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News – Digital Library of Georgia

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*People, Libraries
and Agencies* **IN THE NEWS**

Digital Library of Georgia

Two Mid-20th Century Collections Recall Atlanta Neighborhoods Lost to Urban Renewal, and Georgia's Growing Catholic Community

Two new collections of digitized [films](#) and [slides](#) documenting the growth of Georgia's Catholic community between 1938–1979 are now available freely online from the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG). With these materials from Marist School educators Reverend Michael Kerwick, SM, (1912–1990) and Reverend Vincent Brennan, SM, (1912–1993), researchers are able to piece together the history of the Marist School's campus, community, and activities at its former location (as Marist College) in downtown Atlanta and its Brookhaven home (as Marist School) on Ashford-Dunwoody Road in DeKalb County.

The time periods of Father Kerwick's and Father Brennan's collections coincide with the exponential growth of the city's Catholic community. During the mid-20th century, Atlanta claimed 30,000 Catholic residents. By the end of the century, that number grew to nearly 300,000.

These materials also show portions of downtown Atlanta that were lost through development in the 1950s and early 1960s. A major reason for Marist School's relocation to suburban Brookhaven was the encroaching development of the interstate system and the use of eminent domain to acquire portions of the original campus. Scenes from the original campus and downtown street scenes have captured buildings and streetscapes that were lost to urban renewal.

Dr. Michael Bieze and Dr. Louisa Moffitt, archivists at the Marist School said:



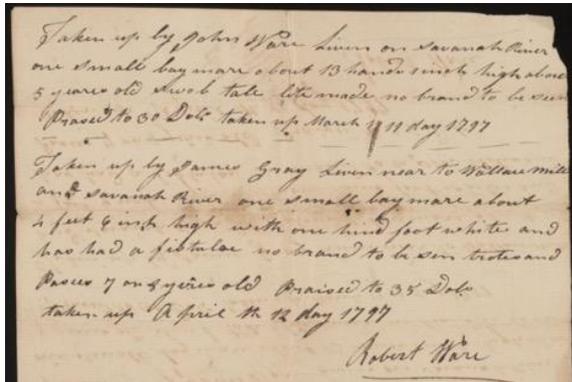
The [digitized] images were taken by Father Vincent Brennan during those years before Marist School was moved to its suburban location in the mid-1960s and includes images from both the old campus on Ivy Street, as well as images of the new campus on Ashford-Dunwoody Road.

Some additional themes covered in these collections include school commencements, athletics programs, formal events such as promenades, and visits to Marist parishes throughout Georgia. Dr. Bieze and Dr. Moffitt both added: "In addition, there are images of Brunswick, Saint Simons Island, Darien, and Jekyll Island during those years."

Two New Digital Collections Provide Genealogical Coverage to Underrepresented East Central Georgia

As recipients of a service grant awarded earlier in 2021, the Greater Clarks Hill Regional Library System has worked in partnership with the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) to release [court records dating back to the 1700s](#) and [funeral home records from the mid-20th century](#) available online.

These courthouse and funeral home records will serve genealogical researchers looking for information about ancestors from east-central Georgia, a historically under-documented region of the state, and will provide information about Lincoln County residents dating back to the 18th century, and as far forward as the mid-20th century.



The first collection, Lincoln County Courthouse Records, includes court documents that cover a variety of areas such as court cases, assault charges, writs of fieri facias (FIFAs), cases against the state of Georgia, power of attorney documents (POAs), bench warrants, petitions, summons, slander charges, illegitimate children cases, affidavits, animal appraisals, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), debt collections, evictions, and plats, dating from 1700–2020.

The next collection, Rees Funeral Home Records, includes obituaries and other funeral arrangement details for some residents or former residents of Lincoln County, with dates ranging from the 1940s to the 1960s. Mallory Harris, a librarian at the Columbia County Library, described the importance of these collections to Georgia residents:

The Rees Funeral Home Funeral Records collection contains obituaries from a Lincoln County funeral home. We selected these obituaries because they contain family background and general information about people with ties to the

Lincoln County area and can especially help genealogists with discovering research leads.

The Lincoln County Courthouse Records contain legal information from affidavits to summons dating back to the 1700s. We also chose to include the courthouse records because they are excellent primary sources that discuss many kinds of legal proceedings which took place in Lincoln County history and could serve as great evidence in historical research for that area.

Kathleen Reichl, the staff coordinator for the Columbia County Library Genealogy Club emphasized that “as a genealogist myself, I have personally used these records, as have many of my patrons and genealogy club members. We find them invaluable.”

Urban Planning, Civil Rights, and Trends in Landscape Design in Savannah Highlighted

In partnership with the City of Savannah Municipal Archives, the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) has made [the minutes of the Park and Tree Commission 1896–1929](#) available freely online.

The historical significance of the collection may not be obvious at first, but Luciana Spracher, director for the City of Savannah Municipal Archives, described its importance to contemporary research:

While on the surface the Park and Tree Commission Minutes might seem mundane, upon closer inspection they contain important information that reflects the intersections of urban planning and civil rights, trends in landscape design, development of Savannah’s cemeteries (both African American and white, since Savannah’s cemeteries were originally segregated), and details such as the use of convict

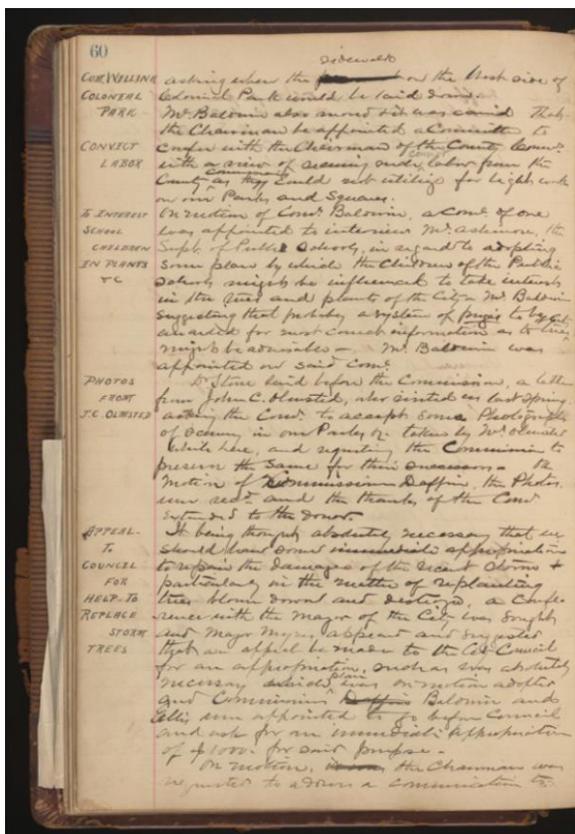
labor in city infrastructure projects; all topics that draw on current socio-political trends and that are largely underrepresented in scholarship.

Minutes from the early 20th-century discuss issues surrounding segregation of public facilities, such as public pools and park benches. These records offer insider perspectives into the decision-making process related to these Jim Crow-era policies that are not often found in governmental records.

such as tree planting, parks, and playgrounds. By digitizing the collection and sharing it through the Digital Library of Georgia (and thereby through the Digital Public Library of America), it will become more widely accessible to researchers in broad geographic locations.

Daves Rossell, professor of architectural history at the Savannah College of Art and Design added:

Having a doctorate in American architectural and urban history, with a specialty in vernacular architecture and cultural landscape, I have had call to use the Municipal Archives on many occasions, including in preparation for historic district nominations, historic landscape recordation, and a variety of research on individual buildings. Without the Park and Tree Commission's records, such fundamental aspects of our civic heritage would be as good as lost. The Park and Tree Commission records are among the most diverse and valuable resources available on many such topics.



Spracher also described the importance of digitizing the collection for accessibility:

Currently this collection is underutilized by researchers because it is available only on site in our research facility in Savannah and is often overlooked as researchers are likely to believe it contains information limited to topics

Birth Registers from Historically Endangered Georgia Nursing Home for Expectant African American Mothers

The Georgia B. Williams Nursing Home in Camilla, Georgia, and the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) have worked together to digitize and present online the [birth registers](#) of the mothers and babies born at the Georgia B. Williams Nursing Home between 1949–1971. This nursing home, located at the home of state-certified midwife Mrs. Beatrice ("Miss Bea") Borders (1892–1971), was the first and only professional birthing center in the rural South where African American women were allowed by local doctors to receive midwife delivery for their newborns during segregation, Jim Crow depression, and medical deprivation in the 20th century.

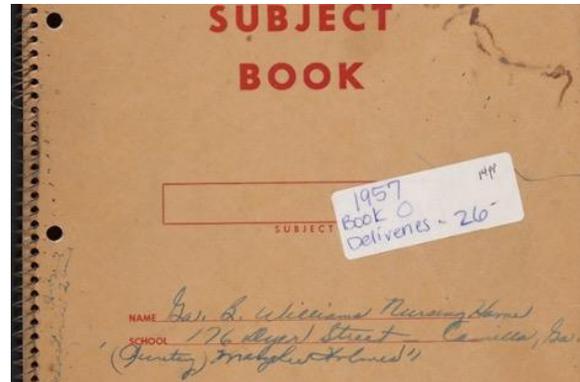
“Miss Bea” and her assistants oversaw over 6,000 births and provided a safe place for African American mothers who had nowhere else to go.

These birth records were recorded in mid-century composition notebooks and contain essential genealogical information.

Depending on the volume, some entries include the mother's name, the date she entered the facility, the time of the birth, the baby's weight, the baby's gender, and whether there were any complications such as stillbirths. Some entries include additional genealogical information such as occupation, age, address, birthplace, number of children in the family, and the name of the father.

Melissa Jest, program coordinator for African American Programs at the Georgia Historic Preservation division of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs said:

The digitization and cataloging of the records from this Black-owned/operated business presents an opportunity for students and researchers to learn about this historically significant place and the people who entered its doors.



It is our hope that this project will bring awareness to Mrs. Borders and will build support for the physical preservation of where she did her work.

The Georgia B. Williams Nursing Home in Camilla, Georgia survives as a very rare example of a professional birthing center run by Mrs. Borders, a state-certified midwife. Increased access to the business records and related documents generated between 1941 and 1971 will assist hundreds of people researching their genealogy and roots in Mitchell County, Georgia.