Five Row was a community of African-American farmworkers and their families who worked at Reynolda, the estate of Katharine S. and R.J. Reynolds. Located just a quarter-mile walk along an unpaved road from Reynolda House, Five Row was developed starting in 1915. A community of two rows of five cottages and gardens that fronted a road along Silas Creek, Five Row expanded to include a school, which also served as a church. Five Row residents were farm and labor workers mowing, driving, hauling, cleaning, timbering, farming and trimming on the Reynolds estate. Many children raised at Five Row were later employed as domestic servants at Reynolda House.

Five Row started with three houses during the early construction days of the Reynolda estate. It was documented that one home was used as a living room, another as a dining room and the third home was used as sleeping quarters for the early workers. By 1916, additional homes were built and occupied by Reynolda’s African-American domestic servants and farmworkers. The cottages were four to five-room white frame homes with ancillary buildings located in the rear yards. Pine trees located in the south yards shaded the homes. In addition to the row of cottages, a large boarding house existed where up to four families could reside. African-American farm managers and essential domestic staff lived in nicer cottages in Reynolda Village located in closer proximity to Reynolda House instead of Five Row which was on the periphery of the estate.

The Five Row School began in 1918 with six children. The first teacher for Five Row School was Lovie Earon, a former maid of Katharine Reynolds. Differing from the citywide school schedule, Five Row School operated for eight months out of the year instead of the standard six. Lessons taught included history, geography, spelling, arithmetic, hygiene and health, and “Palmer writing.” The school was esteemed throughout the community. Many African-American parents outside of the estate wanted to send their children to the school. Though the African-American children were separate from the white worker’s children, they all played together in common areas. Katharine Reynolds provided all of the necessary school supplies. The
Five Row School also served as the Five Row Church using the two-classroom building for Sunday school classes and church services.

The Five Row community was beloved by its residents. Reynolda workers were often rewarded for their hard work with gala events for workers and their families. One memorable event was “The Big Picnic” at which “The Madam”, as Katharine Reynolds was called, purchased all accessories for a baseball game competition including baseball uniforms, bats, balls, gloves and food. Every man would get a present for Christmas and every woman for the birth of each child. The pool below Lake Katharine, a man-made lake built for Reynolda, was a popular communal area for the residents of Five Row and other workers employed on the Reynolds’ estate, whether black or white.

Five Row was demolished in 1961 to make way for Silas Creek Parkway. Charlie Babcock, widower of Mary Reynolds Babcock, provided relocation loans to several families to move to another neighborhood close to the estate. Though moving was bittersweet for most, families were happy to move into newer homes with modern conveniences, like running water and electricity.

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission web site: www.ForsythCountyHRC.org