

Reflections



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THE RITZ THEATER AND HISTORIC HARLEM: REVIVING THE SOUL OF ALBANY

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SOWEGA Rising, Albany, Georgia

For post-reconstruction rural Black communities across Southwest Georgia, thriving African American business districts were their heart and soul. The same held true in Albany, Georgia. Known as “the other Harlem,” Albany’s Harlem business district was similar to what you would find in other communities of its size.¹

In its golden period, Harlem in Albany was the social and economic hub for Blacks in southwest Georgia. Locally owned grocery stores, drug stores, restaurants, beauty and barber shops, photography shops and newspapers were among the businesses that Black

people relied on for safe places to shop in the deeply segregated Jim Crow south. The Harlem Business District also boasted a Black-owned hotel, beauty supply store, and four tourist homes (today called bed and breakfast inns) that were listed in the Negro Motorist Green Book.²



The Ritz Theater (left), built in 1930 and its Cultural Center added in 1991 composes the last, intact block of the Harlem Business District. Photo taken April 2020. Courtesy of Sherrell Byrd/SOWEGA Rising.

Culturally, Harlem was the place to be in southwest Georgia. To further accommodate the many Black visitors to Harlem, local businessmen, A.C. and I. C. Gortatowsky built the Ritz Theater as both a movie house and a live

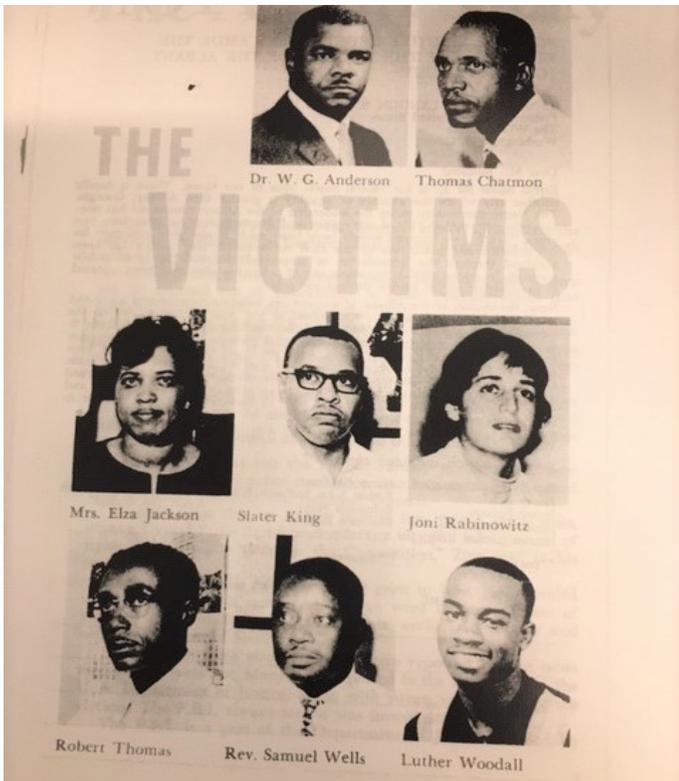
entertainment venue. The theater seated 572 people and became the center of Harlem’s social scene. It was the first theater in southwest Georgia where Blacks

¹ In the early 20th century the Harlem District of New York City evolved from a Jewish/Italian section into a predominantly African American business and entertainment area. Fame of the Harlem Renaissance led other cities to adopt the name for their African American sections. Like Harlem of New York City, Harlem here was originally the Jewish section that evolved into the Black business district by the 1930’s. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Albany, Dougherty County, Georgia. Sanborn Map Company, Apr, 1920. Map. Accessed June 23, 2020 from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01372_007/.

² The Negro Motorist Green Book (known as the Green Book) was published between 1936 and 1966 as a guide to hotels, boarding houses, restaurants and entertainment venues that welcomed African American travelers during segregation. <https://transcription.si.edu/project/7955> By 1941 the book listed four Tourist Homes in Albany. http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Race/R_Casestudy/87_135_1736_GreenBk.pdf

THE RITZ THEATER AND HISTORIC HARLEM: REVIVING THE SOUL OF ALBANY

Sherrell Byrd and Michael Harper continued from page 1



Eight members of the Albany 9 as shown in the *Upside-Down Justice: The Albany Cases* pamphlet, circa 1964. Member Robert Colbert not shown here. (Fair use/Educational use)
Credit: Bruce Hartford/The Civil Rights Movement Archive

could go in the front, purchase their tickets and go directly into the movie. No more back door entry for Black patrons. The Harlem Business District also became the center for the Albany Civil Rights Movement (historically referred to as the Albany Movement) where numerous civil rights marches, protests, and demonstrations were held. The late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. held mass meetings in Shiloh Baptist Church and Mt. Zion Baptist Church, both located in Harlem. King is also said to have even played pool at Dick Gay's Pool Hall located adjacent to the Ritz.

The Albany 9, a civil rights group famed for their anti-segregation protests, organized a boycott of a white-owned grocery store located in Harlem for the owner's participation in a controversial court case and for his refusal to hire Blacks to work inside his store. The boycott and cases of violence against Albany civil rights workers drew national attention to the Albany movement.³

³ *Upside Down Justice, The Albany Cases* published by National Committee for Albany Defendants in 1964 includes an excellent description of the boycott of Smith's Grocery Store, an important milestone in the movement for equal rights. https://www.crmvet.org/docs/64_scef_albany-case.pdf

Many hard-fought victories that ended segregation enabled Blacks to shop in stores where they were once excluded. Their money left Harlem, forcing many Black-owned stores and family owned businesses to close. By the mid-to late 1960s, Harlem was a shell of its former glory. Faded signage and distressed buildings were left as reminders of the once-vibrant Black districts in Albany and many cities throughout southwest Georgia.

In the late 1980s, the City of Albany set out to reopen its Municipal Auditorium on North Jackson Street. At the same time, local efforts to improve the Harlem district and the surrounding neighborhood gained momentum. That movement was led by the late Georgia State Representative Mary Young Cummings and resulted in the renovation of Harlem's Ritz Theater including the addition of the Ritz Cultural Center. Both opened in December 1991 aimed at providing cultural arts programming for underserved youth in Albany and cultural events for the community at large. Regrettably, the Ritz Theater and the Ritz Cultural Center were closed in 2006 due to lack of funding.

Between the late 1990s and mid-2000s, many other businesses in Harlem closed. The area became dominated by vacant lots and empty storefronts. However, members of SOWEGA Rising coalition hope to create an "urban revival" to change that.



Old Mt Zion Baptist Church and the Albany Civil Right Institute rest in the Harlem neighborhood. Both sites are also on Georgia's Footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Trail
<https://www.exploregeorgia.org/itinerary/georgias-footsteps-of-dr-martin-luther-king-jr-trail>

In February 2018, SOWEGA learned from local preservationists that the Ritz Cultural Center was slated for possible demolition to accommodate forty parking spaces for a proposed City transportation center. This plan would leave the historic Ritz Theater standing but with little to no chance for renovation and redevelopment.

The Ritz Theater was built with few theatrical amenities, a shortcoming that was in part addressed by the construction of the Cultural Center. Without the Cultural Center, revitalization of the Ritz would be impossible. Opponents to the City's plan argued that demolition of the Culture Center would sentence the Ritz to a slow death.



*The Ritz Theate, in the center of the block, circa 1960.
Courtesy of Sherrell Byrd/SOWEGA Rising*

During a well-attended public meeting on January 17, 2020 the Albany City Manager Sharon Subadan and the project design firm, Niles Bolton and Associates, Atlanta, GA, agreed to redesign the transportation center in a way that will preserve the Ritz Cultural Center and ultimately the historic Ritz Theater. The community's effort to save the Ritz complex were successful.

With the Ritz secure from demolition, SOWEGA Rising is advocating for a comprehensive revitalization plan for the Historic Harlem Business District, the Harlem neighborhood, the historic Ritz Theater and its Cultural Center. The goal is to restore Harlem as an economic center for Black enterprise while creating a premiere African American cultural and arts center for Southwest Georgia, with the Ritz Theater and the Cultural Center as the flagship institution.

Historic preservation has often been the catalyst of economic and social revitalization. In the Harlem District of Albany, preservation of the Historic Ritz Theater will serve as that spark.

~

Sherrell Byrd and Michael Harper serve on the board of directors of SOWEGA Rising (nonprofit). Historic and cultural preservation, one of the five core initiatives of SOWEGA Rising, is central to their efforts to preserve the Historic Harlem District and the Ritz Theater.

For more information about the Ritz Theater and the Historic Harlem revitalization effort, contact SOWEGA Rising at sowegarising@gmail.com or follow them on Facebook @SowegaRising.



The Chatmon Building shares the block with the Ritz Theater and houses the last few Black business in this once-bustling business district. Credit: Melissa Jest/HPD

SOWEGA Rising launched the "SAVE THE RITZ! SAVE HARLEM!" campaign. The grassroots organization leveraged social media to mobilize people around the proposed demolition for the transportation center. An online petition opposing the demolition of the Ritz Cultural Center garnered over 600 signers and members of SOWEGA Rising were able to meet with federal, state and local leaders to advocate for the Ritz Cultural Center.

THE GRAVE DIGGER, THE LABOR DAY PETITION, AND THE GREAT MIGRATION

Evan Kutzler, PhD., Special Contributor

Assistant Professor, Georgia Southwestern State University, Americus, Georgia

Money weighed on Charles Lewis's mind as Labor Day approached. His salary as sexton of Eastview Cemetery was only 60 percent of what the white sexton at Oak Grove Cemetery made. He knew this because local government salaries were public information published in the *Americus Times-Recorder*. When he started the job in 1911, his salary was only half the white sexton's pay. Mr. Lewis picked September 1, 1919—the nation's twenty-fifth annual celebration of Labor Day—as the moment to appeal for a better deal.¹

His timing was significant. Lewis's Labor Day petition coincided with racial and class violence shaking the country in 1919. The U.S. government inferred an international communist conspiracy when four million American workers participated in strikes from Washington to Maine in steel mills, coal mines, and beyond. Alongside the labor strikes and government investigations that made up the “Red Scare,” racial violence flared up in bloodshed that became known as “Red Summer.” In Putnam County, Georgia, whites burned six Black churches. It took courage, an understanding of national events, and a strong sense of justice for Lewis to protest his wages amidst this unrest.²

The petition Lewis sent to the mayor and the city council is notable for its mentions as well as its omissions. “I have been sexton of the colored [cemetery] for the past eight years,” Lewis reminded them. “I have tried to give Satisfactory to the city and also to the public.” Rather than stating the obvious racial discrimination, Lewis used the price of food to frame his argument. “Now Gentlemen,” he continued, “it enforce me to ask you all to raise my wages on the account of the high price of food.” Lewis asked for \$1.50 per day. In coming to that figure, Lewis made a political calculation. If the city council consented, his monthly salary would increase from \$30 to \$45. Still, it would not match the white sexton's \$50 monthly salary.

This caution suggests that Lewis thought about his audience. Yet knowing his audience, their prejudices, and anticipating their reaction did not mean that Lewis was groveling. He reminded them of his freedom to walk away. If they did not raise his salary, Lewis declared,

Charles Lewis's Petition, September 1, 1919. Americus City Council Records. Courtesy of Evan Kutzler.

“I will be compel[ed] to give up the job.”³ The confidence Lewis projected in his ultimatum may have come from previous work experiences and his middling socio-economic status. According to census workers, Lewis and his wife, Rachel, lived in Americus at the beginning of the century. While Mrs. Lewis worked at home as a laundress for years, Lewis frequently changed jobs. He worked as a railroad laborer and then as a carpenter. They also moved around and purchased property. One year the Lewis family lived at the corner of Forsythe and Poplar Streets. In 1910, Charles and Rachel Lewis owned the house on Oglethorpe Avenue and lived there with seven children ranging in age from eleven months to seventeen years. The Lewis family lived in this house the full nine years that Charles worked as the cemetery sexton.⁴

Being the sexton of Eastview was a difficult but important job. It required the confidence—and the votes—of an all-white city council. One of the first burials was of his own son, Solomon Lewis, who died in February 1911 at the age of four. The cause of death went unrecorded. Other burials included the human

1 “Officials of the City Re-Elected,” *Americus Weekly Times-Recorder* (Americus, Ga.) January 2, 1913; Minutes of the Mayor and City Council of Americus, Georgia, January 7, 1919.

2 Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011), 53. (See contributor for additional sources.)

3 Charlie Lewis to the Mayor and City Council, September 1, 1919, Municipal Building, Americus, Georgia.

4 1900 U.S. Census, 789 Militia District, Americus, Ward 3, Sumter County, Georgia, population schedule, pg. 15B (stamped), dwelling 266, family 292, Charlie Lewis, Rachel Lewis, et al.; digital image, Ancestry.com (<http://ancestry.com>: accessed 29 July 2019) citing NARA Microfilm T623, roll not listed. (See contributor for additional sources.)

remains of awful racial violence. In October 1912, a deputy sheriff dropped off the bullet-riddled body of Babe Yarbrough, a black man accused of attempting to assault a white girl. The city made no serious inquest into the lynching. The murderers were not brought to justice and job of burying one of the city's open secrets fell to Charles Lewis.⁵

While the petition is notable for its clear perspective, the caution, and the confidence, other sources of information on Lewis's life are tougher to interpret. The smattering of documentation—census records, city directories, a debt security, and city council minutes—all contain information written about but not by the Lewises, or their children. Estimates on his year of birth ranged from the 1860s to the 1870s. More troubling, the census takers in 1900, 1920, and 1930 listed Lewis as being unable read or write. Was this an error? A racist assumption? While being a sexton probably required the ability to read and write, it is possible that Lewis was illiterate. When the Lewis family borrowed against their home in 1914, it was Mrs. Lewis—not Charles Lewis—who signed the debt security. The 1919 petition was the voice of Lewis. It is possible, though not certain, that Mrs. Lewis served as the ghost writer.⁶



*The Lewis House, Oglethorpe Avenue, Americus.
Taken August 2019. Courtesy of Evan Kutzler*

The Americus City Council met the same day Lewis, perhaps with the assistance from his wife, asked for

⁵ Alan Anderson, compiler, "Eastview Cemetery," entry for Solomon Lewis. The relation is inferred from his name, his age, and his burial alongside a Solomon Gass, who was possibly a grandfather or great-grandfather on his mother's (Rachel Gass Lewis) side; "Babe Yarbrough Shot by Enraged Avengers: Negro Attempted to Assault Girl in Americus – Was Taken Away from Sheriff Near Oglethorpe by men and Lynched," *Weekly Times-Recorder*, October 10, 1912.

⁶ 1900 U.S. Census, 789 Militia District, Americus, Ward 3, Sumter County, Georgia, population schedule, pg. 15B (stamped), dwelling 266, family 292, Charlie Lewis, Rachel Lewis, et al.; digital image, Ancestry.com (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 29 July 2019) citing NARA Microfilm T623, roll not listed. (See contributor for additional sources.)

increased pay. They read the petition and then promptly voted to authorize the Chairman of the Cemetery Committee to "fill [the] vacancy should said Chas. Lewis resign." Then the council turned to a second Labor Day petition, which also asked for higher wages, from the city's all-white fire department. Were the two petitions coordinated? The city council sent the second petition to the finance committee for investigation. From all appearances of that Labor Day meeting, the city council prepared to give the white fire department raises while calling the black sexton's bluff.⁷ The city council backed down, or, at least, they took a softer stance. Two weeks later, they approved raises for all city positions, both white and black. The mayor's monthly salary increased from \$60 to \$75. The firemen's pay increased from \$70 to \$90 per month. The two city sextons each received a \$10 raise. Beginning October 1, 1919, Charles's salary increased from \$30 to \$40 per month and the white cemetery sexton's salary increased from \$50 to \$60. The raise was \$5 below what Charles had requested in his petition.⁸

It took another year, but Mr. Lewis kept his promise to leave the job if he did not receive the full raise. When Lewis gave up his sexton duties, he also moved his family from Americus to Buffalo, New York. Their decision to leave Georgia coincided with the first national wave of the Great Migration. From World War I to World War II, more than one million African Americans left southern states in search of a better life in northern cities. Events in Sumter County reflected this larger pattern. The black population of Sumter County fell by 3,953 people (19 percent) between 1910 and 1930. Eight of those men, women, and children who left were in the Lewis family.⁹

It is unclear whether the family found a better life in New York. While Lewis found work as an iron worker in a steel plant, the family did not purchase a home in Buffalo during the Great Depression. Lewis died in Buffalo in the 1930s. Mrs. Lewis and most of her adult daughters continued to live together in that city until at least 1940. When Mrs. Lewis finally sold the house on Oglethorpe Avenue in 1942, it may have cut the family's last tie to Americus.¹⁰

(Published in full in the Americus Times Recorder in 2019) ■

⁷ Minutes of the Mayor and City Council of Americus, Georgia, January 7, 1919, Municipal Building, Americus, Georgia.

⁸ *Ibid*, September 1, 1919.

⁹ Stephanie Christensen, "The Great Migration (1915-1960) Black Past, December 6, 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/great-migration-1915-1960/>. Census data comes from the Social Explorer's data sets of the 1910, 1920, and 1930 federal census.

¹⁰ New York State Archives; Albany, New York; State Population Census Schedules, 1925; Election District: 03; Assembly District: 04; City: Buffalo Ward 07; County: Erie; Page: 10. (See contributor for additional sources.)

GRIFFIN ROSENWALD SCHOOL GIVES FAIRMONT ITS ROOTS AND WINGS

Nedra Deadwyler, Contributor
African American Programs Assistant

The construction of Black residential neighborhoods accelerated in the post-Civil War era and increased through the turn of the century in urban centers. Newly freed Blacks moved to these areas to find work and to escape the surveillance by whites in former plantation districts where sharecropping was the only form of work for them. In the case of Griffin, Georgia, it was a crossroads town with a commercial district—characteristics that were essential in the development of the rural South as it transitioned into an industrial society.

The Fairmont subdivision of Griffin is an example of such an early 20th century Black community in such environs. Allison Dorsey describes Fairmont as a “viable Black community” as one where “racial progress” was the main goal and where “education, employment, religious life, and social activities were the norm.”¹ In her oral history about growing up Black in Griffin circa 1960s, Kenda Fuller Woodard tells of a close-knit community of educators and business owners.² Her childhood home was right across the street from Fairmont. Her babysitter lived next door to Simmons Grocery and across from Mr. Tucker’s house. He was the band director at Fairmont High School.³ Fairmont is south of the railroad tracks that runs through downtown Griffin. The neighborhood began as 100 land-lots which were auctioned off to build homes exclusively for Black families.⁴ Each lot soon became owned by teachers, business owners, and factory workers that grew into a cohesive, self-sustained community.

Founder Gen. Lewis Lawrence Griffin, a former state legislator, railroad business man, and officer in the state militia, purchased 800 acres of land from Bartholomew

1 Dorsey, Allison, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875- 1906*. (Athens GA and London UK: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 2.

2 Fuller-Woodard, Kenda Suzette. “Griffin’s African American Oral History Project”. Interviewed by Art Cain, Jewel Walker-Harps, and Rich Braman, Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens GA 2017. https://kaltura.uga.edu/media/t/1_9jovdvop/73671041 Accessed May 4, 2020.

3 Ibid.

4 Walker-Harps, Jewel. “Fairmont History “. Interviewed by John Cruickshank, Center for Urban Agriculture, University of Georgia Extension, 2015 <https://ugaurbanag.com/fairmont-oral-history-project/> Accessed May 4, 2020.

Still after he estimated that a city built at the crossroads of two railroad lines would become a prosperous town.⁵ Historically, Griffin had a plantation economy, growing “King Cotton.”^{6,7} Likely considered urban by that day’s standards, crossroads towns in the rural South allowed for both whites and enslaved Blacks to buy and sell raw goods and finished materials, and attend worship in proximity.⁸ Griffin, the county seat of Spalding County, was founded in 1840 and later incorporated in 1843. The city has a strong history in both agriculture and the textile industry.⁹ Once the railroad was laid, merchants, plantations, and manufacturing followed and Griffin took shape and became a successful commercial district in middle Georgia.^{10,11}

As the railroad shaped the city, Griffin School is considered the glue that holds the Fairmont neighborhood together. It is a Rosenwald school built in 1929 for Black students in Griffin.¹² “The ‘Griffin Vocational School’ is evidence of an era when African Americans desired quality vocational and educational experiences for their



Griffin Vocational School, circa 1929
Credit: Fisk University Rosenwald Database
(Fair Use/Educational use)



Alumni meet at Griffin School April 2020
Photo credit: Nedra Deadwyler/HPD

5 “Griffin Growing Together,” City of Griffin, accessed May 1, 2020, <http://www.cityofgriffin.com/Home/History.aspx>.

6 “A Neighborhood Community Center Built on the Past: Fairmont Rosenwald School Complex as the Centerpiece for Area Revitalization in Griffin, Georgia,” University of Georgia School of Environmental Design, Center for Community Design and Preservation, 2014 <https://ced.uga.edu/resources/images/2015/08/FAIRMONTCOMMUNITY-GRIFFIN-charrette-2014final-webversion.pdf> Accessed May 1, 2020.

7 “Lewis Olgetree, Griffin, Georgia, August 21, 1936,” Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 4, Georgia, Part 3, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.043/?sp=149> Accessed May 1, 2020.

8 Paterson, David E., “Slavery, Slaves, and Cash in a Georgia Village, 1825–1865.” *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 4 (2009): 879-930. www.jstor.org/stable/27779118. Accessed May 11, 2020.

9 “Spalding County Historical Markers: History of Griffin,” Georgia Info., accessed April 21, 2020, <https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/images/uploads/markers/historygriffingahm.jpg>

10 “History of Griffin,” City of Griffin, <http://www.cityofgriffin.com/Home/History.aspx> Accessed April 21, 2020.

11 “A Neighborhood Community Center Built on the Past.” UGA School of Environmental Design, 2014.

12 Cyriaque, Jeanne. Interview by Nedra Deadwyler. Phone interview. College Park, Georgia. May 8, 2020.

children and their children's children," explains Rosenwald school historian Jeanne Cyriaque.¹³ The name changed to Fairmont High in 1949 until it closed in 1972.¹⁴ Ms. Cyriaque documented Rosenwald and Equalization schools throughout Georgia from 2000 to 2015. Griffin School was the 50th Rosenwald school she located.¹⁵ According to the Rosenwald Fund formula used to build these school, the monies came from the local Black community, the white school authority, and from the fund established by philanthropist Julius Rosenwald.

In the early part of the 20th century, it was typical for Black students to only have access to early education in community churches or "chapel schools".¹⁶ Educator and Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University in Alabama) founder Booker T. Washington believed in the non-confrontational ideology of vocational education as the standard opportunity offered to Blacks.¹⁷ His philosophy of self-help lead to the Tuskegee Institute designs of schools to be built in the rural schools for Black students¹⁸ later published by Tuskegee Institute as *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community*.¹⁹ With his donation, philanthropist and businessman Julius Rosenwald helped extend the building of these school across the rural American South in partnership with Washington to more than 5,000 schools for Black children.^{20, 21} Common characteristics of these Rosenwald schools were "pitched roofs, deep overhangs, porches, and white-washed clapboard siding...unadorned... Shaker-like simplicity...design innovations...[such as] classrooms were separated by movable partitions."²² The classrooms had high ceilings, large, double hung windows for daylighting and cross-ventilation, and an elevated building for cooling.²³

The Griffin School is an eight-room school constructed of polychromatic brick with a number of design features specific to this building, making it the only one of its kind documented.²⁴ The doorways on either side of the school had arched porticos, bringing "great monumentality"

¹³ Cyriaque, Jeanne Interview, May 8, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "A Neighborhood Community Center Built on the Past." UGA, 2014.

¹⁶ Cyriaque Interview, May 8, 2020.

¹⁷ Hoffschwelle, Mary S. "Preserving Rosenwald Schools." Washington, D.C. : The National Trust For Historic Preservation (NTHP), 2012. <https://forum.savingplaces.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=693200ab-b3c9-7ee9-f177-6ed15bcd491b> . Accessed April 30, 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Witold Rybczynski, "Remembering the Rosenwald Schools," *Architect Magazine*, September 16, 2015.

²⁰ Hoffschwelle. "Preserving Rosenwald Schools." NTHP, 2012.

²¹ "A Neighborhood Community Center Built on the Past." UGA, 2014.

²² Rybczynski, Witold. "Remembering the Rosenwald School." *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, September 16, 2015.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "A Neighborhood Community Center Built on the Past." UGA, 2014.

to generally a more simple design.²⁵ Ms. Cyriaque said this embellishment was seen on schools built for white children.²⁶ She said the windows are the main defining feature of a Rosenwald school. Another unique architectural feature of the Griffin school is the "quoins" corners of the brick building. The Fisk University Rosenwald database shows the Griffin school under construction 1928- 1929, on 10 acres of land, and costing a total of \$16,500 to build.²⁷ The funding included \$100 from the Black community, \$13,850 from the public (local white authority), and \$2,550 from the Fund. By 1932, the Rosenwald Fund produced 4,977 schools, 217 teacher homes, and 163 shop buildings across the South totaling \$28,408,520.²⁸ Today, such a building initiative would cost ten times more at \$280,500,000.²⁹

Preservation is an act of evoking memory and is set in values that demonstrate the importance of history. In the case of historic Black schools, they hold keys to preserving stories of early community-building. Like churches, schools commonly remain in the Black built landscape. Ms. Cyriaque noted various actions taken to preserve the Griffin School also known as Fairmont High: completion of a historical narrative; informational meetings with local entities, from the school alumni association to City Parks and Recreation officials to individuals with a vested interest in the school's historical legacy; collaborative effort to find funding and to devise a preservation plan. In 2014 the Center for Community Design and Preservation at the University of Georgia conducted a community design charrette and an initial oral history project. Next, the Department of Economic Development visited the school as part of a tourism assessment.³⁰ Such activities are key in preserving the school as well as its surrounding context—the Fairmont neighborhood.

The Griffin School is one of the 259 Rosenwald Schools that was planned and constructed between 1912 and 1937 in Georgia.³¹ It and the Fairmont community are significant because they tell the story of a people's perseverance and offers buildings that are unique in the education and nurturing of Black children. Preserving Griffin School presents an opportunity to restore the Fairmont community as a powerful foundation from which future generations can soar.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Cyriaque Interview, May 8, 2020.

²⁷ Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database. Nashville, TN, n.d. <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/>. Accessed May 6, 2020.

²⁸ Hoffschwelle. "Preserving Rosenwald Schools." NTHP, 2012.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cyriaque, J. Interview, May 8, 2020.

³¹ Ibid.

ABOUT REFLECTIONS

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ABOUT GAAHPN



Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network

The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) was established in January 1989. It is composed of representatives from neighborhood organizations and preservation groups. GAAHPN was formed in response to a growing interest in preserving the cultural and built diversity of Georgia's African American heritage. This interest has translated into a number of efforts which emphasize greater recognition of African American culture and contributions to Georgia's history. The GAAHPN Steering Committee plans and implements ways to develop programs that will foster heritage education, neighborhood revitalization, and support community and economic development.

The Network is an informal group of over 3,000 people who have an interest in preservation. Members are briefed on the status of current and planned projects and are encouraged to offer ideas, comments and suggestions. The meetings provide an opportunity to share and learn from the preservation experience of others and to receive technical information through workshops. Members receive a newsletter, *Reflections*, produced by the Network. Visit the Historic Preservation Division website at www.georgiashpo.org. Preservation information and previous issues of *Reflections* are available online. Membership in the Network is free and open to all.

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