

# Reflections



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network



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

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## FROM GEORGIA STATE INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE FOR COLORED YOUTH TO SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY: THE RESTORATION OF HILL HALL

Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth (presently Savannah State University) traces its origin to the First Morrill Land Grant Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1862. At that time, Georgia was embroiled in the Civil War, most African Americans were still enslaved, and the benefits of these land grant funds were consequently not implemented until Reconstruction. The original legislation set aside 30,000 acres of federal land in each state, and proceeds from sales of these lands were earmarked to create a college to teach agriculture and mechanical arts. In April 1872 the state established this college at the University of Georgia, but it was for white students only. African American citizens protested that no funds were allocated for their education until 1874, when the State of Georgia began annual appropriations totaling \$8,000 to Atlanta University to equitably provide similar funds for African American agriculture/mechanical arts students.

This arrangement between the state and Atlanta University continued until 1887, when legislators learned that the children of white faculty were attending classes with African American students. White legislators justified withholding the appropriation on the premise that the university violated segregation laws mandating separation of the races in education.

In 1890, the Second Morrill Land Grant Act provided \$50,000 appropriations to each state annually, but mandated that land grant funds must be equitably distributed to both

white and African American agricultural colleges. Georgia risked losing all federal funds, and the legislature acted swiftly in November 1890 to establish the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth. Immediately after the legislation passed, African American leaders in cities across Georgia advocated for the school to be located in their town.

In Savannah, African Americans held a series of meetings in the basement of First African Baptist Church to organize their initiative. A committee was formed to locate suitable land and donors for the college that was led by the pastor, Reverend Emanuel K. Love. Their efforts were successful, as George Parsons donated ten acres, and Sara B. Postell donated 66.1 acres near Thunderbolt to the trustees of the University of Georgia for the college.

The first president of the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth was Richard R. Wright, Sr. In 1996, Charles J.

Elmore, currently professor of Humanities at Savannah State University, wrote a monograph about Wright. In *Richard R. Wright, Sr. at GSIC, 1891-1921*, Elmore said, "Out of the controversy in the state over the distribution of land grant funds and the aftermath of the Atlanta University controversy evolved a college that was headed during its formative years by an extraordinary man of rare vision and concern for the welfare of his people." Wright was one of the first African Americans to become president of a historically black college or university (HBCU) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Hill Hall is the oldest building on the campus of Savannah State University. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on April 23, 1981. This photo was taken in 2004, when the exterior restoration was completed.  
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

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## FROM GEORGIA STATE INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE FOR COLORED YOUTH TO SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY: THE RESTORATION OF HILL HALL

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Richard R. Wright, Sr. was born enslaved near Dalton in 1855. His family settled in Cuthbert, and in December 1866 his mother walked to Atlanta to enroll him in the Storrs School established by the American Missionary Association. Wright was one of the first 400 students enrolled at the school. Once, while on a visit to the Storrs School, the Freedmen's Bureau administrator General Oliver O. Howard asked the students what message they would like to convey to their northern friends. Wright immediately held up his hand and responded, "Tell them we are rising."



*Richard R. Wright, Sr.  
President, 1891-1921  
Georgia State Industrial College  
for Colored Youth  
Photo courtesy of  
Savannah State University*

Wright spent seven years in the high school and college programs at Atlanta University, and was one of the graduates of the first college class of 1876. He was the valedictorian of his class, and received his baccalaureate degree in the Classics. In 1879,

Wright received his master's degree from Atlanta University. Wright's classmates at Atlanta University included Henry O. Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point, William H. Crogman, a future president of Clark College, and Lucy Craft Laney, founder of the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta.

After graduation, Wright was principal of the Howard Normal School in Cuthbert. He remained in Cuthbert for four years, and married Lydia Howard Wright. While at Howard Normal, Wright organized the Georgia State Teacher's Association, and was the first president. He organized the state's first black farmer institute and by 1878, he held the first county fair for African Americans.

Wright was a delegate to three national Republican Conventions, and became acquainted with William J. White, who was then one of Augusta's leading ministers and editor of the *Georgia Baptist*. White recruited Wright to organize Augusta's first African American high school, and he became principal of Ware High School in 1880. Ware was named after the president of Atlanta University, Edmund Asa Ware, and it was the first African American public high school funded by city appropriations in Georgia. While principal at Ware, Wright owned the *Augusta Sentinel*, one of the most widely circulated African American newspapers in that era. During that time, he asked Reverend Emanuel K. Love of Savannah's First African Baptist Church to serve as editor of the *Augusta Sentinel*.

Wright remained at Ware until he was appointed president of the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth in 1891. He would lead the college for the next 30 years until 1921.

Richard R. Wright, Sr. envisioned a college that would combine his classical college training that he received at Atlanta University with the mission of industrial and agricultural training that was prominent at Tuskegee and Hampton Institute. He sought a blend of these approaches in developing his plan to divide a typical student day into balancing both literary and manual courses of study. At first, the college curriculum did not require agriculture and/or mechanical arts, as these courses were offered in the normal (teacher training) and sub-normal curricula. All students were required to work on the farm, buildings or grounds, before or after school hours to offset their expenses, as there were no scholarships during the early years. The college graduated its first normal class in 1895, and the first college degree was conferred to Richard R. Wright, Jr., the president's son, in 1898.

President Wright put his prior agricultural experience to work at the college by organizing "Farmers Conferences" beginning in 1893. George Washington Carver of Tuskegee Institute spoke at the 1903 and 1904 conferences, and by 1906 the Farmers Conference drew 192 participants. These Farmers Conferences were one of the programs that President Wright used to fulfill the land grant mission of the college. The conferences provided forums and bulletins for African American farmers to receive the latest information on farming methods and health.



Photograph  
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*Clyde W. Hall, who was acting president of the college from 1978-1980, included this 1903 Farmers Conference group photo in his book, *One Hundred Years of Educating at Savannah State College: 1890-1990*.*

Mechanical arts were first introduced at the college in 1892, with woodworking and mechanical drawing as the key elements of the program. Blacksmithing, masonry and iron were added to the three-year manual training program, and by 1895 students received proficiency certificates in the trades.

Trade instructors Lewis B. Thompson, T. Lee, and Joseph H. Hines supervised students who built Hill Hall in 1900. The building was completed in 1901 and was used initially as the boys' dormitory. It was named in honor of Walter B. Hill, who was Chancellor of the University of Georgia from 1899-1905. Hill Hall was remodeled in the late 1930s during the presidency of Benjamin F. Hubert, Georgia State Industrial College's third president. Supervised by Antonio Orsot, director of Trades and Industries, students added inside plumbing and electricity. The state financed only \$3,377 of the \$43,377 required to renovate the building, and





Hill Hall was completed in 1901 by students who were supervised by by trade instructors. The building materials consisted of masonry, wood and metal, and the students received proficiency certificates in the mechanical arts program that was offered at the college. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

the remainder was provided through federal funds from the Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration that was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Hill Hall is the oldest building on Savannah State University's campus. Throughout its history, the building served a variety of functions on the campus. U.S. President William Howard Taft visited Hill Hall in 1912. During World War I, Hill Hall was a training site for 200 soldiers who participated in the Army Training School for Mechanics.

During the early 1990s, Hill Hall began to deteriorate, and Savannah State University implemented a restoration program to preserve the building. In 1992, Hill Hall was selected as one of 11 buildings on HBCU campuses to receive restoration funding from the Black College Initiative of the U.S. Department of the Interior. This program was managed by the National Park Service (NPS) and the United Negro College Fund. In 1996, NPS released the funds, and Savannah State University closed the building and began fundraising initiatives for the match.



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Photograph Not Available

Exterior repairs including a new roof, windows and doors were completed when a fire struck the building in May 2000.

Photo courtesy of Savannah State University

In 1999, the first Hill Hall Gala raised \$75,000 for the restoration. The 2000 Hill Hall Gala raised funds for academic scholarships and the marching band program. In 2006, Savannah State University will sponsor the eighth Hill Hall Gala, and continues to dedicate proceeds to academic scholarships.

Carlton E. Brown, the 11<sup>th</sup> president of Savannah State University, said he never forgot receiving the phone call that Hill Hall was burning. As he stood watching the 40 firefighters battle the blaze, the building was in the second phase of a three-phase renovation. He vowed to complete this project.

Brown envisions Hill Hall as the core element of an enrollment management center. The building is large enough to accommodate all enrollment processes. These functions would include admissions, the registrar, counseling and financial aid. President Brown plans a museum on the third floor with artifacts and a past presidents' hall. This part of the building would be used for alumni receptions as well.

In spite of many changes in administration, student body, and the name of the college over the years, Hill Hall continues to be the one constant, a grand symbol of achievement for future generations.



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Photograph Not Available

Carlton E. Brown began his presidency of Savannah State University on July 1, 1997. He is a native of Macon, Georgia. Dr. Brown is leading the preservation of Hill Hall.

Photo courtesy of Savannah State University



The main hallway on the interior first floor will lead students to enrollment services. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



In 2001, the Georgia Historical Society and the Savannah State University National Alumni Association erected this marker in front of the entrance to Hill Hall. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

## EMBRACED BY THE COMMUNITY: A STORY OF TWO GEORGIA ROSENWALD SCHOOLS

Tiffany Tolbert, African American Programs Assistant  
Historic Preservation Division

The search for Georgia's Rosenwald Schools has been very productive during 2005. Information provided from various sources has helped to confirm four schools that are still standing, bringing the number of identified Rosenwald Schools in Georgia to 40. The Southwest Georgia Regional Development Center assisted Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator, in locating the Smithville Rosenwald School in Lee County. While



Powell Hall was built on the campus of Savannah State University in 1932 as a three-classroom school for faculty children. The building is presently used for academic offices.  
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Addie Jones Flowers and her siblings attended the Omaha Rosenwald School.  
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Smithville and the Meriwether County Training School (Manchester) are two surviving brick and wood Rosenwald Schools in Georgia. These school buildings are important because, unlike many others, when they closed as schools they were not demolished by neglect. These school buildings were used for other purposes and their continued existence is important to their local communities.

visiting the Mt. Moriah African American cemetery with GAAHPN Steering Committee member Donald Beall, Cyriaque met Addie Jones Flowers, who took them to the Omaha School that she attended in Stewart County. The third school was located with the aid of a teacher in Meriwether County. Cyriaque sent her a historic photo of the Meriwether County Training School, and she informed her that it was still standing. The fourth school was identified while researching historic buildings on the campus of Savannah State University. It was identified as Powell Hall.



The Omaha Rosenwald School in Stewart County is the first school identified in the inventory that was converted to a residence. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The town of Manchester is located in Meriwether County approximately eight miles from Warm Springs, Georgia. In 1928, the Meriwether County Training School appeared in the Georgia Department of Education Annual Report. It was built with the aid of the Julius Rosenwald Fund in order to provide better education for African Americans in Manchester. This five-classroom school was the largest Rosenwald School constructed in the county until 1936, when the Eleanor Roosevelt School was built in Warm Springs and hailed as "The Last Rosenwald School."



This photo of the Manchester Rosenwald School appeared in the 1928 Georgia Department of Education Annual Report.

After its construction, Manchester served as a shining example of acceptable school buildings for African American children. Its construction pleased not only the local residents in Manchester, but Franklin D. Roosevelt, who saw the school during one of his frequent trips to Georgia. In *Builders of Goodwill*, S.L. Smith discussed a meeting with Roosevelt, then governor of New York, and his admiration of the Manchester Rosenwald School. He quotes Roosevelt as saying, "When I was at Warm Springs in 1927-28, I was out riding with two members of our local school board. As we passed a very attractive school a few miles from Warm Springs I remarked that it was a very beautiful building." The chairman of the board said, "That's a Rosenwald Negro School." The other member said, "It puts our Warm Springs white school to shame."



When viewing Manchester's exterior it is easy to see why Roosevelt was impressed. While its construction follows the standard plan for a five-classroom Rosenwald School, Manchester displays ornamentation not common to wood and brick Rosenwald Schools built during this era. This ornamentation includes a fanlight above its arched entrance, quoins on its front façade corners, a circular window in its front gable and a small cupola on the roof. Though the cupola was removed, other features remain as defining elements of the Manchester school.



*The Manchester Rosenwald School still maintains defining architectural features in 2005. The building is currently used for community services and youth programs.*  
*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

After it was constructed, Manchester soon became a county training school, and enrollment soared. To accommodate this growth, the school constructed a separate annex located adjacent to the original brick building. While the exact date of this second building is not known, it appeared on a 1940 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, and was built sometime during the 1930s.



*Sanborn Fire Insurance maps revealed an unusual pattern on the Manchester campus, as the brick building was identified first while the wooden building was denoted later. Like the brick building, the wooden building is adaptively used for community services.*  
*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Both of these buildings are excellent examples of a positive adaptive use for historic buildings. The wooden building still remains in its original location and houses a daycare center for children as well as an Even Start program for adults in the evening. The brick Manchester Rosenwald School is owned by the City of Manchester. For the past 20 years the building has served as classrooms for a Head Start program and is managed by Community Action for Improvement (CAFI). Since both buildings are actively used, they are not in danger of abandonment, new development or encroachment. Their continued importance as historic resources in the city is further insured by the Mayor and City Council of Manchester, who unanimously support the nomination of this school to the National Register of Historic Places.

The town of Smithville is located in Lee County in southwest Georgia. In 1928 this small rural town was the site of a four-classroom Rosenwald School. This school evolved from a school started by A.R. Robinson in 1903. Robinson's concern over the illiteracy of African American children in Smithville led him to start a school in an abandoned house. When the children began to excel, the local school board decided to build a three-room schoolhouse to be used by Robinson and the children. The school remained successful until it was destroyed by fire. The classes were divided and students were relocated to local churches and a Masonic Hall.

In 1928, with the aid of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a new Smithville school was constructed containing four classrooms, a library, an auditorium and storage rooms. The curriculum of Smithville began in the first grade and went through the eighth. In subsequent years the school added an associate student program, focusing on teaching adults Mathematics and English.

Mrs. Willie Mae Davis, a life-long resident of Smithville, attended the school during the 1940s. Mrs. Davis remembers walking to school whether it was hot or cold as well as bringing her own lunch. When it was cold the students were required to cut wood for the stove in order to heat the building. While the construction of Smithville was a major milestone for African American education, Mrs. Davis still remembers the visible signs of segregation, including used textbooks handed down from the white school.



*Willie Mae Davis is a graduate of the Smithville Rosenwald School. She provided historical documents, oral history and led the research team to a former principal.*  
*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

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## EMBRACED BY THE COMMUNITY: A STORY OF TWO GEORGIA ROSENWALD SCHOOLS

Tiffany Tolbert, continued from page 5

Like many African American sharecropper families, Mrs. Davis attended school only when she was not needed for work. Regardless of these challenging circumstances, Mrs. Davis completed school at Smithville by finishing the eighth grade. Mrs. Davis realizes the importance that Smithville had on her education as well as the lasting impact it had on her life. It's this appreciation that caused Mrs. Davis to be concerned about the building's maintenance as well as its preservation.

Reverend Lee Jerome Jones was principal of Smithville from 1945-1946. After graduating from the seminary in Atlanta he was ordained in 1942. Rev. Jones then moved to Smithville where he lived for three years. While in Smithville he not only taught at the school but also was the pastor at New Hope A.M.E Church.

There were three teachers who taught at Smithville during this time, including Clennon King, who would later succeed him as



The Smithville Rosenwald School is an example of an intact four-classroom wooden building. When the school closed in 1955, it was converted to apartments. This photo was taken in 2005. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Reverend Lee Jerome Jones

we had a house loaded." In the two grades that he taught there were normally 30-45 children, but this number decreased when it was time for crops to be planted and harvested. Rev. Jones remembers Smithville as a flourishing community with a majority African American population. He states that the goal of Smithville was to prepare its students for life.

When his time at Smithville ended, his experience with Rosenwald Schools did not. Rev. Jones moved to Sumter County where he was principal of Shady Grove for four years and Shipp Industrial Rosenwald School for two years. His wife, Tammy, attended Quitman Rosenwald School in Brooks County. A few

years later Rev. Jones ended his teaching career and became a full-time pastor. He has lived in Atlanta for the past 40 years and was pastor at numerous churches including Big Bethel A.M.E Church in Atlanta and Antioch A.M.E Church in Decatur. When reflecting back on his time at Smithville, Rev. Jones simply states "Enjoyed it. It was a learning experience for me."



Mrs. Tammy Roney Jones  
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

In 1955, all African American schools in Lee County were consolidated into one large school called the Lee Country Training School. The Smithville Rosenwald School stood vacant for a few years before it was converted to apartments. The school once again stands vacant, while the City of Smithville works to purchase the property. Mayor Jerry Myrick is excited about acquiring the building and hopes that it can be used as a new space for the city library or possibly a daycare center.



Photograph

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This historic photo of the Smithville Rosenwald School appeared in *Smithville, Georgia ... A Glimpse Into the Past*.

Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Davis

### WE NEED YOUR INPUT FOR THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

Karen Anderson-Cordova, Unit Manager, Planning & Local Assistance  
Historic Preservation Division

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Department of Natural Resources is Georgia's State Historic Preservation Office. HPD has currently begun the process of updating the state historic preservation plan. The plan establishes the priorities and policies to guide HPD's preservation efforts for the next five years. As part of the planning process, HPD held two public forums to solicit input to help set goals and priorities and to develop a plan that will be effective and useful to the Division, the preservation community and stakeholders who use the Division's services. The forums provided information about HPD's programs and services and the historic preservation planning process. The forums were held in Athens and Tifton in October, and provided one aspect of public input on various preservation issues.



Another aspect of stakeholder input is to respond to the planning survey. This survey was mailed to HPD contacts without email and is available on the HPD website for internet users. We encourage you to respond to the survey or access it online at [www.gashpo.org](http://www.gashpo.org). We will accept survey responses until the end of November. For more information contact Karen Anderson-Cordova at 404-651-6461.

## UNITED WE STAND... 218 YEARS LATER SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH

In August 2005, Springfield Baptist Church celebrated its 218<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Reverend Jesse Peters organized this historic Augusta Baptist congregation in 1787. Worship services were held for many years under a brush arbor until the free black community who resided in the village of Springfield purchased a circa 1801 wooden church from the white St. John Methodist congregation. The white Methodists outgrew this building that resembled a New England style house of worship. In 1844, it was moved by wagons to the community, and became Springfield Baptist Church. As the congregation grew, Springfield Baptist Church built a brick building in 1897, and turned the St. John building to face Reynolds Street. A walkway connects both buildings today.

Springfield Baptist Church continues to preserve both church buildings while the Springfield Village Park Foundation

constructed an adjacent park to commemorate the African American village that once existed on the banks of the Savannah River in downtown Augusta.

Reverend Dr. Emmett T. Martin has been the pastor of Springfield Baptist Church since 1971. He appointed Deacon Isaac Johnson as the chairman of the 218<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee.



The 1801 St. John wooden building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 17, 1982. The 1897 brick building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 5, 1990.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

One of his challenges in planning the celebration was to find a guest minister to provide a message for the Springfield congregation. Johnson, who is the chairman of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network, had recently met Reverend Dr. Isaac Mullins, the pastor of Thomasville's First Missionary Baptist Church. During the state preservation conference, the First Missionary Baptist congregation invited Johnson to meet with the deacons and the women's auxiliary who are developing a preservation plan for the First Missionary Baptist Church parsonage. Reverend Mullins agreed to speak at Springfield's anniversary, and when he announced his plan to the congregation, everyone wanted to see Springfield's preservation initiatives.

Two busloads of Reverend Mullins' congregation attended services at Springfield. All ministers and the First Missionary Baptist Church Mass Choir participated in the celebration. William H. Mays III, Augusta's interim mayor, presided at the services, and Earlice Taylor of Memphis was the guest soloist.



A marquee and the Tower of Aspiration, designed by Richard Hunt, are important elements in Springfield Village Park.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

## GAAHPN STEERING COMMITTEE



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## ABOUT GAAHPN



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

**T**he 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 2,075 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

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