**Brick Rural Life School (Bricks, N. Car.) | Amistad Research Center**

**Name:** Brick Rural Life School (Bricks, N. Car.)

**Variant Name:** Joseph Keasby Brick Agricultural, Industrial, and Normal School; Brick Junior College; Franklinton Community Center

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**Historical Note:**

In 1890, Julia E. Brick, wife of Joseph Brick, deeded her plantation to the American Missionary Association for use as a school for African Americans. T.S. Inborden became the principal of the school in 1895. Beginning in 1920, the school was named the Joseph Keasby Brick Agricultural, Industrial, and Normal School, and was the first accredited African American school in North Carolina.

During the early 1920s, it became a junior college, but in 1925, the state of North Carolina became committed financially to the education of African Americans and allowed the AMA to close Brick Junior College. The AMA's Fred L. Brownlee convinced the Association's directors to retain the 1,100-acre farmland and rent it to student farmers. A few years later, the state took over the school and the AMA started the Brick Rural Life School to train rural families for successful rural life. Neill A. McLean became principal of the school in 1934. A credit union was established the following year. During the 1930s, the following were also begun: a coop store, farmers' association to sell heavy machinery, a planning council for health and recreation programs, and the non-denominational Brick Community Church.

In 1951, Helen Francis Smith became the Chairperson of Franklinton Center in Franklinton, North Carolina, and the center moved to Bricks in 1953. In 1962, W. Judson King became President of the Center, with his wife serving as hostess. A dining hall was constructed in 1967. The Kings retired the following year, and Reverend James H. Cavanaugh became Staff Minister the following year. Reverend Charles W. Samuels became President and Reverend J. Taylor Stanley became Acting Director in 1969.

During the 1970s, the town of Bricks changed its name to Enfield.

**Sources:** American Missionary Association archives 1969 addendum

[**Records or Manuscript Collections Created by Brick Rural Life School (Bricks, N. Car.)**](http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/archon/?p=creators/creator&id=67)

UCC volunteers unearth history at Franklinton Center at Bricks

Written by Anthony Moujaes
January 28, 2013

Members of Evangelical Reformed UCC and (Jewish) Congregation Kol Ami in Maryland worked on a cemetery site at Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, N.C. and documented the burial plots with an online registry.

In a corner of a small community, on the outskirts of Whitakers, N.C., sits Old Bricks Cemetery, the graveyard of a former plantation. The cemetery, long forgotten and overgrown, turned into a historical site unearthed by a clean-up and restoration effort led by a team of young volunteers from the United Church of Christ.

The goal was to restore the burial places and remember the names and history of those families at rest there, said Glenn Wallace, a member of Evangelical Reformed UCC in Maryland.

The Franklinton Center at Bricks, a UCC conference, retreat, and educational facility in eastern North Carolina hosted a recent ecumenical mission trip for Evangelical Reformed UCC and (Jewish) Congregation Kol Ami, both of Frederick, Md.  Wallace and Jim Weitz were the adult leaders of a group of teens that removed debris from the cemetery grounds, worked to document as many names as they could from the 96 burial plots, and register the cemetery online.

Leaves, branches and pine needles covered the 1.5-acre site, and once the debris was cleared after about six hours of work, the history of Old Bricks Cemetery came together like the pieces of a puzzle.

Old Bricks Cemetery is on land that was once the Garrett slave plantation before it was transformed into the state’s first accredited school for African Americans more than a century ago. In 1895, the American Missionary Association established eastern North Carolina's first accredited school for former slaves, the Bricks School, which is now Franklinton Center at Bricks. The cemetery has a number of unmarked gravesites that likely belonged to former slaves. Some members of the community are also laid to rest there.

"What we soon discovered among the names and dates was a communal family history laid out before us," Wallace said. "Family names such as Garrett and Phillips were prevalent and it seemed that these families stayed close to home for generations."

There were also several stones and bricks randomly placed on the grounds to mark unnamed burial locations. Wallace said the group left those stones in place so visitors could see the cemetery is probably the final resting place for the plantation slaves.

"What was most impressive is that, with their enthusiasm running high, all the youth kept going to make sure every area was thoroughly checked for sunken or missing stones," Wallace said.

"Cemeteries and burial grounds are significant and complex societal and cultural contributions to communities," said Vivian Lucas, director of Franklinton Center at Bricks. "They provide insight into the relationships and life of a community through their expression of faith, art, culture, architecture, symbolism. Cemeteries of former slave plantations where many graves are unmarked tell a sad story of the unremembered, unnamed individuals whose lives helped build this country."

Maybe the biggest rewards from their work emerged after the trip concluded..

Part of the process of archiving the Old Bricks Cemetery was to upload each of the names and gravestone photos onto findagrave.com, an archive of cemeteries throughout the U.S. Each person buried at Old Bricks Cemetery was added to the database with their own webpage, and linked to their parents and children.



The family of John Richard Phillips, who is buried at Old Bricks Cemetary near the Franklinton Center at Bricks in North Carolina.

John Richard Phillips family

The f

amily of John Richard Phillips, who is buried at Old Bricks Cemetary near the Franklinton Center at Bricks in North Carolina.

While researching the family names online, Wallace discovered a photo of the John Richard Phillips family, and one of the names that appears on a tombstone at the cemetery. Wallace contacted the person who posted that photo, and was surprised to learn she lives in Montgomery County, Maryland – just north of Washington, D.C., and about 30 miles south of Frederick. She was researching her great-grandparents, who owned land next to the existing property at the Franklinton Center at Bricks. Phillips' parents were once slaves, and he attended the Bricks School.

"[She] took the time to scan and post that vintage photograph so future generations would be able to find it, and be able to look into the eyes of their ancestors," Wallace said.

"The work we did in the cemetery was a powerful learning opportunity about remembering [and] honoring those whose names are often lost in history," said the Rev. Barbara Kershner-Daniel, pastor at Evangelical Reformed. "To share that with our Jewish friends on the sacred ground of the cemetery is a moment none of us will forget."

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| **Brick School**US 301, Bricks, NC, USA ShareThis |   | North Carolina State Historical Marker |
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|     Marker Text: *"Est. for blacks in 1895 through philanthropy of Mrs. Joseph K. Brick; became junior college in 1926. Closed, 1933. Buildings stood here."*     The origins of the Brick School can be traced to the philanthropy of Mrs. Julia Elma Brewster Brick of New York and the work of the American Missionary Association. Mrs. Brick approached Howard University and expressed a desire to donate land she had acquired in North Carolina to create a school for poor black children. She was referred to the American Missionary Association, a philanthropic organization that developed numerous schools in the South after the Civil War. She donated land, some of which was sold to fund the new school, to the Association and Thomas Inborden was sent to North Carolina along with five teachers in 1895 to begin the school. The school benefited from her benevolence throughout her lifetime, receiving numerous financial donations to meet its growing needs.      Inborden was born in 1865 to freeborn parents and had been schooled at Oberlin College and Fisk University before he joined the American Missionary Association to assist in their goal of educating minorities. The new school in what is now known as Bricks in Edgecombe County was organized under Inborden’s leadership and called the Joseph Keasbey Brick Agricultural, Industrial and Normal School. During the school’s first year, it enrolled fifty-four students, some boarders and others living at home in the local area. The school was coeducational and accepted students up to the fourth grade. The institution eventually boasted over one thousand acres, three large dormitories, educational buildings, and shops. Students supplemented the traditional school curriculum by training in various trades such as blacksmithing, woodwork, mechanical drawing, and cabinetmaking. The dual educational approach benefited the school since a variety of farm products were produced to support its programs. In addition, the school had a strong business in mail-order honey sales. Interest in the school boomed and, at one time, enrolled as many as 460 students.      Inborden and others worked to make the school succeed and in 1926 it was made a junior college. However, due to financial difficulties and decreasing enrollment during the Great Depression, the Brick School was forced to close its doors. Although the school closed, it is credited with being a pioneer institution of education in eastern North Carolina and is recognized for educating many African Americans in the region. References: T. S. Inborden, *History of Brick School* (1934) Robert Ewell Greene, *Thomas Sewell Inborden, Early Educator of Color: A Biography* (1996) William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, III, 250-251—sketch by Ralph Hardee Rives Biography of Anna Easter Brown, Brick School teacher: <http://www.geocities.com/betaupsilon1938/brown.htm> Herring, Kate. The Negro and War Savings in North Carolina (1919), electronic edition, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/herringsavings/herring.html> An Era of Progress and Promise website: <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/iss/EraOfProgress/brickschool.gif> Marker data and essay from North Carolina Office of Archives and History (see [www.ncmarkers.com](http://www.ncmarkers.com/)). |

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Once a plantation known for breaking unruly slaves, the property was purchased after the Civil War by General L. G. Estes. Estes, while fighting for the Union Army, had been particularly impressed with the area.  Better at being an Army General than a farmer, he was unable to make the farm productive and lost it to Mrs. Julia Elma Brick of New York who had lent him the money for the purchase.  Mrs. Brick approached Howard University to take the land to build a school to educate the poor Black children she believed would otherwise not have the opportunity for learning life skills.  Howard showed little interest in establishing such a school.  It ended up being the American Missionary Association (AMA), a philanthropic and former abolitionist organization who was known for setting up battlefield schools during the Civil War for the Black soldiers, who took on the task of building a boarding school on the property. Some of the schools established by the AMA are today’s historically Black colleges.

     Financed primarily by Mrs. Brick, the Brick School opened in 1895 with one student.  By the end of the first year there were 54 students and at its peak there were annual enrollments of 400.  The Brick School was so successful it was considered to have “played a key role in the history of education in the United States”.(1)  In order to meet the needs of the growing educated Black community, the Brick School became a junior college in 1925.  Changes in the Southern political climate, educational focus and the Depression led to the school closing in 1933. For many years, parcels of the land were then leased to sharecroppers.

     Today the property is known as the Franklinton Center at Bricks, a conference center, retreat and educational complex.  As a ministry of the United Church of Christ, it is staffed and managed by Justice and Witness Ministries, specializing in issues of racial and social justice.  Several of the original buildings are still on the acreage and a Magnolia tree stands where the whipping post is believed to have once been.  There are also modern, dormitory style rooms, large conference rooms (one of which is named after Rev. Dr. Yvonne Delk), a swimming pool and a cafeteria style dining hall.  The center offers opportunities for conferences and workshops on church and community leadership education, rural, racial and social justice, spiritual growth and development, as well and community and family activities.  Earlier this summer the UCC Regional Women’s Ministry Partners held our annual meeting in this sacred place.  No matter what race or part of the country we each came from, we admittedly were all touched by the warm staff hospitality while visiting and experiencing the spirit-filled legacy of this revered location.

     Ms. Vivian Lucas, director of the Franklinton Center at Bricks shared the importance of the center being an actively involved partner with the surrounding communities.   Although times have changed since the days of the Brick School, the area still has one of the highest poverty and illiteracy rates in the country.  As part of the UCC ministry the center offers youth and adult literacy classes; nutritional, sustainable agricultural; environmental awareness; diversity appreciation programs and more, now or in the near future.  This summer a community garden was developed where local volunteers worked together to plant seeds yielding far more than the bounty of fruits and vegetables it will produce for all of God’s children.  “God is still speaking…”

     Consider visiting The Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, NC.  For more information and to make donations, visit <http://www.ucc.org/franklinton-center/>.

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(1)  Answering the Cry for Life and Liberty, resource information provided by the FCBNC

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   [American Missionary Association archives addenda, 1849-1991](http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/archon/?p=collections/controlcard&id=28)