



SANDHILLS SANKOFA NEWS

The Official Newsletter of Sandhills Family Heritage Association



RENOVATE, RESTORE & REOPEN SPRING LAKE CIVIC CENTER

Let the Renovation Continue!

by Janet Brower, Board Chair



For a number of years the Spring Lake Civic Center building has sat patiently and proudly holding memories of yesteryear. Memories of families who came from near and far for family reunions. Memories of teens from Spring Lake and surrounding communities who gathered for sock hops and danced the evening away. Memories of Boy Scout meetings, birthday parties and other gatherings that occurred regularly. Memories of weddings and anniversaries that brought kin and friends from across the country bidding fond well-wishes to couples. NAACP strategy meetings brought together civic minded citizens whose aim was to secure the rights of those in Cumberland and surrounding counties, so their voices could be heard also. Organizations like NC Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), area churches hosted fundraising activities, and other community groups held regular meetings and sponsored activities at the Spring Lake Civic Center.

When the doors closed memory making came to a halt, but the memories have since been collected and preserved. Hundreds of photographs, hand-written minutes of meetings, and recordings of eye witness accounts document the important history that was made.

It has been the desire of Sandhills Family Heritage Association (SFHA), which inherited the Civic Center in 2002, to restore and reopen this historic gift. The availability of funds to restore this structure has been far out of reach for the small nonprofit that struggles to stay afloat from year-to-year.



Interior of Spring Lake
Civic Center

SFHA has received a grant for \$250,000 from the NC General Assembly (GA) to support renovation of the Spring Lake Civic Center! Sincere gratitude is owed to Rep. Marvin Lucas for his diligent pursuit of this grant and his ongoing support of SFHA. Participants gathered at SFHA's 20th Anniversary event in December heard the announcement and were elated!

Procedures and required paperwork by the GA have been completed, processed and the funds received! Architectural plans have been completed and approved. Selection of a contractor after a bid process proceeded and has necessitated ongoing conversations with historic preservation specialists, (Jeff Adolphsen, Heather Fernbach), consultant and grant writer, (Beverly Parks) project architect (Laurie Jackson, Maurer Architecture), and SFHA Executive Board (Ammie Jenkins, Priscilla Burton, Debra Clyde, Janet Brower).

Roof Replacement
Dec 2019



Ensuring the historical integrity of the building is a priority for all parties. The Town of Spring Lake Inspections Department will of course approve necessary permits and inspect work being done to the building and grounds by the contractor and subcontractors. For this, we are grateful.

All needed work will not be covered by the GA Grant, so fundraising continues. Help from the community, friends, family and supporters is still needed, however; this grant is tremendous in helping to move SFHA along after the installation of a metal roof and building stabilization in 2019 and demolition of the interior of the building in 2021. This proud, patient treasure is ready for attention and we are excited to be able to make that happen in a way that will be visible to the public. So, onward to renovate, restore and reopen the Spring Lake Civic Center!

Sandhills Unsung African American Heroes and Sheroes

by Ammie McRae Jenkins, SFHA Founder & Executive Director

My purpose for writing this article is to help preserve memories of the people that help shape our lives. I hope the stories of strength, courage, achievements, and determination will inspire, educate and encourage you to talk with your children and grandchildren about the benefits of growing up in the Sandhills of North Carolina. We hear a lot about the trials of Black people but not enough about their enduring faith, self-sufficiency and community achievements.

We are blessed with a rich legacy that should be documented and preserved for future generations. It is impossible to write the real history of the Sandhills and North Carolina without including contributions that African Americans made to their community and state.



Our enslaved ancestors were an essential part of the history and culture of North Carolina. The state depended on their intensive physical labor for the production of tar, turpentine, lumber and other forest products which provided the wealth that kept the state's economy afloat.

While doing research on my family history, the Willis McRae, Sr. family, I was reminded of the churches, schools, houses, roads, bridges, and other landmarks all over the Sandhills area that were built by our ancestors. After the Civil War, they bought undeveloped land, cleared it and developed their own self sufficient communities.

I feel compelled to keep the memory of our ancestors alive because they have given us a rich legacy of FAITH, FAMILY, and COMMUNITY. I hope you will join SFHA and help to document, preserve and build on this legacy that we enjoy because they paid the price with blood, sweat and tears.

The newly renovated Civic Center will be a community resource for Sandhills African American History and Heritage.

Please call 910-309-2198 Or (919) 888-0389 for additional information.

Willis McRae, Sr.—1786-1906

Pioneer Landowner



- Enslaved on Ardnave Plantation in Harnett County
- Centenarian (119 years old)
- Married Three times
- Father of 28 Children
- Pioneer Landowner (658 acres of land in 1882)
- Developed McRaetown (McRae Family Compound)
- Tar Producer and Farmer
- Founding Elder of Spout Springs Presbyterian Church

Willis McRae, Sr., a Mulatto slave, was born in North Carolina and worked on Ardnave Plantation in Harnett County. According to the county land records, he purchased 658 acres of land in Harnett County, located in the thriving center of the navy stores industry in Spout Springs, NC. This purchase made Willis the first major black landowner in the county. Willis and his sons Daniel, Stephen, and Willis Jr., worked in tar and turpentine to pay for the land.

Other Black Men and Women of Strength, Faith, Courage, Accomplishments, and Determination

Mr. Ned McGregor. Co-Founder of Spout Springs Presbyterian Church

Mr. Jack Redding 1839-1919, Co-Founder of Spout Springs Presbyterian Church

Rev. Jack Murchison 1795-1922, Church Founder and Preacher

Mr. "Cooper" Neil Cameron 1847-1927, Craftsman and Businessman

Mr. Joe McCormick 1841-1937, (Runaway twice and recaptured), Farmer

Mr. Duncan McRae 1856 Barber

Mrs. Laura Stinson 1835-1924, Stinson Cemetery

Mr. Lemuel P. Stinson 1843-1912, First Bethel AME Zion Church Parsonage

Miss Rosetta McLean, Chief Cook for Rockefeller's at Overhills Retreat

Mrs. Lucy McRae Lucas 1849-1913, Midwife

John Taylor Williams - 1859–1924

Physician Educator Business Man American Diplomat

Published on NCPedia (<https://www.ncpedia.org>) Article by William S. Powell, 1994
Image courtesy of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, 2009

John Taylor Williams, educator, physician, and businessman, was born in the northern part of Cumberland County, the son of free black parents, Peter Williams, a successful lumberman, and Flora Ann McKay. Although his father was illiterate, his mother was not, and when the boy was six she began to teach him to read. In 1867 the family moved to Harnett County where the father hired a white widow to teach his children in return for his working on her farm. Between 1868 and 1870 John mastered Webster's blue back speller and other books and became an avid reader. By age sixteen he had read widely among volumes of memoirs, history, and biographies.



His parents were active church members—his father was a Presbyterian and his mother a Methodist. John joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church at age thirteen and set out on a course that led him to hold every church position open to a layman. He represented his denomination at quarterly, district, and annual conferences regularly for eighteen years and represented the Western North Carolina Conference in the General Conference of 1892, when it met in Pittsburg, Pa.

In 1876 he entered the State Normal School in Fayetteville (now Fayetteville State University) and in 1880 was graduated at the head of his class. Thereafter he taught school in Lillington, Monroe, Rutherfordton, Southport, and Charlotte. In Charlotte he was assistant principal but resigned in 1883 to study medicine at the Leonard Medical College in Raleigh. Following his graduation in 1886 with the M.D. degree, he was licensed by the State Board of Medical Examiners one of the first of his race to qualify. Settling in Charlotte, he soon had a large practice and became a surgeon in charge of the Union Hospital visiting surgeon at the Samaritan Hospital, and a member of the Board of Health of Mecklenburg County.

In 1888, as surgeon of the First Battalion, North Carolina State Guards he was appointed to the rank of captain by Governor Alfred M. Scales. In 1889 and 1891 he was elected to the board of aldermen of Charlotte. He also was a successful businessman as president of the Queen City Drug Company and with real estate and farming investments. He was a founding member of the Grace A. M. E. Zion Church on South Brevard Street, Charlotte, and a trustee of the A. M. E. Zion Publishing Company.

President William McKinley. In 1897 appointed him the U.S. consul to Sierra Leone, where Williams continued to serve until 1906 as one of the first black American diplomats. He was buried in Ninth Street Pinewood Cemetery, Charlotte.

Elizabeth (Lizzie) McGregor—1851-1941

A Freedom Seeker (Runaway Slave)

Steven McGregor fathered twelve children, all of whom were enslaved on a plantation in Laurinburg, North Carolina. Two of the twelve children, William and Lizzie, were house slaves; and, at the age of twelve and seventeen respectively ran away from their master and made their way to Fayetteville. Lizzie had been a cook in the master's house and William had been a house boy responsible for bringing in wood for the stoves and fireplaces.

As house slaves, they were trusted by their master and therefore had more freedom of movement than the field slaves. They were able to avoid being captured as a result of aid received from the freed Blacks and abolitionists in the Fayetteville area. Lizzie eventually made it to Harnett County where other members of her family lived.

After the Civil War, Lizzie purchased 100 acres of land through her son and nephew because women could not own land at that time. Lizzie's Spring, located on the property, was the source of water for families living in McGregor Town. She lived in her home on the land until she died in 1941.

Source: David L. Brower



Fayetteville Market House

The Fayetteville Market House is the city's main landmark building. It was built in 1832 and served as a center of economic activity during the city's early years, including serving as a location where slaves were sold and traded.

Lizzie McGregor and her brother William escaped from bondage in Laurinburg and made their way to a location near the Market House in Fayetteville where they were seen by someone who knew their family. They were then taken to Harnett County where their family members lived.



**Violet McRae Williams' 1852 Daughter
was sold at this Market House.
She never saw her daughter again.**



Elizabeth "Lizzy" McGregor's
Headstone

Sankofa Youth: Embracing the Past for a Brighter Future

by Chanai Winborn, Administrative Assistant & Sankofa Youth Coordinator



Sankofa Youth is a youth-led enrichment program that provides opportunities for youth to learn, lead and grow. Youth are assisted by an adult program coordinator and two adult youth leaders.

Sankofa Youth activities focus on civic education, character development, life-skills enrichment, and the development of leadership skills. Youth members learn about the history and heritage of African-Americans in N.C. Sandhills, participate in community service activities and serve as SFHA ambassadors and volunteers.

This year, the 4-H chartered group will focus on Entrepreneurship and Public Speaking. Both of these skills were espoused by our ancestors in the Sandhills and around the world! In the Sandhills, it is said that each family in a community would at least have an herbal medicine that they could share with their neighbors. Before modern-day refrigeration, invented by Frederick McKinley Jones, we would find cool brooks of water to place perishable food in so it wouldn't spoil.

Many of our ancestors were brought over to this country to fulfill the need for labor but as we worked, we began to create ways to make that labor less strenuous on our bodies. With inventions such as the improvements to the ironing board by Sarah Boone, the traffic light by Garrett Morgan, and Joseph Lee with the Bread Kneading Machine, Entrepreneurship, the creation of value is in our blood! This year's Sankofa Youth will participate in an Entrepreneurship project where they will collectively come up with a product or service to promote and sell during the Sandhills Family Heritage Associations' Farmer Market season June through September.

A. E. Ali, Sankofa Youth Adult Leader, will lead the children of this years' group in learning skills to enhance their public speaking.

Youth ages 8-18 are invited to join this years' Sandhills Sankofa Youth group. For more information or to sign up please email or call Chanai Winborn at naturallyblessed14@gmail.com | 910-500-6085

*Thank
you!*

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