

# Reflections



A Program of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Volume V, No. 1

February 2005



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

## PRESERVING GOSPEL PILGRIM CEMETERY

**G**ospel Pilgrim Cemetery is located in Athens on a nine-acre site in an African American neighborhood known as East Athens. The cemetery boundaries include Fourth Street, Springfield Baptist Church, Hillcrest Cemetery and a CSX railroad line. The main entrance to the cemetery is on Fourth Street, where a series of unpaved roads slope in a curvilinear pattern ending at the railroad tracks. Many gravestones of prominent African Americans lie along the main road, interspersed with family and individual plots of various sizes.

The Gospel Pilgrim Society was an African American organization that was established to meet the needs of the community for burials in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though the primary purpose of the society was burial insurance, medical and disability benefits were offered to members. By 1919, approximately 75% of the African American community belonged to the Gospel Pilgrim Society or other lodges that provided burials and life insurance. Members paid dues amounting to ten cents weekly to ensure a funeral and proper burial in the cemetery. Families assumed responsibility for maintenance of plots, and visited gravesites on birthdays, Sundays and holidays. The society had no formal perpetual care program, but maintained the site continuously until the last member, Alfred Hill, died in the early 1970s.

The site is densely wooded and reflects the gradual change of the community from an agricultural to urban setting. In 1882, when the Gospel Pilgrim Society purchased 8.25 acres for the cemetery, the community was agrarian. By 1902, the society purchased an additional .75 acres, and sold some land to construct Springfield Baptist Church in 1905. The site is covered with mature trees that accentuate its wooded

appearance. Today, the site is on a major road surrounded by homes and social services that links the East Athens community to downtown businesses. Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery remained the principal Athens cemetery for African Americans until the 1970s, when integration presented new burial options for the community.



*The Morton family plot is enclosed by a chain link fence. (Lockart)*

Athens. With little formal education, Morton started a contracting business, and became a leading politician during Reconstruction. In 1896, Morton was selected as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, and was a member of the committee that informed

William McKinley of his nomination as the party's presidential candidate. Morton was appointed as the U.S. Postmaster in Athens in 1897, and became the second African American to hold that post. After five years in office, Morton renewed his construction business, and built numerous homes and commercial buildings in Athens that still exist today. His most significant legacy was the Morton Building and Theatre. Many African American doctors and dentists maintained their offices in the



*The landscape of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery consists of numerous mature trees surrounding gravesites along unpaved roads. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

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## PRESERVING GOSPEL PILGRIM CEMETERY

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*One of Monroe "Pink" Morton's descendants' gravestone is shaped like a tree. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

of this area, where African Americans received medical treatment during segregation. At night, it became the center of African American entertainment.

Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is the final resting place for two African American legislators who served during the turbulent Reconstruction Era. Alfred Richardson was born enslaved in Walton County around 1837. After emancipation, Richardson worked as a grocer, and later became a carpenter. In 1867, Richardson became a member of the Union League, a leading proponent of national suffrage. The Union League advocated for voting rights for African Americans. Because of his radical politics, Richardson was often a target for the Ku Klux Klan. In one incident, he was shot and believed dead when the Klan attempted to burn his home. Richardson survived the ordeal, and was elected to the Georgia General Assembly in 1868. He was re-elected for a second term, but died in 1872.

The other African American legislator who emerged during Reconstruction with Alfred Richardson was Madison Davis. Like Richardson, Madison Davis was born enslaved to an

Morton Building, while the theatre became a major vaudeville house. When the theatre opened in 1910, the *Athens Daily Herald* described it as the "largest building of its kind owned exclusively by a colored man in the world."

Some of the doctors who worked in the Morton building were Farris and Albon Jackson, and the dentist Burnett L. Jackson. These physicians provided services in the African American commercial district known as "Hot Corner." The Morton Building was the cornerstone



*The graves of the Jackson doctors are among the largest family plots in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery.*



*This is the grave of Madison Davis, one of Athens' first African American legislators during Reconstruction.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

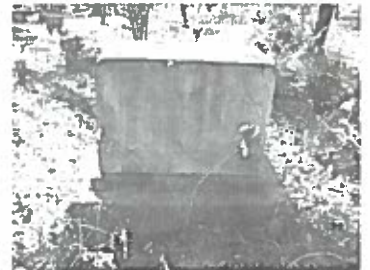
Athens carriage maker in 1833. He began his political career in 1867 as a delegate to the state constitutional convention and was elected to the General Assembly the following year. When 26 African Americans were expelled from the Georgia Assembly in 1868 because of their race, Davis and three others remained due to their light skin color. He served two terms in the legislature and was Athens' first African American postmaster.

William A. Pledger was born near Jonesboro in 1852. Like Monroe Morton, he was the offspring of an enslaved mother and white planter. Pledger attended Atlanta University and emerged as a lawyer, newspaper publisher and political leader. When he came to Athens, he and William H. Heard co-founded the *Athens Blade*, a weekly African American tabloid that discussed racial injustice. Pledger's political career included continuous service as a Georgia delegate at-large to the Republican National Convention from 1876-1900.

A number of African American educators are interred at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. Samuel F. Harris, who completed all requirements at the University of Georgia, was denied a degree due to his race, in spite of the support of the white community. Local businessmen rallied to send him to Morris Brown College, where he was awarded a master's degree. He began his teaching career at the West Broad Street School in Athens, and, while principal, introduced vocational education to the curriculum. By 1917, Harris was principal of the Athens High and Industrial School. Under his leadership, it became the first accredited African American public secondary school in Georgia.

Annie Smith Derricotte was one of Athens' leading African American teachers. She was a graduate of Atlanta University and taught at Knox Institute, one of Georgia's first schools established by the Freedmen's Bureau. She later started her own normal school to prepare others for teaching careers.

When the Gospel Pilgrim Society ceased operations in the 1970s, individual family visitation and maintenance declined, and Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery gradually deteriorated. By 1986, the community began efforts to remove debris from the site. In 2002, Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was so neglected that community volunteers removed 30 tons of garbage from the site. At that time, the City of Athens and the East Athens Development Corporation (EADC) began a series of preservation initiatives. A metal gate was installed in 2003 to limit trespassing in the cemetery. EADC enlisted the services of The Jaeger Company and Southeastern Archaeological Services to develop a master plan for cemetery preservation. The archaeological investigation documented 100 marked graves and estimated up to 3,000 unmarked graves from depressions throughout the cemetery.



*William Pledger's gravestone is located near the main entrance to Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The master plan outlined a number of phases to address cemetery cleanup, security and maintenance of the site. Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery created an opportunity for new jobs in the community, and the Georgia Department of Labor awarded a \$100,000 grant to create six permanent landscaping jobs and 12 temporary jobs to support masonry projects like the stone entrance and gravestone repairs.

The Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) coordinated the process for selecting project consultants who developed the master plan. Burke Walker, the RDC historic preservation planner, is particularly proud of a grant they received from the Georgia Forestry Commission to hire a certified arborist to assess the site. The RDC nominated EADC for an award that achieved national recognition for their preservation initiative from the National Association of Development Organizations.

With the sponsorship of Athens-Clarke County and EADC, Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was listed in the Georgia Register of Historic Places, and a National Register nomination is pending. Currently, Winston Heard, executive director of EADC, is implementing the second phase of the master plan that will reclaim the cemetery's walking trails that inform the public about this sacred place, a treasure of Athens' African American past.

## MASTER PLAN REVITALIZES EAST ATHENS CEMETERY

*Brian W. LaBrie  
The Jaeger Company*

The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was established by a fraternal society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is located on Fourth Street in the historically African American East Athens community. African Americans in the area paid dues to the Gospel Pilgrim Society and this guaranteed them a burial plot in the cemetery as well as a proper funeral. This cemetery was the only African American cemetery in Athens until the mid-twentieth century. Many prominent members of the African American community were interred at this cemetery, including two Reconstruction-era legislators from Hall County: Madison Davis and Alfred Richardson. Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is the final resting place for Monroe B. Morton, a prominent contractor in the southeast and owner of the historic Morton Theatre in Athens. Unfortunately, due to the emergence of other cemeteries for African Americans, the Gospel Pilgrim Society no longer was the only burial option by the 1970s. By 2002, the cemetery appeared neglected and dense vegetation covered many gravestones. At that time, the East Athens Development Corporation (EADC) began efforts to revitalize the site.

EADC, with the support of the community, decided that this cemetery was an important resource that should be utilized as a green space and historic site. They secured funds for the revitalization of the cemetery from the Georgia Department of Labor to provide jobs for residents of the East Athens community for cleaning, perpetual care, and interpretation of the site. EADC hired The Jaeger Company (TJC) and Southeastern Archeological Services (SAS) to create a master plan, a guide that outlines and provides information on the steps needed to implement their revitalization initiative. The primary goal for EADC was the revitalization of the cemetery. Fieldwork was undertaken by SAS to determine the number of burials and map the road network of the



*In August 2003, this was the gate at the main entrance to Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery before the master plan was implemented.*

*Photo courtesy of WLA Studio*

cemetery. The Jaeger Company used this information and other existing research documents to understand the historic context of this unique site. This information, along with accepted preservation standards provided in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, was used to develop the master plan.

To achieve the revitalization goal of the master plan, issues such as access, security, maintenance, organization, administration, interpretation and heritage tourism were identified. These issues were documented and prioritized for EADC to accomplish in phases. Thus, each successive phase could build on the previous one.

Once the master plan was completed, EADC secured funds to clean up and secure the cemetery. When Phase One was completed, EADC unveiled a new entry gate on October 11, 2004. The new gate secured the site and deterred illegal dumping of trash. With the master plan to guide them, EADC is focusing on Phase Two. This phase will include resurfacing of the road network with pedestrian paths and limited vehicular use.



*In October 2004, a new gate was unveiled at the main entrance to Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery after implementation of Phase One of the master plan. Fallen trees and overgrowth were removed to reclaim the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century wooded appearance of the cemetery.*

*Photo courtesy of WLA Studio*

## RECLAIMING AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES IN LITHONIA

Lithonia's earliest European settlement began in 1840, when 100 people lived in a community called Cross Roads. During the next five years, the Georgia Railroad completed its line from Augusta to what later became Atlanta. By 1850, the population of Cross Roads increased to 250 residents, and in 1856 it was incorporated as Lithonia.

These early settlers were primarily farmers. Some, like Jacob Chupp, owned slaves and produced cotton until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the Civil War, Lithonia became a granite producer, and the first quarry opened in 1879. During the next ten years, skilled immigrants migrated to the area to work as stonecutters, and many African Americans left farms for jobs as laborers in the quarries. The Chupp family gradually sold parts of their land to the emerging quarries, and by 1929, the farm, and the final resting place of many African Americans who were buried at the Lithonia One Cemetery, became the property of Davidson Mineral.

In 1971, when new owners were disposing of sections of the property that did not generate income, they deeded Lithonia One Cemetery to the Lithonia Civic League.

This African American organization was founded to promote civic pride and to fight discrimination. Lucious Sanders, who died in 1993, was the community leader of the Lithonia Civic League. Sanders served in World War II, and when he returned home, he started the first voter registration drive in DeKalb County. He fought for recreational facilities for the African American community in Lithonia, and was the first black member of the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Board.

Many African Americans lived in a community adjacent to the Lithonia One Cemetery known as Bruce Street. This community was established around 1895. Former slaves, farmers and quarry



Some headstones are provided by African American funeral homes, such as Cox Brothers and Haugabrooks. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



This grave enclosure is made of red bricks with a cross on the headstone and grave. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



This family plot is surrounded by a concrete wall. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Barbara Lester is the president of the Friends of Lithonia's African American Cemetery (FLAAC). While she is proud of FLAAC's community effort to clean the cemetery, she envisions a potential National Register nomination and a site in the Arabia Alliance heritage corridor. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

workers lived on Bruce Street. Union Baptist Church and the Yellow River School were Bruce Street community landmark buildings that faced the Lithonia One Cemetery. The first Yellow River School burned in 1935, and today only a granite shell remains of the school that replaced it in 1938. In the 1960s, an elementary school was built that is presently the DeKalb County Police Department Training Academy.

The Lithonia One Cemetery occupies 6.7 acres, and most of its boundaries, except for the southwest corner, lie in unincorporated DeKalb County. On the north border there is a community baseball field. The cemetery is accessible from Walker Road, where the police academy occupies the other side of the street. Walker Road is partially paved, and the remote sections are accessible from an unpaved, dirt driveway.

The Friends of Lithonia African American Cemetery (FLAAC) was formed to preserve the cemetery and develop a maintenance plan for its continued care. FLAAC cleared small trees, undergrowth and bushes in most of the cemetery. These volunteers, led by Barbara Lester, work diligently on weekends to remove debris and fallen leaves. Barbara Lester is a member of the Lithonia City Council. While FLAAC raised funds to clear the cemetery, they nurtured partnerships to assist them. FLAAC received assistance from the Georgia State University Heritage Preservation program. Students from the Historical American Landscapes and Gardens class provided a research report that FLAAC will use for future preservation initiatives. The research report contains information that can support a National Register nomination. FLAAC is working closely with the Arabia Alliance to ensure that Lithonia One Cemetery is a viable site in the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area.

Kelly Jordan, chair of the Arabia Alliance, and Barbara Lester also visited the Flat Rock Cemetery in Lithonia. Johnny Waits and other descendants are in the early stages of preserving this African American cemetery, nestled on a hill adjacent to a new

subdivision. Flat Rock Cemetery is located near the intersection of Evans Mill and Lyons Roads in Lithonia. While the old road connected to the cemetery, today the cemetery is only accessible by walking up the hill. Waits has identified a number of families interred at Flat Rock who have celebrity descendants. He plans to contact these families to raise funds for the cemetery preservation. The Arabia Alliance is working with DeKalb County to purchase and protect this cemetery.

Both Lithonia One and Flat Rock Cemeteries are examples of a growing interest among African Americans to preserve the final resting places of their ancestors. Barbara Lester and Johnny Waits believe that their preservation efforts help to raise community awareness about Lithonia's African American past and provide important information to pass on to future generations.

## CARE AND NURTURING OF HISTORIC CEMETERIES

*Christine Van Voorhies Neal, Archaeology Outreach Specialist  
Historic Preservation Division*

Have you ever ridden along a highway, suddenly noticed a small group of tombstones on the weed-covered roadside, and wondered why it wasn't being taken care of? Or, did you grow



*The grave of Joe Austin is maintained by the Progressive Men's Club at the Wahoo Baptist Church and Cemetery in Gainesville.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*



*Johnny Waits stands by the grave of one of his ancestors who is buried at Flat Rock Cemetery.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

up hearing stories about graves being "up on the hill" and now that a development is coming in, you question what will happen to them? Maybe you've gotten hooked on your family genealogy or the history of your community, and finding the location of your ancestors' graves is a top priority. What do you do?

Many people have questions relating to old graveyards and recently a guidebook was published in Georgia to provide some of those answers. *Grave Intentions: A Comprehensive Guide to Preserving Historic Cemeteries in Georgia*, by Christine Van Voorhies (presently Neal), was written to

answer the wide variety of questions most frequently asked about cemeteries. As the Archaeology Outreach Specialist at the Historic Preservation Division (HPD), I honed my expertise in cemetery preservation by researching and responding to questions from the public over the last five years. There are hundreds of historic cemeteries all across the state in need of restoration and protection with hundreds of people who are interested in some aspect of their care. To address these concerns, this book offers valuable advice on topics such as ownership and access to a cemetery, recording and commemorating graveyards, how to plan a clean-up or restoration project, repairing tombstones, ensuring protection from development or other impacts, funding for cemetery projects, and understanding the applicable Georgia laws.

*Grave Intentions* is an easy-to-read text for learning what to do and not to do with historic cemeteries. For example, chapter three suggests the general issues to be considered before any maintenance work begins, and then discusses when and how to proceed. Remember that throughout history, people have been buried in the manner their loved ones felt was meaningful, following family, cultural, and religious traditions of their time. The decorative items and plants placed on the grave—regardless of how those items might look today—were significant to them and should be respected today. In *Grave Intentions*, learn how to determine the difference between trash and grave decorations, and between weeds and purposeful plantings that should be left in place, in order to preserve this important part of the cemetery's history.



*The gravestone of Willie F. Waits in Lithonia's Flat Rock Cemetery is hand-carved and made from concrete.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The book also has an extensive list of other good sources for expert advice, including publications, consultants, organizations, and websites. Additionally, the appendix of applicable Georgia laws is an essential reference when questions arise about access to cemeteries on private property, descendants' rights, and protection from development or vandalism. These laws are not well known, even among law enforcement officials and local government authorities, so having the text of the laws in hand to offer as information is a powerful tool when approaching the county or city about protecting a local graveyard.

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## CARE AND NURTURING OF HISTORIC CEMETERIES

*Christine Van Voorhies Neal, continued from page 5*

Who will take care of these old, neglected cemeteries? The answer is WE will -we as community members, we as local governing officials, and we as families and descendants. Unfortunately, Georgia government has no money available for care and maintenance of private family cemeteries all across the state, which we estimate to number at least 15,000. However, HPD and the Department of Natural Resources can offer guidance about the topics to be considered when working with a cemetery, best practices for cleaning up a graveyard, places to go for assistance – both political and financial – and the text of laws and suggestions regarding legal issues, including when it is necessary to consult an attorney.

Please be sure to visit our website at [www.gashpo.org](http://www.gashpo.org) and browse the information on cemeteries under Archaeological Services. Copies of *Grave Intentions* can be purchased from the Historic Chattahoochee Commission for \$12.95 plus \$4.00 shipping at P.O. Box 33, Eufaula, AL 36072-0033, or by phone at 334/687-9755. All sales proceeds are dedicated to future cemetery preservation projects.

### THE HISTORIC COLUMBUS FOUNDATION SARAH TURNER BUTLER HERITAGE AWARD

Historic Columbus Foundation (HCF) celebrated its 38<sup>th</sup> year at the annual meeting held at the Columbus Ironworks Convention and Trade Center. Following dinner, HCF honored preservationists. Thomas L. French, Jr. and Dr. John S. Lupold were two of the honorees recognized for their recent book: *Bridging Deep South Rivers, The Life and Legend of Horace King*. St. James A.M.E. Church was recognized for an appropriate addition to the original 1875 sanctuary in the Liberty Heritage Historic District. As a special video presentation began, John M. Sheftall, president, announced the recipient of the HCF lifetime achievement award:

“This year’s recipient of the Sarah Turner Butler Heritage Award has been an ardent preservationist for thirty years. Her work in Columbus and in Georgia has led to many achievements and awards. She has received accolades from the Historic Chattahoochee Commission, Historic Columbus Foundation and the Georgia Historic Preservation Division. She has served on Georgia’s National Register Review Board and the Columbus Board of Historic and Architectural Review for two



*Charlotte Frazier and Virginia Peebles, executive director of the Historic Columbus Foundation, Inc. celebrate her award.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

terms. She has also held the position of Chairman of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network.

Statewide and locally, she is known for her passion and commitment to preservation. She has worked diligently at the state level to develop linkages between various sites associated with the “Chitlin Circuit” of theatres where African American performers played during the first half of the twentieth century. She has brought local recognition to properties of historical and architectural significance in Columbus’s African-American community.

Among her most outstanding achievements include the restoration of three downtown Columbus landmarks - the William H. Spencer House, the Ma Rainey House and the Liberty Theatre. She not only secured the initial funds to restore the Ma Rainey house but also promoted Ma Rainey’s national recognition through the issuance of her stamp. Her consistent advocacy and perseverance has been the driving force behind the revitalization and local designation of the Liberty Heritage Historic District.

In 1993, she was selected as one of the 50 most influential African Americans in Columbus, Phenix City and Ft. Benning. For her tireless efforts in preservation in Columbus and across Georgia, she was awarded the Governor’s Award in the Humanities in 2004.

She has been a long time friend and supporter of Historic Columbus Foundation. It is my great pleasure to award this year’s Sarah Turner Butler Heritage Award to Charlotte Frazier.”



*Jeanne Cyriaque congratulates Charlotte Frazier, the 2004 recipient of the Sarah Turner Butler Heritage Award. Photo by C. Donald Beall*



*Isaac Johnson, chairman of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network, and Reverend Scottie Sweeney, pastor of St. James A.M.E. Church, congratulate Charlotte Frazier. Reverend Sweeney received an award for the church addition that complements the historic character of the Liberty Heritage Historic District. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

## THE CENTENNIAL FARM PROGRAM

In 1992, Georgia joined several states in establishing a program to recognize historic farms. The purpose of the program is to honor Georgia's farmers for their contributions to the state's agricultural heritage and to encourage preservation of agricultural resources for future generations. To qualify, the working farm must remain in the same family for over 100 years or the farm must be at least 100 years old and be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Each farm must be a working farm with a minimum of ten acres or \$1,000 annual income. Recognition is given to farms through one of three distinguishing awards:

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Leola Hubbard and Dr. Clinton Warner, descendants of Zack Hubert, celebrate the legacy of this centennial heritage farm. A Georgia Historical Marker was erected at the site of the Hubert home in Hancock County.

**Centennial Heritage Farm Award** – This award honors farms owned by members of the same family for 100 years or more that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Centennial Farm Award** – This category does not require continual family ownership, but the farm must be at least 100 years old and must be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

### *African American Centennial Heritage Farms*

**2001**

Carranza Morgan Farm  
Sunter County

**2003**

Zack Hubert Farm  
Hancock County

**Centennial Family Farm Award** – this category honors farms that were owned by members of the same family for 100 years or more.

To receive an award, an application with supporting documentation must be completed. Applicants must submit photocopies of supporting documents showing original family purchase, proof of 100 years of continual family ownership, and a brief description of the history of the farm.

Applications are approved and selected by the Centennial Farm Program Committee. Applications are accepted throughout the year, but must be received by **March 1, 2005** to qualify for the next award cycle.

For more information or an application, contact Gretchen Brock, National Register Coordinator, at 404/651-6782 or email her at: [gretchen\\_brock@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:gretchen_brock@dnr.state.ga.us).

### *African American Centennial Family Farms*

**1994**

John and Emma Jane Rountree Farm  
Brooks County

**1995**

Carranza Morgan Farm  
Sunter County

**1996**

Lewis Clark Estate  
Thomas County

**2000**

James Fowler Farm  
Worth County

**2001**

Dave Toomer Estate  
Houston County

**2002**

Zack Hubert Farm  
Hancock County

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## ABOUT GAAHPN



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

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 ethnic 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 meets regularly to plan and implement 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 1,850 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.gashpo.org](http://www.gashpo.org). Preservation information and previous issues of *Reflections* are available online. Membership in the Network is free and open to all.

## Reflections

Published quarterly by the  
Historic Preservation Division  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

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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 Natural Resources. The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, 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 Natural Resources. 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.



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