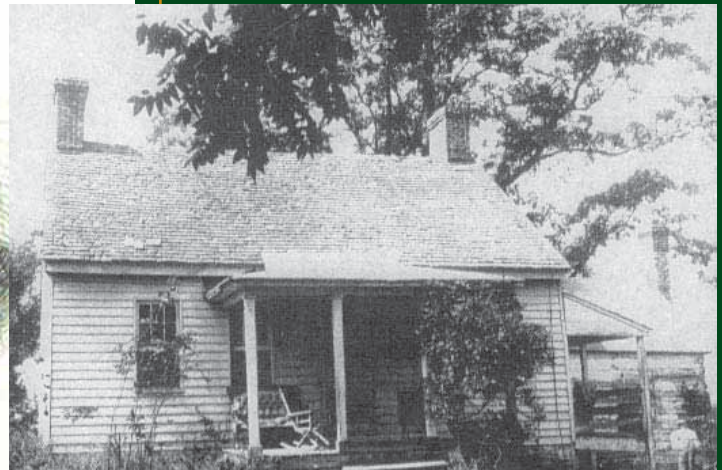
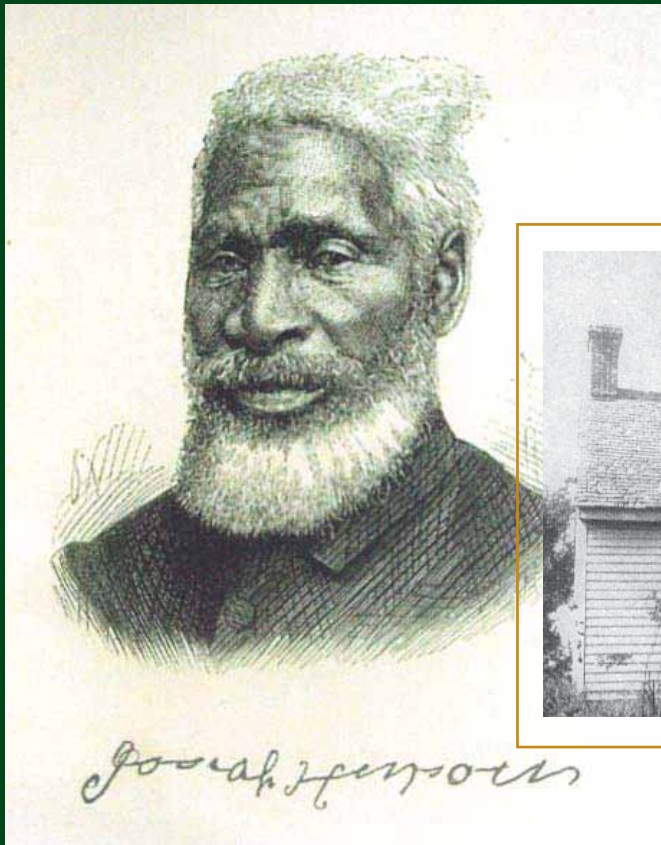


*Historic Structure Report for*

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# The Riley House / Josiah Henson Site

11420 Old Georgetown Road  
Rockville, Maryland



Prepared for  
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission  
Montgomery County Department of Parks

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From Josiah Henson, *An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson ("Uncle Tom")*....,:

***They have forgotten that Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is a novel.***

Henson, 1881, pg. 242

***You remember that when this novel of Mrs. Stowe came out, it shook the foundations of this world. It shook Americans almost out of their shoes, and out of their shirts... It left some of them on the sandbar barefooted and scratching their heads, without knowing where to go, or what to do or say.***

Henson, 1881, pg. 242

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

***The character of Uncle Tom has been objected to as improbable; and yet the writer has received more confirmations of that character, and from a great variety of sources, than of any other in the book. ...*** [after citing other examples, Stowe concludes her chapter on "Uncle Tom" with Josiah Henson:] ***A last instance parallel with that of Uncle Tom is to be found in the published memoirs of the venerable Josiah Henson, now, as we have said, a clergyman in Canada...***

Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1854 edition, pp.37-42

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- Library of Congress, Washington, DC
- Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD
- Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD
- Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, MD
- National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
- Office of the Curator, White House, Washington, DC
- Peerless Rockville, Historic Preservation, Ltd., Rockville, MD
- Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Library, DC Public Libraries, Washington, DC

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## THE RILEY HOUSE AND PLANTATION IN JOSIAH HENSON'S WORDS

*We lodged in log huts, and on the bare ground. Wooden floors were an unknown luxury. In a single room were huddled, like cattle, ten or a dozen persons, men, women, and children. All ideas of refinement and decency were, of course, out of the question. We had neither bedsteads, nor furniture of any description. Our beds were collections of straw and old rags, thrown down in the corners and boxed in with boards; a single blanket the only covering. Our favourite way of sleeping, however, was on a plank, our heads raised on an old jacket and our feet toasting before the smouldering fire. The wind whistled and the rain and snow blew in through the cracks, and the damp earth soaked in the moisture till the floor was miry as a pig-sty. Such were our houses. In these wretched hovels were we penned at night, and fed by day; here were the children born and the sick — neglected.*

Henson, 1881, pg. 23

*I was now, practically, overseer. My pride and ambition had made me master of every kind of farmwork. But, like all ambition, its reward was increase of burdens. The crops of wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, corn, tobacco, all had to be cared for by me. I was often compelled to start at midnight with the waggon for the distant market, to drive through mud and rain till morning, sell the produce, reach home hungry and tired, and nine times out of ten, reap my sole reward in curses for not getting higher prices.*

Henson, 1881, pg. 26

*Gradually the disposal of everything raised on the farm,—the wheat, oats, hay, fruit, butter, and whatever else there might be,—was confided to me...*

Henson, 1881, pg. 40

*After putting my horse in the stable I retired to the kitchen, where my master told me I was to sleep for the night. Oh, how different from my accommodations in the free States, for the last three months, was that crowded room, with its earth-floor, its filth and stench! I looked around me with a sensation of disgust. ... Full of gloomy reflections at my loneliness, and the poverty-stricken aspect of the whole farm, I sat down, and while my companions were snoring in unconsciousness, I kept awake, thinking how I could escape from the accursed spot.*

Henson, 1881, pg. 57

*So, on the 24th of December, 1877, we started [from Canada] for the South, expecting to take our Christmas dinner with our sister... but we were delayed on the road, and did not arrive in Baltimore till the 26th. ... Remaining here till the 3rd of March, we then proceeded to Washington, where I visited many of the old haunts which were so familiar to me in the long-ago days when I used to bring hither my master's produce....*

*And then we went to my old home. Fifty years, lacking only a few months, had passed since I last saw the old place. Fifty long years! since the day when I left the master's house to return to my family in Kentucky, walking with a swinging step and a jubilant heart, because my great object in life was gained (as I thought in my credulity), my freedom papers being safely stowed away in my bag.*

*I did not expect to find the old master who had played me such a cruel trick, still alive. ... But I did almost unconsciously expect to see the old place somewhat as I had left it. Notwithstanding all I had heard of the great alterations which had taken place, since coming South, I still pictured to myself the great fertile plantation, with its throngs of busy labourers sowing the seed, tilling the ground, and reaping the valuable harvests as of yore. I saw the "great house," well furnished and sheltering a happy, luxurious, and idle family; I saw the outdoor kitchen, where the coloured cook and her young maids prepared and carried the dinners into the house; I saw the barns and storehouses bursting with plenty; the great cellars filled with casks of cider, apple-brandy, and fruit; and plainer than all I saw the little village of huts called the niggers' quarters, which used to be so full of life, and alas! so full of sorrow.*

*But the scales have fallen even from the eyes of my imagination, and I realise at last that a change, great and fearful, has indeed come over the land of the modern Pharaohs, who were visited with the Almighty's wrath because they refused to let His people depart out of their bondage.*

*The old place is situated in Montgomery County, Maryland, about twelve miles from Washington, and four from Rockville. Long before we reached the house where my old master used to live, I saw that it was indeed another land from that of my boyhood. The once great plantation is now but a wilderness; the most desolate, demoralised place one can imagine.*

*The fertile fields where once waved acres upon acres of tasselled corn, of blooming rye, and oats and barley; the once ploughed land where grew the endless rows of potatoes, which I have hoed so many weary hours; the rich pastures where great herds of cattles used to graze,--all these splendid lands are overgrown with trees and underbrush. The fences are all gone; the fruitful orchards worn out and dead; and when we drove at last up the grass-grown road to the house, I saw it standing there all alone, without a single barn or stable or shed to bear it company, and it was in such a dilapidated condition that the windows rattled and the very door sprang ajar as we drove up and stopped before it....*

*We went in, and there was the old mistress... Her bed was in the old sitting-room, which was the first place that I had seen that seemed at all familiar. The room and the old corner cupboard, where master used to keep his brandy, just as they were fifty years ago; but the furniture was scanty and dilapidated, and the floor was utterly bare; in fact, there was not a scrap of carpet in the whole house.*

Henson, 1881, pg. 219