

## SECTION FOUR HISTORIC RESOURCES

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### **PURPOSE**

Villa Rica is a unique place in space and time. The land, people and events of Villa Rica's history have combined to create a distinct heritage. This heritage is reflected in the built environment surrounding us daily.

Villa Rica retains much of its historic character, defined by mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century residential, commercial, and institutional buildings and archaeological sites. These properties are cultural, educational and economic development assets.

The purpose of this element is to provide for the preservation of Villa Rica's historic character through the identification, rehabilitation, protection and reuse of the city's historic resources, to promote:

- Building rehabilitation and reuse
- Downtown revitalization
- Heritage tourism, and
- Quality of life.

### **HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Around 1826, farmers and gold miners began to settle on a ridge dividing the waters of the Tallapoosa River and Sweetwater Creek. The first gold miners to this area were from Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey.

William Hix built a tavern and general supply store on what became Main Street. The settlement was called Hixtown. The city was incorporated in 1830. One mile south lay a tract of land known as Chevestown, owned by Allison Cheves.

By 1832 Hixtown had over 2,000 residents, or 60% of young Carroll County's population. 300 men were working in the mines. Gold lots were \$500 per acre, compared to \$2 per acre for land elsewhere in the county. There were at least 19 active gold mines, including a number of English mining companies, the Southern States Mining Company, the Boston and Kennesaw Mines and the Klondyke Mines (**Map 2**).

In 1882 the Georgia-Pacific Railroad was extended through the area. Residents of Hixtown rolled houses and stores on logs pulled by horses to relocate near the railroad. New houses and businesses were also built in the area, and the residents of Hixtown and Chevestown decided to establish a new town along the railroad. Villa Rica, as the new town was named, translates to "city of gold" in Spanish.

The new city was laid out in 1883 and soon a poster appeared throughout the south marketing “94 beautiful lots at auction” in Villa Rica, the “village of gold.” The town plan was established as a series of blocks laid out in a gridiron pattern with the railroad line running east to west through the center of the commercial district. The public square was placed on the north side of the rail line. The railroad depot, built in the 1880’s to accommodate passengers, freight and livestock, was demolished after 1950.

By 1905, Villa Rica included twenty businesses, seven churches, a bank, a hotel, a newspaper, and a school with a faculty of five. An early entrepreneur was Asa Candler, who brought notoriety to the city when he bottled the first Coca Cola here in 1897.

In 1908 fire destroyed a city block on Montgomery Street. Some years later another fire consumed a business block on Main Street. In 1957, a gas explosion caused many injuries and deaths, and destroyed four stores on the south side of Main.

In 1899 the singer and composer Thomas Andrew Dorsey was born in Villa Rica. Mr. Dorsey wrote over 400 compositions during his career, but is best known for “Take My Hand, Precious Lord,” which he wrote in 1932 after his wife and son died in childbirth. Today he is recognized worldwide as “The Father of Gospel Music.”

Gold mining was discontinued in this region around 1926 as the costs of mining began to exceed profits. Settlers who stayed turned to agriculture, particularly cotton. The sandy loam soil produced a superior grade of cotton, second only to Egyptian cotton, which rated as the world’s finest.

Cotton became king. In an average season, 10,000 bales of cotton were purchased in Villa Rica. The buying and selling of cotton was a mainstay of Villa Rica’s economy, and the town supported three cotton gins, three hosiery mills, three cotton warehouses, and a cotton oil mill. Cotton was bought and sold on the city square and then shipped around the world. Other local businesses included furniture brick kilns, blacksmith shops, and general stores.

In the 1940’s, Villa Rica’s Cotton Era was brought to an end by the boll weevil and army worm. The mill town neighborhood of Fullerville was annexed into Villa Rica.

**NORTH VILLA RICA COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Historic resources include those individual properties and districts that are listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register of Historic Places. Generally, to be eligible for the National Register, a property (or majority of properties in a historic district) must be:

- At least 50 years old
- Relatively unchanged in the last 50 years, and
- Significant.

The North Villa Rica Commercial Historic District (**Map 3**) includes five blocks of commercial buildings north of the rail line, constructed for the most part between 1900 and 1923. Within the district are the public square, six buildings that served as commercial cotton warehouses, and several industrial buildings.

The Masonic Lodge, built in 1914 at 113 Temple Street, is the only two-story commercial building in this district. The Pope Brothers Warehouse at 301-319 Temple Street (constructed 1912 and enlarged in 1949) has been rehabilitated as loft apartments, using state and federal tax credits available to National Register listed properties. Other landmark buildings in this district include the two Golden City Hosiery Mill buildings (at 135 Temple Street and on Main Street at the east end of the district), and the Camp Cap Company buildings in the 200 block of Temple Street. In total, there are 18 contributing properties in the North Villa Rica Commercial Historic District.

**ADDITIONAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

Villa Rica has a number of additional districts that appear eligible for the National Register. **Exhibit 34** lists, and **Map 4** shows, the locations of these districts.

**Exhibit 34: Villa Rica Potential National Register Districts**

| District   | Location   |
|--|--|
| South Villa Rica Commercial Historic District  | Main Street between Stone and Westview   |
| North Villa Rica Residential Historic District (Early to mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century homes) | East and north of the North Villa Rica Commercial District                             |
| North Villa Rica Residential Historic District (Older, late 19 <sup>th</sup> century homes)  | Walker Street and lower Rockmart Road  |
| Fullerville Mill Village Historic District   | Willis Drive, N. Dogwood Blvd, and Rockmart Rd. from Dallas Rd. to Industrial Blvd.    |
| West Villa Rica Residential Historic District  | Bounded by Montgomery Street to the north and Bankhead Hwy to the south                |
| Bankhead Highway Historic District   | Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century development between Westview and Bankhead Highway       |
| South Villa Rica Residential Historic District   | Area behind the South Villa Rica Commercial District, extending west to Dogwood Street |

## LANDMARK PROPERTIES

In 1993 Villa Rica initiated a partial survey of historic properties that found at least 250 structures in the city that may be eligible for the National Register. Further survey work is warranted to document additional significant historic resources in the city.

**Exhibit 35** lists, and **Map 5** shows, some of these landmark properties.

**Exhibit 35: Landmark Properties**

| Property                      | Location                | Construction Date       | Comment   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Auto Repair Shop              | 0 Montgomery Street     | 1932                    | Former Gulf station, placed along then newly built Bankhead Hwy. Oldest service station in Villa Rica.  |
| Auto Service Center           | 116 W. Bankhead Hwy     | 1947                    | Block construction  |
| Berry House                   | 203 Peachtree Street    | 1913                    | Rehabilitated 2003-04   |
| Connally House                | 607 Magnolia            | 1860                    | Victorian   |
| Crawford Estate               | 318 Westview            | 1928                    | Brick, still family owned   |
| E. J. Simmons Home            | 303 Rockmart Road       | 1890                    | Wood Frame  |
| First United Methodist Church | 206 North Avenue        | 1905                    | Eclectic  |
| Fullerville Jail              | 121 Ball Park           | c. 1880                 | Small concrete building. Site owned by City.  |
| Funeral Home and Residence    | 206 Carroll Street      | 1892                    | Rear addition built 2003  |
| Jeff Henderson Home           | 228 North Avenue        | 1892                    | Now vinyl sided   |
| Mount Prospect Baptist Church | 133 Thomas Dorsey Drive | 1940 (present building) | Gospel icon Thomas Dorsey (1899 – 1993) sang here, his father preached here, and church helps sponsor annual Thomas Dorsey Festival   |
| Simmons Home                  | 311 North Dogwood       | 1885                    | Wood frame  |
| Stockmar Gold Mine            | 1881 Stockmar Road      | Pre 1830 – 1950's.      | Archaeological site, with layers of pre-history and history. Site of gold mining, farming, concrete block production, and “Flying J” Dude Ranch. Now City owned, to become recreational park. |
| Talley Home                   | 709 Magnolia            | 1890                    | Brick   |
| Ulla Wilson Home              | 216 Elm Circle          | 1885                    | Wood frame  |
| Victorian                     | 326 North Avenue        | 1868                    | Wood frame  |
| Victorian                     | 117 Peachtree           | 1913                    | Wood frame  |

|                         |                     |             |  |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--|
| W. B. Candler House     | 303 Church Street   | 1887        | Wood frame   |
| Westside Baptist Church | 631 Spring Street.  | 1930        | Brick. First served as community hospital, then nursing home, now church.  |
| Wicks Tavern            | 212 Wilson Street   | c. 1830's.  | Relocated to this site from Dallas Hwy. Rescued and rehabbed by Friends of Wicks Tavern. Now a museum.   |
| Williams Family Farm    | 55 Goldworth Avenue | 1891 - 1953 | Farm complex with historic house, several outbuildings, and historic landscape. 10-acre site nominated to National Register. Remains of CCC camp nearby. |
| Zack Allen Home         | 212 North Avenue    | 1902        | Wood frame   |

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

Humans have been in the area for at least 11,500 years, so the potential for finding evidence of past human activity (i.e., archaeological sites) is generally high.

Unlike historic buildings, archaeological sites often have no above ground components that would indicate their presence.

While factors such as distance to water and/or old roads, slope, soil drainage, and previous disturbance can help prioritize areas of archaeological concern, the only sure way to know whether an area contains archaeological sites is to conduct an archaeological survey.

To date, a number of archaeological sites have been documented in Villa Rica and the surrounding area (**Map 6**). Most of these sites are located in the northeast section of the city, now the vicinity of the Mirror Lake development, along the Carroll County/Douglas County Line. These sites have ranged from locations where ancient hunters manufactured stone tools 11,500 years ago to remnants of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century gold mine operations.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and regulations implementing that act (36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 800) governs archaeological sites. These laws ensure that projects receiving Federal funds or requiring Federal permits take archaeological resources into account.

In addition to Federal laws, there are state laws to consider as well. Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) 12-3-621 requires written landowner permission and DNR notification of intent to conduct Section 106 archaeology work on private property. OCGA 31-21-6 requires notification of local law enforcement upon discovery or disturbance of human remains.

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