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Lemon Street alumni partner with KSU to place school on National Register

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From left: Brittney English and Mckenzie Brick, students at KSU, listen at Lemon Street Grammar School as alumni Geo students about their experiences at the school when they were children.

Zach Edmondson

The Lemon Street School Heritage Group and Kennesaw State University students are working together to get the historic Lemon Street Elementary on The National Register for Historic Places. This is a distinction that would bring the building national recognition and better protections.

The school, located on 353 Lemon St. in Marietta, is where Black students in the city and other parts of Cobb County attended until integration in the late 1960s. Many of the other African-American landmarks in Marietta from that time, including Lemon Street High School and the housing projects have been torn down. When there was some discussion that the elementary school would follow suit, The Lemon Street Heritage Group helped save it.

After submitting a preliminary eligibility application for the Lemon Street Elementary to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs in 2021, students in Kennesaw State's public history certificate program are now preparing the school's National Register nomination.

This month, students from the class got to tour the building and pose questions to three alumni. One of the alumni, 74-year-old George Miller, noted the unique bond those who attended the school share.

"It was a school we all loved and we were all loved in," Miller said. "The teachers that were here made sure that you felt like you were somebody. It was more than academics."

Miller's classmate at the school, 73-year-old Pearl Freeman, reiterated Miller's comments on the power the school had on their upbringing and identity.

"To be almost 74 years old and to come back here where I started at as a kid at five or six years old is very overwhelming and very gratifying," Freeman said. "Just the fact that they preserved it ... to know that all of these are the original blocks is just awesome."

The alumni harkened back to the camaraderie the students shared. From the team's dominant football program to its band, the alumni reflected on their time at the school.

Former Marietta City Councilman Anthony Coleman helped spearhead the campaign to get the school saved and eventually on the National Register by recruiting leaders from the community and alerting them to the importance of the landmark.

"I was glad to be a part of helping save the school. When I was on City Council, I pulled people from the community together... and said, 'Hey, I need your help. I can't do it by myself,'" Coleman said. "It was going to take the community involvement for us to save this school, and we've done it."

Part of Coleman and others' motivation was ensuring that future students are educated on the historical significance of the school.

“I want young kids in elementary and middle school to be educated about this rich history of the Lemon Street School,” Coleman said. “It is very important while they are young so they understand why the school is so important to us.”

Kennesaw State senior Dalean Thompson, a student in the class who attended the tour of the school, was grateful to tour and hear first hand about an important landmark in Marietta history.

“It was really amazing,” Thompson said. “To see what they did to keep the integrity of the building, but also to hear from people that went here and what their experiences were like and the feelings of the community at the time.”

The KSU students are working on an official National Register for Historic Places nomination for the school, which they will submit to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs’ Historic Preservation division. If the state were to approve the nomination, it would head to Washington, D.C., for the final hurdle: approval from The National Register for Historic Places headquarters.