**February 2024**

**IMPORTANT- PLEASE READ IMPORTANT – PLEASE READ**

Dear Historical Storyteller – Gospel Water Branch Baptist Church:

Sis. Z. Avery Sis. G. Tate Sis. B. Hicks Sis. B. Bennett

Sis. M. Evans Sis. E. McCord Sis. D. Brown

Rev. F. Bennett Sis. R. Taylor Sis. J. Porter

Sis. S. Taylor Sis. H. Griffin Sis. M. Pollard

Sis. C. Hartfield Bro. J. Roscoe Sis. W.B. Roberson

Bro. R. Garnett Sis. B. Flono Sis. P. Thurman

Sis. N. Crandall Sis. F. Flono Sis. M. Collins

Bro. E. O’ Bryant Bro. G. Manning Sis. E. Faison

I'm thrilled to share that twenty-five esteemed members of Gospel Water Branch Baptist Church in Columbia County, Georgia, graciously consented to participate in an interview. This interview delves into their earlier experiences of African American childhood and adolescence in Georgia. Spanning from the 1930s to the 1970s, these formative years occurred within a few generations of the end of the Civil War, the legal abolition of slavery, and the Reconstruction Period, continuing through the era of Jim Crow laws and limited opportunities for African Americans until the advent of legalized Civil Rights Acts advocating equality for all.

The culmination of these insightful interviews has yielded a compelling document of oral reports, highlighting:

1. The African American experiences of home life before the advent of paved roadways, automobiles, electricity, and indoor plumbing, which were yet to become standard norms in rural Georgia communities.
2. Their journey through the years of attending early one-room Black schools and the subsequent transition into integrated schools.
3. The rich perspectives on worship experiences within the earlier African American Gospel Water Branch Baptist Church services and its historic buildings.

These shared memories offer profound insights into the transformative experiences within homes, schools, and places of worship for African Americans from the 1930s to the 1970s, serving as a lasting tribute to their parents, grandparents, and ancestors, while also imparting a legacy for their children, grandchildren, and future generations.

In response to these narratives, the author has undertaken the task of meticulously documenting these stories chronologically, conducting further research, and supplementing them with historical facts encompassing cultural, environmental, industrial, and legal changes that shaped the African American experience from the early 1930s to the 1970s.

It is the fervent belief of the author that this final combined project will significantly contribute to meeting the need for current published oral reports of African American experiences in Georgia, with a specific focus on Columbia and Richmond Counties during this pivotal period. This endeavor is not only a tribute to the African American community of the past, present, and future but also a testament to their resilience and perseverance.

While acknowledging the considerable personal investment of time and finances involved in this project, the author remains committed to completing a published report within the year. As participants in this storytelling venture, you will be extended invitations to forthcoming promotions, including book presentations and signings. Your involvement may vary, ranging from passive support to active engagement in future promotional activities.

Furthermore, you and your family members are encouraged to continue exploring and documenting other facets of your family's legacy, thereby contributing to the ongoing commemoration of those who have paved the way. In this endeavor, Destined to Publish is recommended as a supportive resource to guide you through the process.

Lastly, I humbly request each of you to support the author's decision to donate funds from the project to Gospel Water Branch Baptist Church, following the deduction of the researcher/author's investment and expenses.

Please review and return a signed copy of this document, expressing your support for all aspects outlined above.

Author – Merry Stewart A person wearing glasses and a brown sweater

Description automatically generated

Storyteller Print Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Storyteller Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Verbal consent via phone will also be accepted after the individual receives/reviews a copy of the above letter).