

Reflections

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**Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network**

FROM BOYS SCOUTS TO BASEBALL: THE CELEBRATION OF JODY TOWN

*Shirlyn Johnson-Granville, Special Contributor
The Jody Town Reunion Committee, Warner Robins*

Military members, who were stationed at the Army Airbase in Wellston, Georgia, now known as Warner Robins, boarded in private homes and lived in “barracks” transported from the military base. Black workers who came to Wellston to help build base also lodged in homes and received their meals from these same hosts. This hospitality provided a comfort of belonging, allowing these workers to be productive members of the contract workforce of Georgia’s largest, single industrial employer, Robins Air Force Base.¹ Under the 1940-41 Wilcox-Wilson Bill, civic leaders convinced the U.S. War Department to locate the army air depot near Macon as part of a long-range plan to prepare

American defenses in case of war.² A telegram from U.S. Congressman Carl Vinson of Milledgeville announced that the land on the other side of the rail line near Wellston, GA was the new site for the military base. The sleepy Southern Railroad whistle stop was rich with the needed 3108.4 acres of farmland which bordered the Ocmulgee River to the east.³ Concurrently, President Roosevelt asked Congress for monies to build 50,000 new airplanes a year.⁴

² W.P. Head. *A Photographic History of Robins AFB, 1941-2016: 75 Years of Power Projection*. Robins Air Force Base, GA: 78 Air Base Wing (ABW) History Office, 2016.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Warner Robins Depot # 1336, National Register of Historic Places nomination 07001336 (2007). P.9.

¹ Oral histories with Shirlyn Johnson-Granville. Jody Town Reunion May 28, 2016. Published (portions) Jody Town Reunion Facebook page, May 30, 2016.



Warner Robins Mayor Randy Toms (right of marker) joins the Jody Town Reunion Committee and Elyse Butler of Georgia Historical Society at the community’s new marker. Courtesy of Sweet Serenity Portraits

FROM BOYS SCOUTS TO BASEBALL: CELEBRATING JODY TOWN

Shirlyn Johnson-Granville continued from page 1

On August 14, 1941, the construction opened to approximately 350 workers. By October, there were more than 1,000 workers, and in May of 1942, at the peak of the base construction, there were more than 6,000 laborers at work which included local men from near-by counties.⁵ The original War Department directive for the Georgia Air Depot approved the building of permanent buildings and facilities at Robins Field with the first contracts awarded to Griffin, Mion and Shepherd of Atlanta for construction of the supply and repair depot; and to Aqua Systems for an aircraft refueling system at Wellston, Georgia. The total contract was \$20 million.⁶ Initially, construction moved slowly. But after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the U.S. Declaration of war the next day, the pace of construction increased.

With construction increase came the need for more workers and more local housing. Word spread fast and local landowners were enthusiastic and willing to develop their individual acreage to accommodate this growing need for housing for military members and their families, and especially for the growing population of Black workmen migrating from across the Southeast. Local Black families who once were sharecroppers, eagerly seized the opportunity to now, not only own their own land, but to become civil service and contract employees.⁷

The Jody Town neighborhood was developed by Mary and Loyd Perdue and Fred W. Carter between 1941 and 1943 with more than 100 lots. Originally named Plantview Subdivision, the street names were named after the children of the Carters (Amanda and Leroy) and for the first residents who were Black (Garman and Simon).⁸ According to local historians, the name “Jody Town” was given to the neighborhood by military members based on the military cadence “...Jody’s got your girl and gone.” The cadence was inspired by character (Joe the Grinder) in a 1930s blues song and later made popular by singer Johnny Taylor.⁹ This name became synonymous with the neighborhood and remains today.

5 Head, *A photographic history* (2016), pp.2-5

6 Warner Robins Depot # 1336 ,National Register of Historic Places nomination 07001336 (2007). p.9.

7 Oral histories with Shirlyn Johnson-Granville. Jody Town Reunion May 28, 2016. Published (portions) Jody Town Reunion Facebook page, May 30, 2016.

8 City of Warner Robins, Houston County, Maps 1943, 1948, 1951. Houston County Clerk of Superior Court, Perry, GA

9 Azizi Powell, ed. “Three Songs about Joe the Grinder.” Pancocojams.Blogspot.com, August 19, 2012. Accessed November 7, 2021 <http://pancocojams.blogspot.com/2012/08/three-songs-about-joe-grinder.html>

10 Head (2016). *A photographic history*, 78 Air Base Wing (ABW) History Office,Robins Air Force Base, GA, pp.2-5

Jody Town’s location was ideal because the workers could cross the railroad tracks and walk to the base main gate. The early housing was modest, made of any materials that were left over from base construction including packing crates and metals. The streets were filled with solid, red Georgia clay and when it rained, the people of Jody Town could see mud up to their knees. A barracks building, referred to as the Dormitory, was constructed for the civilian and military men arriving in Jody Town.¹⁰

When the Robins Base was built in 1941-42, the U.S. military was still racially segregated. Under segregation, the Jody Town neighborhood became not only a place to live, but a community for a race of people with common needs, interests, and values. Jody Town was a community of residents who loved and supported each other and their nation through World War II, the Korean War, the tumultuous years of the Vietnam era, and the economic ups and downs of the south and throughout the country. These residents, our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, were determined to share their resources and faith to ensure that Jody Town thrived as they became citizens of Warner Robins when incorporated as a city on March 5, 1943.¹¹ Of the churches in Jody Town, there was the First Baptist Church of Garman Street founded in 1944 and Dixon Tabernacle C.M.E. Church established by J.R. Dixon (now affiliated with present day Warner Robins C.M.E. Church).

Jody Town offered scouting for the youth. Girl Scout Troop 333 emphasized cooking, sewing, writing, and the arts for girls, and Boy Scout Troop 163 trained boys in technical skills and focused on schoolwork which allowed little time to participate in juvenile delinquency. Boy Scout Troop 163 was founded May 25, 1951 by the Warner Robins Adult School for Colored as the first Boy Scout Troop in Warner Robins—black or white.¹² In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Warner Robins Adult School also taught adults seeking their GED diplomas in order to qualify for civil service jobs at Robins Air Force Base.¹³ Jody Town also had thriving businesses which included grocery stores, beauty salons, restaurants and cafes, ice cream parlors, taxi service, a radio and TV repair shop, a hotel, a laundromat, 11 Ibid.

12 Boy Scouts of America, National Council. Application for Troop Charter from Warner Robins Adult School for Coloreds, (Warner Robins, GA: Central Georgia Council, Peachbelt District). National Troop Number 163, Chartered May 25, 1951.

13 “Rev Milton Scott Family Papers.” Warner Robins, Georgia, n.d. Accessed February 2020 for the Georgia Historical application by the Jody Town Reunion Committee; Shirlyn Johnson-Granville, Chair.

a brick mason who trained men for positions with Air Force contractors, and the only Black barber shop in town that served residents and military members alike. The only Black Funeral Home in Warner Robins was in Jody Town--R.N.T. Funeral Home which honorably guarded the bodies of our fallen servicemen including native Spec. Willie George Turner. And the House of Soul, a popular night club hosted bands and entertainers including entertainers "Little" Richard Pennyman, Otis Redding, and renowned reggae band, Third World.

From Boy Scouts to baseball, local leaders in Jody Town understood the benefits of formal, organized, activities for youth from low-income, single-family households so they decided to organize a baseball team for youth. Since semi-professional baseball leagues were forming across the South, the Warner Robins Jets were formed in 1964 at Memorial Park.¹⁴ Local historians have credited this team for saving hundreds of boys and girls from becoming juvenile delinquents in the 1960s and 1970s. Baseball also served as a respite for Jody Town residents from working long hours on construction crews, as aircraft and sheet metal mechanics at the base for the men and as domestic maid service in homes of the base military leadership for the women. As Jody Town residents built their team, the Warner Robins Jets, from the ground up, they also built the baseball field at Memorial Park before the city of Warner Robins had a Recreation Department. In 1967, the City Council increased the Recreation Department's budget and, for the first time in local history, assigned

¹⁴ Dixon, C. M. Warner Robins: The Second 25 Years . Alpharetta, GA: WH Wolfe Associates, 1993. p.119.



Professional player and former Warner Robins Jet Kal Daniels attended the marker unveiling. Daniels played for three major league teams and held the home run record at Northside High school in Warner Robins for 20 years. Credit: Melissa Jest/ HPD

resources for Jody Town's Memorial Park. "Light poles were added, additional lightning and steps, and a hot water heater for the concession stand was installed," according to City of Warner Robins's monthly minutes, 1967. These enhancements greatly enhanced the Park and made night games more enjoyable for the fans. On any given game day, Jets fans packed Memorial Park. People from across the region lined up in front of the park entrance, awaiting their turn to get a ticket and hear the announcer say, "Play Ball!" Kids rushed concession stand to buy hotdogs, popcorn and, of course, peanuts. And young women eagerly saved seats for each other in the bleachers to share news about newest airmen coming to Jody Town. As integration slowly expanded in the South, Memorial Park became a showcase for semi-professional baseball according to *The Houston Home Journal* in 1969. Soon the City added a state-of-the-art swimming pool and upgraded the concession stand and playground. By the early 1970s, the city Recreation department added Memorial Park to the little league and recreation department baseball schedule for all ages.¹⁵

Jody Town of Warner Robins was more than a neighborhood; it was a community that modeled social and economic success. From dirt roads and homes made of crates, Jody Town birthed a Georgia State Senator, an owner of an international cosmetics company, a major league baseball player, two Tuskegee Airmen, and hundreds of civil and military service members who served our country and who built the Wellston Army Air Depot/Warner Robins Army Air Depot (WRAMA) at Robins Field/Robins Air Force Base.

The Federal Urban Renewal Program demolished the original Jody Town in 1973,¹⁶ but the contributions of the families to the United States Military, City of Warner Robins, the State of Georgia, and the fabric of the world will live forever through the Jody Town Community Historical Marker. ■

Shirlyn Johnson-Granville is the Chairman of the Jody Town Reunion Committee. For more information, visit the Jody Town Reunion page on Facebook or send inquires to readfoundation@bellsouth.net.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J.P. Mitchell, ed. "Federal Housing Policy and Programs, Past and Present", 1985, pp. 254-275.

ROBERT “BOBBY” HOWARD: A MAN OF IMPACT

Rachel Howard, Special Contributor
Widow of the late Robert Howard

On July 25, 1946, two young black couples, Roger and Dorothy Malcom and George and Mae Murray Dorsey, were killed by a lynch mob at the Moore’s Ford Bridge in Walton County, Georgia.¹ Robert Howard, only five years old at the time, did not realize how much this and many other discriminatory acts against Blacks would affect his life.

Robert, nicknamed Bobby, was raised in a large family of seven children. He attended elementary school in Social Circle, Georgia, and graduated from Carver High School in Monroe, Georgia. As a teenager, Robert rode with Dan Young, a funeral home director from Monroe who was active in Civil Rights work in Walton County. Robert helped Mr. Young with NAACP recruiting and voters registration drives. This was the beginning of his Civil Rights activism during the 1950s and 60s--an era when it was extremely dangerous to do so.



Robert ‘Bobby’ Howard (center) with Alabama-based civil rights activists, Collins ‘Pop’ Harris (right) and Ben ‘Sunshine’ Owens (left) in 1968. Courtesy of Rachel Howard

Robert and other fellow activists formed a local Southern Christian Leadership Conference affiliate named COPE (Community Organization for Progress in Education) and chose Robert as its president. Although active

¹ Schrade, Brad. “Moore’s Ford Lynching: Years Long Probe Yield Suspect but No Justice.” Atlanta Journal Constitution. December 29, 2017. <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional/moore-ford-lynching-years-long-probe-yields-suspects-but-justice/J5QYgAcuQoTIRta5AVeS5L/>



Recent portrait of Robert Bobby Howard, 1940 - 2021.
Courtesy Rachel Howard

throughout the South with movement leaders like Hosea Williams, Tyrone Brooks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others, Robert played a leading role at home in integrating public schools, registering voters, organizing economic boycotts of Walton County merchants, and fighting for increased African American political representation.

With assistance from the U.S. Justice Department, many of these demands were met despite fierce oppositions from area segregationists that came in the form of a local church burning, night riding through the Black neighborhood, firebombing of certain sites, assaults on several black leaders and reports of police brutality from the Black residents. Robert was jailed four times, received numerous death threats, and had his car’s brakes tampered with. In 1972, the Howard family home was firebombed injuring his mother.

Robert Howard led four efforts in 1968, 1972, 1984, and 1992 “to do something about Moore’s Ford,” he said.²

² The Moore’s Ford Lynchings, also known as the 1946 Georgia lynching, refers to the July 25, 1946, murders of four young African Americans (two couples) by a mob of White men on Moore’s Ford Bridge in Walton and Oconee counties between Monroe and Watkinsville. This attracted national attention and catalyzed large protests in Washington, DC and New York City. President Harry Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and introduced anti-lynching legislation blocked by the Southern Democrats in Congress. The FBI investigated for four months in 1946, its first time being ordered to investigate a civil rights case, but did not find sufficient evidence to bring any charges. Moore’s Ford lynching. Wikipedia.org. Accessed October 20, 2021

Although the killers have never been prosecuted, seeds planted by Robert and others germinated into a memorial effort for the victims which launched the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee in 1997. Despite working 30 years for an Atlanta trucking firm, Howard was able to start and participate in many organizations including NAACP Walton County Chapter, COPE, SCLC, Walton County Men Club, Masonic Lodge, and the Concerned Citizens Regarding Drugs and HIV/AIDS.



This year, the City of Social Circle renamed the South Cherokee Bridge in honor of Robert Bobby Howard. Courtesy of Rachel Howard.

“Bobby has a heart of gold. Bobby believes in one race and that’s human race,” said Waymond Archie Mundy, President, Moore’s Ford Memorial Committee. “Bobby believes in nothing but righteousness and good. He also understands once upon a time when life was so challenging for blacks and whites that people lost their way. They lost what is right and what is wrong.”³ Robert received many awards and honors, including: the 2010 Profile of Courage Award by the Rainbow Push Coalition; 1997 Citizenship Award for outstanding community service by the A. P. Henderson Scholarship Fund; the 2021 resolution from the Georgia House of Representative (GA House Resolution 37 led by Bruce Williamson, R-District 115); and 2021 American Civil Rights Foot Soldiers Award from the DeKalb SCLC.

On April 22, 2009, Robert was named an Unsung Hero by the Walton Tribune “[f]or his dedication to the cause and his efforts to promote equal rights for all. In a January 27, 2021 article, titled “Howard Made Walton Better”, the Tribune wrote, “[Robert] Howard was a fighter, for

³ Clemons, David. “Our View: Howard made Walton better”. Walton Tribune. January 27, 2021. https://www.waltontribune.com/opinion/article_fa4c3c4e-6293-11eb-b866-87fd95aa0699.html

integration of local schools and for justice for the shameful Moore’s Ford Lynching. He also worked with others to register Black voters, after decades of being disenfranchised. We are losing the men and women of Howard’s generation, but their work for justice remains a legacy for which we will remain in their debt. That work is over now; His Battle Won.”

Robert died on January 21, 2021 at 80 years old, just five days after the City of Social Circle named South Cherokee bridge in recognition of his long endeavor as a civil rights advocate, an activist with a local and regional focus, and a leader in COPE, an SCLC affiliate. Robert crossed that bridge every day to take a lunch to his father down at the Social Circle Cotton Mill. Then, he later crossed it every day to go work at the mill himself.

Some say Robert’s life spoke for him. And many of the sayings from his mouth have also had a lasting impact and bear repeating here -- “It does not matter who gets the credit, as long, as the job gets done.”; “People always talking about these bad kids, what about these bad parents.”; “You don’t have to tell people who you are; *show* them who you are.” (emphasis added); “Don’t let nobody make you feel less than you are.”



The Robert Howard memorial exhibit (shown here) stands in the Social Circle Visitors Center at 129 East Hightower Road. Courtesy of Rachel Howard

Rachel Howard, a native of Social Circle, Georgia, is the wife of the late Robert “Bobby” Howard. She retired from Pactiv Corporation in Covington Georgia where she currently resides.

A HAVEN FOR HUNGRY SOULS: FOUNTAIN HALL AT MORRIS BROWN COLLEGE

Rachanice Candy Tate, DAH, Special Contributor

Chair, Hallowed Ground Committee of Atlanta Branch of Association for the Study of African American Life

Atop Diamond Hill, on Atlanta's historic Westside, sits the "boldly graceful" structure known today as Fountain Hall of Morris Brown College (MBC). Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois referred to Fountain Hall in his 1903 seminal collection of essays titled "The Souls of Black Folks."

Du Bois knew these details of then-named Stone Hall because his office was on its third floor facing downtown Atlanta. He later writes of the bell in the "one low spire" which was donated in 1889 by a First Congregationalist congregation in the North to this "Southern experiment in education." The bell is engraved with the words "without regard to Sex, Race or Color." James Weldon Johnson, an 1894 Atlanta University (AU) alumnus, took these ideals to heart when he crafted the Negro National Anthem. An image of then-Stone Hall graces the cover of early published copies of the anthem.

Through the preservation efforts of the Atlanta Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the bell rang five times for the first time in more than 20 years at MBC's October 2021 Homecoming. Grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund and the National Park Service (NPS) made this moment possible for alumni as they gathered on the hallowed grounds at now-named Fountain Hall to sing the MBC alma mater, "Haven for Hungry Souls."

Fountain Hall, a National Landmark, designated in 1976, is the iconic emblem of "dear ole Morris Brown" and a testament to the American Civil Rights fight for equal education for all. Built in 1882, the 39,000 square-foot-structure was the third building of the then-Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University, CAU) offering Kindergarten-to-College curriculum for blacks and white children. The three original AU buildings were deeded to MBC by for educational use, with a revisory clause to return to AU if Morris Brown College ever closed.



*Fountain (Stone) Hall taken 2021.
Courtesy of Horace Henry.*



Class of '51 alumni at Fountain Hall: (l-r) Betty Underwood Boone, Gloria Parker-McCoy, Ronald Atkins, and Jackye Powell-Fautleroy. Courtesy of Stanley Coleman.

MBC became a member of the Atlanta University Center consortium in 1941 until it lost accreditation in 2002 but never closed.

The restoration of Fountain Hall is at the core of "The Hard Reset" mantra of Dr. Kevin E. James, MBC's 19th President. As Dr. James proceeds with the College's re-accreditation, Fountain Hall will be essential to providing state of the art classrooms.

The 2016 ASALH annual theme "Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories," inspired the Atlanta Branch to form a Hallowed Grounds Committee, to create the Friends of Fountain Hall with MBC Alumni, and to help MBC raise funds to restore Atlanta's oldest HBCU campus buildings. Soon after, a historic preservationist was hired, and grant writing began to replace the roof, create a website, collect oral history, repair the bell to swing again, and restore the windows including the Chapel-stained glass dedicated to E.A. Ware, the first MBC president and wife Sarah J.

Twichell.

The other historic buildings Du Bois referenced were North Hall (now Gaines Hall) built in 1869, four years after Emancipation, and South Hall (replaced by Griffin Hightower). The Atlanta Branch of ASALH is working to bridge the gap and galvanize a consortium institution to restore these landmarks and thereby restore the soul of Black folk represented in these hallowed grounds. ■

Dr. Rachanice Candy Tate is a native of Atlanta and a fourth generation AUC alumna. She serves as Chair of the Atlanta Branch of ASALH Hallowed Grounds Committee; Adjunct Professor at Morehouse College, her great grandfather's alma mater; and alumna of CAU. Tate is a board member of the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation and Historic Atlanta, and is CEO of Culture Centers International, Inc.

For more information, please visit www.FountainHallATL.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Build a Better Network Survey is HERE: GAAHPN Asks to Hear from YOU !

Check your Emailbox for a survey requesting **your input** and ideas for building a better preservation network.

The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) is more than 3,000 strong. With your input, the GAAHPN volunteers can empower more colleagues in our 12 regions with future webinars or online content.

Please visit www.dca.ga.gov/georgia-historic-preservation-division. On the webpage, click the survey link titled *African American Programs Survey* to share your ideas or comments. Thanks.

Georgia Historic Preservation Division

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Image credit: Georgia HPD

Help SAVE Georgia History: Volunteer with a GAAHPN Action Committee

In just **two hours a week**, Georgia neighbors like you can help save historic places that tell of our shared past and...:

- Learn about inspiring preservation projects by grassroots organizations and individuals happening across Georgia.
- Connect with professionals at the Georgia Historic Preservation Division and other agencies that support the reuse and revitalization of important place and stories.



For a Volunteer info packet, email Melissa Jest, GAAHPN Liaison at melissa.jest@dca.ga.gov or call 404 486 6395. Please visit GAAHPN on Facebook and follow GAAHPN on Instagram.

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Image credit: Georgia HPD

ABOUT REFLECTIONS

Since its first issue appeared in December 2000, *Reflections* has documented hundreds of Georgia's African American historic resources. Now all of these articles are available on the Historic Preservation Division website www.dca.ga.gov. Search for "Reflections" to find the archived issue and a list of topics by categories: cemeteries, churches, districts, farms, lodges, medical, people, places, schools, and theatres. You can now subscribe to *Reflections* by emailing Melissa Jest. *Reflections* is a recipient of a *Leadership in History Award* from the American Association for State and Local History.



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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 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 Board 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 3,000 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.ga.gov. 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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