

Untold Stories

OF BLACK MONTEVALLO



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Everybody's stories matter. It's not just a matter of nostalgia, it powers us into the present and the future.
Barack Obama

A CALL TO ACTION!

We are looking for citizen volunteers to help tell the story of an important historic site in Montevallo, the "little school" on Island Street. This two-room wooden schoolhouse, which opened around 1924, was the first public school for Black children in Montevallo. It stood at the corner of Island and Bloch "alley" in a mostly Black community then known as Jacksonville. Black youngsters went to school there until 1939, when the county opened Almont Elementary School.

The schoolhouse also served as a community center for Jacksonville residents, used for meetings, concerts, and other events.

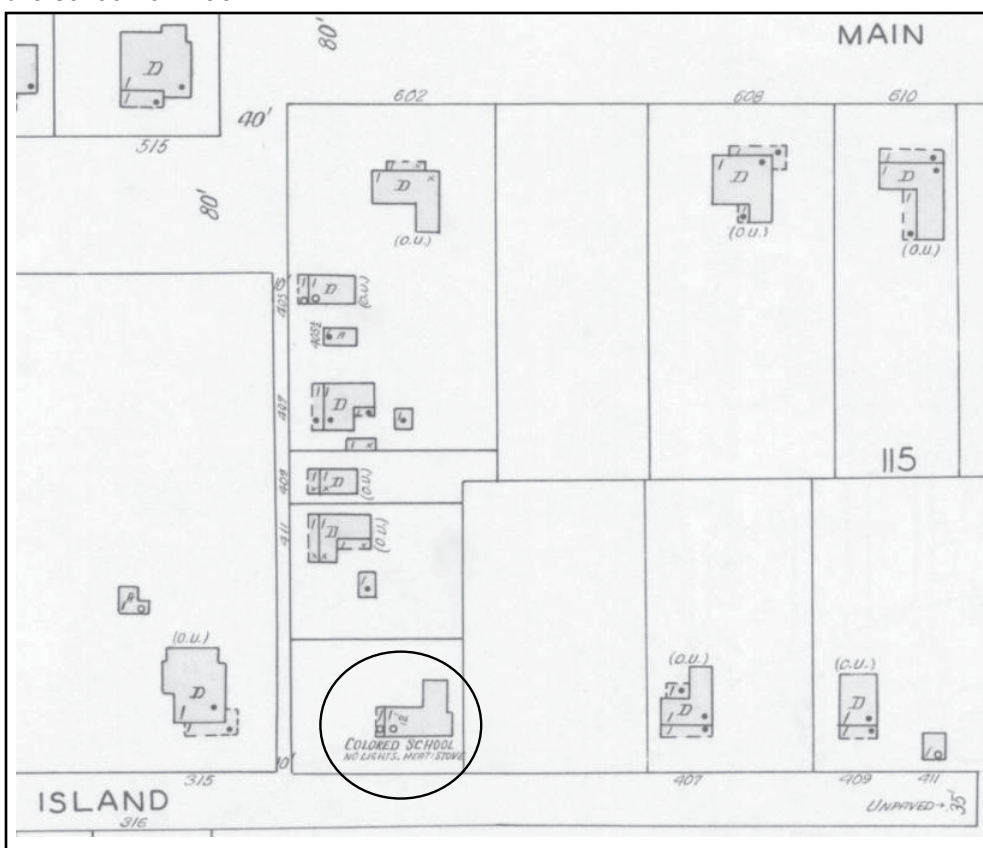
After its closure the schoolhouse fell into neglect. It got new life, however, in the late 1940s, when a Jacksonville family, forced by the city to give up their house on Main Street to make way for a public housing project, bought the property, fixed it up, and added seven rooms. It became the family dwelling first of O. C. and Mary Eliza Brazier Mink Cunningham and then their daughter Onnie Dell Fluker. Ms. Fluker had been a student at the "little school," as she affectionately called it, and she raised her son Franklin in that house. It is now occupied by her grandson, Rance Gaddis, and his family. Mr. Gaddis has expressed support for a marker that would honor his grandmother, the schoolhouse, and the vanished Jacksonville community.

So, this is our call to action. We want to see people of all ages, colors, and backgrounds working together to bring a historic marker to the site of the "little school." This could involve a number of activities, from fund-raising to awareness-raising to raising up those who learned and taught at the school nearly a century ago. One student, Kathlyn Lathion, recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She still remembers

her year at the little wooden schoolhouse. Now is the time to preserve her story and other stories about the Jacksonville community.

In fall of 2022 Mayor Rusty Nix and the city council voted to fund the proposed Montevallo African American Heritage Trail. Hurrah for that! The Trail is intended to promote awareness of the contributions of people of color to our town's history and to honor African American experience in Montevallo. At present the Trail is a glorious possibility. It will take the actions of us, the citizens, to make the dream of a Heritage Trail come true.

What better place to start than the little school in Jacksonville that in the 1920s and 1930s inspired young Black children with a passion for learning and teaching?



Detail of the Sanborn 1933 Fire Insurance Map showing the "Colored School" and part of the surrounding Jacksonville residential area.

To stay informed about the community effort to honor the "little school," email MontevalloLegacy@gmail.com by August 15. You will be placed on a mailing list and invited to an interest meeting in Sept. Submitted by Kathy King and Anitka Stewart Sims on behalf of the Montevallo Legacy Project.