

Lithonia Historic District

Lithonia's connection to granite is reflected in its very name, and now that name is etched on the National Register of Historic Places. The city in southeast DeKalb County was incorporated in 1856 and was officially placed on the nation's list of places worthy of preservation and recognition on September 19, 2016.

Securing this historic recognition has been repeatedly identified in the city's public

planning processes as a driver for community development. "Economic studies have shown time and again the most successful small cities are those that protect their historic places. This designation is one in a series of steps to invigorate our downtown by respecting the distinctive, walkable core of Lithonia and draw Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area visitors to the city," says Mayor Deborah Jackson.



The designation means that the city is now eligible for some powerful economic incentives such as those utilized in the development of Atlanta's Ponce City Market. According to Stephanie Cherry-Farmer, Program Manager for the National Register Program for Georgia, "We are looking

The Lithonia Women's Club was the first lending library in DeKalb County.

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History Comes Home

The Society of American Archivists defines deaccessioning as the process by which an archives, museum, or library permanently removes accessioned materials from its holdings. They elaborate on this definition by saying:

"Materials may be deaccessioned because the repository has changed its collections policy and the material is no longer within its scope. Materials may be deaccessioned because they have been reappraised and found to be no longer suitable for continuing preservation. Materials that are badly decomposed and beyond repair

may be deaccessioned. Deaccessioned material may be offered back to its donor, offered to another institution, or destroyed."

What does this have to do with the "history comes home" aspect of this article? That is exactly how history returned to Roswell, Georgia via deaccessioning of a record book entitled *Meetings of the Stockholders of the Roswell Manufacturing Company, Roswell, Cobb County GA 1840 -1900* out of the DeKalb History Center's archives.

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Roswell's History

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The book contains meeting minutes and information on the finances of the company, including a stock valuation chart, semi-annual reports of the operations of the mill, and votes and resolutions decided upon by the stockholders.

The DeKalb History Center received the record book on May 25, 1953. Board member Mary Givens Bryan had a copy of this volume made for the Georgia Archives and donated the original book to the DeKalb History Center. The book was rebound and placed in our archives. Rebinding was a common archival practice for deteriorating books at that time, but today the archivist might choose to restore an original book cover.

The Roswell Manufacturing Company is well known especially for its place in Georgia's Civil War history. The Union Forces under General Garrard's command received orders from Sherman to seize the mill due to its importance for the Confederate military supply lines. Sherman further issued orders to arrest all owners and workers with the directive that these individuals be sent North.

In the 1950s many historical societies accepted donations that did not necessarily relate to their own local histories or to their collections' policies. But they did often collect important regional, state, and national history to keep it safe. The DeKalb History Center (then the DeKalb Historical Society) was founded in 1947, the Atlanta Historical Society in 1926, and the Roswell Historical Society in 1971.

Ms. Bryan, being an active board member, was aware of the historic value



Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Chair of the DHC Archives Committee; Elaine DeNiro, Roswell Historical Society's Archivist; Jere Wood, Mayor of Roswell (holding the record book); and Fred Mobley, DeKalb History Center's Archivist.

Comes Home

of the record book. She most likely realized that there was no “formally” established historical entity in Roswell or Cobb County in 1953 and donated the book to our archives to ensure its preservation for current and future generations.

Under the guidance of the DeKalb History Center's Archives Committee Chair Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., the DHC and Roswell archivists were able to facilitate the deaccessioning from our collection and then donate the book to the Roswell Historical Society. Our reasoning is that Roswell was never located in DeKalb County; it originated in Cobb County and later became part of Milton County and finally merged into Fulton County.

DeKalb History Center's mission is to collect, preserve, and share the history of DeKalb County. This record book was the only volume in the long history of the mill not held by the Roswell Historical Society.

The Board of Directors of the DeKalb History Center voted unanimously at its August 25, 2016 meeting to approve the Archives Committee's recommendation to deaccession the record book. History has come home to Roswell after preservation and a safe respite at DHC. This transfer was allowed through directives

of the Deed of Gift to donate to the most appropriate repository the historic material that is not in line with DeKalb History Center's collection policy as it stands today.

Ms. Mary Givens Bryan's donation and directive were that if the donation needed to be deaccessioned, it should be donated to an appropriate repository. Her vision, Mr. Thomas's guidance, and DHC Archives Committee and Board of Directors' eagerness to protect and share history allowed for the material to be donated to the historic entity that now protects, preserves, and shares the history of Roswell, Georgia.

All volumes of the Meetings of the Stockholders of the Roswell Manufacturing Company books now reside with the Roswell Historical Society. They are preserved, protected, and available to researchers and interested members of the public who have a keen desire to learn more of the history these volumes offer; and they will be available for research in the city where they originated. History protected and cared for now returns home via the archival practice of deaccessioning. ✦



Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Elaine DeNiro, and Fred Mobley with Meetings of the Stockholders of the Roswell Manufacturing Company, Roswell, Cobb County GA 1840 -1900.



Fred Mobley and Elaine DeNiro at the Roswell Historical Society making our donation official!

Lithonia Listed

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forward to seeing new ventures attracted to the city via the tax incentives that are available to support historic preservation projects in the district as a result of this listing.”

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance worked with the city, the Georgia State University Heritage Preservation Program, and The Atlanta Regional Commission to prepare the nomination materials. More than 350 historic buildings were documented as part of the project. The historic district encompasses nearly all of incorporated Lithonia, including the central commercial core and Main Street, three cemeteries, several parks, the ruins of the Bruce Street School (1938), an early African-American educational institution, and the Lithonia Women’s Club (1928), the site of DeKalb County’s first lending library. Many of the buildings along Main Street were built between 1870 and 1930 and feature elements of locally quarried “tidal grey” granite-gneiss. The name Lithonia is derived from a combination of Greek words: lithos, meaning rock, and onia, meaning place, referencing the granite-gneiss abundant in the city and surrounding area.

The residential sections of the city retain an amazing collection of most of the house types (large and small) found throughout Georgia during the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. House “type” refers to the overall form of the house and the general layout of the interior rooms. House “style” is synonymous with architectural style. The type of houses found in Lithonia include early two-room

houses (Hall-Parlor, Saddlebag, and Central Hallway), larger cottages built around the turn of the 19th century (Georgian, Gabled-Wing, and Pyramid Cottages), and ornately decorated two-story Queen Anne Houses. After 1900 builders and buyers sought new house types including the Bungalow, the American Small House, and the Ranch House.



The Lithonia First United Methodist Church (originally Lithonia M. E. Church) was built in 1910 and designed by architect and Lithonia native John Parks Almand.



Typical one-story granite retail buildings in Lithonia's commercial core. These two show the decorative variations that can be achieved with one material.

On National Register

The residential architectural styles found in Lithonia are also similar to what you would find in comparable Georgia towns. Most of the houses represent popular styles such as Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, Neoclassical Revival, and Craftsman. But Lithonia also boasts a few of the rarer small Georgia town styles, including Second Empire and Mediterranean Revival.



This Gabled-Wing Cottage was most likely built between 1875 – 1915 and has a cross-gable roof with an L-shaped floor plan. It is considered Folk Victorian in style due to the gingerbread ornamentation in the gable and along the eave.



One of the Cofer Bro's seven stores was located in downtown Lithonia. This image was taken around 1940.

Due to the vast abundance of locally quarried granite, many of Lithonia's commercial buildings and community landmarks are built from granite. The commercial areas also include many brick retail buildings, which might include granite details, such as window sills.

Historic community landmark resources are found in the commercial core and throughout the residential areas and include cemeteries and parks. Churches, social and fraternal organizations, schools, and a former library make up the community landmark buildings. Three of the historic churches are built in the Gothic Revival Style, which may include towers (with or without crenellated parapets), pointed-arch windows and openings, and buttressed exterior walls.

Two community resources reflect school segregation in the town and across Georgia. The ruins of the Lithonia Negro School (built in 1938 and burned after it closed in 1955) are across the street from what was the Bruce Street High and Elementary School. Now serving as a community resource and hosting the DeKalb County Police Academy, the building was constructed in 1955 as an "equalization" school. This was one of thirteen equalization schools built in DeKalb during the late segregation era. This practice by the state of Georgia was an attempt to maintain segregated public schools by claiming the schools built for African American students were equal to those provided for white students.

One favorite local resource is the Lithonia Women's Club on Wiggins

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DOWNTOWN DECATUR

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Delicious appetizers from Soiree Catering, two drink tickets and more.
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Lithonia National Register

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Street. It was built in 1928 with local granite and is in the English Vernacular Revival style. The clubhouse had an assembly room, kitchen and a special wing for a library. It was the first lending library in DeKalb County and is now owned by the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance.

While the National Register listing brings recognition to the city, there are no regulations or restrictions on property owners unless they seek tax incentives. It does not provide protection from destruction or neglect.

Many thanks to Mera Cardenas, the Executive Director of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, and Georgia's Historic Preservation Division for contributing to this article. ✦



This Queen Anne House is asymmetrical and has a complex roof. Its many decorative features include small brackets under all the eaves and large brackets over corner windows, an ornamental band delineating the first and second floors, and elaborate window surrounds.

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