

Looking for local black history

■ Sources from archives to newspaper columns tell the story of a people.

February being Black History Month seems the logical time to ask the questions: How much local black history has been written, and how available is it?

The York County Library shows only one book on York County blacks, and it is a family history/genealogy of the Wright family, "Saga of a Southern Family," written by Jonah Wright of York.

A library-sponsored project headed by Clara Gray did collect the history of some of the black churches in York County several years ago. It is a good beginning, but much more needs to be done.

The Winthrop University Archives has a good collection of papers and letters under the general heading "Afro-American history" that includes materials on local blacks. Especially worth noting is the "York County Multi-Ethnic Heritage Project, 1976-1977," directed by Winthrop's Dr. Joye Berman, and made possible by a \$30,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

"Chester County's Black Heritage" is a small (66 pages) undated paperback, written by Elizabeth C. Thompson, that contains biographies, each accompanied by a picture, of 30 of Chester's most distinguished blacks.

Lancaster County is the only one of the three counties to have a published history. Titled "Lancaster County Black History, A Photographic and Literary Document, 1785-1991," the book was compiled by the Lancaster County Black Heritage Committee under the direction of Theodora Smith and Mary Mackey. The group received a grant from the S.C. Humanities Council and got addi-



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Nearby
history

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In Lancaster's Cedar Creek section, a white pre-Civil War plantation owner and lawyer named Erwin Clinton defied S.C. law by teaching a slave named Isom the 3 Rs.

tional money from the Lancaster County Council of the Arts, the City of Lancaster, and a number of other organizations and individuals.

For the past 23 years, Marjorie Clinton McMurray has written a charming weekly column for the Lancaster News called "Here and There," which is intended for blacks but also boasts a large white readership. Along with reporting on current events, McMurray, a former Lancaster High School social studies teacher, injects a generous amount of Lancaster black history.

It is McMurray's contention, and rightly so, that the roots of Lancaster black achievement run deepest in the community southwest of Lancaster known as the Cedar Creek section, the site of Mount Carmel AME Zion Church and Campground. It is there that a white pre-Civil War plantation

owner and lawyer named Erwin Clinton defied S.C. law by teaching a slave named Isom the 3 Rs, sufficient for him to keep the plantation books and study the Bible.

After emancipation, Isom Caleb Clinton (1830-1904) established a school for blacks in 1866. Before the war he had begun a ministry on the plantation and continued to preach. In 1892 he became bishop of the American Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church. Clinton Junior College in Rock Hill is named for him.

Isom's younger brother, Frederick Albert Clinton (1834-1890), was Lancaster County senator during Reconstruction. Of all S.C. black senators and house members, Frederick Clinton, a man of impeccable integrity, is considered by historians to be the most outstanding.

The Mount Carmel Campground dates to 1870. At first, it was an open-air arbor. Now the campground contains more than 100 permanent cabins that await the arrival of thousands of blacks on the first Wednesday through Sunday of every September.

On Feb. 16, 1981, two markers were unveiled. One marker showed that Mount Carmel Campground was entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979; the other was a S.C. State Historical Marker. As McMurray pointed out that day, it was the first time that national and state markers were unveiled in South Carolina on the same day.

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