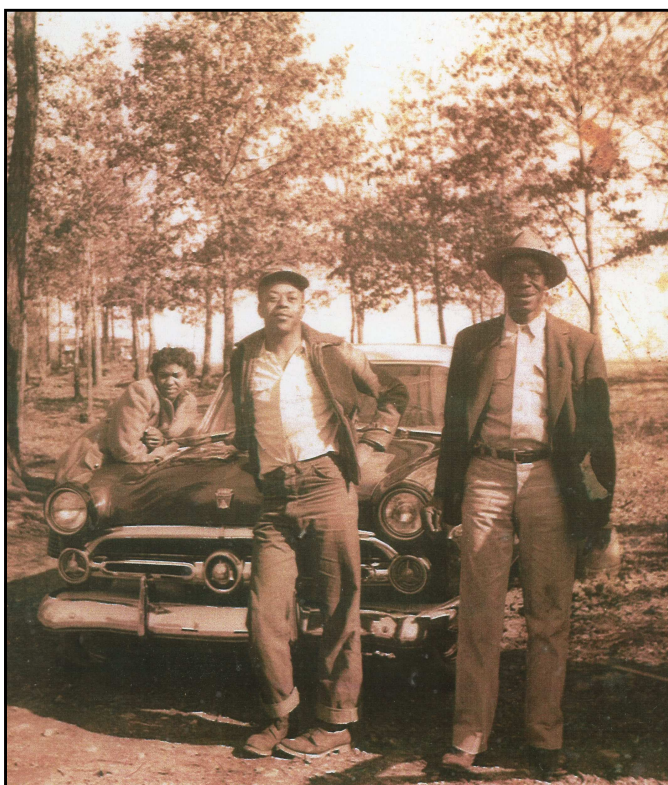


The Historic Mt. Zion Community

The Mt. Zion Community, which was settled in the 1800s, is a small African-American enclave, located on the northeast side of LaVista Road. A strong concept of community emerged as residents fought to survive in the years following emancipation. The Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1870, has always been a remarkable agent of cohesion in the area.



Menona, Wallace and William Nelms in the late 1940s.

In the community's formative years, charismatic and important figures came from the Nelms family, including William Nelms, who owned a sizable farm in Land Lot 148. Edgar Rowe, who also owned a substantial amount of land in the area in the 1800s, was another influential leader.

Wallace Nelms, one of ten children, was taught how to farm as a youth in the 1930s. In these early years, the land was full of chickens, livestock, geese and crops. In the milieu in which Nelms grew up, nearly everyone in the area, be they black or white, strived to maintain a successful family farm.

During his youth, Wallace and his family worked their farm. *"All of us worked these fields. Where you see pine trees used to be cultivated land and we took our land as a means of making a way for us to feed ourselves and feed our animals."* The Nelms family raised what they ate and also sold their fruit, vegetables and eggs to families in Druid Hills.

For many members of the community, church has been a very important part of everyday life. Two historic churches serve as anchors in this area. Mt. Zion AME, the oldest AME Church in DeKalb County, was originally established as Rocky Knoll AME. It was located on Lawrenceville Highway and later moved to its current location at 2977 LaVista Road. Because of

Continued on page 4

MLK's Arrests in DeKalb in 1960

In this issue we highlight a very significant and unique item housed in our Archives: the 1959 – 1961 DeKalb County Sheriff's Docket. This docket includes logs of two separate DeKalb County arrests of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The first arrest was recorded on May 4, 1960. While driving Lillian Smith to Emory University following a visit at his home, King was pulled over by DeKalb County police and arrested. Ms. Smith was a well-known white civil rights activist and author. King was charged because he had an out-of-date Alabama tag on his car and also for driving without a Georgia driver's license. He was able to prove to the court that he had applied for a Georgia tag, and that charge was dropped. However, DeKalb County Solicitor Jack Smith fined King \$25 and

Continued on page 2

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- Upcoming Events, page 4
- End of Year Donations, page 4
- Membership Report, page 5

FUGITIVE SLAVES										DATE OF CAPTURE		DATE OF ESCAPE		DATE OF ARREST		BY WHOM CAPTURED	
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King, Martin L. Jr. 31 m B To Newswire

DeKalb History Center's Third Annual Black History Month Celebration "A Salute to Law and Justice Leaders"

Join us as we recognize outstanding African-American Law & Justice leaders who have made a positive impact on DeKalb County.

Honoring:

Judge Gregory A. Adams

Sheriff Thomas E. Brown

Judge Barbara J. Mobley

Judge Desiree Sutton Peagler

Thursday, February 25th, 11:30 a.m. • The Old Courthouse on the Square
Including a Seated Luncheon

A special presentation will be made to honor Rev. Thomas N. Bristow Sr.,
a Documented Original Tuskegee Airman

Music from the James C. Ward Classical Arts Chorale

Sponsorships Available

Presenter—\$2,500

Includes 8 tickets with reserved seating

Sponsor—\$1,000

Includes 6 tickets with reserved seating

Guardian—\$500

Includes 4 tickets

Investor—\$250

Includes 2 tickets

VIP—\$100

Includes 2 tickets

Please call for availability and benefits.
Seating is limited and tickets are required.
Individual tickets are \$30 for members
or \$35 for non-members.

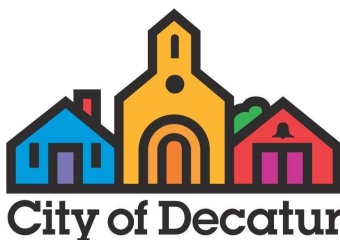
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Historic Mt. Zion Community (Cont.)

Continued from page 1

Mt. Zion's desirable location, the area continues to face threats from overdevelopment.

St. Paul Baptist Church was established over 111 years ago on Wilson Road. In the 1940s, St. Paul became the target of vandals and in 1948 the congregation moved to Nelms Drive. The new building was a labor of love for the church members, as they worked to build the structure with their hands. While construction was underway, services could only be held twice a month and Mt. Zion A.M.E. assisted their new neighbors by allowing them to meet at their church every other Sunday. Throughout the years, these churches have served social and political functions: providing places where many in the neighborhood learned how to read, attended school and practiced public speaking.

The community changed dramatically during the 20th century, as family property was sold and suburban development exploded across the farmland. Through the 1940s and 1950s, much of the African-American population in the area moved away in hopes of making a better living elsewhere; another wave of residents left in the 1980s and 1990s.

As one group was leaving, another was arriving, and the consequent rapid development brought permanent changes to the close-knit community. Yet, as condos and cul-de-sacs sprouted up and became permanent characteristics of the area, the founding families continued to make every effort to keep their land out of the hands of developers, in order to retain their cultural heritage. The success of their efforts has been bolstered by the fact that many descendants of the original inhabitants still live in the neighborhoods they grew up in, and some have retained sizable tracts of land along LaVista Road and Richard Stokes Drive. The congregations of Mt. Zion and St. Paul have supported members of the community and helped to preserve its identity.

Although there are a few historic structures remaining in the area, most have not survived. Wallace explains that, *"Back then, people were just one generation out of slavery. They couldn't build houses with any permanence. They had to take what little pieces of wood they could... and the elements just destroyed it. And so, as soon as somebody else came along, they wanted to tear that old place down and build something better for their children."*

This project would not have been possible without support from **Commissioner Jeff Rader** for providing funding for our research intern, Rebecca Crawford.

Community members who participated during this phase of the project included Mattie L. Finley, Polly Nelms, Wallace and Menona Nelms, Acey Rowe, Albert Rowe, Marion Rowe and Napoleon Stokes.

The DeKalb History Center will host a temporary exhibit about the Mt. Zion Community developed through our research and by the efforts of students from **Arbor Montessori**: Bernadette Bridges, Madeline Burke, Davis Cavanagh, Sammi Doneff, Rebecca Entekin, Savannah Entekin, Cameron Futral, Chase Gooding, Nisu Herrera, Kira Hynes, Paul Jackson, Alex Moore, Beatriz Mora, Will Pfleger, David Robinson, Alison Setili, Isabella Stork and Matthew Tennant. Their teacher for this project was Annie Frazer. The project builds on prior work done by other Arbor Montessori students and the DeKalb History Center.

This Temporary Exhibit will open on the first floor of the historic Courthouse on March 2, 2010 at 5:30 p.m. Please join us for the opening and check our website for additional information. ✦

Upcoming Events

Join us for our **Annual Meeting and Silent Auction on Friday, March 19, from 6:00—8:30 p.m.** at the Old Courthouse on the Square. Enjoy an evening of wine, beer, hors d'oeuvres and music while bidding on fantastic items donated by generous local businesses. Check our website soon for additional information.

Lunch & Learn, The Ranch House in DeKalb County, **on Wednesday, March 24, at Noon.** Learn about the Ranch House in Georgia from Richard Clouse and in DeKalb County from Melissa Forgey. Free—bring your lunch! ✦

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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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