

African American

ATHENS DRIVING TOUR



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Foundation*



1. **Holmes-Hunter Building, 1903** UGA North Campus

Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes were the first black students admitted to the university in January 1961. Originally known as the Academic Building, this building was rededicated on January 9, 2001 as the Holmes Hunter Building. It was in this building that Holmes and Hunter registered for classes, striking a blow against segregated public education in Georgia.

2. **Reese Street Historic District**

This district dates back to the 1860s and was an important educational center for the black community. After the Civil War, African-American families settled into under-utilized areas near downtown. They built their own schools in this area (Knox Institute and Athens Industrial High School).



3. **Knox Institute** Corner of Reese and Pope Streets and no longer there

Founded by the Freedmen's Bureau in 1868, Knox School was a private school that

provided excellent instruction for black students. It was the first school for black students in Athens and was named for John J. Knox, a white official of the Freedmen's Bureau. Under the direction of the Reverend Louis S. Clark, it was reorganized as the Knox Institute and Clark served as principal from 1886 until the school closed in 1928. At its height, the school was one of the most prestigious private schools in Athens drawing its students from five states.

The school offered academic subjects as well as industrial classes such as carpentry, printing, sewing, and there was a special department of music and domestic science.

In 1912, Andrew Carnegie provided money for the construction of a new building named Carnegie Hall, which is where the school continued instructing Athens' black students until financial troubles forced it to close in 1928.



4. **Hill's First Baptist Church,** c. 1890s 205 N. Pope St.

Athens' first black baptist church features gothic revival detailing in a modified cross plan. Members were called to worship by ringing of the bell in its two-and-one-story steepled tower.

5. **Harris House** 446 Reese Street

Dr. W.H. Harris was one of Athens' most prominent early black physicians. He was a principal organizer and largest stockholder in E.D. Harris Drug Company, the first black-



owned drug store in Athens which at one time was located in the Morton Theatre Building. He was co-founder of the Georgia State Medical Association in Augusta, and active in the Republican party.



6. Athens High and Industrial School, 1913 **496 Reese Street**

The Athens Board of Education adopted plans to construct a black public school on Reese Street in 1913. It was a modern, well-equipped, steam heated, frame building. Professor S.F. Harris was the first principal, and classes were held for both elementary and secondary grades. By 1916, it became Georgia's only black public high school and its name changed to Athens High and Industrial School. In 1922 the school was among the first to be accredited by the state. It continued to prosper and moved in 1955 to a new building on Dearing Street. The school was renamed Burney-Harris High School in 1964. This Reese Street building was sold to the Athens Masonic Association, Inc.

7. Hiram House **635 West Hancock Avenue**

The Hiram House was the former residence of Ida Mae Hiram and her husband Lace Hiram. Mrs. Hiram was the first African-American woman to pass the Georgia dental board exams and the first black female dentist in Athens. Ida Mae Hiram lived in this house from 1918 until her death in

1979. The Hiram's' husband-and-wife dental practice, two of only seven black dentists in the entire state, was located at the Morton Theatre Building.

In 1985, the first AME Church purchased this house. Project Renew, a non-profit organization established by the church, has renovated the building for affordable housing.

8. Old Commercial Center **Hancock and Pope Intersection**

This area was a black-owned and run commercial center, complete with a hotel, café, cleaners and a pool hall. Two of the original buildings still stand, but all that remains of the hotel is the foundation walls of the southeast corner of the building.



9. Susan Building, 1946 **1127 West Hancock Avenue**

The Susan Medical Center was Athens first African-American Maternity Hospital. Dr. Andrew Jones founded the center in 1946 and it served the black community until the mid-1960s. The center was named for Jones' mother. He erected the building with charitable donations from local blacks and whites and from "Athens clubs" founded by former black Athenians in large Northern metropolitan areas. Dr. Donnarell Green, the son of a local physician and midwife, purchased the building in 1954. The building now houses the law firm of Green & Green, both descendants of Dr. Green.



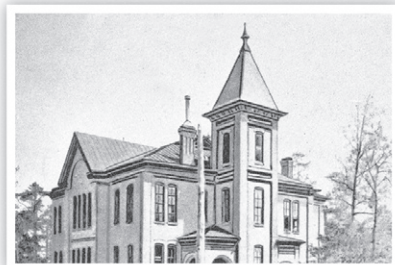
Michael Thurmond, Georgia Labor Commissioner and the first African-American elected to the Georgia General Assembly from Clarke County since reconstruction, previously practiced law in the Susan Building.

10. West Hancock Historic District

This area between Milledge Avenue and the Athens city limits became a black settlement and was a little town in itself. In 1913, 1136 of the city's 6300 blacks lived in the area. West Hancock was home to a wide cross section of Athens' black residents. Doctors, lawyers, and tradesmen lived in the larger homes built on higher, more level sites.

11. Clarke Central High School 350S. Milledge Ave.

(excerpt from Michael Thurmond's *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women of Athens*)
"The doors of the county's public schools swung open at the beginning of the 1970 fall term amid the fears of some and the hopes of others. After eighty-four years of racial separation, the two systems were totally merged, and a new day dawned for public education in Clarke County, Georgia."



12. Baxter Street School, 1886 Corner of Baxter & Pope and no longer there

Athens' first public schools opened in 1886. The Board of Education erected two, two-story, ten-roomed brick buildings, one for each race. Baxter Street School was the first public school for blacks. In 1893, the school

was remodeled for use by white students and the black students were moved to two six-room frame buildings on the east and west sides of Athens.

13. Hot Corner Corner of Washington and Hull Streets

This was the center of African-American commercial, financial, professional, and social life in Athens at the turn of the century. Many black businessmen established their operations here and it became important to the black middle class life.



14. Wilson's His and Hers Styling Salon 343 Hull Street

This building used to house "The Athens Republic," an independent black newspaper. The editor was Julian Brown, a licensed notary public. The paper's content was dedicated to "the religious, the educational, and the industrial development of the colored race." The Athens Republic was first published in November of 1919 and continued to serve the community until the mid- 1920s. Elizabeth and M.C. Wilson, who also own the soul food restaurant next door, own today's salon. It is one of the few black-owned businesses still in operation on Hot Corner.



15. Morton Theatre, 1910 195 West Washington Street

Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton was born a slave who by 1914 owned 25-30 buildings in Athens. He was the Republican delegate to the 1896 convention that chose William McKinley as a Presidential candidate.

The Morton Theatre is the first Vaudeville Theatre in America built, owned, and operated by an African-American. This 350 seat theatre is one of four African-American Vaudeville Theatres on the National Register of Historic Places. Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, and Cab Callaway all performed here.

The first floor office of the Morton building was the dentistry practice of Dr. Ida Mae Hiram, the first African-American woman dentist in the state of Georgia. She practiced for 55 years until she was 83 years old.



16. Morton Building, 1907 146 E. Clayton Street

Built and owned by Monroe “Pink” Morton, this is one of the only downtown buildings

with a façade built of marble. This is a fine example of one of the 25-30 structures owned by Morton in the early twentieth century.



17. First AME Church, 1886 521 North Hull Street

Originally known as Pierce’s Chapel, the city’s first black church was organized in 1866 by Henry McNeal Turner, the first black chaplain in the U.S. Army. These meetings took place in a blacksmith’s shop “under the hill” between downtown and the Oconee River. Later, the church would change its name to First African Methodist Episcopal. The church, designed by the first American trained black architect, was built at its current Hull Street location in 1916.

18. Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, 1882 530 Fourth Street

The cemetery was established in 1882 for African-American Athenians as a result of a burial insurance program called The Gospel Pilgrim Lodge. Members paid a dime a week to be guaranteed a big funeral. Prominent Athenians with grave sites at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery include Charles S. Lyons, Sr., school principal; Monroe “Pink” Morton, newspaperman William Pledger; and Madison “Matt” Davis, a former slave who became a Georgia legislator during Reconstruction and Athens’ first black postmaster. To commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday in January 2002, Michael Thurmond and local volunteers held a clean-up day at the cemetery.



19. Triangle Plaza

The Triangle Plaza lies between the Athens Perimeter and the North Oconee River, a predominantly African-American part of the city centered around a handful of businesses at the

corner of Vine Street and Nellie B Avenue. With the assistance of the East Athens Development Corporation, the area has seen an extensive revitalization in recent years.



20. Weaver D's

1016 East Broad Street

With the 1992 release of R.E.M.'s album "Automatic for the People", the world became familiar with Weaver D's motto.

Dexter Weaver has been serving soul food to the grateful citizens of Athens since 1986. He is the author of the book, *Automatic Y'all Weaver D's Guide to the Soul*.



21. Chestnut Grove School, 1896 Epps Bridge Road

A rare surviving example of a typical one-room schoolhouse where one teacher-

instructed black pupils of all ages. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Athens African American Historical Photos



19th century Athens-
Clarke County rural
African-American
farmhouse



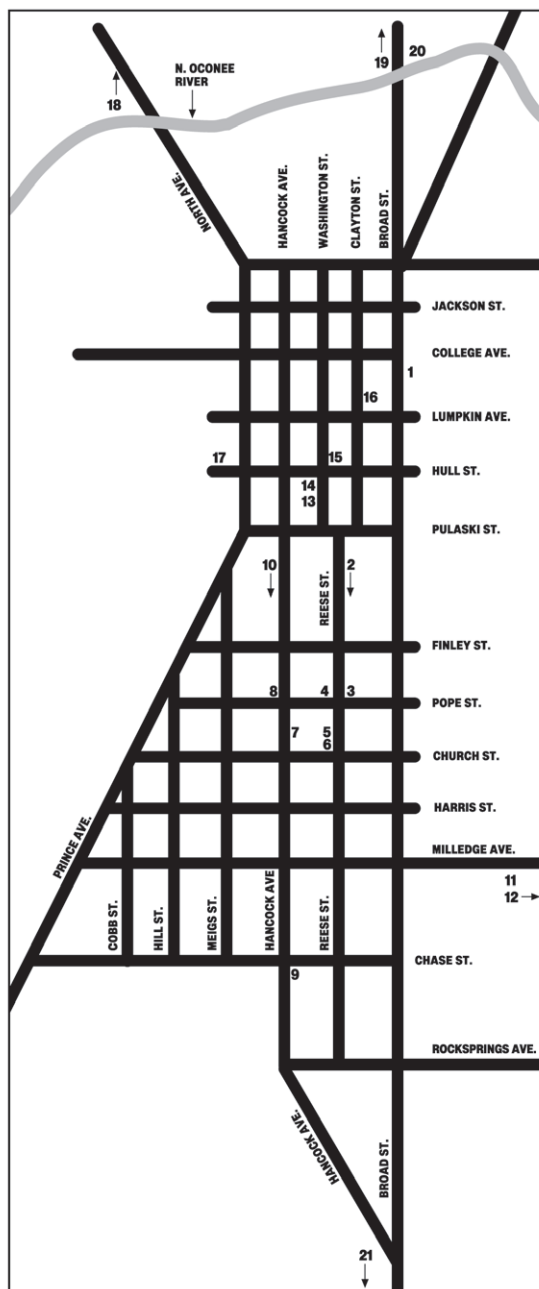
Pink Morton's home on
the corner of Prince and
Milledge circa 1880s. It
was replaced in the 20th
century by Flowerland



1921 photo of the Knox Institute football
team

African American

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