

Unearthing the Past

Located on Ames Street in Matthews, by the railroad tracks, was the Roseville A.M.E. Zion Methodist Church. Methodist records show a church meeting was held at this church in 1890, although it may have been in existence before this date. Looking for a burial area for members of their congregation, the Renfrows allowed Roseville to use a portion of Renfrow property on what is now Monroe Road. The cemetery was opened to members of the African American community of Matthews whose church had no graveyard. This cemetery was used for burials until the late 1950s. We estimate 75-125 souls rest there.

Roseville had an active congregation until 1928. That year the United House of Prayer was established in Crestdale and most of the members of Roseville switched to that church. The abandoned Roseville Church eventually succumbed to time and the elements. However, the Roseville members continued to maintain the cemetery property still owned by the Renfrows. Later relatives of people buried there continued the maintenance of the cemetery property until the 1970s or 80s. Somehow, along the way, the name changed from Roseville to Roseland Cemetery.

The cemetery became a property that time had forgotten. I first learned of Roseland in 1998. Over the years, there were several discussions about renovating the cemetery. Since it was on private property renovating it was impossible. In 2012, it was named a local historic landmark by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission. It was the subject of a couple earlier Matthews rezonings before Taft Development purchased the property. Part of their rezoning requirements was the renovation, care and upkeep of Roseland Cemetery.

A couple of years ago I had a call from Eagle Scout Hoke Thompson. In 2015, he had renovated the Sardis Road Presbyterian Church African American Cemetery as his Eagle Scout project. Growing up in the area, he was extremely interested in Roseland. He has been involved in all cemetery meetings and has been very helpful with steps in cemetery restoration, project schedules, and material lists. With his help, and the help of many volunteers, this cemetery is getting tenderly restored. At this writing, it is about 85% completed. Taft has constructed a battlefield style wooden fence around the perimeter. They have also offered the aide of their landscape crew to help complete the project. A sign unveiling will be held in the summer. Finally, after so many years, the souls can rest in peace again at Roseland..

Paula Lester, Board Historian



Lizzie Gaither

Preserving the Past

As mentioned above, for 20 years local people such as Paula Lester and Harvey Boyd have been eager to clean up and preserve the Old Roseville cemetery off Monroe Road. It was a known African American burial ground for former slaves and Blacks in the area up to the late 1950s. It had been in disrepair for years. However, the sale of the property to the Taft Corporation came with the stipulation that the Cemetery area had be preserved and maintained, and a fence put around it.

Last August, Paula and Hoke Thompson held discussions to plan for the clean up of the cemetery. I asked Paula if anyone had a list as to who was buried there. She only knew approximately 75 graves were located there. I later learned that Janie Hemingway had compiled such a list of 75 names, but no longer could find it.

Having recently conducted research on Tank Town, I knew people whose kin were buried there. I began to pull those names from my notes and found a list of names on Find-A-Grave compiled by William Hart years earlier. Together, I had about 20 names. I was determined to find as many as I could.

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I am Katherine McCoy Shonts (Kathy) and a docent for the Matthews Heritage Museum. I was born at St. Peters Hospital in Charlotte, NC and grew up in the Dilworth area. I have been married to my best friend, Ted Shonts, for 63 years and we have 2 grown sons. Ted and I have enjoyed traveling and seeing many places in Europe, Asia, Africa, New Zealand and have been to every state in the USA except North Dakota.



I started my career in 1966 as a preschool teacher doing part time work for different schools and for the Charlotte Nature Museum. In 1970 the Nature Museum hired me to develop programs, camps and workshops. In the 1980s I developed an Early Childhood Learning Center called the **Owl's Nest** on the Nature Museum property. In 1988 I became the Director for the Charlotte Nature Museum. When Discovery Place decided to add on to their facility, I was promoted to Director of Early Childhood Education and my office was moved to uptown. My staff and I developed school programs, workshops, camps, birthday parties, puppet shows and the popular room called Kids Place. In 2004, I retired from the museums after many successful years.

In 2005 I became a consultant for a new Children's Museum called **Charlotte at Play** while doing programs at many preschools. Christ Church Kindergarten liked the programs I presented and asked me to join their staff. They received a grant that I used to develop a Science Lab for the school. I presented programs in the Lab for children age 2 to 7 years. In 2020 Covid-19 closed all schools and I retired.

During my career I also helped to develop exhibits and programs for Discovery Place Kids in Huntersville, NC which opened in 2010. In 2011, I joined the Mayor of Matthews Committee to develop the Matthews Heritage Museum and have continued helping the Museum.

I have enjoyed working for different museums and at each museum I continued to increase my knowledge on different subjects. The most exciting part of my job for Discovery Place was to participate and lead activities in other locations. Hawaii, Alaska and Africa were wonderful trips along with many naturalists' trips to the mountains and coastal areas of NC.

THANK YOU KATHY FOR ALL YOU DO!

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Using the list of names from Mr. Hart, I looked for death certificates for these people. They confirm where a person is buried. I then looked for family members listed on the certificate and searched for their death certificates, thinking several family members would be buried in the same place. As the cleanup began, some stones were unearthed, adding a few more names. Another researcher, June White, searched for "Roseville" in the [Charlotte Observer](#) and found another 5 people buried there.

From my research on Tank Town, I also had names of people who lived in the area, recorded in the census records. I searched each name to see if I could find a death certificate and searched their family members, too. To date, I have identified 60 people who are buried at Roseville Cemetery. The hunt continues, and hopefully some more names will be added. To see a listing of the names, you will soon find them on our website www.matthewsheritagemuseum.org.

Penny Higdon was born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina and is the youngest of five children. She graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1985 with a degree in Criminal Justice - fun fact number one: while at UNC, Penny was a member of the UNC bowling team and had a high score of 298 in a match and has the trophy to prove it. She has worked for Robinson Bradshaw as a real estate paralegal for 26 years –surely retirement is just around the corner! In this capacity, she has spent quite a bit of time reviewing old land records in the Mecklenburg County Public Registry.

Penny and her husband, John, moved to Matthews in 2001. They have two children and are now empty-nesters. Their daughter, Summer, married last year and lives in Missouri. Their son, Jed, will be attending NYU this fall pursuing a master's degree in Urban Planning. Trips to both are a priority!

Penny has always had an interest in history and historical places. Once the children were of an age and she had some free time, she decided to put that interest to use. She began her service to the history of Matthews by joining the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee in 2009 and chairing the Museum Mayoral Task Force and joining the MHF Board, both in 2010. She also has volunteered with the clean-up of Roseland Cemetery, at the Matthews branch of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, and served as President of the Mecklenburg County Paralegal Association.

In addition to her interest in the history of Matthews, Penny enjoys old cemeteries, researching family history, reading, making greeting cards, and would like to get involved in local theater. Fun fact number two: Penny is a (distant) cousin to Buford Pusser of Walking Tall fame on her mother's side. You will also see her on the campaign trail later this year as her husband runs for re-election as Mayor of Matthews.



A Sunny Saturday, A Blue Bike and a Quarter in My Pocket (4th in a series of 4)
by Diane Adams, Foundation Board Member

Stop 7: Matthews Public Library (Building next to the Reid House). This stop was a reader's dream, and I was a major bookworm. Cool and quiet on the hottest of days, it was a welcomed retreat from the heat and filled with books that were just waiting to be plucked from the shelves, taken to a comfortable chair and savored for a while. You were greeted as you came in the door by Mrs. Tomberlain, the librarian, who sat at the front desk and who somehow knew what you liked to read. She delighted in showing you the new books which had just come in. I thought many times that whoever came up with the idea of libraries, and librarians who loved books, must have been a brilliant person.

Stop 8: Ms. Nancy's magnolia tree (Reid House). Ms. Nancy Reid was my Sunday school teacher, and we had a good relationship. She had told me it was fine to come visit her front yard magnolia tree anytime, whether she was there or not, as long as I didn't climb the high branches because she was afraid I would fall. I loved going under the branches to the base of the tree where it felt almost like a secret garden, where one was hidden from the rest of the world. Lots of day dreaming and thinking about fairies and elves took place under that tree.

These musings could go on for many more stops, and they've gone on longer than they should, but it's hard to keep the memories from bubbling up when you have spent a childhood of Saturdays on a blue bike in Matthews. What a wonderful "growing up" place and how comforting it is as an adult still living here to continue to see and feel the magic that makes this an incredible place for children to thrive and spread their wings as they learn about the world in a place where the world loves them.

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Edited by Barbara Taylor, Director

Available at the Museum

Matthews Remembered DVD.....\$15
Matthews Memories Cookbook...
\$21.95

If you have a local artifact to donate, please call the Museum office 704-708-4996.

Visit our websites

www.matthewshistoricalfoundation.org
www.matthewsreidhouse.org
www.mattheritagemuseum.org

From the Director:

Where does the time go? As we get into the early days of summer, we have a few upcoming dedications for hard work accomplished in the community. The Heritage Trail signage you have heard me mention has now been installed. It starts at the Train Depot and continues at the back of the library, then on a trail through Crestdale to the Greenway at Four Mile Creek. Once the crossing signals are up on Monroe Road, the town will hold a Ribbon Cutting. When we have a date we will let you know.



Another milestone reached has been the restoration of Roseland Cemetery as mentioned on the first page. A dedication of this newly restored hallowed ground is also planned for the near future.

I am hoping to begin a new training program for volunteers in July or August. A few volunteers have left the fold during the pandemic for various reasons, so we are actively recruiting for folks interested in history! Watch for announcements, or call me for details!

A young woman in high school has contacted us to do volunteer work at the museum this summer. Katherina Arcos will be teaching children to make a variety of crafts on Saturday mornings throughout the summer. We will list the dates on the website once we have confirmed them.

Finally, while the North Carolina Pottery is on display, I will be giving tours of the exhibit. Again, dates and details will be posted on our website.
Barbara E. Taylor

Celebrating Ourselves

After a very long year of quarantine and social distancing, we decided it was time to safely come together to celebrate and to see the many finished updates to the Reid House. The Foundation hosted a party for the docents and the group of about 30 "christened" the new patio installed at the House. It is a wonderful space, with water and



electricity at your fingertips. It is a wonderful addition for rentals of the Reid House.

During the last year we weren't able to have our usual Docent Luncheon or Christmas Party, so this party was given



to celebrate the docents and thank them for their willingness to stick with us! Each was presented with a rose by Barbara Taylor, thanking them for their service. Enjoy the photos of the event!



Top Left: Docents
Right: Ted and Kathy Shonts
Bottom Left: Docents and Board Members
Becky Hayes Willard, President