



1864 Military Map
Kingston Saltpetre Cave
Bartow County, Georgia

An 1864 military map depicting Kingston and its surroundings, including the saltpetre cave.

Brochure sponsored by the Georgia Department of Economic Development and designed by the Department of Museums, Archives & Rare Books, Kennesaw State University.



Using oral history accounts and ground penetrating radar, Georgia Department of Transportation staff located an unmarked grave believed to be that of Melvinia Shields in September 2013.



Melvinia Shields' gravesite is located within the Queens Chapel Methodist Church cemetery at 105 Johnson Street, Kingston. Shields attended Queens Chapel during her lifetime.

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Home of
Michelle
Obama's
Ancestors



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Downtown Kingston, c. 1900. A fire that started in the Kingston Inn (far left) destroyed most of the wood-frame business district in 1911.

A Crossroads of History

The city of Kingston, located in northwest Georgia, has long served as a crossroads of history. Settlement by indigenous peoples dates back for perhaps two thousand years to the Woodland Period. By the early nineteenth century, Cherokee had settled in the area and, in addition to farming, had begun mining saltpeter, an ingredient used in gunpowder, from a nearby cave. Following the 1832 land lottery and the forcible removal of the Cherokee, white settlers moved in, bringing with them a population of enslaved African Americans. The settlement thrived as a stagecoach stop before the arrival of the

Cover:
Downtown Kingston, c. 1920.

Western & Atlantic Railroad in the 1840s. The city of Kingston, named after a railroad financier, was established in 1850.

By the time of the Civil War, Kingston was a small hub fueled by cotton production and tourism. The town was an important medical and supply center because of its easy access to railroad lines. The Great Locomotive Chase came through Kingston, as did General William Tecumseh Sherman during the Atlanta Campaign. The city emerged from the war as an important supply distribution site. The railroad kept Kingston afloat during the waning years of the nineteenth century. The town was bypassed, however, as automobiles replaced trains in the early twentieth century. Rich in history, Kingston is today poised for rediscovery.

From Slavery to the White House

Among the city's residents in the late 1800s was Melvinia Shields. Born into slavery in South Carolina in 1844, Melvinia was bequeathed to Henry Shields, who lived in Clayton County, Georgia, in 1850. Ten years later she gave birth to a son, Dolphus Shields, who was fathered by Henry's son, Charles. Melvinia eventually moved to Kingston, where she became part of a vibrant African-American community. Melvinia died in 1938 and was buried in the cemetery at Queens Chapel Methodist Church.



Members of the Shields family in Clayton County. Third from the right (standing) is Charles Shields, the likely father of Melvinia's children.

During the more than four decades that she lived in Kingston, Melvinia worked as a midwife, a job that made her a pillar of the black community. Melvinia aided in the birth of countless children as well as caring for her grandchildren and other relatives. Her son Dolphus moved to Birmingham, where he started a family and became a successful businessman. Eventually his descendants settled in Chicago, where his great-great-granddaughter, Michelle Robinson, was born. Michelle later married Barack Obama, who in 2008 was elected president of the United States.

