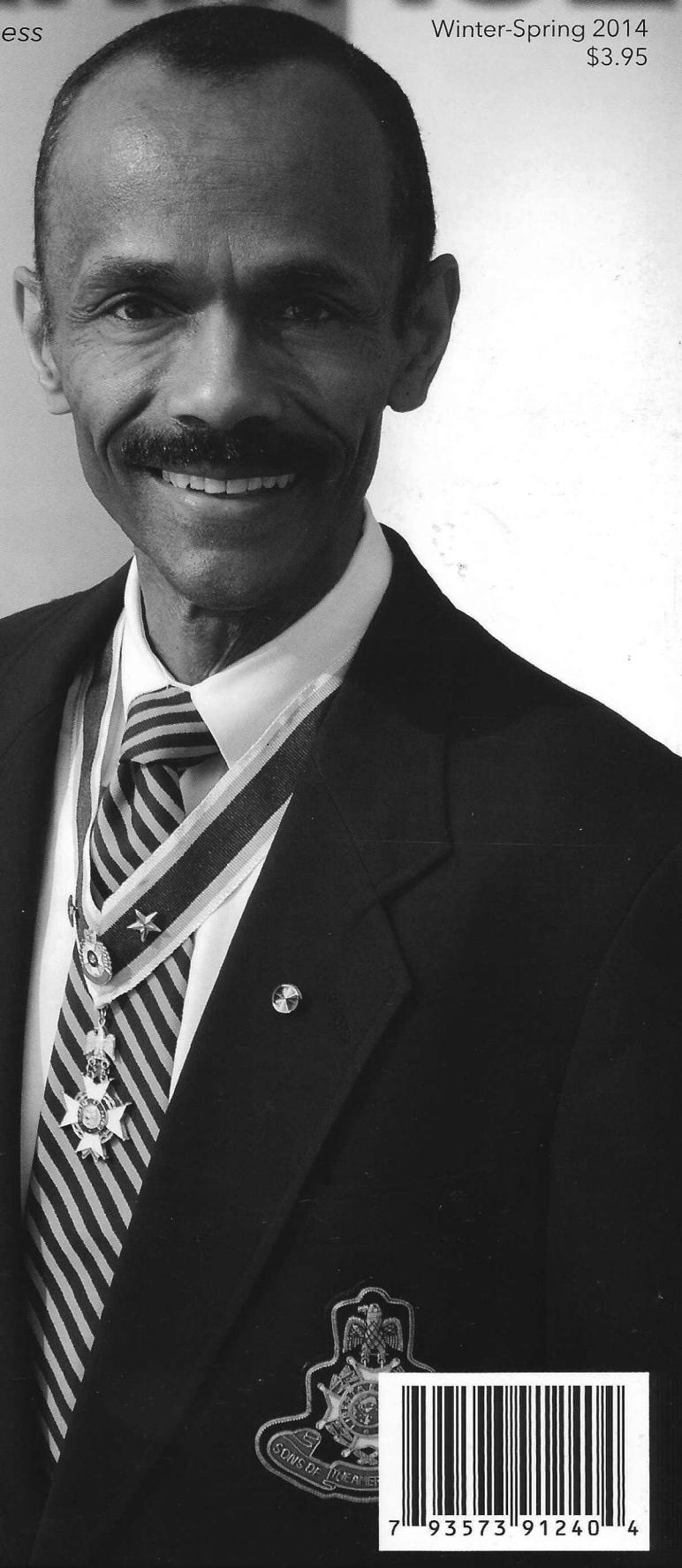




OUR HERITAGE

A Magazine Promoting Cultural Awareness

Winter-Spring 2014
\$3.95



MICHAEL NOLDEN HENDERSON Genealogist Makes History

DEPUTY CHIEF JANAE' FLORANCE Leading by Example

POVERTY: 50 Years of War

INCOME INEQUALITY & RACE: The New Economic (Dis)Order?

APOSTLE DR. FREDERICK K.C. PRICE What Real Faith Is (WRFI) Conference

WALZEM AREA Continues on Road to Recovery



OUR HERITAGE • OUR HISTORY • OUR PRIDE • OUR LEGACY

PROVING CONNECTIONS TO AMERICA'S PAST:

Genealogist makes history by revealing ancestors' contributions

By Anita R. Paul

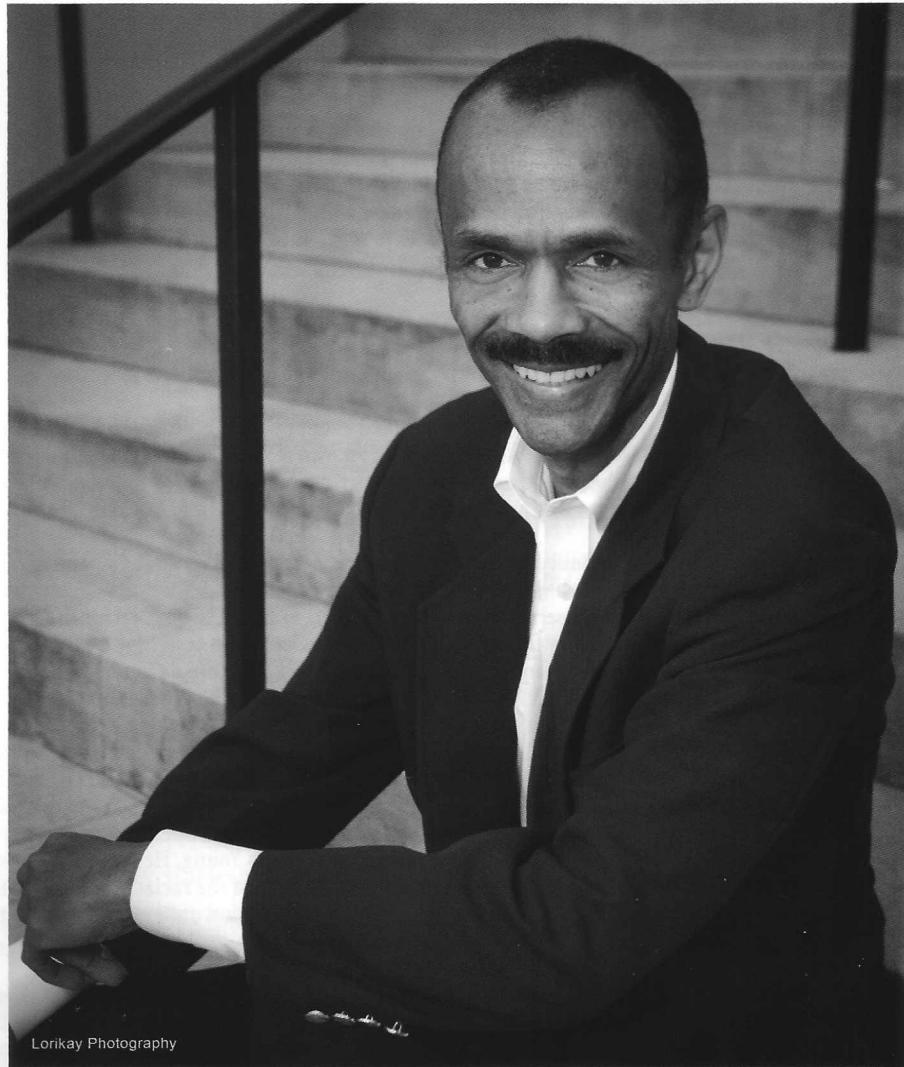
Knowing one's heritage is about more than simply being able to recite a few significant historical names, dates, and events. Finding the name of the first African American self-made millionaire or the number of Africans brought to America during the trans-Atlantic slave trade can easily be learned through a Google search. Yet, learning about one's own ancestry—the names of relatives long gone, where they lived, what they accomplished, the impact they had on their community, and the legacy they left—can be challenging for many.

Genealogy research has seen exponential growth in recent years. Some might attribute the growing interest to TV programs, such as "African American Lives," "Who Do You Think You Are?" and "Faces of America." Others suggest that the popularity of websites, such as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.com have fueled people's ancestral quests. Regardless of the reason, people from all backgrounds are now in pursuit of information about ancestors long forgotten and the stories that surround their lives ... and they're willing to pay for it.

According to a 2012 report by Global Industry Analysts, an estimated 84 million people around the world spend anywhere from \$1,000 to \$18,000 a year in search of their ancestors. For many, the research journey is emotional and revealing. For African Americans, in particular, learning about ancestors can be a process of healing, acceptance, and renewal.

For Michael Nolden Henderson, a retired United States naval officer, the journey to uncover his ancestral roots has been nothing short of historic. Over nearly three decades, Henderson has traced his ancestry to 1657, discovering individuals who were among the first settlers of North America, the founders of Louisiana, early settlers of his hometown of New Orleans, and patriots who served in nearly every conflict America has participated in, including the Revolutionary War.

His 2013 book, Got Proof: My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation, has received national



MICHAEL NOLDEN HENDERSON

Retired Naval Officer, World Renowned Genealogist

acclaim. The memoir describes the challenges and successes Henderson experienced while researching his Louisiana Creole roots, including the discovery of a 31-year relationship between a free woman of color and a Frenchman in Spanish colonial Louisiana.

In 2010, Henderson became the first African American in Georgia inducted into the exclusive National Society, Sons of the American Revolution. Since then, he has made it his goal to join as many lineage/heritage societies as he can. Here, he shares the motivation for his research, what he hopes to accomplish through membership in these exclusive societies, and what many African American genealogists most often overlook in pursuit of their ancestors.

THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

OH: When did you begin researching your family history?

MNH: I was onboard ship in the South Pacific around 1984. One of my comrades received a package that included a family history book with pictures, documents, newspaper clippings, and notes about people in his family. I was so impressed with that book that I wondered if my family had anything similar. I asked my mom if she knew of anything like this that existed for our family. When she told me she did not, I knew I would be the one to create it.

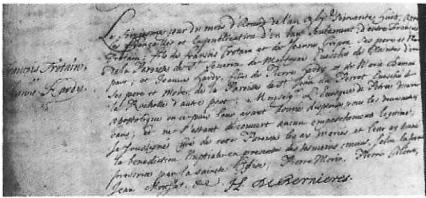
Practically every family has a historian, whether formal or not. Most often, the family historian is the one you'll find at family gatherings sitting among the elders, asking questions, recording birth and death dates, collecting pictures, and trying (usually unsuccessfully) to get everyone else to be interested in family history. That was me ... and still is.

OH: Many African American genealogists run into a “brick wall” and find it difficult to locate documented evidence of their ancestors before 1870. Describe some of your brick walls.

MNH: First of all, I believe that many of the so-called brick walls that genealogists—African American and otherwise—run into are self-imposed. We hear that it's hard or nearly impossible to trace African American ancestry beyond 1870, when African Americans were not listed in federal census documents with a first and last name, and we believe that's as far back as we can go. I reject that. You have to think outside the box and find

Michael Nolden Henderson seated on porch with Mother and cousin, Viola





other types of documents, such as slave inventories, wills, family papers, journals, church records, military records, land and real estate deeds, and more.

I have certainly run into my own brick walls, but I've always found a way around them. The majority of my research has been along my mother's line. Her family has been in Louisiana since its founding. The French and later the Spanish, as well as the Catholic church, maintained very good records, many of which are still accessible. So my challenges were being able to read the centuries-old documents written in French, Spanish, and German. I've hired translators, and even learned to decipher certain words and names in these languages to glean the meaning and to locate my ancestors.

OH: What were some surprising discoveries you made as you researched your family's history?

MNH: I've come across many surprises throughout my research journey. I'll say that I've been most surprised

by the variety of the rich cultural heritage within my family tree. I have located African, Native American, French, German/Swiss, and French Canadian ancestors in my heritage ... and I've learned to embrace them all. Oftentimes, people find it difficult to accept the totality of their ancestral makeup. I believe that my acceptance of my family's cultural diversity has helped me accomplish what I have with my research. When we reject any part of our past, we reject who we really are.

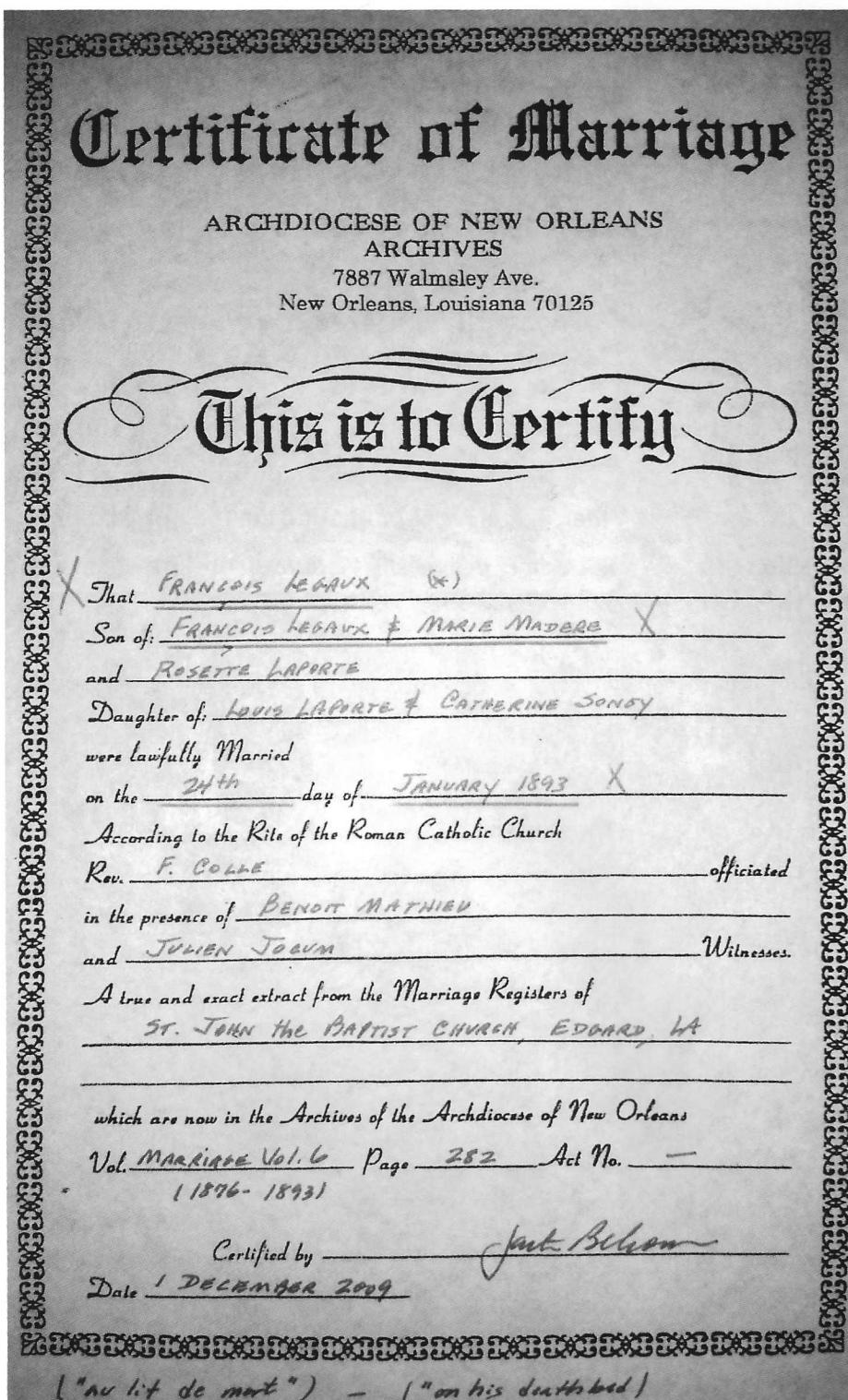
AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE A RICH AND DIVERSE CULTURAL HERITAGE

OH: Who was the first ancestor you discovered who was not African American?

MNH: I located a Louisiana-born French Creole named Francois Legaux on the marriage certificate of his daughter, Georgiana Legaux, who is my great-grandmother. Francois and his mixed-race wife, Rosette Catherine Laporte, were together for more than 30 years before marrying, due to the laws governing Louisiana, which prohibited mixed-race couples from marrying until after the Civil War. Throughout their relationship, they had eight children.

OH: How did you feel when you realized you had other than African American ancestry?

MNH: As a kid, I had heard stories about people in my family being mixed-race, French Creole, or Caucasian, but these



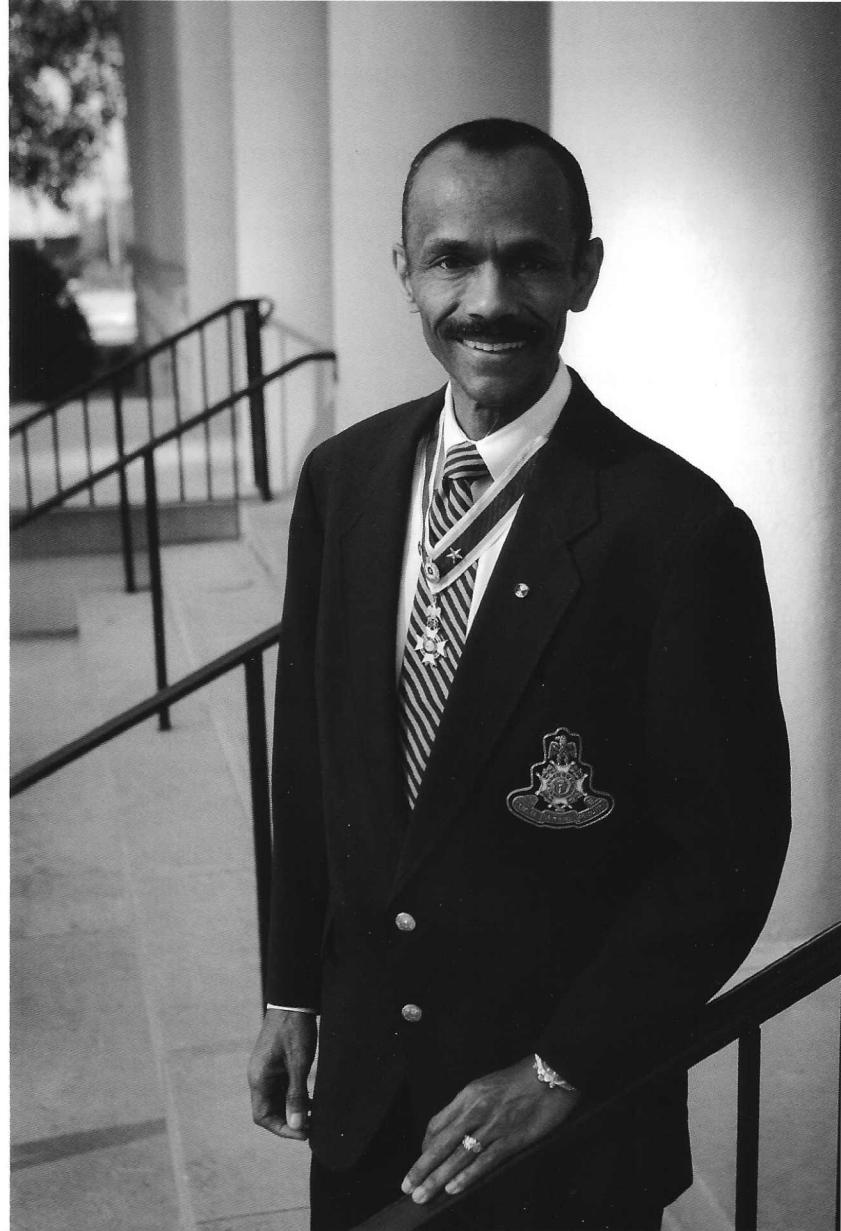
were all stories; I had no proof of this. The Legaux document made the stories real to me. With that one piece of paper, I confirmed that this person really existed, and by locating other documents, I discovered how I was connected to him. I later located a photo of Francois Legaux and his wife, Rosette.

What genealogists have to understand is the family stories are only a piece of the puzzle; often the very first piece. From there, you have to find evidence, or what I call proof, of what the family stories suggest.

OH: How has discovering your cultural heritage changed you?

MNH: It might sound cliché, but I really do have a much greater sense of who I am and an undeniable certainty of the contributions of my ancestors to not only America, but to the establishment of the North American continent. As a result of finding proof of my ancestors, I have joined four lineage societies whose membership is predicated on one being able to prove direct descent from an ancestor in a specified category.

In 2010, I joined the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution. In 2012, I joined the General Society of the War of 1812 in the State of Louisiana. Last year, I became a member of La Société des Filles du Roi and Soldats du Carignan, Inc., and became a charter member of the Order of the Founders of North America, 1492-1692.



MICHAEL NOLDEN HENDERSON
is a member of the
Sons of the American Revolution.



(Pictured Left) Certificate of Membership of the Order of the Founders of North America. Henderson was admitted into the order on Sept. 25, 2013 after tracing his ancestry to Anne LeMoigne.

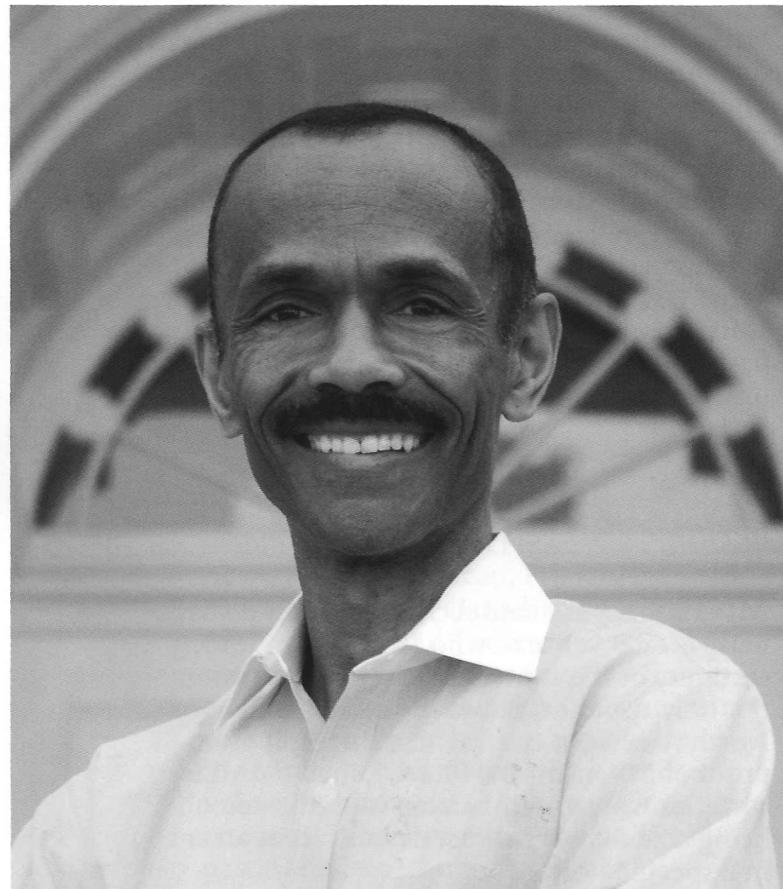
LINEAGE SOCIETIES

OH: Why would anyone want to join a lineage/heritage society?

MNH: Joining lineage societies for me has been a very positive outcome of my research. As a retired military officer, I am proud to acknowledge the patriotic service of my ancestors who served in various military confrontations. Having my ancestors acknowledged—whether they served in conflicts or not—also preserves their memory through societies whose purpose is to recognize, document, and record the lives of early Americans.

In our multi-racial society, having these organizations acknowledge a diverse representation of Americans is important. These groups need to know that the descendants of those who contributed to America's founding and protection, including African Americans, are willing to acknowledge the contributions of their ancestors through documented proof.

Having traced my ancestry as far back as I have has provided me with a true sense of accomplishment. I believe I am an example to other genealogists to have their research validated by a third party and held in perpetuity.



The book cover features a black and white portrait of a woman in historical attire on the left. In the center, the title "GOT PROOF!" is written in large, bold, serif capital letters. Below the title is a circular emblem with a central shield containing a fleur-de-lis, surrounded by the letters "A", "S", "I", and "R", with "1779" at the bottom. At the bottom of the cover, the subtitle "My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation" is written in a smaller, elegant script font. The authors' names, "MICHAEL NOLDEN HENDERSON" and "WITH ANITA ROCHELLE", are printed in a bold, sans-serif font. A small fleur-de-lis logo is located to the left of the authors' names. The foreword author, "FOREWORD BY TONY BURROUGHS, FUGA", is also mentioned at the bottom.

Michael Henderson is the 2013 recipient of the James Dent Walker Award for African American Genealogy Research. The award was presented by the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) at its annual conference in Nashville, TN.

Henderson was also featured in a 2010 segment of the nationally televised PBS program "History Detectives" titled "The Galvez Papers." The segment details Henderson's quest to discover the authenticity of a signature on the manumission document (freedom papers) of his fourth generation great-grandmother, Agnes. The program can be viewed at: <http://to.pbs.org/1jmCPcX>

Want a closer look at his "outside the box" use of documentation? Henderson has written a memoir about some of his findings, "*GOT PROOF! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation*." In *GOT PROOF!* Henderson takes readers on his genealogical journey which led him to discover the 1779 manumission, or freedom papers, of a woman named Agnes. With the assistance of a third party, Agnes engaged in a year-long court battle to gain her freedom, which she eventually won on December 16, 1779. Agnes is Henderson's fourth-generation great-grandmother. As Henderson discovered, the third party who assisted Agnes in her quest for freedom is his fourth-generation great-grandfather, a Frenchman named Mathieu Devaux. Although unable to marry due to the laws of the day, the two maintained a 31-year relationship and produced seven children who were all born free prior to the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. 

Henderson can be reached at
www.MichaelNHenderson.com.