



## THE BLACK HERITAGE COUNCIL APPOINTS TWO NEW MEMBERS

The Black Heritage Council (BHC) of the Alabama Historical Commission, whose primary mission is to advocate for and to advise the Alabama Historical Commission on the preservation of African American landmarks, history, and culture in Alabama, is excited to announce two new members of the Council. The two new members were brought on board on November 12, 2022.



Mr. Robert E. Battles, Sr. is a resident of Mobile, Alabama, and he serves as the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District Representative of the BHC. He brings a wealth of experience in various areas. In 1967, Battles was one of 18 of the first African Americans to enroll at the University of South Alabama. He graduated in the first graduating class in 1969 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology and English, after earning an Associate Degree in the two subjects at the Mobile Branch of the Alabama State University in 1967. Married to the former Betty Jean Tyler, Battles and she have five children.

Battles career began at Scott Paper Company in 1969, and later he served in management at J.C. Penney in Prichard. His work in preservation grew out of his dedication to bring attention to Africatown USA. He was asked to make a presentation to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. in 1999 on Africatown USA and the last slave ship, Clotilde that arrived in Mobile in 1859 with 110 Africans from the West African country of Benin. Battles was selected to make the presentation by then-Congressman H.L. Sonny Callahan who served Alabama's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District in the Nation's Capital.

As executive director of the Africatown Welcome Center, Battles was also invited in 2007 to visit and study at the Schomburg Center for the search in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. He was there to discuss with Dr. Sylviane A. Diouf, curator of the Center, the ongoing projects concerning the commemoration of the bi-centennial of the abolition of the U.S. Slave Trade. In 2012, Battles assisted in having the Africatown Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service.

With a career that spans over 50 decades, Battles was elected and served as a member of the Mobile County Board of Commissioners. He is a former board member of the Mobile Transit Authority, a public affairs talk show host on WGOK Radio 900AM for more than 30 years, and a community organizer, political activist and civil rights advocate who has helped numerous

groups, including African American students in Mobile County whom he alleged in a federal complaint were denied equal protection and due process of law regarding facilities, programs, administrations, the Coalition For a Drug Free Mobile, Africatown Community Mobilization Project, and Mobile's Black Art Gallery and Cultural Center.

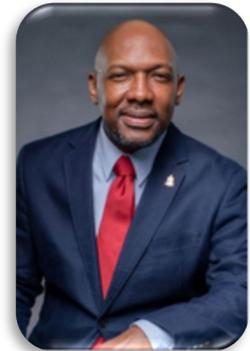
Since becoming a member of the BHC, Battles hosted the organization in Mobile for its 1<sup>st</sup> Quarterly Meeting on December 10, 2022. The meeting was held at the Africatown Cultural & Gift Center which he owns and operates. After the meeting, Battles arranged for Tour Guide Jason Lewis to lead the BHC in a tour of Africatown.

On March 10, 2023, on behalf of the BHC, Battles participated with the historic Oaklawn Cemetery Clean Up. Mrs. Fran Barber-Bruyn, President, of the Veterans Memorial Recovery Team, and her team spearheaded the effort. On his weekly radio program, Battles interviewed her and her husband prior to the event. Other groups like the Knights of Columbus, Proud to Serve, and Unity Fiber also helped out in the cleanup effort at Oaklawn Cemetery.

Battles is the recipient of many awards, including community service awards from Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Catholic Social Services, and, most recently on March 2, 2023, a Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of South Alabama. This award notably recognizes Battles as one of the University's first African American graduates in 1969. He is a member of the board of trustees at Stone Street Baptist Church in Mobile.

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Mr. Eddie E. Davis, Jr. is a soil scientist for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Based outside of the city of Huntsville, Davis provides soil expertise and training for landowners and constituents spanning across 33 counties in north and central parts of Alabama. He serves the Black Heritage Council as a Public Institution Representative.



Davis attended Alabama A&M University where he graduated cum laude and earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Science with a minor in Chemistry in 2002. He obtained a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning, Environmental Planning in 2004 at Alabama A&M University. In 2006, Davis became a professional soil classifier for the State of Alabama, and in 2009, he acquired certification in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at the University of North Alabama. He also became a certified soil scientist for the State of Tennessee in 2011.

In a previous role with USDA, Davis served as the Black Special Emphasis Program Manager on the Civil Rights Advisory Committee, in which he assisted with policy implementations to assure equal employment opportunities for African Americans in all personnel management

policies and practices as well as USDA sponsored programs and activities. He also began “Black History Month-Fact Friday” where he disseminated historical information of African-Americans accomplishments and successes across the state’s agency.

In 2014, Davis served on the planning committee that organized and coordinated North Alabama’s Cultural Diversity Day. The outreach event brought various ethnicities and groups together, including Native Americans, African Americans, veterans, and more. The event helped attendees learn of the various cultures. It also allowed for the dissemination of information to historically underserved groups on how the USDA-National Resources Conservation Service can be of service to all citizens.

Davis is the author of the book, “William Hooper Council: The Greatest Negro the Race ever Produced.” This book captures the story of a formerly enslaved man who would prevail against unimaginable obstacles to become a lawyer, civil rights pioneer, international orator, author, a religious leader and, most notably, the founder and first president of Alabama A&M University. From the success surrounding the book, Davis has become a sought-after speaker. Most recently, he spoke for the USDA’s Office of Partnership and Public Engagement during its Black History Month Celebration 2023.

Davis is a member of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, an organization that focuses on preserving the past to enrich the future. He is past president of the Alabama A&M University Normal Historic District Preservation Association. In 2013, Davis represented the organization at the national meeting of National Trust for Historic Preservation in Indianapolis, Indiana.

While serving as president of the Normal District Preservation Association, Davis worked with 38<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Judge John Graham of Jackson County, Alabama to uncover and preserve African American history for the City of Stevenson. With their efforts and Davis’ research, he and Judge Graham and the members of the Stevenson City Council erected a historic marker known as “Averyville.” Averyville was a Freedman village or community for formerly enslaved people after the Civil War. The most notable former resident of Averyville: Dr. William Hooper Council.

Davis is passionate about his work in helping to preserve African American landmarks, history and culture in Alabama by becoming a member of the Black Heritage Council. His insight on soil conservation will serve as an excellent guide as conservation work and preservation work go hand-in-hand in many ways in maintaining and preserving historic landmarks, history and culture, as well as his expertise in planning and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), especially in cemetery preservation.

Speaking on behalf of the Black Heritage Council, Chair Lateefah Muhammad, Esq. stated, “We welcome both Mr. Battles and Mr. Davis with open arms in helping to advise the Alabama Historical Commission, and to advocate for and document, interpret, preserve and promote African American landmarks, history, and culture in Alabama. We are indeed glad to have them join us in this important and necessary work.” For more information, or a request for assistance, please write the Council at [blackheritagecouncil@ahc.alabama.gov](mailto:blackheritagecouncil@ahc.alabama.gov) , or call (334) 230-2691.