

# Reflections

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The March 2025 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](#).

**GAAHPN has a new website!** You can find all things historic preservation and history at [www.gaahpn.org](http://www.gaahpn.org). From GAAHPN'S history to current events, to archived issues of *Reflections*, it's a one-stop shop for those interested in Black history and preservation in Georgia. Let us know what you think! Email us at [gaahpnhistory@gmail.com](mailto:gaahpnhistory@gmail.com)

You may view the issue here, titled [March 2025 Reflections](#). This month you will find:

- Read about *Georgia Full Story*, a project sponsored by the Georgia Historic Preservation Division to aid individuals in nominating African American resources to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Learn about the work of master storyteller, Georgia Smith in Eatonton, Georgia and her preservation work at the Uncle Remus Museum.
- Celebrate the previous beneficiaries of the Georgia Centennial Farm program.

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Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Community Affairs



# Reflections

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## Georgia's Full Story

By Rebecca Fenwick,  
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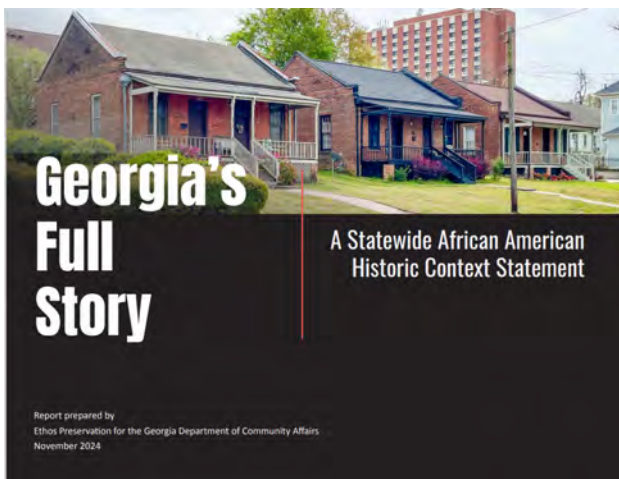
Recently published, *Georgia's Full Story* is the premiere reference document for anyone looking to nominate a resource with African American significance to the National Register of Historic Places, supplementing *African-American Historic Places and Culture: A Preservation Resource Guide* completed in 1993 and *Historic Black Resources* from 1984. The two-year project was funded with state and federal funding from the Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Federal funding was provided via the the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service. The culmination of two years of work, the document provides a narrative of Georgia's Black history through 1985, outlines building and resource typologies indicative of the African American experience in Georgia, provides guidance regarding National Register criteria specific to Black resources, and includes five case studies, each of which represents a

distinctive resource type in a different geographical area of the state. The National Register of Historic Places is our nation's official list of historic properties that are worthy of preservation.

Authored by Savannah-based Ethos Preservation, the project incorporated the contributions of many, including a ten-member paid advisory committee made up of individuals with lived experience preserving Black places from across the state, some of whom are members of GAAPHN. The committee aided the team with valuable feedback as editors, provided guidance related to terminology and approach, assisted with the identification of historic places and contacts, contributed up-to-date photography documenting historic places across the state, and promoted the project within the wider statewide community.

Importantly, the document addresses common challenges that arise when listing historic Black places to the National Register. For example, while not exclusively unique to the Black experience, the reuse of materials and the alteration of buildings is often a part of the story and evolution of Black places. At times seen as a hindrance to understanding a building's original configuration or materials (i.e. its "architectural integrity"), the document outlines how change can be indicative of the cultural practice of building modernization and the evolution of a place. Black churches, for example, were commonly built as frame buildings with wood siding. Many were updated in the 1950s and 60s through the application of brick veneer. When placed in context, such alterations can contribute to the historical integrity of a place, for example, when considering the important role many churches played in the modern Civil Rights movement.

Integral to project success was outreach and engagement. The document's title spurred the printing of "Help Tell the Full Story" wearable buttons, social media engagement, and the creation of [www.georgiasfullstory.com](http://www.georgiasfullstory.com), where a survey was made available for the sharing of stories and uploading of photos and other documents for inclusion in the report.



Cover page of the "Georgia Full Story" Report

## Georgia Full Story *Continued*

Shared by Karen Stewart-Ross, one submission tells the story of a historic African American family settlement founded at what is now known as Possum Trot located on the campus of present-day Berry College in Rome. In 1874, during Reconstruction, Stewart-Ross' fourth great-grandparents Hardy Shelton, a farmer who was born enslaved in 1818 in North Carolina, and his wife, Mary Bearden Shelton, formerly enslaved in Georgia, purchased 120 acres of land in the Flatwoods area of Floyd County near the Possum Trot Church. That land would expand to nearly 200 acres. Together they raised twelve children with some of their descendants acquiring additional property at Possum Trot expanding the family's landholdings to over 600 acres. The settlement lasted until 1924 and the Sheltons' last known family member was buried in the family's cemetery, the former Possum Trot Cemetery, in 1954. 2024 marked the 150th anniversary of the family settlement. As a result of many years of descendant advocacy and engagement, including attending the former annual Possum Trot Homecoming and collaborating with Berry College, in 2021, the site received a historical marker and the cemetery was renamed the Shelton Family Cemetery. Today, this community is remembered and celebrated through reunions held at Berry College and through the continued work of descendant-founded non-profit organizations. On January 30, in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the settlement, one such organization, the Shelton Heritage Society of Georgia and Historic Possum Trot, led by Stewart-Ross, will sponsor an event titled "For the Love of Family and Community: The Seven Lessons of Possum Trot." The event will premiere on Zoom. For more info visit <https://www.sheltonheritagesociety.org>.



*Georgia's Full Story Advisory Committee members gather at the Georgia State Historic Preservation Conference in 2023. Members pictured: Angie Gibson and Joyce Law. Image credit to Ethos Preservation*

By gathering these types of submissions, the work of understanding and interpreting the parameters of the National Register specific to Black places in Georgia is humanized. What we know today is that much of the published historical record does not represent the full story of our past. It is our hope that *Georgia's Full Story* aids those working to preserve Black places so that generations to come can benefit from a National Register that is reflective of our collective history. At a time when significant grant and tax incentive dollars are contingent on National Register listing, the importance of the National Register designation cannot be overstated.

GAAPHN has generously offered to continue the work of gathering stories through [www.georgiasfullstory.com](http://www.georgiasfullstory.com) which will continue to live on now that the project is complete. Anyone interested in reading Georgia's Full Story can access at <http://dca.georgia.gov/document/document/georgias-full-story/download>.



*The historically African American New Hope Baptist Church in Cave Springs, one example where brick veneer was applied to a historically wood framed church. Image credit to Brian Brown*



*Robin Echols Fahmi, a descendant, advisor to Ethos Preservation, and a member of the Sankofa Advisory Council is reading an inspirational speech at the historical marker unveiling held on August 6, 2022. Image credit to Brant Sanderlin of Berry College.*



## Preserving the Briar Patch: the Uncle Remus Museum and the Woman Who Gives it Life

By Maya Henry  
Community Outreach Programs Graduate  
Research Assistant, Georgia State University



*Photo of the Uncle Remus Museum taken by the author*

I parked my car, alongside my Georgia History classmates, at the famed Uncle Remus Museum for the first time in November 2024. Having grown up in New Jersey, I've largely avoided places that look exactly like what it is, two or three slave cabins stitched together in Putnam County.<sup>1</sup> As we walked up to the museum, we saw an older African American woman sitting outside the museum, which opened April 21, 1963.<sup>2</sup> She informed us she was just celebrating her 84th birthday. We learned she was married 65 years, has 6 of her own children, 15 grandchildren, 18 great grandchildren, and 2 great-great grandchildren. We also learned that she was the first Black person to desegregate the hospital in Putnam County as she worked in the medical field for over 30 years including during the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s. When our professor spoke of her accomplishments she retorted "I'm gonna take the 5th, I'm gonna take the 6th and I might even take the 7th." We followed Ms. Georgia Smith into the museum and headed to the Turner Wing, an ode to the relationship between famed author, Joel Chandler Harris and planter Joseph Addison Turner. Harris was a printer's devil for Turner's Confederate newspaper.

It contains artifacts from Turner's life and home, along with a reproduction of his desk and an original from the plantation. As we sat in a room surrounded by artifacts from

Turner's family and works from his newspaper, Georgia Smith, a master storyteller, walked us through some of her early childhood where she sharpened her skills as a self-described "sweet con." Her first hustle was getting her way out of sweeping her grandmother's yard and earning her "PhD in common sense" just like Br'er Rabbit. She recalled seeing the recreation of a slave cabin at the courthouse square where Uncle Remus would tell critter tales. She noticed something funny about Uncle Remus as he had a dark face but white hands. Her suspicions were confirmed when one day, Georgia and her grandmother were exiting the local pharmacy, and she recognized the pharmacist's voice when he said "bye Georgia." Ms. Georgia was appalled to find out three different men played Uncle Remus: two Black and one white. Yes, white Uncle Remus told stories outside the Putnam County courthouse in blackface. But a sweet con always has the last laugh as Ms. Georgia had the opportunity to inform the white "Uncle Remus's" daughter of his double life as both storyteller and town pharmacist. His daughter was shocked to hear this but for Ms. Georgia, Uncle Remus is bigger than the person who plays him.

## Preserving the Briar Patch: *Continued*

Uncle Remus stories represent the folktales told by people of African descent: stories that do not begin and end with Joel Chandler Harris, the Uncle Remus Museum or Walt Disney's 1946 film *Song of the South*. Many of the stories also exist in various cultures with similar characters and plotlines such as Anansi Plays Dead from West Africa or the Rabbit and the Tar Wolf originating among the Cherokee people.<sup>3</sup> The character Br'er Rabbit and his stories resemble the trickster character represented by a talking hare or spider Anansi from Akan folklore in present-day Ghana.<sup>4</sup> In the African American folk tradition, the Br'er Rabbit often represents an enslaved African outsmarting whites in positions of power and using wit to do so.

Although these critter tales predate enslavement, they have become an important staple in African American culture, history and storytelling. These stories took on new meaning during and after the antebellum period as Anansi and Br'er Rabbit were not always heroes but sometimes a victim to their own actions. Now African American storytellers and historians have collected these stories and reclaimed them for various audiences. For example, Karima Amin created a children's book titled *Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends* and scholars Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Maria Tatar compiled *The Annotated African American Folktales* in 2017. The children's book being inspired by the personal family stories of the author and Joel Chandler Harris's written work, while the latter critiqued the legacy of Harris and aimed to establish a literary folk canon that predated slavery and incorporated both African and Caribbean lore. The illustrated book is available at the front of the museum for visitors to look through. Ms. Georgia mentioned another African American author during our visit named Julius Lester who wrote the stories for a young audience called *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*. No matter where one starts, the stories remain worth reading and preserving for modern audiences.

The Uncle Remus Museum contains an eclectic collection of wood carved scenes from the "Uncle Remus stories" such as the Tar Baby in the front of the museum. There are dolls and figurines of various characters like Aunt Minervy Ann, Harris's interpretation of an enslaved woman, Uncle Remus, a composite character of enslaved story tellers, and the critters. The museum contains copies of Harris's works translated into other languages such as German and Japanese from visitors Ms. Georgia charmed. There are photographs of the cast of *Song of the South* signed by Walt Disney at the front of the museum and various artifacts related to Harris's life along with iron antiques from the antebellum period in the county. Overall, the museum is a memorial to the famed writer, Joel Chandler Harris, credited with being the first person to write down the critter tales native to the African American community.<sup>5</sup>



*Image of Br'er Rabbit outside the Putnam County Clerk of Courts. Image captured by the author.*

Like Ms. Georgia, Harris grew up in a working family in the town of Eatonton with a zeal for reading. Harris originally wrote these stories in *The Atlanta Constitution* (now The Atlanta Journal-Constitution) after years of listening to the stories of the enslaved Africans who labored and lived at the Turnwold Plantation.<sup>6</sup> These stories were compiled and published by Harris in 1881 as *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*. Joel Chandler Harris's writing career began when he apprenticed under the planter, Joseph Addison Turner for his Confederate newspaper, the *Countryman* from ages 16-20 (1862-1866) at the Turnwold Plantation. It is important to note that Uncle Remus is not a real historical figure, but he represents the griot or storyteller in an American context. There is a West African proverb that says, "when a griot dies, it's like a library burned down." Ms. Georgia reflected on growing up with the village concept where elders looked after the young regardless of race and household. She remarked that every household had storytellers where children could listen and hear both these stories and hear "the dialect". The dialect refers to the language of African Americans in Georgia that combines aspects of West African languages and English.<sup>7</sup>



## Preserving the Briar Patch: *Continued*

Ms. Georgia works tirelessly to preserve the critter tales and shares them with any audience that will listen. She sat down with graduate students in my Georgia History class to tell us the story of how Br'er Rabbit lost his tail because he was boastful and too proud. She told the same story to children, teens, and adults at her organization's, Mothers Against Crime, event in December of 2024. The organization is a multi-racial coalition of mothers who work to reduce the crime rate in their community through all ages events and free giveaways of food and clothing. I witnessed her command at the holiday event as even Santa Claus knew who she was before they formally met. Santa Claus told Ms. Georgia, "Your reputation precedes you" and received his orders from her for the day's plans. Her partnerships span throughout the state of Georgia, the country and internationally. Her loyalties though, remain with Eatonton first as she volunteers her time on Thursdays and Fridays to share stories and the history of Joel Chandler Harris.

**\*\*Information for the article was gathered from class field trip to the Uncle Remus Museum through Professor Glenn Eskew's Georgia History class for Fall 2024, an oral history interview with Georgia Smith conducted by the author in December 6, 2024 and a December 7, 2024 visit.**



***Image of: Ms Georgia Smith (left) and young people at the Mothers Against Crime Christmas Event on December 7, 2024 (right). Images captured by the author***

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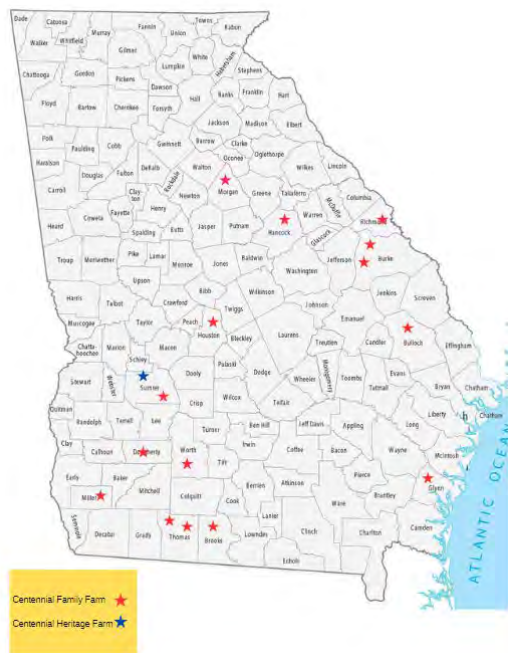
- <sup>1</sup> Historic sign erected by Uncle Remus Museum Inc. in 1977, Located at the Uncle Remus Museum, 214 S. Oak Street, Eatonton, GA.
- <sup>2</sup> Information provided by the Uncle Remus Museum.
- <sup>3</sup> James Mooney, ed., "The Rabbit and the Tar Wolf" from *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 272-73, The Successor to the Cherokee Phoenix, the Cherokee Advocate was published at the Tahlequah following the removal of the nation from Georgia to Indian Territory.
- <sup>4</sup> Christopher K. Starr, 1999, Anansi the Spider-Man: A West African Tricker in the West Indies, Presented at the 23rd Annual Meeting of the American Arachnological Society, LOCATION, MONTH, DAY University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, <http://www.ckstarr.net/cks/1999-ANANSI.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> Walker, Alice. Southern Exposure, Festival: Celebrating Southern Literature, 9, no. No.2 (1981): 29–31, <https://www.facingsouth.org/1981/08/uncle-remus-no-friend-mine>.
- <sup>6</sup> Bickley, R. "Joel Chandler Harris." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Dec 2, 2019, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/joel-chandler-harris-1845-1908/>
- <sup>7</sup> Information derived from an oral history interview conducted by the author with Georgia Smith on 12/6/24.

## Georgia's Centennial Farm Program Showcases the Extraordinary African American Agrarian Legacy

By Dr. Veronica Womack,  
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at Georgia College & State University

Since 1993, over six hundred and thirty farms have been recognized through the Georgia Centennial Farm program. Agriculture has been, and continues to be, an important sector within the state, playing a significant role in rural communities. There is a vital need to document the many contributions of African Americans to developing and sustaining the sector. It is also crucial that African American farm history and agrarian traditions within the state be recorded. The Georgia Centennial Farm award program provides an excellent opportunity to do so. The important story of African American farms serve as a testament to the remarkable quest of African Americans for freedom and self-determination.

The Georgia Centennial Farm program recognizes farms that are nominated through the self-application process. Nominees must be a working farm with a minimum of 10 acres of the original purchase, actively involved in agricultural production, and generate at least \$1,000 in annual farm-generated income. In addition, farms must have been continuously farmed by members of the same family for at least 100 years or be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Map: African American Centennial Farm Award Recipients 1993-2022

Between 1993-2022, it is estimated that only 15 African American owned farms have received the honor, as exhibited in the map. The most recent 2022 Agricultural census reveals 1,743 Black or African American farms within the state, less than 5 percent of farms. These facts highlight the urgency of their participation in the award program. The Georgia Centennial Farm award program supports three distinct awards including the Centennial Heritage Farm Award, the Centennial Farm Award, and the Centennial Family Farm award, each with differing requirements. Almost all African American awardees so far have received the Centennial Family Farm Award, which requires ownership by family members for 100 years or more. Only one recipient, the Carranza Morgan's Farm, in Sumter county, has received the Heritage Farm Award, which requires family ownership for a century and listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Highlighted by Map 1, most award winning farms are geographically located within the Black Belt region of Georgia, often characterized by a large Black enslaved population in 1860. For example, Gilliard Farms, a 2012 award recipient, is located in Glynn county, which had a Black enslaved population of 73 percent in 1860. Thomas county, home of two awardees, the Lewis Clark Farm (1996) and the Kentavia Williams Farm (2013) had a 58 percent Black enslaved population in 1860.

While each farm is distinct, they are all places of extraordinary ingenuity, often documented in the pages of *Reflections*, local and state media, family stories, as well as legal documents such as wills, tax records, and business licenses. The farm families have commonalities such as exceptional innovation, resilience, strong family ties, and community dedication as core values.



Image of John Rountree and Emma Jane Rountree  
provided by the applicants.

## Georgia's Centennial Program Award *Continued*

The business acumen of the owners through the years was evidenced in their focus on efficiency and multiple sources of income. For example, the Reverend James Fowler farm was noted as having been the first to gin a bale of cotton, in Worth County. The Thompson Family farm (2019) in Richmond County, is the oldest African American owned business in the county and its largest commodity farm. Various businesses were also launched on these farms such as the general store and one pump gas station on the Garfield Hall Farm (2010) in Bulloch County, providing financial diversity for the farm and additional services to the community. These farms also served as support to African American churches, birthing historic Springfield Baptist Church in Hancock County on the Zach and Camillia Hubert farm (2002), the Plainview Baptist Church in Morgan County on the Charleston Allen Farm (2010), and the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church on the Carranza Morgan's Farm (2001) in Sumter County. Acting as instruments of school construction, these awardees were critical in providing access to education for the African American community. The Springfield school on the Zach and Camillia Hubert farm, was listed as the first school in Georgia to offer trade and high school to African Americans. Serving a similar purpose was the Union School on the Gilliard Farm in Glynn County, which was the first school for Black students in the area. Reflective of their time, some of these awardees served as places of extreme violence such as the L&M Kinder Farm (2005) in Miller County where death threats were made against male family members during the 1950s, or the Garfield Hall Farm (2010) where the KKK burned a cross to curtail civil rights activities during the 1960s. In contrast, these farms also provided sacred resting places for family members, exhibited by those buried on the Gough Family Farm (2022) in Burke county.

Exceptional leadership was also displayed by farm owners. Leaders like John Rountree, from the John Rountree and Emma Jane Rountree Farm (1994) in Brooks County, who served as the General Secretary of a community mutual aid society that assisted persons who were ill and with burial needs in his community, or Benjamin Hubert of the Zach and Camillia Hubert farm, who became president of Georgia State College, known today as Savannah State University. These farm leaders were not only important to their family farm, but also to the communities they represented. These farm owners have proven over time to be very adaptable and resilient to sector changes such as present day owners of the Titus Stephens farm (2014) which has a focus on agritourism and land conservation today.

An often overlooked contribution of these farms is their influence on Southern foodways and cultural traditions. For example, the David Toomer Estate (2001) traditionally grew blackberries, pecans, figs, walnuts, and other natural delights, and the Cooper Family Farm (2014) raised cows, pigs, and peanuts, all staples at the Southern table. All of these awardees produced cultural harvests. They frequently grew corn, peanuts, pecans, sweet potatoes, peas, collards, rice, turnips, okra, fruits such as watermelon, peaches, pears, apples, plums, figs, and sugar cane, as well as wheat, and rye, all resulting in varying preparation techniques such as syrup production, canning, and preserves. The ownership of hogs, cows, chickens, goats, turkeys, and guineas resulted in community hog killings and barbecues, festivals, bartering and sharing, church revivals and homecomings, all supported by these farms and the farmers, who served as culture keepers.

The need to preserve the rich agricultural legacy of African American farms in the state is important and the Georgia Centennial Farms Award program is an excellent way to achieve this goal. Applications can be found on the Georgia Historic Preservation Division Website. The application deadline is May 1, 2025. For more information please contact, The Georgia Historic Preservation Division at outreach@dca.ga.gov. The Georgia Centennial Farm program is administered by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Georgia Farm Bureau Federation; Georgia Department of Agriculture; Georgia EMC; Georgia National Fair and Agricenter and University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Qualifying Georgia Centennial Farms are honored each October at an awards ceremony at the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter in Perry.

\*\* Sources for the article come from past *Reflection* newsletters by GAAHPN, and information provided by DCA.





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. 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

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