Sandhills Sankofa News

25th Anniversary

The Official Newsletter of Sandhills Family Heritage Association



Our Services

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Held on June 20, 2026, the gala brought together members, supporters, community leaders, elected officials, and friends to honor our past ....read on.

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SFHA had fathers who dedicated their time and treasure to preserve the history and heritage...

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SFHA is thankful to our Servant Hearts volunteers as they provide for the needs of others.

Celebrating 25 Years of Legacy, Service, and Community



Held on June 20, 2026, the gala brought together members, supporters, community leaders, elected officials, and friends to honor our past while looking confidently toward the future. The afternoon featured inspiring reflections on the Association's history, a moving tribute to our founder, Ammie Lee McRae Jenkins, recognition of the SFHA Founding Leadership Team, and a special tribute to the original trustees whose vision led to the construction of the historic Spring Lake Civic Center.

While we did not fully achieve our fundraising goal, the gala was successful in so many other ways. It strengthened relationships, welcomed new supporters, celebrated our shared heritage, and generated additional support through our silent auction and our limited-time Lifetime Membership campaign. Most importantly, it reminded us that our mission continues to inspire people who believe in preserving the history and heritage of the Sandhills.

A Team Effort



As Gala Committee Chair, I had the privilege of working alongside an outstanding planning committee whose dedication, creativity, and commitment made this celebration possible.
My sincere appreciation goes to:

- **Vincent C. McNeill**
- **Janet Brower-Penn**
- **Jerome Fleming**
- **Donna Pratt**
- **R.J. Stevenson**

Planning a gala of this magnitude requires months of collaboration, problem-solving, and countless volunteer hours. Every committee member contributed their unique talents to ensure the event reflected the excellence of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association.

A special thank you to Vincent C. McNeill, whose leadership as Master of Ceremonies and his work in developing the program created an engaging and memorable experience for our guests, and to Janet Brower-Penn, whose leadership as Board Chair and steady guidance throughout the planning process helped keep us focused on our mission. Jerome Fleming, Donna Pratt, and R.J. Stevenson each generously gave their time, ideas, and support to help make this celebration a success.

Creating a Beautiful Experience

One of the highlights of the afternoon was the warm and elegant atmosphere that greeted our guests.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our decorating team, Cassandra Walker and Henrietta McMillion/Dream Creations, who generously donated not only their professional talents but also countless hours of service. Their creativity transformed the venue into a beautiful setting worthy of this milestone celebration.

Their work, however, extended far beyond decorating. Throughout the event they graciously served meals, cleared tables, assisted guests, and remained afterward to cleanup. Their willingness to serve wherever needed reflected the spirit of volunteerism that has been the hallmark of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association for twenty-five years.



Your willingness to share your talents added joy, inspiration, and meaning to our celebration.

Their generosity, professionalism, and servant leadership helped make the gala both beautiful and welcoming, and we are deeply grateful for their extraordinary contribution.

Sharing Their Gifts

A heartfelt thank you goes to the talented individuals who enriched the afternoon through music and inspiration.



We are grateful to the Harvin Children for their uplifting musical selection, Dr. Denise Murchison Payton for her beautiful musical medley, and Vincent C. McNeill, who not only served as our Master of Ceremonies but also shared his musical gifts throughout the program. Regina Thompson Xadu delivered a moving poetic performance of "Aint I a Woman'? We also extend our sincere appreciation to Desi Campbell for delivering an inspiring keynote address that encouraged us to continue building upon the legacy entrusted to us.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

Events like our 25th Anniversary Gala are made possible through the generosity of individuals, families, businesses, and organizations who believe in our mission. We are honored to recognize our sponsors and thank them for investing in the preservation of our history and heritage.

Sponsor Level	Sponsor
Platinum Sponsor	**Vincent C. McNeill**
Diamond Sponsor	**Daughters of Brady Brinkley**
Gold Sponsor	**Brinkley Family Reunion**
Bronze Sponsor	**Pamco Care** **Janet Brower** **Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation**

We are sincerely grateful for your generosity and your partnership in helping preserve the rich history and cultural heritage of the Sandhills.

Thank You to Our Supporters

We also extend our appreciation to everyone who contributed to the success of the gala by donating silent auction items, participating in the auction, purchasing Lifetime Memberships, volunteering behind the scenes, attending the event, and encouraging others to support the Sandhills Family Heritage Association.

Every act of generosity—whether through financial support, volunteer service, or simply being present—helped make this celebration meaningful and memorable.

Looking Ahead

Our 25th Anniversary Gala celebrated much more than an organization's history. It celebrated a legacy of service, preservation, and community that continues to grow through the dedication of so many individuals.

As we begin our next chapter, we remain committed to preserving our stories, protecting our historic places, promoting education, and strengthening the communities we serve.

To everyone who played a part in making this celebration possible—our planning committee, decorators, performers, keynote speaker, sponsors, volunteers, donors, members, and guests—**thank you.**

Because of your generosity, your service, and your belief in our mission, the legacy of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association continues to grow.







Here's to the next twenty-five years of preserving our heritage, strengthening our communities, and inspiring future generations!

Men of SFHA

Myron Jones



I got involved with Sandhills Family Heritage Association in 2002 while working with the Fayetteville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (FACVB). I was employed as the sales manager at that time. My primary duties were to recruit conferences, conventions, sporting events, reunions, and any other visitors or guests to Cumberland County as overnight guests.

Ammie McRae was just forming the Sandhills Family Heritage Association (SFHA) and invited me to her first dinner at Bethel AMEZ Church in Spring Lake to learn more about the organization. I met with Ammie to explain how I could help her and what she could expect from my office. I immediately signed up as a member of the organization, and we began working together on her first vendor market. The vendor market was very successful, and it continued for a few years. I explained to Ammie that as a non-profit organization, we could promote her organization on our website and through print media.

I also worked closely with Ammie as when there were groups wanting to learn or tour African American venues, I would contact her to conduct guided tours and explain the importance of her work and how people of color obtained land and how they lost land in the Sandhills Area. Ammie was well versed in the history of area, and sometimes she would encounter misinformation as the city historian would tell people that slaves were not sold at the market house. His reasoning was that slaves were not considered people, they were considered chattel at that time. Ammie stood her ground and provided the truth as she knew it.

I had been retired for a year when Ammie contacted me about joining the board of directors. In fact, Ammie called me and her words were, “I heard you have retired”, in my mind my first thought was, what do you need Ammie? She informed me that she had spoken to the board about me and that I would be a good fit, so she asked me if I would join the board of directors. I had known and worked with Ammie so there was no way I could say no.

I accepted the position and I immediately began working on the Veterans History Project and later the organization acquired an abandoned enslave cemetery, and I took on the project of clearing and cleaning the area. I contacted local organizations, friends, fraternities, churches and anyone who would want to assist in the effort. We had as many as 65 people assisting at one of many cleanups.during my time with SFHA, I learned a lot about the impact enslaved people had on the local area and the most important thing I learned was North Carolina got the moniker “Tar Heels” from that enslaved cemetery located behind The Tractor Supply located in Spring Lake NC.



I grew up in Spring Lake, and my background serving in the U.S. Air Force and working with the FACVB helped prepare me for working with this outstanding organization. My experience working with nonprofits, knowledge of preparing budgets, and leadership skills helped me become a valuable member of the SFHA.



I noticed the board needed more experience with working with nonprofits and someone who was very familiar with the Sandhills area, so I contacted Eddie Nichols, a local resident, who has family members entombed in the cemetery, and he was excited about joining the group. I also contacted Wilbur Graham, Wilbur was working on a similar project in Finklea, South Carolina. Wilbur agreed to join the organization as a board member, and then he agreed to submit a resume to become the executive director and he was unanimously selected.

I am married to Doris Jones, and I have two sons, Marc and Mardreas. Marc currently resides in Centerville, GA while Mardreas currently resides in Clayton, NC. Marc Blessed me with two outstanding grandchildren, Mikeala and Marc Aaron. Mikeala currently resides in Dunwoody, GA and Marc Aaron is currently serving in the U.S. Navy.



Men of SFHA

Marvin W. Lucas: A Lifetime of Service

Few individuals have left a greater mark on the Spring Lake community than Representative Marvin W. Lucas. An educator, public servant, legislator, and community advocate, his life's work has been dedicated to serving others.

The fifth of nine children born to the late Marvin L. and Rebecca Lucas, Representative Lucas graduated as valedictorian of Anne Chestnut High School's Class of 1960 before earning his degree in English from Fayetteville State University. He later earned advanced degrees from North Carolina Central University and East Carolina University, preparing him for a distinguished career in education.



For more than three decades, he served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in Cumberland County Schools, helping shape the lives of generations of students before retiring from education in 1998.

His commitment to service continued beyond the classroom. Elected as an alderman and later mayor of Spring Lake,

Representative Lucas went on to serve the citizens of North Carolina in the General Assembly for more than two decades before retiring.Throughout his career, he remained a steadfast advocate for education, community development, and the people he represented.

Representative Lucas is also a lifelong servant of his faith. A dedicated member of Bethel AME Zion Church, he continues to serve on the Board of Trustees and as a Sunday School teacher.

His commitment to preserving the history and heritage of the Sandhills is equally noteworthy. Along with his brothers, Alexander and Cecil Lucas, he helped found the Sandhills Family Heritage Association and has remained one of its strongest supporters. His advocacy in the North Carolina General Assembly secured critical state funding that helped advance the renovation of the Spring Lake Civic Center, bringing the community one step closer to realizing a long-held vision.

In 1968, he married Brenda Faye Arrington Ricks, and together they have built a family rooted in faith and service. They are the proud parents of Darrell (Tanya), Angela Renee' (Milton), and Marva Michae' (Donald), and the grandparents of eight grandchildren.

Whether in the classroom, the principal's office, the mayor's office, the General Assembly, his church, or the community. His enduring legacy is reflected in the students he inspired, the communities he strengthened, the history he helped preserve, and the countless lives he has touched through a lifetime of dedicated service.







Men of SFHA

Isaac Jerome Fleming

I am Isaac Jerome Fleming, a native of North Carolina's Sandhills region and the son of the late John and Mavis Fleming. Growing up, my life was shaped by faith, family, and farm life; experiences that instilled in me the values of hard work, service, and a deep appreciation for community.

Growing up, I enjoyed an active childhood in both school and church. I attended Harnett County public schools, participated in 4-H and athletics, and sang in my church's gospel choir. During those years, I also developed a lifelong fascination with World, United States, and North Carolina history. That interest eventually grew into a passion for preserving the history of the Sandhills and the people who call it home.

In 1990, I graduated from East Carolina University, where I became a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. During my time at East Carolina, I met my college sweetheart, Cheri Matthews Fleming. Together we have been blessed with one son, Nyles I. Fleming.

Today, I am employed with Allstate Insurance and remain actively engaged in my faith and community. I am a member of Watts Baptist Church in Raleigh, the Xi Mu Mu Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and the Noble Aspiration Foundation in Cary, organizations that reflect my commitment to service and leadership.

My Journey with the Sandhills Family Heritage Association

In 2001, I joined the Sandhills Family Heritage Association under the leadership and mentorship of the late Ammie L. Jenkins, alongside others who shared deep roots in the Sandhills. Early in our journey, we traveled to the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, where we participated in organizational training, workshops, and collaborative learning experiences. Those experiences helped shape the vision, mission, and core values that continue to guide SFHA today.

People often ask why I became involved with the organization. The answer is simple: I wanted to better understand, preserve, and share the rich history of the African American communities that helped shape the Sandhills.

One of my earliest projects focused on documenting historic African American schools throughout the region, including the Ridgeway School, which is believed to have been constructed using architectural plans associated with the Rosenwald School initiative. Over the years, I have also participated in cemetery restoration projects and helped support community initiatives, including local farmers markets that celebrate our heritage while strengthening community connections.



For the past twenty-five years, the Sandhills Family Heritage Association has worked to preserve the natural resources, livelihoods, and African American cultural heritage of rural and underserved communities throughout the Sandhills. I believe that understanding our past empowers future generations. When young people learn about the sacrifices, achievements, and resilience of those who came before them, they are more likely to invest their own time, talents, and resources back into the communities that shaped them.

That is why active membership in the Sandhills Family Heritage Association is so important. By becoming engaged today, we help preserve our history, protect our legacy, and ensure that SFHA continues serving the Sandhills region for generations to come.

Our history is worth preserving. Our heritage is worth celebrating. Our future depends on those willing to carry this important work forward.

Men of SFHA

Lonell Smith, A Friend of SFHA



In a recent conversation with long-time SFHA supporter, Lonell Smith, I learned a few interesting things about him which explain his long connection with Sandhills Family Heritage Association. He attended Johnsonville School with Ammie McRae when they were elementary students. Ammie was very smart and high achieving even then. He thought she was also pretty and had a crush on her but was too shy, like most boys his age, to tell her. Little did he realize they would reconnect after more than thirty years.

After living in New Jersey and Maryland, Lonell retired and returned to North Carolina and settled in Harnett County. He learned from another classmate that Ammie McRae Jenkins was selling a successful spa business she had owned and operated in Durham and was planning to move back to the Sandhills and start a heritage preservation organization. This came as a real surprise! Little did Smith know that he would later become a part of this organization.

Like many others, Lonell was invited to become a volunteer with SFHA, but other duties prevented him from making a commitment. Yet, he did help with early projects such as the construction of the Brush Arbor and a replica of the Plank Road which are still on the property at 230 Chapel Hill Road. Other men who assisted include brothers Alexander & Cecil Lucas, Thomas Graham, Jr. (all three deceased), Alexander “Collin” Jones, Earl Hailey, Jr., Willie “Zoe” Brinkley and Prince Lucas. Of course, research preceded the start of the project. Grant writing was needed to obtain the funds and of course a design and the right materials were necessary parts of this undertaking. Other than the replacement of a few wooden benches and the lectern, the Brush Arbor still stands tall and proud with an umbrella of grapevines providing cool shade during spring and summer months. The Plank Road replica has not faired as well and will have to be replaced. Thank you for sharing this bit of history.



Men of SFHA

Rev. Leon Dockery A Glimpse Into His Life

Reverend Leon Dockery is a man of faith, creativity, and service whose life reflects his "Five Ps"of endurance: pastor, poet, parent, professor, and performer.

Raised in Cameron, North Carolina, Leon grew up with his three brothers, James, Dewey, and Al. While his brothers later journeyed to Brooklyn, New York, Leon remained in North Carolina and eventually settled in Whiteville, the hometown of his wife, Doris Stanley Dockery. Leon and Doris are the proud parents of four children—Bernard, Andre, Courtney, and Jason—and the proud grandparents of six grandchildren.



Reverend Dockery served for several years as pastor of Little Iron Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Tabor City, North Carolina. Although he later stepped down from the pulpit, he continued following God's will and expanding his mission of service. In addition, he has served in both PK–12 schools and higher education.

His commitment to service is also reflected in SOFU, Sons of Faith United, an organization he helped start with his brothers, and in The Sisters of Faith, a program inspired by the enduring spirit of his mother and her sisters.

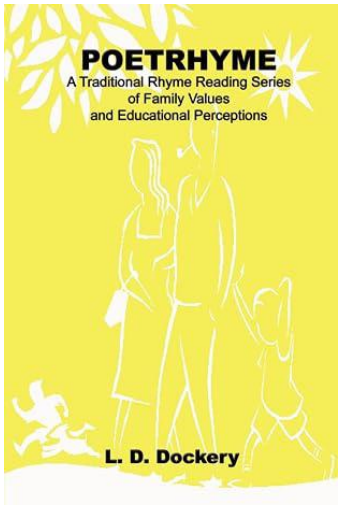
Leon is also developing Adammm House on his family land in honor of his mother, Algie E. Dockery. Envisioned as a community resource, it reflects her legacy as a devoted advocate for her family and the Johnsonville community.

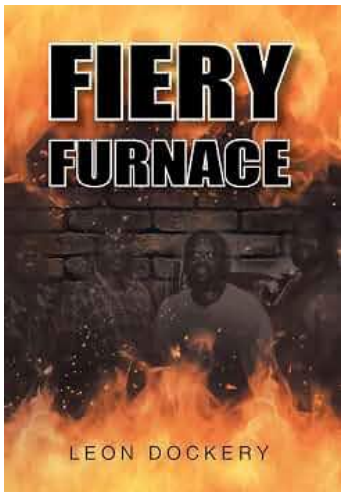
As a poet and author, Leon wrote Poetrhyme, a rhyming and reading series focused on family and educational participation. He also created a children's book series featuring animated community animals and developed mathematics-related materials, including a multiplication book and song called "Mr. Multiply."

In 2026, he published The Fiery Furnace, a book inspired by his brother Dewey and sister-in-law Classie's experiences with real estate, housing, and the court system in New York. The book explores economic challenges, perseverance, and victory.



Through his ministry, teaching, writing, music, and community service, Reverend Leon Dockery continues to inspire those around him. His influence remains especially meaningful in Cameron, North Carolina; at Spout Springs Memorial Presbyterian Church; and through the Sandhills Family Heritage Association, where he serves on the board. His life's work stands as a lasting example of faith, perseverance, creativity, and service to the community.







Men of SFHA

Larry Dobbins, Educator, Politician, Minister, Businessman

Larry Dobbins has lived a fruitful life of service to his community and still does as a valued elder statesman on the Board of Directors of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association. Despite his many accomplishments, he still remembers lessons from his grandparents of love for others, self-respect, and integrity. He shares memories of the love for others his grandparents and their neighbors showed at 'hog killing' when everyone shared. He shares the self-respect of his grandfather having left the Rockefeller Plantation to farm and raise his own food, and share his plow and his mule "Kate" to help his friends and neighbors. Lessons in integrity were set by his family's honesty, loyalty and dependability as he grew up in the Manchester Township community. Though his mother and uncles moved to Newark, New Jersey during the migration to the North—they remained supportive and connected. Larry thrived and succeeded in part due to a memory of his grandfather providing the lesson of how hard it is to keep a plow upright in Sandhills sand. This lesson was clear evidence for Larry that he wanted more for his life through education.



Larry Dobbins holds a B.S. Degree in Biology and a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from Fayetteville State University, as well as a Master's Degree in Biology from Duke University. Mr. Dobbins served for 40 years as an educator, beginning in Columbus County—where he met his wife. He later taught in Durham, Pitt, Harnett, and Cumberland counties. He taught for a couple of years in New York, Long Island as well. He held Assistant Principal and Principal positions in Vance and Cumberland counties.

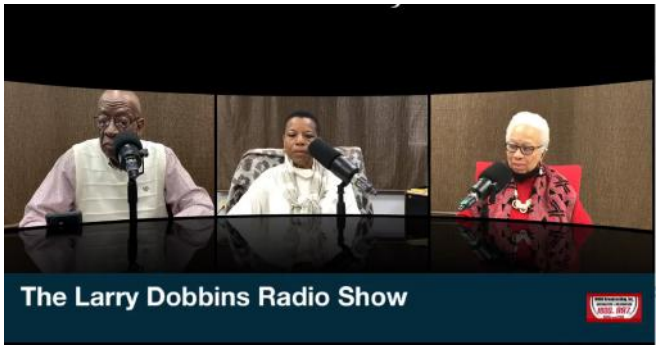
As a politician, Mr. Dobbins was elected to the Spring Lake Board of Aldermen in 2015, became Mayor Pro Tem and served as Mayor from 2017 to 2021. Unfortunately, Larry's wife died after a lengthy illness in May, 2017. He and his four (4) children and grandchildren have continued to support each other before, during and since this loss.

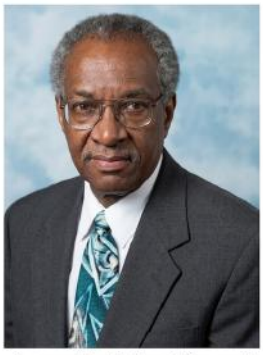
In 2008, Mr. Dobbins became Reverend Dobbins. He served as Pastor at Mt. Herman A.M.E. Zion Church in Goldsboro and later pastored at Mt. Hebrew A.M.E. Zion Church in Fayetteville from 2020-2024. Reverend Dobbins retired from pastoring in 2024.

While still an educator in Cumberland County, he began a tax preparation business and remains active. As is the case with Sandhills Family Heritage Association, he remains active with other community groups serving Spring Lake and surrounding counties. The contributions he brings from his vast experiences as educator, politician, minister and businessman are invaluable to the organizations he serves with his time and talents.



Mr. Larry Dobbins, as is the motto of SFHA continues Honoring Legacy and Building Futures!





Larry Dobbins, Mayor / Educator



Men of SFHA

Harold Belton: Giving Back to the Community That Shaped Him

Some people spend their careers building successful lives. Others return home and dedicate themselves to building up the communities that helped shape them. Harold H. Belton has done both.

Born on May 2, 1947, at Womack Army Hospital to Athena (Lucas) Belton and Harry S. Belton, Harold grew up in the Spring Lake community. He attended Lewis Chapel Elementary School and spent most of his high school years at Anne Chestnut before graduating from Pine Forest High School in 1965 following school integration.

After graduation, Harold lived in New York for three years before answering the call to serve his country in the United States Navy. Following his military service, he returned to North Carolina and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Accounting from Fayetteville State University.

Harold's professional career was marked by more than three decades of distinguished public service in municipal finance. He served as Accounting Division Chief and later Revenue Management Division Chief for Prince William County, Virginia; Deputy Director of Finance for the City of Richmond, Virginia; Director of Finance and Administration for the City of Gaithersburg, Maryland; and later Director of Finance for the City of Oxford, North Carolina. Throughout his career, he earned a reputation for sound financial leadership and dedicated public service.

When Harold retired in 2015, he chose to come home to Spring Lake; not simply to enjoy retirement, but to invest his time and talents in preserving the history of his community.

Since joining the Sandhills Family Heritage Association, Harold has become one of the organization's most dependable volunteers. He has devoted countless hours to the Deerfield Cemetery Restoration Project, helping clear, preserve, and honor the resting place of formerly enslaved men, women, and children whose stories deserve to be remembered. His commitment extends beyond volunteer service as he also faithfully supports SFHA's mission as a monthly donor.



Outside of his community service, Harold enjoys playing golf and spending time with family and friends. Above all, he treasures the time he shares with his daughter, Alexandra, and his two granddaughters, Birdie and Lila, whom he describes as the greatest joy of his life.

Harold Belton exemplifies the spirit of service that defines the Sandhills Family Heritage Association. Through his military service, distinguished professional career, and unwavering commitment to preserving local history, he continues to make a lasting difference in the community he proudly calls home.

Love Grove A.M.E. Zion Church

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK
Southeast North Carolina
an ACTION Pathways program



KINGDOM ENCOUNTERS MINISTRIES

Thank you partners!

April 2026

Households	719
Individuals	242

May 2026

Households	255
Individuals	716

June 2026

Households	190
Individuals	564

July 2026

Households	155
Individuals	448

Servant Hearts Volunteers

Presbytery of Three Covenant Communities
www.presbycc.org
Coastal Carolina

Presbytery Coastal Carolina Hunger Fund

Servant Hearts

Commitment Day 2026



Overhills High School

OVERHILLS HIGH SCHOOL
JAGUARS

Servant Hearts

Commitment Day 2026



Pine Forest High School







The day after our 25th anniversary celebration, Circa 1865 honored our mission awarding SFHA the Cultural Preservation award. Our Chairperson, Janet Brower, attended the Juneteenth Awards Brunch and accepted the award.

Thank You Partners

- Friends and Family of SFHA
- Love Grove A.M.E. Zion Church
- Cumberland Community Foundation
- Spring Lake Memorial Missionary Baptist Church
- Presbytery Coastal Carolina Hunger Fund
- Aaron Curry Foundation
- Sperring Memorial Baptist Church
- SFHA 25th Anniversary Supporters and Sponsors
- Local Businesses
- SFHA Volunteers

We'd Love to Connect with You

Mail to P.O. Box 754, Spring Lake, NC 28390

Wilbur Graham, Executive Director
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www.sandhillsfamilyheritage.org

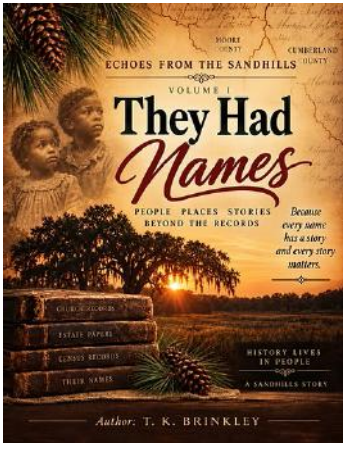
The Echoes from the Sandhills Book Series

Coming this fall!

VOLUME I

They Had Names

Recovering names.
Reconstructing lives.



Through records created before and around emancipation, They Had Names seeks to restore names and pieces of identity to African Americans whose lives are too often hidden behind numbers, property descriptions, and the names of those who enslaved them.