

Reflections



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FROM PIONEERS TO MASONS: PRESERVING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGACY OF NORTHWEST GEORGIA

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On January 12, 2005 the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Marsh-Warthen House. The house was significant in the areas of architecture, exploration and settlement, and social history. Like many historic properties, the house required rehabilitation so that it could become a place where visitors to LaFayette and northwest Georgia could learn about its past. The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) awarded an \$11,000 Georgia Heritage grant to aid in the preservation of the structure, but it took the active participation of the community to interpret the house and its diverse heritage for future generations.

When Spencer Marsh moved his family to Walker County around 1834-35, he became one of the first white settlers in the region. He also brought with him enslaved African Americans, who provided labor to construct this house. Two slave cabins once existed on the east side of the Marsh-Warthen property.

Spencer Marsh was a visionary merchant for his time in Georgia's past, and he partnered with Andrew Allgood and William Briers to form Trion Factory in 1845, the first cotton mill in northwest Georgia. Andrew Allgood was Spencer Marsh's son-in-law, as he married Mary Ann Marsh in 1842.

Trion Factory was located about 11 miles south of LaFayette on the Chattooga River in nearby Chattooga County. Andrew Allgood and

Spencer Marsh were some of the wealthiest men in northwest Georgia. By 1857, they each had equal interest in Trion Factory. The factory operated under the name of Marsh & Allgood by the eve of the Civil War.

Sarah Adaline Marsh, another Marsh daughter, married Nathaniel Warthen in 1859. These families were impacted by the Civil War. The Warthen family moved with 100 enslaved African Americans from their home in McLemore Cove south to Warthenville. Spencer Marsh and his wife took refuge in Cassville with two of his slaves. However, the Allgood family guarded their investment in the Trion Factory. After Spencer Marsh died, the Warthen family and their servants moved into the house around 1876. When Nathaniel Warthen died in 1895, his only son, Spencer Marsh Warthen, became the head of the family.



The Marsh-Warthen-Clements House is located in LaFayette, Walker County. Spencer Marsh built this house circa 1836 with the assistance of enslaved craftsmen. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 12, 2005.

Photo by James R. Lockhart

Spencer Warthen, who was a bachelor, lived in the house with his sisters and mother, and according to the 1900 census, seven African Americans, including Anna Allgood and her five children, lived in the house. About that time, Spencer Warthen built the two-story, east addition to the house to bring the kitchen from the basement to the first floor. The addition created living quarters on the second floor for the servants who provided the helping hands to the Warthen family. African Americans continued to live on the property and provide services for the

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Anna Allgood was a servant for the Warthen family after emancipation. She lived with her five children in the servants quarters at the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House in 1900. Photo courtesy of Helping Hands: In Service at the Marsh House Committee

in the 1850 Marsh slave schedule. According to oral history accounts, this child was believed to be the son of Spencer Marsh and an enslaved woman. He became a skilled carpenter in the region, and because he learned how to read, probably from the Bible, he was also called to preach. He was associated with Rev. George Wheeler, who started the North Georgia Baptist Association in 1870. Wiley Marsh built churches



Evelle Dana, chair of the Task Force and Beverly Foster, president of the Walker County African American Historical and Alumni Association unveil the African American marker in front of the east side of the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Warthen family until the 1990s. Descendants of the Warthen family occupied the house well into the 20th century, but by the 1940s, the entire second floor of the house was closed off. When the final Warthen family members died, the Clements family purchased it in 1992. They sold the property to Walker County in 2003. The county formed a community task force to restore and interpret the house for future generations.

By 1850, Spencer Marsh owned 12 slaves, and among them was a mulatto named Wiley Marsh. Wiley Marsh was born around 1834-35, and was approximately 16



Reverend Wiley Marsh was a carpenter and preacher in Walker and Chattooga Counties. Photo courtesy of Helping Hands: In Service at the Marsh House Committee

and houses throughout northwest Georgia. His story may have been omitted from the history of the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House, were it not for the efforts of the *Helping Hands Committee*, who worked in partnership with the Walker County Historical Society to interpret his story and the stories of the slaves of Spencer Marsh and his children to the public.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Wiley Marsh was working in the Trion Factory area, and it is believed that he may have been a free man or enslaved by Spencer Marsh's daughter, Mary Ann Allgood. It is possible that Spencer Marsh may have manumitted (freed) Wiley Marsh on his 21st birthday or he may have given Wiley to his daughter as a wedding gift. By the 1870 census, Wiley resided in the Trion Factory Post Office and married a former slave named Millie Penn, and they had six children before the Civil War ended. By 1880, they returned to LaFayette. The couple may have been the progenitors of many African Americans who, like other former slaves, took surnames of former slaveowners like Allgood, Marsh, Penn or Warthen after emancipation.

The *Helping Hands: In Service at the Marsh House Committee* has become an integral part of the interpretation initiative, as they document the Native and African American heritage of the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House. In February 2008 the committee unveiled a historic marker that commemorates the African American contributions to the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House. The marker was placed in front of the servants' quarters that comprised the east wing addition of the house.



African Americans who have the Marsh and Allgood surnames gather in front of the historic marker that recognizes the African American pioneers associated with the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The keynote speaker for the marker dedication was Hubert Marsh, the great grandson of Wiley Marsh. Hubert Marsh said that he always inquired about his ancestor's photo when he was growing up, as Wiley Marsh appeared to be a white man. His grandmother would always tell him that Wiley Marsh was his great-grandfather.

The *Helping Hands: In Service at the Marsh House Committee* is but one of several preservation initiatives that the Walker County African American Historical and Alumni Association (the association) has implemented to recognize the African American legacy of northwest Georgia. The association unveiled markers to be placed in the Lytle Cemetery in Chickamauga



Hubert Marsh stands beneath a portrait of Spencer Marsh. He is a descendant of Rev. Wiley Marsh.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

who was a Buffalo Soldier, is buried at Lytle Cemetery in Chickamauga. This cemetery was established in the 1890s. These are important vestiges of the African American legacy in both the antebellum era and post-Civil War Georgia.

The association has not restricted their recognition of African American history to the 19th century, as they are working to preserve the Pleasant Grove School, one of the historic resources in the McLemore Cove Historic District. Located in the Kensington community, the Pleasant Grove School was established by the Pleasant

(Walker County) and the Mount Joy Cemetery in Subligna (Chattooga County). Members cleared debris and cleaned up these cemeteries last fall.

Trustees of the Mount Joy Baptist Church established the Mount Joy Cemetery in 1910. Though the church is no longer standing, the association is collecting pictures of the church and its members. A grave in Mount Joy Cemetery documents Caroline Salmon, who lived from 1831 until 1909. The grave of Homer E. Harrison in Mount Joy bears the symbol of the Odd Fellows. Claude Rollins,



Caroline Salmon's grave inscription says "A good old mother to both white and black."

Photo courtesy of WCAAHAA

Grove Baptist Church in 1931. The church preserves this historic African American school, and adaptively reuses the building for a fellowship hall and community meetings. The Walker County Historical Society presented a plaque to the church to recognize their stewardship during the Marsh-Warthen-Clements House marker dedication.

The association is preserving the Chickamauga Lodge #221. The Prince Hall Masonic Temple in Atlanta and African American Masonic



The Pleasant Grove School was built by the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in 1931. It is a contributing resource in the McLemore Cove Historic District, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 11, 1994.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

lodges in Chickamauga and Dalton are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Chickamauga Lodge #221 has received two Georgia Heritage grants from HPD to preserve this building. The pre-development grant created a preservation plan in 2005. The plan pointed out structural deficiencies in the building that required immediate stabilization. In 2007, Chickamauga Lodge #221 received a \$20,000 development grant to rehabilitate the structure and address safety concerns for public use.



When Chickamauga Masonic Lodge #221 was awarded a pre-development Georgia Heritage grant, red asphalt siding covered the building. The lodge is a Prince Hall affiliate, Free and Accepted Masons.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Chickamauga Masonic Lodge # 221 was originally organized on the Haslerig family's property on Cove Road (Georgia Hwy. 341). This was known as the District Hill area. The District Hill School was once located next to the lodge and the District Hill Cemetery still exists in the area today. In 1921, a fire destroyed the school and lodge. In 1924, the Masons completed construction of the present lodge on Hwy. 341. Students attended school at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church until a Rosenwald school was built in the Wallaceville community in an area that was known as *The Black Folks Alley*. The Masons assist African American



Claude Rollins was a Buffalo Soldier who served in the 24th Infantry. He is buried at Lytle Cemetery.

Photo courtesy of WCAAHAA

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churches through monetary gifts for fuel or laying cornerstones. The Masons provide aid to widows and preside at funerals in the community, and assist with burials and maintenance of cemeteries.

The Chickamauga Masonic Lodge #221 is a two-story, wood frame structure that was built by lodge members. It is the only remaining African American Masonic lodge in Walker County. The lodge hall's first floor space is used for community meetings, while the second floor is reserved for the Masons and Eastern Star meetings. The original handcrafted Masonic stations and pedestals occupy this space. The lodge was also the meeting space for the African American Odd Fellows of Chickamauga. In 1952, red rolled asphalt siding was added to the exterior, along with plumbing and heating. A cornerstone on the building's exterior denotes these changes.



The preservation plan revealed several structural deficiencies and safety issues. The red asphalt siding was removed and revealed the original wood siding.

Photo courtesy of WCAAHAA

Chickamauga Masonic Lodge #221 is the site of the African American Veterans of Foreign Wars Camp that was established after World War II by Walker County veterans who could not participate in other camps due to segregation policies. The lodge hall is also the meeting place for the Esther Chapter #476 Order of Eastern Star. The chapter received their charter in 1944.



The Haslerig family homeplace still exists on their property today.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Across the highway from Chickamauga Masonic Lodge #221 is the property of the Haslerig family, who established one of northwest Georgia's earliest African American dairy farms. Charles Haslerig purchased land for the dairy farm around 1905. He was one of the founding members of Chickamauga Lodge #221 and served as Worshipful Master. His sons worked with him in establishing his business, and Willie Haslerig is still a Mason today. By 1949, Haslerig began pasteurizing milk and his business service area expanded about 30 miles to Chattanooga. Today, a display in the Chattanooga African American Museum interprets the story of this African American farming family.



This barn, built by Mr. Marylen Foster, and the Haslerig homeplace still remain on the property that once was C.D. Haslerig & Sons Dairy.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

In the 1960s, the Haslerig family sold the dairy to Happy Valley Dairy Farms. The old Haslerig homeplace and a few outbuildings from the dairy still remain on the property, along with the District Hill Cemetery that their ancestors established to provide burials for African Americans.



The Walker County African American Historical and Alumni Association members cleared debris and erected signs in Lytle Cemetery last fall. Pictured from left to right are: Homer Benton, Eddie Foster, Sr., Eddie Foster II and Gerald Tinson.

Photo courtesy of WCAAHAA

One of the persons whose final resting place is District Hill Cemetery is Mark Trash. He was once the oldest registered voter at age 123, as he lived from 1820-1943. Beverly Foster, in her book about African Americans in northwest Georgia said “He arrived in Walker County in search of his master’s son. There, ‘Uncle’ Mark Trash (as he later became known) helped bury the dead of the Confederate and Union Armies.”



Beverly Foster, president of WCAAHAA, is a leading force in documenting the African American legacy of northwest Georgia.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Beverly Foster is particularly proud of the association’s recent project to establish an African American Heritage Trail in northwest Georgia. The association was awarded a \$4,376 grant from the Georgia Civil War Commission to inventory African American sites that are associated with the Civil War in several northwest Georgia counties, including Chattooga, Dade and Walker. The Walker County Commission has provided a matching grant for the project. “With the State of Georgia preparing for the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, and wanting to tell the story of the military campaigns and

the civilian home front, this survey will be a valuable resource to obtain an accurate account of history,” said State Senator Jeff Mullis, who supports the project. The association hopes that the inventory will provide enough information for a driving brochure for the sesquicentennial celebration. ■

FLAT ROCK ARCHIVE GRAND OPENING: DOCUMENTING AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HERITAGE

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

The Flat Rock community emerged between the Johnson and Lyons plantations, two large slave-owning estates east of Atlanta in Lithonia along the South River, which separates DeKalb and Henry counties. Descendants of the former enslaved population still live in Flat Rock and they have established the Flat Rock Archive, Inc. to preserve the history of their beloved community. On December 15, 2007 the archival center celebrated its grand opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The community and public officials were on hand to support this historic occasion.

Historical records show that Flat Rock is the oldest African American community in DeKalb County. The boundaries of the community are Browns Mill, Evans Mill, Salem, and Crossvale Roads. Situated on four acres in the midst of aggressive development, the archive is housed in the century-old home of Rev. Theodore A. Bryant, who was instrumental in grounding the



Johnny Waits stands in front of the Flat Rock Archive. T.A. Bryant, Jr., the son of one of the early community leaders, donated this century-old house to the archive.

Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery

community in Flat Rock at a time when changing social roles, urbanization, industrialization, and northern migration presented attractive alternatives to rural farm life. The property contains outbuildings that were utilized until the 1950’s: a barn, a smoke house, and outhouse. During slavery, whites, enslaved African descendants, Native Americans, and free men and women of color all lived in the area. Johnny Waits said, “Flat Rock was located on the South River, the dividing line between Henry and DeKalb counties. There were river barges all along the South River, and of course farming. But by 1848, industry shifted from the river to the railroads. And, also there were the quarries.”



A smokehouse and outhouse still exist behind the Flat Rock Archive today.

Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery

The goal of the archival center is to collect records that document the lives of African Americans from the plantation era through the modern Civil Rights Movement. The current collection consists of genealogical records, historic photographs, church records, and other farm-related artifacts. Johnny Waits, a descendant

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of one of the first slave families in the area, is executive director of the Flat Rock Archive and his vision is to collect as many photographs, maps, genealogies, and stories as possible to create a national database for average citizens, scholars, and researchers to retrieve historical information about black life in America. According to Waits, many Flat Rock residents have ancestors that are buried at the old slave cemetery. His great great-grandmother, Eliza Waits, who was 60 years old according to the 1870 census, is buried at Flat Rock Cemetery. It is believed that Creek Indians may have been buried there also. Other families buried there are the Shoemakes, Lyons, and Bryants.



Spencer Bryant was chairman of the board of trustees of the Flat Rock United Methodist Episcopal Church. He is shown above, seated in the middle of a crowd, in an undated photo. He was born into slavery in 1863. He is the Rev. T.A. Bryant's grandfather. He is also actor and comedian Chris Tucker's great-great grandfather. Photo courtesy of Flat Rock Archive

U.S. Congressman Hank Johnson and State Senator Ronald Ramsey, Sr. were among the guests to commend the Flat Rock Archive and its board for its noble goal to preserve the history and memories of the way it was for black folks in the South. Johnson invited attendees to close their eyes and imagine someone sitting on the porch or in the fields hard at work on this site, which should be "...a state and national treasure." State Senator Ramsey stated that the rural setting and sense of place in Flat Rock reminded him of his early years in North Carolina and that the residents of Flat Rock should be proud that their history is being preserved. Melissa Forgey of the DeKalb Historical Society attended the community event and continues to offer research assistance to the organization. Kelly Jordan, of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Alliance, is an advisor to the archive.

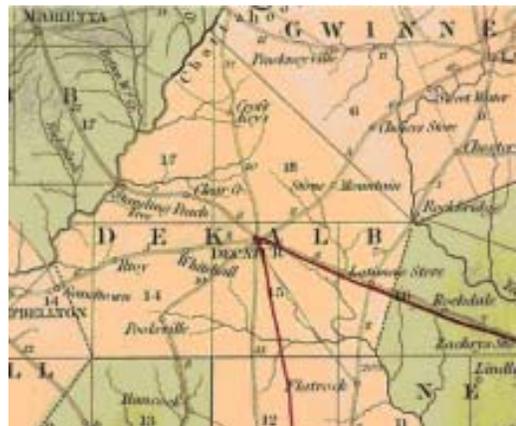
But for the clarion calls from Johnny Waits, T. A. Bryant, Jr., Vira Whitaker, and other old timers, the Flat Rock community would have remained virtually invisible. It appeared on the 1839



U.S. Congressman Hank Johnson was the keynote speaker at the dedication of Flat Rock Archive. He and Kelly Jordan of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Alliance are supporters of the initiative.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

DeKalb County map, but sometime thereafter the small town of Flat Rock vanished from official Georgia maps, particularly DeKalb County maps, and only as recently as 1998 did it reappear. Blacks in Flat Rock have held psychological repositories of their own history in the area. Now, the history and memories are being documented and digitized to share with generations to come. A documentary film on the history of Flat Rock is in progress.



DeKalb County map, circa 1839 courtesy of Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia

The organization has a two-year plan to remain open as an archival center while they address preservation standards for rehabilitation of the building. Afterwards they will apply for listing the house in the National Register of Historic Places. The building will be a house museum offering hands-on experiences of slavery and farm life to future visitors. "Blacks, and the world, need to know the history. How real slavery was. How black folks survived. The archive will provide that service," said Waits.

Flat Rock Archive is a non-profit organization and is open for tours of the site as well as the Flat Rock Cemetery each Tuesday from 10:00am to 6:00pm. For more information, contact the organization at 770-808-0030. You can also e-mail them at flatrockarchive@bellsouth.net. ■

SOUTHERN RURAL BLACK WOMEN'S INITIATIVE GEORGIA HALL OF FAME INDUCTION

*Hermina Glass-Avery, African American Programs Assistant
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In January, Congresswoman Maxine Waters (California) was the keynote speaker at the Southern Rural Black Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. It was hosted by Shirley Sherrod, director of its lead organization in Georgia, the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education. The event was held at one of Georgia's premier Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Albany State University. Congressman Sanford Bishop was also in attendance to show his support for the honorees. The congresswoman applauded the five inductees for their courage and strength to stand up and fight against the struggles to overcome racial, economic, and gender discrimination in the rural South. She affirmed sisterhood and stated: "I love and appreciate black women who have done so much for me – who have help to keep my feet firmly planted on the ground."



*Congresswoman Maxine Waters signs programs following her address to the SRBWI Georgia Hall of Fame inductees.
Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery*



*Congressman Sanford Bishop
Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery*

The Hall of Fame celebrates Black women who have overcome the odds in their communities and assisted countless others through their sphere of influence. The 2007 inductees were: Mary Jo Haywood, Dr. Lillian Patricia Johnson, Carol R. King, Leila Walker and Leola Williams. The exhibit, *Just Stand, Anyhow*, was on display to acknowledge the 2005 inductees: Gladys Mae Spencer Coley, Mary Young Cummings, Josie E. Miller, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Mary Shipp.

The congresswoman acknowledged her delight in visiting Albany for it is very seldom that she has the opportunity to visit and talk to rural women about their unique issues. With fiery enthusiasm, she roared that her job in Washington, DC is to represent all women in America. "I represent Ms. Jones, and Ms. Sallie – women who don't have paid lobbyists, children who don't have childcare and healthcare...They are my sisters and friends who live in shacks in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia...These are my sisters."

This evening of celebration and remembrance emphasized the importance of working together. Congresswoman Waters reiterated this point stating, "We all have a lot of work to do. Let us remember all of the sacrificing, sharing, and giving. And let us honor African American women who are still doing and giving so much." ■



*Anthony B. Knight, Jr. is the curator of the SRBWI Hall of Fame Exhibit: **Just Stand, Anyhow!***

Photo by Hermina Glass-Avery



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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 2,600 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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