

# CITY OF HIGH POINT

## AGENDA ITEM



<b>TITLE:</b> Historic Marker Request (Village of Florence)	
<b>FROM:</b> Sushil Nepal, AICP Planning & Development Director	<b>MEETING DATE:</b> October 2, 2023
<b>PUBLIC HEARING:</b> No	<b>ADVERTISED DATE/BY:</b> NA
<b>ATTACHMENTS:</b> A. Historic Preservation Commission Recommendation B. Staff Report	

### PURPOSE:

A request by the High Point Preservation Society for approval of a historic marker to recognize the Village of Florence that is proposed to be located on Penny Road near the intersection with East Fork Road.

### BACKGROUND:

The Historic Preservation Commission is designated by the Historic Marker Policy to review and evaluate all proposed roadside historic markers prior to consideration by City Council. This roadside historic marker request is the twelfth request under the City's roadside Historic Marker Policy.

### BUDGET IMPACT:

The High Point Preservation Commission is purchasing this marker.

### RECOMENDATION/ACTION REQUESTED:

- A. Staff Recommendation  
Staff recommended **approval** of this request as outlined in the attached staff report.
- B. Historic Preservation Commission Action  
On August 9, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended approval of this request by a vote of 8-0.



## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

### **Historic Marker Request recognizing the Village of Florence**

At its August 9, 2023 meeting, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed a request for a historic marker recognizing the Village of Florence. Eight members of the Commission were present. Mr. David Fencl, Senior Planner, presented the request and recommended approval of the request as outlined in the staff report.

The Historic Preservation Commission determined that the proposed marker met the minimum evaluation criteria of the Historic Marker Policy, which includes the site's significance occurred at least 50 years before the request, no other public or private markers recognize the Village of Florence, and the location of the proposed marker is within the corporate limits. The Historic Preservation Commission also determined that the proposed marker will be consistent in appearance with existing City markers and recommended approval of the historic marker request, as recommended by staff, by a vote of 8-0.

**To:** Historic Preservation Commission Members

**From:** David Fencl, Senior Planner

**Meeting Date:** August 9, 2023

**Subject:** Village of Florence Historic Marker Request by the High Point Preservation Society

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**PURPOSE:**

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is designated by the Historic Marker Policy to review all requests for historic markers to be located in public street rights-of-way. The HPC shall first determine whether the request meets the minimum evaluation criteria outlined in the policy, and if the request meets the minimum evaluation criteria, the HPC shall then evaluate the request based on relevant criteria as determined by the HPC.

The following criteria must be present and factually correct in order for the HPC to review any request for placement of a marker:

1. Any site or event requested to be recognized must be at least 50 years old and for any individual to be recognized with a marker, the individual's contribution that is the subject of the request must have occurred as least 50 years before the request.
2. There may not be any current markers, public or private, currently recognizing the site or event within the City of High Point.
3. The location requested to be recognized must be within the corporate limits of the City of High Point and within public view.

Requests for markers shall be evaluated based on relevant criteria as determined by the HPC, including the following:

1. Is each historical claim by the applicant presenting the request supported by documentation or other evidence of the claim's validity? Documentation should consist of primary sources that were created at the time of the event and may include tax records, deeds, newspaper articles, meeting minutes, photographs, etc. Secondary sources may be submitted to help provide context and justify the significance of the event, person, or location.
2. In an attempt to avoid repetition and promote diversity in the recognitions, is the requested site, event or individual closely related to a site, event or individual accomplishment that has already been recognized with a Marker?
3. Has the site, event, or individual contribution maintained its significance over time?

4. Is the site, event or individual recognized outside of High Point at state wide, national, or international levels?
5. Marker proposals will be rejected if the Commission cannot authenticate or verify the historical information to its satisfaction. The Commission shall make the deciding rule if there is conflicting evidence.

#### **STAFF ANALYSIS:**

According to the information supplied with this Historic Marker Request, the Village of Florence was established in the 1840s by members of the Deep River Friends Meeting. By the 1850s the Village of Florence had 11 dwellings, a general store, two smith shops, one wood shop, and two gun shops. In 1853, the Florence Female Academy was erected and managed by the Quakers. Penny Road was named the Fayetteville Road, and East Fork Road was the Jamestown Road.

In the early days of the Civil War many citizens of the Village of Florence, including one free black family, moved west in a caravan of twenty-five covered wagons to abandon the slave economy of the new country they found themselves in, the Confederate States of America. After the war, the mixed-race Florence community included members of Turner Chapel A.M.E. church and the Gardner and Hill Store at the crossroads was considered the best this side of Greensboro. In 1875 Julius A. Richardson established a buggy shop that was joined by the Briggs Brothers Buggy Shop in 1881. In the 1880s, a school for Black students was established in Florence and around 1912 a larger school was re-established near Turner Chapel and the Florence Memorial Masonic Lodge #719 as a Rosenwald School. Today, only two of the original houses remain standing in addition to the Florence Female Academy.

The historic Village of Florence represents an important site in terms of mixed racial heritage in the mid-nineteenth century, a feature that was rare in Guilford County and the South. The historic marker recognizing the historic Village of Florence is proposed to be erected on Penny Road, near the intersection of East Fork Road.

Staff believes that this historic marker request meets the minimum evaluation criteria due to the Village of Florence's period of significance being more than 50 years ago, there are no other historic markers recognizing the Village of Florence and the marker's proposed location is within the City of High Point and within public view. The applicant has submitted information that documents the history and significance of the historic Village of Florence.

#### **RECOMMENDATION / ACTION REQUESTED:**

Staff recommends the Historic Preservation Commission recommend approval of the historic marker request recognizing the historic Village of Florence. This historic marker request meets the minimum evaluation criteria, and with the documentation submitted, staff believes this request meets all of the relevant evaluation criteria of the Historic Marker Policy.

**Attachments:** Village of Florence Historic Marker Request and Supporting Documentation



**HIGH POINT  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

**2023 OFFICERS**

**JAMES F. MORGAN**

*Chair*

**BENJAMIN BRIGGS**

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Jerry Mingo

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**STAFF**

Anique Oliver Brewer

June 2, 2023

**RE: The Village of Florence Historic Marker**

Dear High Point Historic Preservation Commission and Staff,

Please consider this request by the High Point Preservation Society, Inc. to recognize the historic Village of Florence, a town that was once located in today's Penny Road corridor, with an official city historic marker.

The Village of Florence was established in the 1840s by members of the nearby Deep River Friends Meeting. By the 1850s there were 11 dwellings, a general store, two smith shops, one wood shop, and two gun shops. In 1853, the Florence Female Academy was erected and managed by Quakers. Penny Road was named the Fayetteville Road, and East Fork Road was the Jamestown Road. In the early days of the Civil War, many citizens of the village, including one free Black family, formed a caravan of twenty-five covered wagons to abandon the slave economy of the new country they found themselves in, the Confederate States of America, by moving west. After the War, the mixed-race community included members of Turner Chapel A. M. E. church. The Gardener and Hill Store at the crossroads was considered the best this side of Greensboro. In 1875 Julius A. Richardson established a buggy shop that was joined by the Briggs Brothers Buggy Shop in 1881. A school for Black students was established in Florence in the 1880s, and around 1912 a larger school was re-established near to Turner Chapel and the Florence Memorial Masonic Lodge #719 as a Rosenwald School. Today, only two of the original houses remain standing in addition to the Florence Female Academy.

The village represents an important site in terms of mixed racial heritage in the mid-nineteenth century, a feature that was rare in Guilford County and the South.

We look forward to working with the City of High Point's Historic Preservation Commission on this important project.

Benjamin Briggs

President, High Point Preservation Society

***P.O. Box 5653, High Point, NC 27262***

### **Proposed Marker Description**

#### **The Village of Florence**

Established in the 1840s by Quakers and Methodists, this once vibrant village contained 11 dwellings, a general store, two smith shops, a wood shop, a distillery, and two rifle makers by the 1850s. Before the Civil War, many citizens of the village, including one free Black family, formed a caravan of twenty-five covered wagons to abandon the slave economy of the Confederate States of America and moved west. After the War, members of Turner's Chapel A. M. E. established the Florence Elementary School. Today, only three buildings of the old village remain standing.







## Village of Florence Historical Narrative and Documentation [DRAFT]

By Benjamin Briggs

The Village of Florence represents an important early narrative in terms of mixed racial heritage beginning as early as the mid-nineteenth century, a narrative that is rarely recognized in Guilford County and the South.

The Village of Florence was centered at the intersection of Penny Road (earlier known as the "Great Road" or "Fayetteville Road") and East Fork Road (earlier known as "Jamestown Road" or "Bundy Road"). Although the place-name of Westminster denoted a community generally located within the vicinity of Deep River Friends Meeting that was recognized through the federal government between 1843 and 1904, Florence grew in popularity in the 1850s and remained a placename into the twentieth century.

The Village was established in the 1840s by members of the nearby Deep River Friends Meeting. Historian H. Clay Briggs wrote a comprehensive history of the community in the 1930s, and he stated that Florence was at least fifty years older than High Point (established in 1859) though the date of its establishment was not known to him. He stated in his narrative "a part of the first house built there is incorporated in the John Briggs house, now owned by Mrs. J.R. Briggs of Greensboro, and occupied by Mrs. Bascombe Hodgin." H. Clay Briggs stated "I have always been told that the first house in the settlement (of Florence, NC) was built by a man named Scott, and that this first house is now part of the John Briggs house..."<sup>1</sup> This house remains standing today, and contemporary research has revealed that it was built by 1843, as a deed from that year documents the sale of land to Sarah Scott for \$34 an acre.<sup>2</sup>

Clay Briggs stated "Opposite that house and a hundred yards east of the road was the Stephens house, and old hip-roof house painted red as houses of that style usually were. Esther Stephens was one of the first clerks of Deep River Friends' Quarterly Meeting, set up in 1818. She was a Wheeler and lived at this house from the time she was married. This house was built by Jesse Wheeler, Mrs. Stephens' father."<sup>3</sup> This house was destroyed before 1951.

Clay Briggs states that in 1853 the brick school building for Florence Female Academy was erected by William Gardner (1808-1881) and his wife Penelope Hill (1817-1903). Clay Briggs stated "Winslow Davis built a barn-like addition to the Sarah Scott house...the upper story was used as a dormitory with the first floor serving for administration and instructional purposes."<sup>4</sup> Penelope's sister, Margaret Hill (1815-1905), married Winslow Davis (1814-1884), and the couple operated a dormitory for the girls attending the Florence Female Academy. Penelope's and Margaret's half-sister, Abigail Hill (1834-1913), attended Westtown School in Pennsylvania and returned to Florence to be the principal of the academy. She later married Elihu Mendenhall, an abolitionist whose house stands today at 1106 Skeet Club Road.

Penelope, Margaret, and Abigail were the daughters of Aaron Orlando Hill (1785-1863) by either his first wife Miriam or his second wife Mary. The Aaron Hill family were Quakers in Randolph County, and in the 1840 census there were six free people of color living in Aaron's household. In addition, his home was

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<sup>1</sup> Sizemore, F. J., *The Building and Builders of a City*. High Point Chamber of Commerce, 1947 an article titled "Florence" written by H. Clay Briggs May 29, 1941 on p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Guilford County Register of Deeds Office, Deed Book 27 Page 141

<sup>3</sup> H. Clay Briggs, *The Village of Florence*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



said to have been a station on the Underground railroad.<sup>5</sup> All three women likely held abolitionist sentiments.

Adela Hunt Davis (1824-1900) was widowed by the death of her husband Bartlett Davis in 1858. Her executer was her husband's brother, Winslow Davis. Adela stated that upon the death of her husband "my children and I moved to a house in the village, near the Deep River Friends Meeting House and School, where we were close to dear relatives and friends."

By the 1850s there were 11 dwellings, a general store, two smith shops, one wood shop, two rifle shops, and a Sons of Temperance chapter. The Gardener and Hill Store at the crossroads was considered "the best this side of Greensboro."<sup>6</sup> Elam Beard operated a distillery less than a half mile from the village.<sup>7</sup> Though the village was thriving, national politics weighed heavy on the hearts and minds of Quakers such as the Gardners, Davises, Mendenhall, and others. When Confederates fired on the US garrison of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, a process began that divided the nation and many Quakers could not tolerate living in a country that condoned legalized slavery.

Rev. Thomas Barnum (1792-unk), a Connecticut-born Methodist Minister and resident of Florence, wrote to an acquaintance in Indianapolis in February 1861 "All the South is preparing as fast as possible for war. The future is the darkest and most distressing that ever was known in the country. Many have gone to the Free States, and thousands are struggling to go. You may be assured I and my family are anxious to go into your State. My son Benjamin is old enough to be drafted and compelled to fight for the *Slaveholder*, which is a distressing thought. I fear that if I do not sell my place, I shall hardly be able to go."<sup>8</sup>

Adela Hunt Davis described the reaction of the Quakers of Florence to the news. "Kansas was admitted to the Union January 29, 1861 as a free state. Winslow Davis persuaded me and my relatives that this would be a good place in which to bring up my children. He was administrator of my money. It was decided we would be a part of the twenty-five covered wagon caravan that would leave North Carolina May 7, 1861." On the other side of the Blue Ridge, Adela Hunt Davis stated "Our captain thought it would be wise to divide the train of twenty-five wagons, as a smaller number would attract less attention and be less likely halted and disturbed. The free Negro family requested to go with our group."<sup>9</sup>

The Gardners and the Davises settled Hesper Kansas. Other families moved to Indiana and Iowa.<sup>10</sup>

Historian Sallie W. Stockard summarized the event in 1902, observing that "The town of Florence, in Guilford, went west almost bodily. Men remember when Florence was a thriving little town; now it is a deserted village...the efficient cause was slavery, the old, old story of the time"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Margo Lee Williams, *From Hill Town to Strieby: Education and the American Missionary Association in the Uwharrie "Back Country" of Randolph County, North Carolina*, Backintyme Publishing. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> H. Clay Briggs, *The Village of Florence*.

<sup>7</sup> Sizemore, *The Building and Builders of a City*, article titled "Florence" written by H. Clay Briggs May 29, 1941 on p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *The Indiana Herald*, February 13, 1861, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mildred Davis Watson, *Adela Hunt Davis-- A Kansas Pioneer Mother*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Watson, *Adela Hunt Davis*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Sallie W. Stockard, *The History of Guilford County, North Carolina*, 1902, P. 32.

Although no Civil War battles occurred in Florence, the village was the center of a famous tale involving Union troops. According to "Aunt Sallie" who lived in Florence, locals hid a large supply of rifles or supplies in the barn that was located just north of the Scott House at the close of the War. A rifle factory just southeast of the village was destroyed by Union troops in 1865, but Aunt Sallie remembered supplies being hidden by Union and Confederate troops alike at the close of the War. The old barn was destroyed around the 1940s.<sup>12</sup>

As anticipated by Quakers, the war was devastating to the South, but resulted in the emancipation of all people in the United States. After the War, freedmen purchased Barnum's Chapel Methodist Church on land on the north side of the village. The church was built before the war by the Methodist minister Rev. Thomas Barnum who lived in the village as early as 1850.<sup>13</sup> Barnum was a member of the Guilford County Temperance Convention in 1849, and likely held a leadership role in the group's Florence Division of Sons of Temperance.<sup>14</sup>

Barnum's Chapel was purchased by a Black congregation and established an African Methodist Episcopal church, named for the 12<sup>th</sup> Bishop Henry Turner. The church members included family names of Cole, Fuller, Jeffers, Joyner, Palmer, Pearson, Raper, and Reeder. The second sanctuary was erected in 1921 and the third (standing) sanctuary was built in 1955.<sup>15</sup>

Located adjacent to Turner's Chapel is the Florence Memorial Masonic Lodge #719 is a member of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina based in Durham, a branch of masonry established by Black citizens.<sup>16</sup>

A 30' x 40' one-room school for Black students was established in Florence in the 1880s. Clay Briggs stated in an article published in the Greensboro Daily News in March 17, 1928 that the old school house was one-half mile southeast of where it is now (Florence Elementary School) on the Jamestown road. Della Cain, a colored woman, lives in the old schoolhouse." Leon Ray Harris (1886-1960) was one of the teachers there. Harris attended three terms enrolled at the Tuskegee Institute and found a role for himself, his wife Gertrude (1886-1955), and their family in the Florence community in Turner's Chapel and in reinvigorating the old school. His classes were often integrated with white attendees when he taught there from 1912-1914.<sup>17</sup>

In an article published in the Greensboro Daily News on April 15, 1956, Harris recalled "The Florence church was the center of our community life. We should build the new school near the church. This location was also ideal in case other contiguous districts would be consolidated with ours. We should have a school of not less than three rooms. The cost would be evenly divided between the county, the Rosenwald Fund, and the people of the community. All of us got together, white and Negro. The white

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Carl Garrett, native of Deep River community 1995.

<sup>13</sup> *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, Rev. Thomas Barnum. December 26, 1883, Page 1, and 1850 Federal Census, Southern Division of Guilford County, North Carolina.

<sup>14</sup> The Greensboro Patriot, *Guilford County Temperance Convention*. April 28 1849, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from website <https://www.turnerschapelamechurch.org/> March 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from website <http://www.masonic-lodge.info/MLI/mli2330.htm> March 2023.

<sup>17</sup> *Greensboro Daily News*, Sunday, April 15, 1956, Feature Section.



people donated all the timber for the rough lumber and gave some money. I took my ax into the woods with others. We felled trees, cut the logs and hauled them to the sawmill.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1912 a larger school was opened near Turner’s Chapel to replace the older school for Black children with financial assistance from the Rosenwald Fund, once of only two documented such schools in Guilford County. Three teachers were employed, though the Harris’s had to leave for family reasons.<sup>19</sup>

Rapidly changing requirements in educational facilities and increasing enrollment led to the construction of a substantial new building in 1929. This large school, costing nearly \$20,000 to build, served a wide community stretching from the airport area south to Jamestown, and east into Greensboro. It contained four classrooms, as well as a large auditorium and library. Additions were constructed later, including a cafeteria built in 1947 through funds raised by parents and classroom wings built in 1974. Once racial segregation ended, Florence Elementary contained kindergarten through second grade classes. Since that time, classes have been extended to fifth grade.

Florence grew little during the Reconstruction Era as development in the region occurred along the North Carolina Railroad Tracks that passed through High Point, Jamestown, and Greensboro. The Gardener and Hill Store at the crossroads was considered “the best this side of Greensboro.” In 1875 Julius A. Richardson established a buggy shop that was joined by the Briggs Brothers Buggy Company in 1881.<sup>20</sup>

Resident Virgil Volney Horney, Jr. recalled during the time of the Great Depression that “there were approximately 20 white families and 14 black families. Mr. Horney said the black families and the white families got along very well; they helped each other. Most of the black families owned property and had lived in the area for a long time. There was a black school behind Barnum’s Chapel, the black AME church. Mr. Horney said he was told that black people attended the Deep River Meeting prior to 1916, there was a balcony at the back of the meeting where they would sit. There are a number of black people buried un the Deep River Cemetery.”<sup>21</sup>

The Briggs family consisted of three brothers, Alpheus Martin (1857-1936), Henry Clay (1858-1947), and John Rufus (1860-1917). Alpheus built his home in 1885 in the community (destroyed c. 2000), Clay built a home by recycling older structures including the Nathan Wright and the Nathan Spencer houses around 1885 (standing), and John took the old Scott House that was purchased by his grandfather in 1878. It was these three brothers who established the Briggs Brothers Buggy Company, which moved to High Point in 1901.

Mary Evelyn Thornton Clodfelter, a lifelong resident of the Florence community, recalled in 2003 that “the Briggs family lived near the homes of the Coles, the Williamses, and the Rapers of the Florence Community. From the very beginning, a feeling of mutual respect set the tone for good relationships through the decades. Oscar Cole has said that no one would sell land to the black people until A. E. Richardson, who was born on Penny Road and a member of the High Point Friends Meeting, became instrumental in helping the black community negotiate the acquisition of the deeded land. Pressley

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> H. Clay Briggs, *The Village of Florence*.

<sup>21</sup> *Deep River Friends 1754-2004*, privately published by Deep River Friends Meeting, pp. 42-43.



Raper was one of the first black landowners in the Florence Community. After that, an elementary school and the Turner's Chapel A.M.E. church were built..."<sup>22</sup>

Clay Briggs recollected "of the old houses that were here at the close of the Civil War, there are only six left. The J. R. Briggs house, Mrs. Reid's house, the school building, Richardson's house, a part of the old Pearson house, and a part of my house." In 2023, only the J. R. Briggs house, the school building, and the home of H. Clay Briggs remain standing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Deep River Friends 1754-2004*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> H. Clay Briggs, *The Village of Florence*.











