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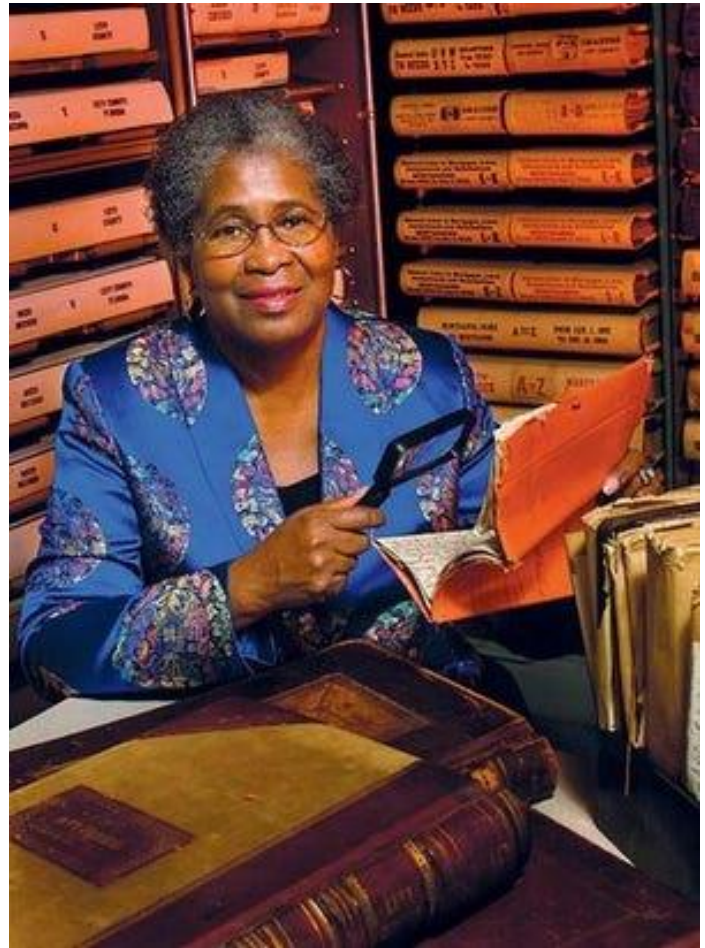
NEWS

Woman chronicles Rosewood

KAREN VOYLES Sun staff writer

Lizzie Jenkins has spent a decade sorting through musty files in her search for details to confirm what happened to her aunt and uncle when the predominantly black Levy County town of Rosewood was burned to the ground in 1923. On Saturday, as part of the kickoff for Celebration of African History and Culture Month in Gainesville, Jenkins will be signing copies of the 250-page book she wrote detailing her research.

"This is really my mom's project because she wanted her sister - the Rosewood schoolteacher - to have her place in history and be remembered," Jenkins said. "What I have done really is to keep a journal of my research. My next volume will be the narrative about Rosewood, but this one is really a chronology of how I found what I found."



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Spending countless hours doing research in the archive room of the Levy County courthouse, author Liz Jenkins has recently finished a book entitled "The Real Rosewood" which chronicles the race riot of Rosewood that took place more than 80 years ago.

Rosewood was established between Otter Creek and Cedar Key along what is now State Road 24. The town was destroyed after a white woman accused a black man - Jenkins' uncle - of rape. The ensuing days of violence left several inhabitants dead and others fleeing into the surrounding woods with only the clothes they were wearing.

For 70 years, those who escaped the atrocity rarely spoke of what happened. When the Florida Legislature began looking into the violence, researchers documented that the sheriff and governor knew what was happening at Rosewood and did nothing to stop the brutality.

In 1994, lawmakers approved a \$2 million compensation package to be distributed among the few remaining survivors and the descendants of others who could document their connection to Rosewood in 1923.

"My aunt, Mahulda Carrier, was married to the man they accused of the rape, Aaron Carrier," Jenkins said. Aaron Carrier was the first target of the mob of white men. After being beaten, he was secreted away by Levy County Sheriff Elias R. "Bob" Walker.

Mahulda Carrier, one of the town's teachers, was also able to escape, then spent the rest of her life trying to recover. She and Aaron later divorced, and she moved often and would change her name frequently, Jenkins said. She would talk about the incident rarely, only in a whisper and only to people she trusted, like Jenkins' mother, Theresa Robinson.

Before Robinson died in 1997, she made her wishes clear to Jenkins.

"She wanted me to tell the truth about her sister," Jenkins said. "She told me 'Don't vent your anger,' and to 'remain humble, but tell the story.' "

A retired Alachua County teacher with a master's degree, Jenkins was already a competent researcher when she met Toni Collins, the historic records coordinator for the Levy County Clerk's Office.

"Rosewood is still a sensitive subject in Levy County and we can't rewrite history, but Liz (Jenkins) was very professional about her research," Collins said. "She would come in and have a narrow focus so I would know exactly what records to help her find."

Along the way Jenkins also met descendants of some of the white people involved in Rosewood, people she now refers to as "my white family." They include nieces and nephews of Rosewood's merchant, John Wright, as well as granddaughters of the Bryce brothers who conducted the train that many survivors rode to escape, and the grandchildren of Sheriff Walker.

Jenkins said the white descendents have been as horrified and she and other black descendants were about the incident, but have agreed that she should tell her aunt's story as accurately as possible.

Jenkins said some of the white descendants have told her they will attend her book signing. The event is scheduled for Saturday in Gainesville's Downtown Community Plaza from 11:30 a.m. until 4 p.m.

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Finding Rosewood

Rosewood was established between Otter Creek and Cedar Key **along what is now State Road 24.**