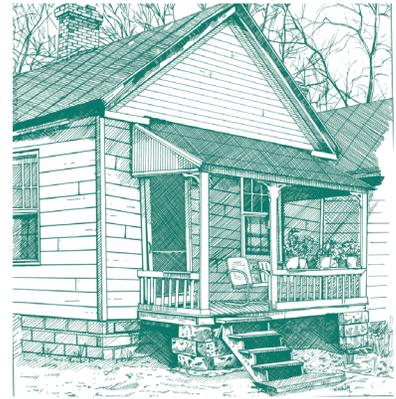


Reflections



A Program of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources



Georgia African American
Historic Preservation Network

Volume VI, No. 2

July 2006

INTERPRETING AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE IN THE SAUTEE-NACOOCHEE VALLEY: THE BEAN CREEK HISTORY PROJECT

Jeanne Cyriaque, African American Programs Coordinator
Historic Preservation Division

The Sautee-Nacoochee Valley is located in White County and includes an area that encompasses over 2,500 acres in the Appalachian Highland region of Georgia. Situated on the southeast edge of the Blue Ridge, the region's landscape features mountains and a series of irregularly shaped valleys that intersperse hills along a backdrop of higher ridges. The Sautee Valley is located on the northeast side and the Nacoochee Valley lies beneath its southern edge. Four creeks run through these valleys joining together as the Sautee Creek that ultimately flows into the Chattahoochee River.

Bean Creek is located on the northern side of the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley. It is a place where an African American community has existed since enslavement to the present. Bean Creek Road is the gateway to the community that is located just off Georgia Highway 255 in Sautee. One of the community landmark

buildings is the Bean Creek Missionary Baptist Church. The Old Bean Creek Cemetery surrounds the church and families who are buried there represent generations of African Americans whose descendants live in the community today.



An endangered circa 1850 slave cabin was moved to this heritage site and nature preserve. When restored, it will help to tell the story of African American life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley from 1822-1865.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Bean Creek Missionary Baptist Church is a landmark in the African American community. The Old Bean Creek Cemetery is located on the hillside surrounding the church. The cemetery is the final resting place for generations of Bean Creek families.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

The history of this African American community is intertwined with some of the white families who settled in the foothills of northeast Georgia. When the Treaty of 1819 ceded lands in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley that were occupied by the Cherokees, they were forced westward. The Land Lottery of 1820 provided impetus for white settlement. Soon 61 families from North Carolina traveled to Georgia to begin farming in these valleys. Among these early white settlers was the Williams family, who arrived in the Nacoochee Valley in 1822.

The Williams family would soon become major landowners in the region. They were descendants of Major Edward Williams of Massachusetts. He later moved to North Carolina and married a daughter of Daniel Brown before both families migrated to Georgia.

continued on page 2

Over the years, this circa 1850s cabin began to deteriorate. In 2002, SNCA director Jim Johnston and his family agreed to donate the slave cabin for preservation and a proposed heritage site with the condition that it be moved to another location.



The slave cabin's original appearance was modified by adding interior rooms, windows and a front porch. These deteriorated elements were removed to restore the slave cabin to its original size. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

Crittenden assembled a talented team of persons to assist with the cabin and the heritage project. Photographer David Greear painstakingly documented every architectural feature of the cabin. Barry Stiles is the craftsman who stabilized the cabin and removed the additions. Stiles found that the original cabin was made of yellow pine and oak, and it was cut with a sash saw. He will restore the cabin to its 1850s form with similar wood. Linda Aaron searched tax digests, wills, and family records. She is a UGA archivist, and has assembled photos, census information and additional documentation for the project. Andy Allen, president of the Friends of Bean Creek, and Lena Dorsey are leading the effort to collect oral histories and memorabilia from the Bean Creek community to interpret African American life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley. They were instrumental in developing the project's first exhibit: *Reflections of Bean Creek*. It was displayed at the Sautee Nacoochee Center.

SNCA found a home for the cabin and the heritage site less than one mile from its original location through a gift from Lillian Hepinstall Everhart. In 1989, she donated three acres to SNCA along Georgia Highway 17 for a nature preserve. Everhart was an environmentalist and wanted this land conserved in its natural habitat. Dale Brubaker, who is a museum consultant that advises the project team, believes that the slave cabin and the nature



Stone mason David Vandiver stabilized the chimney that was falling into the cabin. He will reassemble the chimney to its original form.

Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



Caroline Crittenden and Andy Allen are some of the community folk who volunteer for the Bean Creek History Project. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

preserve complement each other. Crittenden and Brubaker thought this would be the perfect site for the slave cabin, walking trails through the nature preserve, artifacts and an interpretive center. When Crittenden, Allen and craftsman Stiles presented the plan to locate the heritage site in this natural and serene setting, they received the overwhelming support of SNCA and the Bean Creek community.

The heritage site will be an educational tool that will feature the cabin and other artifacts collected by the Bean Creek community to tell the story of African American life in the valley from 1822 to 1865. Besides the slave cabin, the heritage site will include a piece of a stone wall that, according to oral tradition, was part of the wall where E.P. Williams read the *Emancipation Proclamation* to his slaves at the close of the Civil War. Other artifacts include a cooling vat that was used to refrigerate dairy products for the Williams family, a stone bench that was constructed by slaves, iron cauldrons that were used for laundry and cooking, and some of the bricks that were made by slaves with native clay. The heritage site is located just beyond the old Sautee Store on Georgia Highway 17.



This photo shows Andy Allen's great-grandmother, Mary Ann Nicely (left) who was born enslaved in the Sautee Nacoochee Valley. She is pictured in front of a log cabin with Allen's grandmother and grandfather, Lessie and Ed Nicely.

Photo courtesy of Andy Allen



This photo shows the slave cabin resting on the original rock piers in its new home at the Nacoochee Valley African American Heritage Site & Nature Preserve. Stone mason David Vandiver will reassemble the rock chimney and hearth. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

When completed, the Nacoochee Valley African American Heritage Site & Nature Preserve will document the history of the cabin, celebrate the heritage and culture of the Bean Creek community and interpret the story of slavery in the Nacoochee Valley from the African American perspective. For more information on how you can assist the slave cabin restoration and the African American Heritage Site, visit the Sautee Nacoochee Community Association website at www.snca.org.