

Call & Response

News from the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission

Spring/Summer 2012 Volume VII, Number 2



<http://shpo.sc.gov/res/Pages/SCAAHC.aspx>
&

<http://scaaheritagefound.org/>

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Message from the Chair

Bhakti Larry Hough



A look at South Carolina African American historic preservation over the past few months reveals a picture of hope and fear with shades of irony.

I want to end this message on a positive note, so I will start with the fears. I wish I felt better than I do about the prospects for the general appreciation, value and preservation of African American sites of historic significance going forward. The demolition of the George Elmore store in Columbia recently is all the

evidence we need—to borrow a phrase—to be afraid, be very afraid. Elmore did more for African American people in this state—and suffered economic ruin because of it—than most of us will ever do. That, however, did not prevent the African American church that owned the building from demolishing it one week after Historic Columbia Foundation placed a state historic marker in front of it on Gervais St. You'd think the building was safe; it was an African American historic site owned by an African American historic institution that is essentially the spiritual core of African American history in the US. And look what happened. See my op-ed that was published in *The State* newspaper on page 5.

So, those who advocate for the preservation of African American historic sites don't have the strongest of allies in the African American community as a whole. As I mentioned in my op-ed column, I understand that historic preservation in the African American community is a complex issue. Reasonable people will disagree about historic preservation as a major priority. Historic preservation done right and well is expensive, and I don't expect saving old structures to resonate too highly among people who have suffered disproportionate rates of unemployment, foreclosures and

continued

The mission of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission is to identify and promote the preservation of historic sites, structures, buildings, and culture of the African American experience in South Carolina and to assist and enhance the efforts of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

Message from the Chair *continued*

other financial issues during the recent economic downturn. Major reservoirs of resources just aren't there. And of course, it is a property owner's right to do whatever he/she wants with his/her property.

Still, preserving tangible history is important because it is a critical tangible and intangible stone in the spiritual and cultural foundation of any success, prosperity and abundance that African American people enjoy. Challenges, notwithstanding, if we don't continue to aggressively advocate and educate, I fear we will continue to lose important African American historic sites at the hands of African American people.

There is still reason to hope. There are many African Americans who believe in the importance of preserving African American history and have made vocations and avocations of preserving and supporting the preservation of their history. These individuals and organizations give us reason to hope that their efforts will help our community to evolve on this issue. See page 9 for an account of an African American church in Hilton Head that is celebrating local history with a state historic marker.

The irony, and another reason to hope, is that African American history is nothing more than South Carolina history and American history that reflects African American heritage. There are persons and organizations who appreciate it for no other reason than that. If it were not for the various kinds and levels of work, support and assistance of non-African American people, organizations and institutions in African American historic preservation, the state of that preservation would be dismal, indeed. That's mainly because of the resources required.

Therefore, though it is not an anomaly, it is still ironic that a major boost to African American historic preservation in SC so far this year is coming from a white Englishman, Jeremy Thomas.

Thomas bought Laurelwood Plantation, located in Richland County, and the nearby slave cabin, one of the last known in the state. With inspiration from SCAAHC member Joseph McGill who is sleeping in slave cabins around the country, technical assistance from SCAAHC member Jannie Harriot and a lot of help from SCAAHC ex-officio member Michael Bedenbaugh and the Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation, Thomas is bringing

the cabin back to life. The cabin was built for slaves in the 1850s. It later became a sharecropper's house and was a family home in the 60s. I found Thomas' quotes from a WIS-TV news report noteworthy: "You've got an opportunity to save these buildings, but I guess in these economic times it's not in the forefront of people's minds. But once they're gone, they're gone. So it's really important that we save what's left," Thomas said. He added, "There's no substitute for children learning their local history, and better than seeing it in a textbook is being able to touch and feel it, and see how these buildings came into existence." Thomas hopes to have the cabin done in the next few weeks.

From the city of Rock Hill to Beaufort and Georgetown counties, sites and properties are under threat in various ways. The SCAACH will continue to raise its voice in appropriate and necessary ways when and where saving sites, structures and properties is a feasible alternative to destroying them or destroying their historical integrity.

I trust that you will enjoy this edition of *Call & Response*. Please contact me or any commissioner with feedback and input on the newsletter or any other topic related to our mission. Please share with your family and friends information about the SCAAHC and its work and encourage them to join the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation (SCAAHF), the SCAAHC's fundraising and administrative arm. We appreciate very much any support you can give us.



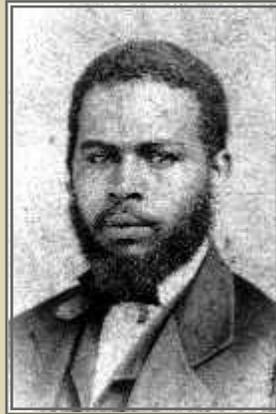
In The News

A Mad Dash for Freedom: Honoring Robert Smalls 150 years later

Katherine Saunders Pemberton

The daring and courageous story of Robert Smalls' seizure of the Confederate ship *The Planter* began in the pre-dawn hours of May 13, 1862 at the southernmost wharf on Charleston Harbor. One-hundred fifty years later, that story has been commemorated at the site with the placement of a South Carolina State Historical Marker.

Smalls, an enslaved mariner, commandeered the ship loaded with Confederate guns, when its captain and others were ashore. He and fellow crew members took the ship from the Southern Wharf – just to the east of the Missroom House and sailed it north to another wharf to pick up their family members. They then sailed it into Charleston Harbor, through the Confederate lines, delivering the ship and its contents to the Union fleet, thus securing their freedom. Robert Smalls went on to a distinguished career in the Union Navy and in public service on the state and national levels.



Historic Charleston Foundation spearheaded the effort to place a historical marker just to the south of its building at 40 East Bay Street at the Battery and worked with the Smalls Family of descendants, the African American Historical Alliance, the State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Charleston and the Arts and History Commission. The African American Historical Alliance also made a generous contribution towards the fabrication of the marker.

The sesquicentennial anniversary of the seizure of *The Planter* was commemorated in May 2012 by a number of events, including the dedication of this state historical marker. The marker was dedicated on Saturday May 12th with

over one hundred people in attendance. The audience was welcomed by Kitty Robinson, director of Historic Charleston Foundation. Jannie Harriot of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission and Katherine Pemberton of Historic Charleston Foundation followed with brief remarks. Brandon Allen then sang the spiritual *My Lord, What a Morning*. Finally, the four great, great, great grandsons of Robert Smalls unveiled the historical marker.

The short ceremony was followed by a reception in HCF's 3rd floor Community Room and was sponsored by the Edwin Gardener Memorial Fund of the Community Foundation. From this vantage point, attendees could see the path taken in Charleston Harbor by Robert Smalls and his friends and family 150 years ago.



Top: SCAAHC member Jannie Harriot offers remarks in front of the veiled marker. SCAAHC member Joe McGill stands to her left.

Left: Three of Robert Smalls' great, great, great grandsons pose in front of the marker. SCAAHC member Terry James is in the rear.

Below: Attendees listen carefully during the program.

Photos provided by the author



Katherine Saunders Pemberton is Associate Director of Preservation at Historic Charleston Foundation

The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls Traveling Exhibit is available to rent from the State Museum!

Visitors to this exhibit will learn about Congressman Smalls' heroic exploits during the Civil War and be inspired by his legacy of bravery, leadership and public service to all Americans.

The exhibit which is touring nationally includes visual displays, three dimensional artifacts such as furniture from the Robert Smalls house in Beaufort, pictures and other memorabilia of Congressman Smalls, his family and his life. Also included is a digital photo frame with pictures from the 2004 christening and the 2007 commissioning of the *LSV-8 MG Robert Smalls*, the largest army transport ship of its kind. The *MG Robert Smalls* is named for the Congressman who was also commissioned as a Major General in the SC Militia. The Collection has been granted a license to show concurrently Part IV of "Slavery and The Making of America" which depicts the story of Robert Smalls' life from slavery to Congress.

Specs:

- 35 framed and matted reproductions of photos, legislation and period documents
- 2 ship models in oak cases
- 4 pieces of original furniture
- Replicas of 1861 Tower musket, walking stick and slave tags
- Memorabilia from the christening of the *LSV-8 MG Robert Smalls*
- Binder containing replicas of correspondence
- Memorabilia from schools named after Smalls
- 12 exhibit panels with text and graphics
- K-12 standards-based tour material & copies of primary source material

Space Requirements - 1000-1200 square feet

Cost - \$5000 for approximate 12-week booking period plus one-way shipping

Security - Medium

Contact - Jeff Powley at 803-737-4159 or Jeff.Powley@scmuseum.org

The following op-ed appeared in
Columbia's *The State* newspaper
on Aug. 8th

Bhakti Larry Hough "One man's trash is another man's treasure"

The George Elmore building at 2313 Gervais St. in Columbia was a treasure for those who value history and historic preservation. Apparently Dr. Blakely Scott and First Nazareth Baptist Church thought it was trash - or at least dispensable.

Elmore was an African American civil rights pioneer and entrepreneur. He operated several businesses and was active in the NAACP. He won the right for African Americans to vote in SC Democratic primaries. In 1946 he challenged the Democratic Party for the right to vote in its all white primary. He filed a lawsuit in the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of South Carolina in a landmark case known as *Elmore v. Rice*. His legal team was led by Thurgood Marshall, who subsequently became a United States Supreme Court Justice.

On Friday, July 27, First Nazareth Baptist Church, owners of the building, which was a store that Elmore owned, had it demolished just a week after a historic marker was installed in front of it.

I am sure that Rev. Scott and his congregation are good people. But they must be historically and culturally clueless - and even insensitive to the legacy of a great man who sacrificed well-being and comfort and suffered greatly in order to achieve justice for his people. Certainly, Scott and First Nazareth did not intend it to be, but the demolition was an affront to the Columbia community, Elmore's legacy and the African American community. That's because Scott, his church and all of us owe a debt to George Elmore and people like him, the chosen few who risked all and sacrificed so much so that we can be who and what we are today.

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So, the very least we can do is preserve and honor any remaining physical, tangible monuments to such persons that still exist when at all possible.

Historic preservation issues are complex, particularly in the African American community. Not all historically significant structures can be saved. And it is the prerogative of property owners to do what they wish with their property. Historic preservation is not an inexpensive undertaking and - as demonstrated in this case -not a priority in the African American community. Therefore, as saddened as I am that the Elmore building was demolished, I am not surprised. I fear that similar historic properties in the Midlands and around the state are at risk.

We professional and lay preservationists have our work to do. We've got to ramp up our ongoing efforts to generate and secure resources to save and rehabilitate structures and educate the people on the value of historic preservation and how the presence and lessons of historic places have relevance for today. This is especially true of the African American community. We need all the inspiration, motivation, and cause-to-reflect that we can get from tangible visible reminders of great people from among us who performed selfless acts at great sacrifice to create a better day they might not see for people they would not know. The African American community owes these people and the things associated with them more than historic markers on empty lots when more is possible.

Generally, African Americans don't seem to place much value on the preservation of historic properties and structures. That may be an effect of slavery and being divorced from our history and an understanding and appreciation of it as an empowering, life-giving force. But the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission and other groups are working to change that.

Therefore, as important as it is for all people to appreciate all our history, it is critically important that African American people take responsibility for our history and not allow ourselves to become unwitting accomplices in our own malaise, mediocrity and, sometimes failure, by helping contrary forces to erase inspiring monuments to and evidence of our genius, greatness, and determination with our indifference. A physical landscape devoid of the expressions and creations of, and structures associated with, our ancestors ensures that our progeny see and feel no empowering legacy of power and greatness to identify with and build on. We simply can't have that; the stakes are too high.

Bhakti Larry Hough is chairman of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission.



The first and second photos show the front and rear of the state historic marker that was placed near the old Waverly Five and Dime Store in Columbia in July. The third photo shows remaining rubble from the store's demolition that began one week after the marker was erected. Photos taken by Jannie Harriot on 8-5-12

*The City of Hartsville
&
The South Carolina African American
Heritage Commission
invite you to the unveiling of a
South Carolina Historical Marker
&
Rededication of Pride Park
Sunday, October 7, 2012
3:00 PM*

630 South 6th Street

Hartsville, SC



Student Say-So

Millicent Ellison Brown, Ph.D.
SCAAHC Ex officio member, Claflin University

In an effort to encourage and support interest by young African Americans in the pursuit of careers in history, historic preservation, archives management and varied other Public History fields, Call & Response is initiating a new column. It will provide news of activities on and around college and high school campuses throughout the state promoting youthful engagement in academic, social, cultural events that open their eyes to pursuits they may not be aware of leading to a better understanding of how "alive" history can be. Whether you offer a program and want to advertise it, or are a young person engaged in a job, internship, class or organization that is history-related; we want to use this column and our readership to spread the news!

Look forward to seeing exciting updates of what young African Americans in South Carolina are doing to expand their own personal knowledge of heritage, ancestry and historical ties to community.

We will share their thoughts and responses to the world of history as seen through their eyes, and build a foundation to assure more and more participation in the future.

A Sesquicentennial Series: *African Americans during the Civil War -*

Stony The Road They Trod Part 7: Worth Fighting For ~ The 1st SC Volunteer Infantry Abel Bartley



Dr. Bartley is Director of the Pan African Studies Program & Associate Professor of African American and Urban History, Clemson University

In October of 1861, Union General Thomas W. Sherman prepared to embark on his Port Royal expedition into South Carolina. As he embarked, he received a memo from the War Department, authorizing him to utilize contrabands in any capacity whatsoever. To those who were watching, they could see that the government had given Sherman carte blanche to create Black fighting regiments. However, when Sherman arrived in South Carolina, he refused to interfere with the prevailing institutions. He saw no circumstance, which would require him to arm African Americans.

In December 1861, Secretary of War Simon Cameron joined forces with several other Republicans who had come to believe that Lincoln and Congress were not sufficiently angry at the South for starting the war. These so-called "Radicals" argued for arming African Americans. Cameron pushed Lincoln to arm African Americans. He put his arguments into a report and then mailed them out to all of the major cities before sending the report to Lincoln. The president was appalled and demanded that the advance copies be recalled and the report be revised to remove all offending paragraphs. Lincoln waited two months, then quietly replaced Cameron with Edwin Stanton. Stanton was a good friend of Radical Republican Charles Sumner. He was also a well-known abolitionist and friend

to African Americans.

Within five months of taking office, Stanton was called before Congress to explain why General David Hunter was organizing Black regiments when he had no authorization? Gen. Hunter had been chosen to replace Sherman as the military commander of the Department of the South. Hunter utilized the authorization given to Sherman as justification for arming the former slaves. He called Abram Murchison, a well-known minister amongst Blacks in the Hilton Head area. Murchison quickly moved to hold a meeting on April 7, 1862, in which he explained that Blacks had a responsibility to fight against secession and if necessary bear arms to defend the union. When he asked how many men would stand with him - all the men in the audience stood.

The men were then asked to come forward and sign a list as volunteers. The elderly and young boys were all rejected, leaving 105 men. The next day an additional 25 names were added. Within a week, there were 150 names on the roll. With these 150 names, Hunter quickly moved to organize the 1st South Carolina Volunteers Regiment. The House of Representatives questioned the organizing of a Black regiment. However, Hunter gave a full-throated defense of his actions. He drilled the men and made them ready for battle. However, when he requested commissions and pay for the soldiers, he was rebuffed by the Lincoln administration. After three months with no pay and no support from the government, Hunter was forced to disband the regiment, with the exception of one company, an end to the experiment.



Dress parade of the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry, Beaufort, SC. Note what appears to be the shadow of the photographer in the foreground. Photo from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007677204/>

continued

A Sesquicentennial Series: African Americans during the Civil War -

Stony The Road They Trod Part 7: Worth Fighting For ~ The 1st SC Volunteer Infantry *continued*

The remaining company became the first Black regiment to see action. On August 5th it was garrisoned to St. Simon's Island off the coast of Georgia. Under the command of Sergeant Charles Trowbridge the company spent two months on the island searching for renegade rebels. They never found the rebels, but their example and dedication forced the Lincoln administration to change course. The freed African American men who took up arms to defend the Union for which they had little to no real allegiance proved that when properly motivated, African Americans could be just as loyal and dedicated as any other American.

In February 1864, the unit's name was changed to the 33rd United States Colored Troops. When Black regiments were organized in Kansas and Louisiana, the Federal government relied on the experience of the African American men who stood their post in South Carolina as a model of what African Americans could contribute as soldiers.

Editor's Note: Dr. Bartley's final article in the Sesquicentennial series will be in next issue. He will summarize progress made over the last 150 years and discuss the classic question—where do we go from here?

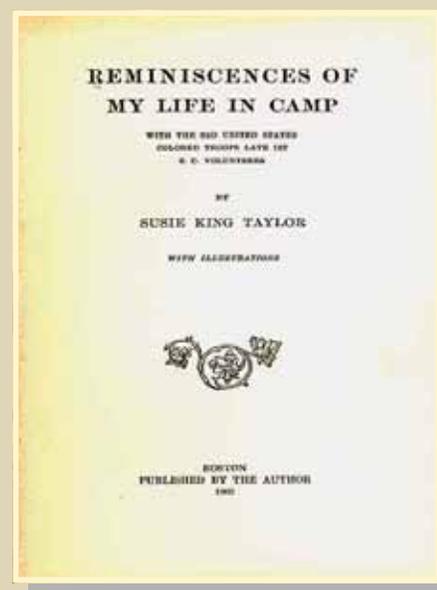
Susie King Taylor 1848-1912 **Civil War Nurse, Teacher,** **Laundress - Post-War Author** **who documented her memories of the** **33rd USCT**



Nurse Taylor was a coastal Georgia native who gained freedom from enslavement at age 14. She served with Co. E of the 33rd for over four years with no pay. After the war, she resumed teaching and did domestic work. Mrs. Taylor eventually relocated to Boston, MA where she died 10 years after her book was pub-

FORT WAGNER being only a mile from our camp, I went there two or three times a week, and would go up on the ramparts to watch the gunners send their shells into Charleston (which they did every fifteen minutes), and had a full view of the city from that point. Outside of the fort were many skulls lying about; I have often moved them one side out of the path. The comrades and I would have quite a debate as to which side the men fought on. Some thought they were the skulls of our boys; others thought they were the enemy's; but as there was no definite way to know, it was never decided which could lay claim to them. They were a gruesome sight, those fleshless heads and grinning jaws, but by this time I had become accustomed to worse things and did not feel as I might have earlier in my camp life.

Above - excerpt from Susie King Taylor's Civil War memoirs, published in 1902; Below - title page from her book. You can find these and her photo located at the bottom of the left column in the electronic version of her rich firsthand account at - <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/taylorstu/taylorstu.html> . Do check it out.



Preservation Project Profile

First African Baptist Church Hilton Head Island

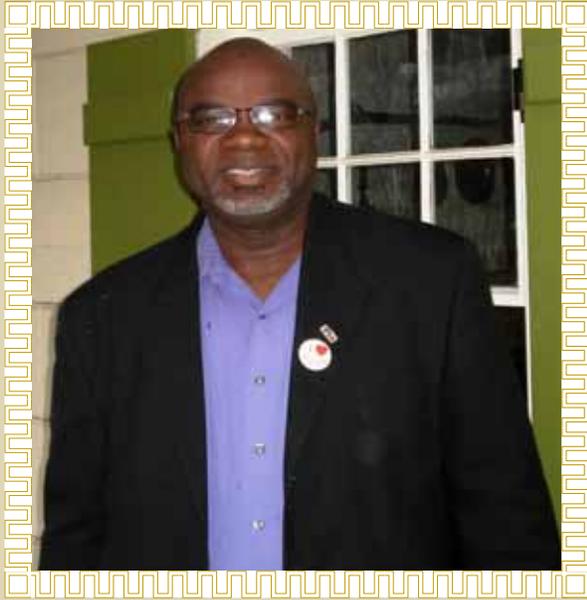
First African Baptist Church of Hilton Head unveiled its South Carolina Historical Marker and celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sunday, August 19. The church was established in the village of Mitchelville after a military order was issued freeing blacks in the Sea Islands as early as April 1862 with the help of General Ormsby Mitchel who assumed command during the same year. By March of 1863, the town was built and named in honor of General Mitchel. The Rev. Abraham Murchinson, a former slave in the employ of the chief Quartermaster, was selected to be Mitchelville's minister. See the marker text on page 11.



SCAAHC Commission members Jannie Harriot (far left) and Terry James (not pictured) attended the First African Baptist Church's historic marker unveiling in August. *Photo by Karen James*

Spotlight on...

Joseph McGill, Jr. Ladson



Joseph McGill, Jr. is a charter member of the SCAAHC and is a Field Officer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, working out of the Charleston office. Prior to his current position, he was the Executive Director of the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa in Cedar Rapids. His responsibilities included seeking funds from grantmaking entities to support the capital and operating budgets of the museum and cultural center and developing programs that interpret the history of African Americans.

Joe is the former Director of History and Culture at Penn Center, St. Helena Island. Penn was the first school built during the Civil War for the education of recently-freed slaves. As Director, he was responsible for the overall development and implementation of the Center's program for collecting, preserving, and making public the history of Penn Center and Sea Island African American history and culture.

He was also employed by the National Park Service as a Ranger at Fort Sumter National Monument in Charleston. As a Park Ranger, Joe was responsible for giving oral presentations on Fort

Sumter, Fort Moultrie and off site. He was also responsible for supervising volunteers and participating in living history presentations.

Joe was the founder of Company "I" 54th Massachusetts Reenactment Regiment in Charleston. The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was the regiment portrayed in the award-winning movie *Glory*. As a Civil War re-enactor, he participates in parades, living history presentations, lectures, and battle reenactments.

Other cultural affiliations include being a board member for the proposed International African American Museum in Charleston and a founding member of the South Carolina African American Historical Alliance. He is also a member of the SC Humanities Council Speakers Bureau.

In addition to appearing in the book *Confederates in the Attic* by Tony Horwitz, his most recent endeavor is the Slave Dwelling Project in which Joe sleeps in slave dwellings in an attempt to bring much-needed attention to and resources for their restoration.

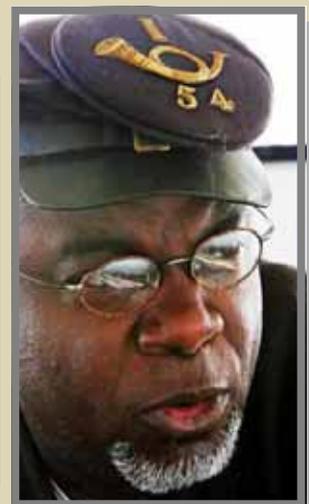
A native of Kingstree, SC, Joe is a graduate of Kingstree Senior High School, and upon graduation, he enlisted into the United States Air Force. While in the Air Force, he served as a security policeman in England, Washington state and in Germany.

Joe holds a BA degree in Professional English from SC State University, Orangeburg, and is married to the former Vilarin Mozee. They have one daughter, Jocelyn Mozee McGill.

Upcoming Stays for the Slave Dwelling Project ~

***Sweet Briar College, Sweet
Briar, Virginia - Sunday,
Oct. 7th***

***Boone Hall Plantation, Mt.
Pleasant, South Carolina -
Friday, Nov. 9th &
Saturday, Nov. 10th***



News from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History

Elizabeth M. Johnson
Deputy State Historic Preservation Office

Recent South Carolina Historical Markers

The Department of Archives and History recently approved texts for the following historical markers associated with African American history. Please note that all of these markers may not have been erected yet. After the text is approved, the markers must be manufactured and installed. Staff contact: Tracy Power (803) 896-6182 or power@scdah.state.sc.us. An online database of historical markers searchable by keyword and location is at <http://www.scaet.org/markers/>.

First African Baptist Church, Hilton Head Island, Beaufort County (Front) This church, organized in 1862, was first located in the town of Mitchelville, a freedmen's village established on Hilton Head by the United States Army. Rev. Abraham Murchinson, its first pastor, was a former slave. The congregation numbered about 120 members when it was organized in August 1862. (Reverse) The church moved to the Chaplin community after the Civil War and was renamed Goodwill Baptist Church. It moved to this site by 1898 and was renamed Cross Roads Baptist Church before retaking its original name; it is the mother church of five Beaufort County churches. The present building was built in 1966. Sponsored by the Congregation, 2012

Benjamin E. Mays Birthplace, Mays House Museum, Greenwood, Greenwood County (Front) This house, originally 14 mi. SE on U.S. Hwy. 178 in the Epworth community, was the birthplace of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays (1894-1984), Baptist minister, college president, author, and civil rights pioneer. Mays was the eighth child of Hezekiah and Louvenia Mays, both born into slavery. In 1911 he left the tenant farm where this house stood to attend high school at S.C. State College in Orangeburg. (Reverse) Mays, a graduate of Bates College and the University of Chicago, was an early and forceful opponent of

segregation. Best known as president of Morehouse College, in Atlanta, 1940-1967, Mays was described by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as his "spiritual mentor." Mays's inspiring memoir *Born To Rebel* (1971) is a civil rights classic. This house was moved here, renovated, and dedicated as a museum in 2011. Sponsored by the Mays House Museum, 2012

Hartsville Graded School / Mt. Pisgah Nursery School, Hartsville, Darlington County (Front) The first public school for the black children of Hartsville and vicinity operated on this site from about 1900 to 1921. It was renamed Darlington County Training School in 1918. A new school was built on 6th St. south of this site in 1921. Rev. Henry H. Butler (1887-1948) was principal at both sites for a combined 37 years. The 1921 school was renamed Butler School in Butler's honor in 1939. (Reverse) Mt. Pisgah Presbyterian Church grew out of a Sunday school started on this site by Rev. T.J. James in 1922. The church was organized that same year, and a new church building was erected nearby in 1926. Rev. James also founded Mt. Pisgah Nursery School, which operated in the old graded school here for many years. Rev. James's family later donated this property to the city for Pride Park, established in 1986. Sponsored by the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission, the City of Hartsville, and Darlington County, 2012

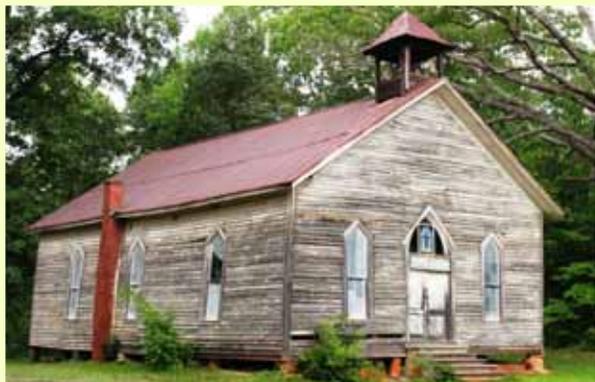
New National Register of Historic Places Listing

The **Mulberry Chapel Methodist Church** in the vicinity of Pacolet in Cherokee County was listed in the National Register on June 27, 2012. Built circa 1880, the church is significant for its association with African American heritage in the South Carolina upcountry during Reconstruction and for its architectural significance as an intact example of a vernacular form of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture. It is a local example of one of the most significant social changes precipitated by black freedom - the establishment of independent black churches and denominations. The property also contains a historic cemetery with approximately 20 marked graves with headstones from 1888 to the 1960s, and an additional 20 or more unmarked graves.

continued

SCDAH News

continued



Mulberry Chapel Methodist Church, Cherokee County
Photo by Andy Chandler, SCDAAH



Dr. Benjamin E. Mays Birthplace and Museum
Interpretive Center, Greenwood County
Photo from <http://www.mayshousemuseum.org/>

Statewide Historic Preservation Conference

The 2013 statewide historic preservation conference will be held on **Tuesday, April 16, 2013** at the S.C. Archives and History Center in Columbia. If you have a project or research that you'd like to present to conference attendees please think about sending in a session proposal. Local success stories are especially popular. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Jennifer Satterthwaite at 803-896-6171, jsatt@scdah.state.sc.us.

For Educators: The SCAAHC recommends these selected lesson plans and teaching documents from the SC Department of Archives & History:

General/Multiple Time Periods

[A Teacher's Guide to African American Historic Places in South Carolina](#)

Colonial (Pre-Contact to 1763)

[Lowcountry Rice Planting and Cooking](#) (8th Grade)

[The Role of African Slaves on South Carolina Rice Plantations](#) (4th Grade)

Antebellum (1792-1860)

[African American Life in the Pee Dee Before the Civil War](#) (3rd Grade)

[Examining Slave Auction Documents](#) (High School)

1900-1940

[Civil Rights Through Photographs](#) (5th and 8th Grades)

World War II and the Twentieth Century

["Bus"ting Down the Doors of Segregation](#) (3rd Grade)

[Separate but Equal?: A Lesson on the Briggs v. Elliott Case in Clarendon County, South Carolina](#) (3rd Grade)

[Brown v. Board: Five Communities that Changed America](#) (Multiple grade levels)

[South Carolina's Equalization School Program](#) (8th Grade)

These links and others are located at ~
<http://shpo.sc.gov/res/Pages/Teachers.aspx>

Guest Corner ***Equalization Schools Story to be Told with Exhibit***

Rebekah Dobrasko

In early 2011, the Charleston County School District contacted me in response to my concern regarding the proposed demolition of three 1950s-era schools on the Charleston peninsula. The school district was embarking on a massive school plant upgrade, which included replacing many of its school buildings constructed in the 1950s. I wanted to ensure that the school district was aware of the historic and architectural significance of these schools.

As a response to the school desegregation lawsuit *Briggs v. Elliott*, the state of South Carolina passed the first statewide sales tax in 1951, dedicating the money to build new schools. South Carolina was determined to prove in court that it was committed to “separate but equal” school facilities, and designed a school improvement program intended to quickly update its black school facilities.

This program, known now as the school equalization program, required the consolidation of school districts and small rural schools. It provided for state funding for transportation to schools, and also required construction of new African American schools, with a specific focus on having at least one black public school in each county. For the first time, black children had busses to take them to school. For the first time, many black students had access to high school education. This program built new consolidated schools across the state. These new schools boasted modern building materials, central heating, and playground and athletic fields. High schools opened with libraries, science and home economics labs, and teacher lounges. The United States District Court ruled in favor of the defendant in *Briggs*, arguing that South Carolina should be given time to implement its school equalization program.

Charleston County is a microcosm of the statewide equalization program. In 1949, the county was divided into twenty-three school districts. It had 9,741 black students in 67 schools and 10,410 white students in 29 schools. The county had only 3 black high schools, while white students had 7. The county was also undergoing a population

shift, as more families settled in North Charleston to work at the Charleston Navy Yard and its associated facilities, while other families began leaving the downtown peninsula for more suburban areas in West Ashley and Mount Pleasant.

Between 1951 and 1955, thirty-three new schools opened in Charleston County. Some of the more notable schools included Haut Gap High School on Johns Island, Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School on James Island (see photo on next page), and Bonds-Wilson High School in North Charleston, the first public black high schools in those areas. Charleston County also constructed some new white schools, allowed under the



Bonds-Wilson High School, North Charleston

equalization program as long as the black school needs were addressed prior to white schools. The new schools were all designed by local architects and both black and white schools had similar appearances.

Older black schools were rebuilt during this program. Burke Vocational School, the only public black high school in downtown Charleston, received 5 new buildings. Laing High School in Mount Pleasant was also demolished and rebuilt. Despite the new construction, black schools quickly became overcrowded and overwhelmed. The equalization school funds were not enough to overcome decades of inequality and inattention to school problems.

By 1954, *Briggs v. Elliott* had been combined with four other school desegregation cases known collectively as *Brown v. Board of Education*. The United States Supreme Court declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional, but the equalization school program continued in SC, as the state intended to maintain the status quo. The last equalization school in Charleston was C.A. Brown High School, which opened as the second black high school on the peninsula in 1962, the year before black parents and the courts required Charleston to desegregate its schools.

continued

The current school construction program calls for the demolition and replacement of many of these equalization schools across the county. Haut Gap has already been replaced, as well as Sanders Clyde Elementary School. Memminger Elementary School and Sullivans Island Elementary School are both in the process of being replaced. As the school district updates its building inventory, it is working with local citizens and me to tell the story of these equalization schools.



The school district plans to erect a permanent outdoor exhibit on the campus of Charleston Progressive Academy which will relocate back

to the old Courtenay Elementary School after seismic upgrades are completed,

In April, we held three public meetings to ask for input on the exhibit and to gather stories from students and teachers who attended these schools. We had a solid turnout with a lot of interest in the story. Please contact me at (803) 896-6183 or dobrasko@scdah.state.sc.us if you attended an equalization school in Charleston County and want to share stories, photographs, yearbooks, or other memories. Currently, we are working to finalize a budget and schedule and hope to begin work on writing and designing the exhibit before the end of the year.

C.A. Brown High School is now part of Trident Technical College's Palmer Campus, and the college is planning several celebrations of Brown's history in October. On October 23, 2012, Trident Tech is sponsoring an East Side Symposium, and I will be on the panel to discuss equalization schools and the history of C.A. Brown. On October 25th, the Preservation Society of Charleston plans to unveil a historical marker for C.A. Brown High School.

If you are interested in learning more about the exhibit, visit <http://www.scequalizationschools.org/charleston-exhibit.html> for a list of equalization schools in Charleston and updates on the project. If you are

interested in the celebrations at C.A. Brown High School, contact Dr. Susan Williams at Trident Techni-



Gresham Meggett Elementary & High School, James Island, has housed Septima Clark Academy since 1997. The script at the bottom of this April 1956 photo says that the school was built in 1952.

Photos provided by the author

cal College: susan.williams@tridenttech.edu.

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The Southern African American
Heritage Center

125 Kershaw Street
Cheraw, South Carolina 29520
843-921-9989

Jazz Luncheon

Friday, October 19th
12 pm

Wesley United Methodist Church
Educational Building,
307 Greene Street, Cheraw

Limited seating ~ Tickets \$25.00 each

*Guest speaker will be Dr. Karen Chandler,
associate professor at the College of
Charleston and co-founder/principal of the
Charleston Jazz Initiative*

For additional information please contact
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