



## Upcoming Conference News

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### Fun Facts About Atlanta: Another Kind of Atlanta Success Story

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The traditional Atlanta story arc involves a young man or woman of unusual ability who moves to the big city and amasses a fortune in real estate, soda pop, or hair products. This story begins, not at the beginning of a brilliant career, but at the end of one.



Ponder House, courtesy of George N. Barnard [Public Domain]

Ephraim Ponder made his fortune elsewhere and moved to Atlanta to enjoy his retirement. In 1857, at the age of 47, he bought 26 1/3 acres on the Marietta Road, about a mile and a half from downtown, when the city was only a mile in radius. He built a home and

moved in with his wife, Ellen, who was beautiful, wealthy, and fourteen years younger than he.

The stately two-story home and landscaped grounds incited quite a bit of talk, but Ponder's management of his slaves caused the biggest stir. Between his home and the Marietta Road, he erected three large manufacturing buildings for his slaves. Having made his fortune as a planter and slave trader, Ponder encouraged his slaves to learn trades and allowed them to make their own money on their own time, contracting directly with Atlanta's white citizens, which didn't sit well with some. On January 4, 1861, Atlanta's City Council passed an ordinance imposing a tax of one hundred dollars for each Negro Mechanic operating outside the city limits. History doesn't record exactly how Ponder responded or to whom, but a week later, the above ordinance was reconsidered and tabled indefinitely.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of Mr. Ponder's troubles. In October of that year, he filed for a divorce on the grounds that his wife had been unfaithful, going back to their wedding day, that she stayed drunk, that she threatened her husband with a loaded revolver, and that she abused him verbally and disrespected him generally.

Brokenhearted, Ponder returned home to Thomasville, Georgia, to await the final divorce decree. His wife stayed in the house, and because their marriage contract forbade either one to sell any property without the other's permission, the slaves carried on as usual. In June of 1864, as Sherman approached the city, Ellen Ponder fled to Macon.

At that point, management of the property was formally assumed by the man who'd been doing it for years, anyway, a slave named Festus Flipper. He's described by historian Franklin Garrett as a "skilled carriage-trimmer and shoemaker," a master of fine leather work. When Mrs. Ponder left the house, Confederate sharpshooters took over the upper floor, making it a target for Federal gunners. In July and August of 1864, an estimated ton of shot and shell was fired into or dropped onto the Ponder mansion, and it was never occupied again.

Festus Flipper stayed on in Atlanta, operating his own boot and shoe shop on Decatur Street, but two of his sons went on to make history. Reverend Joseph S. Flipper became a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and served as Chancellor of Morris Brown University. His brother, Henry Ossian Flipper, was the first black graduate of West Point and the first nonwhite officer to command a company of buffalo soldiers in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry.

And there's your Atlanta success story. I told you it was unusual.