



Gwendolyn Walker

Photos such as this one of Yates Beauty Salon in Mobile, owned by Atlanta Gwendolyn Walker's mother, are being preserved via an online community.

## Old photographs tell stories that shouldn't just fade away

By CATHERINE FOX  
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Gwendolyn Walker sits down at the table, opens a manila file folder of family photos and out pours a life.

This one, circa 1940, is the interior of Yates Beauty Salon, owned by her mother, Ida Yates Howard. The pillars of Mobile, she says with obvious pride, came for her mother's marcel wave, a specialty acquired at hair tycoon Madam C.J. Walker's school in Chicago.

Picture by picture, Gwendo-

lyn Walker, a social studies teacher at Atlanta's Booker T. Washington High School, builds a portrait of an indefatigable woman who raised three children, ran a beauty shop and school, bought rental property and still had time to serve gumbo at her annual open house after the Mardi Gras parade.

And look plenty stylish to boot.

Thomas Allen Harris listens intently to Walker's stories.

"Your mother was an entrepreneur," the New York-based film-

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# Pictures: Film, Web portal help bring the past into focus

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maker exclaimed. "Women as business people: So many people don't know about that."

Harris selects several of the photos to be scanned into his computer — and into history. He is building an online repository for photos such as Walker's, photos that tell the kinds of stories about African-Americans and their lives that are largely absent from public consciousness. Ida Yates Walker's story contradicts racial stereotypes that still pervade the media.

Scheduled to launch this summer, the interactive Web portal will complement his upcoming documentary film, "Through a Lens Darkly."

Created with photo historian Deborah Willis, the film explores the role of photography in shaping African-American identity — for ill and good — from the 19th century to the present.

Now something of a photo missionary, he spreads the word that those photos stowed in shoe boxes under the bed are historical records that should be valued and cared for. And they don't have to be old to be important.

"I tell kids not to delete the photos they take with their iPhones. The moments they capture will never come again."

Thomas Allen Harris, documentary filmmaker of "Through a Lens Darkly"



Photos by HYOSUB SHIN / hshin@ajc.com

**Kerrie C. Williams** (center) helps her mother, **Gwendolyn Walker**, sort through her photos. Watching is **Thomas Allen Harris**, the filmmaker behind "Through a Lens Darkly."

"I tell kids not to delete the photos they take with their iPhones," he said. "The moments they capture will never come again."

Harris' online venture will be open to anyone who wants to look at the pictures and add his own. He conceives it as a community where participants can forge connections — and learn to see themselves through their own eyes.

► **ONLINE:** Information about Harris' documentary and multimedia outreach project: <http://throughalensdarkly2008.blogspot.com>

## PHOTO PRESERVATION

Want to preserve your photos? Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Keep them in a cool, dry place, away from sunlight.
- Protect them in individual mylar sleeves or albums with archival paper, products readily available in stores or online.
- Scan them into your computer and use the scans for framing and sharing.
- Make multiple backups of your digital photos. Download and save to disks.
- Create a clear, accessible caption for each photo, so the information about it will not be lost.

— Catherine Fox