

D. Paul Sommerville
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Grand Army Hall Committee's Memorial Honoring Margie Kline Jenkins

Grand Army Hall, 706 New Castle Street, Beaufort

The Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization founded in 1866, was comprised of Union veterans of the Civil War. Also known as the GAR, the society included chapters for white veterans and separate chapters for black veterans.

The chapter in Beaufort, founded by local veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops and called David Hunter Post Number 9, was a black post formed in 1888; many of the veterans in this chapter had been enslaved on nearby Sea Island plantations. General David Hunter became well-known for enlisting black soldiers from the Union-occupied districts of South Carolina, forming the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Regiment, which was initially ordered to disband, but eventually received approval by Congress. One of the most famous members of the David Hunter Post Number 9 was Robert Smalls.

The GAR Hall is listed in the National Register as part of the Beaufort Historic District and used as an event site and the building is maintained by several private groups such as the Union Veterans of the Civil War and the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War; it was constructed in 1896 on Newcastle Street and is believed to be the only surviving building in South Carolina associated with the GAR. It was home to the Commandment Keeper Church in 1940, when a colleague of Margaret Mead and noted author Zora Neale Hurston stepped inside to film a documentary on the Gullah culture.

Beaufort's Decoration Day (Memorial Day) annual parade used to start from the GAR Hall, winding approximately one mile across town to Beaufort National Cemetery. The historical marker in front of the building was dedicated in 2013 by the Beaufort County Historical Society.

On a personal note, my 92 year old Mother tells of watching the parade as a young girl, along with my grandparents and great grandparents and then marching to the National Cemetery, which was built by my great grandfather, Niels Christensen, the Superintendent of Construction and the cemetery itself. My Mother also recalls being one of the few white families celebrating Decoration Day.

Margie Kline Jenkins

The Multi-Cultural Association was founded by Margie Kline Jenkins and organized to combat cultural disparities in the County; the association provided funding to several local organizations, such as the GAR and Penn Center.

Mrs. Jenkins was a retired educator and community leader. She served on the County's Planning Commission (March 1999 - March 2003) and was the District 8 Representative on the Beaufort County School Board for two terms.

She attended Beaufort County Public Schools and was an honor graduate in the Robert Smalls Senior High School Class of 1961. She was a lifelong member of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church of Dale. After high school, she earned a Bachelor of Art Degree in Education from Benedict College in Columbia and later a Master's in Education from Cambridge University in Boston. She began her teaching career in Jasper County and taught in the following Beaufort County schools: Saint Helena High, Beaufort High, Battery Creek High and Lady's Island Middle School. Her teaching career spanned over 34 years. She was an active member of the Beaufort County Teachers Association and served as president until she was elected to the South Carolina State Teachers Association Board of Directors.

Ms. Jenkins died in March 2015 at age 71. The citizens of Beaufort County owe her a huge debt of gratitude. She is sorely missed.