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News - Digital Library of Georgia

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Digital Library of Georgia

Over 130 Years of Atlanta Area African American Funeral Programs Now Freely Available Online

Over 11,500 pages of digitized African American funeral programs from Atlanta and the Southeast are now freely available in the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) at https://dlg.usg.edu/collection/aarl_afpc. The digital collection of 3,348 individual programs dates between 1886–2019 and contains contributions from the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, a special library of the Fulton County Library System; the Wesley Chapel Genealogy Group; and the Atlanta Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society. Georgia HomePLACE, a program of the Georgia Public Library Service, funded digitization.

“Funerals are such an important space for African Americans,” said Auburn Avenue Research Library archivist and lead project contributor Derek Mosley. “The tradition of funerals is not reserved for the wealthy or privileged, but the community. It is that lasting document of someone’s life. In the program is the history, and throughout this collection you see the evolution of the stories people left for future generations. I was amazed at the one-pagers from the 1940s, and by the 2000s there was full color, multiple pages, and a ton of photographs highlighting the life and love

shared by the families. This collection is public space for legacy.”

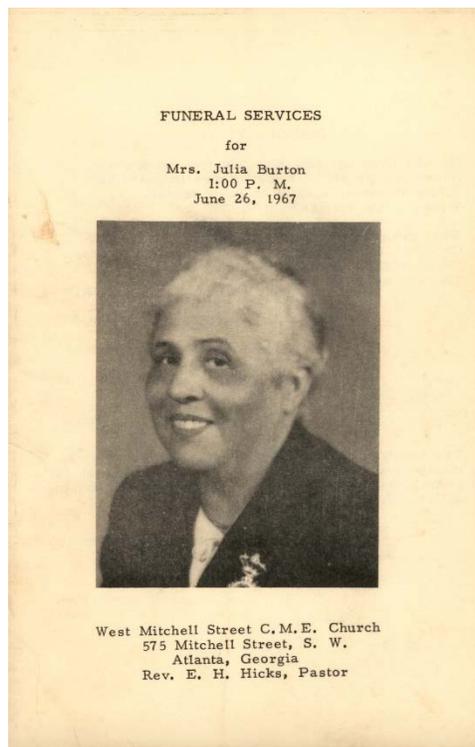
Funeral programs provide valuable social and genealogical information, typically including a photograph of the deceased, an obituary, a list of surviving relatives, and the order of service. Some programs provide more extensive details about the deceased, such as birth and death dates, maiden names, past residences, and place of burial. This data can otherwise be hard

to find, particularly for marginalized populations. Records of these communities often were either destroyed, kept in private hands, or never created in the first place.

“The challenge for African American genealogy and family research continues to be the lack of free access to historical information that can enable us to tell the stories of those who have come before us,” said Tammy Ozier, president of the Atlanta Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society. “This monumental collection helps to close this gap, allowing family researchers to get

closer to their clans, especially those in the metro Atlanta area, the state of Georgia, and even those outside of the state.”

The Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History began collecting funeral programs in 1994 with an initial donation by library staff. Since then, staff and the public have continued to add to the

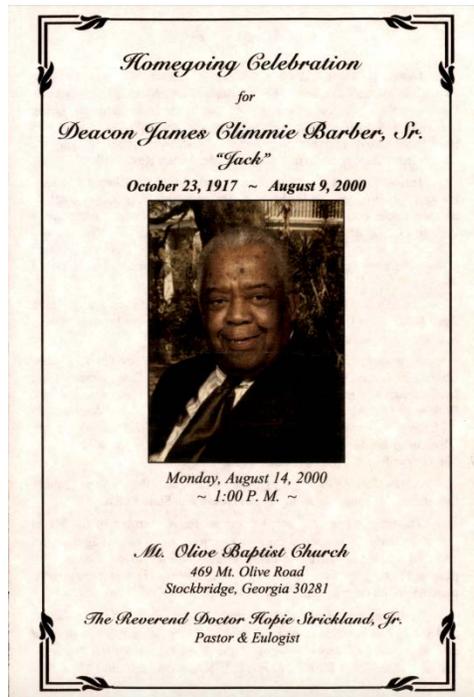


collection with a focus on the city of Atlanta. Although the materials have been physically open for research for decades, patrons can now access them beyond the library's walls. In 2012, the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Atlanta Chapter began its funeral program collection project in partnership with the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History and the Wesley Chapel Genealogy Group.

Fulton County Library System Director Gayle Holloman said, "funerals are filled, of course, with moments that allow expressions of great sorrow. However, for so many, especially in black communities, the funeral program is the written and preserved benediction to a life lived. It is my hope that the understanding of that fact will be treasured for generations to come."

Anchoring the west end of the Sweet Auburn historic district, the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History opened May 1994 in Atlanta. A special library of the Fulton County Library System (formerly the Atlanta Fulton Public Library System), it is the first public library in the Southeast to offer specialized reference and archival collections dedicated to the study and research of African American culture and history and of other peoples of African descent.

The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., Metro Atlanta Chapter was established in February 2000. It is one of 39 chapters of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc., a national nonprofit membership organization of diverse membership committed to the preservation of the history, genealogy, and culture of African-



ancestored populations of the local, national, and international communities.

Created in 2007 in response to a strong interest in genealogy in South DeKalb County, the Wesley Chapel Genealogy Group is a monthly discussion group that strives to support attendees in their genealogical endeavors. Expanding its roots from its home base at the Wesley Chapel Library, the group has served the DeKalb County Public Library and the communities it serves by providing several genealogy workshops in the hopes of helping others trace their

familial roots. The funeral program project is one of its most successful endeavors to date.

Church Record Book from Harris County Covering the Years 1828–1915 Now Available Online in the Digital Library of Georgia.

A record book covering the years between 1828–1915 of the Sardis Church of Christ is now available in the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG). The Sardis Church of Christ, associated with the Primitive Baptist Church, was one of the first churches to be established in Harris County, in west-central Georgia. This resource belongs to the Chipley Historical Center of Pine Mountain, Georgia, and has been made available online thanks in part to the DLG's Competitive Digitization grant program, a funding opportunity intended to broaden DLG partner participation for statewide historic digitization projects. The record book and descriptive information are available at: dlg.galileo.usg.edu/id:chipley_scc_sard.

Harris County was established in 1827, carved from Muscogee and Troup Counties, and from lands ceded by the Creek Nation in the 1825

Treaty of Indian Springs, and reaffirmed in the 1826 Treaty of Washington. A year later, in 1828, the Sardis Church of Christ was formed.

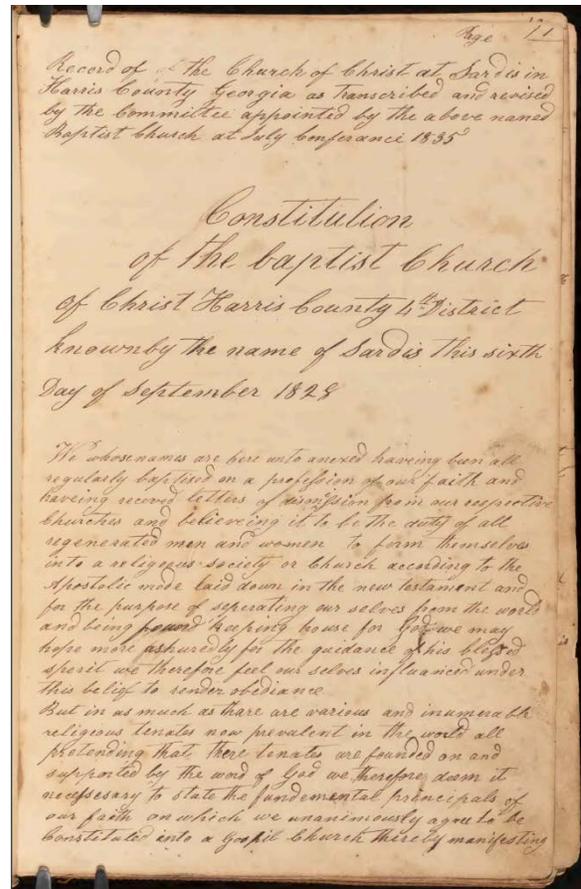
For the most part, the Sardis Baptist Church of Christ records follow a predictable format of when a meeting was held, who preached at the meeting, and that an invitation was given. The records also contain names of those that joined by declaration or by letter, and those that left by their own choice.

The Sardis Church also had African American members. Before the Civil War, these members were often listed only by their first names and are often denoted as “property of,” indicating their status as enslaved individuals. After the Civil War, the notations changed to “colored” or sometimes “freedman,” and their last name was often included. However, no matter what race, the church always referred to a member as Brother or Sister.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the church minutes in the record book became shorter and shorter for each meeting, and membership declined. This is probably due to the establishment of other churches nearby and the increased reliability of roads and transportation.

Although the Sardis Church no longer exists, the church record book is a valuable tool for both those researching Primitive Baptists in regions other than the wiregrass region of Georgia or for those researching very early Georgia churches.

Malinda Brooks, a member of the board of directors of the Chipley Historical Center, noted: “personally, I have used the Sardis minutes in preparation of two published family genealogy books...researchers are excited to find out when their family members entered and exited the Sardis membership, including the death dates of some members. These death dates, especially those that have not been found elsewhere, are treasures to researchers. Most recently, a woman researching her family



for her Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) membership application was able to find ancestors in the Sardis record book which helped strengthen her DAR research, especially given that the DAR was unable to track the correct ancestor.”

Digital Library of Georgia Awards Three Competitive Digitization Service Grants to Georgia Cultural Heritage Institutions Across the State

Three institutions are recipients of the seventh set of service grants awarded in a program intended to broaden partner participation in the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG). The DLG solicited proposals for historic digitization projects in a statewide call, and applicants submitted proposals for projects with a cost of up to \$7,500. DLG staff will provide free digitization, scanning, and hosting services so that more of Georgia’s diverse history can be

found online for free. The Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council (GHRAC) presented the 2018 Award for Excellence in Archival Program Development to this subgranting program. The recipients and their projects include:

Lee County Library (Leesburg, Georgia)

Digitization of the Lee County Library Local History Collection which contains print material dating from 1784–2000 that includes church histories, local Lee County history, and documentation of the 1994 Southwest Georgia flood.

Saint Paul's Church (Augusta, Georgia)

Description and hosting of the handwritten vestry minutes, parish and marriage registers, and commemorative materials of Saint Paul's Church, Augusta's oldest congregation founded in 1750.

Hargrett Library, University Archives

Digitization of the University of Georgia's *Pandora* yearbooks dating from 1965–1974, which include the aftermath of desegregation, the beginnings of the Black student, the women's liberation, the gay liberation, and the campus free speech movements.

Preference in the selection process was given to proposals from institutions that had not yet collaborated with the DLG. Saint Paul's Church and the Lee County Library are both new partners for the DLG. Sheila McAlister, director of the Digital Library of Georgia noted: "our latest slate of projects includes two new partners, a public library and a church archives. The projects document the history of Lee County, the activities of one of the oldest churches in Augusta, and student life at the University of Georgia during a period of enormous social change. With each new project, we're able to illuminate more of the state's history."

Source Recognition Digital Certificates and Outstanding Use of the Digital Library of Georgia Resources Special Awards

The Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) has awarded Source Recognition Digital Certificates and Outstanding Use of the Digital Library of Georgia Resources Special Awards to history students participating in National History Day Georgia.

The Digital Library of Georgia partnered with Georgia Humanities to create the special awards designed to engage students in historical research using DLG resources and to recognize the best examples of student work. Source recognition digital certificates were awarded to students who incorporated primary sources found in DLG's portals in their projects. DLG staff conferred the Outstanding Use of the Digital Library of Georgia Resources special award on exceptional junior and senior individual, as well as group projects.

The certificates were distributed after the National History Day (NHD) Georgia 2020 held its virtual award ceremony on May 7, 2020.

Outstanding Use of Digital Library of Georgia Resources Special Award Winners include:

- Junior—Individual Project Winner: Ava Monger for "Roy Barnes; Breaking Barriers to Change the State Flag" (Project ID # 11008).
- Junior—Group Project Winners: Lillian Harper, Destiny Butts, and Tai-Leea Jones for "That Very Rich Negress" (Project ID # 12001).
- Senior—Individual Project Winner: Becky Dorminy for "Ivan Allen, Beacon of Change: Breaking the Barriers of Segregation in the New South" (Project ID # 25007).

- Senior—Group Project Winners: Brandon Leonard, Layla Burrell, Gabby King, and Jayden Jones for "Dividing a City 'Too Busy to Hate': Atlanta's Own 'Berlin Wall'" (Project ID # 24003).

National History Day (NHD) Georgia is a program of Georgia Humanities and LaGrange College. NHD encourages middle and high school students to engage more deeply in the historical process.

Over the course of the school year, students select a topic related to the year's theme and

develop their projects through extensive primary and secondary source research. The NHD theme for 2020 was Breaking Barriers in History.

Under the guidance of a sponsoring teacher, students choose both their subject matter and a vehicle to present their research within the following categories: documentary, exhibition, paper, performance, or website. NHD attracts thousands of participants each year.

Competitions occur at the regional, state, and national levels. The NHD Georgia State Contest host for 2020 was [LaGrange College](#).