

# Friends of Cunningham Falls and Gambrill State Parks

***Mission: To support and enhance the programs and recreational offerings of Cunningham Falls and Gambrill State Parks through charitable contributions and in-kind donations.***

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FEBRUARY 2021 E-NEWSLETTER (LATE EDITION):  
BLACK HISTORY MONTH FEATURE ARTICLE AND  
MARCH 2021 MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL PREVIEW

# Welcome Friends of Cunningham Falls and Gambrill State Parks – in Maryland’s Catoctin Mountains!

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## ACTIVITIES

- [March 2021 Maple Syrup Festival](#)
- Support of [Cunningham Falls State Park](#)
- Support of [Gambrill State Park](#)
- Sponsorship of the [Aviary](#) at Manor Area of Cunningham Falls State Park
- Expanded partnership with [Catoctin Furnace Historical Society](#), including new trail support
- Support and fundraising for stabilization and restoration of [Ironmaster’s Mansion](#) / Manor House ruins at Catoctin Furnace Historic District

## BOARD MEMBERS

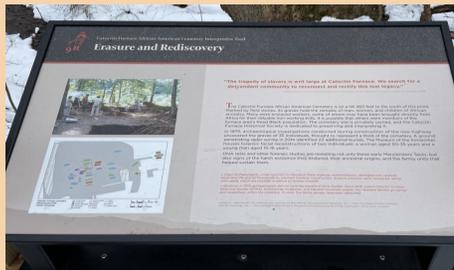
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# New Signs and Trail: Catoctin Furnace African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail

Article and photos by Zoë Brittain

In celebration of Black History Month, a visit to Catoctin Furnace African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail reestablishes a crucial missing link to the past. The trail was recently created to restore recognition to the substantial contributions of African Americans to this region's and nation's history.

The trail begins at the ruins of the historic Catoctin Furnace located in Cunningham Falls State Park and leads visitors along an easy, self-guided stroll dotted with wayside panels describing the iron making process, Catoctin Furnace's historic buildings, and offering a window into the lives of the people who worked and lived there.



Signs along the Interpretive Trail, designed by the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society. The Friends of Cunningham Falls and Gambrill State Parks supported part of the cost.

The historical importance of Catoctin Furnace to Maryland's and the nation's industrial development is well known and documented. The furnace produced a variety of tools and household items, as well as ammunition for George Washington's army at the siege of Yorktown during the Revolutionary War. But the contributions and life experiences of the many enslaved and free African Americans who toiled there between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had nearly been erased.

In 1979, an archeological investigation conducted in preparation for an expansion of US Route 15 revealed the remains of 35 bodies in a previously unknown slave cemetery. In graves marked only by unadorned field stones lay the bodies of African Americans who provided the majority of the labor required to run the furnace.

“More than 100 individuals who labored at the iron-working furnace and in its surrounding community from the 1770s to the 1840s were buried there. Many of these individuals were enslaved workers, some of whom appear to have been brought directly from Africa for their valuable iron-working skills. Other individuals were probably part of the free black population that also lived and worked at the furnace. The labor pool included skilled artisans such as forge workers, colliers, masons, and carpenters.” *Catoctin Furnace Historical Society*



There is documentation for as many as 271 enslaved people of African ancestry who provided most of the considerable labor to run the furnace until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when their labor was replaced by low-wage earning European immigrants. Names of the enslaved workers were recovered from diaries, runaway ads, wills and land records, though only first names were given, with more than a few listed as “Unknown.”

The original characteristics of the cemetery itself reveal how little consideration was given to the people doing the work but reaping none of the benefits. The cemetery was oddly situated in a busy and public setting, not at all suitable for grieving families to pay their respects. Elizabeth A. Comer, archaeologist and secretary of the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, aptly deemed it “an unquiet place.” By contrast, thanks to the softening effect of time and respectful caretaking by the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society, the cemetery is now a private and reflective place.

The trail, which begins at the Catoctin Furnace ruins and passes the still-inhabited village built to support the furnace workers’ lives, connects the past to the present in more ways than one. It provides an opportunity to stop and think about the people of whom all trace was nearly lost. It is a step toward a more honest recounting of how our nation was built, and toward acknowledging how much we owe to our African American ancestors whose legacy is still with us.

*To find more about the Catoctin Furnace African American Cemetery Interpretive Trail, please visit the Catoctin Furnace Historical Society website at: <https://catoctinfurnace.org/african-american-cemetery/>*

# *\*Virtual\** Maple Syrup Festival 2021

On-line Festival events and self-guided activities are happening the whole month of March.

Please see our activities →

For updates and latest news,

Visit

[www.CunninghamGambrill.org](http://www.CunninghamGambrill.org)

And our Facebook page at

[friendsofcunninghamfallsandgambrill](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofcunninghamfallsandgambrill)

**WE'RE BACK!** The Friends of Cunningham Falls State Park, park volunteers, and park staff are pleased to provide a **VIRTUAL** Maple Syrup Festival in 2021.

For your enjoyment and education we will have -

1. **Videos:** Each Monday in March, a new short video will be made available on our website showing a step in the process of making maple syrup.

Click here to view the videos:

<http://www.cunninghamgambrill.org/Events.html>

2. **Hikes:** Self-guided interpretive hikes at the Houck Lake area are listed on our website for you to take at your convenience.

Click here for hike information and maps:

<http://www.cunninghamgambrill.org/Events.html>

3. **Maple syrup** products and **souvenir** apparel: Your beloved Maryland maple syrup products are available for purchase, as well as souvenir apparel from our online store. All proceeds will benefit the park.

Click here to see our new product line of gifts and more:

<http://www.cunninghamgambrill.org/OnlineStore.html>