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Unique Museum Of Black Culture

A VISIT TO HERITAGE HOUSE AT A&T

GREENSBORO - It began as a project of "just helping out", for Mrs. William Reed, but five months later, she had developed one of the most unique museums of black culture in the nation. Visitors to the African Heritage House on the campus of A&T State

University are immediately awed by the sense of history and art generated by Mrs. Reed's creation. What she has done is to transform the university's former drab Afro House, with just 29 relics into a black cultural center with more than 500 artifacts representing the achievements of more than 21 African nations, New Guinea and Haiti. "This is not just the usual museum of black history," said Mrs. Reed, who is in constant touch with the large museums such as the Smithsonian Institute. "Usually their holdings

consist mainly of art works and sculpture," said Mrs. Reed, "but our museum hasn't just gone that route," and we are far out in front of anything I have seen so far."

As an example, the A&T Heritage House contains, in addition to paintings and sculpture, outstanding collections of ceramics, masks, weapons, bracelets, coins, fabrics, and cooking ware. The museum's holdings include a valuable collection of hand-crafted beads, including some whose historic significance date back to the days of the ancient slave trade.

Another eye-catching display is her collection of Egyptian crosses, including hand crosses, chest crosses, neck crosses and praying sticks, all steeped in that nation's Coptic religion.

Mr. Reed's extensive collections belie the actual amount of work that has gone into the creation of the museum.

Armed with only an idea suggested by Dr. Lewis C. Dowdy, A&T's chancellor, she began to assemble the collection last November. "I soon found out that we

didn't have very much to work with and not even one display case," she said. But Mrs. Reed corralled the University's carpenters, begged some assistance from the A&T University Foundation, and the conversion was on.

Today the museum's two floors of holdings are accented by brightly painted walls, plush carpeting and showcases fitting to a quality museum.

The Heritage House also contains a combination reading-dining area, to be used for monthly black heritage dinners and teas, and a small but growing library.

Mrs. Reed's interest in African history and culture can be traced back to 1946 when she first accompanied her husband to Ethiopia, where he served as an official with the Agency for International Development. Subsequent tours of duty took the Reeds to Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia over a period of 13 years.

When Mrs. Reed agreed to assemble the center, she agreed to work afternoons from one to five. Her actual

schedule is more like 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"We needed some art," said Mrs. Reed, who has donated many of her own vast holdings. Charles Davis, another former AID official did the same.

"I already have commitments from other foreign service people for some art," said Mrs. Reed, "but we need funds to acquire other important holdings."

Although highly pleased with the Heritage House,

Dr. Dowdy said the university's ultimate goal is to establish a transcultural center to "learn about the differing and unique contributions to the national heritage."

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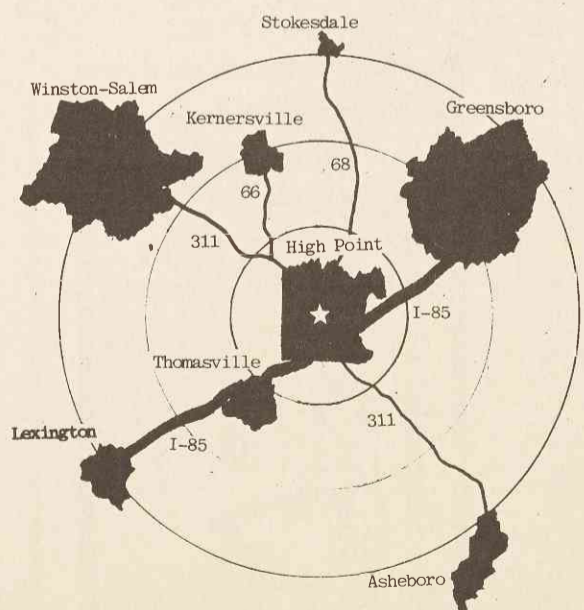
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