

SMHS Second Quarter Newsletter, 2016



Greetings!

Hope everybody is enjoying his or her summer. The newsletter's featured photograph above shows the community at work building the Rock Gym in 1936. The photograph is one of four taken of its construction during the Works Progress Administration and the series is archived at the Hargrett Rare Book Room and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia. Please let us know if you can identify anybody in this incredible view.

There is a lot to report in this newsletter. First, Board member **Susan Devine and her partner, Daiga Dunis, at Hayden Landscapes** led a large assembly of Master Gardeners cleaning up, digging out bamboo, creating a new path, and laying down mulch in April at the Society headquarters. Please come by and take a look at the amazing job they have accomplished in joining the old property to the new. We are extremely fortunate to have their services on hand and are looking next year to having a separate budget for grounds improvement and maintenance at their discretion. **A big thanks to Jim McCurdy** for his support in this effort!

On that note, we have often spoken about ways to better fund the repair and maintenance costs for our building and grounds. Dues and fundraisers tend to cover only operational expenses and program needs. **Former president Frank Luton** suggested that we follow the excellent example of **the Stone Mountain Woman's Club** who have successfully established a companion society for voluntary funding solely for the repair and maintenance of their beautiful mid century clubhouse.



**Historical Society
Headquarters**



Join us on the Fourth of July between 9:00 and 11:30 AM for a hearty pancake breakfast.

Flags will be streaming and the Wells Brown house will be

Using their model, we would like to establish the **1871 Club for the Wells Brown House**. Membership in the 1871 Club would be voluntary and would require a membership donation of \$18.71 that will be dedicated solely to the care and maintenance of the Wells Brown House and its grounds. We would like to launch the 1871 Club in July and will send out more information in a letter to our membership and others in the community who are preservation minded. Contribute once a year or more often. This funding will allow us to build up reserves to handle everything from shutter to masonry repairs and will allow us available matching funds to apply for grants to help with larger repairs. Please consider joining the club when you receive your letter!

Finally, the **Rock Gym takes central stage**. In the last two weeks, we learned that our city leadership has been wrestling with a new lease proposal for the Rock Gym from the DeKalb County School Board. The amount is not in line with the city's fiscal expectations and the future of the Gym is in a precarious position. The new lease amount is \$16K as opposed to \$1 a year, which it has been for decades. While both the School Board and the city have strong arguments in their favor, the good of the gym itself unfortunately is not at the center of either of their positions. The city won't put money into a building that is not theirs and the School Board expects something for a building they own.

Who is the building's advocate in all this? I think we are. It is time for all of us to step up and help trigger a new conversation where both a proud city and school board do the right thing. Preserve the building, find new uses for it, and work in cooperation.

The City Council and Mayor has heard from a number of alumni and residents supporting the building's preservation and its retention by the city. They have suggested that letters/emails be written to the De Kalb County School Board alerting them to public sentiment. This effort is ongoing and we urge you to lend your voice in support of the gym's preservation. If you wish to do so, the individuals to contact are shown to the right.

At this juncture we hope that the city can maintain control of the building until a building donation or appropriate lease agreement is reached. We are looking for a task force to start the conversation and end it successfully with the Rock Gym's care and preservation at the center of that dialogue. The potential for that building as a community asset has not and cannot be realized under the current arrangement. We need a vision and a management plan for the Gym that allows full community use and allows us to go after grants and funding for its repair and maintenance. Maybe a 1938 Club is in our future? Regardless, this will require input from building advocates, city leadership, residents, and the School Board. If the residents of our city could craft such an incredible architectural legacy in the throes of the Great Depression, can't we, who are so blessed in 2016, ensure its future?

decked out in red, white, and blue for the occasion.

Start your holiday with some great food, conversation with friends and neighbors, and some patriotic tunes.

Adults \$12, Children \$5.



SAVE THE DAY

Saturday, August 6,
6:00 -8:00 pm.

The Snead's wonderful barbecue meets Ann Hamby's delicious cole slaw and banana pudding what more needs to be said? Brunswick stew and other fixings will be there too. This has become an annual event for us with all food and drink donated to the Society as a fundraiser. We would like to get a Master Plan for our property going next year and help fund the development of the gardens and grounds. It's a good cause so please come by and sit down for dinner with us or plan on a take out. We will also sell barbeque and Brunswick stew by the quart. We will send out a reminder in July.

Looking Underground – Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey, Civil War Section, City Cemetery

New South Associates, Inc. conducted a volunteer ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey within the Unknown Confederate section of the City Cemetery last December with permission from the Cemetery Trust. New South is involved in a Georgia Department of Transportation study of historic cemeteries and knowledge particularly about Civil War era burials is needed. GDOT has performed a similar survey at Andersonville National Cemetery to provide the site managers better information for planning purposes. We hoped that this survey would do the same plus further our knowledge on Civil war sections in municipal cemeteries like Stone Mountain.

The cemetery contains several historic markers that speak to the burials of unknown Confederate soldiers there and that wartime expediency made trench burials a necessity. A series of commemorative markers note 131 burials of unknown Confederate soldiers in the trench burial section while the state historic marker states that approximately 150 were interred, and that some had lost their lives in a skirmish with “Federal raiders” on July 19th, 1864. This skirmish is described in The Civil War in Georgia Commemorating 150 Years (see column on right). Although the above source does not mention the death toll in these skirmishes, the evidence in our City Cemetery suggests at least one of the skirmishes was deadly for the Confederate forces.

The purpose of the survey was to get a better understanding of where the trench burials, noted in the historical record, were laid out and to see their orientation. While individual markers were placed in the Unknown Confederate Section of the cemetery, they were laid out for visual effect, to honor the unknown dead and their service. The position of the Confederate section at the entry and its visibility from Ponce de Leon Avenue has also probably led to an enlargement of surface commemoration over time. Stone Mountain is rightly proud of its cemetery and in particular this section.

To figure out the underground landscape without disturbing any above ground markers, etc., the GPR survey grid was positioned to cover the extent of the monuments within the section (see area enclosed in red). Historic graves from the Civil War era can be difficult to identify in GPR results due to their decomposition over time and the ephemeral nature of burials placed in pine boxes or burial shrouds. GPR results are dependent on contrast and lack of contrast and that can mean burials are difficult to map. The contrast at Stone Mountain was somewhat difficult to interpret because of the dense clay subsoil and lack of well-defined burial features.



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GPR Survey in Progress above.

Excerpts from The Civil War in Georgia Commemorating 150 years on Skirmishes in July 1864 in/near Stone Mountain village:

On July 15, 1864, constant skirmishing broke out on the Stone Mountain Road north of the village between Union Brigadier General Kenner Garrard's troops and elements of dismounted Confederate cavalry. Three days later on July 18, Garrard ordered five regiments, a force of several thousand men, to tear up the tracks, burn the ties, and twist the heated iron to render it useless. The destruction began one mile west of the Stone Mountain Depot and included several culverts and a water tank.

...fighting broke out in mid- July between Union and Confederate cavalry in Stone Mountain Village and around Tucker's Browning Court House and the railroad. On July 18, 1864, 1000 Confederate cavalymen of Dibrell's Brigade fought a delaying action in Stone Mountain Village against 4000 Federals under General Kenner Garrard who were intent on destroying the railroad. Ultimately the Confederates were driven back and two miles of the Georgia Railroad were destroyed including several culverts and the water tank.

The Confederate forces led by Colonel George C. Dibrell took up sniper positions in the buildings and structures on the north end of the village. The Union forces brought in their artillery and drove Dibrell's men from their position. As they retreated they burned the bales of cotton and other stores to keep them from enemy hands.



Source: Google Earth Pro (2015)

It is impossible to conclusively determine that we have identified burial trenches and individual graves. Given the historical evidence and the evidence shown in the GPR, however, it is assumed that the areas identified by green dotted lines may correspond to burial trenches, suggesting that there were two possible trenches excavated adjacent to Moore Street and that both were located at some distance from the entry. Both trenches are the result of excavation of typical soils. We don't know how long the trenches were open and whether one or multiple burials occurred.

It is significant that both trenches are oriented to Moore Street, which was probably how the gravediggers accessed the cemetery with bodies transported by wagons, to lighten the distance needed to handle the hard task ahead. One of the trenches has a large

metal object in it, possibly a coffin or casket. This may predate the Civil War trench burials or, if contemporary with them, it poses some interesting research questions. Finally, three individual possible grave anomalies (noted in yellow on the map) were also identified in addition to the possible trenches. Presumably, these are not Civil War associated and the fenced area in the lower part of the grid appears to be the burial plot of Kenneth Mackenzie, a Scotsman who died in 1854. The area within Mr. Mackenzie's plot was not surveyed.

This data is intriguing, calling for more research into how many soldiers were actually buried in the two trenches and who might possibly be buried in the coffin or casket within the larger trench. The data also shows the impacts of our efforts to memorialize the dead. Placing the individual markers helps to soften the reality of the trench burials and pays homage to those, although unidentified, gave their lives in military service.

Zellie Orr and the Tuskegee Airmen Presentation

In April, the Society teamed with the Friends of Sue Kellogg Library in welcoming Zellie Orr to the village for a presentation on the Tuskegee Airmen. While most of us consider the Tuskegee Airmen to be the African American pilots who were in the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Forces, the Tuskegee Airmen actually included all the individuals that supported the pilots from navigators and bombardiers to cooks, nurses, and others. The speaker showed a short film on the Airmen that caught your mind and heart and then followed it with an inspirational story on her role in helping to preserve the history of the Airmen, one of whom came from her hometown. It was a great program and at its close, everybody left thinking about the incredible service these men gave to our country.



Joan and Clint Monroe exchange information with Ms. Orr after the presentation.

Don't Forget Friends of Sue Kellogg Book Sale this Friday and Saturday at Sue Kellogg Library, 9-4!



For Village Gardeners

John G. Miller, a farmer that made his home in the village along with his wife Ollie and their five children in the 1880s, made headlines with his incredible melon crop in 1883. Described as big as beer kegs, the Atlanta Constitution article below noted the melons were Cuban Queens. Farmer Miller certainly set the bar high for watermelon cultivators in the 1880s as well as today!

A MONSTER MELON

Mr. John G. Miler is certainly the chief farmer of DeKalb County so far we have heard from. It is a show to see his watermelons, cotton and corn. He has twenty melons on hand that will average 60 pounds each, several weighing 75 to 80 pounds. **The boss melon** was pulled yesterday morning and **weighed 111 pounds**. It was weighed in the presence of Messrs. John P. Tuggle, Irwin L. Tear, A.B.F. Veal and others. It is a big one, larger than a beer keg. It is a fine variety of melon, known as the Cuban Queen. It has a thin rind, very brittle, sweet as honey and solid to the center.

*- Atlanta Constitution,
September 5, 1883*