



News for Immediate Release

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South Mountain Speaker Series to Focus on historic African-American burial grounds in April

Harrisburg – Protecting historic African-American burial grounds in the region will be the topic of the next lecture in the South Mountain Speakers Series on Thursday, April 17, at Shippensburg University.

“Over the last 250 years, African American churches and organizations have established dozens of burial grounds in communities throughout the South Mountain region,” said Jon Peterson, a planner with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy who is coordinating the committee on the speaker series. “These historic cemeteries provide remarkable sites for documenting the rich African American history of the region, including African-American military service in the United States Civil War.”

"Hallowed Grounds, Endangered History: Preserving the Historic African-American Burial Grounds of the South Mountain Region," will be held at 7 p.m. at the Old Main Chapel at 1871 Old Main Drive, Shippensburg. It is free and open to the public.

Today, many of the historic burial grounds have vanished, or they are threatened by a combination of neglect, vandalism and development.

Dr. Steven Burg, professor of history at Shippensburg University, will discuss the ways that the historic burial grounds of the South Mountain can be used to discover the region's rich African-American history.

Following his presentation, a panel will discuss the threats posed to these sites and a variety of efforts that are currently underway to preserve them, and protect and share the stories of these hallowed grounds.

The panel includes Larry Knutson, president of Penn Trails; Lenwood Sloan, former director of Pennsylvania's Cultural and Heritage Tourism Program; and Barbara Barksdale, founder of Friends of Midland, an organization that is restoring Harrisburg's Midland Cemetery, a pre-Civil War African American cemetery.

This event is supported by the Pennsylvania Hallowed Ground Project and Shippensburg University.

The annual South Mountain Speakers Series is envisioned as a revival of the talks given by Joseph Rothrock in the late 19th century as part of his work to preserve and restore Pennsylvania's forests and natural landscape. The fifth season of the Speakers Series is sponsored by the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau.

Two additional lectures this year will include:

- "The Changing Face of Agriculture in the South Mountain Region: Re-creating the Cider Industry," Oct. 4-5 and 11-12 at the National Apple Harvest Festival, Arendtsville; and
- "Changing Climate and the South Mountain Region," Nov. 13 at Dickinson College.

The South Mountain Partnership was sparked by DCNR's effort to engage communities, local partners and state agencies and identify funding opportunities to conserve high-quality natural and cultural resources while enhancing the region's economic viability.

It is a public-private partnership between DCNR and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and has grown into a coalition of citizens, businesses, non-profit organizations and government representatives in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin and York counties, working together to protect and enhance the South Mountain landscape.

South Mountain is at the northern end of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Communities in the 400,000-acre region have thrived off fertile limestone agricultural lands, the timber that fed iron furnaces, plentiful game and wildlife, and abundant pure spring water that is captured by the mountains' permeable soils and released into the valleys.

For more information about the speaker series, visit <http://southmountainspeakers.blogspot.com/> or call the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at 717-258-5771.

Some of the earlier lectures in the speaker series can be found on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/SouthMtnSpeakers>.

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