



The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry

Clerk of Superior Court

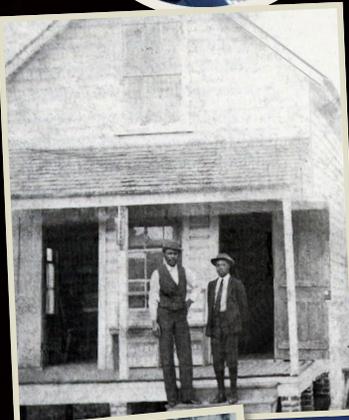
DeKalb County

Eatonville, Florida

(Est. August 15, 1887)



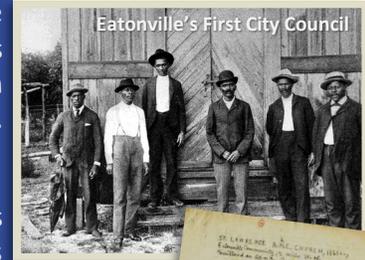
Second Oldest All-Black Municipality in the U.S.



Eatonville, Florida was founded on August 15, 1887, by Joseph C. Clarke, (pictured left) along with northern philanthropist Lewis Lawrence. Together, the men purchased over 100-acres of land just six miles north of Orlando from Josiah Eaton, one of the few white men that would sell land to newly freed black people. They immediately sold 1-2 acre lots to black families from the surrounding areas of Central Florida. At the time, owning land was the key to receiving an education, voting, and running for public office. On August 15, 1887, the town was officially incorporated when twenty-seven registered black voters indicated their intention to create a municipality called Eatonville. People came from distances as far as Tennessee, Virginia, and Alabama to live in the

all-black town of Eatonville. The town's citizens elected Columbus H. Boger as its first mayor to head the entirely black staffed government. Josiah Eaton, the man who sold the Eatonville land, was later elected the mayor of nearby Maitland. Founder Joseph Clarke became the postmaster and opened a general store.

Eatonville was built on the foundations of family, church, and school. The town's first church, The St. Lawrence African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) was located in a house. It was originally founded in 1881 and named after Lewis Lawrence who donated the property. It was the first religious institution in the city. The St. Lawrence A.M.E. has been rebuilt or renovated at least three times and continues to serve the Eatonville community to this day.



In 1889, the town established its first primary school, the Hungerford Normal and Industrial School. The school was situated on land was donated by Dr. Robert Hungerford, a white doctor who cared for black patients in the area. The school operated on the principles of providing vocational learning, literacy, and life skills to newly freed blacks in Central Florida. In 1950, the Hungerford School became a public school administered by the Orange County School Board.

In an 1889 article on the front page of *The Eatonville Speaker*, the headline read "Colored people of the United States: solve the great race problem by securing a home in Eatonville, Florida, a Negro city governed by Negroes". Eatonville was considered a black utopia. It was a vibrant opportunity for change for freedmen living in more oppressive white communities throughout the South; where wildlife was plentiful, and where frost was not a threat to crops. It was a place where settler lots, usually two lots purchased together for a home, and farms were sold for thirty-five dollars.

John Hurston, Eatonville's mayor in 1897, was the father of Zora Neale Hurston (Harlem Renaissance writer) and the city's most famous resident. Zora's experience growing up in an all-black community shaped her writing to reflect the town of her childhood. Eatonville was featured in many of her books, including: her 1928 essay, *How it Feels to be Colored Me* and in her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In 1990, the town established the Zora Neale Hurston Museum of Fine Arts. Today, Eatonville holds an annual "Zora Festival", a nearly month-long celebration of the arts and humanities in January. More at <https://zorafestival.org/>

Between 1865 and 1900, there were approximately 400 black towns, settlements, and enclaves in the U.S. However, fewer than 150 became legally-recognized municipalities. Eatonville remains a predominantly African American community and was added to the National Register of Historic Places on February 3, 1998. Eatonville is known as "The town that freedom built."



Eatonville

