

**CELEBRATING**



**ANNUAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH GENEALOGY CONFERENCE PROGRAM**

***"Black History Commemorations:  
Our Stories Will Continue To Be Told"***

**IN-PERSON AT THE**

**Washington D.C. Temple Visitors' Center  
9900 Stoneybrook Dr Kensington, MD 20895**

**Saturday, February 7, 2026 - 10:00 AM - 5:30 PM ET**

**PRESENTED BY**

**AFRICAN AMERICAN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (AASIG)**

**AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, INC. (AAHGS)**

**State of Maryland and Washington, DC Chapters**

**Agnes Kane Callum - Baltimore, Maryland (BAAHGS)**

**Central Maryland (Columbia, MD)**

**Montgomery County, Maryland**

**Prince George's County, Maryland**

**James Dent Walker - District of Columbia (AAHGS-DC)**

**WASHINGTON DC FAMILYSEARCH CENTER (WDCFSC)**

**A branch of the FamilySearch Library**

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

**WASHINGTON D.C. TEMPLE VISITORS' CENTER**

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**



**10:00 AM - 11:45 AM (Auditorium - lower level)**

**Welcome/Opening Remarks - Chiquita Clark Sorrels**, President AAHGS Montgomery County, Maryland Chapter



**Invocational Prayer - Sister Janet Stowell and Elder David Stowell**, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints



**Musical presentation** [Lift Every Voice and Sing arr. Roland M. Carter | 105 Voices of History National HBCU Concert Choir](#)



**Introduction of Keynote Speaker - Noreen Goodson**, Secretary Agnes Kane Callum - Baltimore, Maryland (BAAHGS) Chapter



## Keynote Address - Chris Haley



**Chris Haley** is an actor, writer, filmmaker, and Director of Research, Education, and Outreach and the Legacy of Slavery Program at the Maryland State Archives and The Utopia Film Festival. He is thrilled to link the two main pursuits of his life together, history and the arts. He is co-director of the Capital Region Emmy Nominated documentary, *Unmarked*, on the state of often unknown and under-supported burial sites of free and enslaved African Americans. He received the 2021 Anne Arundel Arts Council Literary Arts Award Recipient for his many writings, including the poetry collections, *Until the Right One Comes Along*, *Obsessions*, *Fists and Rainbows*, *When Did I Know I Was Black?*, *If You Love Me*, *Your Buddy*, and *Why?* He is narrator and host of the Ambie nominated and Silver Signal Award winning podcast *The People's Recorder*, produced by Spark Media, on the 1930s Federal Writers Project. Among other awards, he is the 2025 co-recipient of the Baltimore Heritage Award for work on the B&O Railroad Museum's underground railroad exhibit, and sole recipient of the 2024 Society of American Archivists (SAA) Diversity Award, The American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) Lifetime Achievement Award, The Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Leader of the Year Award, and the 2023 National Park Service Network to Freedom Robert G. Stanton and Wilbur H. Seibert Award Recipient. He founded the Underground Railroad Legacy of Slavery research program at the Maryland State Archives in 2001. The project has produced online access to over 400,000 entries related to the lives of free and enslaved African Americans

who lived before, during, and after the Civil War. At the invitation of the Literary Hill BookFest 2020, he read two of his poems, *"An African American Dream of 2018,"* and *"Four Cherries"* at the virtual event. Arlington Magazine writer and Literary Hill BookFest Board Member, Tamar Abrams, said of Haley, *"Your voice deserves to be heard!"*

A nephew of Roots author, Alex Haley, and descendant of Kunte Kinte, Chris grew up with a unique fascination for American history. After pursuing his own professional studies in the field, Chris' knowledge of the past helps illuminate the present for his colleagues, and audiences.

He earned his B.A in English, and Drama minor at The University of Maryland - College Park, and resides in Landover, Maryland.



Chris seated next to a statue of his uncle, Alex Haley, in Annapolis, MD.

2026 is the 50th anniversary of the publication of Roots.

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## LUNCH

**12:00 Noon – 12:45 PM** (Theater 1 - upstairs)



### ON YOUR OWN

**Enjoy your fridge free lunch or visit a nearby eatery in Kensington, MD**

*Suggestions include: Five Guys, Chipotle, Continental Pizza, Crisp and Juicy, Frankly Pizza, Buffalo Wild Wings GO, Marathon Deli and Mezeh Mediterranean Grill*

**NO HOT CAFFEINATED BEVERAGES (TEA/COFFEE/COCOA) PERMITTED ON THE PREMISES.**

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## 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM - **GENEALOGY FOR BEGINNERS** (Theater 1 - upstairs)

In this hands-on session, learn how to get started with your family research, where to access free research tools and how to organize your research findings.



**Chiquita Clark Sorrels** - Interested in her family history since she was a teenager. Genealogy is a combination of two things she loves: research and mysteries. Originally from West Chester, PA, and both her maternal and paternal families have resided in Chester County, PA, for over 175 years.

Currently a resident of Montgomery County, MD, she has worked with Peerless Rockville, a local historic preservation organization, giving guided walking tours of historic African American sites, doing research for various projects, including an exhibit on Underground Railroad activities in the area, and giving presentations on local African American history. Chiquita has a Bachelor's degree in Spanish from the University of Pennsylvania, a Master's degree in Library Science from Drexel University, and a Bachelor's degree in Computer and Information Science from the University of Maryland.

In addition to running her own computer support company she is also an adjunct professor at Montgomery College where she teaches computer applications courses.

She is the President of the Montgomery County, MD chapter of AAHGS and is the Church Historian for Jerusalem-Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church in Rockville, MD



**Noreen Goodson** - Born and raised in Baltimore, MD; graduate of Morgan State College and Morgan State University; and elementary school teacher for 30 years in the Baltimore City Public School System. In 1981, she began researching her parents' families in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina. Currently the Corresponding Secretary of Baltimore's Agnes Kane Callum Chapter of AAHGS. Goodson is also a member of the Maryland Genealogical Society and of the historical societies of Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Baltimore City. Currently researching the Goodson's of Richland County, SC.

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*Attendees should bring a laptop or tablet in order to access the Internet for hands-on exercises.*

*It is recommended that prior to the day of the session that each participant create a (free) Family Search account ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)).*

*(This session is limited to thirty (30) attendees)*

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## 1:00 PM – 5:30 PM – Presentations – Auditorium (lower level)

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

### "RECLAIMING BLACK ANCESTRAL STORIES with AI & FULL-TEXT SEARCH on FAMILYSEARCH"

Join Thom Reed, Program Manager for U.S./Canada African Heritage at FamilySearch, for an in-depth look at how artificial intelligence and full-text search are transforming African American genealogical research. This session will explore how FamilySearch's AI-driven tools go beyond traditional indexing to unlock hidden details in historical documents—revealing names, relationships, occupations, and property connections that were once buried in handwritten records.

You'll learn practical methodology for leveraging these tools, including strategies for identifying enslaved and free people of color, interpreting complex record sets, and connecting generations across fragmented sources. Thom will share real-world case studies demonstrating how AI and full-text search have uncovered new leads in records such as wills, deeds, and Freedmen's Bureau documents—stories that help reclaim and preserve Black ancestral heritage.

Whether you're a seasoned researcher or just beginning your journey, this session will provide actionable tips, best practices, and insights to help you harness cutting-edge technology in service of telling the enduring stories of African American families.



**Thom Reed** serves as Program Manager for U.S./Canada African Heritage at FamilySearch International, where he leads initiatives focused on preserving and increasing access to African American historical records. He directed the groundbreaking Freedmen's Bureau Project and has been with FamilySearch for more than a decade, presenting internationally on genealogy, technology, and cultural heritage. Thom is passionate about leveraging innovative tools—such as AI and full-text search—to help researchers uncover hidden connections and reclaim family narratives. He also serves on the Genealogists' Council for the 10 Million Names project, a national initiative dedicated to recovering and reconnecting the names and stories of enslaved individuals and their descendants.

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**2:15 PM - 3:15 PM**

## **BEHIND THE BRICK WALL: SOLVING RESEARCH PROBLEMS WITH DNA**

Learn from illustrative case studies how to use genetic test results to answer your family history research questions. *It is strongly recommended that attendees have already completed a DNA test.*



**Shannon Christmas** - Featured on BBC, NPR, Radio Sweden, and The Atlantic, Shannon Christmas, known for having served as Genetic Genealogist Program Director for the GU272 Descendants Association, Genealogist for ITV's documentary series "Born From The Same Stranger," Research Manager at Ancestry ProGenealogists, and a genetic genealogy instructor on the faculty of the Midwest African American Genealogy Institute, is an internationally recognized genetic genealogy expert, influencer, educator, practitioner, thought leader, biological family reunification specialist, and lecturer. With over a decade of experience pioneering DNA techniques to identify ancestors and solve mysteries, Shannon harnesses expertise in adoption/unknown parentage research, colonial American, Southern, and African American genealogy. He relishes unleashing the power of DNA to amplify voices long silenced by traditional archiving, bringing hidden ancestors into full view.

A former 23andMe Ancestry Ambassador and Ancestry.com Ace, Shannon manages the Captain Thomas Graves of Jamestown Autosomal DNA Project and the Jesuit Enslaved DNA Project. He also serves as co-administrator of the Hemings-Jefferson-Wayles-Eppes Autosomal DNA Project and the Macon DNA Project. Shannon was among a select group of genetic genealogists invited to participate in the American Society of Human Genetics' Roundtable on Genetic Ancestry Inference.

Shannon has received invitations to lecture at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, James Madison's Montpelier, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, the White House, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

A certified product manager who has advised DNA testing companies, Shannon earned a Bachelor of Arts in Government from Harvard University, a Master of City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a Master of Liberal Arts in History with a Graduate Certificate in American Literature and Culture from Harvard University.

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## 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM CEMETERY PRESERVATION PANEL DISCUSSION

### PRESERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES THROUGH COMMUNITY, SCHOLARSHIP, AND ACTIVISM

This panel brings together three leading voices in African American cemetery preservation whose work demonstrates how community advocacy, historical research, and descendant engagement can restore dignity to endangered burial grounds.



**Bernice Alexander Bennett** (*Moderator*)

**Bernice Alexander Bennett** - award-winning author, genealogist, nationally recognized guest speaker, storyteller, and producer-host of the podcast - *Ancestor's Footprints*. First recipient of the Ida B. Wells Service Award given by the Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage for her dedication to broadcasting stories about enslaved and indentured ancestors of African descent. In addition, she received the Elizabeth Clark-Lewis Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) Genealogy Award in 2019 for original research to support African American Genealogy. Bennett is a former member of the Board of Directors for the National Genealogical Society, co-founder and faculty member of the Midwest African American Genealogy Institute, a Volunteer with the Homestead National Historical Park Service, and former Citizen's Archivist with the Civil War Digitization Project of the National Archives and Records Administration. She received the 2022 Midwest Region's Hartzog Award for being a leader in unearthing and sharing black homesteading stories and important historical documentation.





## PANELISTS

### PRESERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES THROUGH COMMUNITY, SCHOLARSHIP, AND ACTIVISM

Together, these speakers show how interdisciplinary collaboration and descendant-centered research can reclaim African American burial grounds and preserve them as sacred spaces of memory and truth.



**Eileen McGuckian**, historian, preservationist, and longtime executive director of Peerless Rockville, has spent decades safeguarding Montgomery County's historic sites, including cemeteries. She led the countywide cemetery inventory and helped strengthen Maryland cemetery laws. She currently serves on the boards of five cemetery-related nonprofits.



**L. Paige Whitley**, researcher and documentarian with Friends of Moses Hall, leads efforts to study and protect the Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Cemetery in Cabin John. Her documentary, *Help Us to Help Each Other, Lord*, highlights descendant stories, rare Morningstar records, and ongoing community efforts to defend the cemetery from threats such as the proposed Beltway expansion.



**Dr. Elgin L. Klugh**, anthropologist and chair at Coppin State University, serves as president of the Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project. His work brings public attention to Baltimore's demolished Laurel Cemetery, where thousands of burials remain beneath a shopping center. His team has identified more than 27,000 individuals once interred there and advocates for a permanent memorial.

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Musical presentation [BING VIDEOS](#) - BILL & GLORIA GAITHER - AMAZING GRACE  
[LIVE] - Featuring Wintley Phipps - At Carnegie Hall, New York, NY/2002)

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5:15 PM Closing Remarks - LaJoy Mosby, AAHGS National President



*Thank you for joining us as we admired our past, elevated  
our present and motivated our future!*

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**A heartfelt thank you to our planning committee, hosts & sponsors!**

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*Bernice Alexander Bennett, Jacqueline Tillman-Lewis, Frank Jenkins*



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*LaJoy Y. Mosby*

**Montgomery County, Maryland**

*Chiquita Clark Sorrels*

**Prince George's County, Maryland**

*Patricia Ford Neal*

**James Dent Walker – District of Columbia (AAHGS-DC)**

*Brenda Kinsler*

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*Gary Petranek, Frances Seay*



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***Be on the lookout for us in February 2027!***

***ASALH® 2027 Black History Theme  
"FROM BLACK PRINT CULTURE TO DIGITAL BLACKNESS"***

*The 2027 Black History theme, "From Black Print Culture to Digital Blackness," explores the duality of print and digital technologies as tools of empowerment and as instruments that can reinforce systemic racial biases. Black print culture has evolved from street-corner papers to independent bookmaking to global digital networks. As artificial intelligence and other technologies evolve, studying the intersection of print media, race, and the digital world becomes increasingly vital.*

[\*2027 Black History Theme Executive Summary\*](#)