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Attached Photographs Depict Rev. Chisholm and Mr. Mitchell at the grave of James H. "Whispering" Smith at Harmony Grove Cemetery.

Two Atlanta Cemeteries United by Historic Bond Will Celebrate Restorations

ATLANTA-The New Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church and cemetery became a significant part of Buckhead following the Civil War. Nearby, Harmony Grove Cemetery is the final resting place of the white landowner, James H. "Whispering" Smith, who gave the property for New Hope in 1872. Both cemeteries recently underwent restorations.

On Sunday, May 3, 2009 at 3 p.m., the Rev. Philip Chisholm of New Hope A.M.E. Church will conduct a church service celebrating the restoration of these two historic cemeteries. Following the church service, Rev. Chisholm will conduct re-consecration ceremonies at New Hope Cemetery and Harmony Grove Cemetery. There will also be a special wreath laying ceremony on the grave of Mr. Smith at Harmony Grove Cemetery, which was recently restored by the Buckhead Heritage Society.

Located at 3012 Arden Road NW, New Hope A.M.E. Church was established in 1872 after Mr. Smith willed two acres of his property to provide a place of worship for African Americans in Buckhead, including many former slaves who were employed by families in the area. The parcel included an existing slave graveyard. Within days of executing his will, Smith died and was buried at Harmony Grove Cemetery, located at the corner of today's West Paces Ferry and Chatham Roads.

The land Smith donated became the site of the first New Hope Camp Meeting, one of the most widely known and well attended camp meetings throughout the South. New Hope was among the first African American congregations in Atlanta to practice African Methodism.

The first structure was a tabernacle. It was replaced by a plank structure, which burned in 1927. A stone basement was completed the following year. The New Hope sanctuary, built in 1936, was restored in 1975 after a tornado, and again in 1990. Throughout the history of New Hope, neighbors have played an integral part in helping the church thrive.

“The cooperation between the community and the church has been wonderful. We enjoy a very supportive and collaborative relationship with our neighbors,” said Rev. Chisholm. During the Great Depression, church members and neighbors bonded together to play a key role in securing funding to construct the sanctuary. As the neighborhood has grown over the years, residents have always felt welcome at New Hope's services and have sought ways to be involved. They helped raise funds to repair the church after tornado damage, donated a lift for elderly and disabled members, contributed money to help paint the exterior and have participated in many other projects.

"We are honored to be participating with New Hope in rededicating these two historic cemeteries. It is especially fitting that the restorations will be celebrated together given the shared history of the cemeteries and the longstanding spirit of cooperation between New Hope and its Buckhead neighbors," said Wright Mitchell, president of the Buckhead Heritage Society. This non-profit organization was formed three years ago to protect, preserve and promote Buckhead's historic resources.

New Hope Church completed the restoration of their cemetery with the assistance of local Boy Scouts and members of the Peachtree Road United Methodist Church. The Buckhead Coalition has also supported various church projects over the years.

Buckhead Heritage recently completed a restoration of Harmony Grove Cemetery with the cooperation of the City of Atlanta and the Buckhead Rotary Club. Many people donated their time and services to the effort including New South Associates, Robert & Company, ArborMedics and Greenwood Cemetery. Harmony Grove Cemetery dates to at least 1870 and has 41 marked graves and at least 130 unmarked or roughly marked graves, identified by mortuary archaeologists as possible slave graves.

Among those interred in the Harmony Grove cemetery are John N. Sims, the father of Atlanta Mayor Walter A. Sims; several Confederate Civil War veterans; the great grandparents of actress Julia Roberts; and the father of Dorothy Shay, a popular recording artist and actress in the 1940s and early 1950s.

The re-consecration ceremonies are open to the public at no charge. For additional information about the New Hope A.M.E. Church, see www.newhopeame.org. Information on Harmony Grove Cemetery and Buckhead Heritage is available at www.buckheadheritage.com.

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