



501 Whitaker Street ■ Savannah, GA 31401 ■ Tel 912-651-2125 ■ Fax 912-651-2831 ■ [www.georgiahistory.com](http://www.georgiahistory.com)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACTS: Laura Garcia-Culler, GHS Executive Vice President  
(912) 651-2125 x. 36  
[lgculler@georgiahistory.com](mailto:lgculler@georgiahistory.com)

### CLARKE COUNTY AFRICAN-AMERICAN CEMETERY RECEIVES NEW HISTORICAL MARKER

**Savannah, GA, October 6, 2008** -- The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) along with the East Athens Development Corporation, Inc. will unveil a new historical marker to recognize Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. The dedication will be held at the intersection of Fourth and Bray Streets in East Athens, adjacent to Springfield Baptist Church on **October 19, 2008, at 3:00 p.m.**

The cemetery, founded in 1882 to serve as a burial site for Athens-area African-Americans, is the final resting place of many noted Georgians including: Samuel F. Harris, principal of the first black high school in Georgia; Monroe B. Morton, politician and owner of the first African-American owned and operated vaudeville theatre in the United States; Madison Davis, a former slave and Reconstruction era Georgia Legislator; William A. Pledger, one of Atlanta's first African-American lawyers and founder of several Atlanta area newspapers; and Harriet Powers, one of the best-known southern African American quilt makers. The cemetery contains excellent examples of African-American funerary iconography and burial practices, including the use of quartz or reflective glass on headstones, and references to celestial events in carvings and markings on trees. Georgia's Commissioner of Labor and member of the GHS Board of Curators, Michael Thurmond, is scheduled to speak at the October 19 marker dedication. Thurmond has been a major advocate for the recognition and restoration of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery for many years. The marker text reads as follows:

#### **Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery**

The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was founded in 1882 by the Gospel Pilgrim Society, a fraternal organization, to furnish respectable funerals and burial places for Athens-area African Americans. Popular in the nineteenth century, such societies offset funeral costs and ensured a funeral procession and proper burial for members. The cemetery illustrates a Reconstruction-era departure in the black community from burial sites associated with specific churches. Gospel Pilgrim also contains fine examples of African-American funerary art. Approximately 3500 persons are buried here, including state legislator Madison Davis and nationally recognized folk artist Harriet Powers.

Erected by the Georgia Historical Society and East Athens Development Corporation, Inc.

Historical markers, which recognize people, places and events, tell the story of Georgia's past in a format that is accessible to residents and visitors alike and are an effective tool for economic development, encouraging local tourism and general state-wide interest. GHS has administered Georgia's historical marker program since 1998, erecting over 150 markers statewide.

The Georgia Historical Society, headquartered in Savannah, is a preeminent educational and research institution and the first and only statewide historical society in Georgia. It is the oldest cultural organization in the state and one of the oldest historical societies in the nation. For nearly 175 years, GHS has collected, preserved, and shared Georgia and American history through a variety of educational outreach programs, publications, and research services.