

AAHGS Metro Atlanta – General Meeting

DATE: May 16,

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: Tamika Strong (Vice President)

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES: 36

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting was opened by Vice President **Tamika Strong**, who welcomed members to the May chapter meeting. Attendees were reminded that the session was being **recorded** for documentation and future member access.

Meeting Etiquette and Disclaimer

- **Etiquette:** Participants were instructed to remain on **mute** once the meeting began, use the "raise hand" icon or chat for questions, and rejoin if experiencing technical difficulties.
 - **Disclaimer:** The **intellectual property and copyright notice** was read, stating that all materials and guest presentations are legally protected and may not be photographed, screen-captured, or replicated without permission.
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Presentation: Give Me Back What's Mine: Black Women Testify Before the Southern Claims Commission

Guest Speaker: Velma Mia Thomas-Fann, public historian, author of the *Lest We Forget* series, and author of the upcoming book *The African Called Car*.

Presentation Highlights:

- **The Southern Claims Commission:** Established by Congress in 1871, the commission convened to hear cases from Southern citizens aiming to prove Union loyalty and seek compensation for private property taken or destroyed by the Union Army.
- **Detailed Testimonies:** African American women claimants had to answer an extensive list of up to 80 questions regarding their marital status, property acquisition, former enslavement, and loyalty to the Union.
- **Stories of Resistance & Loss in Savannah (Chatham County):**
 - **Diana Cummings:** Followed Sherman's army to Savannah. She claimed hogs and corn given to Union soldiers but encountered mistakes by her attorney in filing the claim.
 - **Broomfield:** Sheltered and fed Union soldiers and paid to help them escape. She was threatened with a bayonet by Charlie Lamar, the co-conspirator of the illegal slave ship *Wanderer*.
 - **Sarah Ann Black:** A clever businesswoman who hid her cows in neighbors' yards to save them from Confederates.
 - **Georgiana Kelly:** Collected over 300 loaves of bread for Union prisoners at Andersonville.
 - **Bessie Elizabeth Geary:** Lost all her possessions, including mahogany furniture, in the burning of Darien. Her son was a cabin boy on Harriet Tubman's vessel, the *John Adams*.
 - **Eliza Williams:** Her husband owned 9,000 acres in Emanuel County. The Union army took mules, horses, and hogs from their land.
- **Systemic Disparities:** The government routinely undervalued or outright denied claims submitted by African Americans due to skepticism and strict guidelines. Claimants asked for fair restitution (e.g., \$3,400) but were often awarded drastically lower amounts (e.g., \$30).

Business Meeting Membership Update

- The chapter has grown to **102 financial members**.
- Members were reminded to join or renew via the national website (aahgs.org).

Meeting Minutes and Treasurer's Report

- The previous meeting minutes and the financial reports are posted in the **members-only section** of the chapter website. Both were approved and placed on file.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) & Projects

- **Active SIGs:** Caribbean (1st Sundays), Georgia (1st Saturdays), Tennessee (4th Thursdays), Military, and SDUSMP (2 meetings remaining).
- **Alabama SIG:** Meets the 4th Thursday of the month. The next meeting will feature guest speaker Vance Lockett, author of *The Parkers, Taylor and Laniers of Autauga, Alabama*.
- **New Writing SIG:** Co-coordinated by Tamika Strong and Mallard Benton, the group meets the 1st Thursday of the month at 7:00 PM and had 10 members attend its inaugural meeting.
- **Surname Directory:** The chapter is revamping the discerning research list/surname directory. A new form will be distributed soon, but members who previously completed it do not need to resubmit their information.

Announcements

- **Georgia State Scholarships Campaign:** Johnette Brooks is collecting information on Black educators who received state funding to attend out-of-state programs or Atlanta University for graduate degrees.
- **Juneteenth Volunteer Opportunity:** The chapter has been invited to table at the Atlanta History Center's Juneteenth Celebration on **Friday, June 19th, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM**. Volunteers are needed to help man the table.
- **Upcoming Chapter Meeting:** The June meeting will feature Tamika Strong presenting on navigating **FamilySearch**, exploring layers of the resource beyond simple keyword searches.
- **Save the Date:** There will be no regular chapter meeting in October. Instead, members are encouraged to attend the **AAHGS Virtual Fall Symposium on October 24, 2026**, leading up to the organization's 50th anniversary next year.
- **Chapter Communications:** Members should add the chapter emails (info@atlantaaahgs.org and members@atlantaaahgs.org) to their contacts to prevent messages from going to spam.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Vice President Tamika Strong following closing announcements.