

Reflections



Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network

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INSURRECTION IN HANCOCK COUNTY: REVOLT FORGES A STATE LEADER

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There is a long history in the Americas of enslaved people fighting for their freedom. Some well known efforts are John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, the revolt in Charleston, South Carolina led by Denmark Vesey, and Nate Turner's Revolt in Southampton, Virginia. Countless other attempts have been lost to history, including the 1863 rebellion in Sparta.



Fugitive Poster, circa 1837
Courtesy of Wikipedia.org

According to the 1860 census, Hancock County's population was just over 12,000. More than 65 percent of the population was black with roughly 8,000 individuals enslaved here at the start of the Civil War. Just as news of the war was spreading among the ruling class, the same type of news spread through the enslaved community.

With the majority of the white male population away at war, enslaved people seized on the opportunity to strike back at the

ruling class and, in some cases, free themselves from bondage. Not long after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation a slave named "Savannah," was reported as the first "to go over to the Yankees."¹

¹ Kent Anderson Leslie, *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege: Amanda America Dickson 1849-1893*, (Athens, GA: The Univer-

Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation earlier in the year 1863. The local papers carried stories of runaway slaves joining the Union Army.² Many of these stories fueled the fear of rebellion among slaveholders. The Confederacy continued to run stories related to the arming of Negroes. On September 13, 1863, reports estimated 100 enslaved people gathered together in a wooded area east of Sparta. *The Southern Recorder* noted that 18 Negroes were arrested for "combining and attempting to excite an insurrection."³

As early as March of 1863, the conspirators had begun to meet weekly to plan the insurrection.⁴ Officers were appointed to plan and lead the rebellion: Captain, Lieutenant, the "next-man-in charge," and the "last man." According to the *Daily Intelligencer*, the group was to "kill off old white men and women and children" and "appropriate the young women as wives." The insurgents were then to make their way out of Sparta and join up with [William S.] Rosecrans (commander of the Union Army of the Tennessee) when he arrived in Atlanta.⁵

Four men were identified as the "ringleaders."

Continued on Page 6

sity of Georgia Press, 1995), 53.

² "The Enlistment of Negroes as Soldiers in the Southwest-The whole thing shows up," *Confederate Union*, (Milledgeville, GA), Sep. 1, 1863.

³ "The Trouble in Hancock," *Southern Recorder*, Oct 27, 1863

⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

⁵ "The Emeute in Hancock," *Daily Intelligencer*, Oct. 17, 1863.

BARTOW LEADERS BLAZE A BLACK HERITAGE TRAIL THROUGH THE COUNTY

Sherri Henshaw, Keep Bartow Beautiful Coordinator, Bartow County Development Office, with assistance from Bartow History Center

In 2015 Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham, a long-time resident of Cartersville, saw the opportunity to help uncover unique African American places in Bartow County, dating from the 1830s to 1970s. With support from Bartow County Sole Commissioner Steve Taylor and assistance from the County's Office of Keep Bartow Beautiful, Benham proposed creating a Bartow Black History Trail to share the history of George Washington Carver State Park (formerly Bartow Carver Park) and nine other sites with a larger audience. The Bartow Black History Trail concept is based on "Seven Steps to Plan a Heritage Trail" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

While each site holds great potential individually, as a whole they provide an incredible opportunity for their community to draw from millions of tourists traveling along Interstate 75 each week, lead them on a trip through time, and to significant stories waiting to be told:

1. **George Washington Carver Park**, 3900 Bartow



Credit: Bartow County Government

Carver Road, Acworth, 30102. Established in 1950 as Georgia's first State Park for Negroes, the park was led by John Atkinson, the first black superintendent of a state park in Georgia and a former Tuskegee Airman. Today, the park is undergoing renovations. Park stewards have received a grant for new directional and interpretive park signage and plan a music festival with the Third Annual George Washington

Carver Park Memories Day. www.VisitCartersvilleGA.org.

2. **African-American Masonic Lodge**, Aubrey Street, (pictured below) and

3. **Summer Hill School Complex**, 129 Aubrey Street, Cartersville, GA 30120



Credit: Bartow County Government

The masonic building tells the story of Summer Hill's bustling business community for blacks that flourished between 1930, when it moved from downtown Cartersville, to 1960, when it was destroyed by Urban Renewal. As part of the proposed trail, this Masonic Lodge could become a minority business incubator and a Maker's Space, launching new

entrepreneurs again from the once bustling street.

Summer Hill School campus, served Bartow County's black students from 1889 to 1968. The school story is featured in "Summer Hill," a Georgia Public Broadcasting documentary. Cartersville City Government revived the campus which houses a museum, tennis courts, hiking trails, a swimming pool and a bronze statue of Professor James S and Mrs. Beatrice Morgan (pictured here) who led the school from 1925 to



Credit: Melissa Jest, HPD

1962. www.SummerHillHG.org.

4. **Vinnie's Cabin**, Downtown Cartersville 30120 (pictured here)—Vinnie's Cabin is a slave cabin



Credit: Bartow County Government

built circa 1855 and located behind the Elijah Field Home on North Erwin Street in Cartersville. The cabin was the home of family cook Miss Vinnie (pronounced Vine-ee). At one point, it was destined to be moved to another location for restoration. At this time the cabin is under new ownership.

5. **Black Pioneer's Cemetery**, Euharlee Road and

6. **Euharlee Covered Bridge**, Covered Bridge Road (pictured here), Euharlee 30145 are both located



Credit: Bartow County Government

on Covered Bridge Road in the City of Euharlee. The Black Pioneer's Cemetery dates back as early as the 1830s and was recently restored and added to the Euharlee History Walking Tour. Small wooden crosses mark the more than 300 graves of those ancestors of Euharlee's Black families.

This covered bridge was built in 1886 by renowned bridge builder and freedman Horace King and his son, Washington King, a graduate of the engineering program of Oberlin College. The bridge is listed on the National Register,

and is part of the Euharlee History Walking Tour. www.euharleehistory.org.

7. **St. James A.M.E. Church**, Cassville Road, Cassville, and
8. **Noble Hill Wheeler School**, off Joe Frank Harris Pkwy NW, Cassville, GA 30123 are both located along scenic stretches of the old Dixie Highway route.



Credit: Bartow County Government

St. James A.M.E., formerly Cassville Presbyterian Church, was established in 1833, with the building believed to date to that period. In 1863 the church structure was commandeered to serve as a hospital for wounded troops, and was one of only three buildings left standing in the once proud county seat after the “Burning of Cassville” in 1864. According to local historians, the church was “given to black families living in Cassville,” in 1872 when the former white congregation dissolved.



Credit: Bartow County Government

Noble Hill Wheeler School is a restored Rosenwald School on the National Register of Historic Places and serves as a museum as well as a small resource library. The school was built in 1923 as the first Bartow school for black children, from a program created by the national efforts of Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald to educate black youth.

www.noblehillwheeler.org.

9. **Gravesite of Melvinia Shields, at Queen Chapel Independent Methodist Church**, Johnson Street, Kingston, Georgia 30145



Credit: Melissa Jest HPD

Kingston holds the burial site of Melvinia Shields (1844-1938) later known as Mattie McGruder, great-great-grandmother of former First Lady Michelle Obama. Enslaved as a child, Melvinia Shields left South Carolina when she was deeded to the Shields family of Rex, GA. Three of her four children were listed as mulatto, and carried the Shields surname after the war.

Melvinia Shields migrated with her children to Kingston. A tour and exhibit are available in Kingston.

www.MichelleObamasGeorgiaRoots.org

10. **Butler’s Shoe Store, Downtown Adairsville 30103** (pictured here).

The Butler’s Shoe Store on 105 Gilmer Street presents the story of Arthur Butler, a railroad maintenance man who lost his leg in a train accident and went on to become a cobbler and open a shoe store. Butler worked upstairs here, making shoes, belts, boots, and other leather goods. This historic site offers additional space for the Adairsville Depot Museum and street level space for a retail shop.



Credit: Bartow County Government

The Bartow County Government will seek a Georgia Tourism Product Development Grant in 2018 to support the new trail. Each site will be linked by a printed guide, a driving tour with an interactive app, and website links. For more information, contact Keep Bartow Beautiful, Cultural Affairs and Environmental Programs at henshaws@bartowga.org.

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### In Memory of Joy LaDawn Hill-Watson

Director of Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center and the Summer Hill Museum

March 19, 1968 ~ May 29, 2017



Her work at Noble Hill and support of Carver Park has helped preserve Black history in Bartow County for future generations.

Photo courtesy of [www.mackepingerfuneralhome.com](http://www.mackepingerfuneralhome.com)

## THE W. W. LAW COLLECTION: PRESERVING LAW'S LEGACY, CARRYING ON HIS WORK, AND INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

*Luciana Spracher, Director of Research Library & Municipal Archives  
The City of Savannah, Georgia*



*Law at the Ralph Mark Gilbert Museum, 1996  
Courtesy of SavannahNow.com*

Westley Wallace "W. W." Law (1923-2002) was a prominent Savannah Civil Rights leader, local historian, historic preservationist, and community leader. He was considered not only an institution builder but a Savannah institution himself, and was widely recognized as the keeper of Savannah's African American history.

The W. W. Law Collection, held at the City of Savannah Research

Library & Municipal Archives, represents the bulk of W. W. Law's personal effects, left behind at the time of his death in his Savannah home in 2002. The collection includes more than 1,000 cubic feet of original manuscripts/paper records, publications, visual and audiovisual materials, and artifacts, and represents Law's life-work. Upon his death, it passed by last will and testament to Remer Pendergraph, a long-time friend and mentee, who established the W. W. Law Foundation to celebrate the life and support the legacy of Law.

In April 2014, the City of Savannah accepted the collection through a deed of gift from the Foundation to ensure the collection receives proper archival care and the greatest public accessibility, recognizing that as Law was a community treasure so is the collection that he left behind.

In 2015, a SPLOST 2003-2008 (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) agreement originally between Chatham County and the Foundation was renegotiated between the County and the City to fund archival curation of the collection (including rehousing, preservation, cataloging, reformatting and hiring project staff). The allocation of SPLOST funding by Chatham County citizens, and the continued support of County leadership of the Collection, attest to the importance of Law, his work, and his continuing legacy to the community. The City's Research Library & Municipal Archives Department is tasked with proper archival management balanced with accessibility through a variety of outlets,

including: research collections; digital access, physical and online exhibits, public outreach, educational programming, partnerships with institutions established by Law, public libraries, schools, community centers, and museums.

In order to maximize access during the multi-year archival curation project, portions of the collection are made open to the public as they are finished on a rolling basis, with the core research collection available to the public through the city's research room in Savannah's City Hall. Archival processing activities include: arrangement and description (including cataloging/inventorying and preparation of collection finding aids and research tools); rehousing in archival, acid-free containers; preservation and conservation activities (including pest infestation treatment, cleaning, flattening, etc.); and conversion and digitization.



*Law's home contributes to the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District  
Melissa Jest, Historic Preservation Division*

The overall W. W. Law Collection is diverse in format and subject matter. It has been broken down into smaller collections, and work is prioritized by researcher demand and outreach plans. All of the smaller collections are interesting and support each other, for instance the book and periodical collections have extensive holdings related to music which support Law's music collection of shellac and vinyl recordings. Law was an avid music collector with a music collection spanning most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a variety of audio formats, including shellac and vinyl, representing a wide range of genres including jazz, classical, sacred, blues, folk, and narrative. The photograph collection has many images documenting the local NAACP branch and its activities during the Civil Rights era, also documented in the Savannah Branch NAACP records.



Highlights of the W. W. Law Photograph Collection (1868-2002) include images of Savannah African American historic sites, as well as photographs documenting the establishment and activities of the Savannah-Yamacraw Branch of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), the King-Tisdell Cottage Museum, the Beach Institute African American Cultural Center, the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, and the Negro Heritage Trail Tour.

The W. W. Law Art Collection (1849-1998) spans a variety of artistic styles and media with original artwork by noted Savannah, regional and national artists including Christopher Murphy, Jr., Myrtle Jones, Margaret T. Burroughs, William S. Carter, and Jonathan Green. The NAACP Savannah Branch records (1941-2000) includes correspondence between Law and national Civil Rights leaders like Langston Hughes, Roy Wilkins, Thurgood Marshall, and Medgar Evers.



*The Ralph Mark Civil Rights Museum, Savannah, Georgia  
Courtesy of Bina Design [www.bina-design.com/](http://www.bina-design.com/)*

The W. W. Law Periodical Collection (1831-2001) includes the first issue of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, published on January 1, 1831. These are just a few highlights of a rich and diverse collection that continues to surprise the archivists processing it.

Collaboration has been key in reaching out to the community regarding the W.W. Law Collection. The City Library & Archives is partnering with the Beach Institute African American



*Along with leading marches, Law led tours of the Beach Institute neighborhood as a preservation strategy, 1980.  
W.W. Law Collection, City of Savannah*

Cultural Center, established by Law, on a three-year series of exhibits from the collection. The first exhibit, “Through Law’s Eyes: Select Works from the W. W. Law Art Collection”, ran from March 2016 to January 2017. The second exhibit “Law & Music: Discovering Music through the W. W. Law Collection” includes interactive activities that touch on select Georgia educational standards for K-12 students. It opened this April.

As archivists, the most exciting moments are watching others discover and use the collections. We are thrilled with student use of the collection, and by teachers incorporating Civil Rights related materials into lesson plans. SCAD graduate student in Photography, Trice Megginson featured the collection in his thesis project “Reconstructing the Narrative: Illuminating Savannah’s Civil Rights Narrative.” Images from the collection have been used in Massie Heritage Center’s “Enslavement through Emancipation: Education in Savannah” exhibit, Georgia Historical Society’s Savannah Protest Movement marker dedication program, and the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History’s “Giving in America” exhibit.

At heart, W. W. Law was an educator who continued to educate himself (never seen without reading material under his elbow) and always willing to share his knowledge with every person he met on the street. The W. W. Law Collection not only preserves his legacy but furthers his educational work and continues to inspire us to live up to the high bar he set. Please visit the City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives at [www.savannahga.gov/wwlaw](http://www.savannahga.gov/wwlaw) or call (912) 651-6412. ■

## INSURGENCE IN HANCOCK COUNTY: REVOLT FORGES A STATE LEADER

Leslie Spencer, continued from page 1

Each of these men was indicted and tried separately. All were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Of the four men who were sentenced to hang, two were put to death: John Cain, a painter enslaved by Captain Elisha Cain of Sparta, elected to be the Lieutenant of the insurrection; and Cornelius “Mac” Simmons, a blacksmith enslaved by Alganon [sic] S. B. Simmons and Mary A. R. Simmons of Sparta, the “last-man.”<sup>6</sup> The remaining two men who were spared were: Spencer Beasley, a shoemaker enslaved by Charles A. Beasley of Greene County, “the next-man”; and Richard “Dick” Shaw a painter enslaved by Mrs. Shaw of Marietta, the Captain; Beasley’s sentence was commuted to four hundred lashes, and Richard Shaw was recommended for clemency.

Shortly after the four ringleaders were tried and sentenced, John Cain and Spencer Beasley escaped from the Sparta jail.<sup>7</sup> Governor Joseph E. Brown issued a proclamation for their capture and return. The reward for Cain was set at \$1000, and \$500 for Beasley.<sup>8</sup> Both were recaptured within a few weeks of their escape. Cain was executed in January of 1864. In spite of this escape attempt, Confederacy Vice President Alexander Stephens and Judge Linton Stephens along with other prominent citizens of Hancock County supported reducing Beasley’s death sentence to lashes.<sup>9</sup>

The remainder of enslaved people arrested were tried and received punishment from the Sparta’s “vigilance” committee. Linton Stephens’ body servant, Cary was one of those tried by the “vigilance” committee and received lashes as punishment for his part in the insurrection. Cary Stephens had the opportunity to lessen his punishment, but he refused to testify against his co-conspirators.<sup>10</sup>

Bill Thomas, enslaved by Judge James Thomas (Linton Stephen’s father-in-law) was a co-conspirator in the Sparta insurrection. He had been enslaved by Judge Thomas at the age of 14 and was known to be literate. Though against Georgia law, Judge Thomas taught his enslaved to read so that they may read the

Bible for themselves.<sup>11</sup> Bill Thomas was Judge Thomas’ body servant and would have been present to overhear many conversations between leaders in the Confederacy. The Union victory would emancipate Bill Thomas.

According to his Freedman bank records, Bill Thomas was born in September 1843. He was the son of Harrison McLane and Eliza. He had two brothers and three sisters. His father died circa 1854-55, around the time that Bill was taken to Lancaster, the home of Judge James Thomas, located in the southwestern section of Hancock County.<sup>12</sup> After the war, Bill Thomas changed his name to William Henry Harrison and became one of the two elected black representatives from Hancock County during Reconstruction.<sup>13</sup> He and Eli Barnes, the other elected Hancounty County representative, would testify before U.S. Congress on Ku Klux Klan violent activity in Georgia under the Ku Klux Act of 1871. Linton Stephens would be one of the representatives from Georgia to dispute their claims. ■



Members of Bill Thomas’ family said to be buried at Brown Chapel AME cemetery, Hancock County. Courtesy of <http://www.friendsofcems.org>

6 Kent Anderson Leslie, *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege: Amanda America Dickson 1849-1893*, (Athens, GA: Univ of Georgia Press, 1995), 53.

7 Ibid.

8 N.C. Barnett, “A Proclamation,” *Confederate Union*, (Milledgeville, GA), Dec 8, 1863.

9 J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 168-169.

10 Ibid, 168.

11 John Rozier, *The Houses of Hancock 1785-1865*, (Decatur, GA: Auldfarran, 1996), 193.

12 “United States, Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:NSTZ-FR9> : 24 December 2014), William Henry Harrison, ; citing bank Atlanta, De Kalb, Georgia, United States, NARA microfilm publication M816 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1970); FHL microfilm 928,576.

13 “United States, Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:NSTZ-FR9> : 24 December 2014), William Henry Harrison, ; citing bank Atlanta, De Kalb, Georgia, United States, NARA microfilm publication M816 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1970); FHL microfilm 928,576.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### National Museum Conference panel features Georgia's Beulah Rucker Museum

Rojene Bailey of The Beulah Rucker Museum in Gainesville rounds out a tri-state panel to discuss reusing African American schools to tell our story.

The panel, entitled "D.E.M.O." is one of 36 professional development sessions chosen for the Association of African American Museums Conference, July 31 to August 4.



#### Association of African American Museums

P.O. Box 23698, Washington DC 20026  
202 633 1194 | [www.blackmuseums.org](http://www.blackmuseums.org)

Photo credit: BeulahRuckerMuseum.org

### Genealogy Lecture at Georgia Archives' "Lunch & Learn" this Summer



Certified Genealogist® Yvonne Mashburn Schmidt presents on *About that Native American Grandmother: Clues that Help & Hinder Our Family Stories* on July 14, 2017 at the Georgia Archives in Morrow, Georgia.

This Lunch & Learn Lecture is free and no reservations are required. Bring your own lunch as the session runs from noon to 1 PM.

#### Georgia Archives-University System of Georgia

5800 Jonesboro Road | Morrow, GA 30260  
678-364-3710 | [www.georgiaarchives.org](http://www.georgiaarchives.org)

Photo credit: [www.georgiaarchives.org](http://www.georgiaarchives.org)

### Gullah Geechee Commission Seeks Director



The Gullah-Geechee Heritage Corridor is a National Heritage Area spanning the coast of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. The corridor Commission seeks its next Executive director to help spur

partnerships that will preserve and promote Gullah and Geechee history and culture. Click or copy/paste the following link for more information: <https://form.jotform.com/53227942937161>

#### Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission

PO Box 1007 | Johns Island, SC 29457  
(843) 818-4587 | [info@gullahgeecheecorridor.org](mailto:info@gullahgeecheecorridor.org)

Photo credit: US17coastalhighway.com

### Hidden Figures Exhibit Honors Clayton County Rosenwald School Champions

The "Hidden Figures: A Cultural Experience" exhibit honors local educators Eula and Lillian Arnold (pictured here) who helped save the Jonesboro Rosenwald School they attended as children. The exhibit was sponsored by Clayton County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Art Clayton Gallery and included a re-created 1940s classroom and artifacts.



#### Clayton County Convention/Visitors Bureau

104 North Main Street, Jonesboro GA 30236  
(770) 478-4800 | (800) 662-7829

Photo credit: Clayton CVB and the Arnold Family

## ABOUT REFLECTIONS

Since its first issue appeared in December 2000, *Reflections* has documented hundreds of Georgia's African American historic resources. Now all of these articles are available on the Historic Preservation Division website [www.georgiashpo.org](http://www.georgiashpo.org). Search for links to your topic by categories: cemeteries, churches, districts, farms, lodges, medical, people, places, schools, and theatres. You can now subscribe to *Reflections* from the homepage. *Reflections* is a recipient of a *Leadership in History Award* from the American Association for State and Local History.



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

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## ABOUT GAAHPN



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) was established in January 1989. It is composed of representatives from neighborhood organizations and preservation groups. GAAHPN was formed in response to a growing interest in preserving the cultural and built diversity of Georgia's African American heritage. This interest has translated into a number of efforts which emphasize greater recognition of African American culture and contributions to Georgia's history. The GAAHPN Steering Committee plans and implements ways to develop programs that will foster heritage education, neighborhood revitalization, and support community and economic development.

The Network is an informal group of over 3,000 people who have an interest in preservation. Members are briefed on the status of current and planned projects and are encouraged to offer ideas, comments and suggestions. The meetings provide an opportunity to share and learn from the preservation experience of others and to receive technical information through workshops. Members receive a newsletter, *Reflections*, produced by the Network. Visit the Historic Preservation Division website at [www.georgiashpo.org](http://www.georgiashpo.org). Preservation information and previous issues of *Reflections* are available online. Membership in the Network is free and open to all.

## Reflections

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Melissa Jest, Editor

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