

DeKalb History Center

Historic DeKalb Courthouse
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Decatur GA 30030

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Times of DeKalb

A Quarterly Journal

Fall
2023

The Mysterious and Tragic Life of Lois Fears

By Marissa Howard, Programs & Membership Coordinator

On Thursday, August 14, 1953, two women were found slain in the bedroom of a nice shingled house at 1014 Blackmon Drive in North Decatur: Mrs. Evelyn Bennett, 33, and the owner of the home, Mrs. Lois Fears, 43.

No evidence of a struggle was found, leading toward the suspect being someone they knew and trusted. Police discovered the television blaring a musical program and a small electric fan blowing, hot from days of extended use. An electric iron was on by the ironing board, along with clothes ready to be pressed. In the kitchen, they found plated fried chicken, covered in wax paper. In the living room was the novel, *The Forty-Second Parallel*, lying open on the table along with a postcard

addressed to Evelyn from Jacksonville, Florida. Neighbors were interviewed and reported varied activities around the scene of the crime and "agonizing screams" coming from the home around 2:00 am, on Tuesday, Aug 12th. Another resident reported seeing two or more persons "scuffling" in the house and

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Meet the DHC Staff

Get to know the DeKalb History Center staff! People often ask me - how does the DHC accomplish so much? Some have suggested we must have gnomes toiling away behind the scenes in the Historic DeKalb Courthouse. But that is not the case. In 2007 we had three full time and one part time staff members; today we are composed of six full time and three part time employees.

We have grown so much over the last 16 years - here is the small but mighty crew you support through your memberships and donations.

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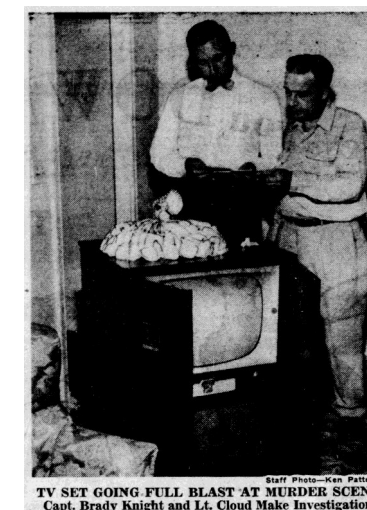
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From The Atlanta Journal, August 14, 1953 via Newspapers.com.

The Mysterious and Tragic Life of Lois Fears continued

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hearing gunshots. For up to four days, mail accumulated in the mailbox, milk soured on the porch and the bodies of Lois and Evelyn remained in the house.

The two women were an unlikely duo. Bennett, born Evelyn Wilburn, was orphaned at an early age. A family friend took in the young girl. Later, during WWII, Evelyn was married to Raymond Bennett of Atlanta, but the marriage lasted just over a year. During the war years, she served as a WAC (Women’s Army Corps). By 1951, she was working at a local drugstore.

Her adoptive family described her as a “jolly, good hearted woman who loved life, and would believe anything anybody told her.” Initially, news reports described Evelyn’s record as spotless. But after police

fingerprinted her body, they found an extensive police record stretching from 1939 to 1953. All charges were related to drunkenness or disorderly conduct. One arrest in 1943 showed her in her WAC uniform. According to her family, Evelyn was staying with Lois at her home for just a short time and they did not know much about Lois. DeKalb police were unable to explain the apparent close relationship between the two women.

Lois’s life was filled with even more mystery, intrigue, and crime. But where to start researching a woman with multiple aliases and an unknown maiden name? Well, you start at the end.

It was disclosed in the



Evelyn Bennett. From The Atlanta Constitution, August 15, 1953 via Newspapers.com.



Lois Fears. From The Atlanta Constitution, August 14, 1953 via Newspapers.com

newspaper that Lois’s unnamed brothers from Alabama made arrangements with A. S. Turner and Sons funeral home for a burial. So I reached out to **Cy Hume, Funeral Home Director at A. S. Turner and Sons in Decatur**, explaining that I was trying to figure out details to a historic cold case murder mystery. After digging through the funeral home’s microfilm records, he called me back.

“What would you like to know?”

Lois Mauldin was born in Cullman, Alabama, on June 27, 1911, to parents William and Ida Carter Mauldin. Her mother and oldest sister died in early 1912, leaving 7-month-old Lois with her father and older brothers. Sometime before 1920, she was sent to live with her maternal aunt, Mary C. Doyal, and became a farm hand in Paulding County, GA. By 1927, Lois and her aunt moved to Atlanta. Two years later, her aunt died and 16-year-old Lois Mauldin disappeared from any records. She never returned to Alabama.

Lois’s early life was filled in by the genealogical records and photographs supplied by Kit Burdick whom I reached out to on ancestry.com. She had done extensive research on the Mauldin family tree, but Lois was unintentionally left out. After contacting Kit, she was able to connect the dots with family photographs and the family tree. She graciously let me share her photographs.

Lois Freeman

In 1927 while working as a phone operator, Lois was charged with blackmail and was sent to Milledgeville Women’s prison for a year. In 1930, Louise Freeman (alias) and a friend went on a “jaunt” in a stolen vehicle that ended in Texas, where they attempted to sell the car ... ✨



Lois with maternal aunt Mary Catherine Doyal in Paulding County. Family photo collection of M. E. Garner.

To view the rest of this article, visit dekalbhistory.org/dekalb-history-center-blog/ or scan the QR code:



Upcoming Programs

Decatur Square Monuments Walking Tour

November 2, 12:30 pm

Join History Afoot Atlanta for this special DHC Partnered Tour on the monuments in Decatur square. Ticket required.

Decatur Architecture Walking Tour

November 2, 4:00 pm

Come learn about the Architects and Architecture of Downtown Decatur. Ticket required.

DeKalb Traveler: Chapel on Sycamore

December 6, 1:00—3:00 pm

Tour and learn the history and architecture of the Chapel on Sycamore, formerly Decatur Methodist First United Church. Open only to DeKalb History Center Members.

For more information on these programs and how to attend, please visit dekalbhistory.org or scan here:



In Memoriam

Gwen Russell Green

Join * Renew * Give

We hope you enjoyed the spring 2023 issue of Times of DeKalb. Please consider making a financial contribution through joining, rejoining, or a one time donation. Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly journal 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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or call 404-373-1088 ext. 1003. Visit our website www.dekalbhistory.org to pay online.

New to the Archives

It’s been very busy in the archives this summer! There are many new collections. Take a look and then call or email us to make an appointment to come see some of the great items we have here! October is American Archives Month.

With financial assistance from the **Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance** we were able to secure valuable Lithonia history collected by Eddy Anderson. It includes oral history videos and photos of Max Cleland, Howard Lee, the Lyon family, the Chupp family, Flat Rock and much more.

Laurel Ridge Elementary donated several yearbooks from the 2010s, as well as some older scrapbooks.



Eddy Anderson
Lithonia collection.

We have a collection of administrative files from the Decatur Music Teachers Association and Friends of Decatur Cemetery.

The Tau Pi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha donated 32 scrapbooks related to the chapter’s work in the Stone Mountain-Lithonia-Stonecrest communities.

We received a donation of photographs from the Northlake Alliance of Gays & Straights (NAGS), now known as the Northeast Atlanta Alliance of LGBTQ.

Our archives assistant, Kathryn, has finished indexing our plat map books from the 1960s-1980s. These plats show neighborhood lots from districts 15, 16, and 18. ✦



Tau Pi Omega scrapbook.

“What’s in a Name?”: DeKalb County Edition

By Kathryn Turnbull, Archives Assistant

As an archivist and resident in DeKalb County, I often find myself wondering (sometimes out loud, in the car, to myself) how a street or neighborhood got its unique name. Some are more obvious than others: as an Agnes Scott alum, “College Avenue” is no mystery. Now that I’ve lived in DeKalb for five years, I’ve decided to do a deep dive on some of the thoroughfares and communities with particularly unique names. It’s an attempt to get better acquainted with the history that seeps into our everyday lives unnoticed and unrecognized. If you have a name (or names) that you’ve always been curious about, get in touch – between our local history books and archival collections, you might just find the answer!

Here are some of my favorite finds so far:

Rockbridge Road: Named for a natural “bridge” crossing over the Yellow River at the county border, just south of Horseshoe Bend. According to Decatur local Mark Pifer, the eponymous

“rock bridge” in question was a shoal “where you could cross by stepping from rock to rock, not an actual bridge in the way we think of it.” This crossing is believed to have connected several prominent Indigenous trails prior to European settlement in the area.

Kirkwood: Believed to be a portmanteau, jointly named for the Kirkpatrick and Dunwody families. James Hutchinson Kirkpatrick was an Irish immigrant and early DeKalb settler, who at one point owned over one thousand acres, one of the largest land parcels in the county. His home stood near the intersection of Ponce de Leon and Ridgecrest Avenues, near where Deepdene Park exists today. Charles Archibald Alexander Dunwody (no, not ‘Dunwoody’; you can blame a series of erroneous spellings for the confusion) was a retired Confederate Major, who had returned to his family’s land in DeKalb after the war. He was, of course, also the namesake of the City of Dunwoody. ✦

To view the rest of this article, visit dekalbhistory.org/dekalb-history-center-blog/ or scan the QR code:



Exhibit Opening

Home, The United Methodist Children’s Home opened on August 31, 2023. The opening reception was well-attended by members of the community and past UMCH alumni. Decatur Mayor Pro Tem Tony Powers, Artist Beate Sass, DHC Executive Director Melissa Carlson, and Dan Beale, representing Wellroot Family Services, provided opening remarks.

This exhibit will be open for at least eighteen months. Upon visiting, be sure to bring a mobile device and headphones for the exhibit audio.

Exhibit Hours are Monday—Friday, 10am—4pm, and Saturdays 10am—2pm.

DeKalb History Center, 1st floor (101 E Court Square, Decatur GA 30030)



Photos by Dean Hesse.



Thank you sponsors!



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Marissa Howard
Exhibits & Communications
Coordinator:
Rebecca Selem
Archives Assistant:
Kathryn Turnbull
Building Attendant:
Sean Skeete

Meet the DHC Staff

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Melissa Carlson, Executive Director



What does your job entail? I run the organization (chief cook and bottle washer).
How long have you worked here? 16 1/2 years.
Favorite thing about your job? The history aspect—teaching and learning about local history and showing how it reflects the nation’s history.

If you could choose any person from history to be your imaginary friend, who would it be and why? Catherine the Great. She’s a strong, fascinating woman who changed the course of an Empire.
What’s the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock? The sideways, punk rock haircut—two toned with rattails.
If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? The Wright Brothers’ first successful flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Marissa Howard, Programs & Membership Coordinator



What does your job entail? I manage membership and create and lead public programs including walking and school tours and lectures.
How long have you worked here? 6 years.
Favorite thing about your job? I get to be creative with programs and research. I get to use the left and right sides of my brain in this job.

If you could instantly learn a new talent, what would it be? Breakdancing.
If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? I want to witness the first people to eat bleu cheese.
What’s one thing on your bucket list? I would like to go to Japan and hang out with snow monkeys in Hokkaido.

Mallory Donaldson, Rental & Preservation Coordinator



What does your job entail? I take care of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse so it can be enjoyed by the public. I keep it relevant and useful.
How long have you worked here? 9 years.
Favorite thing about your job? I love working with the community.
What’s the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock? A bowl cut, and puffy pants.

If you could choose any person from history to be your imaginary friend, who would it be and why? Teddy Roosevelt. He had some wild adventures and I appreciate his contributions to the national parks.
If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? The fall of the Berlin Wall.

Jennifer Blomqvist, Archivist & Volunteer Coordinator



What does your job entail? I process and maintain archival material and make it available for researchers. I also coordinate with volunteers for various duties around the History Center.
How long have you worked here? 5 years.
Favorite thing about your job? I get to travel back in time everyday.

What’s the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock? Very big hair.
What’s one thing on your bucket list? I want to travel the entirety of Route 66.
If you could choose any person from history to be your imaginary friend, who would it be and why? Cleopatra. I would love to hear about what her day-to-day life was like.

Rebecca Selem, Exhibits & Communications Coordinator



What does your job entail? I plan, design, produce, and maintain the exhibits. I’m also in charge of the communications—PR, Quarterly Journals, graphics, etc.
How long have you worked here? Almost 5 years.
Favorite thing about your job? Definitely putting exhibits

together. The process is challenging but really rewarding.
If you could choose any person from history to be your imaginary friend, who would it be and why? Robin Williams. He would provide endless light and laughs.
If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? The stones at Stonehenge being placed.
If you could instantly learn a new talent, what would it be? I would love to be able to play the cello.

Monica El-Amin, African American History Coordinator



What does your job entail? I will be working on oral history and research on the African American community in DeKalb County.
How long have you worked here? 2 weeks.
Favorite thing about your job? The location.
What’s the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock? Arm socks.

If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? I would like to have witnessed the inauguration of John F. Kennedy.
If you could instantly learn a new talent, what would it be? I would really like to be multilingual.

Kathryn Turnbull, Archives Assistant



What does your job entail? I help with processing and describing our collections. I am also the ‘Saturday person’ - I open and manage the exhibits on Saturdays.
How long have you worked here? A little over a year.
Favorite thing about your job? I really enjoy processing new collections and getting

my hands on things people haven’t touched or looked at in years. I like to imagine the kind of research these items could help with in the future.
If you could instantly learn a new talent, what would it be? Hard mental math—I would love to be able to solve hard equations accurately in my head.
What’s the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock? Serious Justin Bieber side bangs.
If you could choose any person from history to be your imaginary friend, who would it be and why? Eleanor Roosevelt. I feel like she would have been really cool to hang out with.

Sean Skeete, Building Attendant



What does your job entail? I make sure rental events run smoothly.
How long have you worked here? 1 1/2 years.
Favorite thing about your job? My co-workers and the low stress environment.
If you could instantly learn a new talent, what would it be?

Realistically, it would be understanding most languages. Unrealistically, telekinesis.
If you could witness any historical event, what would you want to see? The Emancipation Proclamation or the Moon Landing.
What’s one thing on your bucket list? Traveling the world.