

Black History in Pickens County
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This series of articles is devoted to the history of the Black residents of Pickens County.

Dr. Kathleen Thompson has completed extensive research including; archives and library investigation, interviews of local residents, and searches of early newspapers.

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Black in Pickens: Part I **Slavery and the Civil War in Pickens County**

1860 Slave Schedule

The first Black residents of Pickens County were of course slaves. Today some Black residents prefer not to use the term African-American. "I'm an American and I've never been to Africa," a local resident told me. Yet the early slaves did have a sense of being African. Nelson resident Willie Mae Weaver explained that her great grandmother was taken from Africa at age seven and remembered aspects of village life.

In Pickens County a total of 241 slave individuals were owned by thirty-six local landowners. They comprised a total of 5% of the counties population. Of these 29 were recorded as "mulatto" or mixed race. By comparison Richmond County (Augusta, Georgia) had 7,812 slaves and 344 whites. In 1960 the state of Georgia was 25% Negro.

Of the thirty-six slave holders the majority had 8 or less slaves. Those with more slave individuals included James Simmons (13), Andrew Blackwell (12), Thomas Murphy (14) and Hugh Briants (17). By far the largest groups of slaves worked for Samuel Tate (31), and William Tate (25). Each of the Tate's had five slave houses where their workers lived. At this time the marble industry had not developed so the slaves accomplished farm work.

Luke Tate, in his book *History of Pickens County*, records that in 1839 "A number of negro slaves were members of the Talking Rock Baptist Church along with their owners."

Pickens, Slavery, and the Civil War

In 1860 the mountain counties of Georgia presented a special problem for Governor Brown and those who wanted to succeed from the union. With few slaves they did not have the same incentives toward secession as the large slave holding counties. Pickens citizens elected two reprehensive, both of whom voted against secession. One of these was James Simmons, owner of 13 slaves. Upon arriving at the convention delegates from thirteen mountain counties, including Pickens County, wanted the vote given directly to the people but the measure was defeated. Despite opposition from the mountain counties, Georgia succeeded January 19th of 1861. While mountain representatives tried to prevent Georgia withdrawing from the Union in the end most, including Simmons signed the final secession document.

Pickens County was divided with both Confederate and Union supporters. The last United States flag to be flown in Georgia after the secession convention's vote to withdraw flew in Jasper. For several weeks after secession the flag waved in defiance. Other counties encouraged Governor Brown to order state troops to forcibly take down the flag, but he refused. Within a month the flag was removed by those who placed it aloft.

Many who had been opposed secession joined Confederate units when Union troops entered the South. In all, 1,427 men from Pickens fought for the Confederacy and

253 fought in the Union Army. Before the war was over a few even fought for both armies. John Darnell was among those who flew the Union flag at the beginning of the war. In 1862, he was in the Pickens County Militia of the 107th Georgia Militia and later the 9th Georgia Cavalry, both Confederate units. But by 1864, he enlisted in the 5th Tennessee U.S. Mounted Infantry, fighting for the Union.

The 1870 Census, Where have all the Slaves Gone?

In 1860 slaves were counted not in the census but in a separate “schedule,” reflecting their status as property. Five years after the Civil War under Reconstruction colored individuals were counted on the United States Census roles.

Between 1860 and 1870 forty-percent (96) of the former slaves left Pickens County. Where they went and why is difficult to know. Those who stayed continued as farm workers, often for their former owners. Others worked as domestic help in White homes. While they were no longer owned, their economic status showed little improvement. The Black population in Pickens did grow in the future, but at this time many free colored families chose to leave.

Black History in Pickens: Part 2

Negro Workers at the Georgia Marble Company and Jasper

A year after the arrival of the railroad in Tate and Jasper, the Georgia Marble Company was chartered in 1884. A 1902 account in the Atlanta Constitution newspaper records that “Negroes have been employed in the marble industry for 15 years.” (since 1887). That would be before Colonel Sam gained control of the Company in 1905. The article also refers to the negro workforce as holding jobs as “workers in the rubbing beds and as truck men.”

Old photos, preserved on a state run website called Vanishing Georgia, document the work of Black employees. A photo taken in 1890 of the entire workforce of the Blue Ridge Marble Company in Nelson clearly shows Negro workers. Three photos, shot in the 1930s of quarry workers in Tate and Marble Hill, confirms Negro work crews doing tasks such as “attaching cable to a marble block to be lifted out the quarry.” Teams of mules and men are seen in another photo and include a Black employee. These teams transferred marble from the stock yard to the plant and back.

Beginning in 1906 Willie Sanford Green (father of Willie Mae Weaver) worked at the quarry. One of his duties was to check on Sunday afternoon to make sure that the pumps were properly removing ground water from the quarry. One day Willie arrived at the work site and found that the creek had flooded swamping the pumps and filling the quarry. He started the sirens in order to get help from other employees. The sirens always signaled an emergency such as a home fire, accident at the company, or other serious problems.

By the 1930s Colonel Sam Tate had developed the Georgia Marble Company to a size that required 1,030 workers. It is estimated that 15% of that work force was Negro. The Black population of Pickens County in 1930 included 426 Negro males counted on the census. Many of these individuals worked for Colonel Sam at the Georgia Marble Company.

As an employee of the Marble Company family men were provided housing. In fact one was not allowed to buy land and build ones own home if you worked for Colonel Sam Tate. According to Steve Griffith, Sam Tate believed, “If he owned the land, he had the power to remove someone he considered undesirable at any time.”

In addition to family housing, single Black men could stay at a boarding house for colored workers that was provided by the Georgia Marble Company. It was located in the Lower Whippoorwill section, near the creek and quarries. According to Nelson resident Willie Mae Weaver, many of the Black men were from Dahlonga. They would walk home to their families in Lumpkin County on Friday and walk back Sunday afternoon.

When Colonel Sam Tate took over the marble company in 1905 he began recruiting Black workers from other areas of Georgia. The first employees came from Lumpkin County. Willie Mae Weaver’s father, Willie Sanford Green, walked to Tate to become a quarry worker around 1906. She explained that in rural Lumpkin County the only choice was to work at farming. In Tate the pay was better and one could get company housing for their families. Willie Green met Kittie Mae Roach, married her, and

moved from the workers boarding house to a company home in Upper Whippoorwill (Near today's Head Start.).

Additionally Black workers from the areas around Sandersville, and Milledgeville, Georgia came to Tate to labor with marble and to Jasper to work in the sawmill industry. They heard of employment opportunities from relatives and friends who had already moved to Pickens County. Roderick Moore's father moved to Jasper because an uncle had already relocated and got a position at a sawmill. One of the reasons for this migration was the lack of industry and jobs in rural South Georgia

At the pink marble mansion Colonel Sam, his sister Flora, and brother Luke were attended to by several Black employees. An ex slave, Jeff Strickland, was Colonel Sam's first valet and lived in servant's quarters in the basement of the house.

Three Black families lived nearby in company homes build on orders from Colonel Sam. Just outside the gate of the Tate House one can still locate what was once a residence. It has recently been expanded for use as part of events held at the house. This was the home of the Roach family. James Roach was the chef at the Tate Mansion. He and his wife Dora raised their children in this home including; James (Chester), Mary Lois, Grady, Preston, and Truman. Son Preston Roach worked for Steve Tate until Steve's death in 1958. Preston worked managing the Tate property at Lake Sconti (Today's Big Canoe). Truman Roach also worked for the Georgia Marble Company.

While the home no longer exists, just up the road from the mansion toward Smokey Hollow, on the left, was the residence of Temp Echols and his wife Mattie Frances. Temp was Colonel Sam's chauffeur and Mattie was a school teacher.

The Collins family lived in a company house on the opposite side of the road from the Echols family. George Collins was a brick and stone mason and carpenter for Sam Tate and was foreman of the crew that built the mansion. His wife Katherine worked at the Tate House as housekeeper taking care of Sam, Miss Flora, and brother. When George's health precluded stone work, Colonel Sam had a store constructed in Smokey Hollow for George to run. The "Stand" was a landmark in the community for years (More about the Stand in a later installment.)

African-American citizens have worked in Pickens County for as far back as the 1830s, when they were slaves to Cherokee landowner James Daniels. In the marble industry Black workers were so valued that Colonel Sam Tate sought out company employees in South Georgia and other locations. The Tate family had a group of loyal employees that lived near the mansion. In Jasper Black workers worked in the sawmill industry, at the Roper Hospital, in local homes, and other places. While the numbers and percentages of Black residents was and still is small, they have been and are a valuable part of the community.

Almost three hundred old photos of Pickens County can be viewed and downloaded on the Vanishing Georgia website. The Vanishing Georgia Photographic Collection of almost 18,000 images is the result of a Georgia Archives project begun in the mid-1970s to locate and copy historically significant photographs held by individuals throughout Georgia. <http://cdm.sos.state.ga.us/cdm4/vanishing.php>

Black History in Pickens County: Part 3

Black Communities in Tate and Jasper

The Black communities in Tate and Jasper were quite different, each with their own traits. From the turn of the century to the 1950s Tate was a “company town.” One lived in a company owned rental house assigned to you by your employer, shopped at the company store, and if you were a kid your dad worked for Georgia Marble or a business dependent on patronage from company employees. In these ways the Tate experience was no different for Black or White residents. By contrast Jasper’s Black residents owned their own land and homes and lived in clusters around the town’s neighborhoods. Employment for Jasper’s Black residents included a diversity of jobs.

Tate

All housing for Georgia Marble employees, Black and White alike, was rental. Families were assigned homes in specific neighborhoods. As a result all of the homes in the Black communities in Tate were company owned. Tate’s Black communities began at the Pink Marble Mansion and over time included eight locations, all with specific names.

As was in the village of Tate, these were safe communities. A retired teacher told me that after out of town school trips she would return teen students to their homes late at night in the Hollow and other communities with no fear or concern for her or their safety.

These communities and all of Tate thrived from the 1920s to the 1950s. Georgia Marble began to sell off their company houses in 1952 at very reasonable prices to employees. By then some of the homes in the Black sections were unoccupied. People had moved away to find other work when the marble industry began declining. Houses fell into disrepair and were eventually torn down by the company. When I visited Smoky Hollow in 2009 there were two old abandoned homes. Since then both have caved in and are no longer visible. Today only Smoky Hollow exists as a Black community.

Black Communities in Tate

Lonesome City was located off of Highway 53, across the road from the Tate House, and deep in the woods. Families living here predominately carried the last name Patrick. Reverend Bill Patrick was raised here. In the 1910s into the 1930s this was a Black settlement. By the 1950s this had become a White farming area. Due to job losses in the marble industry, Black families had moved away.

Sandy Bottoms was located just to the right of Lonesome Dove, and along the creek. Armstrong was a common family name. Like Lonesome City Blacks moved away and the area reverted to farming.

The Rock Cut: At the Tate House turn right. As you turn and near the railroad track you can see that rocks were blasted and cut to allow rail construction. Several homes were located here. In the 1930s the families of employees Jim Roach, Murphy Moore, Tim Echols, and Joe Stephens resided at the Rock Cut.

Mud Head was a White community adjacent to Smokey Hollow and above the Miracle Fellowship Baptist Church (Built 1897). Here seven or eight houses were occupied by the families of White employees. There was a “mud pond” located here, hence the name. Another road led into this settlement from behind the Tate School gym. Children from Mudhead played with youngsters from Smokey Hollow. Emma Julia Washington’s sister had a friend in Mudhead and the girls would sleep over at each other’s homes.

Smokey Hollow: Just past the railroad tracks Smokey Hollow was the oldest and largest of the Black communities and most widely known. A local resident noted, “There were so many people living here and visiting you couldn’t stir them with a stick.” Today three families live in the Hollow, but in the 1920s and 30s almost thirty homes were provided by the Company. Additionally a store, “The Stand,” sold goods to White and Black customers.

Of all of the settlements, only Smoky Hollow had a bit of a rough reputation and was considered by some as a less desirable place to raise a family. That reputation was known in the White community. Pickens was a dry county and liquor could be bought in the Hollow. Spirits could also be bought in White sections across Pickens County made by local moonshiners.

The name Smoky Hollow was explained by a resident in an article in the Pickens Progress, “In the winter the smoke from all of the fires settled like a cloud in the hollow. We only had wood and coal to burn and it was a smoky place to live.”

According to Willie Mae Weaver and Stephen Griffeth, in his book *The Many Facets of Tate, Georgia*, White employees of the Georgia Marble Company lived in the Smokey Hollow community in the 1910s and early 1920s. Mrs. Weaver can remember her mother talking about a short period of time when both Black and White families lived in the Hollow. “According to my Mother the people got along well. At one point a young White child died of a disease. The whole community, Black and White, mourned together. At the funeral they cried on each other’s shoulders they were that close. This was when Colonel Sam was in Europe seeking furniture for his mansion (Between 1922-1924). Shortly after he returned he began moving the White families into company homes in other sections of Tate which he had recently established.”

New Town was on the road to today’s Head Start, (once the Tri City High School) just before and up from Mt. Calvary Church. There were about five houses. There also was and still is a White neighborhood of beautiful homes in Tate on New Town Street, but that is a different place.

Upper Whippoorwill (Or Wipowill or Wipp-Poor-Will) and Lower Whippoorwill were built after Smokey Hollow at a time when the company was expanding and hiring new employees. Upper Whippoorwill was between New Town, and where the Pickens Training School was located (Now Head Start). The communities were named after the birds that sang sweetly in the afternoons and evenings. Willie Mae Weaver and her husband Howard Haywood Weaver began their family life here in a company home. She recalled that the area was very hilly, and residents had to haul their water from “the spout,” a spring in a rock. Colonel Sam Tate had a boarding house built here for the Black teachers in this community which was managed by Homer and Lula Green. Later they moved back to Dahlongega and Ike and Sally Lou Anderson took over management of the facility. The building is still standing.

Lower Whippoorwill was close to Head Start on the west side and a little way down the hill. It was almost level with the Georgia Marble Company. The homes could be located via a narrow dirt road that started at the Georgia Marble Company. No roads connected the Upper and Lower communities, only walking trails. There was a company boarding house here for Black male employees. It was run by Harrison and Katie Roach Anderson. George and Katie Collins raised their family in a house at this location as did the Welch, Goodmond, Anderson, Davis, and Castleberry families.

Brown Town was not named Brown because of the color of the resident's skin but for the brown color the houses were painted. This cluster of homes was located just above the quarry and along the creek. Brown Town was surrounded by woods and was about two miles below the White Methodist Church. About eight houses were here, lived in by families with names including Brown, Collins, Anderson and Castleberry.

“The Stand” in Smoky Hollow

George and Katherine (Kitty) Collins worked for Colonel Sam Tate for many years. George was a stonemason and supervised the building of the Pick Marble Mansion and she was the Tate's housekeeper. Their son Olin had lung problems ruling out military service as well as a job in the marble quarries or production plants. Because of the close association with the Tate family, Colonel Sam had a store built in Smokey Hollow for George and Katherine's son Olin. The Stand, as it was called, was located just past Miracle Church on the right. Olin Collins and his wife Julia ran the store together while they were raising their family.

Emma Julia Collins Washington remembers her father's store in Smoky Holler. She explained that because marble industry employees were expected to shop at the company store he had more White customers than Black. On Saturday mornings and sometimes Friday night he would pack up orders from area families and deliver their groceries on Saturday. “My father sold meats and produce, canned goods, feed for stock animals, just about anything you needed. There was penny candy for the children and soda pops. You could buy gasoline for your automobile from an old fashioned hand pump. Kerosene could also be bought. On Fridays he would get a shipment of fish which would arrive at the depot. We seldom left our community so having the job of fetching the fish shipment was thrilling. I would walk to the depot with a friend and proudly bring the fish back to my father.”

In addition to a grocery store there was a room with a juke box where one could dance. Julia Collins ran a cafe in another section of the store. One could get sandwiches, hamburgers, and the like. On Sundays she served a full dinner with biscuits, chickens, greens, and more. A barber shop was also included and the barber was Chester Roach.

The Stand was opened in the 1930s and closed in the late 1980s when Mr. Collin's health precluded continuing working. By then the store's business had begun to decline because the marble industry was not expanding and people in the Black communities had moving away. Eventually the building deteriorated and was removed by the company. Olin Collins died in 1985.

Nelson

Nelson had a back community connected to the marble industry. These were also company homes here which were centered around where the water tower stands. Nelson

has the distinction of having a county line bisect the town. One part is in Pickens County and the other in Cherokee County. The line bisected the Black community. The natural result would have been that some of the Black children would go to school in Pickens and others in Cherokee. However, the nearest Cherokee County school was an all White school in Ball Ground. There was no school for Black children. As a consequence the Cherokee County Board of Education paid a fee to the Pickens school system to educate their Black children at the Pickens Training School (later Tri City High School).

Jasper

In contrast to Tate, Black families in Jasper owned their own homes and land. Clusters of Black families were scattered among White homeowners. Compared to Tate, Jasper's Black population was much smaller. Emma Julia Washington lived in Tate until she was fifteen when her father and mother purchased land in Jasper and moved their family. In explaining the difference she noted that Tate was a close knit community where everyone knew each other and had the Marble Company in common. Jasper's Black community was, compared to Tate, more independent. They lived apart, and worked at many different jobs making the situation quite different.

Jasper's Black residents worked at a diversity of jobs. Many of the men were employed in the sawmill industry. Women were employed by well to do professionals as housekeepers and nannies to their children. At the Roper Medical Clinic in Jasper several Black residents were employed by doctors E.A. and C.J. Roper as orderlies and nursing attendants. An early photo shows Aarn McHan, Zillar Barrow (female), and Edward Pitts are seen. Bessie Moore, Charlie Washington, and Frances Chapman also worked at the hospital. James Farrow was a school bus driver for the school system.

When speaking to local people, Vonce Farrow is often mentioned with great fondness. Mr. Farrow worked for the Jasper Banking Company for 44 years. A hard working and industrious man he was also employed at a dry cleaning establishment. Today he is 80 years old and happily retired.

Today

The homes in Smokey Hollow and the other Black Tate communities are gone, survived only by good memories and a handful of families still living there. Today people of all races choose where to live with no restrictions, and that is a good thing.

Reference: *The Many Facets of Tate, Georgia*, Stephen E. Griffeth, 1998
Pickens County, Georgia, Heritage, 1853-1995
Unpublished document and chart listing the communities that existed in 1931
Interviews Willie Mae Weaver, Emma Julia and Eddie Washington

Black History in Pickens County: Part 4

Racial Violence in North Georgia 1900-1930

Led or misled by their leadership, cities and communities make choices. In the following historical narrative the choice was between hate and tolerance. This is the story of two communities, each taking a different path, each with differing outcomes.

Cumming, Georgia (1902-1912)

Hidden in the bottom of his parents' wagon, eight-year-old Olin Collins was terrified and had been since the troubles started weeks ago. Whitecappers and Klansmen had vowed to drive out every Negro family in Forsyth County. They had burned houses and shot into homes during the reign of terror. At night Olin and his brother Clarence laid under quilts, eyes wide open, waiting, worried, and frightened.

His mother and father loved their home. They had a chicken house, and hens who laid eggs, and it was Olin's job to collect the eggs. The farm was a nice place and none of them wanted to leave. They were a peaceable family, troubling no one. Then, late at night, shots were fired into a neighbor's home. Days later another friend's house was dynamited and set afire. Nightly his parents fretted over what to do. Nightly he and Clarence lay in bed, close enough to the kitchen that if they strained they could hear their parent's worried discussions. Finally George and Katie Collins felt they had no choice. For the sake of their children they had to leave, not in a few days, but tomorrow.

That morning Papa told Olin and Clarence to collect their clothes and a few toys. Mama tied the items in a blanket and placed it in the bottom of their wagon. George and Katherine chose a few pieces of furniture and necessities, all that they could put on the wagon and still make a speedy exit. No time or chance to sell the house. The horses were hitched and they began the most terrifying journey of Olin's whole life.

Olin and Clarence lay down in the bottom of the wagon. Before they were hidden Papa said, "Now boys, no matter what don't make a sound. Y'all hear, not a sound, no matter what happens to us." "Yes Papa," they returned, wondering if they could do that should trouble come. Then Mama pulled the blanket over them and Papa began piling furniture atop. Olin knew he would never see their house again.

Heading out they took a road west. The boys could hear the muffled voices of their parents. "Please George hurry up, make the horses go faster," Katie would implore. "I'm going as fast as I can," George Collins replied, fear evident to Olin from the tone of his daddy's voice. When they arrived in Cherokee County they were refugees, people without a home or jobs. They were not alone. A newspaper account from that year described refugee camps along the road between Cumming and Gainesville. On all of the roads leading out of Cumming Black refugee families camped in groups for protection. Dazed and shocked they were unsure of what to do next.

Things did get better. George Collins was hired as Colonel Sam Tate's chauffeur. It is not known how they met, if Sam Tate met and hired George, or George came to Tate and applied for a job. Either way, the family moved to Tate, and lived in a company

house, built for them not far from the Pink Marble Mansion. Olin would grow up safely in Tate where he eventually became chauffeur to Luke Tate and later ran “The Stand,” a community store in Smoky Hollow.

The searing memory of fleeing Cummings never left Olin Collins. It was so painful he was unable to describe the events to his children. When all but one of his children were in college, married or had moved away, a reporter from the Pickens Progress called on him. He asked Olin Collins to tell the story of their troubles in Forsyth County. Fear and pain made that impossible. “I can’t,” he replied. But when the reporter left he told the story, only once, to daughter Emma Julia Collins and never spoke of it again. Emma Julia Collins Washington still remembers the day her father shared his story. “I cried when he told me.”

The results of the censuses from 1910 and 1920 show the extent of the forced removal of blacks from Forsyth County. The 1910 census reported that Forsyth County had a total population of 10,839 residents; and of these residents 1,098 were black, accounting for nearly ten percent of the county’s population. In the 1920 census, a total of 30 blacks were reported to reside in Forsyth County. That accounted for less than .3 percent of the total population. By 1930 the number was 17. The Collins family and others who fled to Pickens County never went back.

What happened to the property of families like the Collins who lost their homes? Cox Newspapers reporter Elliot Jaspin traced land deeds and tax rolls back to 1912. “He found proof that the majority of the property owned by the banished African Americans was never sold, but instead taken by their white neighbors. Called adverse possession, this process is partly statutory and partly common law, and involves the legal acquisition of a title to a property without having to pay for it. In the case of the land in Forsyth County, white residents simply held the property belonging to black residents following their banishment. In the state of Georgia, the period of adverse possession is seven years. After this period of time, whites legally owned the land.” www.pbs.org

By Contrast, Tate, Georgia

A report in the Atlanta Constitution indicates that in 1902 Pickens County experienced attacks on their Black residents (see accompanying article). These racially motivated crimes provoked a very different response from the leadership of the Georgia Marble Company whose workforce was 15 % Black. Tate was not incorporated and lacked a mayor or police chief. The Marble Company and Colonel Sam Tate were responsible for all aspects of safety for the town, thus their response was the “official” one.

It is clear in the accompanying article in the Atlanta Constitution (1902) that the leadership of the Tate community chose a different course, one in which the protection of their Black residents was paramount. Based on the dates and church records, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church may have been the church that was burned. This would have been the two-story building that preceded the current building. The Marble Company provided a replacement for the destroyed building.

The story of Colonel Sam’s response to racial attacks is best described in Stephen Griffith’s Book (see accompanying article). Not only did Sam Tate decry the attacks, but

he provided a way to protect the Black families of Tate. In no uncertain terms he stood up to injustice. The outcome was quite different than in other Georgia communities of the time that experienced racial unrest. The mob of Whitecappers from Dawson County never arrived and Tate continued to be a place where Black people could live and work.

No Black citizens were forced to leave Tate, moreover refugees from the violence in Cumming were taken in. Willie Mae Weaver recalled that several refugee families fled from Cumming to Tate. "They didn't have relatives here, they were just getting away. They got jobs at the marble quarries and stayed. None of those families are left now, they have drifted away." Roderick Moore of Jasper explained that his Aunt Lillie Mae and Uncle John Knox fled from Cumming and came to Jasper where they had family.

Racial Attacks Spread

The first third of the Twentieth Century in North Georgia were traumatic ones for Black citizens, punctuated by period of violence and Black displacement. Atlanta Constitution December 8, 1915, *Two More Blazes in Cherokee County Add to Reign of Fear*, Canton, GA., – "Today's fires bring the total number of conflagrations in Cherokee within the past three days to nine. Believing there is a campaign to drive them from the county, the Negroes of this section are in a panic and many have left for other communities." In Cobb County, the Gainesville News reported on Oct. 16, 1912, that notices were posted reading "Hurry up Niggers and leve this town if you don't leve you will wish you hadder got out." At the end of December 1912, under a headline that read "Georgia In Terror Of Night Riders," The New York Times reported that "an organized effort is being made to drive every negro out of North Georgia counties."

Jasper and Ball Ground

There is an account of heroism that was told to me by Reverend Charles Walker during a visit at his home in 2009. Unfortunately, I failed to ask him the date of the events or how he knew the story. Reverend Walker related the story during a conversation about the events in Cumming in 1912, so I assumed the narrative dated from that time.

Since his passing I have tried with no success to locate someone who could corroborate the story. With this in mind I will share his story. If anyone has heard about the events from a source other than Rev. Walker or has any other information, please contact me via e-mail or phone.

Racial unrest spread from Forsyth County and became a problem in Canton and Ball Ground. Not only were Whitecappers harassing their local Black residents, but some wanted to "cleanse" adjacent communities of their Black population. A group of vigilantes and Klan members were organizing a night run to Jasper where they would run the towns Black residents attempt to intimidate.

Word of the plans reached Jasper and terrified local Black families. Jasper's Black population was considerably smaller than that of Tate, consisting of only four or five families. Several of the families worked for or knew Mrs. Julia Roach Howell. She lived on Main Street next to today's Pickens Progress offices. After she was widowed she

lived in the house on Main Street alone for 45 years. To help her she employed several Black workers. After her death the Howell home was torn down and replaced by today's parking lot.

Julia Howell is said to have chosen to shelter the frightened Black families in her home. Moreover, she sent a message to the angry mob that was forming in Ball Ground. The message was simple, direct and firm. "If you want to harm our Black families you will have to come here and shoot me first." You see Mrs. Julia Howell was White and the vigilantes were not going to harm an elderly, prominent, widow.

A second story about racially motivated harassment and violence dates to a later period, sometime in the 1930s, and was related to me by Coach Roy Cowart. Roy grew up in Ball Ground where his father ran a sawmill. His Dad, Harold Cowart, was acquainted with, and a friend of a sawmill worker by the name of Velpo Smith. Velpo had moved to Georgia from Alabama. The two families lived near each other on the road to Nelson in Cherokee County. Problems started developing with threats by local rabble rousers that they would run all of the Black residents out of Ball Ground. Dynamiting homes was one of the planned acts of violence that Harold Cowart heard about. Concerned about Velpo, he went to him and advised that he move out of Ball Ground. In fact, shortly after the warning Black homes were damaged by dynamite.

That advice was taken by Velpo Smith who quickly moved to Jasper. His name is familiar to many older residents here in Pickens County. Velpo was the "Go to" man for the Black community. If there were problems or news needing to be gotten out Velpo would be contacted and he would get the word to Jasper's Black residents and the Black leadership in Tate.

In Conclusion

Choices made by individuals and communities in Pickens County have shaped the character of the place. In Forsyth County the Collins family met violence and hatred. At Tate they were able to lead a peaceful, productive, and respected life. Why, because Colonel Sam Tate made a choice and his community stood by him. Harold Cowart chose to warn Velpo Smith. In Jasper Velpo filled a leadership role, as a well known, and respected man. No community is without hatred or misdeeds. Even so Pickens County residents can be proud of the choices made by those who lived here during difficult times.

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Historic Black Schools in Pickens County Part 5

As was the case with many early schools, churches served a dual role, church on Sunday and school classes on weekdays. In the 1880s Friendship Baptist Church was organized and met in a two-story frame building which served both as a church and school. The Negro school in Nelson was housed in the same building that was used by Pilgrim Baptist Church.

In Tate Colonel Sam and the Georgia Marble Company were responsible for all of the schools, Black and White. The company provided the building, and had a boarding house where teachers resided. Sam was very concerned about the education of children in Tate. He was also very particular about his teachers and personally hired them. Of course there were separate White and Negro boarding houses for single teachers.

Pickens County Training School

The Pickens County Training School was provided by the Georgia Marble Company and located in the Upper Whippowill community between Tate and Nelson. The Head Start Building is there today. The Training School provided an education for students in grades 1-11. That high school ended after three years was the norm in Georgia until the early 1950s. In 1950 the Pickens Training School was accredited with 6 teachers and had 130 students. The school was run by the Georgia Marble Company until 1954 when the Pickens County Board of Education took over responsibility for all Pickens County Schools.

Tri-Cities High School

In 1957 colored schools in Nelson and Jasper were consolidated with the Training School. At that point the name changed to Tri-Cities High School or Tri-City Elementary. Consolidation meant that children from Nelson and Jasper were bused to school and that all of the Negro children attended the same school. Tri-City operated for another ten years and was closed due to school integration in 1967.

The first principal was Mr. McCloud, followed by Mr. Archibald. The last principal was B. C. Brown. Professor Brown was murdered at an Atlanta restaurant while serving as principal. Due to the tragedy his wife, then a teacher and assistant principal at the school, took over as principal. Lena Brown became a legendary leader, at Tri City, and later for her leadership during integration. There were a number of teachers, including Mrs. Brown, Willie Mae Weaver, and Mary Lois Roach Moore, who taught at Pickens County Training School, Tri-City, and Pickens High School or Tate Elementary.

Separate but Equal?

*"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Written by Chief Justice Earl Warren who wrote the Opinion for *Brown v. Board of Education*.*

The Supreme Court settled the question in 1954. But that begs a second question, Did the Pickens County Board of Education provide equal facilities, books, and

equipment to Black and White students alike? Yes and No. Teachers at Tri-City were excellent and the facility acceptable. But there were inequalities in other areas.

Textbooks were an issue mentioned in many of my interviews. Several former students recalled that the same hand me down Biology textbooks were used for three years of high school. When the children of Emma Julia Collins Washington were attending Tri-City she was working for a local doctor. Emma Julia often helped the family's children study. She was shocked when she compared the textbooks used at Tri-City with those provided in White Schools. Texts used by her children were less advanced, out of date, and ragged. Her son Michael Collins explained that science equipment was also lacking. "There was no gym," he remembered. We had a winning girls basketball team, but they practiced and played games outdoors." There was no baseball or football, only boys and girls basketball. When we transferred to Pickens High School during integration the differences between what we had at Tri-City were like night and day." Michael concluded, "At Tri-County we got a good basic education from intelligent teachers. But what we received, compared to the White schools was not equal."

Pickens Compared to Other Schools in North Georgia

While Black schooling in Pickens County lacked total equality, it substantially better than what was provided in neighboring counties. Gilmer and Fannin County provided no high school for their Negro children. In 1976 I interviewed a former Fannin School Superintendent, Travis Guthrie, who explained the school board's reasoning. In Blue Ridge there was a 1-8th grade school, the Blue Ridge Colored School at Mt. Calvary Church. In fact local resident Willie Mae Weaver taught at the school for her first two years as an educator.

No accommodations were made for Negro high school students in Fannin County until the late 1940s when the teacher at the Colored School pleaded that she had a female student who was brilliant and should be encouraged to attain more education. Rather than build on to the school or hire another teacher, the Board of Education devised a plan. The young woman could be driven daily to the Pickens County Training School in Tate. Given the conditions of roads, such a ride could easily be over two hours each way. Alternatively she could live with relatives that had a Negro school and the Fannin Board of Education would pay for her room and board. She, and others after her, chose to board with family. Mr. Guthrie added that he always attended the student's graduation at the out-of-town schools they attended.

Having written and edited five books of history centered in Fannin County I have concluded that such ill treatment of children contributed to the decline of the Black population in Blue Ridge. The 1900 census of Blue Ridge recorded 182 Black residents, or 15% of the town. Over the years the community shrank to only a few when I interviewed resident in 1975. Long time resident Edna Dickey remembered that many families moved rather than send their high school students to live with relatives.

A high school education was not available to students in Gilmer County. For many years the Roberts family children, who lived near Ellijay, were driven to the Tri-City School by their father. All of the children graduated from Tri-City High School before integration.

Children from Ball Ground also attended the Pickens Training School, and later Tri-City. An arrangement was brokered between the Pickens County Board of Education and the Cherokee County Board whereby Cherokee paid Pickens to educate students who lived in Ball Ground rather than build a Negro school. A bus transported the Cherokee students to Tate.

Negro education in Pickens had flaws, but every child was provided an opportunity for an education from elementary to high school. Many Black students from Pickens attended college and achieved in fields like education and business. Michael Collins went on and graduated from Reinhardt College. He recently retired as a detective with the Cherokee County Sheriff's Department. A pastor for many years, he is continuing his ministry. I asked him, besides his parents, who influenced him growing up. The list was long, too long for this article. He included members of Calvary Baptist Church, as well as teachers and coaches, White and Black. Michael was smart enough to observe inequality as a teen, and smart enough to appreciate the many people in the community that made his success possible.

References

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Michael Collins, interview, 2011, October

Emma Julia Collins, interview, 2011, September

Pickens County, Georgia, Heritage, 1853-1995

Black History in Pickens County: Part 6 **Historic Black Churches**

In Appalachia churches are the heart of community. They provide spiritual guidance, fellowship, and support in times of need. Each of Pickens County's four historic Black churches have been in existence for over one hundred years. Mt. Calvary, in Tate, was established in 1886 while the Tate Methodist Episcopal Church, now Miracle Fellowship Holiness Church, was built in 1887 or possibly a year or two later. Friendship Baptist Church was founded in the 1880s making this congregation the oldest. Black church in Pickens County. Started in 1910, and now 101 years old, Pilgrim Baptist Church in Nelson is the youngest of the four. All have ties to the marble industry and the Tate family, having had land or parts of their facilities donated by the Georgia Marble Company.

History of Mount Calvary Baptist Church **Contributed by Mrs. Willie Mae Weaver**

From *The Many Facets of Tate, Georgia*, by Stephen E. Griffeth

A Baptist Church for Negroes was organized in Tate, Pickens County, Georgia, by Reverend J. N. Jennings. The church was given the honor of being named by a woman, a member of a neighboring church, Mrs. Lucy Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong saw fit to bestow upon this church the name, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, a name which served as an inspiration to early members and which has grown dear to many generations in Tate, Georgia.

The organization of this church took place in a school building a few hundred yards from the present structure at the turn of the hill leading to Smoky Hollow. This building was destroyed by fire. The young church, heroic in spirit determined to go forward under God. Hence, they worshipped under a brush arbor without a shepherd, inviting ministers as opportunity offered, praying and working together, and the good Lord blessed their efforts.

In 1903-04 Deacon Jeff Strickland, assisted by Deacon Sam King and others, laid plans for the present house of worship. The plans were successful. The church is in the shape of a cross.

Mr. Jeff Strickland, an ex-slave, was Colonel Tate's valet. One night Colonel Sam got into a terrible brawl which was very frightening. Mr. Strickland came to his aide and he credited him with saving his life. Colonel Sam was very deeply affected by the courageousness of Mr. Strickland's help and wanted to do something very special for him. Since Mr. Strickland was a Baptist and a deacon in the church and he knew they needed a church building, Colonel Sam chose this way of showing his appreciation by helping build Mt. Calvary Baptist Church. Mrs. Bell Strickland, Jeff Strickland's second wife, was the first Sunday School teacher at Mt. Calvary. Colonel Sam Tate, the late president of The Georgia Marble Company, stood by this church with his money, advice and influence. Ever serving in the spirit of Christ, he proved himself to be a Christian philanthropist.

The church's first pastor, Reverend Lloyd, was called to the pastorship, and after a few years was followed by Reverend Tuggle. Under Reverend Tuggle's administration,

Brother John O. Stephens, Robert Hamilton, and Augustus Hamilton were ordained as deacons and Brother Earl Patrick was licensed to preach. During Tuggle's tenure the Senior Mission, Baptist Young People's Union, and the Junior Mission were organized.

The next pastor, Rev. W. H. Ferrell, who organized the Usher Board, and under his leadership the church joined State and National conventions, as well as the Foreign Mission Board.

The church building was enlarged when Rev. J. J. Watson led the congregation. The wings were expanded and a choir stand added. The Georgia Marble Company donated a pulpit. From 1942 to 1949, Reverend G. P. McKinney led the church. While he directed the congregation, the church was remodeled with the addition of hardwood floors, new bathrooms, pews, pulpit furniture, a new piano, and a central heating system. Homecoming and Vacation Bible School were established as events that are still looked forward to with great anticipation.

Between 1959 and 1960 Reverend E. H. Mitchell served as Shepherd of the Flock followed by Rev. E. R. Davie. During Rev. Davie's tenure additional bathrooms were installed and the dining room added. In 1979 he resigned to become the Director of Black Church Relations for the Southern Baptist Convention.

For the next seven years Rev. Paul Reynolds was pastor of the church. During that time the building was again renovated and central air conditioning was added. Other subsequent pastors have included Rev. Gregory Smith (1988-1991), and Pastor Leland Jones. Reverend Charles Morgan is the current pastor. This is his third year of serving the church with diligence and stirring preaching.

As we march into another century of church work, we feel secure in looking to God for future guidance in winning souls for Christ.

Services are held on the second and third Sundays at 11:30 A. M. Sunday School is every Sunday at 10:00 A. M. Homecoming is always the second Sunday in June. Mt. Calvary Baptist Church is located on Smokey Hollow Road between Tate and Nelson. Turn right off of Highway 53 East just before the Tate Mansion. The church is on the left just after the road to Head Start.

On Sunday November the 20th Mt. Calvary Baptist Church's congregation will be 125 years old. Friends and neighbors are invited to share in this auspicious anniversary. It would be wonderful to see a turnout that included old friends from the community and other churches.

Historic Tate Methodist Church 1887-

When Stephen C. Tate built the Tate Methodist Church in 1887, he also built a Methodist church for his black friends providing the land and the materials. The Methodist Conference from Atlanta sent a minister for many years to pastor this church. Some sources tell me it was known as the C.M.E. church – Colored Methodist Episcopal and others think it was A.M.E. – African Methodist Episcopal. Their opening ceremony was a little different but basically the same as the Baptist church.

Mr. Josh Tate and family attended the church along with the Temp Echols family, Monroe Dodd and family and Nora Buck and daughter. At one time the church grew and they had approximately fifty members. Mr. McElroy, Mr. Monroe Dodd, Mr. Josh Tate and Mr. Temp Echols were stewards in this church.

They only had services on the third Sunday so on the second Sunday, they worshipped with the Methodists. This same pastor preached at a church in Canton on the other two Sundays.

The church had panes in the windows that were frosted and had little ripples in them. The membership dwindled and soon no one was attending church.

The Many Facets of Tate, Georgia, by Stephen E. Griffeth

In the 1940s the church closed as a Methodist congregation. The last pastor was Reverend Curtis from Adairsville. He also preached in Canton coming to Tate one a month for a 2nd Sunday service. The conference encouraged him to move on but he insisted on continuing. When he left the congregation closed the church

The church stayed abandoned and locked up for at least a decade. Stephen Griffeth estimated between fifteen and twenty years passed with the building empty of worshippers. Initially it was reopened by Annie Buck's father, a Holiness minister.

Miracle Friendship Holiness Church

The Methodist church was vacant for about fifteen to twenty years and then, in the 1970s, the Holiness believers took over. Three ladies, Pastor Moss, Mother Thurman and Gladys Glover are responsible for starting the services.

Pastor Mamie Sue Moss found the church in a deplorable condition. She collected money in order to do some refurbishing to the inside of the church. The walls were paneled, carpet came from Calhoun Nelson Baptist Church gave some pews and E.L. Howell built the restrooms.

A piano was donated by a lady from Marietta, Edna Glover; chairs were donated by friends from Marietta and W.L. Stephens built the pulpit. Pastor Moss purchased the drums and had the communion table build. Joyce Dorsey donated an organ and The Marietta Housing Authority provided heaters. Services were held on Wednesday and Friday nights and on each Sunday.

Pastor Moss wanted the frosted windows changed. They were painted red and white which gives the checker board appearance.

Pickens Progress, Smoky Hollow Church in need of repair 9/9/2010, Jeff Warren

How Mamie Moss ended up leading a church in Pickens County when she lived in Marietta and had never seen the church or the community is an amazing story, one that I enjoyed hearing from Miss Mamie during my interviews of her and Joy Dorsey.

Mamie Moss had a reoccurring vision in which she saw a large group of people, unpainted houses, and people running up a hill. She prayed to the Lord for understanding. Later at a church gathering in Marietta she was invited to begin a home Bible study in the Pickens County community of Smoky Hollow. It was 1967 and she accepted the invitation. When she began to visit the Smoky Hollow community she was visiting near The Stand and she recognized that this was the place she had seen in her visions.

Knowing the Lord wanted more of her than just a Bible study Mamie Moss knew she needed to open a church and that the abandoned Tate Methodist Church was where it should be located. "The windows and doors were gone. It was in bad shape," she recalled. Her first sermon was in January of 1971.

Pastor Moss served this church for seventeen years before moving to Kentucky. Joyce Dorsey over as pastor of the church in her absence. After seven years in Kentucky,

and eight years in Texas, Joy convinced Reverend Moss to return. Rev. Dorsey is now the Assistant Pastor.

Today the congregation is very small, with about five church members attending. "Most of the church members died or moved away to Atlanta," Rev. Moss explained. She holds Sunday services on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays at 12 noon.

This historic church is in desperate need of repair. To offer assistance or for more information call Rev. Moss at 706-301-9025. Donations can be made to the Miracle Fellowship Church account (#638261) at Jasper Banking Company.

Pilgrim Baptist Church, Nelson, Georgia

In the year of 1910, Pilgrim Baptist Church was established under the leadership of Reverend Head. The first facility was destroyed by fire. The Georgia Marble Company donated the current building as a gift to the Pilgrim Baptist Church. The building was also used for Masonic Lodge Assembly's and was the old Black school building. It had marble chalk boards and desk tops. And the stage had purple drapes.

Reverend A. V. Williamson was pastor of the church along with Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church until he recommended Reverend Henry Rogers. Rev. Rogers served faithfully for 39 years. He took in 63 members, established a Baptist Training Union Study, an Usher Board, a Missionary Society, and prayer meetings. In addition to ordaining deacons, two members were licensed and ordained to preach. They were Rev. Paul Lawson Jr. and Rev. Paul Gidden. Improvements during Rev. Roger's tenure including new furnace, painting the building, and adding a new Baptismal pool.

Reverend Wofford Bailey was the minister from 1981 to 2002 followed by Rev. Barry McCall. Rev. McCall is now serving as Pastor Elect. Currently God has blessed us with Pastor John H. Brown, and we have grown spiritually under his guidance. We thank God for the leadership of Reverend Brown, and pray that God will continue to bless us as we continue to do his will as we go forward.

Pilgrim is located at 1775 Pickens Street in the Ball Ground side of Nelson. Pickens Street connects with Smokey Hollow Road and Old Highway 5 on the Tate side of Nelson. Services 2nd and 4th Sundays and begin at 11:30 A. M.

History courtesy of Pilgrim Baptist Church

Friendship Baptist Church, Jasper, Georgia

In 1880 Black residents in Jasper organized a church and christened it Friendship Baptist Church. The first church services were held in a brush arbor where a crowd of older members and friends worshiped in true spirit and faith. We are told that they would spend nights praying fervently as the Holy Spirit would inspire them to convert souls to Christ. It was there that the little church was founded.

Shortly thereafter a lot was bought by church member Mr. Will Simmonds for \$20 dollars. A two story frame building on the property was used as church and elementary school with a lodge hall on the second floor. A White pastor served during these years. However, his name is not known or was it found in church records, but he was remembered by older members. He baptized some of the first members including Mrs. Louisia McClure, mother of Addie Smith and Mr. Sam McClure. Reverend Lloyd was also one of the earlier pastors.

In 1909 another lot was purchased from Mr. John McHan, just above the initial property. It is here where the members decided to build another church. Reverend G. B. Harden was a carpenter as well as the pastor. He built a nice frame building on lot #2 and the old building was used only for school purposes after this time.

Seven years later, this school was consolidated with the school at Tate. After a period of years the old church and the school building were torn down. The church that Rev. Harden built was also torn down to make way for a new church facility. A new block church was built in 1962, Reverend Pinkard being the pastor.

In 1984, under the leadership of Rev. James W. Dargon, new additions were constructed as part of the original building. Renovations also included stained glass windows and bricking.

Reverend Russell T. Kennedy Sr. was called to become the next pastor in 1989. Under his leadership carpeting and pew upholstery were purchased. Also Deacon Otis Morgan Jr. was ordained into the ministry.

The pastor since 1992, Reverend R. S. Thomas has accepted the challenge and task of leading his flock through the religious, social, economic, and educational changes that confront us in these times. We thank God for the leadership we have had in the past, and today, and pray that God will continue to bless us. May we continue to do good for His kingdom and remain humble.

History courtesy of Friendship Baptist Church

It was during a conversation with Reverend Charles Walker that he shared the special relationship between Jasper First Baptist and Friendship Baptist Church. On the Vanishing Georgia web site, I had come across a photo of Rev. Walker, and two of his church members at a Vacation Bible School at Friendship Baptist Church in 1968. Rev. Dargon, pastor of Friendship is seen in the center of the photo. That would be two years after school integration. I asked how long First Baptist did a separate Bible School at Friendship. "Not long after that we decided that the Black children should come to Jasper First, after all we are all the same," he replied.

Reverend Walker also told me that when Friendship Church needed to buy building materials at a sawmill in Gilmer County in 1962, he and his deacons worried that they might be cheated by the owner because Friendship was a Black church. He recalled that several deacons from First Baptist went with the Friendship deacons to Ellijay to be sure the process was fair.

Located on the southwest side of Jasper on Mineral Springs Street, church services are held 2nd and 4th Sundays at 11:30 A.M.

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A special thanks to Vivian Chapman and Robert McClure for providing church histories for Pilgrim and Friendship churches.

Black History in Pickens: Part 7

Segregation

(Author's note: During this series I have used the term Black for people of color. Additionally, I have avoided African-American as many local Black residents are not partial to the term. Today colored or Negro is often perceived as racist. While visiting a Black cemetery in Blue Ridge a reporter was offended that a new plaque said Padgett Chapel Colored School. We explained that this was the actual legal name of the school. Because this article involves the segregation years I will use the descriptors, colored and Negro, as these terms are accurate to the era.)

Racial segregation is characterized by separation of people of different races in daily life when both are doing equal tasks. Segregation may be *de jure* (Latin, meaning "by law")—mandated by law—or *de facto* (also Latin, meaning "in fact"). *De facto* segregation can occur when members of different races strongly prefer to associate and do business with members of their own race.

New World Encyclopedia

Jim Crow Laws in the South: The Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876 and 1965. They mandated *de jure* racial segregation in all public facilities, with a supposedly "separate but equal" status for black Americans. De jure mainly applied to the Southern United States. Northern segregation was generally de facto, from blacks predominately living in urban ghettos.

Wikipedia

The name "Jim Crow" refers to a minstrel character popular in the 1820s and 1830s, but it is unknown how the term came to describe the form of racial segregation and discrimination that prevailed in the American South during the first half of the twentieth century.

New Georgia Encyclopedia

North vs. South

I grew up in the mountains of New York State where there were no Jim Crow laws. In reality segregation was practiced, but in less obvious ways. My family and I lived in a small town ten miles from the city of Utica, New York. We had no Black residents, nor did any other surrounding town. All of the Black people lived in one large ghetto in the city and we never saw them, except from a speeding car.

I was a junior in high school in 1960 when a professional social worker, Mr. Richardson, moved his family from Detroit, Michigan, to our part of New York and attempted to purchase a home in Whitesboro. He held a Masters Degree and directed a settlement house in the nearby city of Utica. We lived in the village of Whitesboro where blue collar workers had homes. On the hill, above town, was a subdivision populated by those whose dads were professionals. Mr. Richardson made an offer on a home up on the hill. There were no Jim Crow laws to prevent this occurrence. Most of the subdivision

dads put up \$1,000 a piece and brought the house for slightly more than Mr. Richardson's offer. All quite legal, all quite racist. In the end Mr. Richardson bought a home for his family further out of town. Seems farmers as neighbors were less racist. Or maybe they had less money. Of course there were no other houses close by the Richardson's home.

The high school students from up on the hill and in town found out by overhearing adult conversations. Students from all income brackets were informed and were outraged. The Richardsons had a daughter my age. The girls in the junior class made a point of welcoming Fern more warmly than that usually accorded for new students. Her younger brother was a freshman, a good-looking boy who played football. He was eventually elected president of his class. The first moral of this story is that generations can change. The second is this; if anyone tells you the North was less racist than the South, send them to me.

Segregation in Georgia

In the 1890s, Georgia and other southern states passed a wide variety of Jim Crow laws that mandated racial segregation or separation in public facilities and effectively codified the region's tradition of white supremacy.

New Georgia Encyclopedia



In fact such restrictions were written into the Georgia statutes by legislators on multiple occasions as seen below.

School segregation: 1872, 1877, 1895, 1845, 1957

Transportation, trains, buses etc: 1870, 1891, 1895, 1931, 1935, and 1858

Interracial marriage was strictly forbidden: 1865, 1926

Separate prisons: 1865, 1908

Separate mental institutions: 1935

Segregation in Pickens County

The Pickens County Court House and other public government facilities had separate bathrooms and water fountains for Black and White residents. At the train depot and bus station races sat in divided waiting areas, and once on the train or bus Black travelers were aware of where they should sit. A local Black man recalled, "At the train depot we mostly stood outside the station. Once on the train there was a 'colored car' that we were required to sit in when we rode." Willie Mae Weaver remembers that before integration Black residents did not serve on juries.

Private facilities, such as restaurants, usually had signs identifying divided facilities. In the case of food, Black residents were expected to pick up their food orders from the back door of Jasper restaurants. "Most of the time we didn't eat out," a long-time Jasper woman explained to me. There was one restaurant in Jasper where the sympathetic owner felt the need to create a dining area for Black residents. Champion's Cafe had an area in the back with two or three tables for "colored" diners.

Movie Theaters were very popular to both Black and White citizens, especially children and teens. Black people sat in what was referred to as the "colored balcony." The movie theater on Main Street in Jasper had a colored balcony. In Tate the stage was converted to a movie theater on Friday and Saturday nights and in the summers movies

also ran on Monday and Tuesday nights. The movie theater at Tate School existed from the late 1920s to 1951. There was a colored balcony for kids and adults alike. In fact the balcony at Tate School still exists, as well as the steps going to the balcony. White churches in Tate, Talking Rock, Jasper, and other communities also had colored balconies. This was most common in the era of slavery, before Black citizens were able to build their own churches.

Race Relations During Segregation

As I write I suspect I have made this system of restriction in Pickens County appear to be very harsh and rigid, a system to be resented. But based on my interviews with Black residents, the opposite is true. No one, Black or White, questioned the legality of such laws. Over and over I was told that segregation was just the way things were. “We knew our place and really no one felt a need to challenge the rules. It was just the way things were. When I was raised you did what you were told, what was expected. That was true for both Black and White people.” Emma Julia Washington explained. During the 1940s and 50s people in general were more accepting of race restrictions and seldom thought about it, much less questioned these practices. “It wasn’t an issue,” explained a Preston Roach Senior, now in his 80s. “You had no choice, and you took a lot of things in stride,” wife Mary Ann Roach added. “That was all we knew, it didn’t bother me.” Their son, now in his 50s further explained, “We played together and fished and hunted with our White friends. We had White friends before integration.” Another Black resident told me, “We played with White kids at our house and we played at their homes.” According to those that lived here at that time of segregation violence towards colored residents was rare, and both races treated each other with mutual respect.

As a former Yankee, and a person who participated in protests of racism while I lived in Atlanta (1966-1970) I find such an attitude almost incomprehensible. For those with the same reaction, I would point you out two possible explanations. A description of segregation in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* seems to fit Pickens County. “While the experience of Jim Crow was no less harsh in rural areas, it did lack the rigidity that characterized urban segregation. “Rural Georgia remained a largely pre-modern society, making many features of segregation unnecessary or even problematic.”

In Pickens County, especially in Tate, there was another, possibly more significant, influence. Colonel Sam Tate was known to treat the Black community with care and concerns, making sure all were provided for. “He was stern, but he cared for Blacks just like the Whites,” Willie Mae Weaver explained. “Colonel Sam had a lot to do with how people were treated here.” The view that Sam’s attitudes toward Black residents influenced the behaviors of others was something that I was told by several lifetime residents of Tate. “He set a standard and we followed his example in our own behavior,” a White resident stated.

Nephew Steven Tate was also known for his respectful treatment of Black residents and employees. Preston Roach Senior, who worked for Steve Tate, remembers that, “He was caring toward his Black employees and neighbors. Steve Tate bought a car for my family and treated all of us well. When Preston Jr. was born in the hospital, Mr. Tate came by, visited, and paid the bill.”

The Impact of Segregation on Black Residents

It would be easy to assume, and correct for some places and individuals, that segregation made Negroes feel inferior. But Emma Julia Washington and Willie Mae Weaver were quick to rid me of that view about Pickens's County's Black residents who lived and worked during segregation. Emma Julia explained, "We were raised to obey, but we were also raised to believe we were as good as Whites. Our parents taught us self respect and that we were as good as anybody. They also taught us to respect others as the Bible teaches." "There was a sense of harmony here, of mutual respect between Black and White citizens," Willie Mae Weaver declared softly.

The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights movement passed over Pickens County. There were no protests or sit-ins, no NAACP or CORE meetings. Fred Anderson remembered when Reverend Martin Luther King was assassinated. "A mean kid on the bus said to me "Well, your king is dead." Fred stopped to laugh then explained, "We knew more about President Kennedy than Martin Luther King. The grown-ups really admired President Kennedy." Fred was not disrespecting King's contributions but acknowledging that the racial battles were fought in other places. The events seemed to take place a long way from Pickens County, despite the fact that Atlanta isn't so far removed physically. "This was a more naive place," Fred concluded. The conflicts and triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. Martin Luther King would impact Pickens County residents, Black and White. Transformation happened as the country changed its' laws and beliefs about the rights of Black and minority citizens.

Changes in the Laws

1963: The city of Atlanta passed an ordinance which repealed all city ordinances "which required the separation of persons because of race, color or creed in public transportation, recreation, entertainment and other facilities.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, enacted July 2, 1964) was a landmark piece of legislation in the United States that outlawed major forms of discrimination against blacks and women, including racial segregation. It ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and by facilities that served the general public. Wikipedia

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Fred Anderson, interview, 2010, April

Preston Roach Sr. Mary Ann Roach, and Preston Roach Jr. interview, 2011, May

Willie May Weaver, interview, 2011

Black History in Pickens County: Part 8 Integration in the Schools and Community

This project has been made possible by the Pickens Arts and Cultural Alliance, and grants from the Georgia Humanities Council, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Integration in the Schools

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, (1954), was a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court that declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional. As a result, segregation was ruled a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. This ruling paved the way for integration and the civil rights movement .

Wikipedia

New Orleans, Louisiana, William Fridz Elementary School,1960:

Driving up to the school in the U S Marshall's car six-year-old Ruby Nell Bridges could see the gathering, and actually thought it was Mardi Gras. "There was a large crowd of people outside of the school. They were throwing things and shouting, and that sort of behavior goes on in New Orleans at Mardi Gras," Ruby recalled later. As soon as Bridges entered the school, white parents went in and brought their own children out. All of the teachers refused to teach where a black child was enrolled. The school system hired Barbara Henry, from Boston, Massachusetts, to teach Bridges, and for over a year Mrs. Henry taught her alone as if she were teaching a whole class. Every morning, as Bridges walked to school, one woman would shout, "I'm going to posin your food Nigger!". Ruby was frightened by the threat but was afraid to tell her parents. Instead she would only eat food in sealed bags, items like potato chips. A psychologist, Robert Coles, who befriended the family, got Ruby to talk about her fears. Reassured, she again ate cooked foods. Ruby was driven to school for a year by federal marshalls who escorted her inside the school to her teacher. In the afternoon the marshalls took Ruby home. The abusive crowds lasted for months.

Ruby Bridges was the first African-American child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South. Former United States Deputy Marshal Charles Burks later recalled, "She showed a lot of courage. She never cried. She didn't whimper. She just marched along like a little soldier, and we're all very proud of her." In her own writing Ruby continued the story in her memoirs, "Militant segregationists, as the news called them, took to the streets in protest, and riots erupted all over the city. My parents shielded me as best they could, but I knew problems had come to our family because I was going to the white school. My father was fired from his job. The white owners of a grocery store told us not to shop there anymore. Even my grandparents in Mississippi suffered. The owner of the land they'd sharecropped for 25 years said everyone knew it was their granddaughter causing trouble in New Orleans, and asked them to move."

Pickens High School, Jasper, Georgia, August, 1965: Twelve high school students and three elementary children were the first to integrate the Pickens County School System. As a precaution the bus that brought the students that first day had a police escort

provided by the county sheriff. The first day went so smoothly that the escort was deemed unnecessary and discontinued. Myrna Denson remembered, "By noon we knew there would be no problems."

School Integration Comes to Georgia

The journey from the first Supreme Court integration decision in 1954 to actual integration was a long one. Many white Georgians resisted integration and advocated closing schools rather than abiding by the court's decision. Promises to prevent the desegregation of public schools became a hallmark of the administrations of three Georgia governors during the decade of the 1950s: Herman Talmadge, Marvin Griffin, and Ernest Vandiver. Under Talmadge's leadership, the state passed legislation requiring that public schools be closed and converted to private schools rather than submit to court-ordered desegregation. The Georgia legislature also adopted a constitutional amendment forcing the governor to cut off state funding to any school that desegregated. (*Atlanta in the Civil Rights Movement* at www.atlantahighered.org)

Governor Ernest Vandiver Jr. was forced to decide between closing public schools or complying with a federal order to desegregate them. He formed a special committee chaired by Atlanta attorney John A. Sibley to conduct public hearings on the issue. The committee was known as the Sibley Commission. In ten hearings, held across the state during March 1960, Sibley allowed witnesses to state their choice of two options: continuing massive resistance at the expense of the school system or amending state law to allow token integration while keeping segregation largely intact.

Despite Sibley's efforts to minimize support for resistance, 60 percent of witnesses favored total segregation. On April 28, 1960, Sibley, ignoring the results of the hearings, presented the commission's report to state leaders, in which he recommended accepting Hooper's (Federal district judge) decision while offering several measures that would allow schools to remain largely segregated. Before the legislature had a chance to vote a new crisis (Integration at the University of Georgia) forced Vandiver to make a decision regarding segregation. Choosing to avoid further confrontation with the federal government, Vandiver introduced a bill that repealed cutoff funds laws for both the university and public schools. The bill passed on January 31, and the Atlanta school system officially desegregated the following autumn of 1962. (New Georgia Encyclopedia)

In 1967, only 22% of the black students in the 17 southern states were in integrated schools. In Pickens County full integration was achieved by the fall of 1966. By comparison; Atlanta 1962, Savannah, Brunswick, and Athens 1963, Pickens County 1965-66, Gwinett County 1966-68, Jasper County 1969, and Newton County 1970.

By 1969 the Georgia Board of Education accepted that school integration was inevitable. On December 17, 1969 a ruling was agreed upon. Any county that refused to acknowledge the federal court order would lose state funding altogether. The order required that "dual school systems must be completely abolished." (New Georgia Encyclopedia)

The Pickens County Board of Education Devises a Plan

The Federal Government, in the form of the US Department of Education, required every school system in the United States to propose a desegregation plan. The

Pickens County Board submitted a plan late in 1964, and another in the Spring of 1965, both were rejected. School Superintendent M. T. McMurrain received a letter from Frances Keppel, US Commissioner of Education dated July 19, 1965. The third plan submitted was accepted. During the 1965-1966 school year Black students and teachers could voluntarily transfer and Tri-City School would continue to operate. But in the beginning of the 1966-1967 school year Tri-City would close and all of the schools in the county would be integrated.

Choosing , Now or Next Year

For the 1965-66 school year Black families had to make a choice, remain at Tri-City for one more year, or have the children be the first to integrate. All of the former students I interviewed explained that the decision was made by their parents with no input from them. “In that era, students did what they were told,” JoAnn Bridges stated, “I don’t like change and wanted to wait, but kids then were obedient. My mother said, ‘It will be the best for us,’ and I accepted that.” While the students did what they was expected, the decision to wait or go now was a difficult one for parents. Emma Washington recalls that choice, “I said wait a year, but my father, Olin Collins, felt sooner was better. He volunteered to be sure the children got to school, so I signed the papers for Sandra and Michael to transfer.” Michael Collins told of his family’s decision, “It didn’t bother me that I wasn’t asked. I was obedient and trusted my family’s decisions.

First Black Students to Integrate

Seniors: Reginald Chatman, Ronald Johnson, and Roderick Moore. Juniors; grade 11: Deborah Humphrey. Sophomores, grade 10: Jackie Morgan, Pam Moore, Annie Kate Mackey, JoAnn Bridges, and Robert Pitts. Freshman, grade 9: Faye Chatman, and Michael Collins. 8th grade: Melvin Nelson Bridges. Jasper Elementary; Brena Farrow, grade 4, Karen McClure, grade 3 and Sandra Collins, grade 2. (Source; Pickens Board of Education records, cross checked with PHS 1966 yearbook.)

How Would Integration Go, A Community Wonders?

Pickens County parents and school personnel knew of the violence in other places including in nearby Alabama’s cities; Little Rock, Birmingham, and Selma. There were a few die hard segregationists who called Board of Education members to voice their opposition. By and large the emotions for adults were anxiety, and concern for everyone’s safety. Parents, Black and White, worried and fretted. People knew that violence was not the Pickens County way, but the potential for smaller problems was there. There was a discussion at the August 3, 1965 Board of Education meeting, but the board records in that era provided no details of any discussions, only an agenda.

For students the impending arrival of Black classmates at Pickens High School evoked a combination of curiosity, and discomfort that comes with major changes. Worry is not the teen way.

First Day, Pickens High School

The morning of the first day of school teachers and administrators always arrive early. The principal of Pickens High School that day was new to the job. While Bill Hasty was a seasoned administrator from Cherokee County, this was his first year at

Pickens High School. He had been a principal at an all-White school in Ball Ground and had no prior experience with integrating a school. Myrna Denson was also a first year secretary in the front office. Coach Roy Cowart recalled that this was his initial teaching position. On top of that he and Kathy had their first child just a week earlier.

Concern for the changes and the day's events hung in the air, but no one discussed it. Surprisingly there were no special faculty meetings to talk about how to handle integration. Nor do former faculty members remember any lengthy discussion about the coming Black students at the meeting the day before school began. Opening day would be business as usual.

While parents and faculty might have felt anxiety, the White students were more curious than worried. Gail Baldwin was in the 10th grade, "It didn't bother me, but it was different." Another student at that time said that at first the Black students seemed exotic but, "Within a day or two they blended in and weren't any different than us."

The Black students arrived by bus but with a police escort. Myrna observed that no Black parents drove their children to school, and all arrived by bus. The sheriff's deputies did not walk in with the Black students but lingered awhile outside just to be sure they were not needed. They would not be called upon the next day.

Myrna Denson remembers the day vividly, "We were scared to death, and so I expect were the Black students. None of us acknowledged our fears but stayed calm, and that helped. After they arrived and went on to homeroom we all relaxed. By afternoon we knew the Tri-City students would fit right in."

The Black students' respectful attitude was a key factor in how smoothly the day progressed. Teacher Mary Jane Griffith explained that, "I am not sure if the students were hand picked or not, but you could not have chosen better. The three senior boys were excellent students and most polite." Myrna Denson remarked that, "I was only 25, and the Black students treated me with great respect. It was, Yes Ma'am, and No Ma'am." Both Myrna and Mary Jane agreed the faculty at Tri-City High School, and the student's parents had instilled the qualities of discipline, hard work, self respect, and respect for others in the arriving students. In reciprocation Roderick Moore described his White teachers, "They were fair and treated us with respect."

There were of course a few remarks by rude White students. JoAnn Bridges recalled being called a "chocolate drop," by two boys on the bus and crying, as well as spitballs being sent her way by a mean White boy. JoAnn also remembers that White classmates Claudia Miller and Melba Bryant were friendly and welcoming from the first day. Another White girl remarked to her, "I thought you'd be different but you're the same as us." Michael Collins described his first day at PHS as "pretty smooth." Taken as a whole the first day and subsequent days went well.

In the afternoon of the first day, Maxine Moore asked Frances Chatman how she was doing. Frances was the mother of Reginald and Faye, who were transferring from Tri-City to Pickens High. Frances replied that she had worried and prayed all day and stayed on the other end of town to try and keep from being so nervous. By their afternoon conversation it was apparent to the whole community that there would be no trouble and that the day went smoothly at school. Roderick Moore described his feelings that day, "My parents were worried, and scared but I wasn't. I knew that whatever happened those of us from Tri-City would be together."

Jasper Elementary School

With just three Black students and much younger children, integration was far less dramatic. Still the small number of Black students made it harder for them to feel the solidarity and security that the high students felt. Karen McClure Benson recalls being asked several times, "Is your blood red?" A White student, Paul Hamnac remembered, "I was in the fourth grade. It was a big thing for my parents. Not so much for me. Somehow I knew people all wanted the same thing."

The Second Year

At the July 1966 meeting the Board of Education officially closed Tri-City School and transferred approximately 90 students in grades 1-12, as well as teachers into other schools. Leila Brown was principal at Tri-City before and during integration, and is credited as being a "Stabilizing liaison between the Black and White communities during this critical period." (*Pickens County, Georgia, Heritage, 1853-1995*)

Recently I spoke with seven adults who transferred from Tri-City to other schools in 1966. All agreed that there were no major problems, "just a little kid stuff." By then the novelty of new Black students had worn off. Michael Collins remembers that this was a somewhat harder change because the Tri-City students were losing their school. "Some of the students resented the closing and weren't eager to change schools. It wasn't all or even most of the Black students, but pockets of resentment," Michael explained. "As a whole pretty much everybody got along," he added.

An examination of yearbooks between 1965 and 1975 reveals Black students participating in a wide variety of school organizations and activities. The first year, with only twelve Black students, Black faces appear in photos of the Glee Club, Coed Y-Club, and Letterman's Club as well as on the basketball, football, and track teams.

In addition to students, Miss. Aileen Prince transferred from Tri-City High School. Miss. Prince taught science for many years at Pickens High and is remembered as a liaison with the Black students, families and community. PHS Home Economics teacher Mary Jane Griffith explained that Miss. Prince later has a "Gentleman's Club" for the young Black men at the school and was, "a positive influence on our Black students, boys and girls." Roderick Moore described Miss. Prince as, "strict, kind, and a very good teacher."

Integration at Head Start

The Pickens County Head Start, under the leadership of Betty Walker, was the first in the state to be integrated. Black teachers and teacher aides included Mary Louise Roach Moore, Mary Ann Roach, Willie Mae Weaver, Katyleen Mackey McClure, and Carrie Jordan Bridges. During the time that Mary Ann Roach was at Head Start she finished her Bachelor's Degree in Education from Brenau University and taught for the school system for over 20 years.

Black History in Pickens County: Part 9

Sports, a Microcosm of Change

While Pickens High School's Black minority was small, surrounding counties had no black student in their high schools or Black families in their communities. This included Fannin, Gilmer, Dawson, and Forsyth Counties. Cherokee County was one of the few rivals that had Black players. During the first year of integration Ronnie Johnson and Reginald Chatman played end on the football team, and also were starters on the basketball team. Of the ten teams played in football that year, at least eight would have been all-White.

The first football game in 1965 was against Forsyth County. Pickens lost 0 to 18. A loss meant less resentment and potential problems from Forsyth, but the tide would be turned by later teams. Bill Sperling was the head football coach in 1965 to 1967.

Prior to the Forsyth/Pickens varsity football game in 1969 there was apprehension related to possible race issues. At the end of a close and hard fought game Michael Collins scored the winning touchdown. Coach Enis instructed him before the play that after he scored, and Enis expected Michael to score, to go directly to the bus, and "The rest of the team and coaches will be right behind you." They left with a police escort that night and did not stop to eat until close to Pickens County.

Preston Roach Jr. recalled the 1968 football game against Forsyth County held in Cummings. A drumming by Pickens at the 1967 game in Jasper added to the tension. Preston was one of three Black members of the band, and as such was seated in the stands during the game. "Tension was at a fever pitch. The administration, staff, and coaches handled it well. They had a feel for what was right. There was certain stuff that they weren't going to allow."

In the Fall of 1965 to the late 1960s when the teams traveled to schools that could involve possible racial problems, a police escort was arranged as a precaution. Another issue was getting a meal for the team. In some counties there were restaurant owners who would refuse to serve anyone who was black, or just close the restaurant when they saw there were Blacks to be served. To avoid this situation the coaches or administrators contacted restaurants ahead and arranged to stop and eat at accepting places.

Racial tensions still existed in Forsyth County during the 1960s and 1970s. Lawton Baggs was teaching in the county in the late 60s and recalled that there were several homes on the lake sold to Black professionals. A local realtor was accused of doing the transactions and harassed by the racist element. It got so bad that the realtor put an ad in the newspaper to deny the accusations. It was in such a racially charged atmosphere that the students, and coaches played.

By 1970 the Pickens High Football Team included seven Black A-team members, three more on the B-squad, two cheerleaders, two band members, and under the dragon mascot costume was Sandra Pye, another Black student. Coach Roy Cowart explained; "In the early years of integration there was always some tension before games when we played all White communities. Not for what our kids would do, but emotions run high during games, and we were concerned for a potential incident, particularly from the stands. We asked our players to be level headed in both football and basketball." Fred

Anderson added, "Coach Enis was good to the Black kids, and (Assistant) Coach Qualls was like a father to me. Color didn't matter, they played their best players."

Fred Anderson played for Pickens High School in the 1970 game against Forsyth County and remembers the game. "We dressed on the bus to avoid any situations. Some people in the crowd would shout racial slurs. At one point the Forsyth coach hollered to the quarterback, 'Catch that Damn Nigger,' to which the boy responded, 'Which one coach?' As in earlier Forsyth away games Coach Enis planned to leave quickly. They went directly from the field to the bus. "After beating Forsyth 20 to 0, it was best to get out of town quickly," Fred recalled.

Gilmer County was a traditional rival for Pickens. Fred Anderson contends that the racial slurs and tension was as bad as at Forsyth. "When we arrived there would be signs in the stands and on the field house, 'Kill the Coons.'" The final score for the 1969 game was Pickens 27 and Gilmer 0. "Its easier to ignore racial remarks when you know your going to beat the other team.

1971-1972 was Fred Anderson's Senior year. He set school records in rushing yards (4,632), single game rushing yards (337), scoring (320 points), and touchdowns (49). He was named Player of the Week in the state of Georgia three times, and to the Georgia Prep Honor Roll 7 times. In the AAA classification Fred was All-State Georgia in 1970, 1971, and 1972. His Total Offense in 1970 of 7,480 yards was a region record. The University of Southern Mississippi provided Fred Anderson with a full four-year football scholarship. Fred graduated after playing for four years.

Rickey Benson was the first Black student to get a basketball scholarship. After graduation in 1975 he played for Gaston State College in Alabama.

The Times They are a Changing

Michael Collins entered the 9th grade as one of twelve students who integrated Pickens High School in 1965. By the time he was a senior in 1968-69 segregation, integration, and race were non-issues for students. Michael was elected Class President, Captain of the Football team, and Student Body President. Several of his former teachers testified to his leadership skills. "Ask him about the student lunchroom walkout he stopped," one former teacher told me.

"We called it the Great Lasagna Revolt," Michael recalled. Every Friday lasagna was served in the lunchroom and students complained. Someone said we should walk out and I casually agreed. To my surprise the students were actually going to walk out. The principal called me in his office and asked what I knew, and if I could stop the demonstration. I knew I had to talk to the kids. We didn't walk out, but the administration was fair and listened. After that we got a variety of selections on Fridays."

The most telling indicator of a reversal of attitudes and behavior was in 1967 when Michael was arrested for using the wrong bathroom. He and a group of eight or so White friends were going to the movie in Jasper. They arrived early and decided to walk on to the Welcome Junction Grill. This was a high school hang out before and after movies. There were two inside bathrooms and two outside, and on that day only the outside ladies room worked. The owner told Michael he could use that bathroom. He had been there many times before and knew the management well. "Everyone used that bathroom. It was like today's Uni-sex bathrooms," Michael explained.

When he came out a city policeman stopped Michael and asked why he was using the Ladies Room. The officer did not believe him and took Collins to the squad car. A friend saw him being taken, and Michael called, "I'm going to jail, call my Mama!" The owner tried to tell the police that he gave permission with no acknowledgement by the officer.

This may have been racist on the part of the officer, but the reaction of the White friends was unconditional. They called others, and walked, and drove over to the city jail. Before long a crowd had gathered. When Emma Julia, and her husband Velpo Smith arrived the crowd of teens was growing, and it was all White. Velpo asked the group to go home, but they would not leave their friend in jail. "A few had bats. They got there before me and shouted that if the police didn't let me go, they would get me out. They were hoppin-mad," remembered Michael.

When Emma Julia and Velpo entered, the police officer refused to tell what the charge was or to allow Michael to bond out to his parents. The officer insisted he must stay in jail. Velpo quietly reminded them that the crowd outside had refused to leave when he asked them to do so, and that they would guarantee Michael would be back on Monday to see the judge.

The deputy considered the crowd outside and allowed Michael to go home with his parents. As soon as they walked out the crowd of students cheered, and promptly disbanded. On Monday the case was dismissed and the officer reprimanded. Not only was Michael a leader of an almost all White student body, but his fellow White students were threatening violence, not against him, but in a misguided attempt to protect Michael.

A story that occurred while Michael was attending Reinhardt College makes a similar point about change, and really tugged at my heart. Michael and two Reinhardt College classmates made an auto trip to Roswell, Georgia. One friend was Black, and the other White, raised in McCaysville, a town with no Black residents and which was known for anti-Black sentiments by the residents. In was a cold winter night when they had car trouble and to make it worse the Black companion had develop a stomach sickness. They stopped at a store and asked if the boy could rest a bit. "Ain't no nigger sitting here," the owner snarled. By the time the tow truck arrived the Black student was even sicker. A kinder man, the tow driver put the boy in his cab to warm him. On the way back to the college the White student asked if this sort of thing happened often. "Often enough," Michael replied. With tears of anger and empathy streaming he answered "It just isn't right." Indeed every generation is capable of change.

Civil Rights Act, 1964

This act, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2, 1964, prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and made employment discrimination illegal. This document was the most sweeping civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. www.ourdocuments.gov

Integration in the Community

Integration in Pickens County lacked drama. Signs for separate water fountains and bathrooms were removed without event or comment. In the courthouse there were a set of White bathrooms on the first floor, and another smaller set of bathrooms labeled "Colored" in the basement. The basement rooms lacked a window, had a concrete floor,

and facilities of lesser quality. Upstairs the “White” bathrooms had windows, tile floors and better equipment. After the signs went down residents of both races could choose between upscale, or downstairs. The sign on the separate “Colored” entrance to the Courthouse was taken down.

Signs designating the colored section at the train station were removed, and separate seating abolished. Leila Brown was the first Black to serve on a Grand Jury and the first Black representative to the state teacher’s organization from Pickens County. Change happened with acceptance by the community.

Michael Collins recalled his first meal in a previously all White restaurant. “It was after a football game and a friend’s dad took me out to dinner with his family after a game. He looked at me and said, ‘Gus, you’re eating in town with us and your going in the front door.’ Nothing happened; it wasn’t a Civil Rights action. Things changed, not in a dramatic way, they just kind of rotated in place.” That statement seems to describe community integration in Pickens County, it happened with a minimum of fuss and no protests.

The 1960s were years of racial turmoil in much of the South often characterized by anger and violence. In Pickens County the transition from segregation to integration went more smoothly aided by community acceptance and an abhorrence of conflict.

Acceptance and respect between races was a long standing tradition in Pickens County dating back to the era of Colonel Sam Tate. “I have always been treated well by White neighbors,” explained Preston Roach Sr. In a Facebook conversation recalling school integration Peggy Kendrick affirmed, “I’m glad that I lived in Pickens County (during integration) not elsewhere.”

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You many contact Dr. Thompson at 706 633 3865 or tjthomps@tds.net

Comments, feedback, and new information are welcome.

The first three Black graduates of Pickens High School were Reginald (Reggie) Chatman, Ronnie Johnson, and Roderick (Ronnie) Moore. Reginald Chatman passed away in 2004, his wife Vivian still lives in Pickens County. Ronnie Johnson lives and works in Atlanta. Roderick Moore resides in Jasper.

Black History in Pickens: Part 10

A Proud Musical Tradition

In quartets and trios, Black residents past and present, have expressed their deep faith by sharing the gospel in song. The Pickens community has nurtured, listened to with pleasure, and appreciated this African-American tradition of singing spirituals.

Early Musical Groups

The local tradition began with Cornelius Rucker. He was a member of Pilgrim Church in Nelson, but directed the choir at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Tate. The multi talented Cornelius could sing all parts, but usually sang bass and baritone. The original quartet was organized by Rucker and consisted of Mr. Glover Green, James Pitts, Henry Lee Gunn, and Cornelius Rucker.

In the early 1940s the Georgia Marble Company and Colonel Sam Tate sponsored the quartet. Later the Brookshire Tire Company in Atlanta supported the group. During the 1940s they sang on the local radio every two weeks.

Later in the 1940s another groups formed. Sometimes they sang as a quartet using various combinations of members, and at other times they all performed together. The members included Mr. Preston Roach Sr. as lead singer, Truman Roach as baritone, Will Rucker, Cornelius Rucker as bass, T. J. McClure, Anna Mackey, and Earstene (Teen) Mackey. Later Mr. James Pitts sang tenor. During these years Melvin Bryant and James Howell also sang. Mr. James Anderson accompanied them on the guitar.

Truman Roach recalled another group that performed in the 1950s and 60s, during the era of segregation. The group included Truman, James Franklin (Chester) Roach, Glover Green, and Cornelius Rucker. Preston Roach Jr. remembers the clear, strong voice of Robert Allen Williams singing in various groups.

In addition to performing locally all of these groups sang in churches, and at events in Blue Ridge, Monticello, Canton, and other communities. All had ceased performing in the 1970s. The tradition was picked many years later by Preston Roach Sr., Robert McClure, and Truman Roach.

The Mount Calvary Trio

Mt. Calvary Church has been the centerpoint for all the groups past and present. Mr. Cornelius Rucker was the Choir Director at the church and all of the members of the earlier groups sang at the church. Today's trio members are also long time choir members at Mt. Calvary. Preston Roach sings (lead), Truman Roach (tenor), and Robert McClure (bass and baritone) comprise the trio. Truman and Preston are brothers and Robert a double first cousin to the Roaches.

In 1993 all three were reminiscing about the earlier trios and began to harmonize on songs they remembered from the days of Deacon Rucker. As other members of the church heard those songs, requests were made to the three to perform at the church services. Before long they not only sang as a trio at Calvary, but began to be invited to other churches, including White churches, funerals, and public events. Today if you attend Red Cross events, activities at the Tate Gym, attend the Senior Center or visit the

nursing home, you will likely have heard the group. They have also sung on ETC-3 Television.

The group usually performs a capella creating a unique sound that harkens back to a long tradition of unaccompanied Negro Spirituals from the days of slavery. If the harmonies in this type of music remind you of [Barbershop quartet music](#) it is because the earliest groups singing in the Barbershop style of music were African Americans.

Asked why they sing and perform, all three members of the Trio testified to their pleasure at being able to share their faith, and to God's generosity toward them as individuals and as a group. Truman described his experiences, "I love to sing and have been singing since I was small. In grammar school I was always given singing parts in school musicals. At Fort Valley State College I worked to improve my skills and joined the college choir." Brother Preston Roach explained, "Singing uplifts me and others. I can get down and without intent start humming. Next thing I know and I'm feeling better. I get so much out of praising the Lord in song, it's a blessing to be able to sing for others." "Anywhere, anytime, I'm 100% involved. When I was in Ohio I sung in my church choir and when I worked at Lockheed I joined their employee's choir." noted Robert McClure. "I love to give God praise in song. I'm not much on talking, but singing about My Lord is a privilege."

Indeed, it must be a privilege for the members of the trio to perform, but it is also a privilege and pleasure to listen.

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Black History in Pickens County: Part 11

The research and interviews that underlie these articles have taken place over a period of three years (2009-2011). During that time many people have been instrumental in the production of this record of Black life in Pickens County from the time of the first slaves, who were owned by a Cherokee Indian plantation owner, and thus predate early White settlers, to today. I would like to begin by thanking those who have helped.

The Pickens Progress and Dan Pool have been generous in their willingness to run these articles. Never have I been asked to shorten the articles that I submitted to Mr. Pool. The Progress staff is committed to recording local history. Numerous articles in the Progress, by the staff and local historians, have documented the rich local culture for all to read.

Funding for the historical research was provided by two state agencies. Both are funded by your tax dollars. The Georgia Council for the Arts supported a photography project that recorded life in the Black community. Lisa Payne and her Pickens High School photography students, Lisa Snellinger, and Al Clayton did a fantastic job with their photo journalism.

The Georgia Humanities Council provided grant monies to pay for the cost of research including, equipment, research fees, books, and travel expenses. A committee, which included Lawton Baggs, Justin Davis, Robert McClure, Portia Goss, and Willie Mae Weaver, provided leadership. The fiscal agent for the grant was the Pickens Arts and Cultural Alliance (PACA). This supportive group also arranged for the presentation of a photo album of the community at the 125th Anniversary of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church as well as providing a program that included the church's history.

The lasting results of this process of photography and historical research includes community photography spanning three years and this series of articles. The articles are archived on the Pickens Progress website, and will be presented in bound form to the Pickens Library and Mt. Calvary Church.

Two women provided extensive guidance and insights and have become good friends. I would like to tell you why I admire both of them,

Emma Julia (Collins) Washington

Emma Julia began her working life as a maid in the homes of White families and ended her career as an educator. In between was a life of hard work, determination, and accomplishment.

Beginning at age eighteen Emma Julia worked for several White families, sometimes two at a time. She would cook at one home and clean at another. Her first family was that of Dr. Guerrant and Mrs. Jean Parrow. Emma Julia was in charge of the kitchen, and she looked after the children. Another family she cared for was that of Dr. Barrow and his wife Lucille. They had no children, so her duties were cooking and cleaning. The last family, Dr. Burgess Lee and his wife Hazel had three children that Emma Julia cared for. During that time she was working from 7:30 AM to 3 PM for the Lee family she also worked the 4:00 PM to midnight shift in a local sewing factory. Fortunately her parents, Olin and Katherine Collins, were able to care for her children Michael, and Sandra.

“I was tired of cleaning other people’s houses. I wanted to better myself and set an example for my children,” recalled Emma Julia, explaining her decision to attend college in her 30s. While considering returning to school she received encouragement from Jean Parrow, Dr. Parrow’s wife. Mrs. Parrow herself had returned to college and earned a degree and certification in Special Education that allowed her to teach in the local school system. “You’re smart Emma Julia, you can do it,” Jean Parrow would remind her.

There were many challenges involved in returning to school while working. It had been years since high school and many of Julia Emma’s college subjects were not classes she had taken in high school. Chemistry and trigonometry were new to her. Advanced Biology also involved new skills, “I had never cut up a frog in high school, but in my college biology lab we had to dissect a pig. ‘What will I do with this thing?’ I thought.” Even today Emma Julia had a look of disgust on her face while recalling the prospect. Nevertheless she cut up the pig and did all that was required in her classes.

When she started college in 1970, son Michael, and daughter Sandra were attending Pickens High School. Because of these difficult new subjects they became their mother’s tutor. Often all three did assignments together at the same dining room table. Emma Julia would study late into the night and then go to work the next day. Sundays following church were also set aside for studying.

Driving to college classes was another challenge. A few were nearby but mostly involved an out -of -town drive one or two nights a week. Classes provided by the University of Georgia were taught locally, but those at Truett McConnell College, Reinhardt College and North Georgia College required a drive to and from class.

After attending college Julia Emma taught as a paraprofessional for two years in a county school program called “Project Follow Through” working with at-risk students. Later she worked with small children at the Pickens Day Care Center.

When her mother became sick Emma Julia had finished three years of college. She stopped her education to nurse her ailing mother. While she did not complete the degree she was able to go from being a maid to White families to working in schools with White and Black children.

For many years I taught classes on Friday night and Saturday mornings at Brenau University as an adjunct professor. Most of my students were, like Julia Emma, paraprofessionals with family responsibilities. Despite a tough load they were more productive than most traditional undergraduates. My hat’s off to Julia Emma and those women willing to make immense sacrifices to better their lives.

Willie Mae Weaver

Children were always the central focus of Willie Mae Weaver’s life. She grew up in a family of six girls. They lived in Tate where her father worked in the marble industry. The noise and confusion of so many folks in one household was something Willie Mae loved.

As an older teenager she required female surgery. The doctor explained the consequences to her. “Willie Mae, you’ll never be able to have children,” he solemnly declared. “You’re not God and you don’t know what he has in store for me. Take out what you have to and leave the rest,” was her angry retort.

After graduation from Morris Brown College, Willie Mae Green took a teaching job in Blue Ridge, Georgia, at “Padgett’s Chapel Colored School.” After two years of teaching she met her husband-to-be, Howard Haywood Weaver. They were married at the end of her third year in Fannin County.

After their wedding the Weavers moved to Tate where Howard took a job with the Georgia Marble Company. The quiet home of the childless couple drove Willie Mae to distraction. Husband Howard suffered with her as she longed for children. He developed a plan, making an appointment at the Department of Family and Children’s Services. His plea was direct, “We got to get some children for Willie Mae before she goes crazy or leaves me one,” he implored of the social worker.

And they did get foster children, a total of forty-four. “I still hear from some of those children,” Willie Mae offered. The noise of children filled their home as a stream of children lived with them and moved on. The children were local and from other counties as well. Howard and Willie Mae adopted six of their foster children, four boys and two girls. When her sister-in-law died they took in her five children. At age 79 Willie Mae still had five children in her home. Today Howard has passed away, but there are seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren in Willie Mae’s life.

Howard Weaver was a great support in raising all of the children. “He was a firm disciplinarian, but the children were crazy about him,” Willie Mae explained.

Willie Mae’s life has been dedicated to children. She was an elementary teacher at the Black Tri City School, and later Tate Elementary and Head Start. Altogether Willie Mae taught for thirty years.

Today, Black in Pickens County

The Black communities in Tate and Jasper have dwindled. Smokey Hollow still exists but today there are less than a half dozen homes. The county’s Black population was 4.6% in 1860 and peaked at a high of 8.2% in 1930, at the height of marble production. Today the percentage is 1.1%. By comparison, according to the US Census Bureau the United States is 12.3% Black and Georgia is 30.5% Black. There are a number of interracial couples in the county . In the 2010 census 1.2 percent of the county's residents listed themselves as “two or more races.” Combine the Black percentage and mixed race and you get 2.3 percent for Pickens County. In the 2010 Census the Hispanic population, at 2.8 percent, surpassed the Black/mixed race population for the first time.

Beginning with the declines in the marble industry, families have moved away seeking work in more urban areas. Some went North, but most to Atlanta. Those that I have met from areas like Canton continue to feel a fondness for Pickens County. Several families that live in the Canton/Marietta area still return to Tate for church. Resident or former resident, Black members of the community, past and present, have made and still make important contributions to this place.

(Writer’s footnote)

It has been a real pleasure to meet and work with the Black residents of Pickens County. Doing this history has been enjoyable work. I intend to continue researching and enjoying my new friends.

Kathy Thompson

References:

Julia Emma Washington, interviews by Kathleen Thompson, 2010, 2011
Willie Mae Weaver, interviews by Kathleen Thompson, 2009, 2010, 2011

While this is the last article in the series *Black History in Pickens County*, research and interviews will continue. Comments, feedback, and new information are welcome. *You may contact Dr. Thompson at 706 633 3865 or tjthomps@tds.net Her website is www.kathythompsonbooks.com*

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL COLLECTED AFTER THE ARTICLES WERE WRITTEN

Article

1. Rev. Walker notes in his book that there were Black students at the Carmel Mission. It is well documented that the wealthy members of the Cherokee Nation had Black slaves. By 1860, the Cherokees had 4,600 slaves. *“Many historians agree that at least 10 percent of all people on the Cherokee Trail of Tears were black. The vast majority were slaves, though some were runaways and intermarried, free blacks.”* (National Public Radio). In fact, because the Cherokee waited a year after the National Government to free their slaves, Oklahoma was the last slave state.

3. A local resident that Smokey Hollow was a place where illegal whiskey could be easily obtained. One policeman called it “Smokey Hell.”

7. There was an arrangement with the Cherokee County School System by which Black students from Ball Ground were bused to Tri City School (for Negroes). Effectively this allowed Ball Ground schools to be all-white. Nor did Cherokee County have to build and staff a “Colored school” for the Black children of Ball Ground. There is a similar engagement today between Pickens and Dawson schools, but it is not to achieve segregation. All students in Big Canoe attend Pickens schools, even though Big Canoe has a corner in Dawson County.

8. One previously undiscussed issue in the integration of the Jasper community was the public swimming pool. The national laws passed and court decisions related to race relations required that public facilities, such as a public swimming pool, be open to all Americans. Locally this was a touchy issue, with the potential for real conflicts. The Black community chose not to raise the issue and did not send their children to the pool. Emma Julia Washington remembered her mother explaining why, “I don’t want my grandchildren in that pissy water.” Of course that was not entirely true. Emma Julia noted, “We knew our (Black residents) limits and we didn’t push past them. It was several years before Black children swam in the Jasper pool, if at all. Later the city built a new pool.”