



Reflections



Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network

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AT THE CROSSROAD: VISITING GEORGIA'S RURAL BLACK CHURCHES

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The African American programs office at Georgia Historic Preservation Division engaged summer intern Ariyanne Colston to assess data and inquiries regarding some of Georgia's rural historic African American churches, in an effort to identify those in danger of being lost. After reviewing more than 150 entries and files compiled over the last 15 years, Ms. Colston set out to prioritize those identified rural churches and to conduct site visits with HPD program staff over the course of eight weeks. In the following report, Ms. Colston shares her observations while visiting three rural historic African American churches and meeting those advocates working to save them.



Church sign for Mt. Zion Baptist Church welcomes all.
Credit: Melissa Jest/HPD

My internship is part of a deeper quest to save the physical evidence of Black religion in Georgia—older and historic Black churches—that represents the enduring faith of the founders but are rapidly slipping away.

This quest led me to three rural churches in West, Central, and North Georgia respectively; each exhibits varying levels of structural integrity, community support, and preservation potential. All confirm the need for ongoing documentation and targeted technical assistance.

Mt. Zion Baptist Church sits near the dead end of a residential road cut off by Interstate 85. The well-maintained church epitomizes African-American vernacular ecclesiastical architecture and its adaptation through the years.¹ Two white, wooden towers stand on each side of the edifice, indicating that the church's original white clapboard hides beneath its current red brick exterior. The congregation organized in 1868, but Rev. Van X. Shrieves explained that the church we were visiting was built in 1906.

Like most Black churches in the rural south, Mt. Zion stood at the center of Black life. The Mt. Zion church campus includes a one-room schoolhouse and a cemetery, indicating that the congregation served its members and surrounding families “from the cradle to the grave.”

Just at the rear of the church, the old wooden schoolhouse suffers through the perils of neglect. And across the road named for the church is the

1 Church Types in Georgia, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. <https://georgiashpo.org/historicchurches>

Accessed June 11, 2018.

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Ariyanna Colston continued from page 1

cemetery, the final resting place for some of those founding ancestors. Rev. Shrieves said the congregation wishes to save and restore the schoolhouse and seek a National Register district nomination for the church, school, and cemetery.

Mt. Zion is representative of the many historic black churches that desire to recognize their history but struggle to meet the requirements for National Register designation. In my internship I learned that this designation involves three basic must-haves: age, historical significance, and structural integrity. The third is likely the biggest hurdle for Mt. Zion and many historic rural African American churches. The tendency is for congregations to update edifices beyond recognition as they choose to use their historic properties rather than abandon them. But this often means such otherwise significant, rural Black churches may not find their way into the national record.

University of West Georgia Archivist Shaneé' Murrian joined this site visit to Mt. Zion and shared about the *African-American Churches in West Georgia Community Archives Project* that aims to preserve and archive pieces of history at churches established 100 years ago or earlier. She recommended an oral history "harvest" as a first step toward preserving Mt. Zion.

Andrews Chapel Methodist Church sits on a quiet rural road in Cohutta. It is a strange but charming single-tower church with an even stranger history: the founders bought the edifice, then located in Tennessee, and hauled it across the state line by mule. The town of Cohutta now owns the vacant church building.

Inside, town officials and descendent of the church, Ms. Teresa Burse, discussed the church's history and their hopes for the structure. Brimming with enthusiasm, they discussed marketing, funding options, and the benefit of National Register designation. With only one known member of the congregation surviving and possibly no written records remaining, this nomination process will prove challenging. This rural church models both reasons for optimism and for concerns as the town considers a new use going forward. (Learn more about Andrews Chapel on page 3)

St. Paul CME Church in Sparta, Georgia is nearly empty, save a few pews and the red carpet on the floor. Here, church trustee and local preservationist, Harrell Lawson, shares his vision for the church he loves. Using its history, Lawson believes this historic church can generate interest and revenue needed to preserve itself.

St. Paul sits tucked away at the end of a two-lane road, on the same land sold to the congregation in 1870 by the plantation owner David Dickson. The paved road brings you to the back of the church which seems odd. But Lawson explained Old St Paul church was built to face the Dickson Plantation where the founding church members were enslaved. From this enslaved community rose American notables such as Rev. Lucius Hosley, Julia Frances Lewis Dickson and her daughter Amanda America Dickson.



*Old St. Paul CME sits ready for heritage tourists.
Credit: Melissa Jest/HP*

St. Paul's congregation now worships in a new building down the road and hosts an annual homecoming service that packs the new sanctuary beyond capacity while "Old" St. Paul sits unfurnished and unused.

Lawson asks how does a historic congregation translate the need to preserve its historic edifice to a younger generation that doesn't want to look back? How does one make historic preservation palatable in an era of innovation? Also, given their location, rural churches face special challenges in drawing both attention and income to historic resources in sparsely populated areas. Perhaps the dramatic true story of Amanda America Dickson² and her return home to the St. Paul congregation in 1870 provides a start. ■

Ariyanna Colston is a dual-program graduate student pursuing a Masters of Divinity at the Candler School of Theology and a Juris Doctor through the Emory School of Law. Her research interests include The Black church, historical memory, and theories of place and space.

² "Amanda America Dickson (1849-1893)," New Georgia Encyclopedia, 2018, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/amanda-america-dickson-1849-1893>, accessed January 27, 2019.

ANDREWS CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH OF COHUTTA, GEORGIA

Kevin McAuliff, Contributor
Senior Planner, Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

Red Clay Road is the historic axis in Cohutta, Georgia. It runs north to the Tennessee state line and beyond. Andrews Chapel Methodist Church faces Red Clay Road where it and Pleasant Valley Road intersect. Farm fields and fences are prominently in view as one stands on the church steps. And less than 300 feet way, the old Southern Railway tracks (now the Norfolk Southern Railway) run north on a high bed of crushed stone through town. Cohutta began as a stacking place for wood for Southern Railway locomotives and first incorporated in 1886.¹

Freedman Henry Andrews organized the Andrews Chapel congregation in Red Clay, GA, in 1872 with the Rev. W. C. Wilson serving as pastor. The building now fronting Red Clay Road, built in 1902, was rolled on logs to its present location in 1923. Soon after, Andrew and Thomas Prater added the “wings” or transepts giving the church its cruciform shape. During the first half of the twentieth century, the congregation continued to grow. Pastors over the years included W.C. Wilson, the Rev. Petty, L.S. Johnson, the Rev. Fowler, the Rev. Williams, D.D. Green, Simon Snell, J.H. Shelly, M.L. Housch, Charles L. Stovall, and Rodney B. Weaver.²

Whether by design or happenstance, the relocated church building is oriented so the geographical and liturgical directions are identical. The west (front) façade is very near the street and presents a front gabled mass with a square, engaged tower on the north side occupying almost half of the façade. The tower is entered by a double door, and is visually balanced by one large 4X4, double-hung sash window in the façade. The bell still hangs, hidden, in the tower.

Andrews Chapel is significant as a rural church in the process of evolution. It assumed a form closely approximating the liturgical disposition of a Gothic Revival church. It is also important as one of three buildings--a coherent set of rural, institutional buildings, intended to satisfy the religious and educational needs of a distinct minority enclave. The two other buildings are the Colored School and the Pleasant Valley Missionary Baptist Church, both standing due west at the same intersection.

1 Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, *An Official History of Whitefield County 1852-1999*, Fernandina Beach, 1999.

2 S. Danielle Shelton, *History of Andrews Chapel*, Unpublished research paper, 2019



Andrews Chapel Methodist Church
Credit: Melissa Jest/HPD

The north end of Cohutta has long been home to a well-established Black community. Freed blacks who settle here contributed to the town's growth and founding of these cultural institutions that were and continue to serve as hubs of Black life. Land for the Colored School and Pleasant Valley Baptist Church on land donated by W. M. Pitner in the 1920s.³ As their congregations dwindled, members of Andrews Chapel and Pleasant Valley Church worship together in the latter building and used the one-room schoolhouse as a fellowship hall.

In 2016, the last remaining member of Andrews Chapel and caretaker of the building, Billy Prater arranged for the African Methodist Episcopal Church to donate the building to the Town of Cohutta.⁴ Andrews Chapel itself stands empty, but is to be converted to a public meeting space, according to Cohutta Mayor Ron Shinnick. ■



Sanctuary of Andrews Chapel Methodist Church.
Credit: Melissa Jest/HPD

3 Whitfield-Murray Historical Society, *An Official History of Whitefield County 1852-1999*, Fernandina Beach, 1999.

4 “Andrews Chapel Methodist,” *Historic Rural Churches of Georgia*, 2017, <https://www.hrcga.org/church/andrews-chapel-methodist/>, accessed May 7, 2019.

MAMIE GEORGE S. WILLIAMS: TIRELESS CHAMPION OF HER PEOPLE

Velma Fann, Contributor
Historian, New South Associates

Mamie George Williams (1872-1951) was a towering civic and political leader of the early 20th century. A native and a life-long resident of Savannah, she held high-ranking positions in local and national women's clubs, served as a member of the Interracial Commission of Georgia, assisted in establishing a school and home for African American girls, and rose to become one of the nation's foremost leaders of the Republican Party. Yet today, few speak her name.

A graduate of Beach Institute in Savannah and the Atlanta University, Mrs. Williams began her life of civic service during World War I, supporting Liberty Loan Drives and other war efforts at home. She earned a coveted pin for her 2,400 hours of volunteer work with the Toussaint L'Ouverture branch of the American Red Cross in Savannah.



The Toussaint L'Ouverture chapter of American Red Cross, Savannah, 1918. Mamie George S. Williams, front row left. Credit: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia

Mrs. Williams is also credited with bringing out 40,000 Georgia women to vote in the 1920 presidential election, waging a voter's campaign in 160 counties and flooding the state with literature, making speeches and picketing polling places.¹

¹ "Georgia Woman Associate Member of Nat'l Committee: Mrs. George S. Williams First to Sit on National committee of her Party,"



*Mamie George S. Williams circa 1924
Courtesy of Georgia Women of Achievement*

In 1924, Mrs. Williams made national political history as the first Republican woman from Georgia and the first African American woman in the nation appointed (and later elected) to serve on the National Republican Committee. Mrs. Williams also became the first woman in U.S. history accorded the privilege of the floor at a National Republican Convention. She spoke in defense of the Georgia delegation whose seats were being contested by the lily-white faction of the party that sought to strip Black Republicans of their power.² She remained in politics and later expressed her devotion to politics, stating: "To many politics is a sordid game. But to me it means the getting of everything worthwhile out of it for the race."³

Immediately after the 1924 convention, she gathered with other influential black women to establish the National Republican League of Colored Women, the first national political organization of African American women.

Mrs. Williams became a charter member of the Southeast Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and was elected President of the Georgia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. She was also elected Vice-

Pittsburgh Courier, 26 April 1924, 3

² "Mrs. Williams Chosen Again to Head Women: Nat. Republican Party Honors Georgian," *Chicago Defender (National Edition)*, 30 June 1928, 10.

³ "National Republican Committeewoman Rates Politics Among High Calling," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 29, 1930, 2.

President of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, serving with such venerable women as Hallie Q. Brown, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells, and Mary McLeod Bethune.⁴

As Georgia's Republican committeewoman, Mrs. Williams was due the honor of recommending supporters to federal positions. She was repeatedly denied this privilege by President Herbert Hoover, whom she and other black Republican leaders helped to elect. When Hoover named a committee of three white men to dispense federal jobs in Georgia, the *Chicago Defender* wrote, "Her record is clean. No taint of corruption is charged against her. The only reason that can be assigned for no consideration being shown her is that she is Colored."⁵

She held her seat of political power until 1932, when the lily-white contingency successfully removed Black Republicans from key, decision-making positions. At the close of her political career, the *Atlanta Daily World* thanked Mrs. Williams for her service, noting that "...at no time did temptation in its glaring disguise move her to deliver her people and her party for thirty pieces of silver."⁶

Mrs. Williams continued supporting the black community, serving as a Director of the Carver Bank in Savannah and as Board Member of Central (City) State College in Macon. In 1935 Williams was awarded the Waldorf Club silver loving cup for outstanding service. In the 1940s she led a movement to establish the Colored Recreation and Swimming Pool in Savannah and was instrumental in securing a grant to establish a state home for colored girls in Macon.

Born in Savannah in April 1872, to Reverend James and Sarah Miller, she was given the name Mary Frances, but was called Mamie. She married twice, and twice was widowed, marrying Forance Lambert in 1899, and Savannah businessman George Williams in 1902. She often was referred to as Mrs. George S. Williams, carrying the name of her second husband, a respected business leader in Savannah. To her closest friends and contemporaries, she was Mamie George.

Mamie Williams died in Savannah's Charity Hospital on July 8, 1951. In eulogizing Mrs. Williams, Sol Johnson, editor of the *Savannah Tribune*, wrote:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Mrs. Williams in Conference at the White House," *Chicago Defender (National edition)*, September 14, 1929, 1.

⁶ "Mrs. Mamie Williams," *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 June 1932, 6. Also "Georgia Woman Associate Member of Nat'l Committee: Mrs. George S. Williams First to Sit on National Committee of her Party," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 April 1924, 3.

In the passing of Mrs. (Mamie) George S. Williams, Savannah has lost another citizen...loyal to it to the core and a tireless champion of her people...Perhaps none of her activities gave her more satisfaction than her work with the Chatham Protective Home for Negro Girls and the Girl Scouts. Many children whom she mothered bear eloquent testimony of the devotion to a cause to which she gave the latter years of her life.⁷



*Charity Hospital and Training Schools for Nurses built 1931
Courtesy of Georgia Historical Society*

Although battle-tested, victorious and at times standing as a lone reed speaking out on behalf of her people, Williams never wavered; she never gave in. Mamie George Williams was a beacon of light for women and tireless champion for her people. ■

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A published author, Velma Maia Thomas (Fann) is a historian at New South Associates, Inc., She has researched and is writing extensively on Mamie George Williams, in the hope of securing public recognition for Mrs. Williams and her accomplishments.

⁷ Charles Lwanga Hoskins, *Yet With A Steady Beat: Biographies of Early Black Savannah*, (Savannah: The Gullah Press, 2001), 301.

CARRIE MAE HAMBRICK DAY: CELEBRATING SERVICE AND COMMUNITY IN STOCKBRIDGE

Lisa Fareed, Special Contributor

Program Assistant, Stockbridge Main Street Program, City of Stockbridge, Georgia

For 11 years running, hundreds reunite in the Tye Street neighborhood to pay homage to a lady and a landmark that served the community for over 50 years. The third Saturday in May is reserved for the



Carrie Mae Hambrick, c. 1940
Courtesy of Stockbridge
Main Street Program

Carrie Mae Hambrick Commemorative Celebration organized by the Stockbridge Civic Association.

To honor this neighborhood icon, the Stockbridge Main Street Program unveiled a historic marker and interpretive signage during this year's celebration. This "Green Front Café Identification Project" was made possible by a Georgia Department of Economic Development Tourism Product Development

Grant. Mayor Anthony S. Ford and local leaders spoke of the legacy of Mrs. Hambrick and her 50-plus years of selfless service. And following the tradition of Mrs. Hambrick, all were welcome to the day-long celebration and no one left hungry.

Carrie Mae Slaughter was born 100 years ago on March 8, 1919 in Jonesboro, Georgia. Through the popularity of her Green Front Café, she became a respected businesswoman. Through her philanthropy, she became a pillar of the community. Believed to be the first restaurant in Stockbridge where Blacks and Whites safely dined together despite the prevalent segregation of the time, the Green Front Café was one of the town's best loved gathering places.¹

In the 1940s Stockbridge was a farming town in Henry County. The population was less than 500, and there was a Jim Crow culture. The downtown had a few essential businesses such as the general store, pharmacy, and feed store. With the closest eateries being miles away in Morrow, workers from the rock quarry and surrounding cottonfields did not have many options for a wholesome meal until a young woman began

¹ Oral histories collected in 2018 as part of the *The Green Front Café Identification Project*. Stockbridge Main Street Program, City of Stockbridge, Georgia

operating a small café out of her home in 1949.

With her husband, Hime Hambrick, Sr., Carrie Mae Hambrick acquired their home from her cousin, Argustus "Rat" Slaughter, who built it in 1947. Mr. Hambrick was a WWII veteran and longtime employee of Atlanta Army Depot. Together, they nurtured a family of five, and later, a community of hundreds. Warm and welcoming to all, Mrs. Carrie Mae, as she was called, created a sense of place and belonging for the community. The little green building at 112 Second Street became a local hub. It was common to call the café's pay phone to get a message out to someone who would be passing through. Mrs. Carrie Mae became the friend and advisor to elected officials and longtime neighbors. She used her café to support causes or would partner with leadership to "get things done".

Nestled within a tight knit community, Mrs. Carrie Mae served soul food delicacies and her sought-after cornbread at a good price. She had simple selections like hot dogs on toasted buns, and hamburgers made-from-scratch that were said to rival any craft burger today. Kids from both sides of the railroad track loved Mrs. Carrie Mae too. She and her business sponsored a youth baseball team called the Stockbridge Pirates. Every summer she arranged trips to nearby amusement parks for a busload of neighborhood kids.

Carrie Mae Hambrick passed away on January 17, 2010 at age 90. The Green Front Café closed in 2008 and sat vacant for several years. In 2018, the mother-daughter-team of Diane and Malana Miller of Stockbridge took up that challenge of reviving the beloved business when they purchased the building. According to Mrs. Miller, the renewed Green Front Café will serve both area patrons and



The Green Front Café is currently under renovation.
Photo credit: Melissa Jest/HPD

those visiting the nearby Martin Luther King, Sr. Heritage Trail, with health-conscious, comfort foods and refreshments.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2019 Statewide Historic Preservation Conference September 18 through 20 in Rome

This annual educational conference is presented by Georgia Historic Preservation Division (HPD) and the Georgia Trust with the City of Rome and Georgia Alliance of Preservation Commission. This convening offers mobile tours, educational sessions and ample networking opportunities for professionals and grassroots advocates alike.

Set in Rome, Georgia, the two-and-half day convening will highlight area projects like the Fairview School/Rosenwald campus in nearby Cave Spring.

For more information, contact Georgia HPD conference coordinator Sarah Love- Sarah.Love@dnr.ga.gov

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Image credit: The Fairview-E.S. Brown Heritage Corporation

GAAHPN celebrates 30 years, welcomes new volunteer board members



Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network

Come join the GAAHPN steering board at the Statewide conference in Rome as they mark 30 years of preservation service. The GAAHPN board also seeks diverse, energetic volunteer board and committee members to help preserve and promote Georgia's rich legacy of historic places, spaces and stories.

With support from GAAHPN leaders, Georgia HPD was among the first state preservation offices to establish a dedicated technical assistance program focused on African American heritage.

Contact GAAHPN liaison Melissa Jest at melissa.jest@dnr.ga.gov for more information about volunteering with GAAHPN.

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Image credit: Georgia HPD

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. 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.

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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. 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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