

Sharing DeKalb's History

The mission of the DeKalb History Center is to collect, preserve, and share the history of DeKalb County. When our archivist, Fred Mobley, makes presentations to county residents, we can achieve all three of these goals. This past February, he participated in Black History Month celebrations by sharing the cultural history of DeKalb's Mount Zion Community and attending the 146th anniversary of the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal church on LaVista Road.



Reverend David F. Richards, III, the Pastor of Mount Zion AME, Adrienne Nelms Hickman, the Minister of Music at Mt. Zion as "Ma Stokes" and Fred Mobley, DeKalb History Center archivist.

from the Georgia State University's Heritage Preservation Program to conduct research on the communities in that area on LaVista Road. The research focused on District 18, Land Lots 148, 160 and 161, and the communities that are referred to as Nelms, Mount Zion, Oak Grove, and Akin. Our intern, Rebecca Crawford, discovered a fascinating history covering the time from Reconstruction following the Civil War up into the 20th century.

In 2009 the History Center, funded in part with a grant from DeKalb County government, hired an intern

Crawford delved into historical records and conducted oral histories with residents of the area. She developed an in-depth

Continued on page 6

Decorative Arts

Decorative Arts from the Permanent Collection

This new exhibit features a sampling of pieces from the DeKalb History Center's holdings, acquired over the nearly 70 years since the organization was established. The emphasis is on antique American made furniture, with some items previously owned by prominent DeKalb County citizens.

The furnishings are accentuated with textiles, pottery, and framed art; and most objects date from the early 19th century to the early 20th century. Some of the pieces on display were previously at the Swanton House, which meant they could not be enjoyed by as many visitors as we can welcome into our

Continued on page 4

Inside this issue

- Upcoming Events, page 2
- Reconstruction Symposium, page 3
- Fall School Programs, page 7

Upcoming Events

DHC Exhibits Open

During the AJC Decatur Book Festival

Saturday, September 3, 10:00 am - 6:00 pm

Sunday, September 4, noon - 6:00 pm

Free & Open to the Public

Join us for this weekend opportunity to visit our exhibits located on the main floor of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse: *Tears and Curses: A Human Focus on the Civil War*; *Highlights from the Guy Hayes Collection*; and *The Mid-Century Ranch House: Hip and Historic!* Plus you can see our newest exhibit: ***Decorative Arts from the Permanent Collection.***

Our Decorative Arts exhibit features a sampling of pieces from our holdings acquired over the nearly 70 years since the DeKalb History Center was established. The emphasis is on antique furniture with some items previously owned by prominent DeKalb County citizens such as author Caroline McKinney Clarke, Judge Charles Whitefoord Smith, and Bishop Warren Akin Candler. Most objects date from the early 19th to the early 20th century.

Sparking Change – The 100th Anniversary of the Second Fire at the DeKalb County Courthouse

September Lunch & Learn

Tuesday, September 20, noon - 1:00 pm

Free & Open to the Public

The next bi-monthly Lunch and Learn will be presented by two DeKalb History Center staff members Fred Mobley (Archivist) and Jenny Goldemund (Programs and Preservation Coordinator).

Join the DeKalb History Center to learn more about our home – the Historic DeKalb County Courthouse, with a focus on the fire that consumed it 100 years ago. The talk will include background information on Decatur's square and why the courthouse is located here. Did you know that part of the current courthouse was built on the remains of the county's fourth courthouse? Our speakers will cover the history and architecture of the 1898 courthouse and the fire which partially destroyed it in 1916. Learn about the changes made to the remains of the fourth courthouse in order to reopen it for court functions in 1918. The talk will conclude with a brief summary of the fifth courthouse's history up to the present. ♦

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RECONSTRUCTION

IN DEKALB COUNTY & ATLANTA



What did the Atlanta area look like after the war? How did people react to the devastation they saw? What were the living conditions in DeKalb County and Atlanta? How did people rebuild their communities?

Join scholars for a discussion about Reconstruction in our area.

Sessions:

Rebuilding and Reconstruction in Postwar Atlanta

Dr. Wendy Hamand Venet, Georgia State University

The Wind Roared: Georgia During the Age of Reconstruction

Brian Steel Wills, Kennesaw State University

The Struggle for Civil Rights in Georgia's First Reconstruction

Glenn Eskew, Georgia State University

A DeKalb History Center Symposium

101 E. Court Square, Decatur GA 30030

August 20, 2016, from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Advance tickets are \$35/\$45 (Discount for DHC members).

Tickets are \$40/\$50 beginning August 16. Lunch is included.

For more info visit www.dekalbhistory.org, or call 404-373-1088, extension 20

Sharing

Continued from page 1

history of the intertwined communities of Mount Zion and Oak Grove, whose early family settlers included the Nelms and Akin families. Oak Grove was a white farming community and Mount Zion, or Nelms, was a black farming community. Crawford learned that both communities helped each other during harvesting.

The Mount Zion AME Church was founded in 1870 and continues to be the hub of the black community. Oral histories conducted in 2009 helped to clarify the history of these two names. The community sometimes known as Nelms derived its name from William Nelms, an African American who owned a farm in District 15, Land Lot 148, in the late 19th century. Throughout the years the Nelms family were active and civic-minded residents of the area; they still are today. With characteristic grace, Mr. Wallace Nelms gave clarity to the preferred community name in an interview conducted by Crawford, with characteristic grace. He said, "Why would you call it the Nelms Community? It was never called that. It was Mount Zion. Most black communities revolved around the churches because churches were the only institutions in black communities that they had any control over."

The culmination of our research project was a temporary exhibit produced in conjunction with students from the Arbor Montessori School. Wallace Nelms loaned many artifacts related to his days growing up on his father's farm to display along with our own archival documents and the newly gathered information and scanned photographs.

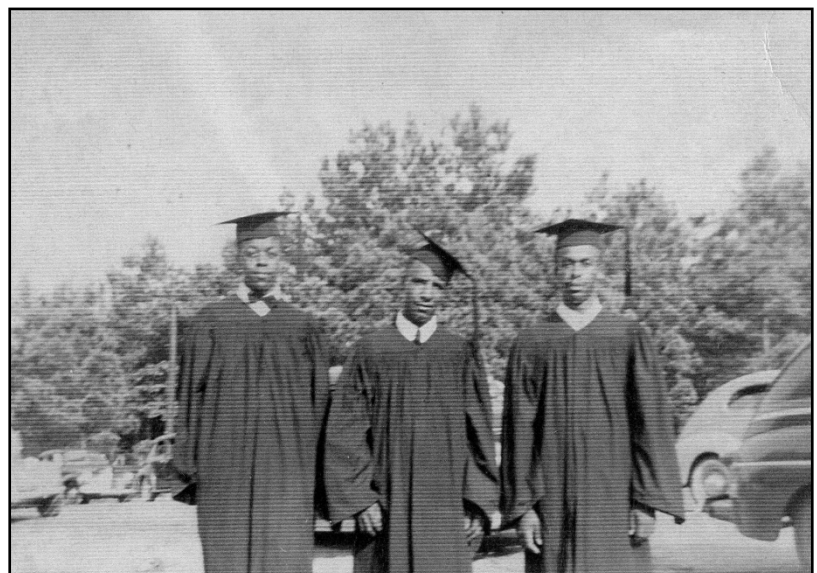
It was with this exhibit in mind that members of the 146th Mount Zion AME Church Anniversary Committee contacted DHC's archivist to participate in their February programs and the 146th Anniversary of the Church on Sunday, March 13, 2016. This celebration highlighted the long history of this community in DeKalb and shared both the cultural history of the inhabitants and the history of Mount Zion AME Church. This

collaboration resulted in additional materials for the archives at DHC, providing more material for research, with increased photographs that now cover much of the area's history from the late 19th to 21st century. Most of the newly acquired ephemera material relates to activities at the church.

For Mount Zion AME Church's anniversary programs, held on two consecutive February Saturdays, DHC's archivist developed



Wallace Nelms (far left in the white shirt) and his classmate attended the Mount Zion School in their community.



Wallace Nelms, William Brown, and Edward Nelms in the parking lot at Mount Zion—they were preparing to sing for the congregation in celebration of their graduation.

DeKalb's History

and presented a PowerPoint presentation along with historical presentations by church members, incorporating the cultural history of the area and the church's 146 years of history. The anniversary committee's photo collection that expanded the time period of the 1970s through early 2000s with earlier period photographs and historical information, creating a digital presentation of the history of Mount Zion community and Mount Zion AME Church. This presentation was incorporated into a historical retrospective that included choral music, presentations, and historic living-person presentation on the history of Mount Zion.

The DHC archivist's work sessions with the anniversary program committee involved interracial participation among community members, including reminiscences of growing up in DeKalb County during

the second half of the 20th century. These sessions highlighted the emotional reactions of children and teenagers trying to comprehend the daily events in their lives as DeKalb moved through the era of the Civil Rights Movements and the slow process of desegregation, thus engaging in DeKalb History Center's mission of sharing history. The preparation for the program helped collect more historical material of the DeKalb's history, therefore allowing preservation of the history of all stakeholders of this area of DeKalb County, Georgia.

The historic photos accompanying this article were loaned to us for scanning by Wallace Nelms during the 2009 research project. ✦



Derby Ferry and an unidentified woman in front of the historic Mount Zion church.



Menona Nelms and her brother, Homer, dressed for an event.

Decorative Arts from the Permanent Collection

Continued from page 1

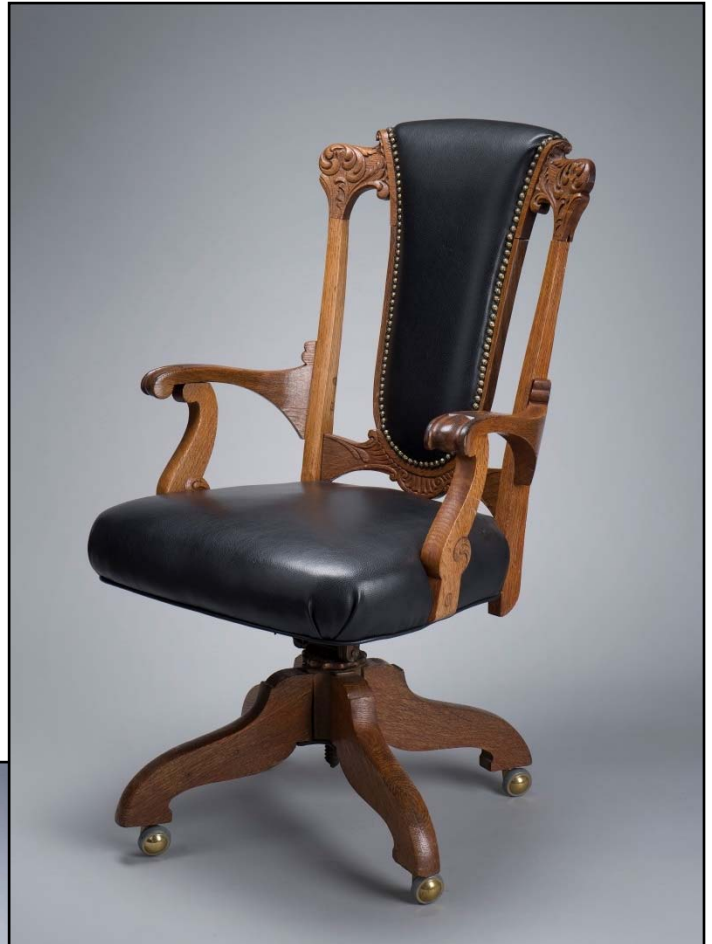
gallery spaces at the Historic DeKalb Courthouse.

We have rotated nineteen original or loaned exhibits through our gallery spaces since 2008. Prior to 2006 the exhibits were seldom switched out. We have focused on innovative and creative ideas for these exhibits, and this is our first time presenting historic objects in a manner that they can be enjoyed for their artistry as well as for their history. A few of the pieces have never been displayed before.

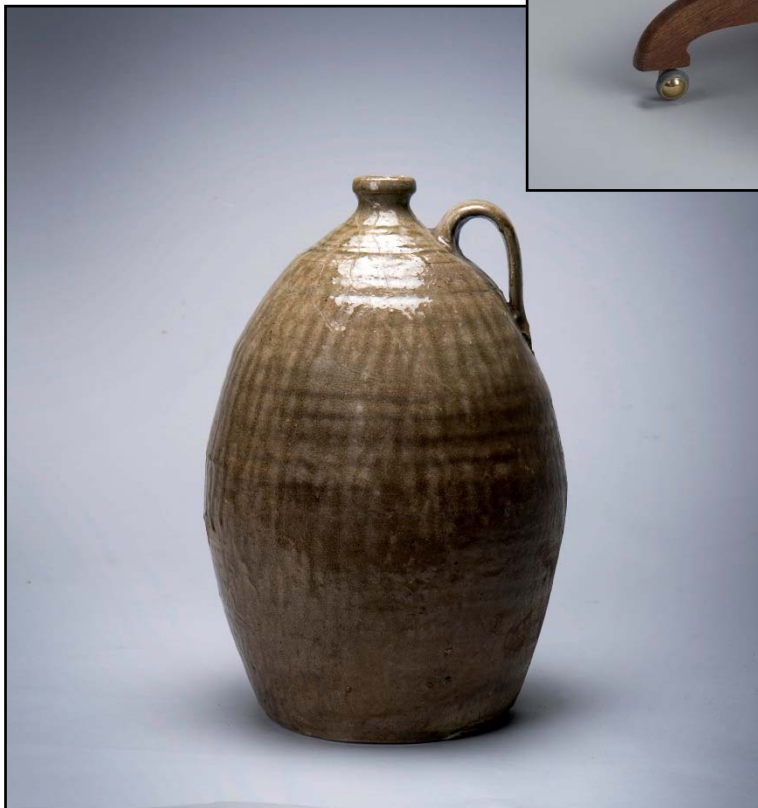
The spark for the *Decorative Arts* exhibit was the recent donation of a “Plain-Style” bureau made between 1830 and 1850. Handcrafted of walnut and pine, the bureau is signed by Alexander Chestnut, a DeKalb County resident during that era.

Some pieces are included because of their provenance (previous ownership). You will see an arrow-back rocker that belonged Caroline McKinney Clarke, an author and lifelong Decatur resident. Another highlight is a sewing or quilting basket, which was owned by Martha Lumpkin Compton (1827-1917) for whom “Marthasville” was named.

Other pieces, such as the bureau, are included because they were made in DeKalb County. Both bedcovers – a handwoven blanket and a vibrant quilt – were made in Lithonia. ✦



Above: A swivel oak office chair that was owned and used by Methodist Bishop Warren Akin Candler (1857-1941).



Left: A handmade pottery jug found buried in Swanton House basement in 1938 when the donor was a child. It was said to have been made in a kiln on Swanton property.

School Programs for the Fall

This fall we are offering seven days of school programming (in October and November) so that students from all over DeKalb County can benefit from our professional living history programs. The programs meet curricula guidelines for second grade students up to high school students depending on the day.

The biggest event is our "History Adventure" which utilizes our antebellum structures on West Trinity Place. This fascinating program has eight stations with professional living historians. Students meet Sequoyah, Oglethorpe, Mary Musgrove, a Revolutionary War soldier, Harriett Tubman, Creek Indians, and early DeKalb settlers. They hear mountain music and listen to traditional African tales

while visiting historic homes and cabins. There are presentations of Native American skills. All presenters are professional actors and living historians and they leave students feeling energized about Georgia History or Early U.S. History. The different days are tailored to the curriculum needs of specific grade levels to optimize learning and enhance what is taught in the classroom.



The programs must be reserved by teachers, but if you would like more information or to volunteer, contact Jenny Goldemund at 404-373-1088, extension 20 or by email at goldemund@dekalbhistory.org. ✦

Membership donations are important to our mission. If you have questions about your membership please email Melissa at forgey@dekalbhistory.org.

Join * Renew * Give

Collecting, Preserving and Sharing the History of DeKalb County

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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DeKalb History Center

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