SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact Gage Harter.
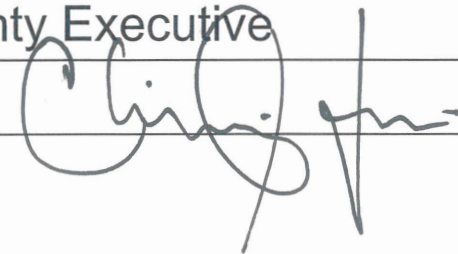
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County

Program Title: Historic Thoroughfare

Program Category: Parks & Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Rob Orrison

Title: Division Manager

Department: Office of Historic Preservation

Telephone: 571-641-0223   Website: pwcgov.org/history

Email: rorrison@pwcgov.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter

Title: County Executive

Signature:

Executive Summary

The Prince William County Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) created the online exhibit *Historic Thoroughfare* about a historic African American community founded in the post Civil War era, to both educate the public as well as to increase public access to and awareness of this site.[1] Thoroughfare is a small community in western Prince William County which has recently been the site of contested area amid the pressures of development. To address public concerns, in 2021 the Prince William Board of County Supervisors created a new historic park and dedicated funding to the research and interpretation of this community. OHP staff published *Historic Thoroughfare* in May 2023 as a culmination of a multidisciplined project that included archaeology and archival research as well as the collection of oral histories from community members.

By working closely with the Prince William County Planning Office, another local county agency, as well as County GIS staff, OHP staff created an ArcGIS StoryMap for this online exhibit. This StoryMap includes historic overlay maps, archival research, and a digital tour of Thoroughfare that incorporates audio clips from many of the oral histories. OHP staff also worked closely with the Thoroughfare community to edit and revise the exhibit before publishing the StoryMap.

Historic Thoroughfare is utilized as a way to increase public awareness about the rich history of this small Prince William County community. While in the future Thoroughfare Historic Park will be a physical destination for visitors, at present the creation of this park is months away. This exhibit grants online access to sites that are not publicly accessible, allowing visitors to experience the community before on-site interpretation is available.

---

[1] *Historic Thoroughfare* can be accessed here:
https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d583585695b54a4d8b8941c84a325691

Introduction & Challenges

Thoroughfare is a small, rural community in western Prince William County near Haymarket, Virginia. It was established after the Civil War primarily by free-born and formerly enslaved African Americans and included those of Native American descent from surrounding counties. The earliest property transfer to an African American landowner in the area can be traced to 1873, when Caroline Dulaney conveyed 20 acres of land to Thomas Primas, a previously enslaved laborer at nearby Cloverland Plantation.

The history of Thoroughfare is incredibly rich. However, if there has been one constant in the recent history of the community, it is the impact of nearby development. In 2020, preservation concerns over local cemeteries stirred community protests and drew the attention of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors. In 2021, Prince William County dedicated funding to conducting a historic recordation project of Throughfare through oral histories, archaeology, and archival and architectural research. The following year, Prince William County purchased several tracts of land in Thoroughfare, including two historic African American cemeteries, to preserve the land and educate the public as a dedicated historic park managed by the Prince William County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

While the master planning for the new public historic site is ongoing, it is just one part of the Thoroughfare project. However, the Board directive to research Thoroughfare as well as to engage and educate the public about this historic community is ongoing, which led the Office of Historic Preservation to consider new options for interpreting a site that is currently inaccessible to the public.

Program

The Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), part of the Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR), manages thirteen historic properties throughout Prince William County. The 2022 acquisition of property makes Thoroughfare the newest historic site on this list, and the location of the future Thoroughfare Historic Park. However, it will be months before the park is planned and open to the public.
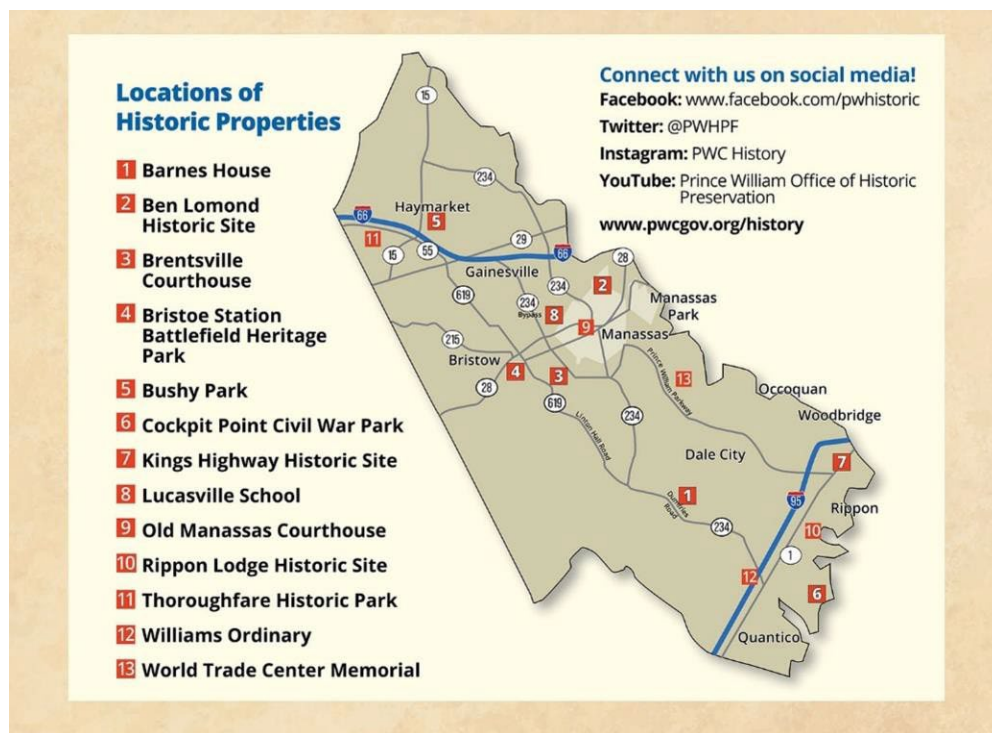

Figure 1: Prince William County Historic Properties

OHP staff decided that an online exhibit served as the best way to consolidate research and increase public knowledge about Thoroughfare. Since there is no area that is currently publicly accessible, it was decided to use an ArcGIS StoryMap as a way of digitally exploring the landscape while simultaneously interpreting the history of the community. This platform uses the key

component of "storytelling with maps," making it an ideal solution for accessing a site virtually. Moreover, Prince William County's existing ArcGIS accounts meant that this proposed project incurred no additional fees outside of the staff time dedicated to creating the exhibit *Historic Thoroughfare.*[2]

OHP worked closely with the Planning Office, including the County Archaeologist, as well as Prince William County's GIS team through the Department of Information Technology's Geospatial Technology Services. Through these collaborations, OHP staff were able to discover free ArcGIS training and tutorials to learn how to create an engaging and useful online exhibit. In addition, staff learned how to incorporate existing layers into accurate historic maps for *Historic Thoroughfare*. GIS staff also worked with OHP to ensure that the exhibit's maps and images adhered to County guidelines for inclusion of online descriptions, tags, and credit information. The StoryMap was primarily the work of one OHP staff member, one staff member from the Planning Office, and two GIS analysts from the Department of Information Technology.
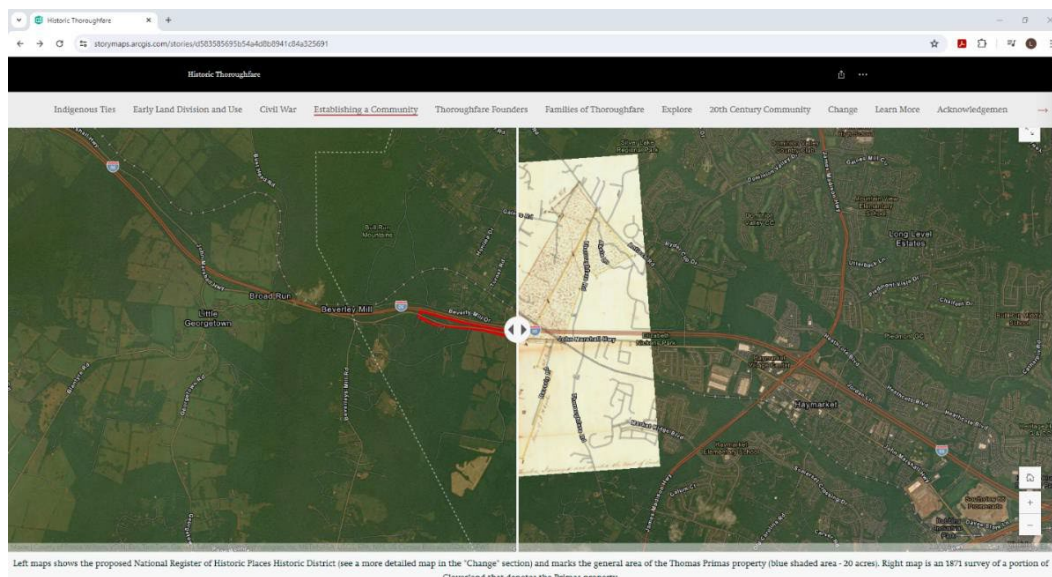

Figure 2: Example of a historic overlay map in exhibit.

---

[2] *Historic Thoroughfare: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d583585695b54a4d8b8941c84a325691*

Historic Thoroughfare also includes a tour of the community, where visitors to the site can click through and explore tour stops. For the most part, the stops on this tour are not accessible to the public; when this is the case, that inaccessibility is noted in the description. Many of the tour stops also include audio from oral histories collected during the research project, and each sound clip described a memory or description of these physical sites, including Oakrum Baptist Church, family cemeteries, and even a nearby pond.
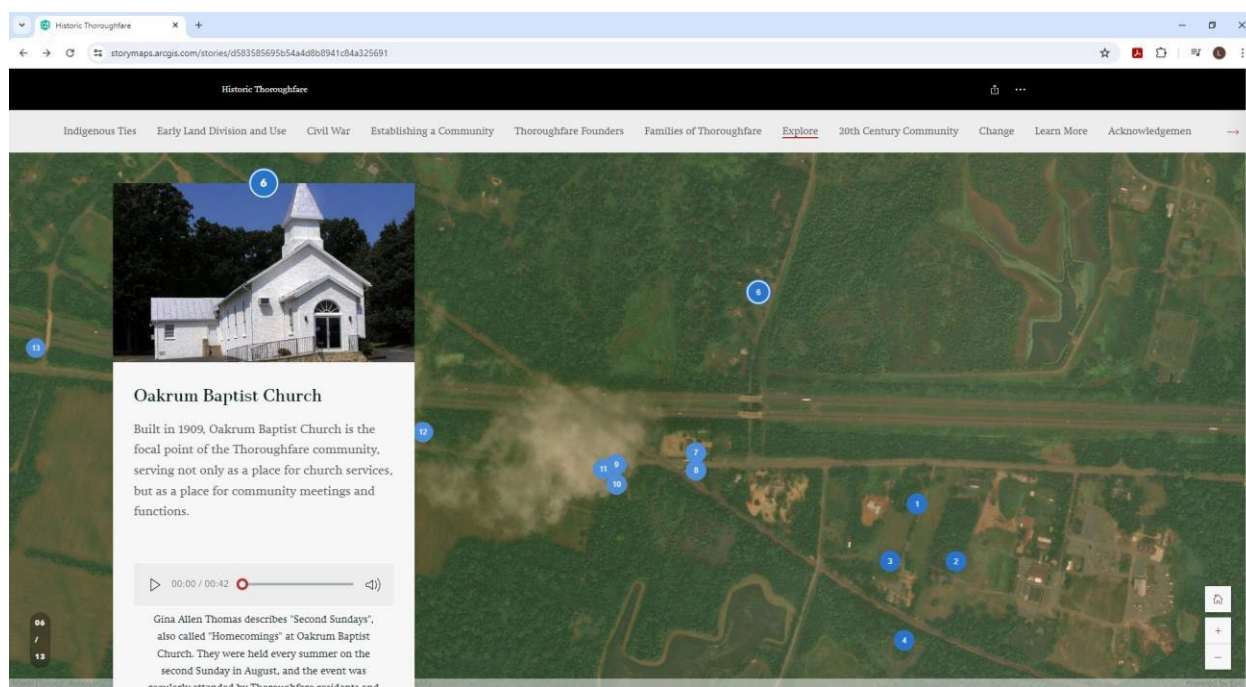
Figure 3: Tour stop which includes a clip of an oral history from the community.

Before publishing *Historic Thoroughfare*, staff ensured that the community was involved for comments, edits, and suggestions. Staff incorporated feedback from this intensive community editing process into a new section in the exhibit ("Families of Thoroughfare") and made edits to existing sections and images. OHP staff worked closely with the community to ensure that the exhibit accurately depicted their history while also incorporating the archival research completed prior to this project.

Results

Although the creation of this exhibit was an intensive process, OHP has been actively suggesting this model as a method of interpreting community history. ArcGIS StoryMaps are often utilized within city and county government, and even within museums and nonprofit organizations. However, they are rarely used as interactive exhibits designed to increase knowledge of sites and provide public access to the sites that are currently inaccessible. Moreover, many in Prince William County associate the name "Thoroughfare" with contention. *Historic Thoroughfare* acknowledges the concerns for the preservation of the community's history while focusing on the interpretation of the past as well as the inclusion of the community as part of the storytelling process. In doing so, it encourages virtual visitors to learn about the rich history of Thoroughfare beyond news headlines and protests. This online exhibit broadens the audience for this exhibit. Unlike a traditional, physical exhibition, *Historic Thoroughfare*, is accessible to people throughout the local community, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the world.

To date, *Historic Thoroughfare* has been viewed over 1,000 times since it was published one year ago. The exhibit is included on OHP's Historic Communities page along with other local oral histories and research.[3] In the future, it will also be included on the landing page for Thoroughfare on the National Park Service's Reconstruction Era Network. OHP staff plan to adapt the online exhibit into a physical exhibit which will travel to Prince William County sites, further increasing knowledge about this important historic community. This exhibit will serve as a key piece of the interpretation for Thoroughfare Historic Park once it is open to the public. Additionally, it allows

---

[3] Prince William County Office of Historic Preservation, Historic Communities page: https://www.pwcva.gov/department/historic-preservation/historic-communities

not only local residents but people with ties to and interests in the community from across the state and country to learn about Thoroughfare's abundant history.

Figure 4: Landing page for Thoroughfare StoryMap.