

Catherine Brewer Benson House Not To Be Demolished

Historical and Fact Finding Report
2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204

Objective: Macon, Ga community members, regional historians, and preservationists call for the Catherine Brewer Benson House (also known as the Thomas Brewer House) to not be demolished due to its high historical value and level of importance to the American public, including its international historical value. Catherine Brewer Benson was the first woman in the world to receive a bachelor's degree when she graduated from Wesleyan College in 1840. Catherine Brewer Benson as a historical figure is of the utmost importance to American and world-wide history, representing women's rights and access to equal education. The home located at 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204 is what remains of her homeplace at the time she received the first bachelor's degree awarded to a woman; at the time when this historic moment took place in 1840.

Community members, regional historians, and preservations urgently request the Macon-Bibb County Design Review Board and Macon-Bibb County Planning and Zoning to deny any request by the owners or their stakeholders to demolish the structure(s) located at 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204. They request that the design review board and planning and zoning office bar the owners and stakeholders from reapplying for a certificate of appropriateness for at least 6 months or greater, requiring that a second and third professional opinion be rendered in regards to its viability for restoration. Further, it is requested that one of these additional professional assessments be made from an organization outside the middle Georgia area, given the home's national and international significance. In the event that the owners and and their stakeholders are unable to make recommended repairs or restorations, it is requested that

they have the time needed to locate a new owner capable of making the recommended repairs and restorations. As a last resort, the home structure(s) should be considered to be moved to a new owner's property or site where recommended repairs and restorations can be made. Demolition should not be considered as an option whatsoever given the historical value to the American and international public.

Lastly, it is requested that the owners and their stakeholders host the public input meeting they promised to provide. Previously a public (i.e. Town Hall) meeting was to be hosted April 6, 2022, but was canceled due to severe weather. This meeting has not been rescheduled by the owners or their stakeholders.

Historical Facts and Public Requests

- In 1840, Catherine Elizabeth Brewer Benson became the first woman to receive her degree from the first college in the world chartered to grant degrees to women. Thus, making her the first woman in the world to receive a bachelor's degree. Source: <https://www.wesleyancollege.edu/academics/Commencement/catherine-brewer-benson.cfm>
- According to historical records and the Georgia Archives Thomas Brewer was the father of Catherine Brewer Benson. She is recorded as the first woman to receive a degree from Wesleyan College. **See Figure 1.**
- The Thomas Brewer House (i.e Catherine Brewer Benson House) is recorded by the Georgia Archives as being "built between 1820-1830. The home was later divided and moved closer to [Vineville Avenue] street." **See Figure 1.**
- The Sanborn Maps from c. 1884 show that the Thomas Brewer House (i.e Catherine Brewer Benson House) was one of the last homes in the Vineville area to remain on its original site, before being moved closer to Vineville Avenue. **See Figure 2.**

- The Sanborn Maps from c. 1924 show the site of the Thomas Brewer House (i.e Catherine Brewer Benson House) after it was moved closer to Vineville Avenue and its subdivision. This is apparent because the dwellings surrounding the subdivided home are constructed of brick. The Brewer House subdivision is recorded in the c. 1924 Sanborn Map as being of wood construction as it was on its original site. **See Figures 2 and 3.**
- According to historical records and the Georgia Archives the home “has been remodeled four times. The last time the brick and stucco columns built and the wings added.” The most recent facade remodel that includes the brick and stucco columns, and the wings, are reflected as the home located at 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204 stands today. **See Figures 4 and 6.**
- Despite the home being remodeled four times as recorded, it is the sentiment by Macon, Ga community members, regional historians, and preservationists that this adds value to its historical narrative and marks the home more unique and more valuable than previously known.
- When the home was last listed for sale it was noted as being a “Gorgeous historical house - perfect for a home or office. Lots of parking and lots of charm.” Any disrepair and damages occurring since the 2015 listing are the responsibility of the new owners. Restorations and repairs should be required by the new owners, given the national and international historical value of the home. **See Figure 5 through 11.**
- The current owners and their stakeholders promised the Macon-Bibb County community that they would host a public meeting to discuss their plans for 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204 and receive public comments and concerns on the matter. They scheduled this meeting for April 6, 2022. However, it was canceled due to severe weather. The promised public meeting has not been rescheduled. It is requested that the owners and their stakeholders host the public input meeting they promised to provide. **See attached email at the end of this report.**

- In the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204, the application states that it may be unreasonable to make repairs and restorations for the structure. However, the documents included in the application do not state that needed repairs and restorations are impossible or cannot be done.
- A second and third assessment of needed repairs and restorations should be required due to the high historical value and significance of the structure.
- In the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204, the document provided by Pi-Tech, Inc. states “Based on the observed deficiencies it is our opinion that the structure is unsafe for occupancy (residential or commercial) in its current condition... Further, it is our opinion that the cost to repair/restore the structure would be more than its value at the completion of the restoration.” This statement by Pi-Tech, Inc. infers that restoration is possible and not impossible.
- In the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application for 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204, the document provided by Pi-Tech, Inc. states that the cost to repair/restore the structure would be more than its value at the completion of the restoration. However, given the high historical importance to the American and international public, the structure should be viewed as priceless, and higher in value than its market price.
- In the Staff Analysis questions for demolition, it is stated that the house located at 2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204 has no historical significance to low historical significance, however this is factually untrue and incorrect.
- Given the fact findings of this report and confirmed connection to Catherine Brewer Benson, the staff analysis questions (i) through (viii) should be reassessed and answered to include the knowledge learned from this report.

Figure 1

Source:

<https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/vg2/id/4162/>

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Item Description

Title Macon, ca. 1880s-1890s. Home of Thomas Aspenwald Brewer located on Vineville Avenue.

Original Caption It was built between 1820-1830. The home was later divided and moved closer to the street. Brewer was the father of Catherine E. Brewer who received the first diploma from Wesleyan Female College in 1840.; 2003/01/19: Wesleyan Female College is now know as Wesleyan College.

Figure 2

Source: Sanborn Maps c. 1884
(below)

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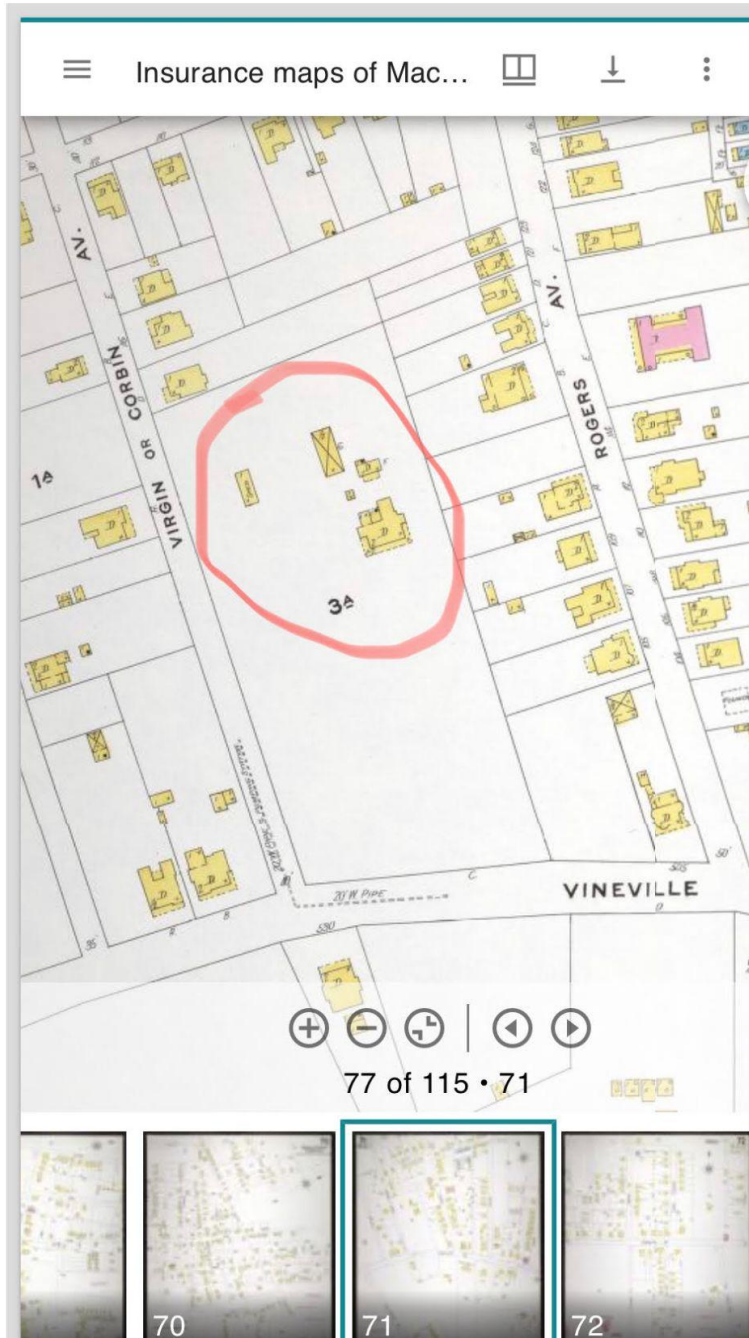



Figure 3
Source: Sanborn Maps c. 1924
(below)

More about the viewer



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Collection:
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Georgia Towns and

Figure 4
Source:

<https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/vg2/id/4228/>

 **GEORGIA ARCHIVES**
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA **VIRTUAL VAULT**



Item Description

Title Macon, ca. 1950s. Brewer-Corbin Home. Vineville Avenue.

Original Caption Originally, this house had wooden columns. It has been remodeled four times. The last time the brick and stucco columns built and the wings added. House still stands.--from field notes; 2003/02/21: It could not be verified that the home is still standing.

Identifier bib232

Figure 5

Source:

https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/2353-Vineville-Ave-Macon-GA-31204/2123532232_zpid/? and <https://www.trulia.com/p/ga/macon/2353-vineville-ave-macon-ga-31204--2031558979>

Zillow Edit Save Share More

4 bd | 2.5 ba | 4,040 sqft
2353 Vineville Ave, Macon, GA 31204

● **Off market** | Zestimate®: **\$281,400** | Rent Zestimate®: **\$1,699**

Est. refi payment: \$1,630/mo **Refinance your loan**

Home value Owner tools **Home details** Neighborhood details

Note: This property is not currently for sale or for rent on Zillow. The description and property data below may've been provided by a third party, the homeowner or public records.

Gorgeous historical house - perfect for a home or office. Lots of parking and lots of charm. View docs for sellers disclosure, lead based paint exhibit, plats and property information

Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



From: Vineville Neighborhood Association
<historicvineville@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 5:10 PM

Subject: Neighborhood Meeting at The Big House - April 6th

Vineville Neighbors,

We notified you a few times over the last year about the house at 2353 Vineville Avenue, which The Big House Foundation has owned since 2015, as well as their plans to demolish the house and expand in the Vineville neighborhood. Since the last update individuals from Historic Macon Foundation and from the board for the Vineville Neighborhood Association and have tried to stay in regular contact with The Big House to stay abreast of any updates and to communicate neighbor's concerns as we have tried to work to find a resolution that works for all neighbors.

As you will remember, The Big House obtained a letter in December 2020 from a structural engineer declaring the building unsafe for occupancy, as well as a letter from the county's Chief Building Official condemning the building, which was later rescinded.

As of the last update that we provided last November The Big House had asked that the VNA board provide input on the board's

preference between demolishing the house entirely, or keeping and restoring the façade of the house to allow a stage to be built on the back of the remaining house facing away from Vineville Avenue. The VNA board's preference has always been to restore and preserve the house as a home, but in discussing the quotes that The Big House received from contractors we understand that to completely restore the house at this point is no longer a feasible option. The VNA board communicated to the Big House that preserving as much of the house as possible is of utmost importance, in an effort to try to maintain the continuity and integrity of the neighborhood and with minimal impact to the streetscape.

In our most recent update from The Big House they have indicated that based on their recent discussions with architects and contractors that they now believe that preserving any part of the building is no longer a feasible option. As a result, we have asked that The Big House host a neighborhood meeting so that they can present their proposal to the VNA membership and allow an opportunity for a Q&A, which they have agreed to. This meeting is currently planned to take place next Wednesday, April 6th from 5:30-6:30pm outside of The Big House. They plan to have their staff and some of the individuals that they have hired to work on this project present to help answer questions.

We hope that everyone takes advantage of this opportunity to learn about the proposed changes that could have a significant impact in Historic Vineville, and the opportunity to voice your feelings and ask questions about this complicated issue, as we

know there are many different opinions on these proposed changes. We look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

Brad Coman, Past President



Vineville Neighbors,

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