



Reflections

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HITCH YOUR WAGON TO A STAR: GEORGIA COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS PRESERVE THE HOME OF SALLIE ELLIS DAVIS

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Historic Preservation Division*

Sallie Ellis Davis, a Milledgeville educator, was born in rural Baldwin County around 1877. Sallie was the daughter of Josh Ellis, an Irishman, and Elizabeth Brundage, an African American woman. Her mother died when Sallie was three, and her father raised Sallie with the help of his mother. Josh Ellis owned over 1,000 acres of land, a cotton gin and a general store. He educated Sallie in her early years in rural Baldwin County.

African Americans lived in Milledgeville in close proximity to whites during enslavement and by the end of the Civil War, both free blacks and freedmen resided in a community whose landmark building included Flagg Chapel Baptist Church. The church is named in honor of Wilkes Flagg, an enslaved blacksmith who purchased freedom for himself, wife and son. Flagg was literate and was a minister. By the end of the Civil War, he donated land for the church and established a school. Flagg's accomplishments were recognized by the American Missionary Association (AMA), and Reverend Hiram Eddy of the AMA sent five white teachers to instruct 350 students who were attending the Flagg Chapel School. With assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau, the Eddy School was built

for Milledgeville's African American students. Both the church and the three-room wood school became anchors for the Eddy School neighborhood.

When Sallie Ellis became college age, Josh agreed to send her to Atlanta University. Sallie entered Atlanta University and immediately knew she wanted to teach. After two years, she returned to Milledgeville where most of her fellow teachers did not have a college education. Sallie returned to Atlanta University and graduated with a normal (teaching) degree in 1899. While she was an Atlanta University student, W.E.B. DuBois was on the faculty. He would influence her career as a teacher and remained a mentor

throughout her lifetime. Sallie Ellis returned to the Eddy School as a teacher and later principal, a post she would hold during most of her 50+ year career.

By 1900, the three-room schoolhouse was replaced by Eddy High School. Eddy High School also included elementary classes. It was constructed solely by African American tradesmen. Sallie Ellis was the most credentialed teacher in Milledgeville at that time, and she was the first female principal of the school. When she returned to Milledgeville, she met John Davis, who



The Sallie Ellis Davis residence is a 1910 Central Hallway house located in Milledgeville. The house is a contributing resource in the Milledgeville Historic District, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 28, 1972.

Photo courtesy of Georgia College & State University

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HITCH YOUR WAGON TO A STAR: GEORGIA COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS PRESERVE THE HOME OF SALLIE ELLIS DAVIS

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owned a shoemaking business. With Josh Ellis' permission, they would marry. Sallie continued to work after marriage. She and John Davis had no children of their own, but adopted two girls. They settled in a house on Clark Street, about a block from the Eddy School.

In 1925, the Eddy School burned to the ground. The board of trustees decided to turn the school over to the white board of education, with a \$7,500 cash contribution. Community craftsmen added an auditorium and home economics building for a public meeting space. Sallie and John supported the effort by donating one year of her salary. During this time, Sallie returned to the classroom as a teacher.



Georgia African American
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Photograph Not Available

The rear addition provides a catering and staff area for events, as well as a porch and bathrooms. Photo courtesy of Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Sallie Ellis Davis was known by all her students as a strict disciplinarian. She was stern, yet respected by the hundreds of students she impacted in her career. Davis was a community leader as well, and believed her work as an educator would lead to economic advancement for her students. One of her favorite mottos was "hitch your wagon to a star." In 1934, John Davis died, but Sallie continued to raise their daughters and provide her home for female boarding students from the rural areas. Some of her students, including her daughter, Louise, would become schoolteachers.

In 1946, the second Eddy School burned. Sallie Ellis Davis was heartbroken, and she could not see the African American community rebuilding yet another school, and retired after 51 years of teaching. Davis died in 1950. Another school was constructed in 1949 by the Board of Education, but it was no longer at the old site. The elementary and high schools were in separate buildings, and the high school became George Washington Carver. The elementary school was not named until 1967, when it became the Sallie Ellis Davis Elementary School 17 years after her death. Sallie Ellis Davis was inducted into Georgia Women of Achievement in 2000 for her lasting legacy in Georgia women's history.

The Sallie Ellis Davis residence was in continuous use until 1989, when the Board of Regents purchased it. Georgia College & State University (GCSU) leased the house to the Sallie Ellis Davis

Foundation in 1990, a nonprofit organization of former students and community members, who wanted the residence to become an African American cultural center. In 2003, the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) awarded the City of Milledgeville and the foundation a Historic Preservation Fund grant totaling \$5,220 to develop a rehabilitation plan for the residence. The Jaeger Company prepared the plan that outlined the condition of the structure and steps required to preserve it.

In late 2008, GCSU announced a partnership with the Sallie Ellis Davis Foundation that moved the project forward and helped to build a relationship with the community. The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation included the house on its *Places in Peril* list in 2009, and this garnered additional support from the preservation community. As part of the Georgia Trust's *Partners in the Field* program, \$10,000 was allocated for the building's stabilization. Lord, Aeck & Sargent Architects (LAS) provided in-kind assistance with the drawings and design for the rear addition. Garbutt/Christman was the on-site contractor, and numerous foundations and local businesses supported the project, providing \$50,000 in material and services. Garbutt/Christman and GCSU organized a volunteer cleanup day, salvaging 4,500 bricks for reuse. Brick masons used these materials to reconstruct fireplaces, foundation piers, chimneys and fireplaces. House interiors were refinished, a new roof installed and electrical/mechanical systems were updated. Sidewalks and landscaping were provided by supporters.



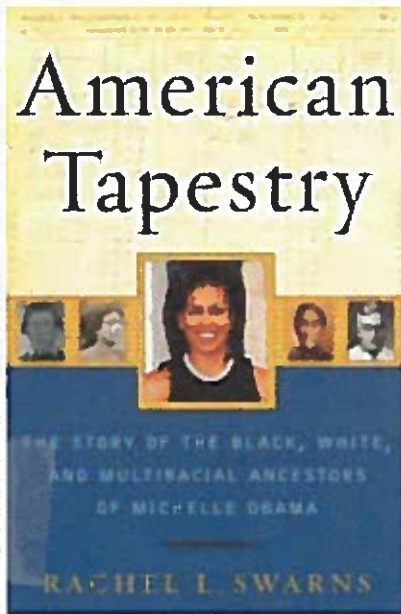
Susan Turner, LAS principal, joins three generations of Sallie Ellis Davis descendants at the dedication. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The rehabilitated Sallie Ellis Davis House was completed and dedicated in April 2012, and now is the home of a new African American Cultural Center. Partners and descendants of Sallie Ellis Davis attended the dedication. Carolyn Thomas, chair of the Sallie Ellis Davis Foundation, and Stas Preczewski, Interim President of GCSU are excited about the partnership, and Eva Elaine Allen Pritchard, grandniece of Sallie Ellis Davis, and Pastor Omer Reid of Flagg Chapel Baptist Church, were among the day's speakers, and Mayor Richard Bentley presented a proclamation. Sallie Ellis Davis may have witnessed the destruction of two school buildings, but her home will remain in service to the college and the Milledgeville community for years to come.

ENSLAVED GIRL MELVINIA SHIELDS CASTS A SHADOW TO THE WHITE HOUSE

*Barry Brown, Heritage Tourism Specialist
Georgia Department of Economic Development*

There was a festival atmosphere in Clayton County's bucolic village of Rex on June 26 with tents and banners and live gospel music. Hundreds of people came out basking in the bright though warm weather to witness the unveiling of monument and the release of a book, *American Tapestry: The Story of the Black, White, and Multiracial Ancestors of Michelle Obama*. Author Rachel Swarns' book connects Rex and tells the story of family ties to Michelle Obama and the White House.



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Interest began in the fall of 2009 when an article was published in the *New York Times* revealing genealogical research that linked a young enslaved girl, Melvinia as the great-great-great grandmother of Michelle Obama, with the small farm on the outskirts of a village that would later be known as Rex, Georgia. Since the 1840s Rex was the center of a farming community with a large grist mill, a cotton gin and a few store fronts. It's the sort of picturesque community you'd see in a postcard with a babbling brook and mill wheel turning slowly in the current.

Melvinia was bequeathed in a will from her South Carolina owner to a relatively prosperous Clayton County farm family headed by Henry Shields in 1850 when she was about six years old. The Shields grew cotton, corn, and other staples and owned two other slaves. In 1860, at the dawn of the Civil War, Melvinia gave birth to her first child, Dolphus, the father being the Shields' oldest son Charles, a white man (according to DNA research revealed in the book). Melvinia remained with the Shields family through the Civil War and after emancipation. According to the 1870 census Melvinia was employed as a farm laborer, washwoman, maid, and was the mother of four children, three of whom were listed as mulatto. She continued to live on the Clayton County farm of Charles Shields until the end of the 19th century.

Melvinia next appears in the census living in Kingston, Bartow County Georgia under her married name Mattie McGruder. Employed as a midwife, she shared a home with her adult children



**Photograph
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**Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network**

Clayton County and state officials join author Rachel Swarns (fifth from left) at unveiling of Melvinia Shields' monument in Rex. Photo courtesy of Georgia Department of Economic Development

and four grandchildren. According to the late Miss Ruth Applin of Kingston who not only knew Melvinia, but married her grandson Emory, "“Mattie McGruder (was) a loving, spiritual woman seen often with her bible and singing hymns.” Melvinia died at the age of 94 and is buried in the churchyard at Queen Chapel Methodist Church in Kingston.

The monument unveiling ceremony in Rex was followed by an author's presentation and book signing at the National Archives in Morrow, a fitting location due to the genealogical and family records playing such a vital role in bringing the story to light. Over 500 people were in attendance including the Georgia Department of Economic Development Tourism Division and



Melvinia Shields is a maternal ancestor of First Lady Michelle Obama. Photo by Melissa Jest/HPD

Clayton County officials who have been working on the Melvinia Shields project for several years. At the end of the program the black and white members of the Shields family who came from around the southeast gathered for group photographs and conciliatory remarks to cap off a truly uplifting occasion. ■

SAVING THE WALLACE GROVE SCHOOL: A VESTIGE OF RURAL EDUCATION IN MORGAN COUNTY

*Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator
Historic Preservation Division*

Christine McCauley, executive director of the Madison-Morgan Conservancy, would often call African American programs to discuss historic schools and how they evolved in Georgia's African American communities. Sometimes we would discuss the role of philanthropy in building African American schools at the turn of the 20th century, and McCauley was amazed to find out that Morgan County had no Rosenwald Schools. I would encourage her to examine how African American education was approached in her county, and pointed out that sometimes Georgia counties had their own solutions to African American education during segregation. McCauley kept researching, meeting regularly with community elders, and discovered that Morgan County had constructed 100 schools for African Americans from 1871-1910. Most of these schools that were located on donated farmland or near churches did not survive, but McCauley found one that remains, and became a partner in preserving the Wallace Grove School.



The Wallace Grove School is a one room schoolhouse with six windows that were donated by Franklin Restoration.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



*Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network*

Photograph

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Before the restoration began, the Wallace Grove School had deteriorated and was in need of a new roof.

Photo courtesy of the Madison-Morgan Conservancy

The Wallace Grove School is believed to be the last remaining one room schoolhouse built for African Americans in Morgan County. It was constructed in 1901 and is located on the grounds of Wallace Grove Baptist Church. Both the school and original church building were constructed on an acre of land donated by W.P. Wallace, a local white farmer. The original church building burned in 1950, but the school remained active until the late 1950s, when all African American schools were consolidated.

Reverend Tommy Chatman, the church pastor, often stared at the dilapidated structure as he sought a solution to the congregation's need for a fellowship hall, since the church had a kitchen, but limited space. The congregation could sponsor functions outside, but what about using the old schoolhouse during stormy weather? Chatman and some of the church deacons had carpentry skills, so they approached McCauley and the Madison-Morgan Conservancy to assist in the restoration.

Pastor Chatman and the restoration crew got plenty of help from the community. It was their desire to restore the school according to the Secretary of the Interior standards, so each board

of the school was carefully marked while the members cleared debris and other non-reusable items. While the church deacons were busy with site preparation, Sunflower Farm loaned a bulldozer and provided labor on workdays. McCauley focused on fundraising. She contacted Champion Lumber who donated wood, while Social Circle Hardware provided beaded board. Local churches and individuals gave cash, while Great Estate Landscaping and Ruark Farms donated sod and pine straw for the landscaping around the school.

Restoration of the Wallace Grove School was completed in eight months due to this effort between the Wallace Grove Baptist Church and Morgan County citizens. The restoration celebration also was a homecoming, as former teachers and students arrived to share their memories and photos.



*Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network*

Photograph

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The Madison-Morgan Cultural Center donated furniture for the interior. Photo courtesy of the Madison-Morgan Conservancy



Emma Johnson, the last teacher, and Anne Wallace-Walker, granddaughter of W.P. Wallace, attended the community celebration.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Now McCauley hopes that current Morgan County students can visit the Wallace Grove School on field trips and learn how students were educated before there were bathrooms and lunchrooms. The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the Wallace Grove School at their 2012 annual meeting, when the Wallace Grove School project received an "Excellence in Restoration Award."

REDEDICATION OF THE AVONDALE BURIAL PLACE CEMETERY: A GLIMPSE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY LIFE IN SOUTHERN BIBB COUNTY

*Hugh B. Matternes, Ph.D. Mortuary Archaeologist
New South Associates, Inc.*

On February 21, 2012 church and family members gathered to remember those who were briefly lost from history. After dedication prayers were offered by Bethel AME Church pastor, Rev. W. A. Hopkins, flowers were laid on dozens of new graves marking the end of an unusual journey. The remains of 101 individuals originally discovered at the Avondale Burial Place, a largely forgotten cemetery in southern Bibb County, were laid to rest in a specially prepared section of the Bethel AME Church Cemetery.



The Avondale Burial Place monument describes the special section in the Bethel AME Church Cemetery where the remains of 101 individuals were relocated.
Photo courtesy of New South Associates, Inc.

The journey to reach this point began nearly five years ago, when historians and archaeologists from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) learned that an old cemetery lay under a forested corner at an old agricultural field near the Middle Georgia Regional Airport. An exhaustive review of historical records by GDOT and New South Associates historians found no record of the cemetery's existence. There were fleeting references of a dispersed African American community inhabiting an area between present day Walden and Avondale. The community largely vanished during the early to mid twentieth century, leaving only a few traces of its existence. The cemetery is perhaps the most



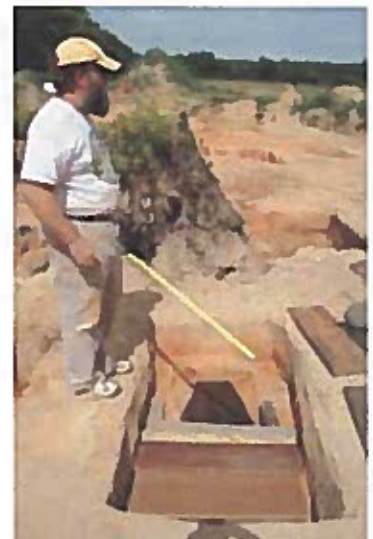
Rev. Herman "Skip" Mason, a family descendant, consecrates the new burial ground with soil from the original site. Photo courtesy of New South Associates, Inc.

permanent vestige of their presence. Beginning as early as the late nineteenth century, genealogical records document how former community members pursued opportunities for a better life elsewhere. Some moved to nearby Macon, others to towns in Georgia, while most appear to have joined the Great Migration, a mass exodus of African Americans from the South, responding to labor demands in the North and Midwest. Those who remained in the area took care of the cemetery, perhaps as late as the early 1950s, but as they passed on the cemetery fell into obscurity, known only to a few older long-term residents. With no visible indications of the cemetery's existence in the overgrown wood line, we are indebted to Mr. John Lucas, who pointed out the location where it lay.



The original burials were located at this site near the Middle Georgia Regional Airport in rural Bibb County.
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The cemetery's discovery in the late stages of planning for the proposed improvements to Sardis Church Road placed GDOT in the position of having no realistic option but to consider relocating it. Inquiries through online genealogical resources turned up descendants whose roots were clearly from the area. Their work linked pre-emption African Americans, brought to the area as early as the 1820s, with descendants who lived there through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The final resting place of these folk has long been lost to family memory. While initially apprehensive about the



Mortuary archaeologist Hugh Matternes measures one of the graves at the site. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

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REDEDICATION OF THE AVONDALE BURIAL PLACE CEMETERY: A GLIMPSE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY LIFE IN SOUTHERN BIBB COUNTY

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concept of seeing the cemetery moved, they also saw an opportunity to learn if these were in fact their long lost ancestors and as a chance to learn about parts of their past that had largely gone unrecorded.



Mortuary archaeologist Valerie Davis re-assembles the glass viewing plate found on a coffin. These artifacts were catalogued and reinterred with the original graves.
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Genealogical records were not the only fruitful means of identifying potential descendants. DNA extracted from the bones and teeth of 23 individuals is being compared to DNA provided by potential descendants. By examining DNA stored in a cell's mitochondria the relatedness of female lines can be determined. Researchers have found that several distinct groups of DNA sequences (called haplogroups) from the cemetery exhibit distinct African ancestry. Preliminary results indicate that at least two potential descendants share enough DNA with the Avondale sample to suggest that they are relatives. Continued research on the Y-chromosome is slated to examine whether similar results can be obtained along the male family member lines.



This coffin handle was interred with a child. It was inscribed "the Lord is my shepherd." Photo courtesy of New South Associates, Inc.

Artifacts and grave structure suggest a blend of traditional West African and American burial traditions. The cemetery was placed on a small rise, a common rural feature allowing the dead to be closer to heaven and near a wetland, perhaps to reflect the West African belief that water separated the lands of the living and the dead. Graves were placed with the head to the east; this pattern reflects both a Christian placement (so that the dead can face Christ on Judgment Day) as well as aligning the dead with the movement of the sun, an

important component of West African cosmology. The hardware on some of the coffins were emblazoned with crosses, lambs, and cross and crown (a.k.a. Crown of glory) motifs, also emphasizing Christian visions of life after death. A black glass pendant with a rose in its center was an indicator that Victorian era mourning ware was probably worn. Personal possessions such as wedding bands, purses, combs, a tobacco pipe, and a porcelain doll were included with some individuals to supply them with objects that they would need in the world of the dead. Among children, a pierced silver coin and bead necklaces probably served as charms. Originally these would have provided good luck and protection from harm; after death they shielded the innocent spirit on its trip to the next world. Coins placed on the eyes helped hold the eyelids shut and provided fare for the spiritual trip.



A porcelain doll was found in a child's coffin. Photo courtesy of New South Associates, Inc.



This is an impression from one of the adult graves at Avondale Burial Place Cemetery.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

REDEDICATION OF THE AVONDALE BURIAL PLACE CEMETERY: A GLIMPSE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY LIFE IN SOUTHERN BIBB COUNTY

An examination of the skeletal remains revealed a hard life. Almost 57 percent of the cemetery was composed of children under the age of 10, indicating that childhood was an especially perilous period of life. Modern medicine, community health awareness, and enriched child care practices have substantially lowered childhood death in modern communities, but even by nineteenth century standards, these were very high losses. Over 65 percent of these children died before they were weaned (usually by age 3). Growth arrest lines on the teeth of the survivors, referred to as enamel hypoplasia, indicate periods where disease, malnutrition, trauma, and other forms of stress literally disrupted a child's growth. Many children were not able to overcome these perilous events. Among adults, growth disruption during childhood resulted in adults standing much shorter than their modern counterparts. Males stood nearly four inches shorter and females were over 1.5 inches shorter than people today. Dental data, including results from isotopic, wear, deterioration, and disease analyses, imply that diet was a major contributor to these issues. Many families in the community appear to have followed a traditional rural Southern diet composed largely of corn meal, pork, and molasses. This high carbohydrate diet, which was occasionally supplemented by garden-plot vegetables and game, lacked sufficient protein, vitamins, and other nutritional needs to keep growing children healthy. During hard times and winters, insufficient amounts of even these foods may also have been a concern.



*These children were buried next to each other in a family plot at Avondale Place Cemetery.
Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Diet was also an issue among adults. A high sugar diet combined with only a rudimentary understanding of adequate dental health care resulted in a high incidence of dental infections and cavities. When one's teeth hurt, even less food is consumed. Joint deterioration and arthritis, present even among the middle aged, indicated that physical demands were great; most of the calories an adult consumed would have been burned quickly while keeping up with the daily workload. High physical demand, poor diet, and insufficient volume would have spiraled together to place the adult's health in jeopardy. Add disease and it is little wonder why most

adults died before reaching their 50s. There are extremely few health responses among the bones, implying that death tended to happen quickly, leaving no trace or opportunity for the skeleton to respond. A review of Federal Mortality Census data for the region indicate that communicable diseases including pneumonia, whooping cough, malaria, typhoid, and other fevers, took a significant toll in southern Bibb County. These and similar maladies likely accounted for many of the deaths in Avondale.

At the conclusion of the Dedication Ceremony, family member, Rev. Skip Mason observed, "These must be very special people, we only get one funeral and they got two". A funeral is a time to remember the dead, to bond families and friends together, and reaffirm one's ties to the community as a whole. During the course of this journey, family and church members discovered that they shared common roots, surnames, and a desire to see their ancestors treated in a sacred and respectful manner. Avondale's Dedication Ceremony served to remember these forgotten people and helped tie the Avondale Burial Ground descendants with living members of the community. Avondale's people were brought not only their own world closer together, but that of their descendants. Their memorial services were carried out by two communities separated by time, but bonded by a common desire not to forget who they are. Indeed Rev. Mason was truly correct; the folks who were buried in Avondale Burial place truly were and are a very special people.

For more information about the Avondale Burial Place, visit the project website at www.avondaleburialplace.org and watch the project video: *I Remember, I Believe* at www.youtube.com/user/georgiadepoftrans?feature=results

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• Are You Related?

Our research has identified the following families living close to the Avondale Burial Place. If your family is from the Avondale-Walden area in southern Bibb County your DNA could link you to a long lost ancestor. If you are interested in submitting a sample, please contact Hugh Maternes at New South Associates, Inc. (770-498-4155 ext 114) or visit us through the website at www.avondaleburialplace.org/. All sample results will remain confidential and used only for research purposes.

Surnames				
Allen	Collins	Glover	Lundy	Reese
Bagley	Cummins	Green	Londy	Ryder
Barton	Dean	Henderson	McBray	Stubbs
Bivins	Deah	Hodge	McClendon	Thomas
Bostick	Delia	Hunter	McClennon	Walker
Brown	Dickson	Johnson	McLennon	Wilder
Casterlow	Dixon	Kinlaw	Mitchell	Young
Castillo	Gile	Lucas	Moore	York
Clark				

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.georgiashpo.org. Search for links to your topic by categories: cemeteries, churches, districts, farms, lodges, medical, people, places, schools, and theatres. You can now subscribe to *Reflections* from the homepage. *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 Committee 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.georgiashpo.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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