

Reflections



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FROM A COUNTY TRAINING SCHOOL TO A FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER: VIENNA PRESERVES ITS ROSENWALD SCHOOL

Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator
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Vienna is located in west-central Georgia where cotton is king, and other crops include soybeans, pecans and peanuts. In 1841, Vienna became the county seat of Dooly County. African Americans have lived in Vienna since the town's beginnings, and it is the site of one of the first public schools in Georgia that offered African Americans an education through the ninth grade.

In the early 20th century, both white and African American rural schools in Georgia and throughout the South depended upon partnerships between state superintendents of public schools and local county boards of education. These educators worked together to determine salaries for teachers and construction and maintenance of school facilities. Because of Jim Crow-era segregation, most of these limited resources were directed to white schools, and a reform movement that relied heavily upon northern philanthropy emerged to address education for African Americans. Its goals were to improve the training of black teachers and school facilities.

Educators like Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute appealed to northern philanthropists by advocating the value of "industrial education" for African Americans and, in 1912, he began a school building program with the assistance of Julius Rosenwald, who was president of Sears, Roebuck & Company. The Rosenwald-funded school

construction program ultimately achieved enormous success at least in part because it did not challenge the racial norms that were prevalent at that time, but instead focused on improved access to education for African Americans within a segregated environment.

At first, the Rosenwald Fund rural schools were constructed from plans developed by Tuskegee architects. The Tuskegee plans were called *The Negro School and Its Relation to the Community* and included industrial training rooms where girls could receive training in domestic science and vocational training facilities for boys. These plans incorporated auditoriums and libraries in larger schools to ensure a community use for the facilities.

As the school building program expanded to other southern states, the Rosenwald Fund hired Fletcher B. Dresslar, professor of school hygiene and architecture at the George Peabody

College for Teachers, to complete a report that when published in 1920, led to a complete reorganization of the school building program. The most immediate result was the removal of program operations from Tuskegee to Nashville and the hiring of Samuel L. Smith as administrator. Another outcome was the design of *Community School Plans* that significantly improved the construction standards and became models for most Rosenwald Schools that were built in the 1920s and early 1930s.

The Rosenwald Fund required a partnership formula to



Vienna High and Industrial School is an excellent example of a Rosenwald *Community School Plan* building that was constructed to accommodate six teachers in three classrooms on each side, an auditorium, and a principal's office. Photo by James R. Lockhart

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FROM A COUNTY TRAINING SCHOOL TO A FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER: VIENNA PRESERVES ITS ROSENWALD SCHOOL

Jeanne Cyriaque, continued from page 1



Vienna High and Industrial School was constructed on a four-acre site that exceeded the minimum standards of the Rosenwald Fund. Over time, two additional buildings and a rear playground were added, along with brick columns erected by school alumni to enhance the entrance from the street.

Photo by James R. Lockhart

ensure that each school met minimum standards for the size of the school, length of school term, ventilation and sanitary privies. School grants were awarded according to the number of teachers as opposed to number of classrooms, and varied from \$500 for a one-teacher building up to \$2,100 for school buildings with ten or more teachers. *Community School Plans* specified large banks of windows that maximized lighting and introduced model landscapes where the school building was the central element on a minimum two-acre site that often included a teacher's home and shops.

African Americans were required to contribute cash and in-kind contributions to match the Rosenwald Fund grant. The communities often sponsored *Rosenwald Rallies* to raise funds for their schools. Sympathetic whites also contributed some funds for these schools, but the Rosenwald Fund worked closely with the southern states and other philanthropists to develop *County Training Schools* that had industrial training as a core part of the curriculum. The John F. Slater Fund provided equipment and supplemented teacher salaries for *County Training Schools*, and the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation established the *Negro Rural School Fund* to send "Jeanes" teachers to the counties to act as supervising instructors for industrial training. Southern states employed white administrators known as state agents for Negro schools whose salaries were provided by the General Education Board. These partners worked in conjunction with the Julius Rosenwald Fund to build larger schools.

The Vienna *County Training School* was constructed in 1926, under the administration of state agent Walter B. Hill, Jr. He was the son of University of Georgia Chancellor Walter B. Hill. Hill served as state agent for Negro schools in Georgia from 1920-1930, when the most Rosenwald Schools were built under his administration. Hill also engineered partnerships with the northern philanthropic organizations to build a number of *County Training Schools* throughout the state. In Vienna, the total cost of the brick

building was \$17,737. Public funds for the building totaled \$13,037, the African American community contributed \$2,000, the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$1,700 and the white community contributed \$1,000.

The school is an "H" shaped, single-story red brick building that is designed from a six-teacher *Community School Plan*. Each wing of the building has three classrooms with a rectangular core noted by a principal's office and auditorium. The school is known in the community as the Vienna High and Industrial School. By 1959, a wooden building for home economics and the band, as well as a small brick classroom were built to accommodate increasing enrollment. The school continued to function as Vienna's African-American high school until 1970, when a new high school was constructed.

From 1970 until 2004, the brick building was continuously used as a school, serving pre-kindergarten students. In 2003, the Vienna Historic Preservation Society sponsored a program to honor the school's history as a Rosenwald School. Numerous alumni and supporters attended the event, including Joyce Henry Williams who was a student and later taught at Vienna High and Industrial School. Mrs. Williams was one of a group of alumni who sponsored a reunion in 2000 to celebrate the school's 44 years as a Vienna African-American community landmark. Another supporter is Mayor Willie Davis. He was a former Dooly County teacher and superintendent of schools.

Today, the school continues to be a community center, and the building is now known as the Dooly County Family Resource Center. Old classrooms now provide computers and meeting space or double as offices for Dooly County Board of Education staff, and the auditorium space and stage is used for community events.



A wood building was constructed on the campus as enrollment increased. Its design was influenced by the Community School Plans. Photo by James R. Lockhart

The Dooly County Board of Education, who owns the Rosenwald School, recently sponsored the nomination of the Vienna High and Industrial School to the National Register of Historic Places. It is one of the original 242 Rosenwald Schools that once existed in Georgia. The Rosenwald Fund built over 5,000 schools in 15 southern states, and the Vienna High and Industrial School is an example of one of the larger schools that has survived and is adaptively used today by the community that it was built to serve. ■

ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER UNVEILS NEW EXHIBIT: SLAVE LIFE AT THE TULLIE SMITH FARM

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

In 1845, Robert Smith purchased land surrounding what is now the intersection of I-85 and North Druid Hills Road in Atlanta. Smith's farm eventually grew to over 800 acres, and the original farmhouse and kitchen and later several historically appropriate outbuildings, including a slave cabin, were moved to the Atlanta History Center in the early 1970s. While the Atlanta History Center had previously offered interpretive programs to visitors and school children, the story of the 14 enslaved men, women and children who worked the farm and lived in close proximity to the Smith family was largely left out of interpretive programs until the Atlanta History Center received funding from the Poppy Garden Club to develop the exhibit, *Slave Life at the Smith Farm*.



This circa 1925 image of Uncle Wilke, a former Smith family slave, is featured in the exhibit.

Photo courtesy of the Atlanta History Center

The 1850 slave cabin is the outbuilding on the Smith Farm that interprets the lives and contributions of the African Americans who lived there. The exhibit consists of ten fabric panels that include an overview of slavery in Georgia and unique characteristics of slave life in the Piedmont region where the farm was located. Panels explore the topics of labor, work systems, clothing, and community life and foodways. The housing panel describes different types of dwellings that slaves lived in from coastal regions to the mountains. Though the slave cabin is not a documented slave dwelling, it is representative of the log cabin dwellings that were common in the upper Piedmont counties. Another panel describes some of the methodology that can be used to research slave life. Many of these resources are available at the Kenan Research Center. Jeanne Cyriaque and Dr. Lauranette Lee, Curator of African American History at the Virginia Historical Society provided assistance to Atlanta History Center staff, Joanna Arrieta, Manager of Historic Houses and Donald Rooney, Curator of Urban and Regional History, in developing the exhibition and locating resources. A panel entitled "Freedom" describes events unique to the Georgia experience after emancipation.

The Atlanta History Center regularly offers tours of the Smith Farm, and now docents are incorporating the slave cabin in their interpretation of the site. The slaves' garden is located behind the cabin, and directly behind the kitchen outbuilding where food was prepared. Joanna Arrieta is excited about two additional educational tools that are being developed to enhance the



This log cabin dwelling on the Smith Farm houses the exhibit. Log slave cabins were common in the Georgia Piedmont region.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

educational experience for visitors. A printed take-away guide will provide a key to the outbuildings at the site and more detailed information about the enslaved residents. Because of the large number of school children who regularly visit the Smith Farm, she is spearheading the effort to develop an "activity trunk" where the children can lift water buckets, play with musical instruments and see artifacts associated with slave life in the cabin and the farm.



Andrea Chanay is one of the docents who conducts the Smith Farm tour. She is dressed in period clothing while sharing information about the Smith family and the slaves who lived there.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The Atlanta History Center and the *Slave Life at the Smith Farm* exhibit is open daily. To plan your visit, call 404-814-4000 for hours and admission information, or visit their website: www.AtlantaHistoryCenter.com. ■

DEWEY CITY HISTORIC DISTRICT: THOMASVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD ACHIEVES NATIONAL REGISTER LISTING

*Denise Messick, National Register Historian
Historic Preservation Division*

The city of Thomasville in southwest Georgia is fortunate to have retained a diverse collection of historic resources. Thomasville has also been proactive in recognizing the significance of these properties. When the historically African American neighborhood of Dewey City was included in the National Register of Historic Places in August 2008, it became the city's ninth district listed by the National Park Service. This latest district lies just west of the Stevens Street Historic District, another residential area that is also important (along with Dewey City) for its role in black history in Thomasville.

Dewey City's achievement of National Register status was not by happenstance. It was the culmination of years of hard work and collaboration by residents, community leaders, city planners and Thomasville Landmarks, a citywide nonprofit agency. It is said that all preservation is local. The Dewey City nomination would not have been completed without the interviews and research conducted throughout the community by local staff and volunteers. The enthusiasm of Dewey City residents was evident when an exceptionally large crowd participated in the public information meeting held in September 2007.



Felix Street in Dewey City was settled after 1912 as part of the "Homestead Park" plat. Photo by James R. Lockhart

For over a century Dewey City had a distinct identity as an African American neighborhood with boundaries defined within four historic plats. These detailed plats delineated new streets and subdivided lots for sale. The first plat, known as the Quinn and Cochran Addition, was filed in 1899. Recorded in 1904 as the "Dewey City Subdivision," it was likely named after Admiral George Dewey, hero of the Spanish-American War. Charles Bluett Quinn had initially bought the land outside Thomasville to provide housing for its African American residents. Even though Thomasville did not have specific zoning ordinances dictating where whites and blacks could settle within the city, housing patterns were influenced by the "Jim Crow" segregation practices of the time. The low-lying land between two creeks had been sparsely settled prior to Quinn's purchase.

Subsequent plats in 1911 and 1947 expanded Dewey City's street grid. Early 20th century migration from farms to jobs in Thomasville drew new residents. Periods of significant growth

occurred in the 1920s and after World War II. The first residents included laborers, domestics, yardmen, and railroad workers. Dewey City was once self-sustaining with at least three small grocery stores in the 1940s, plus other businesses such as beauty and barber shops and auto repair garages at various times. Changing economic conditions resulted in uneven growth. The platted lots were never completely developed with housing. Some residents either formally or informally occupied the vacant lots for their side yards or gardens. Most buildings remained single-family, owner-occupied houses. The neighborhood has recently seen some new "infill" housing within the approximately 110-acre district.

New families and the proximity of the Dewey City Branch baptismal pool likely enticed three churches to build in the neighborhood between 1900 and 1947. These churches provided



This is an example of a 1920s bungalow (left) on Forrest Street. Photo by James R. Lockhart

strong anchors for the residents who attended as well as childcare for working parents in the neighborhood. The Dewey City Branch is a branch of the Oquina Creek. Its waters served as a baptismal site for a large community from the area's earliest settlement until the 1940s. Churches from all over the northwestern portion of Thomasville "marched" through city streets to the Branch, where large baptisms would be held. This site is still visible today.



The circa 1953 St. James Primitive Baptist Church is one of the churches in the Dewey City Historic District.

Photo by James R. Lockhart

The Dewey City Historic District contains examples of house types popular in working class neighborhoods in Georgia from the early to mid-20th century. These include bungalows, shotgun houses and many others. The district also has some



These are examples of a bungalow (left) and a shotgun house (right) on Festus Street in the Dewey City Historic District. Photo by James R. Lockhart

interesting variations that were adapted for this community. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dewey City began to see small square or rectangular houses constructed out of concrete masonry units. One builder, Otis Johnson, and his company Alajay, Inc. were responsible for building and helping to finance most of them. African Americans, including Alvin Griggs of Dewey City, did much of the carpentry and masonry work. According to Hilda (formerly Johnson) Blicht, concrete block replaced wood as the favored construction material because of lower maintenance costs. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson worked with local banks to arrange special financing for homeowners. Hilda Johnson was involved in the design of the homes. The “block houses” tend to be between 850 and 1,100 square feet with living room, kitchen, and two bedrooms. Building inspectors reportedly called them “1040s” due to their size of approximately 1,040 square feet.

Dewey City’s neighborhood schools were highly regarded both for academics and athletic teams. The first black public school in Thomasville was established on Clay Street in the Stevens Street Historic District in 1902. When its lease expired in 1909, a new school was built in Dewey City, beginning the long tradition of education for which Dewey City was known locally. This school was called simply Dewey City School and housed grades 1 through 10. By 1914, land fronting Inner Boulevard was deeded to the city of Thomasville with terms that a new “school building for a colored people’s school” would be built for “not less than \$4000.” The



The house on the left is an example of a concrete block house that is known locally as a “1040”. Photo by James R. Lockhart

same campus would be used for several decades. Some families boarded their children in the neighborhood to attend the schools. In 1950 Douglass High School became the first black school in the region to have a gymnasium. This gym is reportedly a World War II aircraft hanger that had been moved from Spence Field in Moultrie. Part of the old school complex now houses the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, a collection of artifacts and memorabilia commemorating local, state and national African American accomplishments (www.jackhadleyblackhistorymuseum.com).

The National Register is our nation’s catalogue of places that are important in our past. These buildings, structures, sites and districts provide a sense of identity and a tangible link to a



This historic photo of Douglass High School appeared in the 1932 Georgia Department of Education biennium report. This building no longer stands on the campus. It was constructed in the 1925-26 school year with aid from the Julius Rosenwald Fund and was Thomas County’s Training School for African Americans.



This portion of the former Douglass Junior High School was constructed in the 1950s. Photo by James R. Lockhart

community’s history. While listing does not guarantee preservation or financial assistance, it is one way to provide recognition and increase public awareness of these irreplaceable resources. Properties that are listed in the National Register (or eligible for inclusion) must be taken into consideration when federal agencies are planning projects that could affect them. The designation also may qualify property owners for federal and state tax incentives under certain circumstances. During times when grant funds are available, local governments and nonprofit agencies may be eligible for preservation grants. (The nomination materials for Dewey City were prepared in part with a grant from the federal Historic Preservation Fund.) For information on these and other programs, please visit the Historic Preservation Division website at www.gashpo.org. ■

IF I LIVE TO BE 107: ATLANTA CENTENARIAN CELEBRATES ANOTHER BIRTHDAY

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

When asked by one of the hundreds of people who attended her 106th birthday party in Atlanta what was her secret to such a long life, Ann Nixon Cooper said, “I was just too busy to die!” Little did Mrs. Cooper realize how busy she would become by the celebration of her 107th birthday on January 9, 2009.



*Ann Nixon Cooper at 107 years old
Photo by Sue Ross*

For the past three years Mrs. Cooper has celebrated birthdays at her home and the birthday bash always includes three cakes to celebrate her centenarian status. A host of Atlanta celebrities attend the party, including former Atlanta Mayor and U.N. Ambassador Reverend Andrew Young. In fact, he began an annual ritual on her 99th birthday when he presented her with a charm with her age on it to wear around her neck. Needless to say, Young has given her a number charm each year and Mrs. Cooper adds the old ones to her charm bracelet that she proudly wears along with the “present year” necklace.



Mrs. Cooper proudly displays her clothes, jewelry and shoes that she wore to Atlanta parties.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

When visiting Mrs. Cooper’s home, one is amazed to see her collection of evening dresses and stiletto heels that she once wore to parties at places like the Alonzo Herndon home. Surprisingly, she can probably still wear them all. At age 105 she broke a hip, and for a period of time she discarded the heels for flats, but not for long. She still wears her heels when going out or entertaining at home. In fact, until her injury, she was doing the “electric slide” at age 105.

Ann Nixon Cooper was born in Shelbyville, Tennessee in 1902. She grew up in Nashville, where she met her husband, Dr. Albert Cooper. The family moved to Atlanta in 1922, and she has lived in her Tudor home since 1937. Dr. and Mrs. Cooper raised their four children in this house. Only one of her children is still living, Joyce Bobo of California, but Mrs. Cooper has 14 surviving grandchildren.



Janis Perkins and Mrs. Cooper dancing to the “electric slide”. She was 103 years old at the time.

Photo by Sally Warner

Since her husband Albert was a prominent African American dentist in then-segregated Atlanta, the Cooper home became a place where many parties and celebrations occurred. Mrs. Cooper remembers visitors like the late singer Nat King Cole and a young Morehouse student, Spike Lee, who would later become a filmmaker.

Mrs. Cooper never worked except for a few years at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, where she remembers making \$7.00 per week. The staff noticed her impeccable penmanship skills, and she became the calligrapher for policies. She focused on community service throughout her lifetime, and is a member of First Congregational Church. She led the 135th homecoming celebration litany at the church when she was 100 years old.



Guests at the birthday bash eat all three cakes that celebrate Mrs. Cooper’s centenarian status.

Photo by Paul D. McPherson, Jr.



Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin visits with Mrs. Cooper at her 107th birthday celebration.

Photo by Sue Ross

Last October, Sally Warner and James Davis, two dear friends of Mrs. Cooper, decided that her vote in the presidential election deserved news coverage. CNN was contacted and took on the story. Don Lemon of CNN rode with Warner, Davis and Mrs. Cooper as she traveled to the Fulton County Government Center to cast her early vote in the presidential election. Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin escorted her to the voting machine. Mrs. Cooper registered to vote on September 1, 1941. Though she had voted in many elections in her lifetime, Ann Nixon Cooper never thought that she would live to see an African American president.



Mrs. Ann Nixon Cooper proudly displays her "I'm a Georgia Voter" decal as she talks to reporters after her historic vote. Photo by Sue Ross



Don Lemon of CNN was one of the people who attended Mrs. Cooper's 107th birthday bash.

Photo by Paul D. McPherson, Jr.

After CNN and Atlanta news stations broadcast Mrs. Cooper's historic vote, the former Illinois Senator Barack Obama called her to thank her for her vote. CNN again reported the telephone call, and Mrs. Cooper's vote made national and worldwide news. But Mrs. Cooper had one more surprise on election night when President-Elect Barack Obama mentioned her in his acceptance speech. She was invited to the inauguration, but decided to watch it in the comfort of her home. She is just content that he was elected, and if she ever meets the president in person, she would just like to shake his hand. ■



Jocelyn Dorsey of WSB in Atlanta and Reverend Andrew Young visit Mrs. Ann Nixon Cooper on her 107th birthday on January 9th. They are reviewing an article in Essence Magazine that featured Mrs. Cooper's historic vote.

Photo by Sally Warner



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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 2,650 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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