

Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area

Cultural Landscape Assessment



Credit: Jim Allison

Addendum to the Arabia Mountain Heritage
Area Management Plan (2006)

The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (AMNHA) is a compact area rich in natural wonders and historic resources located about 20 miles east of Atlanta, GA within the counties of DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry. The 40,000 acre area, dominated by granite outcroppings and monadnocks, is part of the Georgia Piedmont Region. Its natural resources have supported human settlement for

roughly 12,000 years. Local historian **Vivian Price** notes that it “**would not be** unreasonable to assume that prehistoric man lived and farmed along virtually every creek bank and hunted in every woodland in **DeKalb County.**” The extant archaeological sites and historic structures illustrate the complexity of Native, African-American and Anglo communities.

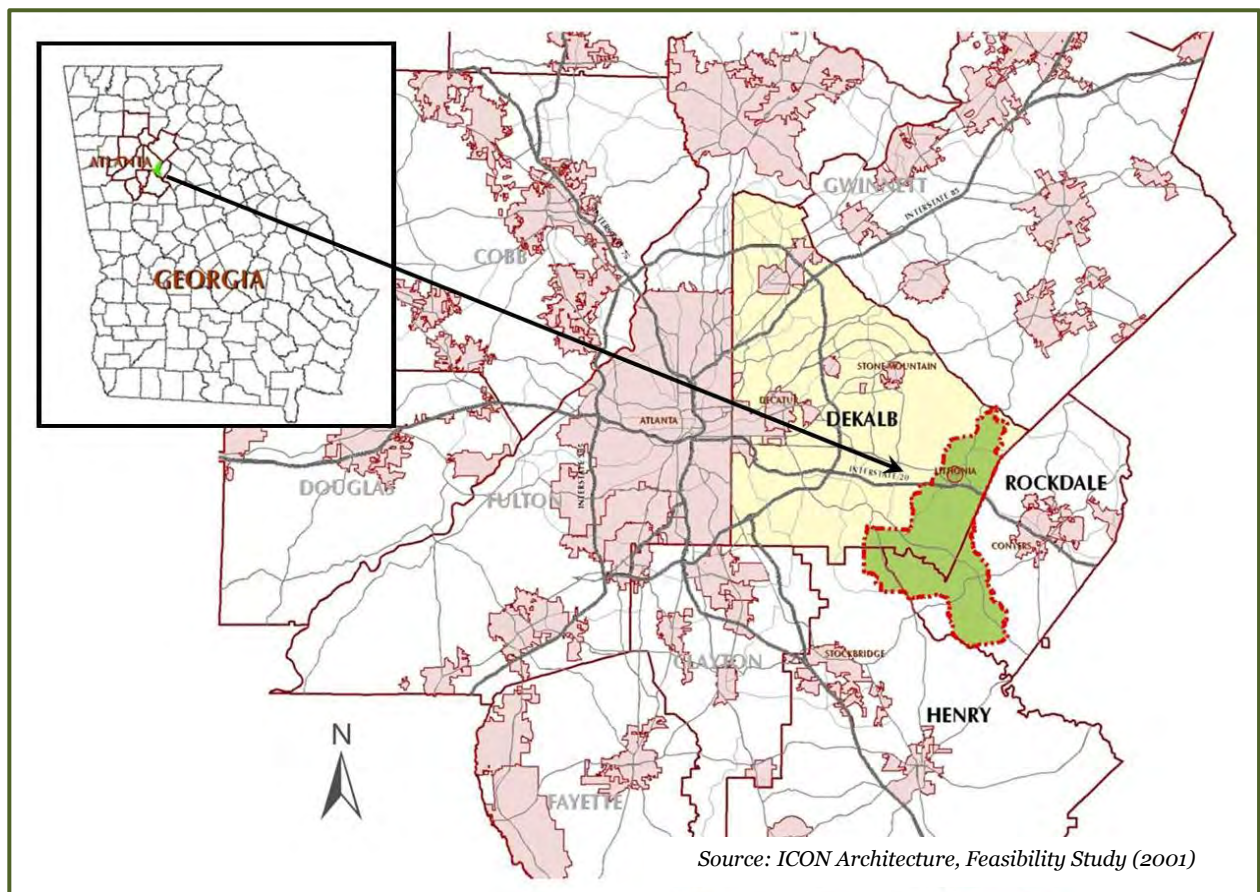


Figure 01: Regional Map of Heritage Area

Overview of the Heritage Area

There is little written evidence of the **AMNHA's early history**. By the time of Anglo **settlement in the early 1800's**, the area was sparsely inhabited by Creek and Cherokee tribes. It's believed that the area served as a buffer between the two nations as well as a transportation and trading area.¹ The land was ceded by the Creeks to the State of Georgia in 1821 and land lots were distributed by lottery to American settlers, many of whom were Revolutionary War veterans.

The area remained sparsely populated well into the 20th century. A 1935 School District map of DeKalb County shows that many roads remained unpaved.² The landscape was dotted with stone quarries and rural farms. Most of the earliest settlements formed around the South River, which bisects the NHA, or along crossroads. Inhabitants also settled alongside the nearby railroad line that ran between Augusta and Atlanta.

Today, the **AMNHA's** proximity to Atlanta and its large parcels of undisturbed land make it attractive to suburban development. The broader Atlanta region was the second fastest growing metropolitan area in the country in the 2000s.³ Current economic conditions have curtailed recent growth but the area is still vulnerable to overdevelopment and the economic downturn may threaten the financial resources of already protected

properties. However, the area has been noted for its distinctive ability to retain “open and small scale character in contrast to the character of the fast growing metropolitan area.”⁴

The Heritage Area encompasses a variety of landscapes. The topography and geology are “defined by rolling hills and ridges cut by numerous streams... most of the land forms in the region relate to underlying bedrock of granite and metamorphic rocks.”⁵ Two exposed granite monadnocks that formed hundreds of millions of years ago are the primary features of the area.

Arabia Mountain and Panola Mountain, now a county and state park respectively, bear evidence of 19th century human settlement and 20th century quarrying activities. Smaller granite outcroppings are scattered throughout the area and active quarries are found within the northern boundary. This “**Lithonia Granite**” has been used in buildings throughout the heritage area, the region and the country. The close proximity of the railroad allowed granite to be transported all over the United States for use in street curbing, municipal buildings and significant structures at the West Point and Annapolis military academies.

¹ Price, Vivian. The History of DeKalb County, Georgia 1822-1900. Wolfe Publishing Company. Fernandiana Beach, FL. (1987)

² Roberts, Leigh. Cultural Resources Report for Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve. Not published. (1997)

³ <http://www.atlantaregional.com/about-us/the-region>

⁴ ICON Architecture. Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area Feasibility Study. (2001)

⁵ Ibid.

The largest and most developed settlements in the AMNHA are the National Register listed crossroads community of Klondike, the historically African-American Flat Rock community and the town of Lithonia. Remnants of the rural farm landscapes are evident at the Vaughters and Lyon family

properties. The 2,200+ acre tract in the Monastery of the Holy Spirit encompasses the historic rural landscape as well as the conservation ethic of the current owners. Together, these sites form the basis for the National Heritage Area and can be used to illustrate its cultural development.



Arabia Alliance

Arabia Mountain

Methodology

This Cultural Landscape Assessment was prepared for the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area as an addendum to the 2006 Management Plan by Ecos Environmental Design. A preliminary review was commissioned to fulfill requirements of the enabling legislation and to begin evaluation of the cultural landscape resources. Mera Cardenas, Executive Director of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, Inc., the non-profit management entity for the Heritage Area, selected the sites and prepared this report in consultation with the National Park Service (NPS) Southeast Region Office.

Site selection was based on representation within the three counties that are part of the Heritage Area: DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties. The 2006 Management Plan identified five cultural focus areas that were also used in this report to identify and select relevant cultural landscapes. Several sites may be associated with multiple focus areas. The NPS has defined four general types of cultural landscape. Three of those types are present within the area: historic sites; historic vernacular landscape and ethnographic landscapes. This study is intentionally broad and preliminary and should form the basis for future and more comprehensive analysis.

In summary, the focus areas and their associated landscapes are:

Focus Area	Identified Cultural Landscape	NPS Landscape Type
Culture And Community	Historic District of Lithonia	Historic Site
	Klondike Historic District	Historic Site
	Flat Rock Cemetery	Ethnographic Landscape
Natural Systems	Davidson - Arabia Nature Preserve	Vernacular Landscape Ethnographic Landscape
	Panola Mountain State Conservation Park	Vernacular Landscape Ethnographic Landscape
	Lyon Farm	Historic Site Vernacular Landscape
Early Settlement	Parker House	Historic Site Vernacular Landscape
	Vaughters' Farm	Historic Site Vernacular Landscape
	Flat Rock Cemetery	Ethnographic Landscape
	Historic District of Lithonia	Historic Site
Granite Industry & Technology	Davidson - Arabia Nature Preserve	Vernacular Landscape Ethnographic Landscape
	Monastery of the Holy Spirit	Historic Site
Spiritual Landscape	Davidson - Arabia Nature Preserve	Vernacular Landscape Ethnographic Landscape

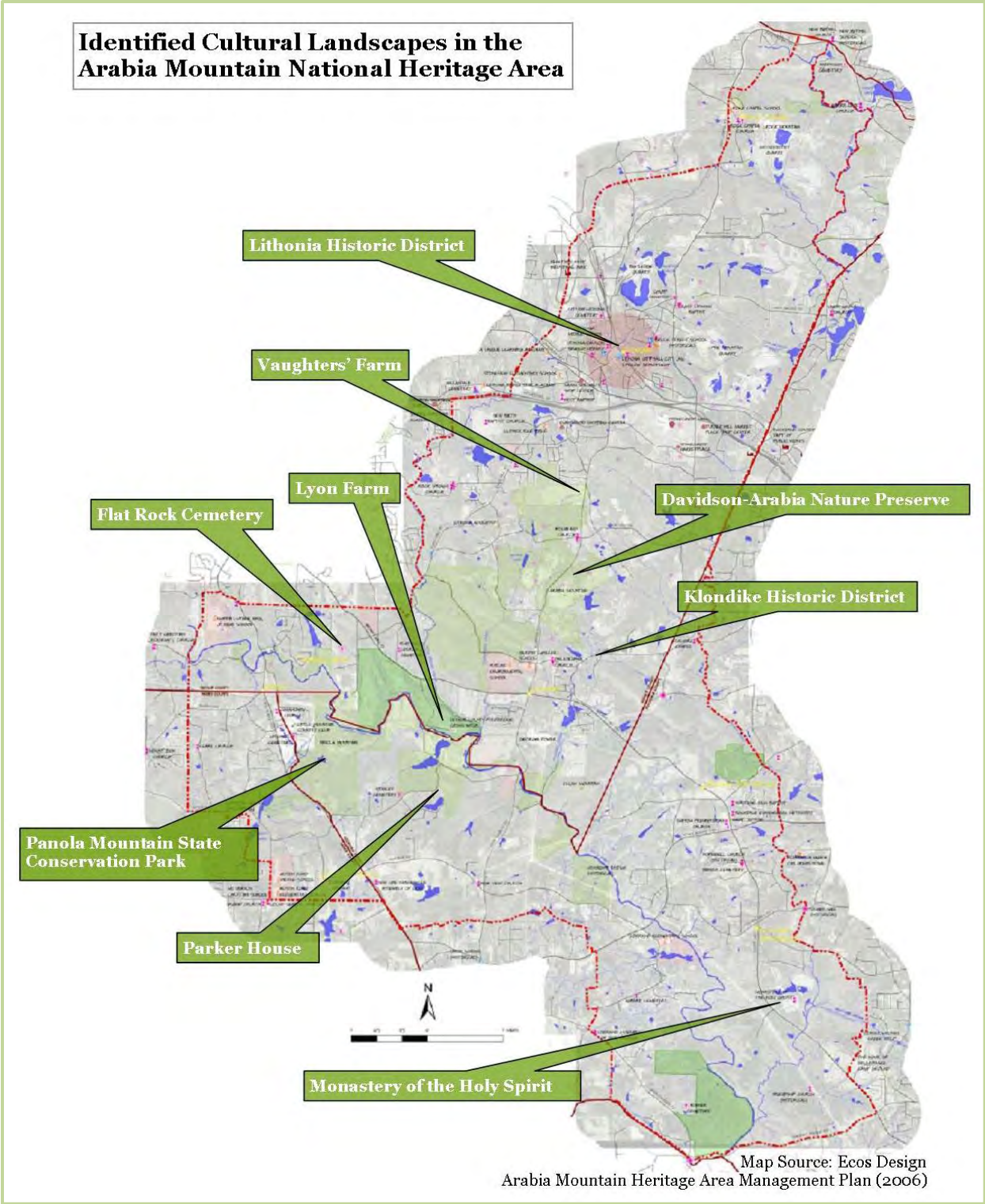
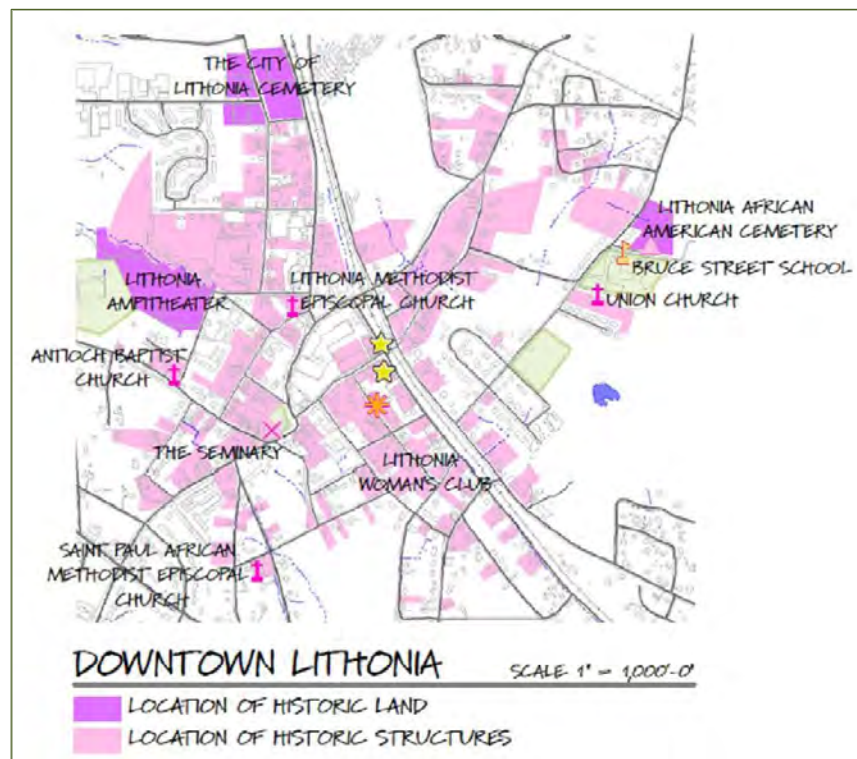


Figure 02: Highlighted Landscapes of the AMNHA

Historic District of Lithonia / DeKalb County NPS Landscape: Historic Site

The Historic District of Lithonia started as a small crossroads community linking other Georgia towns; one road of the crossroads connected Lawrenceville and McDonough and the other was simply a post road between Decatur and Augusta.⁶ The crossroads grew into a boomtown built on granite, the abundant natural resource that eventually influenced **the town's name**. Local lore holds that a private school teacher who was also a Greek scholar gave the town its name by combining two words - “**lithos**” meaning rock, and “**onia**” meaning place - to form Lithonia. The distinctive granite is present in nearly all public buildings, community institutions and many historic homes.

The Georgia Railroad line between Atlanta and Augusta was completed in 1845 and by 1856 the community had grown large enough to incorporate into a city. Lithonia was initially a commerce center that served the surrounding rural community of farmers and the original boundary extended just a half-mile from the rail station. Today, the city is still considered small and is less than one-square mile. The layout of the historic district is typical of many railroad towns across Georgia. Lithonia is oriented along the rail line and includes a central business district with nearby residential neighborhoods and a traditionally segregated African-American community.



Map Source: Pond-ECOS Design 2006 Management Plan

Figure 03: Historic Resources of Lithonia

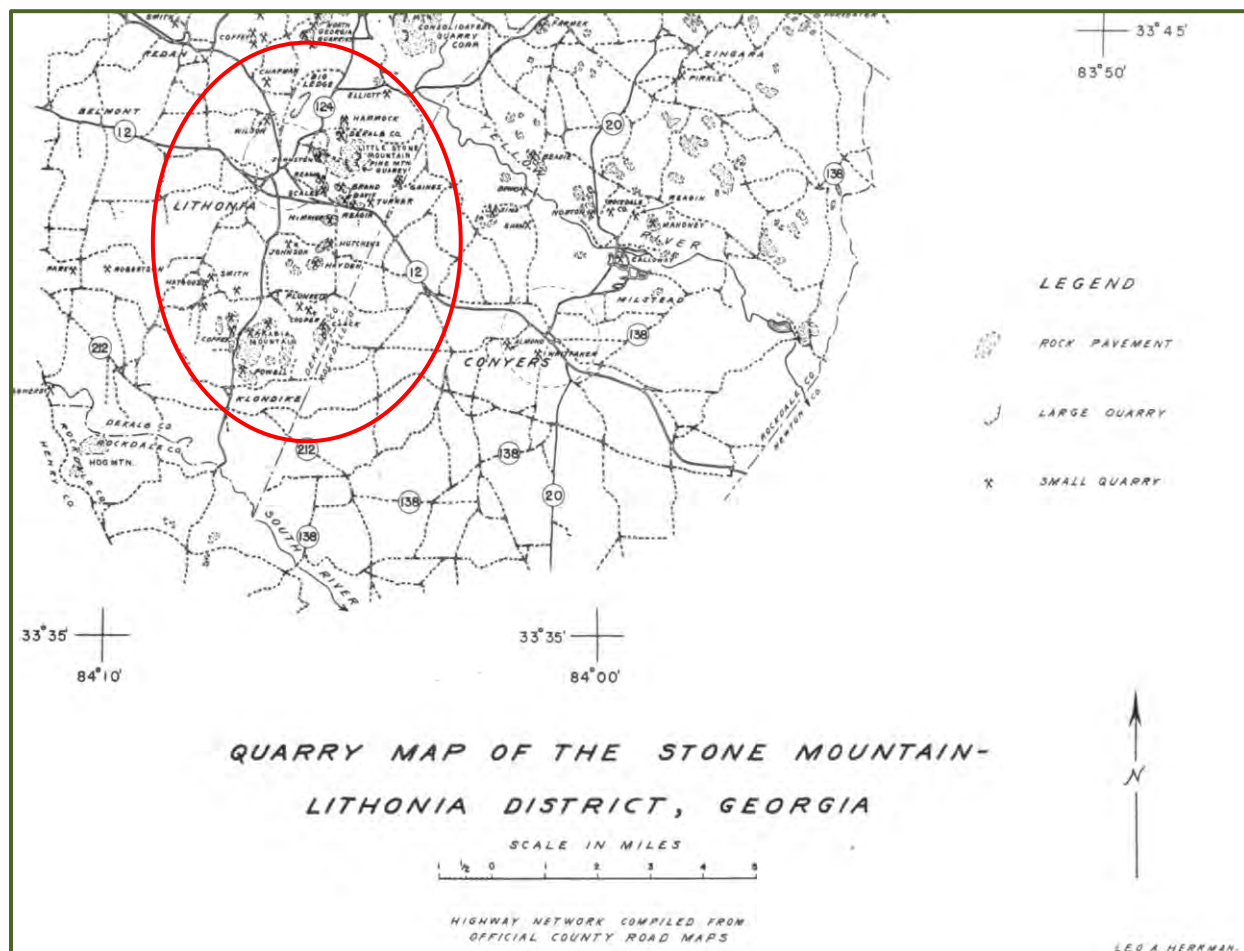
⁶ Almand, Judge Bond. Lithonia: The First Hundred Years 1856 -1956. Manuscript. (1956)

The fortunes of the railroad town changed considerably around 1880 with the development of tools and methods that allowed for easy quarrying of granite for commercial purposes. Lithonia granite or gneiss—officially called Tidal Grey—is desired for its distinctive swirl pattern and high structural density. The presence of the railroad meant that the stone could be shipped anywhere in the country and it

was used in the construction of monuments and buildings. In 1949, the Lithonia district produced nearly 1.5 million tons of granite valued at the time at \$3 million.⁷ The technological advances led to the birth of a new industry and granite quarries are still operational around the city. Figure 04 shows the proliferation of quarries across the region in the early 20th century.

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Figure 04: Historic Quarry Map - 1954



⁷ Herrmann, Leo Anthony. *Geology of the Stone Mountain-Lithonia District, Georgia*. State Division of Conservation. Department of Mines, Mining and Geology. (1954)

The influx of both skilled and unskilled workers in the late 19th century lead to **rapid growth and most of the town's** infrastructure dates to this period between the granite boom and the Great Depression. The town center expanded,

schools and houses were built and new companies were formed. The Lithonia **Women's Club**, built in 1928, is one of the granite community landmark **buildings and is the site of the county's** first library.



Courtesy Georgia State Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection

Lithonia Women's Club in 1953



*Left: Hand Drillers at Lithonia quarry 1910-20
Below: Grady Kelly at Arabia Mountain Stone
Crushing Co.*



Courtesy Georgia State Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection

In the **1960's**, **Interstate** 20 replaced the railroad as the main transportation mode between Atlanta and Augusta. The highway passes just a mile south of the city center and has transformed Lithonia from a small town to a suburban community. The easy access to regional shopping centers led to a decline in downtown business and two urban renewal projects exacerbated the situation. A four lane road was constructed between the highway and Stone Mountain that bypassed the city center. In an attempt to restore economic conditions, a shopping center was built near the center of town but in the process, more than two dozen historic buildings were demolished **including the train depot and the city's first church.**⁸ By the 1970's, the economic backbone of the community buckled when many of the larger quarry operations supplying cut stone ceased operations.

Despite these challenges, the resources within the Historic District of Lithonia are remarkably intact. Figure 03 highlights the locations of historic structures. Main Street is lined with granite buildings that harken the boomtown era. Community buildings and many of the historic Victorian cottages retain their integrity. The ranch homes that were built **in the 1960's** as **"modern"** housing options are now reaching their own period of significance and contribute to the historic district.

⁸ The City of Lithonia: 150 Year Celebration 1856-2006 (2006)

The city of Lithonia has been studied for significance in a National Register of Historic Places nomination form for:

Community Planning and Development

- as a representation of a 19th century railroad strip town, one of the most common town plans in rural Georgia.

Architecture

- its houses, commercial buildings and community landmark buildings are representative of building types and architectural styles built throughout Georgia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Representative styles include: Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, NeoClassical, English Vernacular Revival, Craftsman and Ranch.

Commerce

- its commercial buildings represent a center of trade in southeast DeKalb County.

Black Ethnic Heritage

- neighborhoods represent an excellent example of self-sustaining African-American communities where residents lived, shopped and socialized during segregation.

European Ethnic Heritage

- for the influx of immigrants from Scotland, Wales, England, Italy and Scandinavia who were skilled in cutting and polishing stone during the start of the granite industry.

Transportation

- the presence of the railroad represents the importance of **transportation to Lithonia's growth**. The railroad spurred **Lithonia's initial growth**, allowed the granite industry to thrive and, with the construction of I-20, the town was connected to the interstate highway system.

Threats

The Historic District of Lithonia has suffered from a decline in economic development from changing economic prosperity and living patterns. The population of the small city has decreased from 2,187 persons in 2000 to 1,924 persons in 2010.⁹ The commercial downtown has been unsuccessful in attracting new businesses. To increase development, the city council passed a new master plan in 2010 that addressed the economic challenges and incorporates historic resources into future planning. A National Register of Historic Places nomination was completed in 2003 but was rewritten in 2006 and was not formally submitted to the state office. A plan was initiated by AMNHA in 2010 to revive the nomination and submit it in 2011. The entry of the Historic District of Lithonia onto the National Register will open another avenue for economic development through tax credits and civic pride.

⁹ <http://www.atlantaregional.com/info-center/2010-census/census-2010>

Davidson - Arabia Nature Preserve / DeKalb County

NPS Landscape: Vernacular Landscape & Ethnographic Landscape

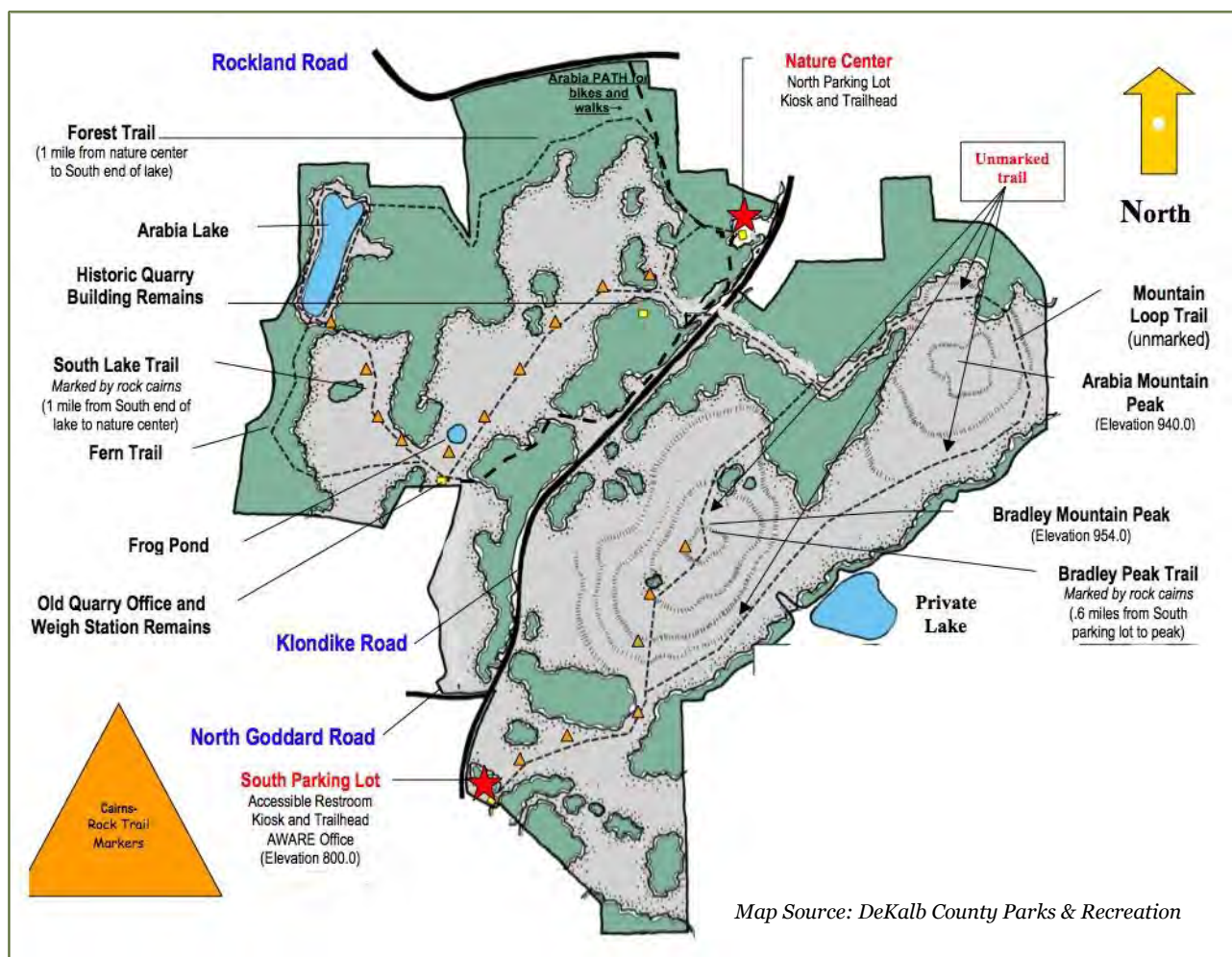
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The Davidson – Arabia Nature Preserve is a 2,000 acre DeKalb County park comprised of large formations of exposed granite, wetlands, pine and oak forests, multiple streams, and two lakes. It is the cultural landscape most readily identified with the resources of the NHA. While today it is considered an exceptional ecological wonder that harbors several rare, native plant species, the area is very much influenced by the hand of man.

The nature preserve is comprised of three distinct areas: Arabia Mountain to

the northeast, Bradley Mountain to the east and Mile Rock to the northwest.

The areas are accessed by a visitor's center in the north area and parking at the base of Bradley peak in the south. Visitors can navigate the preserve through miles of hiking trails and a multi-use bike trail. The major north-south thoroughfare, the two-lane wide Klondike Road, runs between the mountain peaks and Mile Rock. The below map illustrates the areas of circulation, water features and accessible trails.



The geological features of the Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve are bare granite at the peaks partially topped with a sparse, granitic soil. This soil supports the growth of cedars, mosses and lichens along the rocky slopes.¹⁰ Depressions in the stone collect rainwater and runoff and create vernal pools that support several types of plant species unique to

this ecosystem. The preserve also includes a six-acre deep water lake that once supplied water to all quarries in the vicinity. Another lake currently in private ownership is to the east of the Bradley peak.

The Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve lies within suburban Atlanta but the viewshed is surprisingly free of modern intrusions such as large scale buildings.



ICON Architecture



ICON Architecture



Credit: Jim Allison

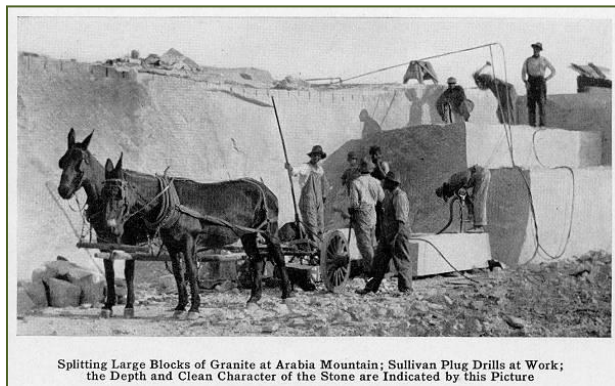
*Above: Viewshed from Arabia Mountain peaks red diamorpha in vernal pools.
Lower left: Granite Stonecrop, a state endangered species
Lower right: Arabia Lake*



Credit: Jim Allison

¹⁰ Herrmann (1954)

The quarry industry that was active around Arabia Mountain from the **1880's through the mid-20th century** has had the most visible impact on the cultural landscape of the nature preserve. The practice of quarrying granite is inherently destructive as the material is cut and hauled away for use as curbing or building material. Workers used black powder and dynamite to **“raise a ledge” or sever a large block of stone from the mass.**¹¹ Quarrying Arabia Mountain ultimately reduced its elevation by 12 feet.¹²



Mine and Quarry Magazine, October 1916



Postcard - The Johnson Quarry



*Arabia Mountain
Above: remnants of the compressor house
Right: quarry debris*



¹¹ Almand (1956)

¹² Roberts (1997)

The Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve has been documented for significance in:

Community Planning and Development

- for supplying curbing and Belgium blocks used in street design across Georgia and across the U.S.

Commerce

- for the activities that supported over a dozen locally-owned quarries.

Industry

- for the processes and production of millions of tons annually of granite building materials.

Conservation

- for the planning and protection of a rare natural resource and its resident plant species

Threats

The Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve is a DeKalb county park. Current shortfalls in the county budgets have lead to service reductions across all operations. The park is understaffed and has not yet filled an interpretive position vacated late in 2010. This position is integral to interactive programs that engage the community and serve the public.

The park is not under any development pressure. However, the surrounding area is growing and increasingly faces pressure from larger scale development that may affect the historic viewsheds.



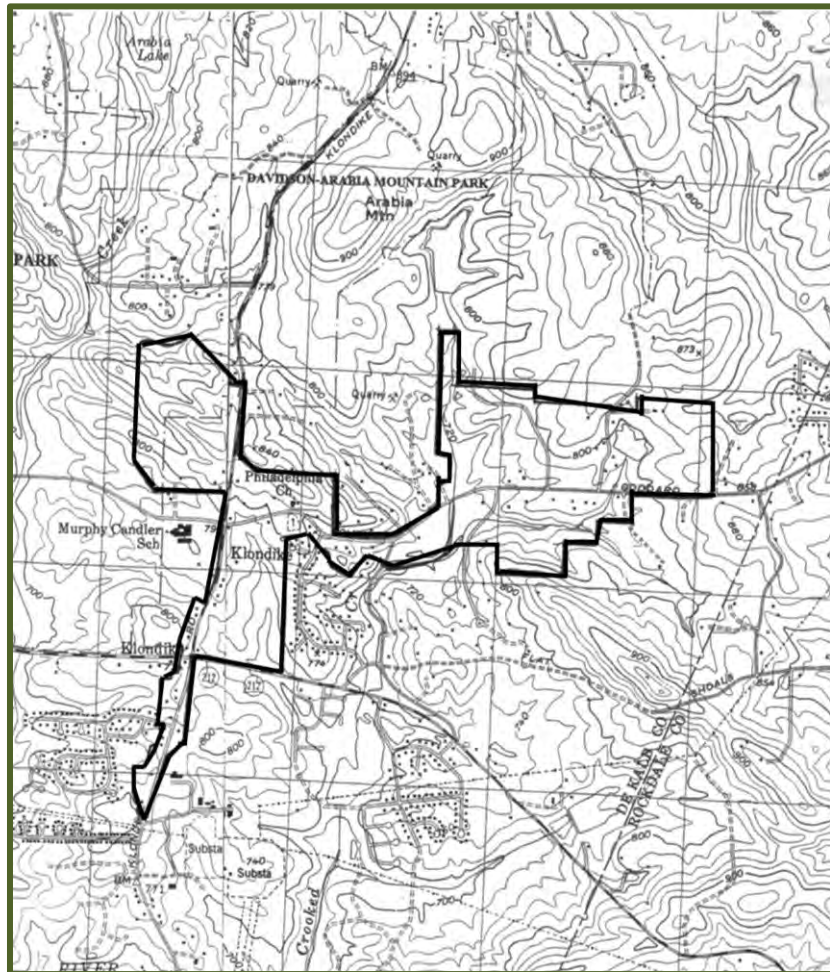
Arabia Mountain: view from private land to the east.

Klondike Historic District / DeKalb County NPS Landscape: Historic Site

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The Klondike Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007, is the type of small, rural crossroads community that is rarely still found in Georgia. It contains some of the oldest homes in DeKalb County, including more than a dozen built between 1890 and 1930. Many of the homes include stone quarried at nearby Arabia and Bradley Mountains in their

foundations, chimneys, piling, porches and construction. The Historic District represents about 34 structures assembled around a T-shaped section of Klondike and South Goddard Roads. The crossroads are the heart of the district and contain a granite store constructed circa 1900, the oldest of three commercial buildings in the community.



Source: National Register Nomination

*Figure 05: Boundary of the Klondike Historic District
See Arabia Mountain to the north.*

Klondike has a rural character of open fields and wooded lots that has changed little from its period of significance (1890-1930). Most of the historic homes in the community were built as single-family farmhouses and include agricultural service buildings on their expansive tracts. Some lots show evidence of earlier farming techniques such as terracing.



Terraced fields along Goddard Road

The oldest structure in the district is the Housworth-Mosley House, built in 1850 as a log central hall plan with two later additions. There are fewer than a dozen known antebellum structures in DeKalb County and two of them are within the small Klondike Historic District: the Housworth-Mosley House and a single-pen home are both located on South Goddard Road.

The Klondike Historic District was placed on the National Register in 2007 for significance in:

17

Community Planning and Development

- as an excellent example of a crossroads community that formed when DeKalb County was first opened to white settlement in the 1820's.

Architecture

- its houses and community landmark buildings represent architectural styles and house types popular in Georgia from the mid-19th Century through 1957 and for its distinctive use of granite from the nearby Arabia Mountain quarries. The dominant style is vernacular with Folk Victorian details. The representative housing types are single-pen, central-hall, gabled-ell, Queen Anne, New South, bungalow and ranch.



Historic Structure Report - 2007

Housworth-Mosley House c.1843

Threats

The Klondike Historic District is a small, rural community facing disinvestment. Several homes are vacant and are subject to vandalism or squatters. Larger tracts of farmland have been

subdivided and the introduction of multiple homes on what was once farmland threatens the rural character of the district.

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Typical homes of the Klondike Historic District

Panola Mountain State Park / Rockdale, Henry & DeKalb Counties NPS Landscape: Historic Site, Vernacular Landscape & Ethnographic Landscape

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In contrast to nearby Arabia and Bradley Mountains, Panola Mountain has never been quarried for its granite and remained in private hands for decades. The stone of Panola was considered poor quality. As a result, the granite monadnock is remarkably untouched.

Panola was established as a State Conservation Park in 1974 and has grown from its original 471 acres to over 1,600 acres through multiple small acquisitions. Panola was Georgia's first conservation park and was designated to "protect the geologically and biologically complex, fragile, and unique environment."¹³

The mountain and the immediately surrounding area including its lower slopes are a National Natural Landmark, designated in 1980. The nomination found that **"the significant natural value of Panola Mountain is the presence of communities of plants which represent successional stages of vegetation on rock... Not only are such communities present, but many of them occur in soil-filled depressions, isolated from one another by expanses of exposed rock... ideally suited for scientific study and educational demonstrations... Panola Mountain is valuable as a natural area because of the endemic and rare species of plants" characteristic of granite outcroppings.**¹⁴



Courtesy Georgia Department of Natural Resources

A Panola Mountain viewshed.

¹³ Weinland, Marcia. Assessment of Cultural Resources in Panola

¹⁴ Nomination form, National Natural Landmarks

The park boundaries are irregular and encompass a variety of topographies. The west side of the park is considered the “**conservation area**” while the east side is the “**recreation area**.” The main park entrance is on the west and is accessed off state Highway 155. This area includes the nature center, parking facilities, picnic pavilions and children’s playgrounds. Two self-guided soft trails,

a fitness trail and a nature trail with interpretative signage, lead from the parking area. An unmarked trail leads to the top of the mountain but it is accessible only by guided tours. This limited use protects the fragile ecosystem of the mountain from inadvertent human destruction. The mountain itself includes only about 100 acres of the park.



Map Source: Georgia Department of Natural Resources

The east portion of the park provides access to fishing, boating and guided tree climbs in Alexander Lake. The multi-use concrete PATH trail enters the park from the Lyon Farm in the northwest and terminates at the east

parking lot. An archery range on an abandoned golf opened in April 2011 and provides static targets as well as a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile 3-D target trail. To the north is a permit-only “**power of flight**” wildlife sanctuary.

Panola State Conservation Park includes two documented historic homesteads. The first is the Parker House located near Alexander Lake at the southeast entrance to the park. The second is the **Vaughters' Farm located on Klondike Road** outside the general park boundaries and on the other side of Arabia Mountain.

The Parker house is a wood-frame plantation **plain built in the 1830's**. It is **the last remnant of Aaron Parker's farm** which once covered 2,500 acres, included 15 slaves and was among the largest landholdings in the county. After his death, the property was divided among his 13 children. The house would

have 7 owners before it was acquired by a golf course developer.

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The site immediately surrounding the house was altered considerably when the rural land was converted to the Southernness Golf Course in the early **1990's**. **The first floor of the house was** used for offices while the second floor was relatively untouched. Most historic finishes and architectural features are intact. Several surrounding buildings were added east of the house to support other golf course functions. The house itself sits on a grassy knoll enclosed by a fieldstone retaining wall. The parcel is surrounded by an asphalt driveway and turnaround on three-sides and a parking lot to the north.

Figure 06: Google Earth view of the Parker House and surrounding buildings.



Map Source: Google Earth

The Parker House was placed on the National Register in 2009 for significance in:

Exploration and settlement

- representing early white settlement along the western

edge of the Georgia frontier in the **1820's and 1830's.**

22

Architecture

- as a excellent example of a plantation plain type house, an early Georgia house type built along the Piedmont and coastal plain areas between 1820-1850.



Courtesy Georgia State Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection

The Parker House

Above: 1979. Below: 2011 - a lightning strike in March damaged the north chimney.



The Vaughters' Farm, a non-contiguous part of Panola Mountain State Park, is believed to be the last working dairy farm in what is now an urbanized county. The 141 acre tract is characterized by rolling topography, open fields, a picturesque barn and granite outcroppings along a creek. The family sold the property to the state in 2002 as part of a greenspace initiative.

The farm is located off Klondike Road. The road itself cuts just inside the eastern boundary of the property in front of the granite farmhouse, built by

S.B. Vaughters in 1947. Across the road are the historic dairy barn and a small vernacular machine shed built with salvaged materials from a four-stall mule barn. Mr. Vaughters recalled the state of the land when he bought the **farm in 1946 as "badly eroded."** There were gullies that one could hide a car in... most of it was partly covered by loose rock which had to be removed. The farm had been tenant-operated for **many, many years.**¹⁵ Mr. Vaughters also built the farmhouse himself with lumber cut on-site and milled locally.



Source: ICON Architecture

*Vaughters' Farm
The dairy barn and machine shed.*

¹⁵ Vaughters, S.B. "Real Life Experiences Autobiography." Pamphlet. 1989

Threats

There are no immediate threats to the Panola Mountain State Park. However, neither of the identified historic homesites has a preservation plan or current use and are thereby threatened with neglect. As state-owned properties they are also subject to budget shortfalls

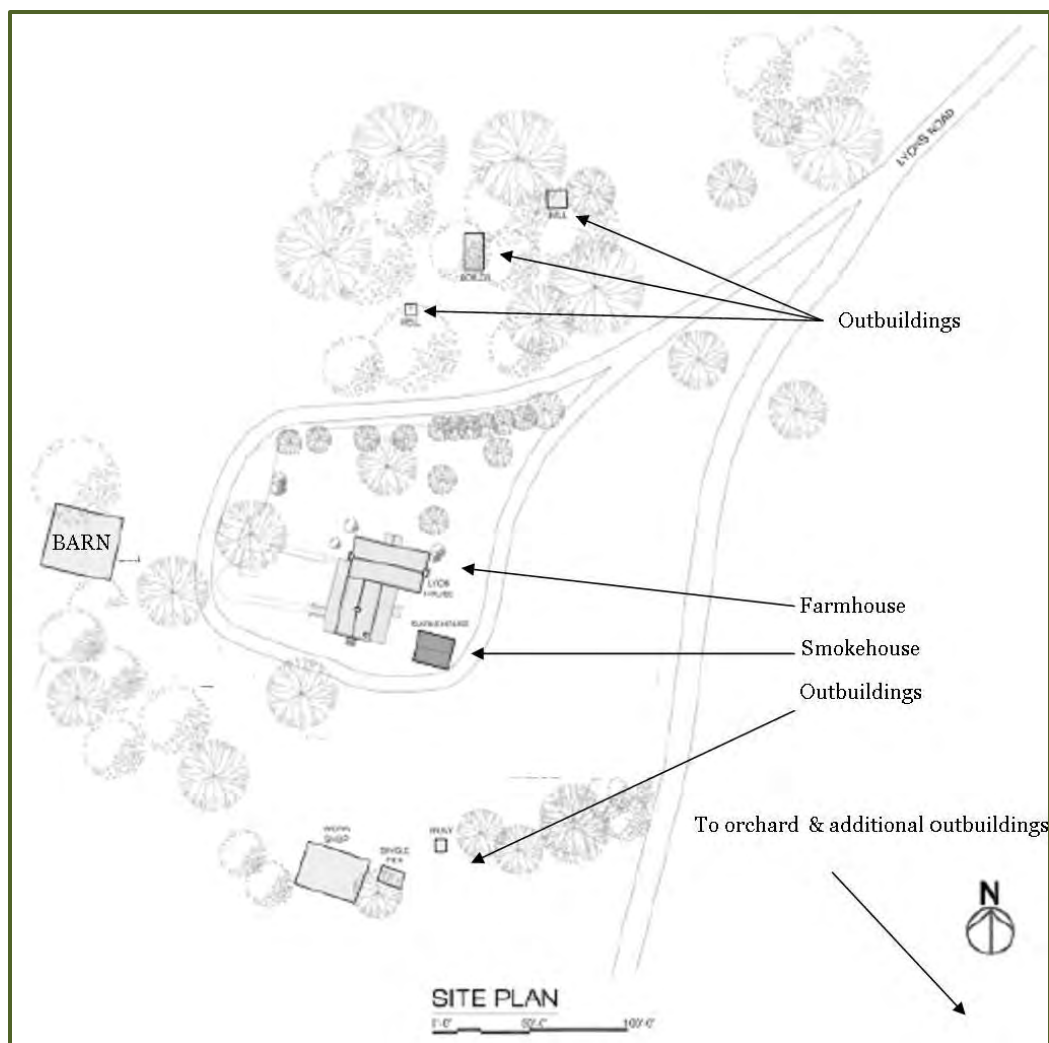
in the current fiscal atmosphere. A recent historic structure report for the Parker House outlined steps to stabilize the house and chimneys. The **Vaughters’ Farm is identified as the future site for the NHA visitor’s center** but no action has yet been taken.

Lyon Farm / DeKalb County
NPS Landscape: Historic Site & Vernacular Landscape
 4506 Lyon Road, Lithonia, GA

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The Lyon family was one of the first white settlers when the area that is now DeKalb County was ceded to Georgia by the Creek Indians **in the 1820's**. Joseph Emmanuel Lyon, a Revolutionary War veteran, obtained a 100-acre parcel that was continuously occupied and farmed by his descendants until 2006. A 48-acre area of that property is now owned

by DeKalb County. It is defined by gently rolling farmland along the South River with a 2.5 acre parcel of agricultural structures including the historic farmhouse. Remnants of an orchard and supporting structures are on a knoll southeast of the farmhouse complex.



Map Source: Historic Structure Report- 2008

Site plan of the Lyon Farm building complex.



The house and barn on the Lyon Farm.

The farmhouse section contains structures which include a privy, barn, workhouse, smokehouse/kitchen, sorghum mill, cane mill and well. The buildings are in various states of repair and the variety of materials and construction methods underscores the self-sufficiency of rural living in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The farmhouse is the central structure of the complex with agricultural buildings surrounding the home in close proximity. As a working farm for over a century, there are many structures that have been lost due to collapse, neglect, cycle of use or because they were simply recycled into other structures.

The property is approached from the long, sparsely populated Lyon Road off Browns Mill Road in unincorporated Lithonia. Lyon Road terminates at the property and directly feeds into a dirt driveway which encircles the house. The road itself was a deeply rutted dirt **“fair weather” road until the family** requested it be paved in 1943.¹⁶ The end of the road serves as the northern boundary of

the property. To the east are fields that are now overgrown and bisected by a modern-day hardscape multi-use trail (PATH). The PATH also runs along the south of the property between the agricultural complex and the South River. To the west, beyond the barn, are a small field and wooded area.



View of the PATH cutting south and east of Lyon Farm. Note the outhouse in the foreground.

¹⁶ Historic Structure Report. Lyon House, Lithonia, Georgia. Georgia State University. (2008)

The landscape features of the property include a single-course granite retaining



wall that separates the driveway from the north lawn; large trees including antebellum oaks that shade the house on the west and a muscadine grape arbor to the south. Smaller plantings of boxwoods, crape myrtles roses and various vines are planted close to the house.

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Left: Granite columns and retaining wall at entrance to the yard.

The farmhouse is a vernacular style I-house with a rear ell. The house developed over time and the foundation and support beams of the original house are believed to be enclosed in the current structure. The I-house, characterized by a two-story central hall plan two bays wide and one bay deep, faces north. It is clad in non-historic shiplap siding with exterior brick shouldered chimneys on the east and west facades. The single-story rear ell that projects from the south façade has a full-length, elevated concrete masonry unit (CMU) porch along both the east and west facades. This area of the home is believed to be the oldest. Portions of the house, including parts of the foundation and fireplace hearths, are built with granite likely gathered at nearby Panola Mountain.



The Lyon house, looking east.

The interior of the Lyon property is little changed from its historic configuration or finishes. The interior woodwork is **generally 6" tongue-and-groove** unpainted paneling which is laid horizontally. The fireplace mantles are vernacular representations of a mix of Georgian and Federal styles and appear to be hand carved.

The Lyon Farm has been noted for significance in:

Agricultural Development

- as a local example of 19th and 20th century agricultural development through its intact structures and that the land remained under the continuous ownership of one family.

Architecture

- As a local example of vernacular, rural architecture expressed in **the 1850's era I-house** and the orderly yet asymmetrical organization of the structures and reuse of local materials which illustrate subsistence farming.

The Lyon property has one of the most unique views in the Heritage Area – that of Panola Mountain. Due to terrain and tree cover, the mountain is not visible from many other locations in the area. Looking out over the South River, the sloping mountain appears to rise out of the distant field. It is a perspective that would not have been seen by many outside of the Lyon family for over 150 years.

Threats

The Lyon Homestead is protected by public ownership but currently does not have an active preservation plan. Additionally, the county currently lacks funds to adequately rehabilitate and protect the property. The major threats facing the property are neglect and abandonment. Though eligible, it is not listed on the National Register. AMNHA has started the process for individual nomination. Additionally, the preservation and interpretation of the property could benefit from research studies such as a cultural landscape plan and archaeological study of farming practices and the location of the three reported slave cabins.



Panola Mountain in the distance. Notice the smokehouse close to the house.

Flat Rock Cemetery / DeKalb County NPS Landscape: Ethnographic Landscape

The community of Flat Rock is one of the oldest settlements in DeKalb County and represents a strong connection between community and place.¹⁷ The Flat Rock Cemetery illustrates that connection because it links the descendants of slaves to the land their ancestors worked. Located on the third highest elevation in the county, the cemetery has been used as a sacred burial space since at least 1834, the date of the earliest marker, **into the 1960's** when a new cemetery was acquired. The land was likely used by indigenous peoples prior to Anglo settlement.¹⁸ It is believed that the slaves from the Lyon plantation and others from around the county used the cemetery for decades.

As early as 1832, the Flat Rock community had a post office and was a thriving crossroads town on the stagecoach line between Nashville, TN and Augusta, GA.¹⁹ The community supported the surrounding plantations of the Johnson, South and Lyon families among others. The completion of the railroad in Lithonia, just north of Flat Rock, siphoned traffic and commerce away from Flat Rock²⁰ and by 1845, the post office was gone. The name itself even disappeared from many maps. Slaves of the area plantations founded

two churches **in the early 1860's** that served as anchors in the community and likely contributed to them remaining in the area after emancipation.

The Flat Rock Cemetery is accessed from an abandoned road bed approximately ½ mile off Lyon Road. A 2008 archaeological survey conducted by Georgia State University identified about 250 graves. The site is in a heavily wooded, mature hardwood forest with steep topography. Previously, much of the land surrounding the cemetery had been used for farming. It is likely that the cemetery caretakers used a common farming practice on steeply incline land to build the cemetery: the loosely defined rows of burials appear to be terraced to accommodate the terrain and allow for more plots.²¹ The oldest graves are located at the highest elevation.



Credit: Dr. Jeffrey Glover

2008 Archeological Survey at Flat Rock Cemetery

¹⁷ Glover, Jeffrey. Et al. *Reclaiming a Sense of Place: Geospatial Technologies and the Flat Rock Cemetery Project*. Computer Applications to Archaeology. Williamsburg, VA. (2009)

¹⁸ Personal communication from Johnny Waits

¹⁹ Talmadge, John E. Rebecca Latimer Felton: Nine Stormy Decades. Athens, GA. University of Georgia Press. (1960)

²⁰ Personal communication from Johnny Waits

²¹ Glover (2009)

Graves in the Flat Rock cemetery reflect many of the burial practices found in traditionally African-American cemeteries. Many of the graves are oriented east-west and have plain fieldstones at both the head and the foot. There are several mortuary stones that are only found in African-American cemeteries within Georgia. Commercially available, intricately carved headstones are also present. The 2008 archaeological survey also revealed a number of grave goods and

broken vessels that likely served as graveside offerings.

Threats

The cemetery was recently threatened by an upscale suburban development to the west. The property lines were inaccurately drawn and encroached on the cemetery land. The remote location means the cemetery is vulnerable to vandalism and neglect. The cemetery is not yet listed on the National Register.



*Above: a mortuary marker
Below: fieldstone marker, primitive
marker and grave offering.*



All photos courtesy Dr. Jeffrey Glover



Monastery of the Holy Spirit / Rockdale County NPS Landscape: Historic Site & Vernacular Landscape

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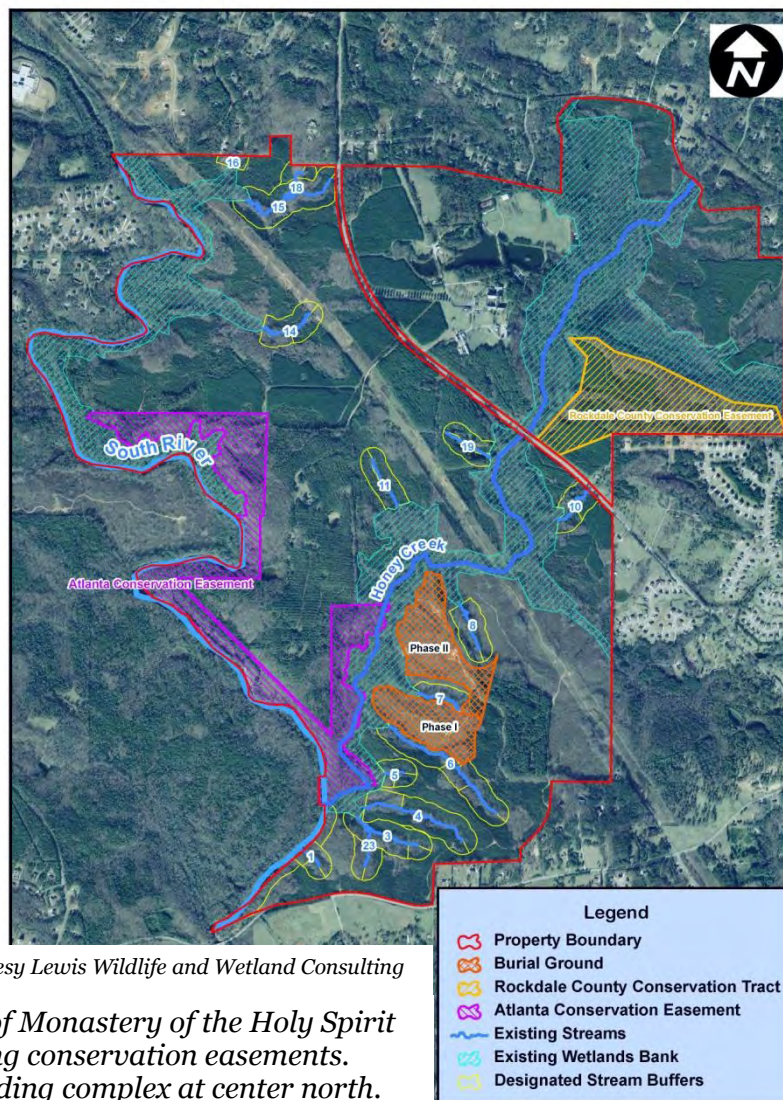
The Monastery of the Holy Spirit is a 2200+ acre spiritual and natural preserve tucked in the far west corner of Rockdale County. The tract, which straddles Honey Creek and is bisected by State Route 212, is the largest greenspace in the county. Nearly half of the land is under conservation easement or wetland and stream mitigation. The land is also the home of a community of Cistercian or Trappist monks who settled here in 1944. The Roman Catholic order is based on a contemplative life in harmony with nature and with God far from the “haunts of men.”²²

The peace and tranquility of the Monastery are also a large draw for

visitors. About 60,000 people come to the Monastery every year making it the largest tourist attraction in Rockdale County.

The site of the Monastery includes the former Honey Creek plantation near Conyers. At the time that the group of 21 monks moved here from rural Kentucky, the property was about 1400

acres. Some of the land was already cultivated for crops and also incorporated second growth forest and wetlands. The limited amenities included a dirt road, a well, a number of farm building and sharecropper's cabins. A large barn would serve as living quarters while the monks established their new community.²³



Courtesy Lewis Wildlife and Wetland Consulting

*Site Map of Monastery of the Holy Spirit
showing conservation easements.
Note building complex at center north.*

²² <http://www.trappist.net/TheLand>

²³ Kramer, Dewey Weiss. Open to the Spirit. (1986) accessed at: <http://www.trappist.net/OpenToTheSpiritHistorical>



Courtesy Georgia State Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection

The barn where the Monks first made their home on the property

The monks had planned to follow their agricultural roots and farm the area. Cotton had been the primary crop on the plantation. However, when they sent a soil sample to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for analysis, the monks were **told to “make bricks.”**²⁴ The community turned to other pursuits and at times raised beef and dairy cattle, pigs, rabbits, chickens and bees. Today, the Monastery supports itself through sales of bonsai, sculpture and stained glass.

The majority of the Monastery grounds are undeveloped woodlands, pastures and wetlands. Stream buffers have been re-forested with hardwood plantings while selective timber operations cull the loblolly pine forests. Early human settlement is also evidenced in the Native American mounds throughout the property and the remains of a slave cemetery.

The monks live and worship in a cluster of buildings at the northern end of the property, accessed by a magnolia lined drive off Highway 212. The drive ends at the Monastic Heritage Center (opening May 2011) which incorporated the old barn and the Abbey Church. This complex of buildings also includes the cloister, a retreat house, bonsai greenhouse and gift shop. Several small lakes lie to the west of the retreat house.

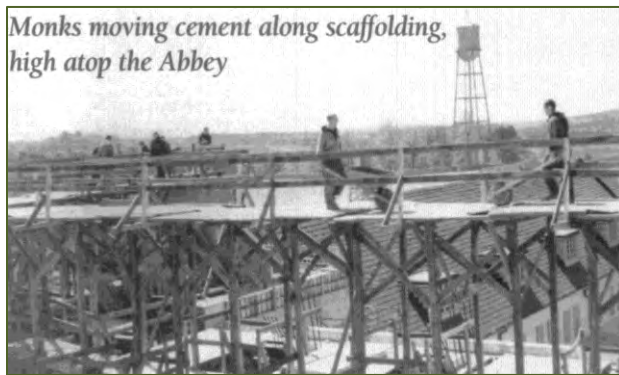


The Abbey Church

The Abbey Church and cloister are a remarkable feat of workmanship and engineering and have been hailed as **“Georgia’s most remarkable concrete building.”** Completed 15 years after the monks first arrived, they were built of poured concrete in a streamlined Gothic style by the monks themselves who were amateurs in masonry, construction and architecture. An article in **“The Georgia Contractor” magazine states:** **“The buildings built of massive amounts of concrete, were put together by hand.** Not only were the architectural plans

²⁴ <http://www.trappist.net/TheLand>

donated to the project, but non-engineering eyes had to be taught to read the specification. A church had to be built – and a construction crew rolled **up their sleeves and got to work... They** built wooden forms for every structural element of the building – foundations, columns, slabs and window frames that were poured, pieced together and set in place.”



Courtesy Monastery of the Holy Spirit

Using wheelbarrows and scaffold to build the concrete Abby church.

The monks also developed a process to create the stained glass windows for the church. The design had to be simple enough for amateurs to reproduce. Trapezoidal shapes of glass were cut and each window had a set number of pieces with the same distribution of colors. The layout, however, was left to the individual monk to determine. Blue segments were used in the nave while white, yellow orange and red are used in the sanctuary. This gives a tunnel like effect to the interior and draws the eye to the tabernacle. The repetition of simple motifs is practical as well as an expression of the Cistercian artistic tradition.²⁵

²⁵ Kramer (1986) accessed at: <http://www.trappist.net/OpentotheSpiritTheAbbeyChurch>

Today, the monastic community supports itself through donations, sales in the gift shop and of bonsai as well as other endeavors. The retreat house is open to visitors of all faiths for extended stays and reflection. The Monastery also sells burial plots in Honey Creek Woodlands, a 30-acre tract dedicated to green or natural burials without embalming or elaborate caskets. Conservation easements have helped to supplement income as well as limited pine logging. The Monastic Heritage Center will increase tourist visitation and allow the community to develop a more secure revenue stream.

Threats

There are no immediate threats to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. However, as a self-sustaining monastery, the community is threatened by rising costs associated with an aging population. Accelerating health care and overhead costs threaten the ability of the monks to support their lifestyle. Increased tourism through the Monastic Heritage Center is seen as a way to sustain the community into the future.

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