

# Rolling Road to Shipping Lane

## The Money Crop Trail

### INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAIL

The first segment is an approximate 0.2-mile loop starting at the Plumer-Cranford barn (2). Follow the Money Crop Trail to the Rice House and outbuildings (3-5), then return to the parking lot. This short loop will give an introduction if you do not have time for a more in-depth visit. It takes approximately 15 minutes to walk.

### EXTENDING THE STORY

Follow the first section loop up to the Rice house, then continue down the Rolling Road crossing fields and follow the Rolling Road to the historic wharf site at Battle Creek (8). You will have to turn around and return along the same route. This trail is approximately 1 mile in length one-way (2 miles round trip.) It takes approximately 30 minutes to walk one-way (1 hour round trip.)



## Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm

2695 Grays Road  
Prince Frederick

[Website](#)

A site rich in history. [Read more...](#)

0 300 600 Feet

- |                                 |                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Parking                         | Tobacco Barn                   |
| Horse Trailer Parking           | Plumer-Cranford Barn           |
| Structure                       | George E. Rice House           |
| Property Boundary               | Cow Barn                       |
| Red - Farm Trail                | Meat House                     |
| Blue - Cathole Trail            | Corn Crib                      |
| Orange - Forest Loop            | Shell Midden                   |
| Black - Spring Overlook Trail   | The Point & 19th Century House |
| Money Crop Trail (Rolling Road) |                                |

### SOME RULES TO ENJOY AND PROTECT CALVERT COUNTY'S NATURAL PLACES

- Dogs must remain on leash
- Stay on established trails and boardwalks
- Equestrian use requires a permit (free)
- No overnight camping, except by permit
- No fires, except in fire rings and grills provided at the parks
- Unless posted otherwise, park hours are dawn to dusk
- Do not collect plants or animals
- Limited hunting with a valid Maryland State Hunting Permit

The Money Crop Trail, along the [Rolling Road](#): Journey along the same path that farmers used, driving oxen, mules, and horse-drawn carts more than 250 years ago.



Click on the **tobacco leaf icon** to learn more about a subject



# The Money Crop Trail

The Money Crop Trail, located along the Rolling Road, invites visitors to journey along the same path that farmers used, driving oxen, mules, and horse-drawn carts more than 250 years ago.

It is a walking timeline from the mid-20th century back to pre-colonial times, and connects Battle Creek to the agricultural economics and lifestyle throughout the centuries. The Money Crop Trail follows much of the physical Rolling Road, and leads you back in time to an earlier era of the farm.



[What is a Rolling Road?](#)

The road trace has existed since at least 1865 but likely was in use as early as circa 1725, based on evidence of early historic occupations on the property. Over time farmers used many methods to transport their crops to market, including ox, mule and horse drawn carts. As road access to southern Maryland gradually improved, commerce began to move away from the waterfront and more to local roads, leading to the eventual abandonment of the Rolling Road.

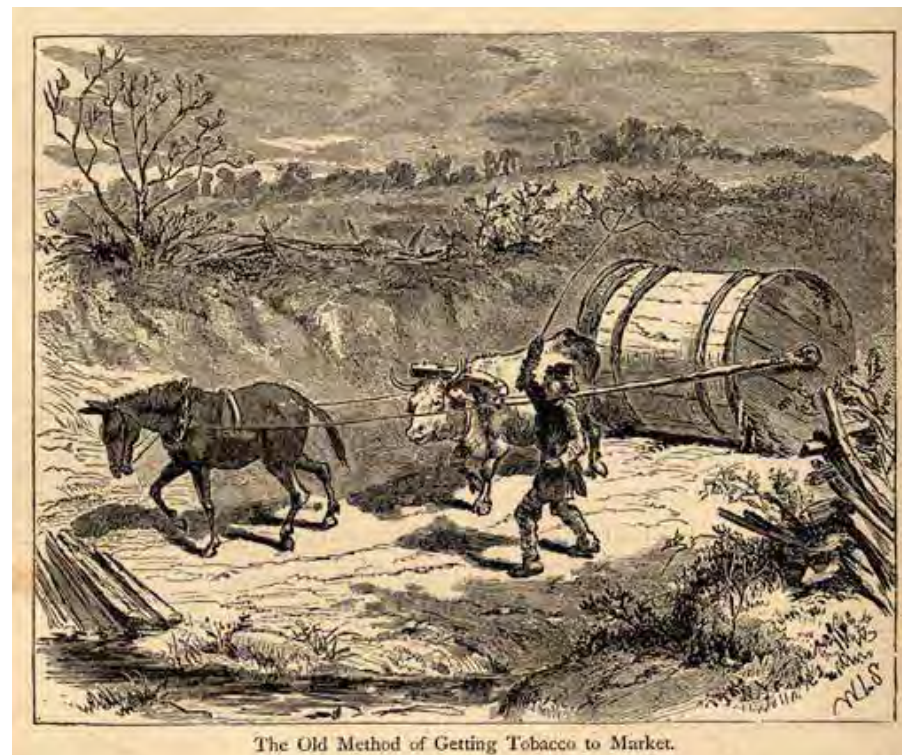
No rolling roads in Maryland are known to be accessible or interpreted for the public, underscoring the importance of preserving the Biscoe Gray Rolling Road, maintaining its (currently) distinctive physical and experiential presence, and enhancing its interpretive value.

[Back to the Map](#)

# Tobacco: The Money Crop

- Tobacco dominated agriculture in southern Maryland for more than 300 years, and this money crop provided a source of income and prosperity for its citizens. Understanding the story of tobacco production is fundamental to understanding the larger story of the Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm and the Rolling Road that runs through the heart of the site.

- Profits from growing tobacco became the mainstay of the Maryland economy. This shaped colonial life and the society that developed along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. The story of tobacco became integral to the history of Maryland.



- The tobacco prize is a large screw press used to compress tobacco into hogshead barrels used for shipment. Rolling these hogshead barrels down to the wharf created the Rolling Road.



**See our tobacco prize in the  
Plumer-Cranford barn**



# The Rolling Road

Rolling roads were named such because of the practice of loading tobacco in hogsheads (wooden barrels) weighing up to 800 pounds. Sometimes loaded onto carts and sometimes attached to the carts and rolled behind, hogsheads were the primary tobacco packing and transport method until the 1930s.

*An image of a loose tobacco leaves on a cart heading down the road with oxen overlaid on top of a modern image of the rolling road Repeated use created large berms on either side of the trace.*



Within the Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm, the historic Rolling Road was a primary transportation route for those who lived on the property, connecting farm fields to local waterways. More important, it was how tobacco and other goods made it to boats on Battle Creek in the eras in which the Creek was still navigable for larger vessels.

[Back to the Map](#)



# Tobacco Barns (#1)

Several barns were located on the property, but only the more modern barn which sits on the hill close to Grays Road was used by farmers on Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm.

This a frame barn appears to date to the early 20th century and is historically associated with the Biscoe Gray property. Materials and construction date the barn to as early as 1900; however, the barn does not appear on historic maps of the property until about 1940.



[Changes in the Landscape through Historic Imagery](#)



The [Plumer-Cranford Barn](#) was relocated to Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm

[Back to the Map](#)



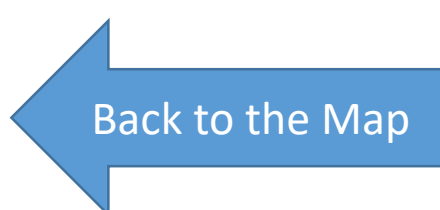
# Tobacco Barns (#2)

The Plumer-Cranford Barn was relocated from Broomes Island to the Heritage Farm in 2003. The framing beams are original from circa 1840, while the siding and roof were replaced after it was re-assembled at the Heritage Farm. The Plumer-Cranford barn is an example of distinctive agricultural architecture in this region and tobacco barns are considered an endangered cultural resource.



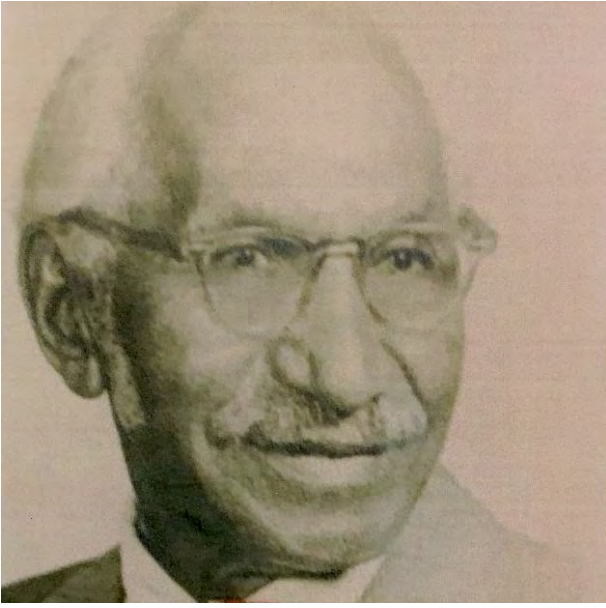
*Above: photo taken during the reconstruction*

*Right: The barn houses a 19th century tobacco prize, a large screw press used to compress tobacco into the hogshead barrels used for shipment.*



A more [modern barn](#) is located on the nearby hill.

# George E. Rice (#3)



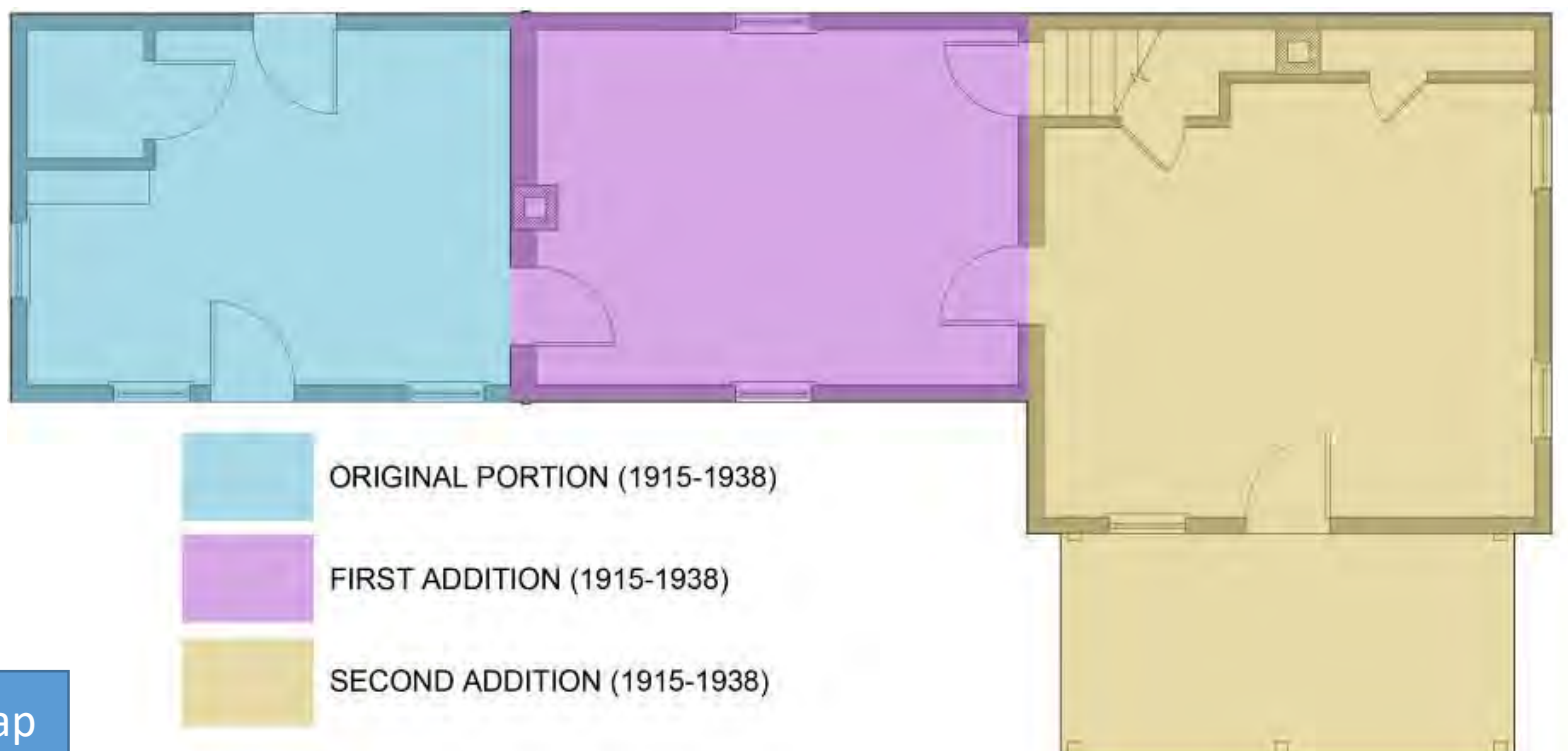
George Rice was an African-American farmer who owned and lived on the property in the early 20th century.

*Photo of George Rice, courtesy of his daughter Marian Johnson*

He purchased the 60 acres adjacent to the wharf in 1902. We presume that he lived in the [19<sup>th</sup> century house \(#8\)](#) and farmed the adjacent fields.

In 1915, he expanded his land holdings with the acquisition of land adjacent to today's Grays Road. It was on this parcel that he built this new home near Grays Road, which made his residence much more accessible to the main roadway. With water transportation being replaced by better roadways in the 20th century, there was little reason to remain in dwellings near the waterfront.

The house was built in at least three phases between 1915 and 1938, as illustrated in the diagram below. The earliest construction is a one-story portion shaded in blue below. The middle portion of the house, shaded in purple, was built next, followed by the two-story portion, shaded in yellow. The entire structure is a wood frame construction and has gabled roofs and a porch that extends across the east side of the two story addition.



[Back to the Map](#)

*The stabilization of the house was made possible by a grant from the African American Heritage Preservation fund administered through the Maryland Historical Trust.*



# Outbuildings (#4,5,6)



The **cow shed** (#4) was used for livestock while the southern bay was used as a shelter for agricultural equipment and vehicles. The hatch could have been for keeping fowl or for hay storage.

The **meathouse** (#5, below left) is closest to the main house. Meat was kept here after the butchering of hogs and cows in the fall after the weather was cold enough to keep the meat from spoiling until it was cured. Meat was cured with salt and then placed on shelves or in boxes and barrels in a meat house. If meat was to be smoked it was hung in the meat house and subjected to a smoky fire for a week or longer. Smoke added flavor, but also produced chemical compounds that helped protect the meat from bacteria and insects. South of the meathouse is **the corn crib** (#6).



[Back to the Map](#)

*The outbuildings were restored with a grant from the African American Heritage Preservation fund administered through the Maryland Historical Trust.*



# Piscataway Indian Heritage (#7)

Dr. Julia A. King and Scott M. Strickland, archaeologists from St. Mary's College of Maryland spent several weeks testing an important Native American archaeological site. Overlooking Battle Creek, the site appears to have been occupied from as early as ca. 200 CE until 1300 CE. The purpose of the investigations was to collect additional information about the site and its function in preparation for nominating the site to the National Register of Historic Places.

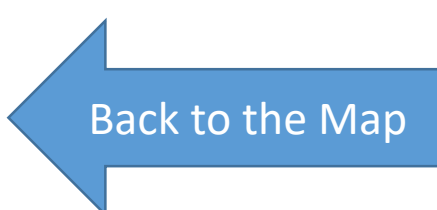
The investigations yielded thousands of fragments of oyster shell, stone artifacts, and ceramic vessel fragments. Perhaps the most exciting find consisted of a linear series of post molds presumably associated with long-vanished architecture at the site. These post molds, ranging from 3 to 4 inches in diameter, were spaced approximately 8 inches apart. Architecture from these early centuries is relatively rare in the Chesapeake. Its presence at Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm enhances the historical significance of the park.

Although the site is relatively small in size, measuring only a couple hundred feet in length and extending only a short distance from the creek bank, the thick deposits of shell and numbers of stone and lithic artifacts indicates that this site was repeatedly visited for several centuries on a seasonal basis before an as-yet-unexplained abandonment.

At the time the site appears to have gone out of use, major changes were happening in the Native American world of the Middle Atlantic. Groups from west of the fall line appear to have been migrating into the Potomac River's inner coastal plain, and these migrations may be related to the reasons the site at Biscoe Gray was abandoned. Whatever the reason, the preservation of this important property will insure that scientists will have the opportunity to research this question.



*The archaeological investigations at Biscoe Gray have been funded by a very generous grant from the National Park Service. Today's indigenous descendants, including the Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, have been intimately involved with the work.*





# The Cathole on Battle Creek (#7)



[← Back to the Map](#)



# 19<sup>th</sup> Century House (#8)

*Please stay on the trail*

Warehouses, stores, and residences near the shoreline once greeted small boats coming up Battle Creek.



**Visitors need to remain on a stabilized path not only for their own safety but also to protect the historic site.**

Settlement patterns changed with the introduction of new roads into southern Maryland. As access to markets grew with the addition of improved roads in the 1930s and 40s, the waterfront became less and less important to farmers. As a result, structures like the 19th century house, currently collapsing near this spot, were abandoned as new structures grew up near important road intersections.

[Back to the Map](#)



[Wharf and Waterfront](#)



# The Wharf (#8)

- At the end of the rolling road a wharf once connected the rich agricultural lands to the larger, outside world, via the boats that docked here.
- Hogsheads of tobacco were loaded onto wharves and transported to larger markets. Where today we have a view of the water, there would have been a wharf for the loading and unloading of tobacco and trade goods.



Current view of Battle Creek where the rolling road would have ended at a wharf.

- Battle Creek connected the isolated tobacco farms to various markets, where Maryland tobacco was shipped from the fields to larger markets worldwide.

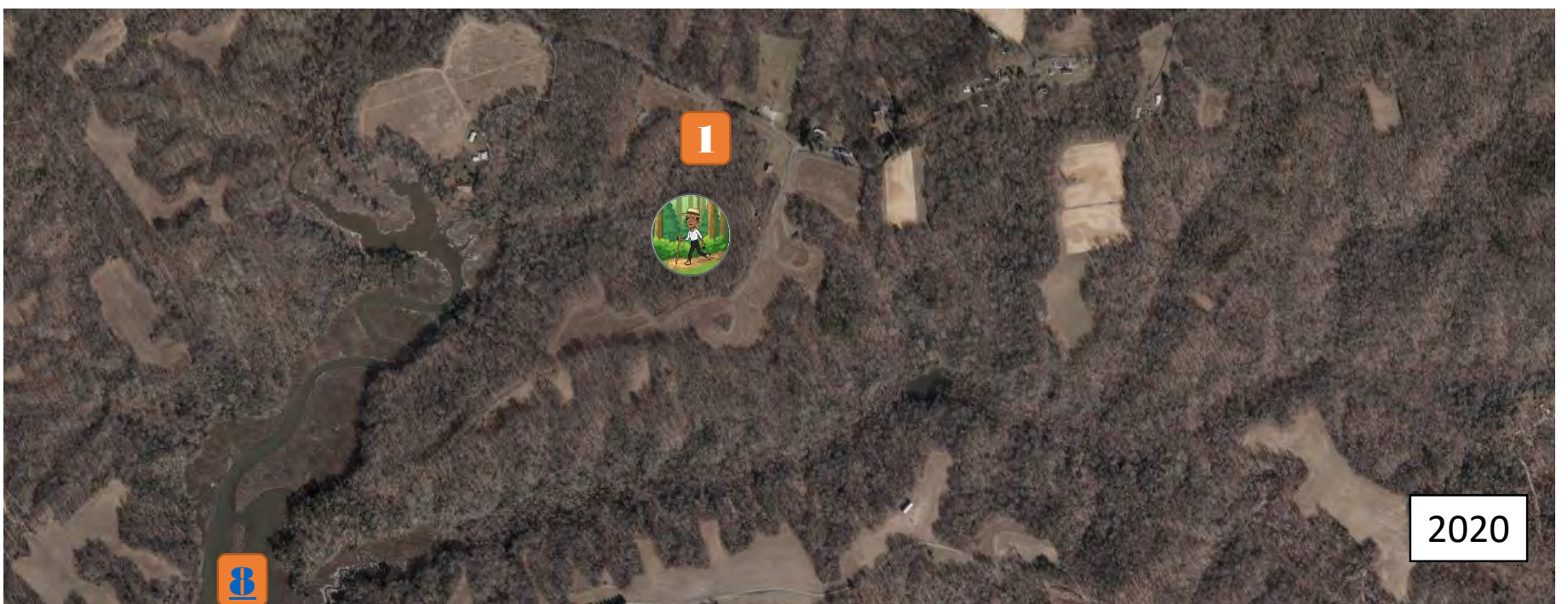
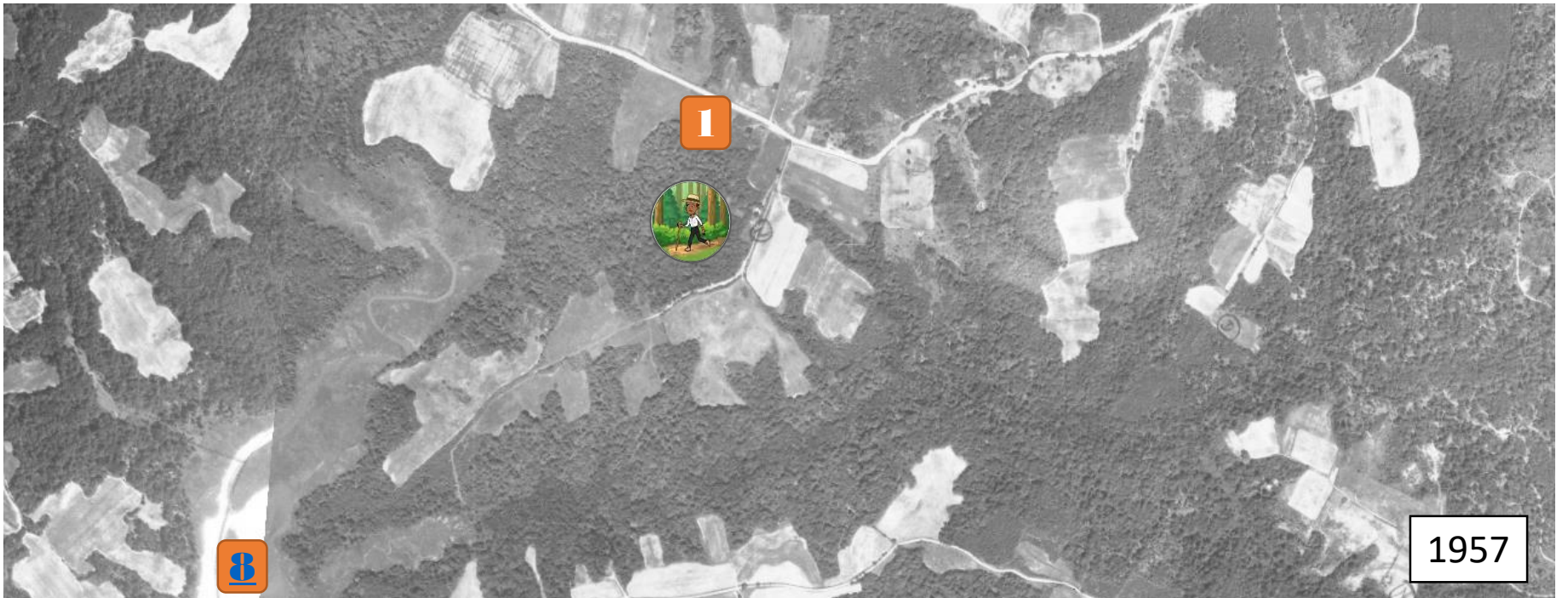
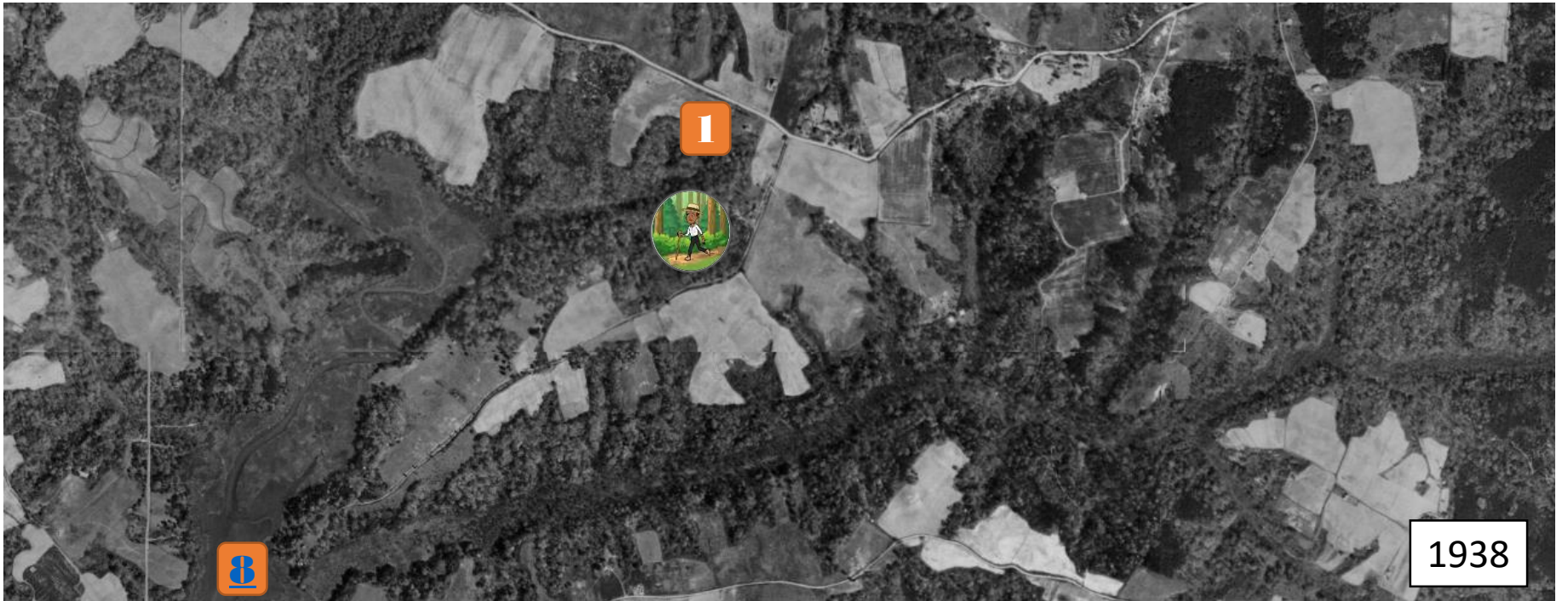
[Back to the Map](#)



# Changes Though Time

Explore these and other historic imagery:

<https://geocortex.calvertcountymd.gov/>



← Back to the Map

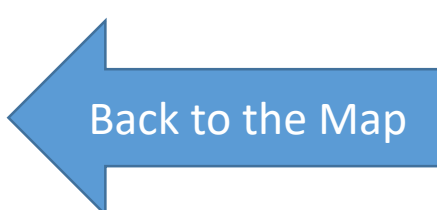


# Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm



The site is rich in natural and cultural resources, is a living laboratory to explore, understand, and experience Calvert County agricultural practices and lifestyles throughout its history—from Native American transitory settlement, small scale colonial farming, 19th century era agriculture, and 20th century tobacco farming to contemporary, pioneering community supported agricultural and sustainable farming efforts.

Through archaeological preservation, interpretive site development and programming, and hands-on educational opportunities, the Heritage Farm provides activities and experiences for those of all ages and physical abilities.





# Farm to Market

Transportation patterns influenced the commercial and residential development in southern Maryland.



Loading Tobacco, photo courtesy of Tommy Briscoe

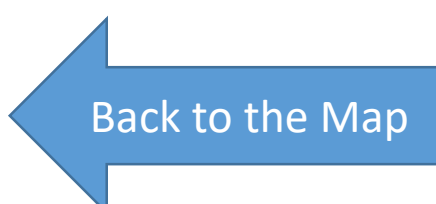
In the historic era, tobacco was transported in hogsheads from the barn down the rolling road to the wharf. But several changes affected the importance of the rolling road.

Excess sediment in the river channel prevented larger boats from accessing wharves.

The market also changed from bulk in hogsheads to loose-leaf, transported by individual growers to market at auction.

As roads improved, transportation of the money crop shifted away from the waterfront and towards new roads. Transporting tobacco to market via trucks became much easier and less laborious.

With these shifts, settlement patterns changed as commercial hubs near the water were no longer necessary. Residences began to be built closer to strategic road intersections--George Rice abandoned the 19<sup>th</sup> century house near the wharf to build his house by Grays Road is such an example.





# Rolling Road to Shipping Lane

## The Money Crop Trail

### INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAIL

The first segment is an approximate 0.2-mile loop starting at the [Plumer-Cranford barn \(2\)](#). Follow the Money Crop Trail to the [Rice House and outbuildings \(3-5\)](#), then return to the parking lot. This short loop will give an introduction if you do not have time for a more in-depth visit. It takes approximately 15 minutes to walk.

### EXTENDING THE STORY

Follow the first section loop up to the Rice house, then continue down the [Rolling Road](#) crossing fields and follow the Rolling Road to [the historic wharf site at Battle Creek \(8\)](#). You will have to turn around and return along the same route. This trail is approximately 1 mile in length one-way (2 miles round trip.) It takes approximately 30 minutes to walk one-way (1 hour round trip.)

