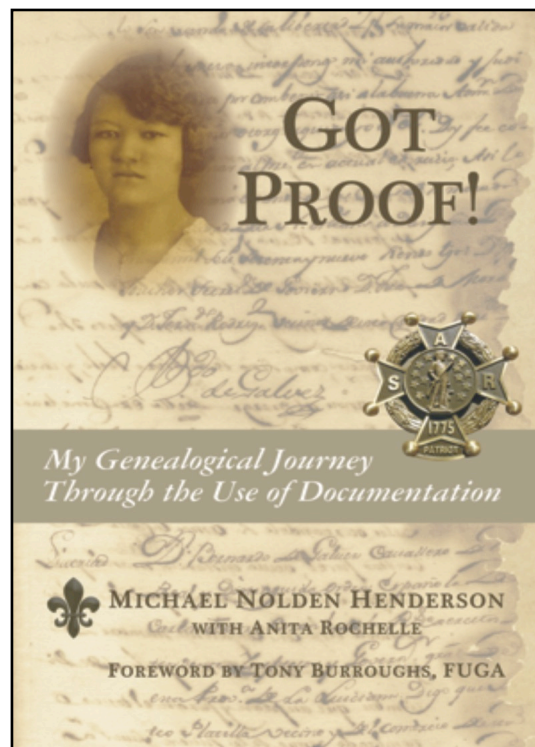


In *Got Proof! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation*, Lieutenant Commander Michael Nolden Henderson, U.S. Navy retired, captures the attention of genealogists, historians, and others interested in the complex social structure that developed during the French and Spanish colonial periods in Louisiana.

He explores the forbidden relationships that spawned the unique heritage of Creoles of color. Referencing documents from as far back as the 1770s, Henderson uses his own experiences as a family history researcher and the insight of noted scholars to reveal the methods, standards, and techniques he used to prove his ancestry.



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As a kid growing up in Algiers, a neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana, Henderson was curious about his family—how he was related to each of his extended family members and why they were considered Creole. This innocent childhood curiosity led him to inquire about the spelling of his maternal grandmother's maiden name: Mathieu. When told by his mother that “the family was French Creole and that’s just the way they spelled it,” he was unsatisfied and continued asking questions of his elders.

Years later, as a young lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, Henderson interviewed a distant cousin—the family historian—who told him of the haunting tale of an ancestor who lamented for years, “They wouldn’t allow us to use Daddy’s last name.” That family lore spurred him on a 2-decades-long journey to discover “Daddy’s last name” and why the family was prevented from bearing it.

Throughout his journey, Henderson visited archival depositories across the United States, met noted history and genealogical scholars and researchers, attended conferences, and traveled to Marseille, France, where he met with an unlikely French cousin. With each bit of information uncovered, Henderson desired to connect with a more experienced genealogist to assist and guide him to the answers he sought.

He uncovered one document after another, most written in French or Spanish, that revealed an engaging tale of love and freedom in the midst of Louisiana’s involvement in the American Revolution. As the story of a free woman of color and her French consort unfolded, Henderson sought a viable source to tell the story of his ancestors on a broader scale. Little did he know that he would eventually become both the historian and the storyteller he sought.