

# Reflections

## Dear Subscribers:

The September 2023 issue of *Reflections*, a publication of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN), is now available. It is available in PDF format on the Georgia Historic Preservation Division website.

You may view the issue [here](#), titled *Sept2023 - Reflections*

The Camilla Massacre is a story, like many others, that is not known and is finally being told. This article explores and explains the history of African Americans trying to vote during Reconstruction in Mitchell County. Also, there is now a marker in Camilla from the Georgia Historical Society commemorating this event.

Who doesn't like to go down memory lane? That is what students from equalization schools in Northwest Georgia do every year. Learn about the history of the location where they meet, George Washington Carver State Park, and how and why these students, who are now adults, take value in Memories Day.

Learn about Richmond County's rich history of African American funeral directors from Reconstruction, and how cabinet makers and seamstresses came to provide funeral services that are still in demand today.

Georgia's Full Story cannot be told without Black history. Discover how you can make sure every African American story is told in the state of Georgia in hopes of putting structures, cemeteries, or neighborhoods on the National Register. Any African American historical significance needs not to go unnoticed.

Questions or comments? Please Contact:

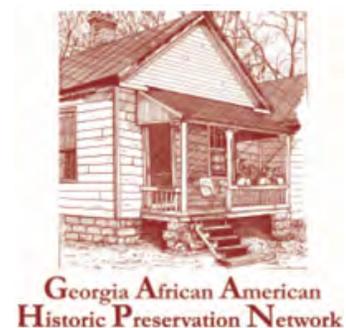
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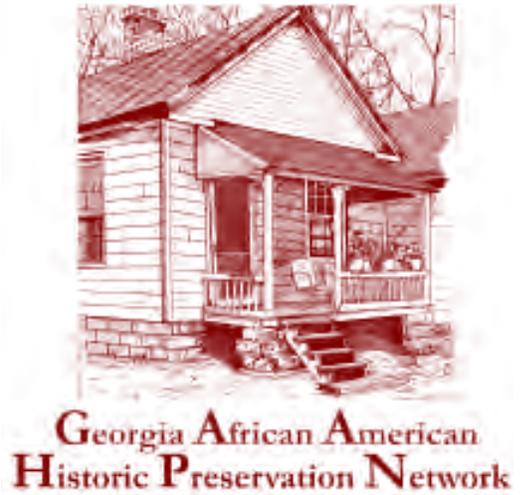


Georgia Historic Preservation Division



# Reflections

Volume XIX, No. 2



September 2023

## REMEMBERING THE PAST: THE CAMILLA MASSACRE

*Dr. Joshua Butler and Dr. Lee Formwalt, Albany State University*

Georgia experienced a violent episode during the 1868 election campaign known as the Camilla Massacre.

The state met the Radical Reconstruction requirements in July 1868 and was readmitted to the Union. Campaigning as a Republican in southwest Georgia was not for the faint-hearted in 1868. Republican leaders like carpetbaggers Francis Putney, John Murphy, and William P. Pierce, and freedman Philip Joiner exhibited great personal courage.

Republican candidates in southwest Georgia, accompanied by a drum-and-fife band, spoke to mostly Black audiences. When Pierce and Murphy spoke to Sumter County Blacks in Americus, 35 miles north of Albany, on September 15 a white crowd gathered. The scene turned ugly, but the two candidates fled the town after dark.<sup>1</sup>

Having barely escaped with their lives, the two candidates traveled to Albany and planned a political rally in Camilla for Saturday, September 19. Organizers distributed advertisements for the Camilla rally in Dougherty and Mitchell counties. Murphy approached Albany band leader freedman Peter Hines and engaged his group for the Camilla rally.<sup>2</sup>

When some of the freedmen gathering at Putney's plantation the night before Saturday's march to the Camilla rally complained about rumors of white violence, Republican leaders reassured the Black marchers there would be no trouble if the freedpeople raised "no fuss." Putney told the concerned Blacks that rumors that armed whites would await them in Camilla were just "threats made by the white folks . . . to scare them and keep them" out of the Mitchell County seat.<sup>3</sup>



*Camilla Massacre GA Historical Marker Society Marker Dedication Ceremony, held in February 2023. Photo Credit: Mary Joseph/HPD*

As the sun rose Saturday morning, Peter Hines and his band started out for Camilla. The bandwagon's music attracted men, women, and children from the fields they passed, swelling the crowd into the hundreds. Some men brought weapons, mostly shotguns loaded with bird shot, which they carried out of habit rather than fear.

1 O. H. Howard to J. R. Lewis, September 16, 1868; Morrill to M. Frank Gallagher, September 19, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-GA (M798).

2 Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 63; Pierce, deposition, September 24, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-Ga (M798).

3 Smith Bowen, deposition, September 25, 1868; James Washington, deposition, October 7, 1868; George Thomas, Peter Massey, Gabe Jenkins, and Harrison Clements, deposition, September 26, 1868; Plenty Arnold, deposition, September 25, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-GA (M798).

## THE CAMILLA MASSACRE

*Continued from page 1*

In fact, the freedmen brought very little ammunition and once the bird shot in most of the weapons was unloaded; the guns were useless. This was no invading force of armed looters, as the white inhabitants of Camilla claimed.<sup>4</sup>

As the several hundred marchers neared Camilla, the local sheriff rode out to urge the Republican leaders not to enter Camilla. The Republicans insisted that the peaceful marchers were exercising their right to attend a political rally and continued to the town. As the bandwagon led the freedmen into Camilla's courthouse square, they saw armed white men lined up on the west and south sides of the square. A drunken townsman stepped in front of the bandwagon and ordered the musicians to stop playing. The music halted momentarily; when it started up again, the intoxicated man aimed his gun at the band and fired. The men on the west side of the square followed suit and killed one of the eight band members and wounded the rest. Camilla residents awaiting the freedmen now opened fire on them. The freedmen who had guns fired back, but they soon ran out of their birdshot.<sup>5</sup> Pandemonium engulfed the courthouse square as men, women, and children ran for safety. The freedmen fled to the woods north of the courthouse. Joiner, Murphy, Pierce, and Putney tried to organize those with arms to protect the freedmen from the mob. The situation worsened as armed and mounted whites chased and shot at any Blacks they spotted. Escaping from Camilla was a harrowing experience for the many freed-persons who made it into the woods and swamps as they raced back the twenty or so miles to Dougherty County.



*Marvin Broadwater, Sr., Mitchell County Alumni, and Commissioner Hayward at the Camilla Massacre Historical Marker Dedication in February 2023.*

*Photo credit: Mary Joseph/HPD*

The four political leaders made it back to Dougherty by the next morning. Putney suffered a gunshot wound to his shoulder. Joiner and Murphy fled in Murphy's buggy which the two abandoned as men on horseback closed in on them. Murphy was beaten bloody while Joiner hid helpless in a cornfield before escaping through the corn "on his all fours." In all, at least a dozen of the freedmen who went to Camilla were killed. Some of them died instantly; others were killed after being "shot repeatedly while lying wounded on the ground." Thirty or so were wounded.<sup>6</sup>

News of the massacre spread throughout the country via telegraph. Democratic newspapers blamed the slaughter on the freedmen and their unscrupulous leaders. The Republican newspapers blamed the Democrats' attempt to stop Black Republicans from voting as the cause for the bloodshed. The Camilla Massacre had a great political impact; only two Republicans showed up to vote on Election Day in Mitchell County. In majority Black Dougherty County, the Democrats' weapon of choice was to steal the election through fraud.<sup>7</sup>

The southern white version of the Camilla Massacre became a part of the Lost Cause mythology as later generations passed it on. People labeled as criminals Blacks who exercised their constitutional rights. Black voters became looters, and those who shot and killed them became men of honor defending their homes and their women. A lesser-known oral tradition has been handed down in some of the old Black families in the Albany area who considered Francis Putney a hero for his role in Camilla and because he treated his Black tenants and customers decently and fairly.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Peter Hines, deposition, September 23, 1868; Squire Acre, deposition, September 25, 1868; Lewis Smith, deposition, September 24, 1868; Howard Bunts, deposition, September 24, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-GA (M798); William Miss to R. C. Drum, September 29, 1868, Governor's Incoming Correspondence (Rufus Bullock), Georgia State Archives.  
<sup>5</sup> Mumford S. Poore, deposition, September 25, 1868; John Murphy, deposition, September 22, 1868; Philip Joiner, deposition, September 24, 1868; Daniel Howard, deposition, September 25, 1868; William Pierce, deposition, September 24, 1868; Francis Putney, deposition, September 22, 1868; Washington Jones, deposition, September 23, 1868; John Davis, deposition, September 26, 1868; Goliath Kendrick, deposition, September 23, 1868; Thomas, Massey, Jenkins, and Clements, deposition; Lewis Davis, deposition, September 25, 1868; Bunts, deposition; William Outlaw, deposition, September 24, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-GA (M798); Macon Weekly Telegraph, September 25, 1868.

<sup>6</sup> Pierce, deposition; Hines, deposition; O. H. Howard to J. R. Lewis, September 20, 1868; Bunts, deposition, Outlaw, deposition; Murphy, deposition; Murphy to O. H. Howard, September 20, 1868; Joiner, deposition; Ishmael Lonon, deposition, September 27, 1868, Roll 22, BRFAL-GA (M798).

<sup>7</sup> Springfield (Mass.) Semi-Weekly Republican, September 23, 1868; Savannah Daily News & Herald, September 23, 1868, October 1, 1868; New York Times, September 28, 1868, September 29, 1868; W. Dean Burnham, Presidential Ballots, 1836-1892 (Baltimore, 1955), 352-353; Susan E. O'Donovan, "Philip Joiner, Black Republican Leader," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 4 (1986), 62; Christian Raushenberg to O. H. Howard, November 21, 1868; Francis Watson, deposition, November 4, 1868; Samuel Polfus, deposition, November 4, 1868; Edwin Payton, deposition, November 4, 1868; Andrew McLane, deposition, November 4, 1868; Ishmael Lonon, deposition, November 4, 1868, Roll 23, BRFAL-GA (M798).

<sup>8</sup> Callaway, "Recollections of Plantation Life in the Years Following the Civil War," Callaway Papers, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah; Warren, "Memories of Albany," typed ms, 1939, copy in author's (Lee Formwalt) possession. James Griffin, interview with author (Lee Formwalt), October 8, 1986.

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## MEMORIES DAY: CELEBRATING A JEWEL IN THE BARTOW COUNTY LANDSCAPE

*Dr. Sherri Garrett, Retired Educator, Cedar Hill High Legacy Group  
Alexis Callahan, Curator, Summer Hill Heritage Group*

**M**emories Day is an annual celebration that takes place on the 4th Saturday in February and brings together an assemblage of schools in northwest Georgia with two things in common: all historically African American and all operated during segregation. First hosted by the Bartow History Museum in 2015 at George Washington Carver Park, the original purpose of “Memories Day” was to collect personal historical accounts from those persons who remembered having either been to the park or been a part of its creation as the first “Georgia State Park for Negroes.”

By 2018, the Summer Hill Heritage Group, an alumni extension of the historically Black Summer Hill High School, expanded "Memories Day" to not only spotlight the legacy of George Washington Carver State Park's significance in the Civil Rights and environmental justice movements, but to also align other segments to the celebration. Three important segments have since evolved: First, to pay homage to George Washington Carver Park; second, to give recognition to northwest Georgia's African American high schools that operated before desegregation;



*Cedar Hill High School Alumni, Cedartown, GA. Memories Day, February 2023.  
Photo Credit: Summer Hill Heritage Group*



*Summer Hill Heritage Group, Cartersville, GA. Memories Day, February 2023.*

*Photo Credit: Summer Hill Heritage Group*

and third, to reminisce about the rivalries, the athletic accomplishments, and the camaraderie found among groups that had so much in common.

The backdrop for Memories Day is its location: George Washington Carver Park. This 345 acre park was named to honor the renowned Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) botanist and inventor, George Washington Carver. The rich history of the park began after World War II when there were no public parks for Blacks due to segregation laws strictly enforced in all state parks in the South, which prevented African Americans from enjoying outdoor amenities. John Loyd Atkinson, Sr., a former Tuskegee airman, who returned from World War II began looking to build an outdoor recreational facility for African Americans, similar to Florida's American Beach, created for Black families to compensate for the effects of Jim Crow laws.

## MEMORIES DAY

*Continued from page 3*

He had difficulty getting permits on his own until the Georgia State Parks Division stepped in. In 1950, the Georgia State Parks Division leased 1457 acres which became Red Top Mountain State Park and 345 acres which became George Washington Carver State Park on the newly created Lake Allatoona. John Atkinson, Sr. became the first Black park Superintendent in Georgia and while in this position Atkinson built a clubhouse, concession stand, playground, boat ramp, boat and fishing docks, swim beach with diving platform and residences.

Each year Memories Day celebrates the contributions of John Atkinson, Sr. with a special recognition during the program. Members of the Atkinson family share affectionate memories and familial history of the development of George Washington Carver State Park and its continued value in the community. In 2020, the Summer Hill Heritage Group invited alumni from historically Black high schools from the northwest Georgia area to participate in the festivities. Alumni representation has come from the following schools: Elm Street High, Rockmart; Cedar Hill High, Cedartown; Main High, Rome; Lemon Street High, Marietta; Carver High, Atlanta; Ralph Bunch High, Canton; R. L. Cousins High, Douglasville; Stephens High, Calhoun; and George Washington Carver High, Carrollton. ■



*Lemon Street High School Alumni, Marietta, GA. Memories Day, February 2023.*

*Photo Credit: Summer Hill Heritage Group*

*\*This article is written in memory of Charles Atkinson, son of John and Bessie Atkinson, Sr., who we lost on June 3, 2023.\**

## CONNECTING THE DOTS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER: THE UNLIKELY HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FUNERAL DIRECTORS IN RICHMOND COUNTY

*Author Joyce Law, CSRA Region Co-Representative, GAAHPN and Diversity Scholar, National Trust for Historic Preservation*

Three magnetic features of Springfield Village Park will lure you to visit: Richard Hunt's imaginative sculpture, Tower of Aspiration, the thunderous gurgle of the lower-level fountain, and the fragrance of seasonal red roses. Your attention will lock onto the winding path of interpretive panels, which tell a comprehensive story of Augusta's African American past. The 1863 excerpt list of Free People of Color in Richmond County includes a seamstress named **Isabella Moore**.



*Springfield Village Park, dedicated in 2002, adjacent to Springfield Baptist Church.  
Photo Credit: Joyce Law.*

Similarly, to many people of color born before Emancipation, few facts are recorded of Isabella's life. The advantage that she held in the cottage industry of sewing to earn her own income as a free woman provided distinguished burials of her descendants at the front entrance of Cedar Grove Cemetery. Obelisks and tablets retain information about her life, mother, and children. Moreover, she is a reporter for a more realistic view of the colonial and federal decade lifestyle of urban Blacks. She and her spouse, **Jeffrey Moore (1789-1850)**, were married in 1828. Both are listed in the 1850 Census as Free Inhabitants.

Mrs. Moore's story, at further inquiry, unwittingly begins the surprise narrative about the development of Augusta's professional African American funeral home directors and embalmers.

During her 91 years lifespan (1777-1886), she would see her daughter **Mary Jane Sinkfield (1844-1921)** and son-in-law **William Sinkfield (1814-1886?)**, a carpenter, participate in this pioneering leap from precision crafts as tailors, harness makers, and cabinetmakers into a melded skills network of funeral directors. This evolution began in 1883, with Mary Jane joining the firm in 1886. Her occupation is also listed as an ice dealer. Their oldest son George began at the company in 1882, as a carpenter; younger son Edwin joins in 1901 and eventually becomes the company manager by 1903. These milestones are based on the Augusta City Directory listings from 1877 through 1907. Located directly across from Cedar Grove, Augusta's oldest and largest African American municipal cemetery established in 1818, the Sinkfield's cabinet shop had held a huge logistical advantage since 1877. The year 1907 also marks a turning point for the Sinkfields through a smearing monetary scandal by Edwin Sinkfield, providing a wider market share for other undertakers.

Prior to today's funeral homes, African-Americans like other groups prepared the deceased for burial at home, distributed personal invitations to the service and covered the cost of burial and assistance to families through benevolent associations and societies. The organized groups were essential during long cast of segregation, which prevented African Americans from obtaining life insurance policies until the breakthrough establishment of Augusta's Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance Company in 1898, Georgia's first insurance enterprise, which received its legal charter in 1905. Organizations such as Walker Pilgrim Progress, Home Relief Society, and Union Waiters Society of America dominated the self-financing of burials.

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White funeral director, the German- university-educated W. Edwin "Boss" Platt (1853-1929), became chart president of the Georgia Funeral Directors Association in 1877. In 1900, Platt successfully advocated for the professional examination and licensing of funeral directors and embalmers. He obtained the first state-issued certificate and also opened the Southern College of Embalming in Augusta. African Americans were welcomed to attend separately, in keeping with the social segregation ways of the time.

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Platt's Funeral Home, through long established, open-minded employment of African American cabinetmakers, paved the way for free born Francis M. Dugas (1841-1923) to acquire the skills to open his own undertaking firm around 1891, at the current site of Augusta's main library located at the southeast intersection of Telfair Street and James Brown Boulevard.

**Dent's Undertaking Establishment** is frequently lauded as Augusta's first African American funeral home. Recently digitized records of additional sources reveal the Dent's formation date as 1905, as shown in company advertisements. The company started as Dent and Mims, with **John H. Dent, Jr. (1874-1911)** in the lead. The death of both original owners played a key role in continuity of Dent's. The formerly enslaved "**Uncle**" **Stephen Mims** died in 1907, shoving John's spouse, **Julia (1875-1945)**, to the forefront of the business operations. The Dent's only child, Lucille, also arrived in 1907.

Upon the sudden death of John Dugas, ten days after winning first place in the double mule team race during the 1911 Negro Fair, Julia became the face of the company until her own demise. Her second husband, **Israel Brown (1888-1931)**, rose to operating manager. The important point is that the chronological ages of the Dent's refute their capacity to have been legal owners and practitioners as Augusta's first African American funeral home directors.

In 1914, a young trustworthy tailor named **W.H. Mays, Sr. (1889-1948)** joined the Dent's staff rising to Assistant Manager by 1919. In 1920, a bold headline in The Augusta Chronicle issue of August 7th, "Colored Embalmers Hold General Meeting," reveals a rarely applauded act of activism. Israel Brown was elected as charter president of the Colored Embalmers and Undertakers of Georgia at the two-day meeting. The session met at Dugas auditorium, with Edwin Platt and the renown Rev. Dr. Charles T. Walker giving addresses.



*Local artist Sala Adenike designed the images and accompanying song of this piece depicting local African American trailblazers in the first of the 2019 Golden Block series located on Laney-Walker Boulevard, dedicated on November 9, 2019. Installed at the site of the former Dugas & Son Funeral Home, the building was later repurposed in the early 1960's as the Pilgrim Civic Room. The late J.P. Waring, Sr. credits the moniker "Golden Blocks" to George N. Stoney, M.D., (1865-1926), which describes the concentrated commercial vibrancy of the intersecting 9th Street (now renamed James Brown Boulevard) and Gwinnett Street (now Laney-Walker Blvd) corridors. Photo credit: Joyce Law.*

The remaining officer slate of officers are: **W.J. Wyatt of Waycross**, as First Vice President; **Mamie E. Weldon of Augusta**, Second Vice President; **S.D. Allen of Columbus**, Secretary; and **E.A. Jones of Waycross**, Treasurer. "Willie" Mays secured the property at 1221 James Brown Boulevard and opens W.H. Mays Mortuary in 1922. His spouse **Ethel Hudson Mays, (1892-1962)**, a 1911 graduate of Augusta's nationally acclaimed Haines Normal and Industrial Institute, worked alongside him, filling an impressive slice of the funeral service demands. A new dynasty was created, and is still intact, as there are only two remaining businesses from the Golden Blocks era and corridor.

*Research conducted in Augusta City Directories and local newspapers.*

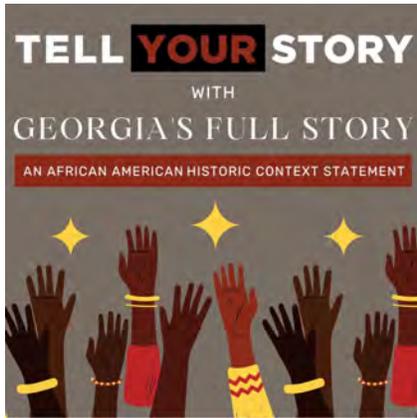
### CAMILLA MASSACRE, *continued*

It took 130 years for the city of Camilla and Mitchell County to honor the victims of the Camilla Massacre publicly. The Prison and Jail Project's 1998 Freedom Walk culminated with a eulogy of the massacred victims as nineteenth-century civil rights heroes. It took another two decades for the massacre to be given the public attention it deserved on its sesquicentennial reenactment of the last part of the 1868 march to Camilla and a historical conference on the Camilla

Massacre at the Albany Civil Rights Institute. Now, with the erection of the Camilla Massacre historical marker in February 2023, there is now permanent recognition of the significant civil rights event that took place at the Mitchell County Courthouse with the shedding of blood by southwest Georgians who were exercising their recently won rights as American citizens.

## AN UPDATE ON GEORGIA'S FULL STORY (GFS) INITIATIVE

Briana Paxton, Ethos Preservation



The preservation field is ever evolving. Work that contributes to greater equity and the ultimate preservation of historic resources that were in the past underrepresented in our collective historic narrative is profoundly important.

Ethos Preservation is honored to be involved and is actively authoring Georgia's Full Story with support from an advisory committee of preservationists, historians, and people with lived experience in the preservation of Black heritage from across the state, to include two members of GAAHPN!

Why list a place on the National Register? Commonly known as an honorific designation, the listing of historic places to the National Register can open the door to historic tax incentives and grant funding that may otherwise be unobtainable. There is an unprecedented amount of historic preservation dollars and grant giving programs for the preservation of Black sites across the U.S., increasing the timeliness of this project.

Georgians with knowledge of Black places of historical significance are encouraged to share the location of sites, historical information, photographs, and other information with the project team at [www.georgiasfullstory.com](http://www.georgiasfullstory.com). Our goal is to highlight a variety of places from across the state to showcase the breadth of historical

periods, types of historic resources, and associations with African American history related to the Black experience in Georgia.

One story shared with us by GAAPHN member Angie Gibson spotlights the Rev. Isaiah A. and Katie B. Harris House in Albany. Rev. Isaiah A. Harris was the founding minister of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, a pulpit from which he served as a civil rights activist to establish a literacy school and champion voter registration. After his death in 1951, Harris' wife Katie B. Harris used the building as a "freedom house," providing lodging, food, and support to Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) workers in the 1960s. The Harris legacy of activism was continued by their children, Alphonso, Juanita, and McCree, who were civil rights strategists, and younger siblings Rutha and Emory, who were members of the original SNCC Freedom Singers and were SNCC workers, along with brother J.T. Johnson, who joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a SCLC Field Secretary.

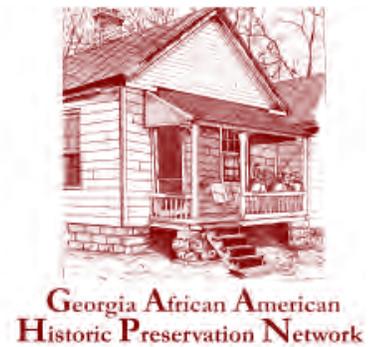


Harris House, Albany, Georgia. Photo Credit: Ruth Harris

*The context statement is anticipated for publication in 2025. Until then, you can chart progress of the project by following Ethos Preservation on social media and monitoring [www.georgiasfullstory.com](http://www.georgiasfullstory.com). For more information contact project manager Briana Paxton at [briana@ethospreservation.com](mailto:briana@ethospreservation.com).*

## ABOUT GAAHPN

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](http://www.dca.ga.gov). Preservation information and previous issues of *Reflections* are available online. Membership in the Network is free and open to all.

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## 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](http://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 Mary Wilson Joseph. *Reflections* is a recipient of a Leadership in History Award from the American Association for State and Local History.

## Reflections

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