



## **Reclaiming Pre Civil War Black History in Howard County: one important weekend to start**

November 17, 2023

RECLAIMING HISTORY. It's a thing, and in many cases it's not easy to do. The accurate history associated with a building people named the "Thomas Isaac's Log Cabin" wasn't as important as saving it for preservation and relocated for installation and interpretation as a "way station" on the state's National Road tourism system. A way station is a place where people can stop to rest as they travel between two places. For many years, a small cot in a corner with almost no furnishings inside was the interpretation that greeted decades of Ellicott City visitors and residents.

There's a famous quote embraced by many that "history is written by the victors" but that's primarily due to how power typically works. Those who have taken/assumed or were given the power are the ones who decide what they think is valuable in history and is significant to them, and it's what gets showcased/uplifted. Sometimes, the decision of what history to uplift is a monetary one created around decisions about what will bring in money which is reality. Another famous quote is an African proverb: Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter. Nothing can be done about the decision that was made in the past to interpret the building's past as a temporary safe space for those passing through town (cabin/way station) instead of the home of Levi Gillis (Mulatto, never enslaved) that he most likely built for his wife Eliza Jane, and their five children about a decade before the Civil War that he sold to Thomas Isaac. But we CAN celebrate that the history has been reclaimed by the work of citizens who wanted to know the accurate history and (when they discovered it after working for 9 months) wanted their county's residents, students and visitors to also know.

After several months of working with county Rec and Parks with content shared with them from the efforts of those citizens, a new narrative inside the log home (respecting its permanence) has been created and is available to be seen this weekend only. We're happy and grateful for what we can get, particularly since the building was originally scheduled to be closed for the season (until April) today. Help us celebrate by coming to meet those citizens who dedicated their time to do this at the first book signing event of the local nonprofit's held at an independent bookstore down the street from the log

home. Hear some about how we did it, and what it meant for us to do it. Then go to over to what was first Levi and Eliza Jane's home to imagine what life was like for them living in the house during 1850s Ellicott's Mills with their children. We hope many people will find this history as significant for our county and state history narrative as we do. We now join the rest of the state that always celebrates this history when discovered in their jurisdictions.

We start at 2pm Saturday upstairs at Backwater Books on Main Street in Ellicott City. Decent temps are anticipated, and an outside side patio to spill over into if needed. The log home is open this weekend only for 2023, 1-4pm on both days. An introduction of what is a larger plan of Howard County Lynching Truth & Reconciliation, Inc.'s (HCLTR) for history interpretation and a more balanced narrative for students, residents and visitors. Our nonprofit appreciates the new Director of Rec and Parks (and the outgoing one) who were instrumental in getting this done in the clutch. Thanks in advance to the docents staffing the weekend hours. On behalf of Levi and Eliza Jane Gillis and all of the Black and Mulatto people who knew them when they came to the area and lived in Ellicott's Mills, I thank them also. A descendant, a county resident, was personally invited by me to attend.

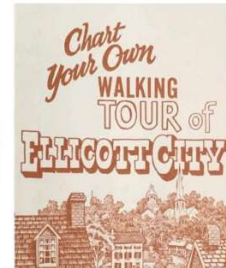
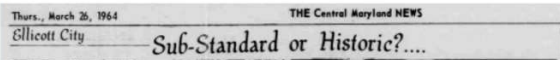
For some, this is just more county history added to the mix. For us and others I know, it's so much more.

Marlena Jareaux  
Executive Director  
HCLTR

For those of you who were donors and early adopters of our fundraising efforts to get the book into the libraries and county high schools, know that we have your personal copies of the books also! A separate effort to get your copy to you is also happening. Emails were sent to the email addresses used for your orders to make arrangements for your pickup. Those ordering hardbacks that will be signed by the authors, will be handled after they are signed this weekend. Thanks for your support and your patience. Contact me with any questions: [marlena@hocoltr.org](mailto:marlena@hocoltr.org)

# ONCE UPON A TIME... COME HEAR A NEW PRE-CIVIL WAR BLACK HISTORY STORY ABOUT AN OLD BUILDING IN E.C. SAT. NOV 18 @ 2PM

ONCE BELOVED FOR YEARS AND FEATURED ON TOURS



THEN MADE INTO HISTORY FOR THE "NATIONAL ROAD" AND  
FURNISHED "AS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE SETTLER'S TIME"

THAT'S NOT ACCURATE HISTORY THOUGH...

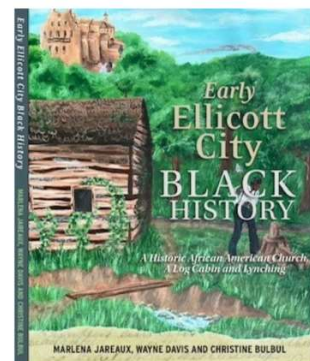
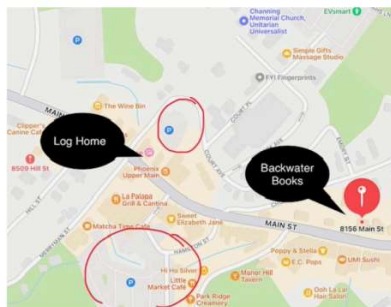
Period-appointed cabin and  
costumed docents reveal various  
aspects of Ellicott's Mills, an 18th-  
century Quaker mill town, and the  
birth of the National Road.

Beyond the Patapsco River, Ellicott City has antiques shops and unique restaurants in historic  
buildings. This old mill town features America's oldest surviving railroad station, the  
B & O RAILROAD STATION MUSEUM, as well as THOMAS ISAAC'S LOG CABIN, which served as a  
National Road way station.

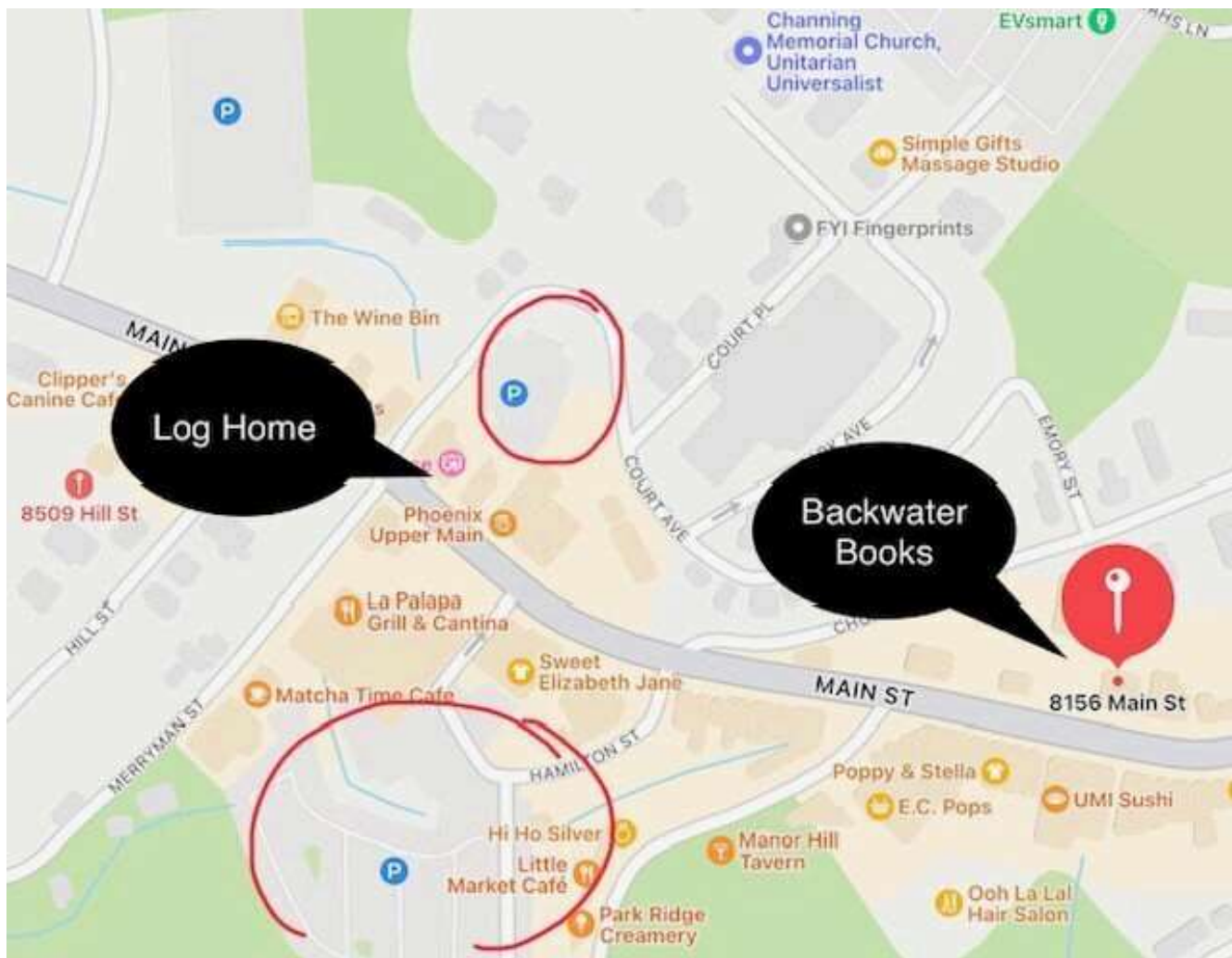
COME HEAR ABOUT LEVI'S FAMILY'S HOME, HOW WE MADE THE HISTORY ACCURATE  
AND GET A NEW TOUR



8156 MAIN ST ELlicott CITY 21043  
SOME STREET PARKING AVAILABLE







We were also invited by the Maryland State Archives to be their Lunch and Learn presenter for the month of February 2024 (Black History Month) in association with Enoch Pratt Library which we of course accepted! That led to another presentation invitation in the county that will be announced soon. For information about the state archives presentation click [here](#) where you can also register:

[Maryland State Archives, Events](#)

## Help Us Get This Local Black History Into County Student Hands...

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P.O. Box 174  
Simpsonville  
Maryland  
21150  
United States of America

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