

# HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

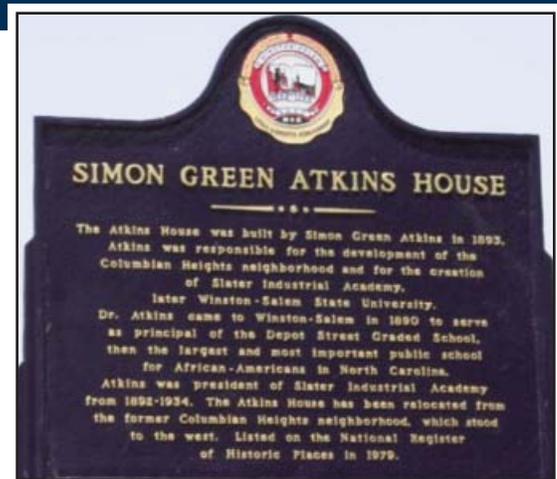
Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

## Simon Green Atkins House

The former home of renowned African-American educator, Simon Green Atkins (1863-1934) is now located on the campus of Winston-Salem State University, having been moved twice from its original location. Dr. Simon Green Atkins pioneered the development of both the Slater Industrial Academy (now Winston-Salem State University) and the Columbian Heights neighborhood in the early 1890s.

Atkins was born in Chatham County on June 11, 1863, graduated from St. Augustine's College in 1884, and then taught at Livingstone College in Salisbury. After six years there, Atkins moved to Winston to serve as principal of the Depot Street Graded School, which under his leadership grew to become the largest and most important public school for African-Americans in the state. Atkins had an immediate impact on the community. In January of 1891, the year after he moved to Winston, Atkins appeared before the local Board of Trade to request assistance for establishing a college for African-Americans.

Atkins also suggested the development of a suburb for the increasing number of black professionals in the city. Atkins realized that the success of his school depended upon the recruitment of teachers with professional training, who would be unwilling to live in the poor, congested sections of town assigned to blacks. Thus, he conceived the idea of an African-American community located adjacent to the school where the residents would own their own homes. Atkins was successful. On June 3, 1891, the Inside Land and Improvement Company was incorporated by eleven prominent white men. They assembled the land that was to become the Columbian Heights suburb. A plat was drawn by Jacob Lott Ludlow, the City engineer who also drew the plats for the white suburbs of West End and Washington Park. The development was a success. Columbian Heights soon became the place for African-Americans to live. City directories from the first decades of the 20th century show that lawyers, doctors, teachers, ministers, as well as skilled craftsmen were residents of the neighborhood. Atkins was one of the development's first residents, living in his home by 1893. According to tradition, Atkins refused to allow the developers to name the neighborhood for him; instead, he suggested the name Columbian Heights, which honored the Colombian Exposition that he had recently visited.



With the neighborhood laid out, the school grew rapidly and expanded under Atkins' leadership, who left the Depot Street Graded School in 1895 to work full time with Slater Industrial Academy. However, by that time the institution was called the Slater Normal and Industrial School. In 1925, it became the Winston-Salem Teachers' College, with a curriculum including four years of college work and concentrating on advanced education for teachers and principals for the black elementary schools in the state. It is said to have been the first black institution in the United States to grant degrees for teaching in the elementary grades. Atkins remained as president of the school until his retirement shortly before his death in 1934. Today the house is used as the Winston-Salem State University Welcome Center.

In 1979, the Simon Green Atkins House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

### Simon Green Atkins House National Register Nomination

<http://www.wssu.edu/cg-okelly-library/archives/buildings/atkins-house.aspx>

<http://www.chathamhistory.org/atkinsarchive.html>

<http://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/stories/simon-green-atkins-and-his-family>



This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission's web site:  
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>