

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**Project Title:** Documenting the History of the African American Experience at Ferry Hill, the Blackford House, and the Bridgeport Community

**1.1 Project Budget: \$56,749.00**

### **1.2. Statement of Purpose**

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park (C&O Canal NHP) seeks a research team to develop a Historic Structures Report (HSR) for the Blackford House near Lock 38 and a supplemental to the Ferry Hill Historic Resource Study (HRS) focused on African American history. The two tasks involve a substantial amount of cross-over research, particularly in background/historical context; thus, the research team can approach these tasks in tandem. The research products will provide a comprehensive approach to the study of enslaved and free African American workers in the Maryland community and their role in the local economy and community.

This story of the African American experience at Lock 38 and Ferry Hill parallels the broader American civil rights story, yet it places that story in a setting unfamiliar to many. Ferry Hill Plantation house, located on the hill above Lock 38, was built circa 1810 as the home of John Blackford. In 1816, Blackford acquired the ferry franchise at Lock 38 from which the house and plantation took its name. Blackford purchased adjacent lands until his holdings grew to over 700 acres incorporating three separate farms. An enslaved workforce was vital to the economic success of Blackford's enterprise. Blackford held 18 "full time" slaves at the time of this death, although he leased slaves from other local farms at harvest time. Two of his slaves operated the ferry across the Potomac to Shepherdstown, (now West) Virginia. These slaves were allowed to collect tolls and hire assistants, so long as all the profits were brought back to Blackford.

Blackford operated a large, multi-faceted business operation, owing in large part to the advantageous location of Ferry Hill Plantation at a major crossing of the Potomac River. In addition to the plantation and the ferry operation, the Ferry House at Lock 38, now known as the Blackford House, was a popular tavern and boarding house. The C&O Canal, of which Blackford was an ardent supporter, brought more opportunity for trade with Ferry Hill Plantation. All of these operations were supported by enslaved workers at Ferry Hill Planation.

The C&O Canal near the Ferry Hill Plantation also was a well-documented route on the underground railroad, and reports exist of Blackford and his descendants apprehending escaped slaves along the route. Free African American boatmen also plied their trade on the canal, passing through locks operated by their enslaved brethren.

### **1.3. Background Information**

The Blackford House, Ferry Hill, and the Lock 38 landscape is uniquely positioned to explore the American story of Civil War to Civil Rights. This place, where enslaved people worked, overlooking the Potomac River became an international boundary between the Confederacy and the United States during the Civil War; it faces a portion of Virginia incorporated during the Civil War as West Virginia; it overlooks the C&O Canal Towpath, a vital link heading northwest

on the Underground Railroad; and it takes its name from the ferry that transported people and their stories through these hallowed grounds for generations. After the Civil War, schools for Freeman were established nearby in Jefferson and Washington counties.

The requested research—a Historic Structures Report (HSR) for the Blackford House and a Historic Resource Study (HRS) supplemental on African American history in the Ferry Hill area—will contribute to a growing body of work on Lock 38 and the Blackford House’s history including the Historic Structures Reports for Ferry Hill (2005, n.d.), Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for Ferry Hill and Bridgeport (2004), and the Historic Resource Study for Ferry Hill Plantation (2007). While extant studies have focused on the history of the owners of Ferry Hill, these syntheses do not develop the historical context for African American slaves who lived and worked at Ferry Hill and associated environs including Blackford House and the Bridgeport community.

The HRS supplemental can be guided by a suite of primary source documents including the journals of Colonel John Blackford and Franklin Blackford, which record the day-to-day activities at the plantation and the use of slave and free labor to run the operation. The journals document the importance of Ferry Hill to the local economy, particularly the role in slave labor and free white and free black laborers in supporting the plantation’s operations. The HRS will situate slave activities at the property within the social and economic context of slavery in western Maryland’s regional economy. Blackford’s journals indicate a slave population around twenty five that were not managed by an overseer. Records suggest that Blackford’s slaves had some autonomy and were not closely supervised, which contrasted to slave practices in nearby areas. The HRS would explore how slave management practices at Ferry Hill related to general slave treatment and work conditions in the region.

The HRS supplemental will also review the role of the underground railroad in the slave life and economy. After 1835, journal entries suggest enslaved African Americans used the C&O Canal’s towpath and Potomac River crossing as routes to freedom. The supplemental would seek new sources including newspaper records and other archival materials to explore the lifeways of individuals of African descent at Ferry Hill within a local, regional, and national context.

#### **1.4. Scope of Work**

The project scope of work includes the following items:

- Task A: Historic Structures Report (HSR) for the Blackford House that includes the following sections: Introduction, Documentary Narrative on Historical Context; Physical Description, Existing Conditions, Evaluation of Significance; Historic Preservation Objectives, Treatment Recommendations, Bibliography, Footnotes/Endnotes, and Appendices. The HSR should include both photographs and measured drawings to record existing features and conditions of the building. The HSR should meet NPS’ specifications and standards and consist of an integrated report in text, photographs, drawings, and tables.
- Task B: Supplemental to the Ferry Hill Historic Resource Study (HRS) focused on the African American history and experience that includes the following sections: Introduction, Background/Context, Research Themes, Recommendations for Future

Research, Bibliography, Footnotes/Endnotes, and Appendices. The HSR should include relevant maps and figures and meet NPS' specifications and standards.

### **1.5. Deliverables**

- Four (4) printed copies and disk of the PDF and MS Word files of the Historic Structures Report for the Blackford House.
- Disk of digital archival-quality copies of field documentation materials, including photographs and negatives, measured field drawings, condition reports and surveys, materials test reports, and other information gathered during production of the HSR.
- Four (4) printed copies and disk of the PDF and MS Word files of the Supplemental to the Ferry Hill Historic Resource Study (HRS).

### **1.6. Requirements for Proposal Preparation**

Investigation proposals must:

- Provide the PI and project team qualifications that meet the Secretary of Interior's standards for historical work.
- Include a draft schedule of dates for project deliverables.
- Include a general approach to aligning research with the archaeological investigations at Ferry Hill. The RFP for the archaeological studies will be issued at the same time as this RFP for the HSR and the supplemental HRS.

### **1.7. Points of contact for future correspondence**

Questions on the RFP scope and project should be directed to Dr. Sophia Kelly, Cultural Resources Program Manager, C&O Canal NHP at 301-714-2236 or [sophia\\_kelly@nps.gov](mailto:sophia_kelly@nps.gov).

Questions on the CESU network should be directed to Dan Filer, Chesapeake Watershed CESU Research Coordinator at 301-689-7108 or [danny\\_filer@nps.gov](mailto:danny_filer@nps.gov).