

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BYWAY CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

Advisory Committee Meeting #4 – October 23, 2007:

Meeting will focus on linking byway sites with interpretive themes and sub-themes. The result of this meeting will be a list of interpretive sites, a list of appropriate themes and sub-themes, and options for interpretation at various sites. All information will be available for inclusion in future funding and grant applications.

Draft Byway Vision

The following vision statement was developed through initial meetings to reflect the overall purpose and intent of the Religious Freedom Byway and to provide a foundation for interpretive planning and marketing. The vision statement is subject to further refinement by the committee and interpretive team.

Whether traveling by land or water, the Religious Freedom Byway offers insights into the people, issues and unfolding stories of the struggles for religious freedom in America, a tumultuous and rocky road traversing more than 400 years of visible history of all cultures and ways of life in Southern Maryland.

More than just a glimpse of history, the byway links together the many significant historic buildings, landscapes and waters of Southern Maryland to portray an authentic story of the real struggles for religious freedom. More than just places, the byway hosts a public conversation that celebrates and explores the development and continuing differences of religion, race, class, and culture through a series of festivals, events and symposia. *[Alternative sentence to above as suggested at AC Meeting #3: The byway offers a lens to look at the way many different cultures have struggled with religious freedom and tolerance]*

Spectacular scenery along the Potomac River and its tributaries – rural areas interspersed with farms, small towns and extensive wetlands – enables visitors and residents to appreciate the region’s remarkable historic, scenic and natural qualities.

The byway works like an outdoor museum, making it easy to follow, fun to experience, but challenging to the minds of visitors and residents of all ages. Landscaped waysides with informative panels tell a coherent story from one stop to the next. Restaurants, inns, country stores and farmer’s markets along with opportunities to paddle, bicycle and walk help to accommodate a slower paced discovery of our heritage.

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Goal for Interpretation (Set by Advisory Committee)

Link together the various heritage tourism sites to form a coherent travel experience, telling a story that captures the essence and national significance of the struggles for religious freedom and tolerance.

Overview

Consultants for the Corridor Management Plan toured the region in June and in September to see first-hand the sites that are proposed for inclusion on the Religious Freedom Byway. These visits afforded the opportunity to learn more about the area's history and to understand how the story of the founding of Maryland, as well as the struggle for religious freedom, is connected with other stories and sites along the byway.

As noted in the Corridor Management Plan Request for Proposals (Section C.1.4) Project Description: "The CMP must also develop a coherent plan for telling the powerful stories of Southern Maryland's 400 years including Maryland's beginnings and religious toleration, tobacco culture and its shaping of the rural landscape, war and conflict during the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and the maritime traditions along the Potomac River."

An Overarching Interpretive Theme

After reviewing the original project description and touring the region, the consultant team agrees that the overarching story to be told is:

Maryland's founding and the reflection of national events in the state's history.

This approach is recommended for both interpretation and marketing purposes for several reasons including:

- **Knowledge of history** – Although travel research shows a large number of tourists are interested in exploring the culture and heritage of the places they visit, there are many studies (including those by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the National Assessment of Educational Programs) which have found that students in high school and college do not gain a basic understanding of American history. Further, these studies have found that in recent decades fewer colleges and universities require classes in American history to graduate. (Currently, 78% of colleges and universities have no history class requirements.)
- **Heritage destinations are primary places to learn about history** – With an interest in history but no in-depth knowledge of America's historical events, heritage destinations are becoming one of the primary places that travelers learn about history. This means that interpretation of these destinations must place their stories in **historical context** with larger national events and must be sure that the stories they tell are **authentic and accurate**.
- **Basis for telling a wider range of stories** – By embracing the story of Maryland's founding, opportunities are created to tell a vast array of stories about Southern Maryland. This interpretive approach can reflect the stories of many people who lived in this region over 400 years in addition to political and military leaders. As stated by author and historian David McCullough: *For a long time, the*

spotlight was on only a relatively few people – white, male descendants of Western Europeans. Now the lights on the stage are coming up, revealing for the first time all of the others who have been on the stage all the time.

- **Broader marketing message** – Marketing the Religious Freedom Byway may limit the message to tourists who may perceive its appeal as being primarily for those who are interested in religion or religious history. Considering all of the stories that the region can tell – settlement, the economy, religious freedom and even the Revolutionary War, Civil War and War of 1812, it becomes clear that every story of Southern Maryland’s history contributed to the larger stories of American history. Using this approach in marketing will enable tourists to more easily feel a connection to these stories and will serve as a call to action to travel to Southern Maryland to explore sites related to these stories. (*Note: Marketing will be discussed in more detail at the November 27 Advisory Committee meeting.*)

Interpretation Challenges

Although numerous sites were identified that can tell one or more of the stories of Southern Maryland, some challenges were also apparent. Challenges which will be addressed through the Corridor Management Plan process include:

- **Distance** – Driving the beautiful country roads is one of the appeals of traveling in Southern Maryland. However, long driving distances need to be considered as they relate to interpretation.
- **Signage** – Wayfinding signage is sparse and often unclear. Signage is addressed in greater detail in another section of the Corridor Management Plan.
- **Hours/Days/Months of Operation** – Many sites have limited hours, days and months of operation. These are noted in the following section of identified interpretive sites and will have an impact on who can visit and when.
- **Locked Sites** – Some of the churches along the byway route were open to the public. However, other churches identified along the existing route were locked and inaccessible to visitors. Destinations that don’t offer a real visitor experience are not appealing and site constraints associated with visitor appeal will need to be considered as part of the interpretive planning process.

Interpretive Sites

The following sites have been identified as being key to telling the story of the byway. After consensus regarding the proposed list is achieved with input from the Advisory Committee, interpretive tools will be proposed that will make the site attractive to visitors and help them to understand the overall story of the byway and the individual site.

ANCHOR SITES

Four sites have been identified as primary or anchor attractions along the byway route. These are sites that currently offer a specific visitor experience which includes interpretation through exhibits, guided or self-guided tours, living history presentations, or special events and programs. These sites are open to the public and have specified days/hours/months of operation.

1. **Thomas Stone National Historic Site**, 6655 Rose Hill Road, Port Tobacco
<http://www.nps.gov/thst/index.htm>

Site Open: Year-round
Hours: Memorial Day – Labor Day: Monday-Sunday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.;
Labor Day – Memorial Day: Wednesday-Sunday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
(closed Monday and Tuesday)

Site characteristics :

- **The story** – Home of one of four Maryland signers of the Declaration of Independence; member of the Continental Congress; tobacco plantation
 - **The site** – Introductory film and exhibits, plantation house, 19th century farm buildings.
 - **The current visitor experience** – Story is told through film, exhibits and guided tours.
 - **Visitor services** – Visitor center with restrooms and gift shop.
2. **St. Clement's Island Museum**, 38370 Point Breeze Road, Colton's Point
www.co.saint-marys.md.us/recreate/museums/stclementsland.asp

Site open: March 25 – Sept; weekdays 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 12 – 5 p.m.; October 1- March 24 – Wednesday- Sunday, noon – 4 p.m.
Water taxis: Memorial Day weekend – end of Oct; Saturday – Sunday, noon – 4 p.m.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Founding of Maryland, early settlement, river heritage, importance of religious freedom and toleration
- **The site** – Exhibits which tell Maryland's story and connect it to larger national themes of the country's settlement.
- **The current visitor experience** – Self-guided tour through exhibits; water taxi rides to St. Clements Island from Memorial Day weekend to the end of October (weather permitting) (**Need to identify what is presented during the trip to the island, does the island have a specific attraction, or is it just a boat ride?**)
- **Visitor services** – Restrooms, picnic areas

3. **Historic St. Mary's City**, Route 5, St. Mary's City
www.stmaryscity.org

Site Open: March – November (variable seasonal hours)

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – First capital of Maryland; fourth permanent settlement in North America; tobacco plantation, religious heritage – site where Maryland colonists assembled to establish government and freedom to worship.
- **The site** – Reconstructed buildings; tobacco plantation; archaeological sites; reconstructing chapel, Dove ship, museum with interpretive exhibits and film.
- **The current visitor experience** – Living history at tobacco plantation and other sites, hands on activities, special events, Visitor Center and Exhibit Hall.
- **Visitor services** – Gift shop, snacks at Visitor Center, restrooms at Visitor Center, meals available at college student center.

4. **Sotterley Plantation**, Route 245 (Sotterley Road), Hollywood
www.sotterley.com

Site open: Grounds open year-round, Tuesday – Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.;
Manor House tours – May – October.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Colonial port of entry, tobacco plantation, slavery
- **The site** – Plantation house, 18th century warehouse, smokehouse, 19th century slave quarter, plantation school.
- **The current visitor experience** – Unknown because site was not visited
- **Visitor services** – Museum store

POTENTIAL SECONDARY SITES

There are other important and worthwhile sites along the byway that fill in the route between anchor sites and relate to one or more of the identified themes. Most do not offer regularly scheduled tours and may have irregular hours. While some have signage telling the history of the site, others currently have no interpretation and offer no information sharing.

Each of the potential secondary sites has the potential to be enhanced through the use of interpretive tools (such as interpretive signage, small exhibits, or audio) to help tell the story of the byway.

1. **Mount Carmel Monastery**, Mt. Carmel Drive, La Plata
<http://users.erols.com/carmel-of-port-tobacco/index.html>

Site Open: May-October 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.;
Services Saturday and Sunday: 8:00 a.m.; Services weekdays: 7:15 a.m.
Gift shop: open 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. daily

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – First religious community for women in American (1790)
- **The site** – Two of the original convent buildings are restored and open for tours.
- **The current visitor experience** – Visitors can attend services as well as tour the property. There is a historical marker sign on the property. Restored building could have additional interpretation.
- **Visitor services** – One building houses a gift shop and restrooms.

2. **Port Tobacco Historic District**, Route 6, West
www.potomacheritage.org/pathfind/tobac.asp

Site open: Courthouse: April – October; 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.; Sat, Sun and Mon
One Room School: April – October; 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.; Sat and Sun
Also open on Monday, June – August

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Native American settlement; major seaport after English colonization; original county seat; Civil War history
- **The site** – Reconstructed Courthouse offers museum exhibits; surrounding Village buildings viewed from exterior; interpretive wayside signs tell Civil War story
- **The current visitor experience** – Open limited hours. There is limited outdoor interpretation on the site through wayside exhibits and plaques. (**The site was closed when we were there – what is in the museum?**)
- **Visitor services** - **Does the courthouse have public restrooms and a gift shop?**

3. **Smallwood's Retreat House**, Smallwood State Park, Marbury
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/smallwood.html

Site Open: April – mid-October, Sunday, 1 – 5 p.m.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Home of General William Smallwood, a major general in the American Revolution; governor of Maryland.
- **The site** – Smallwood's house, reconstructed tobacco barn with a tobacco exhibit; state park offers camping and recreational facilities.
- **The current visitor experience** – Very limited hours of operation, no interpretation provided when the site is not open. (unknown what extent of interpretation is done in the house or in the barn).
- **Visitor services** – Public restrooms on nearby park lands, picnic facilities nearby, playground nearby.

4. Friendship Park

Site open: Daylight hours

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Native Americans; ecology
- **The site** – Park with related open space and visitor amenities
- **The current visitor experience** –
- **Visitor services** –

5. **Christ Church, Ironsides (Old Durham Church)**, Ironsides Road, Nanjemoy

Site open: Open daily year-round;
Services at 11 a.m. on Sunday (10 a.m. July and August)

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – One of the original 30 churches chartered in the Province of Maryland by the Colonial Assembly in 1692.
- **The site** – Church building dates to 1732. Cemetery beside the church. Historical plaques posted on church building (behind the bushes.)
- **The current visitor experience** – Sanctuary is open.
- **Visitor services** – None.

6. **St. Ignatius Catholic Church and Cemetery**, Chapel Point Road, Port Tobacco

Site open: Open daily year-round;
Mass at 8 a.m., Monday – Friday;
Services at 5 p.m. Saturday; 7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.
Sunday.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Nation’s oldest active parish; founded in 1641; Jesuit residence since 1741.
- **The site** – Church, manor house and servant house; large cemetery; sites is on a 120-foot bluff overlooking the mouth of the Port Tobacco River where it joins the Potomac.
- **The current visitor experience** – Sanctuary is open. An interpretive sign is placed in the front of the church.
- **Visitor services** – None.

7. **Christ Episcopal Church**, Zach Flower Road, Chaptico

Site open: Sanctuary not open.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Used continuously since 1736; church built in 1763; involved in War of 1812; members of Francis Scott Key family buried in Key family vault.
- **The site** – Church and cemetery.
- **The current visitor experience** – Church viewable from exterior only. Cemetery surrounds church building.
- **Visitor services** – None.

8. **Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church**, Newtowne Neck Road, Leonardtown

Site open: Sanctuary is open

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Oldest Roman Catholic Church in Maryland, dating to 1640; church built in 1766, early story reflects religious intolerance against Catholics; was a self-contained Jesuit community
- **The site** – Church has unusual architectural features; empty manor house stands behind church (in need of work), surrounded by open land.
- **The current visitor experience** – Sanctuary is open; historic marker is at the entrance.
- **Visitor services** – None

9. Leonardtown

Site open: Tudor Hall/Historical Society, need hours of operation
Courthouse, need hours of operation
Old Jail Museum/Visitors Center, need hours of operation

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Civil War connections, tidewater plantation
- **The site** – Historic town with specific visitor sites as well as a general walking tour of significant historic buildings located throughout town
- **The current visitor experience** – Self-guided tour through town includes 21 properties, film at historical society as well as a guided tour of Tudor Hall, outdoor wayside exhibit at Tudor Hall (historical society), interpretation at Museum
- **Visitor services** – Unknown, restrooms available in surrounding businesses within Town

10. St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church, Poplar Hill Lane, Valley Lee

Site open:

Site characteristics:

- **The story** –
- **The site** –
- **The current visitor experience** –
- **Visitor services** –

11. Piney Point Lighthouse Museum and Park, Lighthouse Road, Piney Point

Site open: Museum open, April – October, Saturday and Sunday, noon – 4 p.m.;
Grounds open year-round.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – Lighthouse was a beacon for boats and ships traveling the Potomac.
- **The site** – Lighthouse, museum, cruises on the St. Mary's River to learn about the area's history.
- **The current visitor experience** – Museum open limited hours, boardwalk to lighthouse and associated buildings lined with small exhibits and interpretive panels.

- **Visitor Services** – Unknown extent of services offered on site

12. Cecil's Mill Historic District, Indian Bridge Road, Great Mills

Site open: March – October, Thursday-Sunday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; daily,
November – Christmas Eve, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – One of Maryland's first industrial districts. Originally a textile factory (1810) to process cotton.
- **The site** – The mill and the general store are used as shops for local arts and crafts and other souvenirs and collectibles for sale.
- **The current visitor experience** – Primarily shopping; little interpretation.
- **Visitor services** – None

13. Trinity Episcopal Church, Trinity Church Road, St. Mary's City

Site open: Sanctuary is typically open during daytime hours
Grounds and cemetery is always accessible

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – on land associated with founding of Maryland, associated with first state capital, religious toleration,
- **The site** – Church building, cemetery, and path down to waterfront and Church Point
- **The current visitor experience** – Little interpretation – original State House location is identified within cemetery
- **Visitor services** – None, but visitor services available within nearby college buildings and at Historic St. Mary's City

14. St. Mary's College of Maryland, Historic St. Mary's City

Site open: Grounds open all the time
Building times vary by building, open during school hours

Site characteristics:

- **The story** – early female seminary, on land associated with founding of Maryland
- **The site** – Various buildings in historic quadrant of campus, adjacent to Historic St. Mary's City, that date to 1906
- **The current visitor experience** – No interpretation
- **Visitor services** – Restrooms, meals in college cafeteria, small bookstore in student center for snacks

15. Point Lookout State Park

Site open:

Site characteristics:

- **The story –**
- **The site –**
- **The current visitor experience –**
- **Visitor services –**

Additional observations:

In addition to identifying the sites along the route, plans for the byway will also address additional issues. These issues could be introduced in the October meeting and further explored in the November meeting.

1. **Byway name –**

The Religious Freedom Scenic Byway is not “exciting” from a marketing perspective. Given the number of themes that have been identified along the route it is also somewhat limiting and misrepresents what visitors can experience. A more inclusive name – such as “Pioneers, Parishioners, and Patriots” or something that better conveys the storyline should be explored and considered.

A subheading such as “Traveling the Trail to Religious Freedom” may be more appropriate

Another option would be to develop a byway name using the word “belief,” as all of the identified themes relate in some way to belief systems – whether it be religion, slavery, the opportunity to prosper in the new world or the belief in a government system that guarantees freedom.

2. **Visitor Services –**

The need for visitor services is a critical issue. This includes everything from wayfinding signage to hotel rooms to restrooms and welcome/visitor centers which seem to be open limited hours (Leonardtown) or difficult to access (like the one that you have to pay to get on a toll road to access).

Any tour maps, guides or other materials that are developed should clearly identify towns where restaurants, gas stations, hotels and other visitor services are available (i.e. La Plata, Leonardtown) as opposed to “towns” like Port Tobacco that are historic sites with none of these services.