

- Session Format: **Panel**
 - Session Tracks: **j. education; l. Ethnicity and Race, African Americans, Immigrants, Native Americans**
 - Title of Panel: **OUR STORY, THIS PLACE: *African American Education in Madison County North Carolina, The Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School***
 - Moderator: **Les Reker, Director of the Rural Heritage Museum at Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, North Carolina.**
- Summary of Session Content:

Preface:

This panel recounts aspects of an exhibition, organized and presented by the Rural Heritage Museum of Mars Hill University, that examined the history of African American Education in Madison County, North Carolina, after the Civil War and until the period of Civil Rights in 1964. The profound impact the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School had on the lives of its students will be presented by school alumni and other panel members.

Abstract:

Today's historians tell us that a *SENSE OF PLACE* is what defines a people. This panel analyzes aspects of an exhibition that told the story of African American education in a place called Mars Hill, in the Appalachian mountains of Madison County, North Carolina. It details the history of an African American peoples' experience, in their own words, from Reconstruction through the period of Integration and the Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s.

The Long Ridge Colored School, and later the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School, played a significant role in the history of African American education in Madison County. Aspects of the day to day learning experience of the students who attended the school will be discussed. The panel will also talk about some of the struggles, the hopes and the dreams of the students, their teachers and their parents. All of this is presented through the experiences of panel members who attended the school. A brief history of the Rosenwald Schools in Appalachia and the legacy of a Rosenwald education will be presented.

Objective:

It is hoped that conference attendees will take away an enhanced awareness and a greater understanding of the struggles and success stories experienced by

African Americans in their desire to provide a quality education for their children in Madison County, North Carolina, after Reconstruction. Another goal is to provide an opportunity to understand the hope for a brighter future that the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School provided African American children between 1928 and 1965.

- **Titles /Participant presentations:**

Oralene Simmons

On being a Rosenwald School alumnae and the first Black accepted to Mars Hill University

Presentation Summary:

Preface:

Ms. Simmons will speak about her studies at the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School from 1949-1953, her grandmother, Effie Anderson Coone, who taught at the Mars Hill Long Ridge “Colored” School in 1901, and her experience studying at the segregated Stephens-Lee High School in Asheville, North Carolina. She will then share her story as the first African American admitted to Mars Hill College in 1961.

Abstract:

Ms. Simmons will recount her life and her studies at the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School from 1949-1953; she will speak about her grandmother, Effie Anderson Coone, who taught at the Mars Hill Long Ridge “Colored” School in 1901. She will relay her experience studying at the segregated Stephens-Lee High School in Asheville, North Carolina, She will then share her story as the first African American admitted to Mars Hill College in 1961. Ms. Simmons will also relate the impact of being the great great-granddaughter of Joseph Anderson, a slave who was taken as collateral and imprisoned in the Asheville jail in 1859 for the debt incurred in first building of Mars Hill College.

Biographical Information:

Oralene Simmons is the great great-granddaughter of Joseph Anderson, a slave who was taken as collateral and imprisoned in the Asheville jail in 1859 for the

debt incurred in first building of Mars Hill College. She is also the first African American admitted to Mars Hill College in 1961. She has been a community leader during the years of integration and protest. Later on she became the Director of the YMI Cultural Center in Asheville, North Carolina. She organized the “Martin Luther King, Jr., Prayer Breakfast” in Asheville, the largest in the Southeast, and continues in a leadership role for this event.

Ryan Phillips

The rehabilitation of the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School building

Presentation Summary:

Preface:

Mr. Phillips will relate some of the challenges faced by the Friends of the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School in its efforts to rehabilitate the historic building and the process of placing it on the National Register of Historic Places.

Abstract:

The only Rosenwald School building still standing in Western North Carolina, the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School brought elementary education to African American children between 1928 and 1965. After Integration, the building was converted into a burly tobacco curing barn. Some of the obstacles confronting the Friends group in its efforts to turn the building into a community center and Museum will be presented. The challenges being met to bring back an historic building from a state of profound disrepair by properly conforming to the strict standards of rehabilitation required by the National Register of Historic Places will also be discussed.

Biographical Information

A native of Mars Hill, North Carolina, Ryan is a cultural historian of southern Appalachia. He is also a photographer/videographer and owner of Legacy Films Ltd. He serves on the Planning Committee of the Friends of the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School.

Fatimah Shabazz and Omar McClain -joint presentation

On being students at the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School

Presentation Summary:

Preface:

Ms. Shabazz and Mr. McClain will relate some of the challenges they faced receiving an education during the years of segregation. They will also share some of their day to day experiences while attending the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School.

Abstract:

Ms. Shabazz and Mr. McClain were two of over 2,000 students who attended the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School. Ms. Shabazz's mother, Mary Wilson, taught at the school from 1939 to 1953. She was Ms. Shabazz's first school teacher. She and Mr. McClain will discuss the challenges of living in an urban county and being educated in a rural county in a two room school house. They will share their recollections of the learning environment they experienced in the small classes of the Rosenwald School. They will also discuss the generational influence they and others had as a result of the vision of Dr. Booker T. Washington and financial support of Julius Rosenwald. They will also discuss the wider influence the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School had on the predominately African American communities in Asheville, North Carolina.

Biographical Information

Fatimah Shabazz is a Broadcaster, a Vocalist/Percussionist, an Independent Transformational Facilitator, and a member of Womansong Chorus. She is a native of Asheville, North Carolina and attended the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School. In Asheville, she attended the Livingston Street School, the Hill Street Elementary School, Stephens-Lee High School, Asheville High School, and Blanton's Business College. She also attended the College of Alameda, (California), and the School of Fashion Design, San Francisco.

Omar McClain attended the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School, then the Hill Street Elementary School and Stephens Lee High School in Asheville.

He served in the 82nd Airborne Division of the US Army, the U.S. Army Band, and the USO Band. He was honorably discharged after tours of duty in Santo Domingo

and Viet Nam. He attended Queens College of the City University of New York then worked in finance on Wall Street and elsewhere.

Contact information

Oralene Simmons: C/O the Rural Heritage Museum, Box 6705, Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, NC 28754, 828-689-1400, ogsimmons@att.net

Ryan Phillips: C/O the Rural Heritage Museum, Box 6705, Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, NC 28754, 828-689-1400, ryanephillips@yahoo.com

Fatimah Shabazz: P O Box 1753, Asheville, NC 28802, 828-273-4236
isaqueen@live.com

Omar McClain: P O Box 1753, Asheville, NC 28802, 828-273-4236
omarmcclain13@gmail.com

Les Reker, Director, Rural Heritage Museum, Box 6705, Mars Hill University, Mars Hill, NC 28754 828-689-1400, lreker@mhu.edu