



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

148 ANDREW YOUNG INTERNATIONAL BLVD., N.E. ♦ ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-1751

MICHAEL L. THURMOND
COMMISSIONER

August 22, 2008

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Sir/Madam:

As Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Labor, it is with great pride that I submit this letter of support for my hometown of Athens, Georgia. It is my hope that Athens will be granted a place on the National Trust's "2009 Dozen Distinctive Destinations."

Amid the oldest land grant public university in the country, The University of Georgia, the Athens music scene, which produced the rock band R.E.M., sidewalk cafes and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, lays a destination of thriving cultural heritage. Visitors to Athens experience a city whose history is steeped in African American culture, a city that in 1868, elected Alfred Richardson and Madison Davis – among the first blacks – to serve in Georgia's reconstruction legislature.

Other distinguished organizations have already taken notice of Athens' unique history and heritage. The National Register of Historic Places has included several sites in Athens, "worthy of preservation," and I believe worthy of being placed on the National Trust's Dozen Distinctive Destinations.

Notable destinations in Athens include:

The Morton Building

In 1910, it was one of the largest buildings of its kind in the world. It housed black lawyers, dentists, doctors and other professionals. It was owned exclusively by a black man, Monroe B. Morton. The Morton Building hosted movies and performances by big stars such as Cab Callaway, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. The four-story building is preserved and renovated as a community performing arts center.

First A.M.E. Church

In 1866, the first black church in Athens was originally called Pierce Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The congregation changed its name to First A.M. E. and in 1916 built the present building on Hull Street.

Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery

The 11-acre tract founded in 1882 was once a very prominent burial site for African Americans in Athens, Georgia. The cemetery holds the graves of Alfred Richardson and Madison Davis, the country's first African-American state legislators. There has been a resurrection of interest in the history of Gospel Pilgrim. Efforts are underway to identify the more than 3000 people who were laid to rest there over the last 124 years.

Chestnut Grove School

The old Negro one-room county school that sits on the grounds of Chestnut Gove Baptist Church has been renovated and restored. According to the church's history, "The Historic Chestnut Grove School was built in 1896. It is the only surviving restored example of a one-room schoolhouse for black children in Clarke County and one of the few such schools remaining in Georgia."

Reese Street and West Hancock Avenue Historic Districts

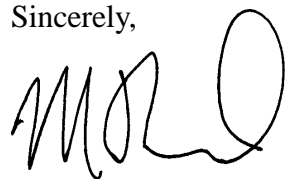
This area contains the Susan Medical Center where Dr. Andrew Jones opened the first black maternity hospital in 1946 and subsequently utilized by Dr. Donarell R. Green. Today, the Susan Building is home to the law offices of Dr. Green's grandsons.

Hiram Home

Is the restored home of Dr. Ida Johnson Hiram, the first black woman dentist in the state of Georgia. She practiced in Athens for 55 years.

Athens is a city of beauty and elegance, a destination that is sure to attract a wide spectrum of vistors. I truly hope you will consider listing Athens, Georgia among the 2009 *Dozen Distinctive Destinations* for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Sincerely,



Michael L. Thurmond