

# Black History Month Celebration

*By Tiffany Parks*

The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Black History Month Celebration at the DeKalb History Center took place February 13th and was a hugely successful, sold-out event. The topic was *Rural Civil Rights: Voices Across Georgia and DeKalb Inspiring Dialogue on Race and Truth*. The program challenged people's notion of what was rural. Before the 1960s, many parts of DeKalb County, including Lithonia and Flat Rock, were considered rural enclaves.

The opening speaker was Ms. Melissa Jest, the African



*From the left: Mr. Jamar Boyd, II, Ms. Deborah Jones Tatum, Ms. Mary Elizabeth Wilson, Ms. Marcia Glenn Hunter, Chief Louis Dekmar.*

## Lithonia Activism

*By the Honorable Marcia Hunter*

Lithonia, Georgia, looks a lot different today than it did when Marcia Glenn Hunter was born. She remembers when Lithonia was a small rural town with dusty roads. The former mayor's fascinating story starts on Magnolia Street, where she was born. She grew up in a loving family with her mother and eight siblings. For the Woods family, everyday life was not easy. It was hard. Maggie Woods, Hunter's mother, worked as a domestic. Monday was washday, which was grueling work that lasted the entire day. People used outhouses, drank water from wells, and picked food from the garden. Life for African Americans was especially hard

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American Program Coordinator at the Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Her interesting speech about the unsung rural heroes of Georgia set the stage for the theatrical event. Then, Ms. LaDoris Davis, the event's moderator, entered the room holding a protest sign and singing the popular civil rights song "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round." The gist of the dramatic reading was about how the civil rights movement empowered rural African Americans to stand up against their oppressors. The main character was a wise, feisty grandmother named Mrs. Beulah, played by Ms. Greta Glenn. Mr. Adam Washington played the part of Leon, a determined SNCC activist. SNCC stands for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and was an organization that empowered African Americans to register and vote. Ms. Amber Thomas, a senior at Decatur High School, played a sharecropper and danced to John Coltrane's song "Alabama." Ms. Keyla McClure played the role of Ruth, a bold Holocaust survivor. Many Jewish Americans were active participants in the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Rothschild of The Temple were good friends. Ms.

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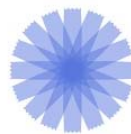
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# Black History Month Celebration

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Jayme Alilaw was the extraordinary soprano who sang the Negro spiritual, "Guide My Feet." The reading ended with the main characters triumphantly singing the popular "Movement" song "I Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Set On Freedom." The reading was based on facts. During the early 1960s, SNCC's Southwest Georgia Project was led by Charles Sherrod. He and other SNCC members went to rural areas and empowered the African American locals to become leaders and registered voters. It was a dangerous mission, and many locals were murdered just for talking to the SNCC representatives. At the same time, people in rural enclaves in DeKalb County were challenging the segregated school systems and businesses by protesting. There were many unsung rural heroes who stood up against their oppressors during the civil rights movement but little to no media captured these monumental events. The best way to celebrate these unsung heroes is to tell their stories and to keep their memories alive.

After the dramatic reading, the audience watched a debut documentary titled, *Civil Rights Testimonies Across Rural Georgia and DeKalb*. Some of the highlights of the film included Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, the first black mayor of the City of Decatur, who discussed her memories of the KKK marching on Decatur Square. Also, Deborah Tatum, a LaGrange County resident, discussed Austin Callaway, a distant family member who was lynched in 1940. Chief Louis Dekmar, the first white police chief to publically apologize for a lynching that

occurred over 80 years ago—The Callaway lynching—was also featured.

The last part of the event featured the dynamic panel members who were recognized as being current civil rights leaders. Mr. Jamar Boyd II, youth minister and one of the local NAACP Georgia leaders, discussed the current issues facing youth activists. Ms. Marcia Hunter, the first black mayor of Lithonia, discussed what life was like growing up in rural Lithonia and her experiences as mayor. Ms. Elizabeth Wilson discussed her journey from her hometown of Greensboro, Georgia, to Decatur, Georgia and her experience as the first African American mayor of the City of Decatur. Ms. Deborah Tatum discussed how a genealogy project led her to discover a murdered distant relative, Austin Callaway. Chief Louis Dekmar, the LaGrange County Police Chief, discussed the public apology for the lynching of Austin Callaway.

The conversation between the audience and the panel members was interesting and productive thanks to the management of the panel moderator, Dr. Mary Etta Thomas, a retired library media specialist from DeKalb County School System.

The program ended on a high note, with a great discussion about race and reconciliation. The DHC wants to thank the panel members, sponsors, actors, and guests for a great event! ✦

## Upcoming Events

### High Noon History

**Fridays in May: May 4th, 11th, 18th, and 25th at 12:00 noon**

**FREE for Members/\$3 for Non Members**

Bring a sandwich, bring a friend, and enjoy some history! The DeKalb History Center announces the return of "High Noon History", a walking tour offered on Fridays in May. The tour will last 45 minutes, and the guide will discuss the history of Decatur Square. Meet on the south steps of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse. **RSVP NOT Required.**

### DHC Exhibits Open During the Decatur Arts Festival

**Saturday, May 26, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, May 27, noon - 5:00 p.m.**

**Free & Open to the Public**

*Reclaimed by Nature: the Historic Davidson Quarries of Arabia Mountain; Decorative Arts from the Permanent Collection; Tears and Curses: A Human Focus on the Civil War; and The Mid-Century Ranch House: Hip and Historic!* ✦

# Annual Meeting

The DeKalb History Center celebrated its 71st anniversary on March 23. New directors and officers were elected during the Annual Meeting: President, Jacqui Steele; Past President, Meg Samuels; President Elect, John Hewitt; Treasurer, Joe Stoner; and Secretary, Tiffany Parks. Incoming board members are Stephanie Cherry-Farmer, Mike Pratt, Susan C. Tarnower. Outgoing board members John Coleman, Cathy Mullins, Beth Shorthouse and Melissa Spalding were thanked for their service to the organization.

Donations from over 100 generous individuals, restaurants, artists, and businesses helped us to raise more than \$7,400 at our silent auction. ***Thank you for your support!***

Our guests enjoyed food from **Avalon Catering, Endive Fine Catering, Gotta Have It Catering, Fox Brothers Bar-B-Q, Legacy Catering & Events, LowCountry Catering, Oakhurst Market, Soiree Catering & Events, Sun in my Belly, and Zest Atlanta.** Décor or services provided by **PeachyKeen Planners and Decor, 2000 A.D. Concepts in Floral Art, Spectrum Entertainment, C. Brown Photo, and Peachtree Tents and Events.**

Special thanks to our volunteers who made the night a great success: **Rick Setser, Shelia Harkleroad, Jim Jarboe, Mary K. Jarboe, Sam McRae, Cathy Mullins, Meg Samuels, Beth Shorthouse, Pete Pfeiffer, Tiffany Parks, Timothy Patton, and Jane Stoner.**

Silent Auction Packages included donations from Agave, Align Health Coaching, Arcanum/Philip Hunter, ART Station Theatre, Druid Hill/Clark Ashton, Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta Braves Foundation, Atlanta Cajun Zydeco



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# & Silent Auction



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# Activism in Rural Lithonia

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because of Jim Crow Laws. In Lithonia, African Americans were not allowed to vote or attend the City Council meetings. Only whites could select the premium meats when shopping at the local grocer. She vividly remembers a time when weary African Americans would wait on the side of the road for trucks to pick them up and take them to neighboring counties to pick cotton for little pay.

But, it was against this unequal backdrop that the entire Woods family developed an activist spirit. Their house was dubbed the “activist house,” long before there was an official civil rights movement. Hunter’s mother was determined that her children would not pick cotton or work as domestics.

Maggie Woods was the first African American to serve on the City Council of Lithonia in 1972. As a testament to her dedication to improving the community, she convinced the City Council to purchase a small plot of land so that African Americans could have a park. **African Americans could not use the local city park, although they paid taxes.** She brought important issues about the African American community to the City Council’s attention. She paved the way to make it possible for more African Americans to eventually join the City Council. The NAACP Youth Council of Lithonia came as a result of the family’s activism too.

Hunter attended Bruce Street High School during the 1950s and 60s. While in high school, her sister got involved in protesting, including

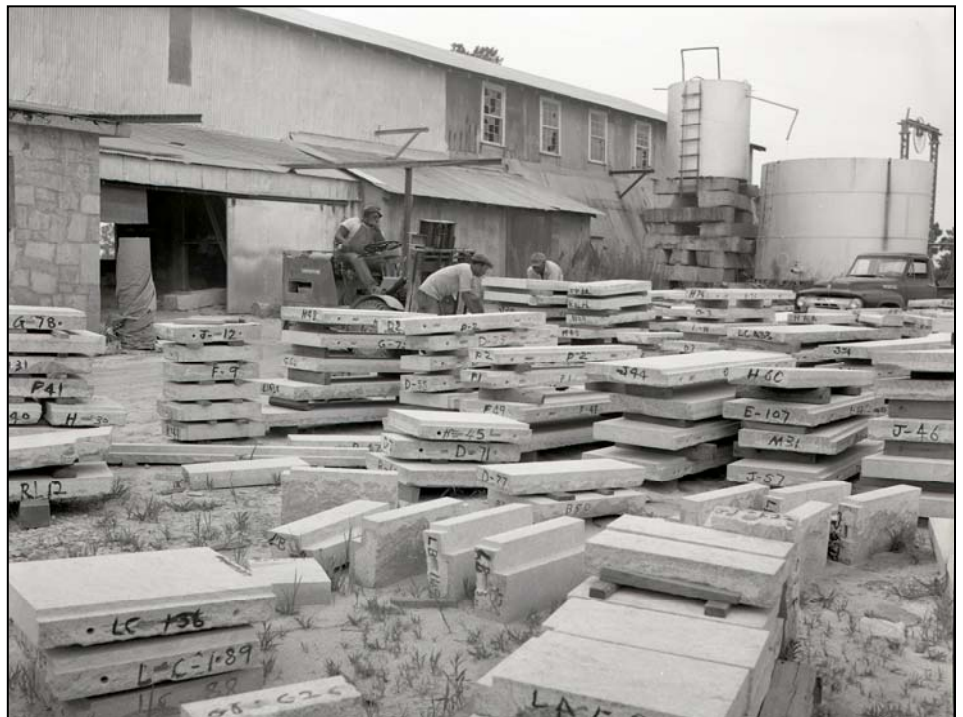
attending the March on Washington. During this time, there were serious consequences if young African Americans protested for their rights. They could be arrested or face criminal charges that prevented them from getting accepted into college or buying a home. Hunter graduated in 1962 and attended Clark College, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Business Education.

Hunter stayed true to her family’s activist roots; she ran to become the first African American woman mayor of the city of Lithonia in 1995 and was re-elected in 1999. Her tenure involved bringing major economic developments into the city, including procuring property to build businesses at Lithonia Plaza. It was not always easy, but she was able to make a difference, and she enjoyed serving all of the people of the

Lithonia community.

As she looks at the social and political scene today, she worries that not enough young African Americans know about the history and struggles of their forefathers and foremothers. She believes that knowing the struggles and lessons of the past can help young African Americans navigate through turbulent times.

Although her mother has long passed away, Hunter and her siblings will never forget the solid legacy she left. Lithonia is a thriving city now, but Hunter still remembers those shacks and dusty roads of her youth, and that keeps her humble. The Honorable Marcia Glenn Hunter continues to serve the Lithonia community and has no intentions of stopping. ✦



*Workers at a quarry in Lithonia, around 1955. From the DHC's Guy Hayes Collection.*

# Membership Corner

Wow! What a year we had at the DeKalb History Center. Our membership program has expanded by leaps and bounds. To meet this demand, we have begun to use an entirely **new** database management system. This new database will help us better manage memberships but also speed communication. Unfortunately, like any new system and transition, there will be growing pains, so please bear with us. There will be a few changes to memberships moving forward.

**Renewal cycles**—Renewal cycles will change from *Quarterly* to *Monthly*. Currently, we have four renewal cycles throughout the year March, June, September, and December. Moving forward, if you send payment in April you will renew April the next year and so on. You will receive a notice *before* your renewal date.

**Going Green**—We will send more member specific update emails as well as renewal notifications via email. This will make your renewal easier and require less paper for us. We will still send out final renewal notices via U. S. mail. If you have never received a “member only” email, we may not have your email address. Please send [howard@gmail.com](mailto:howard@gmail.com) an email to be added to the member list. *You can still renew on paper by mail, in person, or over the phone.* Just send in payment with “Membership Renewal” on it.

**Membership Benefits**—The DHC has begun partnering with other museums in the Atlanta Metro area. Keep an eye out for discounts to events and programs with other museums. Your membership card will be important to hold on to for this reason!

## Membership levels

- If your membership level is **Senior/Teacher/Student (\$25)** or **Individual (\$30)**, you can purchase only 1 ticket at the member’s rate for each event.
- If your membership is **Household (\$50) or above**, you can purchase 2 tickets at the member’s rate for each event.
- If your membership is **Patron (\$75) or above**, you receive 2 admissions to any DeKalb Traveler Tour (not including Bus Tours). To redeem just mention your free admission.

**Thank you for your patience as we move forward through this transition time. As always, if you have any questions, comments, suggestions, or updates please let me know. ~ Marissa Howard ✦**

## Join \* Renew \* Give

All funds received through memberships directly support the preservation of DeKalb County history and are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly newsletter to keep you informed on all our activities. We hope that you will join our team by either renewing your membership or joining as a first-time supporter.

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Please mail this form with your contribution to: DeKalb History Center, 101 East Court Square, Decatur GA 30030

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