

# Reflections



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



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

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## RECLAIMING NEWNAN'S AFRICAN AMERICAN PAST

Newnan was established in 1828, and soon became the county seat for Coweta County. One of Newnan's early settlers was John Stephen Powell. He assembled a plantation approximately 2 ½ miles north of Newnan on what is today the Old Atlanta Highway. Powell built his plantation with his wife, five children, and 40 slaves. Generations of the Powell family lived on this land, and his descendants owned portions of the plantation for over 100 years. At his death in 1857, Powell bequeathed his slaves to his wife, Sarah, and his children. By the time Sarah died in 1866, the slaves were freedmen, but many chose to remain on the plantation as sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

At the time that Powell and other white settlers moved to Newnan, religion was an important part of community life. Churches of all denominations were quickly organized, and slaves attended the same churches as their masters. One of John Powell's sons, W.F.S. Powell, was a Methodist minister. After emancipation, he assisted the freedmen in the construction of one of the most important vestiges of freedom, their own church. The original Powell Chapel Church was built circa 1879.

African American farmers who lived on the old Powell homestead initially used the church for dual purposes: both religious and educational. Classes were held in the wood-framed Powell Chapel Church beginning in the late 1890s. When the church burned in 1907, students attended classes on a nearby homestead until a brick structure was built in 1920. Parents were determined to build a school

for their children, and the community rallied to achieve this goal. In 1936, a group of trustees purchased ten acres of land from Wyatt Powell, great-grandson of John Stephen Powell. The trustees acquired scrap lumber from an abandoned old schoolhouse in the Roscoe community for the Powell Chapel School, as the church was the center of this African American community. The scrap lumber was not sufficient to complete the building, so the men and boys hauled wood while the women used their culinary skills, holding numerous bake sales to raise money for the necessary materials. One of the church members, Willie Carlyle, was the carpenter for the project.

Through the sweat equity provided by the African American community, the Powell Chapel School was completed in 1937. Coal and wood provided heat for the students in the one room school. Outhouses and a well were located at the rear of the building, but these no longer exist on the property. Coweta County

did not assist the African American community in constructing the school, but when it was completed, the county provided funding for two teachers and modest meals, most often pork, beans and fruit. Students brought bread and utensils from home, and ate at their desks.

Until the school closed in 1952 during consolidation, the Trustees of the Powell Chapel School continued fundraisers in the community to maintain the building. The Powell Chapel United Methodist Church occasionally uses the building for activities, but the trustees



*Newnan's Powell Chapel School is a rare example of an African American rural schoolhouse. As enrollment grew, a partition divided the one room into two classrooms for teaching grades one-seven.*

*Photo by James R. Lockhart*

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A 1921 school rally in Newnan illustrates the determination of African American parents to raise money for their children's education in the Jim Crow era. Source: 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, Georgia Department of Education.



**Cynthia Rosers, President**  
African American Alliance, Inc.

who own the school provide stewardship for this one room African American rural school.

In November 2000, Cynthia Rosers, an African American preservationist, visited the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society offices in the Male Academy Museum at College Street and Temple Avenue in Newnan. She was not surprised that the museum exhibits did not include any information about Newnan's African Americans. Rosers had a conversation with the society board president, Natalie Helvie, who recognized the omission of this part of the city's diverse history. Helvie asked Rosers to assist the society in developing a research project on Coweta County's African American history. At first, Rosers declined, but Helvie persisted, recruiting Rosers for membership on the board of directors. By 2001, Rosers became a board member, and the seeds of change were sown through their partnership.

One of their first projects was a symposium that involved dramatic readings of slave narratives by students from Newnan High School (NHS). Recognizing that some operational funds were necessary to support projects for the African American Heritage Committee, Rosers obtained corporate support from the Bank of Coweta and Newnan Utilities.

In successive symposiums, additional members were recruited from Newnan's African American community. NHS students assisted the committee in an oral history project that captured collective memories from seven senior citizens who were from Newnan. One of the seniors was Reverend Robert Sutton. His daughter, Bernice Sutton Poythress, joined the committee, and she informed them about the declining condition of the Powell Chapel School. Two generations of the Sutton family attended the school, and she recruited other alumni to join the new preservation initiative. By October 2001, the committee became the African American Alliance of the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society. The African American Alliance elected Rosers as president, and began a series of fundraisers to save the historic school, just as the trustees had done over 65 years ago.

The African American Alliance sponsored a pending nomination to the National Register of Historic Places with the support of the property owners, the Trustees of Powell Chapel School. African American Alliance members Kathy Proctor and Bernice Sutton Poythress provided the historical context to support the nomination.



The Coweta County African American Heritage Museum and Research Center opened in April 2003 with financial assistance from the City of Newnan, corporate donations and sweat equity from the community.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

While the African American Alliance was collecting artifacts associated with Newnan's African American past, the Newnan City Council was considering rehabilitation of a shotgun house on Farmer Street for use as an interpretive center. A historic cemetery is located across the street from the shotgun house. It is believed to be the burial ground for more than 249 African Americans. The city leased the shotgun house to the African American Alliance, and through their partnership, the Coweta County African American Heritage Museum and Research Center was dedicated in April 2003. In the three rooms of this shotgun house, visitors can view African American exhibits, conduct genealogical research, or visit the African American Alliance offices. The museum's grand opening is scheduled for July 12, 2003. For more information, visit the African American Alliance website, at [www.africanamericanalliance.net](http://www.africanamericanalliance.net) or call 770/683-7055.

## A CELL TOWER STORY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

Just southeast of Newnan is the town of Turin, a small Georgia community with a population of 165 residents. In Turin, the mayor has a hands-on approach to town operations: learning to fix potholes, process water bills, and respond to citizens on a first-name basis. Amy Starr, the town mayor, first became active in Turin politics when she applied for a vacancy on the planning and zoning commission.

In 1999, a contractor submitted a request for a 250<sup>ft</sup> cellular communications tower to the planning and zoning commission. The commission, led by Amy Starr, at first recommended denial of the request to the town council. This action led to extensive negotiations between the cell tower company and the town. The cell tower company proposed Turin because the town was in the middle of a dead spot, and there was no cellular tower coverage in the area. Turin was the only location the company could use for its communications tower, but the tower would damage the “view shed” of this historic community.

Since a communications tower company’s license is granted through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the FCC licensee is required to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Because the undertaking involves a federal agency, the cellular communications company, on behalf of the FCC, initiated a review process to determine the impact of the project on historic properties. The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) reviewed the proposed project, working with all parties to assess the potential for “adverse effects” on local historic resources. During this process, the role of HPD was consultative, providing technical assistance in the identification of historic properties, assessment of National Register eligibility and potential impact on visual effects in the historic setting of Turin.

One historic resource in question was Turin’s Walter B. Hill Industrial School, a Rosenwald school. The Walter B. Hill Industrial School opened in 1927. The school was a three-teacher, wooden building. The Rosenwald Fund provided a grant that



*The Walter B. Hill Industrial School was named in honor of the Special Supervisor of Negro Education when it opened. In Georgia, the Rosenwald Fund provided grants for 242 school buildings during segregation. The National Trust for Historic Preservation listed Rosenwald Schools as one of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in June 2002.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

required matching contributions. African Americans contributed 32% of the construction costs and the Rosenwald Fund contributed 30%. The remaining contributions were from whites (19%) and public funds (19%).

Three teachers taught 80-90 students at Walter B. Hill. Their monthly salaries were \$12. The Walter B. Hill Industrial School was the first of six Rosenwald schools built in Coweta County, and was the only one to offer industrial classes. In fact, the school was the only vocational school for African Americans in Coweta County until it was consolidated in 1953. When the school closed, the building became town property, and it was used for storage of the town’s fire department equipment.

The Walter B. Hill Industrial School was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, as this rare

African American resource is one of the few remaining Rosenwald schools in Georgia. The Section 106 review process determined an “adverse effect” on this historic resource. For years, Turin wanted to rehabilitate the building for use as a town hall and local history center. The cell tower company offered the town \$10,000 for the project in a Memorandum of Agreement, the legally binding document that delineates responsibility and actions required to mitigate adverse effects.

An additional \$100,000 was provided for the project through public referendum in Special Local Option Sales Tax funds. The town hired the Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Development Center (RDC) to provide technical assistance in the first round of building rehabilitation. Lynne Miller, historic preservation planner for the Chattahoochee-Flint RDC, is excited about the project. “This phase will focus on replacing the building’s metal roof and strengthening the structure. As funding allows, the town will then rehabilitate the balance of the building exterior, and the shed will be removed.”



*The old China Grove Baptist Church is located next to the Walter B. Hill Industrial School. A former principal’s father gave a sermon at the school once a week, and some current church members attended classes at the school. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Funding through grant programs is, more often than not, vital in the success of historic preservation projects. One of these crucial programs is the Georgia Heritage Grant Program administered by the Historic Preservation Division, Department of Natural Resources. Since its inception in 1994, the Georgia Heritage Grant Program has provided seed-money to make hundreds of statewide historic preservation projects a reality. Many of these important projects have involved the restoration of historic African American resources. Last year, several African American projects received grant assistance through the program.

The Powell Chapel Schoolhouse, located in Newnan, received a \$13,500 Georgia Heritage development grant to stabilize the exterior of the schoolhouse. Work will include reroofing the structure, foundation stabilization and repair of doors, windows, and siding. The schoolhouse was constructed in 1937 to educate African American children in Coweta County. The African American Alliance of the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society plans to restore the one-story, rectangular, wooden school as a museum dedicated to the interpretation of 1930's African American school life.

The Hamilton Plantation Slave Cabins are the only two remaining structures from the 1793 plantation established by James Hamilton at Gascoigne Bluff on St. Simon's Island. The walls of the cabins are made from tabby, a concrete-like building material made



*The Hamilton Plantation Slave Cabins were listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 30, 1988. These tabby resources yield significant archaeological information about the lifestyle of slaves who lived on plantations in Georgia's coastal regions. The cabins were restored in the 1930s by Glynn County and the Cussina Garden Club. Photo courtesy of the Cussina Garden Club.*

of lime, oyster shells, sand and water. An \$18,500 Georgia Heritage development grant will be used to repair the deteriorated tabby walls and cypress trim on the doors, windows, and eaves of these rare tabby structures.

Hubbard Alumni Association received a \$30,600 Georgia Heritage grant for the rehabilitation of the Women's Dormitory, located on the campus of the former State Teacher's and Agricultural College (STAC) in Forsyth. This development grant will provide funds to repair the dorm's roof and install gutters and downspouts. The building was part of the historic campus of STAC, the official state-supported school for the instruction of African American teachers during the 1930s. The Georgia Board of Regents closed the school in 1939, and the buildings became



*The Hubbard Alumni Association, Inc. dedicated a historical marker in April 2003 to commemorate the State Teachers and Agricultural College. The Women's Dormitory will be rehabilitated and used as an African American museum and cultural center. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

the property of the Monroe County Board of Education, who renamed STAC the Hubbard Training School in honor of William M. Hubbard, the school's founder. The Hubbard School was Monroe County's first African American high school.

Each year, approximately 15 - 20 projects are selected for funding, based on need, degree of threat to the resource, project planning, and community benefit from the resource. Geographical and demographical distribution and variety of resource types and uses are also considered in award decisions. Grants are available for development and predevelopment projects. Development projects include stabilization, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration activities. Predevelopment projects include plans and specifications, feasibility studies, historic structure reports, or other building-specific or site-specific preservation plans. The maximum grant amount that can be requested is \$40,000 for development projects, and \$20,000 for predevelopment projects.

In order to be eligible for funding, applicants must be a local government or private secular nonprofit organization and have documentation of matching funds (equal to at least 40% of the project cost). The property for which funds are being requested must be listed in, or eligible for listing in, the Georgia Register of Historic Places, and be listed prior to reimbursement of funds. All grant assisted work must meet the applicable Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Archaeology and Historic Preservation."

**This year's grant application is currently available with a submission deadline of July 11, 2003. For further information about the grant program, please contact: Cherie Bennett, Grants Coordinator, Historic Preservation Division, Department of Natural Resources, 404/651-5181. Her email address is: [cherie\\_bennett@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:cherie_bennett@dnr.state.ga.us).**

## DESTINATION MADISON:

### TOURING THE HEART AND SOUL OF GEORGIA

Since 2000, downtown development projects in selected cities are the focus of the Georgia Cities Foundation's (GCF) "Heart and Soul" bus tour. The tour highlights innovative ways that Georgia cities create vibrant, attractive downtown businesses that serve as an economic development magnet in communities.

This year's tour stopped at the Madison-Morgan County Welcome Center, a city located on Georgia's Highway 441 Heritage Trail. Madison is a Main Street City, a designation given by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to cities committed to economic development in the context of historic preservation through innovative revitalization of their downtown districts. Bus tour participants were provided with a walking tour of downtown commercial buildings that enhance Madison's economic development while preserving historic resources.



Madison is the county seat of Morgan County, established in 1809. Once a stagecoach stop, Madison maintains its historic central town square, anchored by the Welcome Center, City Hall, the Morgan County Courthouse and a U.S. Post Office. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was established in 1984 to revitalize Madison's downtown area. The DDA volunteer board provides leadership to ensure economic development in historic buildings complemented by beautification and streetscape initiatives. Restaurants and shops surround the square, and two African American historic buildings are located within walking distance of the square.



*The Morgan County African American Museum received a \$3,000 tourism grant from the City of Madison. This circa 1890 house museum promotes heritage tourism in Morgan County.*

*Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*



*The City of Madison awarded three facade grants to this Washington Street commercial building. The building features a funeral home, restaurant, and the local NAACP office, and is owned and operated by African Americans. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

### HPD ANNUAL PRESERVATION AWARDS

During Historic Preservation Month in May, the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) presented its seventh annual Preservation Achievement Awards. Staff nominate preservationists who contribute to the agency's mission, vision, and goals for preservation in Georgia. Honorees are recognized for their career achievement or noteworthy projects. These individuals are representative of all parts of the state, and work in various areas of preservation. Thirteen recipients were honored at the annual awards ceremony. Linda Wilkes, a member of the Steering Committee of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network, was one of this year's award recipients.



*Linda Wilkes*

Linda Wilkes is a preservationist who promotes HPD's goals in a number of important initiatives in her capacity as Manager of Research and Redevelopment Services for the Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF), a program of the Georgia Municipal Association. One of those initiatives includes "Georgia Cities: The Heart and Soul of Georgia" annual bus tour that Wilkes organizes. During the bus tour, 12 Georgia cities are given an opportunity to showcase three completed or future downtown development projects. Most of these projects are excellent examples of historic preservation and include historic buildings such as theatres, depots and courthouses. Approximately 35 business leaders, state officials, representatives from the philanthropic community, economic development officials and the media participate in the tour. The participants see firsthand the economic benefits of historic preservation to the local community and the state. Wilkes assists in carefully selecting host cities for the tour that exemplify good leadership and the best success stories. She also assists HPD with its African American program by identifying potential partners and cities that raise awareness of African American contributions to Georgia's heritage.

The GCF mission is to assist Georgia cities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by serving as a partner and facilitator in the funding of capital projects. This is accomplished through the Foundation's revolving loan program.

HPD is proud to have a valuable ally in Linda Wilkes, who works behind the scenes to assist in preservation initiatives throughout Georgia.

## PRESERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN SACRED PLACES

Bainbridge is the largest town in Decatur County and is the county seat of this rural area in southwest Georgia. Located north of downtown Bainbridge in a former residential area is the First African Missionary Baptist Church, a Romanesque Revival-style church surrounded by lumberyards, a funeral home and Oak City Cemetery. Construction for the brick church started in 1904, and by 1909 the First African Missionary Baptist Church was completed.



*The First African Missionary Baptist Church in Bainbridge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 28, 2002. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

Architectural features of the church include two square entrance towers topped with tall pyramidal roofs and elaborate stained glass windows. Inside the church, 12 rows of curved pews are arranged in a semicircle surrounding the pulpit. A small brick addition was added shortly after the church was built behind the choir for the pipe organ and storage space. A wood lattice wall hides the pipe organ, installed in 1924-1925 in the apse behind the pulpit. The sanctuary's dark oak window and door surrounds and tongue-in-groove wainscoting contrast with the plaster walls. The vaulted wood ceiling is set diagonally in framed panels.



*Interior design features include a vaulted ceiling and several stained glass windows in the sanctuary. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

The First African Missionary Baptist Church maintains the original electric light fixtures and steam radiators, although a modern heating system was installed in 1991. New oak pews were installed in 1950, and the annex building was added to the rear of the church in 1959. The brick-veneer annex with a kitchen meets the educational needs of the congregation and serves as a fellowship hall for church activities. A recent alteration is the handicap-accessible ramp across the north entrance tower.

Thomas H. Bynes, a church member, was the Tuskegee Institute architect who designed the First African Missionary Baptist Church. The church's architectural design differed from most African American rural late 19<sup>th</sup> century churches that were

often one-room frame buildings with gable roofs. The First African Missionary Baptist Church evolved after Emancipation when the African American members of the white First Baptist Church established their own church near the Flint River in an area called Fort Hughes. In 1900, Dr. N.B. Williamson became pastor and initiated fundraising for the present church. The congregation purchased a lot for \$600 in 1904. Congregation members were responsible for the church construction. F.L. Patterson donated bricks for the church, designed by Bynes and built by Eugene Smith and his assistant Starling Smith (no relation.)

The First African Missionary Baptist Church hosted the General Missionary Baptists Convention of Georgia in 1909 and 1959. This historic church continues to be a community landmark building for African Americans in Bainbridge.



*Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on May 9, 2002. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church is a landmark building in Acworth, Cobb County. The Romanesque Revival-style brick church was constructed circa 1882. The church has a front gable roof and round-arched, four-over-four, double-hung windows and double entrance doors. Conical metal roofs nestle above the two church towers, and the original bell is retained in the south tower. The York Bell Foundry of Ohio manufactured the bell. A 1998 report revealed that this bell was probably original to the bell tower construction due to its large size and cast-iron material that were not manufactured after the turn of the century.



*The pulpit's semicircular raised platform and balustrade are original interior design features in the sanctuary. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

*Photo by James R. Lockhart*

Inside the church, modern pews are arranged in a central-aisle plan. A choir platform is located in the rear of the sanctuary. Other interior features include the patterned ceiling, original plaster walls with beaded, tongue-and-groove wainscoting and decorative door and window surrounds. The original wood floors are covered with modern carpeting.

## PRESERVING AFRICAN AMERICAN SACRED PLACES

Alterations to the building include replacement of the original glass planes with Plexiglas and the addition of sheetrock, paneling, and linoleum to the vestibule. A concrete-block addition was constructed in 1973 to add restrooms and a kitchen.

At the beginning of the Civil War, there were 3,829 slaves in Cobb County, and 240 in the census district that included Acworth. After Emancipation, many freedmen remained to become farmers and laborers. Bethel A.M.E. Church was formed in 1864. At that time, the church shared a building with the Zion Hill Baptist Church, and each congregation met on alternate Sundays. By 1871, Bethel A.M.E. trustees purchased land for the church, and the present building was constructed circa 1882. Under the leadership of Pastor J.R. Fleming, the church added the vestibule and two towers in 1895. Fleming served as pastor from 1895–1897.

**P**aradise Cemetery is located on a two-acre site northwest of the downtown square in Jefferson, Jackson County. This historic African American cemetery is the only remaining component of a complex that once included the 1919 Paradise African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, a parsonage, school, and two duplexes owned by the church. A large section of rock and concrete foundation from one of the churches that once occupied the site bears “Paradise A.M.E. Memorial Gardens” on a granite slab placed on one side of the foundation remnant.



*Paradise Cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on May 30, 2002. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

Paradise Cemetery grave markers are located southwest and west of the 1919 church ruins in a grid arrangement with approximately 24 square-shaped family plots with low concrete or granite enclosures. The southern portion of Paradise Cemetery is informally arranged with markers from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century burials. Burials from the 1950s-1990 are located immediately behind the church site while 1880s-1949 burials are located closer to the Southern Railroad.



*Beveled markers covered with large concrete slabs adorn burials in this section of Paradise Cemetery. Photo by James R. Lockhart*



*A tall obelisk identifies the burial of Harrison Hawkins. Hawkins (1845-1917) was an African American landowner in Jefferson. Photo by James R. Lockhart*

Unmarked rocks identify many graves, but several graves are marked by obelisks, urns or engraved designs on flat grave markers. The date of the earliest burial is 1880. Tractors destroyed some grave markers during a clean up of the cemetery. Mature cedar, oak and pine trees provide landscaping for Paradise Cemetery with grass ground cover, concrete and granite curbing, and open space for parking.

## GAAHPN STEERING COMMITTEE



**Karl Webster Barnes**

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404/758-4891

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**Jeanne Mills**

Atlanta, 404/753-6265

**Linda Wilkes**

Atlanta, 678/686-6243

**Thomas Williams**

Kennesaw, 678/445-5124

## STAFF



**Jeanne Cyriaque**

*African American  
Programs Coordinator  
Reflections Editor  
Voice 404/656-4768  
Fax 404/651-8739*

[jeanne\\_cyriaque@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:jeanne_cyriaque@dnr.state.ga.us)

**Leslie Canaan**

*African American  
Programs Assistant  
Voice 404/656-2840  
Fax 404/651-8739*

[leslie\\_canaan@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:leslie_canaan@dnr.state.ga.us)

## 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 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 1,475 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](http://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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**Historic Preservation Division**  
**Georgia Department of Natural Resources**  
**156 Trinity Avenue, S.W.**  
**Suite 101**  
**Atlanta, GA 30303-3600**