

Newsletter

OF THE ATHENS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 7745 • Athens, Georgia 30604-7745

November 2010



The Morton Theatre: A Centennial Retrospective with Thomas Riis and Jill Read

**Sunday, November 21, 2010
2:30 p.m. at the historic Morton Theatre
195 West Washington Street, Athens**

As a part of the 100th anniversary of the Morton Theatre, the Athens Historical Society will present a lecture and panel discussion of the Morton Theatre's history, its place in American vaudeville, and its impact on Athens culture. The program will be held at the Morton Theatre on Sunday, November 21, 2010, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. A reception will be held after the meeting in the former E.D. Harris Pharmacy section of the Morton Theatre building.

Dr. Thomas L. Riis, the Negler Endowed Professor of Music and Director of the American Music Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder, will speak on *American Vaudeville and the Early Years of the Morton Theatre*, illustrating his subject with video and early sound recordings of African-American performers. Professor Riis is a specialist in music theatre history, lectures and writes frequently on topics related to 19th and 20th-century African-American music. He taught at the UGA School of Music from 1981 to 1992 and was involved in efforts to restore the Morton in the 1980s.

Following the lecture, a panel discussion with audience participation will address the legacy of Morton founder and businessman Monroe Bowers "Pink" Morton, the Morton's place in the life of "Hot Corner" and significance to Athens culture, and the preservation and revival of the Morton Theatre. Jill Jayne Read, former Director of Cultural and Economic Development of Clarke County, who led the efforts to restore the Morton Theatre, and others will participate.

The meeting is free and open to the public.

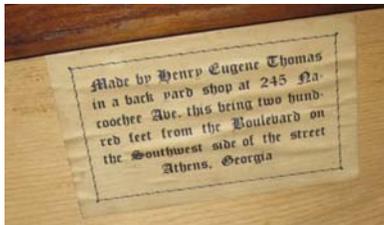
The public is encouraged to bring memorabilia and share recollections of the Morton Theatre.

We hope you will also attend the other gala festivities celebrating the 100th anniversary, including a musical program featuring Broadway artist and Athens native Calvin Smith in *A Night of 100 Stars* on Saturday evening, November 20 – see the Morton Theatre webpage at www.mortontheatre.com for show tickets and more information about other activities, the history of the building and its owner.

Monroe Bowers "Pink" Morton was very ambitious and achieved a great deal of financial success in an era following the Civil War and Reconstruction when most blacks were severely oppressed. He was born July 21, 1856 (according to the 1900 Clarke County census), the son of an illiterate slave woman, Lizzie Morton. He served as the U.S. Postmaster for Athens from 1897 until 1903; owned and edited a black newspaper in Athens; and his construction company built numerous buildings around Athens and the Southeast, including the Wilkes County, Georgia, courthouse. He died Feb. 12, 1919 in Athens at the age of 63, and was buried in the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. His obituary in the Athens newspaper *Weekly Banner* said that he was one of the wealthiest Negroes in the South. Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB) has an interesting video of his life in the *Georgia Stories II* series, online at www.gpb.org/georgiastories/stories/pink_morton. The postcard above is courtesy of Gary Doster.

Georgia Bellflowers: The Furniture of Henry Eugene Thomas

Henry Eugene Thomas (1883-1965) began his career as a finishing carpenter, but made a name for himself as a dealer and master craftsman, creating furniture inspired by the antiques he found in the Southern countryside. He worked out of a small backyard shop on Nacoochee Avenue in Athens, Georgia, from the 1920s through the 1950s, and was particularly well known locally for his end tables with finely tapered legs and distinctive bellflower inlay.



Gene Thomas, known to friends and family as “Shorty,” occasionally signed his furniture “H. E. Thomas,” and more frequently applied a paper label to the inside. He favored old woods and often incorporated elements taken from pieces of antique furniture. In addition to creating furniture of his own, he refinished and repaired older pieces for many collectors in town.

Unless an object is signed or labeled, the best ways to identify something as being made by Thomas are through oral history and comparison to known works. Though many Athenians remember Mr. Thomas, or recall their parents or grandparents buying furniture from him, little information about his career has been formally documented. The desk at right is one of six similar pieces that have been located to date.

In early 2012 (January 14-April 15), the Georgia Museum of Art will present the first exhibition highlighting Thomas’s furniture and career. The exhibition will feature 12-18 pieces of furniture made by him as well as related photographs and ephemera. Ashley Callahan, an independent scholar and the Georgia Museum of Art’s former curator of decorative arts, is guest curator of this exhibition.

If you would like to share information about Mr. Thomas or photographs of his furniture, please contact Ashley at adbcallahan@gmail.com or 706-254-9969. For more information and periodic updates, “like” the *Georgia Bellflowers* page on Facebook.



Photo by Michael McKelvey

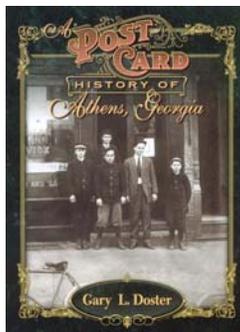
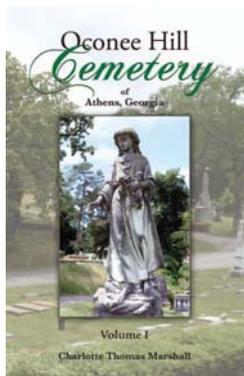


Beat the membership dues increase by renewing your membership before January 1, 2011!

PLEASE NOTE: The membership of the Athens Historical Society voted at the October meeting to increase dues effective January 1, 2011. Any renewals or new members received before that date may pay the current 2010 rate. After January 1, basic dues will be \$20; family \$30; Supporting \$50; and Patron \$100. Thank you for your continued support and involvement with AHS!

AHS Publications make great gifts!

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gaahs



Do you have these books on your bookshelf?

Quantity	Title	Price	Total
	<i>Oconee Hill Cemetery of Athens, Georgia, Volume I</i> (2010 reprint) by Charlotte Thomas Marshall ** also available at ADD Drugs in Five Points, Athens Welcome Center, Aurum Studios downtown and Borders at Beechwood **	\$55.00	
	<i>A Postcard History of Athens, Georgia</i> by Gary Doster	\$30.00	
	<i>Papers of the Athens Historical Society, Vol. I</i> (1964, 2007 reprint)	\$10.00	
	<i>Papers of the Athens Historical Society, Vol. II</i> (1979)	\$10.00	
	<i>Athens-Clarke County Cemeteries</i> (limited quantity available)	\$30.00	
	<i>Athens Historian - all twelve volumes</i> (limited quantity available)	\$50.00	
SHIPPING & HANDLING - Please add \$7.00 for 1 book, \$8.00 for 2 books, \$9.00 for 3 or more			
SUBTOTAL			
AHS Membership(s) for next year (2011) – see the box below for membership levels - beat the dues increase by renewing before January 1, 2011!			
<i>Why not give an AHS annual membership to your favorite history buffs?</i>			
TOTAL OF ORDER - Make check payable to Athens Historical Society			

Please put your name & address in the box below so we'll know where to ship the items. If you wish us to ship them to someone on your gift list, provide name & address & the items to be shipped on a separate sheet.
Thank you for supporting your Society with your order & your membership!

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Choose membership level: **Dues cover the calendar year – annual dues go up January 1, 2011!**

_____ Individual - \$10 (\$20)

_____ Patron - \$50 (\$100)

_____ Family - \$15 (\$30)

_____ Business - \$100 (\$250)

_____ Supporting - \$35 (\$50)

_____ Please accept my tax-deductible contribution

of \$_____ to help fund AHS special projects

Tear off this form and mail with your check payable to the Athens Historical Society to AHS, P.O. Box 7745, Athens GA 30604-7745! Thank you!

Newsletter

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P.O. Box 7745 • Athens, Georgia 30604-7745

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

It's time to renew your membership dues for 2011! Beat the rate increase by renewing before January 1!

2010 AHS Officers

A. Blair Dorminey – President
James K. Reap – Vice President
Betty Alice Fowler – Secretary
George W. Smith, Jr. – Treasurer
Eve B. Mayes – Historian

AHS Board of Directors

<i>2009-2010 term</i>	<i>2010-2011 term</i>
Mary Anne Hoit Abbe	Charles Knox, Jr.
Jane Wilfong Mann	Judy Long
Marianne Gordon Rogers	Steven Scurry

Upcoming AHS Meeting Dates

November 21, 2010

The Historic Morton Theatre turns 100
2:30 p.m. at The Morton – reception to follow

January 23, 2011

TBA

AHS Website & Information

www.rootsweb.com/~gaahs/
email: ebmayes@windstream.net

Face book pages with an Athens twist – Thanks to Laura Carter and others for passing on several Facebook pages about Athens that might tickle your fancy. If you are a Facebook member, just search for the name of the page (in italics below). Facebook is free to register, but I warn you, it's addictive!

Growing up in Athens GA – post your memories of Athens as it “used to be” on this page and see how many others remember them too. Do you remember when Saint Mary’s Hospital was on Milledge Avenue? Or when the Athens Fair Grounds were off of Hawthorne, where Bishop Park is now? Or seeing the latest show at the drive-in movie complex where St. Mary’s is now?

The Facebook page for the *Athens-Clarke County Heritage Room* features “This Day in Athens” with email newsletters and blogs about events in Athens history. Did you know that the U.S. postal stamp honoring Moina Michael (the Poppy Lady) was issued in Athens in 1948? Other items include the victory of UGA over Georgia Tech (1897), the Spanish Flu Epidemic (1918), the fires at the Michael Brothers’ building downtown (1921), and the Georgian Theater (2009).

Ashley Callahan has created a Facebook page about the *Georgia Bellflower* furniture style of Athens-native furniture maker Gene Thomas (see the article about the 2012 GMOA exhibit on page 2 of this newsletter).

While you're on Facebook, don't forget to become a fan of our page, too – *Athens Historical Society!*