

Flat Rock & Shermantown

By Tiffany Parks

On February 23, 2017, a sold-out crowd attended the Ninth annual Black History Month celebration at the DeKalb History Center. The topic was *The History and Preservation of DeKalb's Historic African American Communities: Flat Rock and Shermantown*. The program was a historical journey through both communities, from Reconstruction through the Jim Crow era, and up to the present. A mix of scholars and long-time residents gave historical context to the program.

Mr. Michael Thurmond, the newly elected CEO of DeKalb County, gave heartfelt opening remarks.

Then, the moderator, Mrs. LaDoris Davis, energized the crowd by entering the room singing *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah*.

Mrs. Davis introduced the first speaker, Mr. Johnny Waits, founder and curator of the Flat Rock Archives Museum. Mr. Waits discussed the history of Flat Rock, which is one of the oldest, continuously inhabited African American communities in DeKalb County. According to the Flat Rock Archives website, the terrain of Flat Rock was not conducive to large cotton plantations, so the slave population was smaller. The ex-slave population of Flat Rock soon became a community of farmers who created their own tools to build the community, but the old pioneers of Flat Rock built more than homes. They built a fine, resilient community of people. One of the long-time residents of Flat Rock is Reverend T.A. Bryant, the grandfather of the famous actor and comedian Chris Tucker.

Next, Mrs. Davis introduced Dr. Paul Hudson, history professor at Perimeter College at Georgia State University, and Mrs. Lora Mirza, retired associate library director at Perimeter College at Georgia State University. They gave a brief history of Stone

Mountain's Shermantown. Stone Mountain towers over the quaint community of Shermantown. Shermantown is a product of the post-Civil War period. Many African Americans worked in the quarries and built their churches from the mountain's granite. Although the Klan was a familiar fixture of Stone Mountain, the African American community of Shermantown had a will and strength as strong as the granite that could not be broken.

The African American church has always been the backbone these communities. The Flat Rock Methodist Church was established in the 1860s and was the center of worship before it was torn down in 1971. In Shermantown, Bethsaida Baptist Church, St. Paul's AME Church, and Ebenezer Baptist Church are still

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The event closed with a panel discussion including Shermantown residents Ms. Gloria Brown, Ms. Elaine Vaughn, and Ms. Evelyn Herans.

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Indian Creek Cemetery

The DeKalb History Center oversees an account specifically designated for the care of the Indian Creek Cemetery which is located on Indian Creek Drive in Clarkston. Indian Creek Baptist Church was formed in 1839 under a different name and initially held services in the Decatur Presbyterian Church building. By 1842, it had moved permanently and changed its name to Indian Creek Baptist Church.

The cemetery was not originally owned by the Indian Creek Baptist Church—it started as a family burial plot. The Church did maintain it for a while, but their ability to do so came to an end. In 2001, a group of people interested in the cemetery established this fund through the DHC. For over 15 years, donors have made financial contributions to ensure its maintenance and upkeep.

If you would like to contribute to this fund, please send a check to the DeKalb History Center and specify that it is for Indian Creek Cemetery. ✦

Upcoming Events

High Noon History

Fridays in May, noon - 12:30 p.m.

FREE/\$3 (discount for members)

"Bring a sandwich, bring a friend, and enjoy some history!" The DeKalb History Center announces **High Noon History**, a new tour offering on Fridays in May - **May 5, May 12, May 19, May 26**. The tour will last 30 minutes, perfect for those on their lunch break. Topics will include Architecture of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse and Decatur Square history. Reservations are not required. We will begin on the **south steps of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse** at High Noon!

DHC Exhibits Open During the Decatur Arts Festival

Saturday, May 27, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, May 28, 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!

The Best in this Section: Lithonia, the DeKalb Granite Industry, and Metro Atlanta's Early Soccer History

May Lunch & Learn with Patrick Sullivan

Tuesday, May 16, noon - 1:00 p.m.

Free & Open to the Public

Professional soccer marked its return to Atlanta in March 2017 with the inaugural season of the Atlanta United Football Club. While soccer is often viewed as relatively new sport in the United States, and the South in particular, the history of the game in Metro Atlanta extends back almost 130 years and has its local origins in DeKalb County's granite quarry industry. Immigrant English, Scottish, and Welsh stonecutters brought soccer over when they arrived in Georgia during 1880s and 1890s. Teams and players representing Lithonia and Stone Mountain later emerged as stalwarts of the sport when organized league play began in Atlanta in 1908 and continued (off and on) through the late 1920s. The Lunch & Learn will explore the largely forgotten history of soccer in Atlanta and DeKalb County during the early twentieth century, examine the sport's strong ties with the Lithonia branch of the Paving Cutters' Union, and highlight some of the prominent individuals who promoted and played the game here.

Patrick Sullivan is an architectural historian with New South Associates in Stone Mountain, Georgia. He received his M.A. in Heritage Preservation from Georgia State University. Mr. Sullivan has been investigating the history of soccer in Atlanta as a personal research project over the past two years.

Welcome Wednesdays

Second Wednesday *most* months, starting June 14, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.

\$3/\$6 per session for each child (discount for members)

The DeKalb History Center announces a new program for toddlers (ages 2 - 5) and their guardians, "Welcome Wednesdays." This monthly program, which begins June 14, emphasizes play and learning through the arts, sciences, and literature. Each class will feature a central theme that we will use to rediscover or learn about the world around us.

Join us for our first class "Colors!" where we will explore all colors that make up our world. In this program, we will discover how to make new colors by mixing primary colors, and we will go on a hunt for colors in our museum. In all of the programs, children will listen to a story and work on an art project based on the theme of the program.

Held from 10:30 - 11:30 a.m., most programs are the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Dates include: **June 14, July 12, August 16 (3rd Wednesday), September 13, October 11, November 8, and December 13**. Infants 12 months and under and accompanying adults FREE. RSVP recommended. Contact Marissa at howard@dekalbhistory.org for more information, or call 404-373-1088, extension 20. ✦

Annual Meeting

The DeKalb History Center celebrated its 70th anniversary on March 24. New directors and officers were elected during the Annual Meeting: President, Meg Samuels; Past President, Beth Shorthouse; President Elect, Jacqui Steele; Treasurer, Joe Stoner; and Secretary, Tiffany Parks. Incoming board members are Ronald B. Ramsey, Sr., Doug Solomon, Keri Stevens, and Angela Turk. Outgoing board members John Hewitt, Kathy Laity and Tim Bricker were thanked for their service to the organization. We also elected two new Trustees: Mary K. Jarboe and Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr.

Donations from over 100 generous individuals, restaurants, artists, and businesses helped us to raise more than \$7,500 at our silent auction.

Thank you for your support!

Our guests enjoyed food from **Avalon Catering, Avenue Catering Concepts, Endive Fine Catering, Fox Brothers Bar-B-Q, 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 & Events, C. Brown Photo, and PeachTree Tents and Events.**

Special thanks to our volunteers who made the night a great success: **Committee Chair Rick Setser, John Coleman, Cathy Mullins, Mary K. Jarboe, John Coleman, Linda Fountain, Claudia Stucke, Lyle Davis, Doug & Pat Solomon, Nora Tocups, Beth Shorthouse, Pete Pfeiffer, Mel Spalding, Tiffany Parks, Greg Donaldson, & Brad Syna.**

Silent Auction Packages included donations from 2000 A.D. Inc. Concepts in Floral Art, Agave, Aimée Designer Jewelry, Alliance Theatre, ART Station, Atlanta Botanical Gardens, Atlanta Braves Foundation, Atlanta Preservation Center, Audi Atlanta, Avenue Catering Concepts, Batdorf & Bronson Coffee



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carrying on their traditions for over 100 years later. To represent the spiritual power of the African American church, Mrs. Evelyn Herans and Mrs. Elaine Vaughn, members of St. Paul's AME Church, sang old-time Negro spirituals, one of which was *Wade in the Water*. The audience joined in and started singing. Needless to say, the energy in the room was supercharged.

Lastly, Ms. Davis introduced Ms. Jeanne Cyriaque, the vice chair of the board of directors of Georgia Humanities. Before retiring, she spent 15 years as the African American Programs Coordinator in the Georgia SHPOs office. Ms. Cyriaque discussed the importance of preserving historic African American communities. One way that historic communities can be preserved is by being listed on the National Registration of Historic Places. Ms. Cyriaque also discussed current housing trends in historic African American communities and gentrification. During the break, everyone enjoyed food prepared by Zest Atlanta Caterers.

Dr. Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, the founder and CEO of Preserve Black Atlanta, was the panel moderator. Ms. Evelyn Herans, Mrs. Gloria Brown, and Ms. Mamie Lane from the Shermantown community, and Ms. Bertha Clark, Ms. Alice Bailey, and Ms. Martha Williams from the Flat Rock community were the panel participants. They discussed church life, family life, and social life. Audience members asked questions. Some of the highlights of the discussions were Ms. Brown (from Shermantown) explaining the delicate dance African Americans and the Klan had to perform in order to coexist with each other from day to day. Also, Ms. Clark, Ms. Bailey, and Ms. Williams from the Flat Rock community discussed education during the Jim Crow era. They received honorary high school diplomas in 2010 from the DeKalb County School System. They were not able to receive their diplomas 60 years ago.

The program ended with Mrs. Davis thanking the sponsors, panel participants, and presenters. The program was a real success!

Program correction: Reverend T. A. Bryant received his high school diploma from Lithonia Colored School in 1947. He did not receive an honorary diploma in 2010. ✦



Mr. Johnny Waits, founder of Flat Rock Archives Museum.



Ms. Jeanne Cyriaque talking about the importance of preserving historic African American communities.



Ms. Williams and Ms. Clark were both born in Flat Rock, Georgia.

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DeKalb History Center

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