

Reflections

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The December 2024 issue of *Reflections*, a publication of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN), is now available. It is available in PDF format on the Georgia Historic Preservation Division website. It's easy to become a subscriber; just click [here](#).

You may view the issue here, titled [2024-December-reflections](#). This month you will find:

- Recently, a bench was dedicated by the Toni Morrison Historical Society to honor the enslaved Africans in Cobb County.
- Learn about the impact of the professional relationship between George Washington Carver and Henry Ford.
- The Butler Street YMCA is part of a development plan titled the Sweet Auburn Grande. Follow the story of its past to learn about the building's historical significance to downtown Atlanta's Black community.

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Georgia Historic Preservation Division





GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
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Historic Preservation Division

Reflections

Volume XXX, No. 3



December 2024

Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District Places Toni Morrison Society Bench by the Road to Honor Enslaved Family of Cobb County

By Dr. Carolyn Denard, Board Chair of the Toni Morrison Society



Photo courtesy of the Marietta Daily Journal

On Wednesday, June 18th, the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District of Cobb County, placed a Bench by the Road, a memorial monument project of the Toni Morrison Society, to honor an enslaved family who lived near the Covered Bridge District in Cobb County. The Bench by the Road Project of the Toni Morrison Society is a commemorative community outreach project established in response to comments Morrison gave in a 1989 acceptance speech for the Frederic G. Melcher Book Award from Unitarian Universalist Association where she lamented the absence of historical markers that help us remember the lives of those who were enslaved.

There is no place where you and I can go to think about or not think about to summon the presences or recollect the absences of slaves. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There is no 300 foot tower. There is no small bench by the road. There's not even a tree scored, an initial, that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or better still on the banks of the Mississippi.¹

The society launched the Bench by the Road Project to begin to establish such places and create historical sites of memory to fill the void that Morrison expressed in her acceptance speech.



The bench ceremony program courtesy of the Toni Morrison Society

Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District Places *Continued*

The history of the enslaved family that was honored with the Bench placement was discovered by Ms. Patricia Burns, a member of the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District. At the ceremony, she shared with the audience how after moving to her home in the Covered Bridge District thirty-five years ago, she discovered in the kitchen cupboard a tattered note card with the names “Matilda,” “Calvin,” “Zeida,” and “Rhoda” written on the card. “I felt in my bones” Ms. Burns recalled, “that those names meant something to somebody.” She says she “carefully tucked away the little card until she had time, time to explore: who is Matilda?”

After researching census records, Ms. Burns found that Matilda and her children had been enslaved on a plantation owned by Martin Luther Ruff near the site of the Concord Covered Bridge. The records showed that after emancipation, Matilda continued to live in South Cobb County on a lot near what is now the Silver Comet Trail in Heritage Park within the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District.² The Bench placement is across Concord Road from her home. With this news, Ms. Burns was determined to honor them: “This formerly enslaved family had to be recognized,” she said. “We had to call their names in the historic district where they lived and where they survived.”

When she read about the Bench by the Road Project of the Toni Morrison Society, established to honor little known sites, people, and events in African American history, Ms. Burns said she believed that a bench would be the perfect way to commemorate Matilda Ruff and her family and the over 3,000 enslaved people of Cobb County that their lives represent.³ She wanted a place where people could read the story of Matilda and her family and sit and reflect on their journey as enslaved people and later as free Blacks in Cobb County.

On a beautiful summer morning, in the exact area where Matilda Ruff and her children had been enslaved and later where they had lived as free people, nearly 60 people gathered to tell Matilda’s story and dedicate a Bench by the Road to honor and commemorate their lives. In attendance at the ceremony were a cross-section of members of the community, musicians, a young poet who offered an expressive tribute, and representatives from the offices of many county and state legislators. Mr. Dave Mahloy of the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District welcomed the audience to the ceremony.

Cobb County Manager Jackie McMorris gave remarks on behalf of District 4 Commissioner Monique Sheffield. Ms. McMorris also thanked all those in the county who had made the Bench placement a reality: The Friends of the Covered Bridge Historic District, the Toni Morrison Society, office of Representative Terry Cummings, Delta Sigma Sorority, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Cobb- Sheriff Foundation, the Cobb Parks and Recreation, and Keep Cobb Beautiful. A special thank you was extended to Smyrna’s Jonquil Garden Club and Girl Scout Rowan Stufflebeam for the garden of flowers surrounding the Bench that will be known as “Matilda’s Garden”.

Representative Terry Cummings gave a moving keynote address highlighting the history of the Ruff family in Georgia. She noted, it being the eve of the Juneteenth holiday, how appropriate it was to celebrate the history of African Americans like the Ruffs who survived slavery and who continued to thrive in their daily lives and as leaders in the county, the state, and the nation. Representative Cummings also thanked those who provided financial support for the Bench placement.

Co-Chairs of the Bench by the Road Project, Drs. Carolyn Denard and Craig Stutman, greeted the audience on behalf of the society. They congratulated the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District for honoring Matilda Ruff and her children and pointed out that the Bench being placed for them at the ceremony was one of 33 other benches that have been placed by the Toni Morrison Society throughout the country and abroad since the Project was launched in 2006. They noted that there had been four other benches already placed in sites in the state of Georgia (First Congregational Church of Atlanta, Woodruff Library at Clark Atlanta University, the historic Southview Cemetery, and the Train Depot in Cartersville) but this would be the first bench placed for an enslaved Georgia family.

The Bench Placement in the Concord Covered Bridge Historic District was the culmination of a full community effort, where the members of an enslaved family, representative of over 3,800 people who had been enslaved in Cobb County, Georgia were remembered at the unveiling of a commemorative Bench by the Road in their honor. The program was a testament to the importance of creating meaningful historical markers not only to honor those who survived and thrived but also to provide a place for the community to share a moment of collective remembrance and reflection.

¹ Morrison, Toni. “Melcher Book Award Acceptance Speech.” *UUworld*. Speech presented at the Frederic G. Melcher Book Award, October 12, 1988. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/bench-road>. The article originally appeared in *World: Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Association* 3:1 (January/February 1989): 4-5, 37-41.

² *The National Archives in Washington DC, USA; Eighth Census of the United States 1860, Series Number: M653. Record Group: Records of the Bureau of the Census; Record Group Number: 29, Accessed via Ancestry.com in 2021.*

³ Temple, Sarah Blackwell Gober. 1935. *The First Hundred Years. A Short History of Cobb County, in Georgia*. Atlanta: Walter W. Brown Publishing Company, 199.

Forged of Steel and Seed – The Legacy of Vision, Innovation, and Partnership between George Washington Carver & Henry Ford in Richmond Hill, GA

By Lauren Seaman Master of Historic Preservation and a Master of Science in Tourism from the University of Florida. Architectural Historian and President of the Richmond Hill Historical Society.

Henry Ford, a name synonymous with industrial innovation and mass production, left a lasting legacy that extends far beyond the automobile industry. While his contributions to global manufacturing transformed economies all over the world, his impact on one small economy in Georgia showcases a different side of Ford—a philanthropic man dedicated to the earth, natural resources, and unprecedented partnerships that spanned industries and social boundaries alike.

Looking to escape the Florida land boom of the early 1920s, Henry and Clara Ford began searching for a suitable site for a new winter home. At the recommendation of a close friend, Henry and Clara toured areas of coastal Georgia and visited acreage along the southern banks of the Ogeechee River. Henry found the area rich with wildlife, natural resources, and opportunity; while Clara became captivated by the Spanish moss-covered live oaks, abundant avian wildlife, and the charm of coastal Georgia. In March 1925, Henry Ford purchased his first 100 acres of land in Ways Station, Georgia, a small and impoverished coastal town, just outside the hustle and bustle of Savannah.

Over the next few years, Ford purchased more than 85,000 acres of land, which included rice plantations and overgrown fields, and began to develop a vision for the vast opportunity before him. One of Ford's guiding principles throughout his life was the belief that industry and agriculture should work hand-in-hand. Armed with his expertise in industry and manufacturing, Henry Ford sought to pursue his vision of creating a prosperous and self-sufficient, rural town and decided to enlist the country's leading expert in agricultural experimentation to help him navigate the nuances of the landscape, soils, and agricultural makeup of the Georgia coastline.



Henry Ford with George Washington Carver at the dedication ceremony of the George Washington Carver School in Richmond Hill, GA. c. 1940. Image Courtesy of the Richmond Hill Historical Society



George Washington Carver Examining Soy Fiber. Image Credit: From the collections of The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan.

At that time, George Washington Carver was a well-known and esteemed agricultural scientist who had recently published works on his agricultural experimentation through the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Carver, born into Slavery in Missouri during the Civil War, achieved a high school education while working as a farmhand in Kansas. Despite limited access to educational resources in his formative years, Carver was recognized at an early age for his intelligence and dedication to education and learning. His passion for learning was fueled by a desire to improve the life and livelihoods of “the man farthest down,” and sought to devise practical farming methods to improve yields, self-sufficiency, and soil health.

Struck by Carver's passion and similarly innovative mindset, Henry Ford quickly bonded with Carver over their mutual devotion to developing practical applications for new technologies and improving the livelihoods of those less fortunate. The two began planning regular visits to each other's research institutions in both Dearborn and Tuskegee and began sharing intellectual knowledge, research, and success stories. Excited by their work together, Ford invited Carver to visit him in Ways Station to advise him on local crop development and sustainable agricultural practices in coastal Georgia. Carver's expertise in soil conservation and alternative crops like peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans aligned well with Ford's vision for sustainable agriculture in the South.

Ford began investing heavily in the area to drive the union between industry and the local landscape, and to support the experimental farming practices developed and designed through their partnership. Ford established a farm, timber operations, and a sawmill, which not only bolstered the area's agricultural industry but also provided hundreds of jobs for the region's impoverished residents. Ford also established societal infrastructure to serve the residents of Ways Station and improve their cultural quality of life. He constructed a community house, kindergarten building, commissary, churches, a medical clinic, carpentry workshop, bakery, post office, and an Industrial Arts & Trades School, to name just a few.

The two men shared a fascination with alternative uses for crops, aiming to find innovative ways to utilize plant-based products in industry and everyday life. They experimented with hundreds of different crops in Ways Station, ultimately discovering that Iceberg Lettuce grew extremely well in the Coastal Georgia soil. Ford and Carver also experimented heavily with soybeans and their uses including in the textile industry. Ford eventually went so far as to construct a suit from soybeans and wore proudly it to showcase the infinite possibilities available through practical applications of experimental agriculture.

Forged in Steel Continued

The bond formed by Carver and Ford was forged through a great passion for helping others and belief in the natural environment provided contributions and advancements in agricultural techniques which not only benefited the community but also highlighted the importance and benefits of integrating scientific research with thoughtful development. Their collaboration symbolized a forward-thinking approach to merging agriculture and industry in the early 20th century. To honor Carver for all his support, knowledge, and friendship, Henry Ford constructed a school in 1939 to serve the educational needs of the African-American children of lower Bryan County. Ford named the school George Washington Carver, in his honor. Pictured below, are Carver and Ford at the dedication ceremony of the George Washington Carver School in 1940.

The efforts of Ford and Carver in Ways Station not only served as a catalyst for improving the lives and prosperity of the residents and community members of Ways Station but also completely redefined the physical and sociocultural landscape of the small town. Physical evidence of their activities remains visible today and stands proud as reminders of their formidable imprint not only on Way Stations industry, commerce, and agriculture but also on the well-being of its people. Ways Station was later renamed Richmond Hill in 1941, to honor this dedication and Richmond Hill continues to celebrate their contributions today, almost 100 years later. George Washington Carver and Henry Ford's physical impact on the area's architecture, infrastructure, and economy serve as reminders for generations to come of this dedication to the prosperity and well-being of this community, which went far beyond pure financial gain and economics. Though Carver passed away in 1942, and Ford soon after in 1947, the foundation they laid in the small town of Richmond Hill shaped the town's identity and set the community on a path of progress and ingenuity.



Students waiting to board the bus to the George Washington Carver School in Richmond Hill GA. c.1945. Image Courtesy of the Richmond Hill Historical Society

By arming his community members with skills, knowledge, and hope, Henry Ford revitalized a rural and impoverished community in Coastal Georgia through agriculture, industry, and education. Ford's dreams of creating a sustainable community that could prosper long after his influence passed were achieved through forging ahead-of-his-time partnerships, collaborative vision, and philanthropy. Their experiments in agriculture, rural development, and philanthropy continue to inspire and prove that progress in industry and progress in society, need not be mutually exclusive.

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Interested in learning more about Henry Ford & George Washington Carver's groundbreaking works? Visit the Richmond Hill Historical Society & Museum and become a member to stay apprised of all upcoming events. 2025 will mark the Centennial of Henry Ford's influence in Richmond Hill. We invite you to celebrate his vision with us at The Henry Ford Legacy Centennial Gala on February 22, 2025. Please join us as we honor the partnerships upon which our wonderful city was built.

Remembering the "Black City Hall": The Butler Street YMCA

by Maya Henry
African American Programs Graduate Research
Assistant, Georgia State University



The Men of Atlanta newsletter printed in 1932 on the Butler Street YMCA (Image on the left). Image courtesy of the Auburn Avenue Research Library. The Butler Street YMCA in 2024 (Image on the right). Photo credit to Kraig McClendon.

My twenty-two year long educational career began at my local YMCA in New Jersey. The YMCA or the Young Men's Christian Association is a worldwide non-profit movement for projects and services directed to all ages based on principles around strengthening the mind, body and spirit. As a product of the pre-k program at the YMCA, its health facilities and summer camp, I intimately know the positive impacts the YMCA has on children and families. I spent summers and afterschool sessions swimming, visiting museums like the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia PA, and playing soccer. Most known for recreational activities such as athletic teams, fitness classes for various age groups or perhaps its religious origins, the YMCA also had a political history. I discovered Atlanta's Historic Sweet Auburn District had a Black founded and operated YMCA to serve its community from 1894 – 2012 called the Butler Street YMCA. There were African American YMCAs?

¹ University of Minnesota Libraries, "African Americans and the YMCA (Archives and Special Collections)," libguides.umn.edu, 2003, Last updated Jun 17, 2024, University of Minnesota, <https://libguides.umn.edu/c.php?g=1088894&p=7940991#:~:text=By%20the%20mid-1920s%2C%2051%20city%20YMCA%20and%20an,students%20had%20been%20established%2C%20with%2028%2C000%20members%20nationwide>, (accessed November 12, 2024).

I also learned that only three of these Black YMCAs are still in operation today: Dearborn YMCA, Mobile, Alabama; Dryades YMCA, New Orleans, Louisiana; and West Broad Street YMCA, Savannah, Georgia. Four other Black YMCAs closed or combined with other YMCAs in the area during the 21st century including the Butler Street YMCA, Cannon Street YMCA, Charleston, South Carolina, Garner Road YMCA, Raleigh, North Carolina, and William A. Hunton Family YMCA, Norfolk, Virginia¹. This information inspired me to learn more about the significance of the Butler Street YMCA, located in downtown Atlanta, and where its future is headed.

The Butler Street YMCA was started in the basement of the Wheat Street Baptist Church in 1894. The idea was conceived by J.S. Brandon along with his sister-in-law, Hattie Askidge, as the organist, both in elected roles.² The organization operated in the church until the property on Butler Street was purchased for \$10,609 in 1918, after the second elected president, W. J. Trent, started a campaign to raise money for a building in 1909.³ The new building cost \$115,000 and was designed by the architects Hentz, Reid, and Adler in the Georgian Revival and Federal style. The 10,000 square foot structure was constructed by prominent African American builder Alexander. D. Hamilton.⁴

² "Butler Street YMCA," [Sweetauburn.us](http://sweetauburn.us/ymca.htm), <http://sweetauburn.us/ymca.htm>, Internet Archive, March 6, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160306035452/http://sweetauburn.us/ymca.htm>, (accessed October 9, 2024).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Asanta, Molefi K., and Mark T. Mattson, "The Butler YMCA (Atlanta) Is Founded," *African American Registry*, (accessed October 5, 2024). (accessed October 5, 2024).

The Butler Street YMCA Continued

Hamilton was responsible for buildings at Morehouse College and the 1922, post-fire re-construction of Big Bethel AME Church.⁵ The YMCA included 48 dormitory rooms, 7 classrooms, a small auditorium, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, shower baths, a café and restrooms.⁶ Since the YMCA was constructed in 1920, it remained a staple in Black political, cultural, recreation, and social life. In 1920, Major Robert Russa Moton, principal of Tuskegee Institute, dedicated the Butler Street YMCA. The first president of the YMCA in the new building was Dr. Henry R. Butler (1862-1931), who the street was later named after.⁷ His medical practice was located on Auburn Avenue and served as the first Black owned pharmacy in Georgia. Butler's medical practice lasted 40 years on Auburn Avenue. He served in various leadership positions and created health organizations important to African Americans.

In 1942, A. T. Walden and John Wesley Dobbs started The Hungry Club Forum, which originated as a secret organization and later became more widely known as a liaison between the black community and white elected officials. The club's motto was: "Food for taste and food for thought for those who hunger for information and association".⁸

⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Minnesota Libraries, Butler Street YMCA Records, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, (accessed November, 12, 2024).

⁷ "6 Interesting Things You May Not Know about African Americans and the YMCA," YMCA of Metro Atlanta, <https://ymcaatlanta.org/blog/6-interesting-things-you-may-not-know-about-african-americans-and-ymca>, (accessed September 25, 2024).

⁸ Asanta, Molefi K., and Mark T. Mattson, "The Butler YMCA (Atlanta) Is Founded," African American Registry, (accessed October 5, 2022).

SCHEDULE OF SPEAKERS	
September	KICK-OFF Ivan Allen, Jr. Mayor, City of Atlanta
October	6 - Mrs. Frances Pauley Georgia Council on Human Relations
13	Dr. Horace Mann Bond Dean, School of Education, Atlanta University
20	Charles L. Weltner, Fifth District Representative, United States Congress
27	Dr. Herman Long President Talladega College
November	3 - OPEN
10	Pauli Georgia State Representative
17	OPEN
24	Dr. Benjamin E. Mays President Morehouse College
December	1 - OPEN
8	Dr. John W. Lelton Superintendent Atlanta Public Schools
15	Dr. M. L. King, Jr., President Southern Christian Leadership Conference

The second page of a Hungry Club brochure from 1965-1966. The brochure lists the goals of the forum as well as planned speakers for the season such as Ivan Allen Jr., the Mayor of Atlanta, Dr. Horace Mann Bond Dean, School of Education, Atlanta University, Charles L. Weltner, Fifth District Representative, United States Congress, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays President, Morehouse College, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. President of SCLC. Courtesy of Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.



Photo taken outside the Butler Street YMCA with prominent figures in the Hungry Club. Photo includes A.T. Walden at the bottom center. Courtesy of Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.



Photos taken inside the Butler Street YMCA at a Hungry Club Banquet. Patrons sit at sponsored tables to encourage the membership campaign. Courtesy of Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

The bipartisan group had prominent speakers such as Civil Rights Movement leaders, politicians, mayors such as the first Black mayor in Atlanta, Maynard Jackson (grandson of John Wesley Dobbs), in addition to local and state politicians, writers, and religious leaders including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and King Sr., Vernon Jackson, and Langston Hughes.⁹ This organization served as an important space for African Americans to discuss political issues that affected their community and organize their vote into a powerful voting bloc in Atlanta, earning it the monicker, "Black city hall". Plus, African Americans were able to influence white politicians to vote in their favor by leveraging their collective power through the Hungry Club.

In 1949, lawyer A.T. Walden (Democrat) and John Wesley Dobbs (Republican) created the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) and regularly meet at the Butler Street YMCA. In 1949, the All Citizens Registration Committee formed to register and amplify the power of African American voters.¹⁰ In 1949, 1953, and 1957 ANVL played a vital role in electing Hartsfield and other moderate white politicians, but 1953 marked a shift. In 1953, ANVL recruited Black candidates for elections. Rufus Clement, president of Atlanta University, which later became Clark Atlanta University, was a league candidate and beat a white incumbent on the Atlanta Board of Education. A Black pharmacist named Miles G. Amos, also won a seat on the city Democratic executive committee due to the support of ANVL and political organizing at the Butler Street YMCA.¹¹

⁹ The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "King, Sr., Speaks at Butler Street YMCA in Atlanta | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute." Archive. kinginstitute.stanford.edu, April 9, 1936.

¹⁰ Asanta, Molefi K., and Mark T. Mattson, "The Butler YMCA (Atlanta) Is Founded," African American Registry, (accessed October 5, 2022).

The Butler Street YMCA Continued

As other important Black institutions were forming such as WERD radio located in the Prince Hall Masons Grand Lodge at 334 Auburn Avenue, WERD radio station was the first created and operated by African Americans.¹² John Wesley Dobbs and A.T. Walden, along with Black voters, were able to pressure Atlanta Mayor Hartsfield to hire African American police officers after playing a large role in mobilizing the Black community toward his election. These officers were hired in 1948, and operated out of the Butler Street YMCA instead of the precinct.¹³ In a time when Atlanta was dubbed “the city too busy to hate” despite the limited resources for officers, violent attacks, attempted murders, and racially motivated restrictions on the jurisdiction of African American officers.¹⁴ The first Black police officers were sworn in April 3, 1948.¹⁵

¹¹ Williams, Louis. “Atlanta Negro Voters League,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified May 4, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/atlanta-negro-voters-league-anvl/>, (accessed November 11, 2024).

¹² Etling, Laurence. “WERD,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Aug 24, 2020, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/werd/>, (accessed November 11, 2024).

¹³ “The ‘YMCA’ Cops,” *National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund*, July 12, 2021, <https://nleomf.org/the-ymca-cops/>, (accessed November 11, 2024).

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ 42 “History of the APD | Atlanta Police Department,” <https://www.atlantapd.org/about-apd/apd-history>, (accessed September 25, 2024).



Atlanta's first eight African American officers. From left, front: Henry Hooks, Claude Dixon, Ernest H. Lyons; back: Robert McKibbens, Willard Strickland, Willie T. Elkins, Johnnie P. Jones, and John Sanders. Photograph courtesy of Thomas Mullen of Atlanta Magazine/Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center

Their names were Henry Hooks, Claude Dixon, Ernest H. Lyons, Robert McKibbens, Willard Strickland, Willie T. Elkins, Johnnie P. Jones, and John Sanders. They were mostly WWII veterans their position after the political activism of the Hungry Club.¹⁶ These young men, between the ages of 21 and 32, operated in the basement of the Butler Street YMCA but had many limitations. The men were unable to drive squad cars, work from the local precinct, patrol white neighborhoods, or arrest white people even if they witnessed a white citizen committing a crime. In this Situation they were forced to call for back up. Their main focus in their early policing was to diminish crimes related to bootlegging and public drunkenness, playing on old stereotypes of African Americans as drunkards or debaucherous. With little respect or resources from the city, these eight officers also faced a death threat in which a fellow white officer offered \$200 to a member of the public if they could kill one of the Black officers. Other white Atlanta officers leaned into stereotypes about African American men by spreading rumors about witnessing the policemen drinking alcohol while on patrol. Almost half of these officers quit the force after their first year. By 1953, African American police integrated into the local precinct and were able to arrest white citizens by 1963. Some African Americans in the historic Sweet Auburn neighborhood did not trust the officers or see them as a positive force in the community, evidencing a history of negative perceptions and experiences with police in African American communities. Others celebrated the new officers by forming a crowd of 400 the day they were sworn in.¹⁷

The YMCA served as a hub for the activism necessary to hire these eight black officers and for the larger Civil Rights Movement that led to the eventual integration of the force. The Butler Street YMCA remained a pillar in Atlanta's African American community well into the 1990s but faced a decline in the early 2010s. Closing operations in 2012, the YMCA's historic building remains intact today with future plans for development according to Wisconsin based developers, Gorman and Company. The Butler Street YMCA is included in phase two of their development plan for Sweet Auburn titled Sweet Auburn Grande. The plan is to restore the historic building for both community and commercial use in part funded by the \$3 Million provided by the Atlanta Boards and Commissions.¹⁸

¹⁶ “The ‘YMCA’ Cops.” *National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund*, July 12, 2021, <https://nleomf.org/the-ymca-cops/>, (accessed November 12, 2024).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Green, Josh, “Sweet Auburn Project Scores 3M,” *Urbanize Atlanta*, March 22, 2024, (accessed November 12, 2024).

The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) was established in January 1989. It is composed of representatives from neighborhood organizations and preservation groups. GAAHPN was formed in response to a growing interest in preserving the cultural and built diversity of Georgia's African American heritage. This interest has translated into a number of efforts which emphasize greater recognition of African American culture and contributions to Georgia's history. The GAAHPN Steering Committee plans and implements ways to develop programs that will foster heritage education, neighborhood revitalization, and support community and economic development.



The Network is an informal group of over 5,000 people who have an interest in preservation. Members are briefed on the status of current and planned projects and are encouraged to offer ideas, comments and suggestions. The meetings provide an opportunity to share and learn from the preservation experience of others and to receive technical information through workshops. Members receive a newsletter, Reflections, produced by the Network. Visit the Historic Preservation Division website at www.dca.georgia.gov Preservation information and previous issues of Reflections are available online. Membership in the Network is free and open to all. Sign up here!

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Reflections

Published quarterly by the Historic
Preservation Division Georgia
Department of Community
Affairs
Jennifer Dixon, Division Director
Mary Wilson Joseph, Editor

This publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, through the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or consultants constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, or if you desire more information, write to: Office for Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.