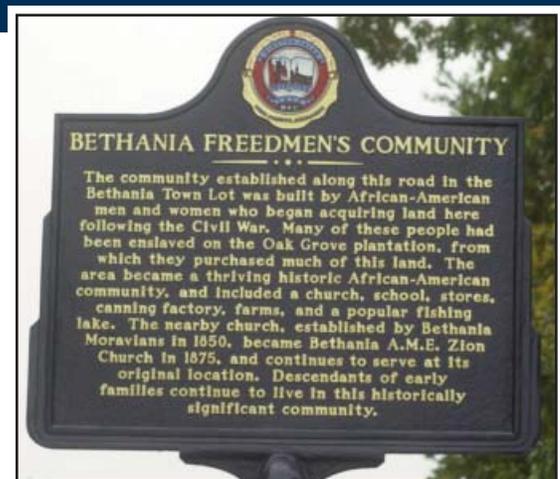


HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Bethania Freedmen's Community

Bethania, established in 1759, was the second of three towns developed by the Moravians in the Wachovia Tract, which also included the settlements of Bethabara and Salem. Bethania was unique not only in its plan, which followed a German agricultural town model, but also in that it was settled by both Moravians and non-Moravians. These first settlers signed agreements specifying they would be granted life tenancies if they would abide by the Church's rules. By the early 19th century, Bethania had become a thriving agricultural community.



John H. and Sallie Alspaugh Conrad House
Courtesy of Heather Fearnbach

Bethania's establishment and its resulting growth created the need for a larger work force. As a result, the Moravians began to increasingly rely on the use of both African and African-American slaves, in addition to free black and white laborers. The Moravians required that the congregation collectively own slaves that lived within Wachovia's town lots. Yet Church members that owned or leased land outside of the Moravian towns could own slaves. Eventually, due to Bethania's thriving economy and the size of several of its residents' plantations, the town came to have the largest African-American population of any of the Moravian communities. This large slave population performed a variety of agricultural tasks and domestic services in Bethania.

The Bethania Freedmen's Community came to exist along Bethania-Rural Hall Road after the Civil War. Many of the African-American men and women who settled this community had once been enslaved on the very land that they were eventually able to purchase.

The area became a thriving African-American community, and included a church, school, stores, canning factory, farms, and a popular fishing lake.

The remaining buildings of the Bethania Freedmen's community are examples of the architectural styles and forms that were common from the mid 19th century through the post-World War II era throughout the state. Within the enclave can be found the Bungalow, Foursquare, Minimal Traditional, and Ranch style dwellings. Today, these buildings are largely inhabited by descendants of the individuals that constructed them and often there are several generations of families that live in close



James and Lillian Allen House
Courtesy of Heather Fearnbach

proximity to one another. Also linking the community are connections of employment and church membership.

As Forsyth County has grown, the number of farming and “crossroads” settlements has dramatically declined. Rural African-American communities that are documented to have existed from the late 19th century to the present are quite rare, thus making the Bethania Freedmen’s Community extremely significant.



William Maceo and Alta Washington Ervin House
Courtesy of Heather Fearnbach

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

<http://www2.journalnow.com/news/2008/oct/25/freedmens-plots-former-slaves-settled-into-a-commu-ar-125495/>

<http://www2.journalnow.com/news/2008/nov/02/recognition-time-ar-129098/>



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