Reflections





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THE SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator Historic Preservation Division

ne Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice evolved from a need to promote a human rights agenda that focused on the eradication of barriers that marginalized these women. In 2000, the Ford Foundation convened a meeting to discuss challenges unique to the rural southern experience and to develop strategies to improve the quality of life for women in these communities. The barriers include discriminatory practices that alienate southern rural women on the basis of race, class, culture, religion and gender. These barriers mirrored the experiences of black women who reside within the

Black Belt, the geographical region that extends through Alabama, southwest Georgia and the Mississippi Delta. In 2002, a bi-racial group came together from 77 rural counties to formulate the tri-state collaboration that today is known as the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative (SRBWI).

SRBWI combines advocacy, training, grassroots organizing, community asset building and leadership development into a number of programs that are implemented in the targeted 77 counties to help women build economically sound families and communities. The southern regional office of the Children's Defense Fund administers the program in Mississippi and is that state's

lead organization. The other state lead organizations are the Federation of Childcare Centers of Alabama (FOCAL) and the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc. State program directors are Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald (Mississippi), Sophia Bracy Harris (Alabama)



Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was the site for the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative 2007 luncheon for the Hall of Fame project. This historic African American church was designated a National Historic Landmark on February 20, 2006 by the National Park Service.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Photograph Not Available

and Shirley Sherrod (Georgia). Sarah Bobrow-Williams of Augusta serves as the asset and finance development director.

The Ford Foundation funded a two-year planning process that entailed conducting listening sessions with over 1,000 women across the tri-state, 77 county region. The women's role in the history and culture of the region was one of the program areas identified from the listening sessions. Early on, SRBWI administered cultural inventories throughout the region to develop a cultural heritage tourism plan. In 2004, the National Trust for Historic

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THE SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

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Preservation awarded SRBWI a grant to sponsor a Share Your Heritage workshop that was held at the Ritz Cultural Institute in Albany, Georgia. Participants and presenters from the 77 counties in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi provided input that SRBWI is using to develop a cultural heritage corridor and related programs for the region. SRBWI partnered with three advisors to assist them in each state: Jeanne Cyriaque, African American programs coordinator for Georgia's Historic Preservation Division, Georgette Norman, director of Troy University's Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Alabama and Alex Thomas, Heritage Trails director for the Mississippi Development Authority's Division of Tourism.

One of the major outcomes of the Share Your Heritage workshop was the Southern Rural Black Women's Hall of Fame (HOF) project. The goal of this initiative is to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of ordinary women "...whose everyday choices have affected the course of history – women who may have championed the rights and futures of children, women involved in the Civil Rights Movement, women whose actions have helped to develop and motivate others." SRBWI implemented a nomination process in each state to recognize these women at an awards ceremony and to present an exhibit that may be housed at museums and historic sites throughout the region. Nomination categories are achievement in faith, sacrifice, action, cooperation and reflection.



Unita Blackwell of the Mississippi Delta, one of the African American women in the SRBWI Black Women's Hall of Fame, is congratulated after the ceremony by Jeanne Cyriaque, Georgia cultural heritage corridor advisor.

Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery

Each state is exploring museum sites for a Southern Rural Black Women's HOF that will host the traveling exhibit, artifacts and multimedia components that explore local history. The museums will serve as Welcome/Resource Centers to disseminate interpretive materials, marketing and retail products made by women in the SRBWI network. The HOF will also serve as meeting venues for SRBWI community education and outreach activities. SRBWI in Georgia is currently researching historic sites, planning interpretive centers and exhibits, and developing plays from oral histories focused on history and culture in Georgia counties. Thirty-nine counties in Georgia are in the SRBWI service area.

The HOF project promotes a sense of pride among southern rural black women, their families and communities by documenting and preserving both inductee's personal history and local history. Induction ceremonies are planned in each state as well as a bi-annual regional ceremony for all honorees to celebrate their collective accomplishments.



The president & CEO of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Lawrence J. Pijeaux, Jr. and Carolyn M. McKinstry of the Sixteenth Street Foundation hosted the opening reception and the bi-annual ceremony of the SRBWI Hall of Fame.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

In December 2005, the first inductees were honored at the Rosa Parks Museum in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The awards ceremony included art exhibits

designed by students from schools in the targeted counties.

Additional sponsors for the permanent exhibition included the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, the Charles M. and Магу D. Foundation, the Sister Fund, the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Samuel Rubin Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. SRBWI developed Just Stand Anyhow! curated by Anthony B. Knight, Jr. and designed by Zoila Torres of Soli Design with their support.

In October 2007, curator Knight unveiled the 2005 Alabama HOF exhibit at a reception sponsored by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The regional awards ceremony was held the following day at the Sixteenth



Each inductee in the SRBWI Hall of Fame is featured on stand-alone panels in the traveling exhibit.

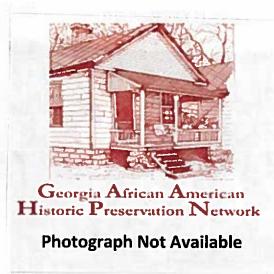
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Street Baptist Church. Serving as keynote speaker for the weekend's activities was Nikki Giovanni, poet, writer and community activist. She is currently a University Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Ms. Giovanni and the HOF inductees have worked diligently for equality and civil rights for all people. Throughout the weekend activities, Nikki Giovanni shared personal wisdom and excerpts from poetry that she has published since 1968.



Nikki Giovanni and Hermina Glass-Avery Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The Princely Players provided music that focused on Birmingham Sunday during the induction ceremony. The group fosters education of the African American experience through drama, song and dance. They have been featured on National Public Radio and the eight-member ensemble has performed spirituals, work songs, hymns and freedom songs at the Smithsonian Institution.



The Princely Players incorporate music and drama in their performances about the Civil Rights Movement. Photo courtesy of the Princely Players

The Georgia 2007 induction ceremony and the 2005 Georgia inductees traveling exhibit is scheduled to be unveiled in January 2008. After the ceremony, SRBWI will be seeking museum and other historical locales for public viewing of the exhibit. If you are interested in hosting the exhibit, contact Shirley Sherrod at 229/432-5799 or Sarah Bobrow-Williams at 706/729-9710.

SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN'S GEORGIA HALL OF FAME

Hermina Glass-Avery, African American Programs Assistant Historic Preservation Division

The Southern Rural Black Women's Hall of Fame is a program of the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative, an organization that seeks to promote human rights and to eradicate historical race, class, cultural, religious and gender barriers experienced by southern women. The first exhibit series *Just Stand*, *Anyhow!* honors outstanding women from southwest Georgia who have exemplified great courage while enduring tremendous adversity. They represent Baker, Coffee, Dougherty, Mitchell, Wheeler, and Worth counties.



Anthony B. Knight, Jr. discusses the Hall of Fame exhibit:

Just Stand, Anyhow! Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

2005 GEORGIA SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Gladys Mae Spencer Coley: Coffee County. An activist for equality in education during the civil rights era, Mrs. Coley spoke out vehemently against the Coffee County Board of Education's unfair hiring practices and was the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit against the City of Douglas in the late 1970s.

Mary Young Cummings: Dougherty County. One of sixteen children, Mrs. Cummings attended Howard University where she earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence. She was arrested several times for her involvement during the Civil Rights Movement in speaking out against social injustices. In 1983 she was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives. She also served one term as president of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials (GABEO).

Josie Miller: Baker County. She is known for her valiant efforts in saving the lives of two civil rights activists in Dougherty County and for her personal activism in voter's registration. Mrs. Miller was the first African American to be elected to the Baker County Board of Education.

Bernice Johnson Reagon: Dougherty County. Bernice Johnson Reagon was born and raised in Albany, Georgia and currently lives in Washington, D.C. While living in Albany, she was involved in the Civil Rights Movement where she attended Albany State College

SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN'S GEORGIA HALL OF FAME

Hermina Glass-Avery, continued from page 3

and was arrested at a SNCC demonstration. After a night spent in jail singing songs, Ms. Reagon joined the SNCC Freedom Singers and began to use music as a tool for civic action. She earned a B.A. in history from Spelman College. In 1973, Ms. Reagon founded Sweet Honey in the Rock, an award-winning quintet. Reagon received a doctorate in U.S. history from Howard University.

Mary Shipp: Worth County. A former educator, businesswoman and political activist, Mrs. Shipp was active in launching a voters' rights campaign in 1977 when her late husband was elected as the first African American to hold a public office. She ran unsuccessfully for Mayor of the City of Sylvester. She was appointed to the Georgia Board of Corrections in 1992. Her proudest achievement is seeing a senior citizens' center named in her honor.

2007 GEORGIA SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Mary Jo Haywood: Mitchell County. Her legacy of activism led to the election of African Americans on all county boards. Her action against the City of Camilla opened the door for many blacks to head city departments. Also, she led the effort for the first regulated countywide Day Care facility, a center that is still operational and benefits the African American community.

Dr. Lillian Patricia Johnson (Deceased): Dougherty County. Dr. Johnson was the first African American woman to serve as the director of the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services. The Georgia Department of Human Resources building in Albany bears her name.

Carol R. King (Deceased): Dougherty County. Mrs. King was the founder and director of one of the nation's first and oldest Head Start programs. She dedicated her life to educating children while pursuing better family life through jobs and education for their parents. She was responsible for employing and facilitating the education of hundreds of adults.



Peggy King Jorde admires the photo exhibit of her mother, Carol R. King. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

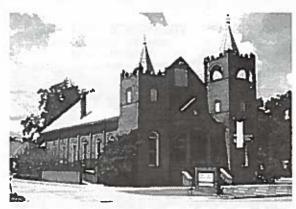
Leila Walker (Deceased): Worth County. Her role as political activist encouraged many blacks to exercise their right to vote and had a lasting impact on the community.

Leola D. Williams: Baker County. A mother of ten children, she gave up welfare and worked on the farm so she could have independence to go to jail, integrate schools, attend governmental meetings and travel by bus to the March on Washington to protest segregation and poverty.

The principles of historic preservation are vitally important to SRBWI's Hall of

Fame program. The quality exhibit requires historic research of the highest integrity and it involves the search for historically significant sites, (i.e. churches and schools) as permanent exhibit space. Such sites will incorporate the context in which Hall of Fame inductees are being honored. Many of these sites are beyond the 50-year age requirement; however, many of the schools built during the Civil Rights era are just beginning to reach the minimum preservation criteria. And most of them are already being adaptively reused as economic revitalization projects supporting entrepreneurs, historic house museums, and community centers.

One such site that now serves as a Civil Rights museum is Mount Zion Baptist Church. Built in 1906, Old Mt. Zion Baptist Church served as the central gathering place for activists in Albany, Georgia during the Civil Rights Movement, and in 1961, it was this church that hosted the first mass meeting of the Albany Movement. Located in the historic Freedom District, the church is now the Mount Zion Albany Civil Rights Movement Museum and its mission is to commemorate the Civil Rights Movement and to serve as a local and national educational resource. During the movement, Old Mt. Zion's doors were opened to many an activist to protest against racial inequalities, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Due to their historical significance, Civil Rights era buildings, structures and sites must be considered for National Register designation.



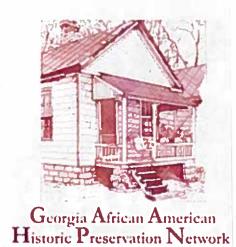
Mt. Zion Baptist Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 10, 1995. It is presently home to the Mount Zion Albany Civil Rights Movement Museum. Photo courtesy of the Georgia Department of Economic Development

Many of the women who struggled in the Civil Rights Movement were unsung heroines and never were given recognition for their untiring, selfless efforts. SRBWI's HOF is serving as a catalyst to change that perspective. The women inducted into the HOF have created a lasting legacy for future generations and they continue, although some do so posthumously, to *Just Stand, Anyhow!* helping to educate, enrich, enlighten, and thereby empowering the lives of all women. For more information about the Southern Rural Black Women's Hall of Fame, please visit their website at www.srbwi.com.

CULTURAL MEMORY, PRESERVATION AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: THE OLD STONE CHURCH

Restorative justice is working beyond the legal system to bridge fractured communities through circles of dialogue and understanding, a voluntary community reconciliation process on the human rights continuum. The founding principles of restorative justice are respect, reflection, and resolution. Restorative justice aims to bring together all parties involved in conflict and to right the wrongs for the sake of repairing communities.

Due to the history of African Americans in this country, preservation in these communities can often times be difficult and may involve much more than just saving the old building. It involves preservation of cultural memories shared by groups that may evoke some very painful moments of the past that were caused by racial violence and intimidation.



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This photo depicts the Antioch Baptist Church congregation on the front steps of the church in 1951. Some of the stained glass windows were broken by vandalism and golf balls from the Candler Park Golf Course that is on the opposite side of the street. Photo courtesy of Sophie Carey

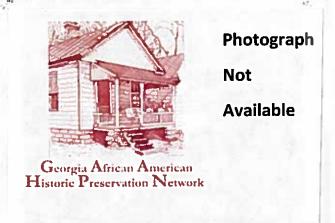
Racial intimidation and violence has a way of transforming the relationships between people and space over time. Affected individuals or communities may react to such deeds in a number of ways: maintain positions; alter positions (relocation or migration), or counter positions (retaliation). With relocation, many communities leave behind cultural resources like churches, cemeteries, schools, homes, and other buildings that convey no apparent relationship or meaning to present-day communities. Whether lost, buried, or existing in an individual's personal memories, documentation is one of the key factors in understanding historic buildings- for they indeed have a story to tell.

The Old Stone Church certainly has a story. It has a complex history that involves the struggle to build a community together and to maintain it during unpleasant moments in history. A vernacular granite building located at 470 Candler Park Drive in the Candler Park Historic District, Old Stone Church was hand built by skilled male members of the historically African American congregation beginning in 1918. Oral history has it that the builders

Hermina Glass-Avery, African American Programs Assistant Historic Preservation Division

quarried the granite from Stone Mountain. Members pooled their resources to purchase the stone, mortar, plaster, timber, stained glass, pews, pressed tin ceiling tiles, pine wood, cement, wainscoting the makings of a spiritual haven, the makings of a church - Antioch Baptist Church. A 1918 property deed and 1924 plat map document the building's name simply as "Antioch Baptist Church" but, recalling their baptism, some of the African American descendant congregation call it "Old Antioch" or "Antioch East Baptist Church." Its current stewards have named it the "First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta." But to all of the stakeholders who are working collaboratively to uncover and share its history, it is affectionately call the "Old Stone Church."

Members of the congregation lived in what is today the Candler Park Historic District decades before this designation. Candler Park was originally part of the town of Edgewood and African Americans were present in the area from the time of its development in the mid-1870s. Small bands of families built homes on Hooper Avenue in what was called "Hooperville", on Mayson Avenue and Oakdale Road. In the 1880s-90s, Edgewood was a bustling town with streetcars, booming real estate and commerce centered around DeKalb Avenue, the commercial heart of the area. By 1900, the population quadrupled from a mere 300 in 1890 to 1,200 with blacks (58%) and whites (42%) co-existing in a segregated society. Three different streetcar lines ran through Edgewood. Schools and beautiful, new elegant homes of varying architectural types and styles were built for whites, while blacks were relegated to run-down, substandard housing. But they still understood themselves to be a "community."



The Old Stone Church on 470 Candler Park Drive, is presently home to the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta. Photo courtesy of Edith Kelman

Mother Mattie Howard, age 84, attended Antioch Baptist Church as a child. "We lived in that community till I was about seven. And they had all the black folks come out of that neighborhood and we moved to Edgewood. I guess you heard about Edgewood. They pushed all the blacks below there. And a

Cultural Memory, Preservation and Restorative Justice: The Old Stone Church

Hermina Glass-Avery, continued from page 5



Photograph Not Available

Mattie Howard stands on the steps in front of Antioch Baptist Church on Mayson Avenue, now Candler Park Drive, in the late 1940s.

Photo courtesy of Mattie Howard

group of them stayed on Hooper Street. I joined the church when I was ten. I was baptized, so I went to Sunday school."

African Americans built the original Antioch Baptist Church (1874) on Oakdale Road (formerly Bell St, and later Whitefoord Avenue), but it mysteriously burned to the ground in 1916. They temporarily worshiped at the lodge until the groundbreaking in 1918 for their new edifice on Candler Park Drive (formerly Mayson Avenue). When the building was completed in 1922 the congregation moved into its new place of worship. By 1924, census data indicates that blacks were employed as

house servants, midwives, carpenters, rock grinders, washerwomen, carriage drivers, porters, blacksmiths and various other blue-collar occupations.

In 1922, the neighborhood became "Candler Park" when Asa G. Candler, famed Coca-Cola magnate/real estate businessman, sold 60 acres directly opposite the stone church to the City of Atlanta for use as an exclusive park and golf club. The real estate transaction translated into razing homes rented and owned by blacks, thereby forcing them out of the district to an area south of DeKalb Avenue, still known today as Edgewood. By the 1930s and



The First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta/Old Stone Church is a contributing resource in the Candler Park Historic District that was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Source: National Register files, Historic Preservation Division

40s, more homes were demolished and street names affiliated with the black neighborhood were changed. Racial intimidation was severe by the 1950s, so the congregation left the Candler Park building and relocated to the Edgewood neighborhood, a thriving working class area.

Until 2006, the original living members and their descendants had not been in Old Stone Church for over 50 years. Stairs were added on the first floor, and, in the sanctuary, the stained glass windows had been replaced with palladium windows. The pulpit that contained the choir loft and baptismal pool had been converted into a performance stage.



Photograph Not Available

The original 1922 bell from the Old Stone Church currently sits in front of Antioch East Baptist Church in Edgewood as a reminder of their history. Photo courtesy of Edith Kelman

Mrs. Howard attended the initial meeting at Old Stone Church/First Existentialist in November 2006. The occasion marked the first time she had been in the church since the congregation relocated to Edgewood. "I was so hurt when they told me that the stained-glass windows were gone. I was young, but they ... had to sell a whole lot of peanuts and they fried fish on Saturday to raise money to get those windows. They would ring the bell to let you know that it's time for Sunday school. There was a dirt basement

down there. And you didn't have a bathroom, either. You had an outhouse. One for the men. One for the ladies."

In September 1906, four miles west of Candler Park-Edgewood neighborhoods in downtown Atlanta, a four-day race riot occurred. The idea of preserving the Old Stone Church was partially inspired by Edith Kelman's involvement in the Centennial Remembrance of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot as well as her interest in uncovering the history of the First Existentialist Congregation's building where she is an active member. As she dug deeper into the original historical research, it became increasingly clear that this process of understanding the building needed to involve the key stakeholder - the descendant congregation of First Antioch Baptist Church, the current stewards of the building, Candler Park and Edgewood neighborhood organizations, researchers, educators and other interested participants. So, in early 2006 the Old Stone Church Bi-racial History Project was organized.

In November of 2006, the Old Stone Church Bi-racial Committee sponsored a series of dialogues and invited Antioch's descendant congregation and its current pastor, Dr. John F. Williams, and others to share their memories, stories, and comments at the Old Stone Church/First Existentialist. Participants included the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, Reverend Marsha Mitchiner, First Existentialist's current minister and its founding minister emeritus, Reverend R. Lanier Clance, WRFG Radio, members

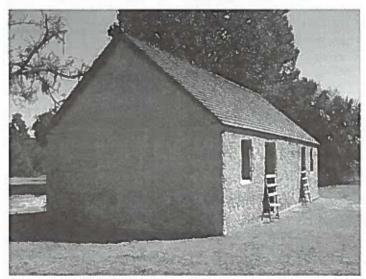
of the Coalition to Remember the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, Candler Park Neighborhood Organization, and the Atlanta Public Schools. From this collaboration a documentary titled *Undying Faith* was created. Earlier this year a stone monument dedicated to the original congregation of the church building was installed on the premises. Coinciding with the 133rd anniversary since the founding of Antioch Baptist Church, an exhibit of the history of the Old Stone Church is on display at Antioch East Baptist Church in Edgewood.

Recently, a conditions assessment of the building was conducted. The board of directors is considering the recommendations for rehabilitation. For more information about the Old Stone Church Bi-racial History Project, please contact Edith Kelman at (404) 222-0801 or mail inquiries to: Old Stone Church History Project, P.O. Box 5567 Atlanta, GA 31107.

SAVE THE DATE: THE ATLANTIC WORLD AND AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE GEORGIA LOW COUNTRY

The role of African Americans in the evolution of Georgia's barrier islands and coastal areas is the subject of an upcoming symposium in Savannah from February 27-29, 2008. The symposium will provide a forum to present new scholarship on this topic. Sponsors for the symposium include the Ossabaw Island Foundation, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Georgia Southern University, Savannah State University and the Georgia Historical Society.

Symposium speakers will present a variety of topics on Low Country African American life. They include Emory Campbell, Erskine Clark, Allison Dorsey, Michael Gomez, Jacqueline Jones, Timothy B. Powell, Theresa A. Singleton and Betty Wood. One of the keynote speakers is Phillip D. Morgan of Johns Hopkins University, who is a recipient of the Bancroft Prize for his work on the South Carolina Low Country.



The Ossabaw Island tour will provide an opportunity for participants to view the North End tabby slave cabins. Photo by David Crass

The symposium will provide a teacher workshop on Wednesday, February 27th from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Pre-conference tours on Wednesday are the *African American History Tour* (\$35.00) or the *Ossabaw Island Tour* (\$60.00). The workshop and tours are also available on Friday, February 29th following the morning symposium educational sessions. Other special events include the welcome reception on Wednesday, February 27th at 6:30 p.m. featuring hors d'oeuvres and entertainment by the McIntosh County Shouters. The welcome reception cost is \$35.00. A topical lunch will be provided on Thursday, February 28th where participants can interact with speakers for a fee of \$25.00. After the symposium sessions, a low country boil will be held at the Owens Thomas House for \$40.00. The symposium is free, but a \$3.00 reservation fee is required. Donations to the Ossabaw Island Foundation are appreciated. Register online at www.ossabawisland.net.

The host hotel for the symposium is the DeSoto Hilton at 15 East Liberty Street in the heart of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District. Room rates are \$139. Hotel reservations can be made online at www.desotohilton.com or call 912/232-9000. For air travelers, the DeSoto Hilton is 20 minutes away from the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport.



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ABOUT GAAHPN



Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network

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 2,550 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. 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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W. Ray Luce, Division Director & Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Jeanne Cyriaque, Editor

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