



**GEORGIA**  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION**



**Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network**

# Reflections

Volume XI, No. 1

December 2012

## **GROWING FOOD FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO ORGANICS: GILLIARD FARMS, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CENTENNIAL FAMILY FARM**

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

**C**entennial Family Farm awards are presented each fall to recognize Georgia farms that have remained in the same family as a working farm for 100 years or more. The 19th annual award ceremony was held at the Georgia National Fair in October 2012. Twenty-five farms were recognized this year. Two of the Centennial Family Farm awards were presented to organic farms for the first time and one of these, Gilliard Farms, became the tenth African American farm of 426 farms since the program's inception in 1993 to receive this distinguished award.

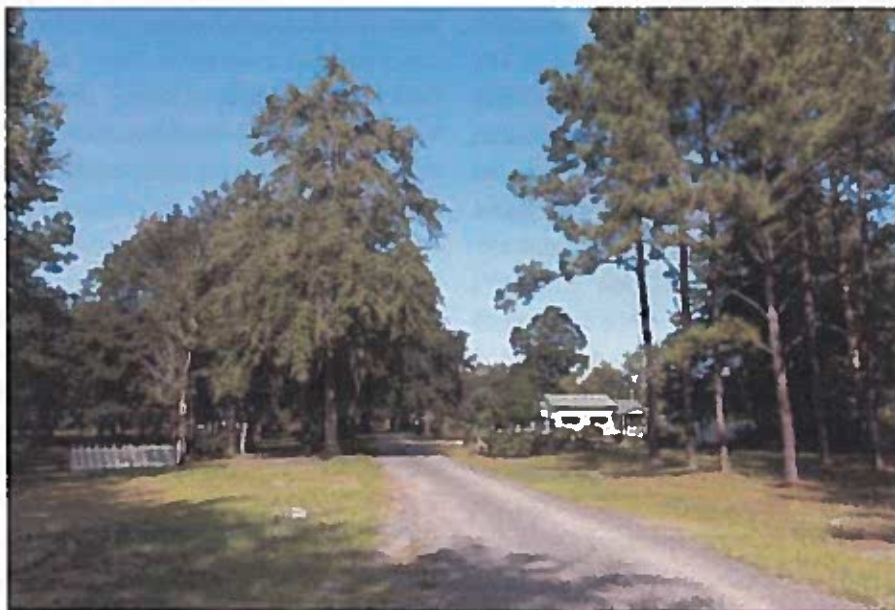
Gilliard Farms is located in Brookman, a rural community just outside of Brunswick in Glynn County, Georgia. The founder

of this farm was Jupiter Gilliard, who was born enslaved in 1812. Gilliard established this farm with the purchase of 457 acres in 1874. The Glynn County Tax Digest from 1874–1880 confirms Jupiter Gilliard was a landowner in the 27<sup>th</sup> Militia District. He and his wife Riner were also included in the 1870 U.S. Census. Jupiter died around 1877 or 1878, and had two sons, Jubiter and

London, who appeared in the 1880 U.S. Census. London Gilliard was the great-great grandfather of Gilliard Farms' present owners, Althea and Matthew Raiford. Today, they retain 50 acres of Jupiter's original purchase.

Brookman was a farming community and Glynn County established the Union School on a tract owned by Ophelia Johnson, who is Althea and Matthew's grandmother. The current building dates from the early 1900s. It was built by Glynn County to educate African American children in the rural area through the eighth grade. After their early education at the Union School, rural students attended the Colored Memorial School that later became Risley High School in

Brunswick. In the 1950s, as more schools were opened for African American students, Ophelia converted the home to a residence. Once inside the home, transoms and doors that were former classroom elements in the schoolhouse still remain. While Ophelia started at the Union School, she later attended school and finished her education at Dorchester Academy in Liberty County.



*Gilliard Farms is located on Galilee Road off U.S. Hwy. 80, about four miles west of Brunswick in Glynn County.  
Photo by Charlie Miller*

*continued on page 2*

## GROWING FOOD FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO ORGANICS: GILLIARD FARMS, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CENTENNIAL FAMILY FARM

*Jeanne Cyriaque, continued from page 1*



*The Gilliard family erected a historic marker to recognize the Union School that once existed on their family land. Photo by Charlie Miller*

Althea Raiford spent much of her career in the military, and she said her brother called her about seven years ago



*Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network*

**Photograph Not Available**

*Althea Raiford retired from a military career to pursue farming.*

*Photo by Anthony Masterson*

and they conversed about the family land and his desire to become an organic farmer. When Althea retired from the service, she and Matthew attended a family reunion in 2010, and expressed their goal for the Gilliard land to become an organic farm. While their mother Affie was shocked at this development, their aunt Mary Lou and grandmother Ophelia were delighted that their heirs wanted to return to farming. Althea reached out to the Veteran's Farmer Coalition for technical assistance, and learned of a program in California that admitted 25 prospective farmers out of 300–400 applicants. Matthew applied and was selected for the program and received a scholarship. Althea also applied for a grant to get the farm started, and in 2010 became the first disabled African American Navy female veteran to receive the grant.



*Matthew Raiford is both a farmer and a chef on Little St. Simons Island.*

*Photo courtesy of Gilliard Farms*

likes to be called, holds a bachelor's degree in Culinary Arts from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Matthew holds an additional certification in ecological horticulture that prepared him for organic farming. "Chefarmer" Raiford specializes in classic French cuisine. Prior to his return to Gilliard Farms, Matthew served as the Executive Chef of Haute Catering at the U.S. House of Representatives.



*The Raiford siblings, Matthew and Althea, continue the family farm that was established in 1874.*

*Photo courtesy of Gilliard Farms*

Althea and Matthew Raiford are the sixth generation of Gilliard descendants to farm on the family land. Fifteen acres of land are in agricultural production on Gilliard Farms. They produce vegetables and fruits and raise chickens and hogs. Gilliard Farms operates a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to provide their customers with fresh, nutritious, wholesome food. Their CSA members can pick up the food personally or at central locations. Each box of produce varies weekly and contains recipes from "Chefarmer" Raiford. Additionally, members can join and order online at [www.gilliardfarms.com](http://www.gilliardfarms.com). Matthew Raiford believes "as a chef, the quality of the food I prepare and present has always been of utmost importance. As farmers, Althea and I invest all that we can into producing extraordinary food that nurtures the body and the being. At Gilliard Farms, we extend our passion for eating well to and beyond our surrounding community, knowing that with their strong support we can do anything."

Matthew and Althea Raiford are members of the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (SAAFON), a network of small and limited resource farmers who are USDA certified organic or growing organically. SAAFON farmers are located in six states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, and St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Georgia farms in the network are the Gilliard Farms in Brunswick, Hometown Farm, African-American Family Farmers Inc. and Melvin's Produce



*Chickens are abundant on the Gilliard farm. Photo by Charlie Miller*

in Eatonton, Oak Tree Farm in Jacksonville, Clee Farm in Sylvania and Sanabella Farms in Kite.

Each year SAAFON honors African American farms growing organically that are 100 year-old farms with the Booker T. Whatley Award. SAAFON honored Gilliard Farms this year to receive this award. It is given to farmers in honor of Booker T. Whatley, an Alabama farmer and visionary who introduced regenerative farming that made greater use of internal resources.



*Two young piglets have recently arrived on the family farm. Photo courtesy of Gilliard Farms*

The genesis for SAAFON came from executive director Cynthia Hayes and Owusu Bandele, a retired agriculture professor from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Alarmed at the loss of African-American owned land (from 15 million acres in 1920 to less than 2 million acres today) both felt that African American farmers needed education and training to enter the organic foods industry. They started SAAFON educational programs six years ago to aid African American farmers to complete the application process that is required to achieve certification in organic farming.

Another first for SAAFON was African-American participation in local Farmers' Markets. SAAFON made history in Savannah in 2009 when they started a Saturday Farmer's Market in Forsyth Park, a Savannah historic park that once excluded blacks during segregation. The weekly market is now a beehive of

community activity from spring until November. Robbie Graham, one of SAAFON's Georgia growers, is a regular participant, selling organically-grown greens and other vegetables, strawberries and watermelons. The City of Savannah often sponsors other community programs like health pavilions throughout the summer on Farmers' Market Saturdays at Forsyth Park.

SAAFON training opportunities for their members often are held in collaboration with agriculture departments at 1890 Land Grant Universities that are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) including Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Southern and Tuskegee, bringing in speakers from USDA and national farmers' organizations.



*Truly Living Well is an urban organic farm near Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. This view of the farm faces Wheat Street Baptist Church. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

SAAFON partners with other African American farmers' markets like Truly Living Well in Atlanta. Truly Living Well is an organic farmers' market near Atlanta's famous Auburn Avenue. This organic market sits on land leased from Wheat Street Baptist Church and is adjacent to the new Ebenezer Baptist Church, an important landmark in the American Civil Rights Movement. The market is open to the public on Friday afternoons. Another Truly Living Well site is on Washington Road in East Point.



*Gabraelle Lane holds a large yam produced at Truly Living Well. She was one of the SAAFON delegates who attended the conference in Turin, Italy. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque*

Eight delegates from SAAFON, including Matthew Raiford, recently attended a global discussion on international food issues in Turin, Italy. The biennial conference was an opportunity for SAAFON members to dialogue with farmers from Africa about mutual interests including climate change, deforestation and maintaining African growing techniques that are relevant today for organic farming. For more information about SAAFON, visit their website at [www.saaфон.org](http://www.saaфон.org).

## UNITY GROVE ROSENWALD SCHOOL: A CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT PROJECT WITH GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Danielle Ross, African American Programs Assistant  
Historic Preservation Division

The Unity Grove Rosenwald School, located in Locust Grove, Georgia, was discovered in 2011 by Elyse Hill, a member of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network. Unity Grove is the only surviving Rosenwald School of five that were located in Henry County. It is the 51<sup>st</sup> Rosenwald School that has been found still standing in the state. Unity Grove was an African

community, \$400 from the Rosenwald Fund, and \$1,337 in public funds. Rosenwald Schools were constructed in the first half of the twentieth century. Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee Institute, was looking to change the current condition of education for African American children in the South. At the time, many schools for African American children were housed in run-down buildings or churches. By 1928, the Rosenwald Fund was in full swing and established one Rosenwald School for every five rural schools constructed at that time.

The school is a two-teacher school plan that served the African American children locally, and accommodated approximately 90 students. The school served the children of sharecroppers in the area and attendance was kept at 3 to 4 months out of the year, due to harvesting times. The Rosenwald Community School Plans served as a progressive idea in schoolhouse design for rural African American communities. The schools were conscious of health and safety, took into consideration ventilation, natural lighting, heating, and aesthetics. Many schools were oriented according to sunlight for maximum lighting during the day. Rosenwald Schools were constructed from 1912 to 1932, after which many fell into disuse with racial integration in education in the 1960s and 1970s.



In September 2012, graduate students from Georgia State University visited the Unity Grove Rosenwald School to conduct a conditions assessment.  
Photo by Danielle Ross



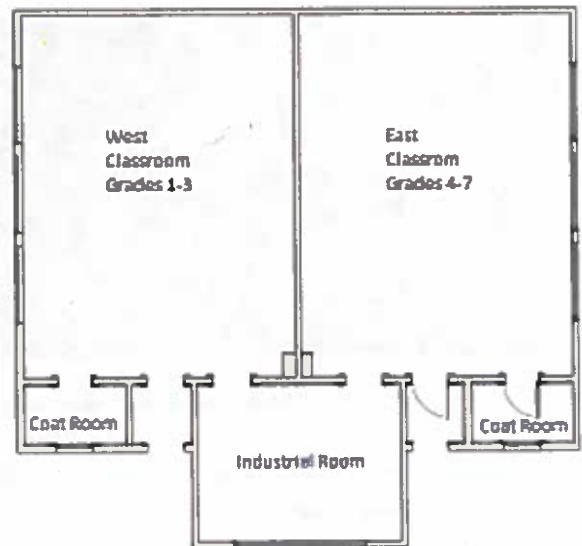
Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

Photograph  
Not  
Available

James Weldon Johnson  
Photo courtesy of  
University of South Carolina  
Rare and Special Collections

American community that was developed after the Civil War. The earliest known date for the existence of the school is 1891 because of its connection with James Weldon Johnson, who served as a teacher at the school. He was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Johnson taught at the original Unity Grove School building during the summer of his freshman year at Atlanta University. James Weldon Johnson was a well-known poet, novelist, journalist, and educator.

In 1931, the State Department of Education approved the contribution from the Rosenwald Fund for construction of a two-teacher Rosenwald School at Unity Grove to replace the old schoolhouse that was in disrepair. Unity Grove was built for a total cost of \$2,537, with \$400 being derived from the black community, \$400 from the white



The Unity Grove Rosenwald School was a two-teacher Community School Plan building that featured two classrooms and an industrial room.  
(Public Domain)

Unity Grove currently sits on privately owned land, but Henry County is considering rehabilitating the school for adaptive reuse as a historic landmark or museum to assist in telling its story. With the school's current condition, rehabbing the school is a feasible option. While currently not fulfilling its original use, the school retains many of its historic characteristics that would make it an exemplary rehabilitation project. Richard Laub's *Historic Building Materials*, a graduate class in the Heritage Preservation program, performed a conditions assessment on the school for the city

## UNITY GROVE ROSENWALD SCHOOL: A CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT PROJECT WITH GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

through a partnership with Georgia State University. The assessment consisted of studying and exploring the building in order to identify the current condition of the structure and preventative and routine measures that need to be taken to improve it.

The conditions assessment took place at the site of the school. Two former students of Unity Grove School, Mr. Walter Daniels and Ms. Stella McCord were also present at the day of the assessment. The opportunity to speak with past attendees of the school served as a great benefit because of the rare information



*Ms. Stella McCord and Mr. Walter Daniels, former Unity Grove students, visited the students while they were conducting the conditions assessment. Photo by Danielle Ross*

that could be obtained that otherwise would not have been discovered in the process. Upon speaking with Mr. Daniels, the class discovered that he attended Unity Grove in 1935 shortly after the school was constructed. While standing in his old classroom, Mr. Daniels indicated that there was no electricity or plumbing during his attendance, and the large windows proved to be very important. While explaining to the class his experience, Mr. Daniels helped by describing how each classroom was split. The classroom to the west was designated for 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> grade, while the classroom on the east was designated for 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition to his memory of the interior of the school, Mr. Daniels helped to shed light on the exterior paint color of the school during his attendance—which was white.

While one group of graduate students was gathering information from Mr. Daniels, another group was outside with Ms. Stella McCord. Ms. McCord, the second student, attended Unity Grove along with her siblings. Ms. McCord assisted in helping to describe the landscape that surrounded the school and the typical school year for the attendees. According to Ms. McCord, students at Unity Grove attended school for three months out of the school year due to farming schedules. During those three months, students walked over a mile to school from the surrounding area. In talking about the history of the school with Ms. McCord, the surrounding historic landscape of the school was discussed. Ms. McCord recounted that in the 1930s-1940s there were no trees and minimal



*Elyse Hill (far right) found the school through her research of Henry County. She and Mr. Walter Daniels share their oral histories with the students. Photo by Danielle Ross*

vegetation surrounding the school and the homes in the vicinity were randomly placed, as opposed to the current existing planned housing developments. She also stated that a male and female outhouse was located to the northwest of the school, while a ball field was located down a hill to the northeast of the school. Ms. McCord also helped with smaller details such as the placement of the stove in the center of the 4<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Both students stayed for a significant amount of time during the conditions assessment and walked through the school with the Georgia State graduate students answering many, if not all questions that the class had.

Unity Grove School retains many of its historic characteristics, such as the wood floors, chalk trays, and breeze windows, which have helped to identify how the school was arranged in its time of use. Each room in the schoolhouse has succumbed to different structural problems as the level of usage



*Breeze windows were located between the classrooms. Photo by Danielle Ross*

has varied over time. With talk of the proposed rehabilitation project, it will be exciting to see the school returned to its former architectural state and life brought back into the structure. ■

## PHYLLIS WHEATLEY CLUB

*Katheryn Ferrall-Graff, Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc.  
on behalf of the Georgia Department of Transportation  
and the Federal Highway Administration*

In 1937, just outside of Valdosta, Georgia, two women, neighbors and relatives, in a surprisingly integrated community established a meeting place for African American women called the Phyllis Wheatley Club. For nearly forty years, their clubhouse was a hub of social, charitable, and political activity for African American women.

The Valdosta branch of the Phyllis Wheatley Club was just one of hundreds of African American women's clubs founded across Georgia and the United States in the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Initially established as "colored" counterparts to white women's clubs during the Progressive Era, these clubs quickly surpassed their white counterparts in number. By the 1890s, two national organizations of African American women's clubs had emerged: the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW), founded by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and the Colored Women's League (CWL), founded by Helen Cook. In 1896, the two merged to become the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC). Mary Church Terrell was elected the NACWC's first president, and in 1909, she became one of only two women to serve as a founding member of the NAACP. Local branches named in honor of prominent African American women, such as Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune, quickly developed in communities all across the country; but perhaps the most popular namesake was that of Phyllis Wheatley.



*"Illustration for Phyllis Wheatley, Poems on Various Subjects. Image courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston"*  
(Public Domain)  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h7.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h7.html)

Sometimes spelled Phillis or Wheatly, Phyllis Wheatley is generally recognized as the first African American, the first slave, and the third woman in America to publish a work of poetry. Brought to America from Africa as a slave ca. 1761 aboard *The Phillis*, Phyllis Wheatley was given a classical education by her Boston owners, John and Susannah Wheatley. With the Wheatley's encouragement, Phyllis Wheatley's first poem was published in 1767 when she was

just twelve years old. Her first book, *Poems on Various Subjects*, was published in 1773; she was emancipated shortly thereafter. Her book was so popular that she gave a recital before George Washington and travelled Europe on a promotional tour.

Although the date the first Phyllis Wheatley Club was founded is unclear, Phyllis Wheatley Clubs were reported in Nashville, New Orleans, and Augusta by the 1880s. With mottos such as "Lifting as we climb," and "If you can't push, pull, and if you can't pull, please get out of the way," all of the federations worked to improve the quality of lives of African American women. There appear to have been three prototypes for Phyllis Wheatley Clubs in the United States: YWCAs, settlement houses, and small independent clubs.



*This undated post card illustrates the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the YWCA in Atlanta. [www.atlantatimemachine.com](http://www.atlantatimemachine.com)*

Clubs such as the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the YWCA in Atlanta were simply "colored branches" of the YWCA that functioned under white oversight. The first "colored" YWCA was founded in Ohio in 1889, and by the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, these clubs existed in cities all over America. At the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> century, as African Americans left the south in droves for better opportunities in northern industrial towns, African American women found themselves excluded from racially segregated settlement homes for women, such as Hull House in Chicago. In response, settlement homes called Phyllis Wheatley Clubs arose in Chicago, Minneapolis, and Buffalo. Far less common and primarily a northern phenomenon, these settlement houses sought to provide young African American women safe lodging, protection from urban vices, training in domesticity, and job placement services, all while fostering racial uplift.

Perhaps the most prevalent type, especially in the South, was the small, independent club. Commonly small groups, these were social or political clubs that gathered in church buildings and living rooms, and functioned similarly to prayer groups, sewing circles, and charitable organizations. Dozens of small, independent



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

Photograph  
Not  
Available



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

Facing southwest along West Hill Avenue, the Phyllis Wheatley Club (center) is surrounded by the homes of the club founders' Ella Mae Alexander (left) and Marietta Gaines (right). Photo by Kathryn Ferrall-Graff

African American women's clubs were active in Georgia by the 1930s, with clubs named for Phyllis Wheatley located in Augusta, Americus, Waycross, and Valdosta.



Phyllis Wheatley Club, Buffalo, New York, 1905  
Source: en.wikipedia.org (Public Domain)

The Valdosta Phyllis Wheatley Club is significant as one of the few African American women's clubs in Georgia with a dedicated clubhouse. The club was organized by a group of influential, well-educated and religious women. In July of 1937, Ella Mae Alexander inherited a parcel of land just east of downtown Valdosta. Together with a relative, Marietta Gaines, she constructed a clubhouse for the "Phyllis Wheatley Club, Inc. No. 1." Though both women were of mixed-race ancestry, they were known to their neighbors as "white," and as such, these women were protected by their community. Although a surprisingly-integrated neighborhood for 1930s rural Georgia, it was not without racial tension. By

constructing the clubhouse between their homes, the women were extending this protection to the clubwomen by providing a safe space in which the women could gather. The Valdosta Phyllis Wheatley Club became a local hub for charitable activity, but was also a source for social and political education. For example, Mary McLeod Bethune, former NACWC president and member of Theodore Roosevelt's Federal Council on Negro Affairs, reportedly spoke at the Valdosta clubhouse in the early 1940s.

Like many small, independent African American women's clubs, membership in the Valdosta club dwindled after World War II but experienced resurgence in the 1950s when it became an official federation of the NACWC. In the 1960s, under the leadership of Lily Gaines Rogers, local educator and daughter of Marietta Gaines, the clubhouse became a site for children's after-school activities, but by the 1970s, the Valdosta club had ceased operation. The clubhouse was host to various churches from the 1970s until the death of Margaret Carter, the last surviving board member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, in 2011; it now sits vacant.



Mary McCleod Bethune (center) visits the YWCA in Washington, DC, 1943  
(Public Domain) Source: Library of Congress

Organizations like the Phyllis Wheatley Club played a vital role in the lives of African American women from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century Progressive Era through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Civil Rights Era, and the NACWC still has active federations today. Although the Phyllis Wheatley Club is virtually unknown to current residents of Valdosta, this building was part of an important national movement and the hub of social, religious and political activities for African American women in Valdosta for nearly thirty years. This club's legacy and contributions will endure for generations.



Georgia African American  
Historic Preservation Network

Photograph Not Available

Ella Mae James Alexander and Marietta (Mary) Davis Gaines Source: Collection of James Edward Alexander

## 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

## STEERING COMMITTEE



Isaac Johnson  
Chairman

Isaac Johnson, Chair  
706/738-1901  
Velmon Allen, Vice-Chair  
GAAHPN Network  
912/261-1898

Lillian Davis  
Dr. Gerald C. & Barbara Golden  
Terry & Cynthia Hayes  
Richard Laub  
Kenneth Rollins

## STAFF



Jeanne Cyriaque  
African American  
Programs Coordinator  
Reflections Editor  
Voice 404/656-4768  
Fax 404/657-1368  
[jeanne.cyriaque@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:jeanne.cyriaque@dnr.state.ga.us)



Danielle Ross  
African American  
Programs Assistant  
Voice 404/657-1054  
Fax 404/657-1368  
[danielle.ross@dnr.state.ga.us](mailto:danielle.ross@dnr.state.ga.us)

## 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

Published quarterly by the  
Historic Preservation Division  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Dr. David Crass, Division Director  
Jeanne Cyriaque, Editor

This publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, through the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or consultants constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, or if you desire more information, write to: Office for Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.