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A Revolutionary Discovery Chronicled in New Book
Got Proof! Explores One Family Historian's Surprising Results

Most people avoid cemeteries at all costs; not Michael Henderson. Like many family history researchers, he gravitates to them, curious about the lives of those who lived centuries ago. This curiosity is what got him started down the path of researching his roots and eventually discovering an ancestor who helped secure America's independence from the British during the Revolutionary War.

"Ancestors want to be found. They often leave evidence of their existence in documents, photographs, and even on headstones," says Henderson, a native of New Orleans, Louisiana who now resides near Atlanta, Georgia.

His affinity for genealogy research occurred over time, spurred by his many visits to his hometown during military leave periods when he served in the United States Navy. "I would visit the French Quarter [in New Orleans] and have flashbacks of what the area must have been like in the 18th and 19th centuries," Henderson recalls. "I wondered whether I had ancestors who lived there, but was told by my mother that all of our people lived in the country."

As his research continued, a conversation with a distant cousin opened a genealogical can of worms, and Henderson was off on what would become a nearly 30-year journey to discover his Louisiana Creole ancestry. Now a retired lieutenant commander, Henderson has written a memoir about some of his findings, *Got Proof! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation*. "The book title says it all. The focus of my research has been finding documents to prove the family lore and uncover answers to the mysteries that have been kept secret and hidden for so long."

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.

As it turned out, Devaux served as an artilleryman under the Spanish general Bernardo de Galvez, who led troops to major victories in the Battle of Baton Rouge, the Siege of Natchez, the Battle of Mobile, and the Siege of Pensacola. Finding proof of his ancestor's service led Henderson to apply for membership into the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). In 2010, he became the first African American in Georgia inducted into the male lineage society. That same year, the story of Agnes and Mathieu caught the attention of the PBS series "History Detectives." The segment, titled "The Galvez Papers,"(<https://www.pbs.org/video/history-detectives-galvez-papers/>) explores Henderson's quest to determine whether the signature of Bernardo de Galvez on Agnes' manumission document is authentic. Two years after his induction, Henderson was elected president of the Button Gwinnett Chapter of the SAR and to this day he remains the only African American SAR member in Georgia.

"In my travels, I meet people from many backgrounds, some who don't believe they could ever prove their ancestral link to American history. I suggest they dig deep and find proof to connect their ancestors to the rich history of this country. We all have a part to play in the narrative of America."

Got Proof! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation is available at www.michaelnhenderson.com and on www.amazon.com.

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