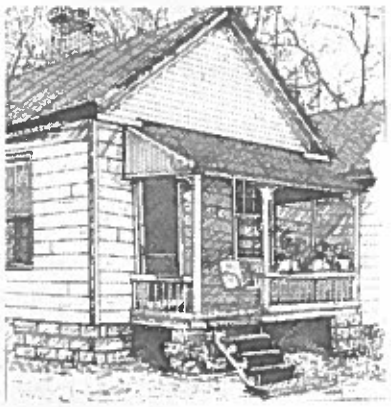
Reflections



Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network

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

Volume VI, No. 2 **July 2006**

Interpreting African American Life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley: The Bean Creek History Project

Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator
Historic Preservation Division

The Sautee-Nacoochee Valley is located in White County and includes an area that encompasses over 2,500 acres in the Appalachian Highland region of Georgia. Situated on the southeast edge of the Blue Ridge, the region's landscape features mountains and a series of irregularly shaped valleys that intersperse hills along a backdrop of higher ridges. The Sautee Valley is located on the northeast side and the Nacoochee Valley lies beneath its southern edge. Four creeks run through these valleys joining together as the Sautee Creek that ultimately flows into the Chattahoochee River.

Bean Creek is located on the northern side of the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley. It is a place where an African American community has existed since enslavement to the present. Bean Creek Road is the gateway to the community that is located just off Georgia Highway 255 in Sautee. One of the community landmark buildings is the Bean Creek Missionary Baptist Church. The Old Bean Creek Cemetery surrounds the church and families who are buried there represent generations of African Americans whose descendants live in the community today.

Bean Creek Missionary Baptist Church is a landmark in the African American community. The Old Bean Creek Cemetery is located on the hillside surrounding the church. The cemetery is the final resting place for generations of Bean Creek families.
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

An endangered circa 1850 slave cabin was moved to this heritage site and nature preserve. When restored, it will help to tell the story of African American life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley from 1822-1865.
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The history of this African American community is intertwined with some of the white families who settled in the foothills of northeast Georgia. When the Treaty of 1819 ceded lands in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley that were occupied by the Cherokees, they were forced westward. The Land Lottery of 1820 provided impetus for white settlement. Soon 61 families from North Carolina traveled to Georgia to begin farming in these valleys. Among these early white settlers was the Williams family, who arrived in the Nacoochee Valley in 1822.

The Williams family would soon become major landowners in the region. They were descendants of Major Edward Williams of Massachusetts. He later moved to North Carolina and married a daughter of Daniel Brown before both families migrated to Georgia.

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Interpreting African American Life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley: The Bean Creek History Project

Jeanne Cyriaque, continued from page 1

One of his sons, George Walton Williams, would later become a successful businessman in Charleston, while Charles Williams opened a store and operated a post office in the valley. Major Williams was a progressive farmer who, like his Indian predecessors, focused on subsistence farming. He grew corn, raised livestock and established one of Georgia's earliest dairies. A third son, Edwin P. Williams, shared his father's interest in farming, and emerged as the most successful farmer in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley.

Edwin P. Williams acquired considerable land in the years leading up to the Civil War. In 1845, he purchased 2,300 acres of land from James R. Wyly, making him the owner of a large portion of the eastern edge of the valley. He and his brother Charles also owned half of the 124 enslaved people who were recorded in the 1861 tax digest. Most of the farmers in White County had one-to-two slaves, but the Williams brothers were an exception. The property of E.P. Williams was valued at $58,266 and his land holdings were valued at $26,700 at the eve of the Civil War.

When the Civil War ended, E.P. Williams read the *Emancipation Proclamation* to his slaves in front of a stone wall at the site of his home. The freedmen did not leave the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley, as many of them continued to work for E.P. Williams and other former slave owners as sharecroppers. These African Americans began to settle in the area around Bean Creek, and family descendants of these freedmen still live there today.

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Photograph Not Available

This 1948 map identifies landmarks that are significant to the Bean Creek community and the places where family residences are located. Map reprinted courtesy of the Bean Creek History Project.

The Old Bean Creek Ball Ground is located just down the road from the church. The *Valley Vets* played baseball here. They were Bean Creek's African American baseball team, and the Bean Creek History Project of the Sautee Nacoochee Community Association (SNCA) developed an exhibit, *Celebrating One Hundred Years of Bean Creek Baseball*, to commemorate the significance of the team to the Bean Creek community. SNCA displayed the exhibit during a benefit concert that featured Nashville singers Joni Bishop and Odessa Settles of the Princely Players. The exhibit is currently on display at the University of Georgia.

*The baseball exhibit contains historic photos, uniforms and memorabilia that document the history of the **Valley Vets**.* *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Every year Bean Creek families and their descendants attend a baseball game at the Old Bean Creek Ball Ground. This annual event features the *Valley Vets,* and the Friends of Bean Creek sell hot dogs, pottery and other memorabilia to commemorate the veterans who played on the team.

*Jeanie Daves displays her pottery collection of **Valley Vets** memorabilia. She is one of the volunteers who contribute their expertise to the Bean Creek History Project. Some participants wear their **Valley Vets** baseball shirts.* *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The Bean Creek History Project is an initiative of SNCA. Caroline Crittenden is the volunteer project director who coordinates the effort to preserve an old slave cabin that once belonged to descendants of E.P. Williams. The cabin was once home to servants of the Williams family. After emancipation, the family maintained the cabin. The original cabin is 16 by 28 feet with one room and two front doors, but the Williams family added a bath, bedroom, dining room, kitchen and a front porch for family members. In the 1930s, the granddaughter of E.P. Williams lived in the cabin.

*Elnora "Bessie" Trammell (seated) and her daughter, Mary Alice Stark enjoy the annual **Valley Vets** baseball game.* *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Over the years, this circa 1850s cabin began to deteriorate. In 2002, SNCA director Jim Johnston and his family agreed to donate the slave cabin for preservation and a proposed heritage site with the condition that it be moved to another location.

The slave cabin's original appearance was modified by adding interior rooms, windows and a front porch. These deteriorated elements were removed to restore the slave cabin to its original size. *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Crittenden assembled a talented team of persons to assist with the cabin and the heritage project. Photographer David Greear painstakingly documented every architectural feature of the cabin. Barry Stiles is the craftsman who stabilized the cabin and removed the additions. Stiles found that the original cabin was made of yellow pine and oak, and it was cut with a sash saw. He will restore the cabin to its 1850s form with similar wood. Linda Aaron searched tax digests, wills, and family records. She is a UGA archivist, and has assembled photos, census information and additional documentation for the project. Andy Allen, president of the Friends of Bean Creek, and Lena Dorsey are leading the effort to collect oral histories and memorabilia from the Bean Creek community to interpret African American life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley. They were instrumental in developing the project's first exhibit: *Reflections of Bean Creek*. It was displayed at the Sautee Nacoochee Center.

Stone mason David Vandiver stabilized the chimney that was falling into the cabin. He will reassemble the chimney to its original form. *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

SNCA found a home for the cabin and the heritage site less than one mile from its original location through a gift from Lillian Hepinstall Everhart. In 1989, she donated three acres to SNCA along Georgia Highway 17 for a nature preserve. Everhart was an environmentalist and wanted this land conserved in its natural habitat. Dale Brubaker, who is a museum consultant that advises the project team, believes that the slave cabin and the nature preserve complement each other. Crittenden and Brubaker thought this would be the perfect site for the slave cabin, walking trails through the nature preserve, artifacts and an interpretive center. When Crittenden, Allen and craftsman Stiles presented the plan to locate the heritage site in this natural and serene setting, they received the overwhelming support of SNCA and the Bean Creek community.

Caroline Crittenden and Andy Allen are some of the community folk who volunteer for the Bean Creek History Project. *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The heritage site will be an educational tool that will feature the cabin and other artifacts collected by the Bean Creek community to tell the story of African American life in the valley from 1822 to 1865. Besides the slave cabin, the heritage site will include a piece of a stone wall that, according to oral tradition, was part of the wall where E.P. Williams read the *Emancipation Proclamation* to his slaves at the close of the Civil War. Other artifacts include a cooling vat that was used to refrigerate dairy products for the Williams family, a stone bench that was constructed by slaves, iron cauldrons that were used for laundry and cooking, and some of the bricks that were made by slaves with native clay. The heritage site is located just beyond the old Sautee Store on Georgia Highway 17.

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Photograph Not Available

This photo shows Andy Allen's great-grandmother, Mary Ann Nicely (left) who was born enslaved in the Sautee Nacoochee Valley. She is pictured in front of a log cabin with Allen's grandmother and grandfather, Lessie and Ed Nicely. *Photo courtesy of Andy Allen*

This photo shows the slave cabin resting on the original rock piers in its new home at the Nacoochee Valley African American Heritage Site & Nature Preserve. Stone mason David Vandiver will reassemble the rock chimney and hearth. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

When completed, the Nacoochee Valley African American Heritage Site & Nature Preserve will document the history of the cabin, celebrate the heritage and culture of the Bean Creek community and interpret the story of slavery in the Nacoochee Valley from the African American perspective. For more information on how you can assist the slave cabin restoration and the African American Heritage Site, visit the Sautee Nacoochee Community Association website at www.snca.org.

Exploring African American Historic Resources in Washington and Wilkes County

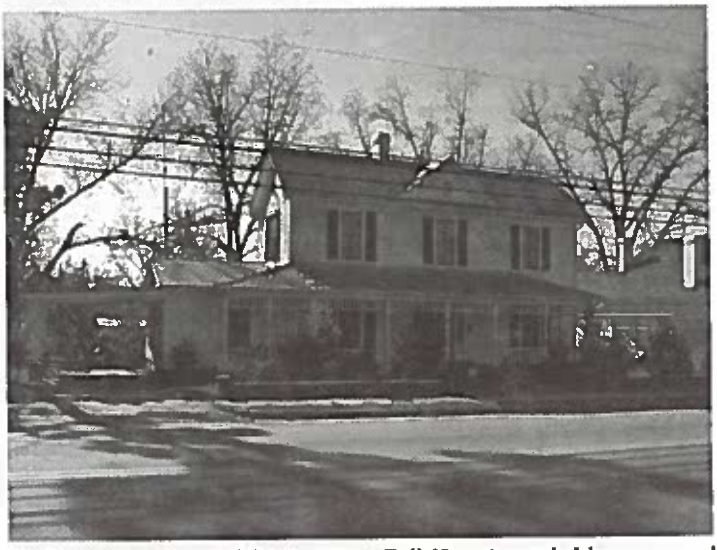
Tiffany Tolbert, African American Programs Assistant
Historic Preservation Division

Washington is located in Wilkes County, Georgia. Founded in 1780, Washington became the first town in the United States to be named after George Washington. Washington was the site of numerous historic events important to the history of Georgia as well as the United States. For example, in 1795, Eli Whitney perfected the cotton gin at the Mount Pleasant Plantation. Washington also was the last meeting place for the Confederate government. In May of 1865, Jefferson Davis and his cabinet met in Washington and dissolved the Confederacy.

While the history of Washington and its important events has been well documented, the history of African Americans in Washington and Wilkes County was overlooked. Wilkes County has always been home to a large number of African Americans. In 1802, it was home to 5,039 slaves. By 1820, the population included 1,057 farmers who owned 8,921 slaves. On the eve of the Civil War in 1860, two thirds of Washington's population was African American, and many African American settlements developed. These settlements eventually developed into neighborhoods and served as the social, educational and political center of African American life in Washington. Urban renewal destroyed most of the historic African American resources during the late 20th century, but there are a few significant historic resources that exist as examples of African American life in Washington and Wilkes County.

Following the Civil War, African Americans settled in three areas of Washington. The earliest African American residential area in Washington was settled in the 1850s by free blacks. This area was known as Baltimore in honor of the Baltimore (Maryland) relief society that helped freed slaves after the Civil War. Most of the African Americans who lived in Baltimore worked in homes of Washington's wealthy white citizens. The Wylieville area developed after the Civil War just to the west and southwest of downtown Washington. John Wylie, who acquired several hundred acres during the 1860s, divided and sold numerous lots to freed slaves. This area is also known as Freedmanville and Whitehall. Wylieville became the center of African American life in Washington. It contained many homes as well as its own commercial district known as "The Corner" and Hodge Academy, an educational institution for African Americans. While both the commercial district and Hodge Academy are gone, Wylieville still contains many historic residential structures.

In addition to the Baltimore and Whitehall communities, many African Americans settled along Lexington Avenue. Among them was Dr. Frederick Douglass Sessoms, Washington's first African American doctor. After moving from Hertford (North Carolina) Dr. Sessoms became very influential in the community where he was the only African American doctor as well as a civic leader. By the turn of the 20th century, Dr. Sessoms was well respected in both the black and white communities of Washington. This mutual respect allowed him to perform medical procedures with white doctors during a time when many white physicians refused to consult with black doctors in the treatment of patients.



Dr. Sessoms constructed this two-story, Folk Victorian style I-house around 1890. He built the home for his family and medical practice. His office was located on the first floor with a separate, covered entrance for patients.
Photo by Tiffany Tolbert

The most visible mark of Dr. Sessoms' legacy is his home, and it still stands in Washington. Dr. Sessoms' daughter, Janet Wilkerson, preserves his office just as it was when he practiced medicine there, and maintains the house. The Sessoms house is one of the largest and finest homes built in Washington's African American community.

Dr. Sessoms and his descendants are buried in Resthaven Cemetery. Resthaven has served as Washington's city cemetery since 1857. The cemetery contains the graves of the earliest settlers of Washington as well as many city leaders. The historic African American section of the cemetery is located southwest of the white section. Recently this cemetery has received additional care and maintenance to aid its preservation.

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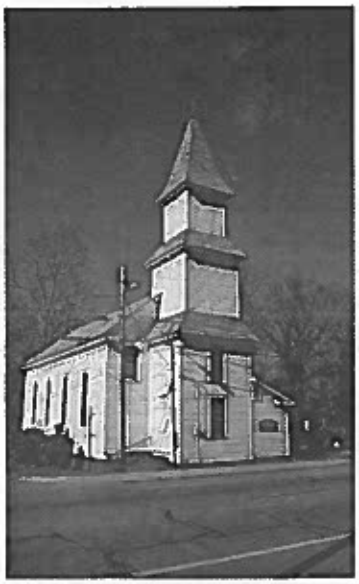
Photograph Not Available

This circa 1905 photo displays an African American church congregation in the Whitehall area of Washington. The photographer was J.W. Stephenson. Photo courtesy of the Georgia Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection, wlk125.

As Washington's African American community developed, congregations and churches were organized to serve the residents of these neighborhoods. Three churches were organized in the Wylieville neighborhood beginning in the 1860s. Jackson Chapel A.M.E Church is the oldest of these churches.



Freed slaves built Jackson Chapel A.M.E. Church in 1867 to serve the African American community called Wylieville in Washington. The church is a community landmark building in the Washington Historic District. *Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The preservation of its historic resources has always been a focus for the City of Washington. The Washington Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on December 8, 2004. Recently, the city was designated as a *Preserve America* Community. *Preserve America* is a White House initiative that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve cultural and natural heritage. *Preserve America* recognizes communities that protect their historic resources while using them to promote economic development and community revitalization. There are currently 13 *Preserve America* Communities in Georgia.

There is an increased interest in preserving not only the African American history of Washington, but also Wilkes County. Wilkes County has many historic African American resources, but the most endangered resources are the remaining rural schoolhouses. Because the education of African Americans was not publicly supported during segregation, many churches in Wilkes County started their own schools. Many of these schoolhouses have been destroyed, and today only a few African American schoolhouses remain in Wilkes County.

The Cherry Grove School is located next to the Cherry Grove Baptist Church and Cemetery in Wilkes County. It is a rare, one-room, wood frame building and is distinguished by its stone pier foundation. *Photo by Tiffany Tolbert*

The preservation of these schools is of particular interest to Patricia Wilder. Ms. Wilder attended the New Hope School and is a member of Jackson Chapel A.M.E Church. She believes that the destruction of these schools is not simply the removal of buildings, but also the removal of the history of African American education in Wilkes County. Ms. Wilder is encouraged by the preservation efforts at Jackson Chapel A.M.E Church. The church is pursuing a historic marker and plans to unveil its bronze National Register plaque in 2007 when the church celebrates its 140th anniversary. Ms. Wilder is currently a member of the Washington City Council and serves on the historic preservation committee.

Built during the early 20th century, the New Hope School educated many African American children in Wilkes County until its closure in 1956. This two-story wooden schoolhouse is located across the road from the New Hope C.M.E. Church. *Photo by Tiffany Tolbert*

Willie E. Burns is the current mayor of Washington. When he was elected in 2004, Burns became the first African American mayor in the town's 226-year history. A native of Wilkes County, Mayor Burns is the current president of the Georgia Conference of Black Mayors. He has an immense interest in preserving and interpreting Washington's African American history as well as promoting the city's economic development. One of his initiatives is the establishment of an African American history museum in Washington. It is Mayor Burns' hope that efforts, such as these, will bring lasting attention to African Americans and their contributions to Washington and Wilkes County.

This historic home was once the residence of Mango Wingfield. He built this home in the Whitehall area of Washington. Wingfield was a local entrepreneur and insurance agent. He was a member of Jackson Chapel A.M.E. Church. It is an example of one of the more elaborate houses in the African American community. *Photo by Tiffany Tolbert*

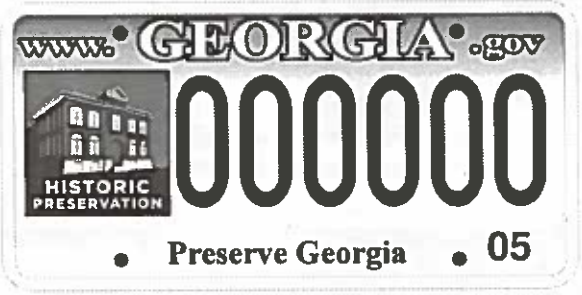
Historic Preservation License Plate Announced by DNR's Historic Preservation Division

Carole Moore, Grants Coordinator
Historic Preservation Division

Georgia drivers can support historic preservation now by buying a specialty license plate. Proceeds from sales of the new plate will be used to help preserve significant historic buildings and sites owned by non-profits and local governments throughout Georgia.

The new plate, chosen from among 23 entrants, was designed by Georgia artist Larnie Higgins of Planet Studio in Atlanta and depicts a historic train station located in Savannah. According to the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) director Dr. Ray Luce, "The train station represents the significant role railroads played in the development of the state of Georgia. The design also works as a symbol for a variety of other types of historic resources around the state, including schools, theaters, city halls and other public buildings."

The license plate was authorized by the 2005 Georgia General Assembly and signed into law at that time by Governor Perdue. More than $20 from each $25 license tag fee will go to HPD's Georgia Heritage Grant Program, which provides funding for historic preservation projects around the state. The funding is direly needed. In 1997, a special legislative study committee identified a $5 million per year goal for the Georgia Heritage Grant program. The grant program has not yet reached that goal; indeed, it reached its highest point in SFY 2002 at $500,000, and funding amounts gradually have been cut since September 11, 2001.



Last year, local governments and non-profits applied for more than $1 million in grants, although there was only $129,000 available. Dr. Luce explained that even with low funding, the grant program has made a significant impact on historic preservation projects in Georgia. "In its first 11 years (SFY 1995-2006), just over $3 million in matching grants were awarded to over 300 preservation projects in the state. These projects included a wide range of resources, such as lighthouses, cemeteries, theaters and auditoriums, post offices, jails and depots, 25 courthouses, and over 20 schools."

The license plate can be reserved at county tag offices for a $25 specialty tag fee. After 1,000 orders have been received, the plate will be produced by the Georgia Motor Vehicle Division. To find out more about the license plate and/or to use a mail-in order form to reserve a plate, please visit HPD's website at www.gashpo.org or contact HPD's grant coordinator Carole Moore at 404/463-8434 or e-mail her at carole_moore@dnr.state.ga.us.

Celebrating Our Coastal Heritage: The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network

Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator
Historic Preservation Division

Seventy-four participants joined the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) in Brunswick for the annual meeting: *Celebrating Our Coastal Heritage*. The Brunswick Landmarks Foundation sponsored the opening reception for the GAAHPN annual meeting at Old City Hall. The building is used by the Brunswick City Commission for meetings and provides offices for the Main Street program.

The annual meeting workshops were held in the educational building at First African Baptist Church. This community landmark building is located in the Old Town Brunswick Historic District. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on April 3, 1979.

The educational building at First African Baptist Church is a sensitive addition that complements the historic sanctuary. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Mayor Bryan Thompson welcomed GAAHPN to Brunswick at the First African Baptist Church. Thompson is an avid collector, and presented GAAHPN a historic photo of the first wooden building that was built to educate African Americans after the Civil War. This building no longer exists on the site of the current campus of buildings named in honor of Captain Douglas Risley, who was a Freedmen's Bureau agent. Mayor Thompson also presented a historic document that Captain Risley sent to the Freedmen's Bureau in 1870.

Photograph Not Available

This wooden building was the first school that was built to educate freedmen in Brunswick at the end of the Civil War. It was located on the present site of several buildings that were constructed on the Risley campus in the 20th century. Photo courtesy of Mayor Bryan Thompson

Richard Laub, Jennifer Martin Lewis and Brian Robinson discussed the projects that their programs assisted. *Photo by Tiffany Tolbert*

Georgia's graduate programs in historic preservation and the technical assistance that they provide in African American communities was the topic explored by three programs: Georgia State University, the Savannah College of Art and Design and the University of Georgia. Clarissa Myrick-Harris shared her expertise in a workshop on oral history. She is the immediate past chair of the Georgia National Register Review Board, and is the co-curator of the exhibit: *Red Was the Midnight: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot.* GAAHPN Steering Committee member Velmon Allen, executive director of the Southeast Georgia CDC and Brian Robinson of the Brunswick Landmarks Foundation discussed local community revitalization initiatives and historic preservation.

Workshops concluded with presentations on the Risley School, Brunswick's first African American school, and the Harrington School on St. Simons Island. Colonel Thomas Fuller, president of the Risley Alumni Association, discussed the preservation of the Risley School

The Risley Alumni Association are the stewards for this building on the campus. It is located between Colored Memorial School and the former Risley High School. *Photo by Linda Cooks*

campus. Amy Roberts and Ronald Upshaw of the St. Simons African American Heritage Coalition presented the partnerships that have evolved to preserve this endangered resource in the Harrington community.

A field session included a tour of these historic schools and other resources on St. Simons Island. Colonel Thomas Fuller greeted participants on the Risley campus, and Cynthia Lee and Amy Roberts of the St. Simons African American Heritage Coalition conducted the St. Simons portion of the tour. When the participants returned to First African Baptist Church, they were treated to a fish fry and low country boil.

Colonel Fuller shared the Risley Alumni Association collection with participants. *Photo by Richard Laub*

Celebrating Our Coastal Heritage was sponsored at minimal cost to the participants through donations from Lord, Aeck and Sargent Architecture and the Society for Georgia Archaeology. Brunswick volunteers including GAAHPN Steering Committee member Velmon Allen, Betsy Bean and Walter McNeely orchestrated key connections to ensure community participation. GAAHPN recognizes the City of Brunswick, the Georgia Department of Economic Development and the Glynn County Board of Education, our government partners, who provided facilites and in-kind services.

Participants visited the Cassina Garden Club tabby houses that were once slave cabins on Hamilton Plantation. *Photo by Tiffany Tolbert*

These contributions reflect the partnerships and volunteerism that aid GAAHPN to provide workshops and technical assistance to the network, and we acknowledge your valuable support of African American cultural and historic resources in Georgia.

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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 2,200 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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