

NEWS FROM THE
SOUTH
CAROLINA
AFRICAN
AMERICAN
HERITAGE
COMMISSION



Mission Statement

The mission of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission is to identify and promote the preservation of African American historic sites, structures, buildings, and culture of the African American experience in South Carolina, and to assist and enhance the efforts of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

Call & Response

<https://scdah.sc.gov/historic-preservation/resources/african-american-heritage/south-carolina-african-american-heritage>

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Searching for Silver Linings

Jannie Harriot, SCAAHC Chairperson



Those of us who have been blessed to, as the Bible says, have lived more than three score and 10 years might be tempted to think we have seen just about everything. We understand that life can still surprise us, but often believe that our maturity and experience have prepared us for anything. We often believe that when our worlds are rocked, we can simply steady ourselves, regain our footing, and move forward.

Perhaps, like me, that's how many people the world over felt as recently as early March, before public health authorities determined the severity of the coronavirus (COVID -19) pandemic required that we hole up in our homes and practice social distancing to prevent its spread among the population. It seems like only yesterday we were going about the business of living oblivious to the possibility that our lives and the economy could be so dramatically and abruptly brought to a screeching halt.

No doubt, for many people in a society where so many live alone, the sickness, fear, and death have been the hardest parts. The social distancing, while normal for some, has also taken some adjustment. The cloud of sickness and death that hangs over our heads breaks my heart. I have friends and relatives who have been diagnosed with and died from COVID-19. I am praying fervently that they and others the world over recover and have their health and quality of life restored.

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Searching for Silver Linings

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Not being able to visit the families of my friends who died or attend their funerals was especially disconcerting. Almost as challenging for me, is the social distancing because I have spent most of my personal and professional lives “social connecting.” I am often up close and personal or in large crowds—whether at a meeting, conference, or a family or church gathering. I was out and about so much that I relished and looked forward to the quiet time in solitude at home with great anticipation! I looked forward to the rest, restoration, and idle time in which I could recharge my batteries before jumping back into the social mix. I just as enthusiastically look forward to the return to the flurry of activity among people because of the mental and spiritual stimulation and nurturing such fellowship provides.

That is what has been the most challenging part of this pandemic: The inability to go about my business as usual, coupled with the inability to practice my faith and fellowship with other believers. I was crushed because I could not attend an annual church event that I have always looked forward to and participated in with great enthusiasm for more than 50 years.

In my church, the Household of Faith, we observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This annual observance and feast include large gatherings of family and friends and is a major highlight of the church calendar. It is a time of fellowship and spiritual deepening in the doctrines of our faith. Our church leadership has generally followed social distancing guidelines given by federal, state, and local authorities. They have also implemented virtual worship options, as many other churches and denominations have. Local churches in the network have some autonomy. Consequently, like a small number of churches, my church has chosen to ignore these guidelines and go on as usual with Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread events - which usually draw large crowds. For the first time in many years, I did not attend. That made me sad. There is nothing I would enjoy more than this staple of my spiritual life for more than a half century. Not being able to attend leaves a void that I had to find other ways to fill. I did not attend because I trust the wisdom and expertise of our public health authorities. Also, the tremendous loss of life and the alarming data on the spread of COVID -19 are convincing enough for me - an African American septuagenarian - that, my spiritual passion notwithstanding, the wisest option was to observe these holidays at home away from the crowd.

I understand and appreciate the spiritual zeal of my brothers and sisters in my church and those elsewhere. Our faith and fellowship are such integral parts of our beings that we feel incomplete, if only temporarily, when we can't practice them as we usually do.

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We enjoy the virtual services but they come nowhere close to being a substitute for the live and personal experience of fellowship in close proximity to others that we can hug and embrace and feel the palpable energy of love. Many worshippers everywhere, including those in my church, are stressed over the loss of livelihood, concerned for the health and well-being of themselves and their loved ones, and worried about the future.

Therefore, they feel what they need most at this time is the peace, comfort, fellowship, and deepening of faith and spiritual reassurance that congregational gatherings will provide for them. Despite the sickness and death around them, they believe that God, in his infinite love and wisdom, would not require they be deprived of that and will therefore keep them safe from harm. I also believe in God, but I am not presumptuous to test him especially when - despite our deeply held faith and fervent prayers - such great human suffering persists.

I wish I better understood the great mystery that allows for pain, misery, and suffering in a universe governed by a beneficent God. I would like to think that the coronavirus pandemic has peaked. I would like to think that it is not deadly enough to require all this social distancing. I would like to think that faith in God will protect us all and make it go away, but we are dealing with a great mystery. With all the knowledge and understanding that we do have, at this juncture, there is so much more that we don't know about this disease and what lies ahead. The very last thing I would want is to be infected, not know it, and infect other people before I find out. Therefore, I choose to err on the side of caution - not just for myself, but for my brothers and sisters whom I would meet along the way. It's not just about us as individuals, but about all of us! It's about the love, concern, and compassion for the people around us. I hope those who choose to ignore social distancing recommendations will seriously reconsider. In the words of the old Negro spiritual, "we will understand it better, by and by".



About the Author

A native of Hartsville, South Carolina, Jannie Harriot currently serves as the chairperson of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission and Executive Director of the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation.





Jonathan Green, "Communal," Used with special permission.

Black Carolinians Speak: Portraits of a Pandemic

The South Carolina African American Heritage Commission recognizes that this is an especially difficult period for all residents of our state. African Americans, as reported by the media, have been impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the social and economic distress it has caused. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing disparities in education, health, and employment. Future generations will likely seek to understand how this global pandemic redefined what it meant to be Black in South Carolina and how the crisis altered the rhythms and traditions of African American life in the Palmetto State.

*The goal of this initiative—**Black Carolinians Speak: Portraits of a Pandemic**—is to gather first person testimonies, letters, music, images, art and other documents that capture the African American experiences in South Carolina during the global pandemic of 2020.*

Share Your Story at:

<https://greenbookofsc.com/speak/>

All documents and information collected will be housed in the Commission papers
at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.



For the most up-to-date news, statistics, and information about the South Carolina state government's response to the ongoing public health crisis, visit the South Carolina DHEC website at: <https://www.scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>



SAVE THE DATE!!!



Pictured Above, Standing: SC Department of Archives and History Executive Director Dr. Eric Emerson, USC History professor Dr. Bobby Donaldson, legendary actress, singer, and director Phylicia Rashad and SCAAHC chairperson Jannie Harriot. Seated is renowned educator Dr. Vivian Ayers Allen, winner of the 2019 Herbert A. DeCosta, Jr. Trailblazer Award. **Photo courtesy of Cecil Williams.**

2020

Preserving Our Places in History Awards Ceremony & Luncheon

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

11:30AM

Marriott Columbia

1200 Hampton Street, Columbia SC



Green Book Spotlight



Built in the 1940s by Rev. Arthur Holmes and his wife, Mary, this two-building complex was initially built to provide comfort and safety for Black ministers visiting Florence, SC. Their friend and business associate, Katherine Harris—also the first Black notary public in the city—later christened it the **Ebony Guest House**, promoting it as a “Home Away from Home” for potential customers.



Listed in the *Negro Travelers' Green Book* in 1953-1957, 1959-1961, the Ebony Guest House served many famous guests including Jackie Wilson, Ruth Brown, Fats Domino, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, and James Brown. Gospel and jazz legend **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** (Left) was a frequent visitor and close friend to Mary. A room in the rear building, pictured above, was named in her honor.

Photo: By Source, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38653426>



A Travel Guide to S.C.
African American Cultural Sites

Visit Our Website!

The Green Book of South Carolina

<https://greenbookofsc.com/>

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