

3/13/2013 5:15:00 PM

Greenfield Area Resident Measures Time by US Presidents

By Earlene Scott for The Times-Gazette

Constance "Connie" **Ford** measures time not in years or decades, but by U.S. presidents. Her ancestors include early pioneers who came west from Virginia and north from Tennessee and Kentucky to meet in Greenfield. Her family was one of the first African-American families in the Greenfield area and the Old Pioneer Cemetery in the village shelters the bones of those long ago family members. Their mortal remains serve as a reminder of what came before and what has passed since their humble beginnings.

Connie is the "Keeper of the Stories" for her family and the one person who cherishes old letters, the family Bible, and assorted keepsakes that serve as the roadmap to her family's past. Recently, a new chapter of the family history culminated in finding and proving that at least one of her ancestors served in the Revolutionary War. She was accepted as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) on Dec. 12, 2012 based on that proof.

In addition to Connie's submission to the DAR, a 1903 application for membership in the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) shows Nathan Reid served as captain of Reid's Company of the 14th Virginia Regiment, subsequently the 10th VA Regiment. He was commissioned Jan. 28, 1777, wounded at Brandywine Sept. 28, 1777, and sometime after November 1779 was transferred to the 1st Virginia Regiment.

He was one of the 80 men selected by General Anthony Wayne to assist in storming Stony Point and was also one of seven picked men who went with Ethan Allen when he captured Fort Ticonderoga from the British. His name appears on a list dated Dec. 27, 1782, showing the arrangement of the Virginia line. Capt. Reid retired Jan. 1, 1783. He lived the remainder of his life in Virginia and died Nov. 6, 1830 in Popular Grove near New London.

Ford attributes the assistance she received from other members of the DAR and associates in other genealogy forums as instrumental in helping her finally solve the mysteries surrounding her family and finding the proof of kinship to a Revolutionary War patriot.

Connie's great-great-great-grandmother Lucretia was born as a slave in 1790 during the presidency of George Washington. She made her way to Greenfield through Adams County in the early 1830s with help from Hugh Smart, a pioneer Greenfield businessman. Smart and his assistance prompted a lifelong respect and friendship with Lucretia. She was married to James Baird and he appears to have died prior to her arrival in Greenfield. Lucretia is buried in the Old Pioneer Cemetery in Greenfield.

Several of Lucretia's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are also buried in close proximity, as well as numerous other descendants, are buried in the newer Greenfield Cemetery. Lucretia died in 1855, and according to her will left Greenfield property and other possessions to her great-grandchildren.

It was during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln that Connie's great-grandfather, John W. Bird (1842-1916), enlisted June 24, 1863 at Camp Delaware, Ohio to fight for the north in the Civil War. He served in Company E, Fifth Regiment of the United States Colored Troops. John was wounded twice and after the war returned to the Greenfield area to become a farmer and raise his family. At his death in 1916, during the term of president Woodrow Wilson, he was buried in Greenfield.



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*Photo courtesy of the Greenfield Historical Society
Constance "Connie" Ford portrayed her great-great-great grandmother Lucretia, whose headstone she is seated beside, during a former "Ghost Walk" sponsored by the Greenfield Historical Society.*

A descendant named Charlie Byrd was serving in World War I at that same time. Charlie was an uncle to Connie and his service continued a long family tradition of serving the United States in the military. Note the spelling of the family name as "Bird" and "Byrd." The family began using the "Byrd" spelling for the family name after the Civil War. Prior to that era most of the family was unable to read or write and there was no consistency.

One of Connie's uncles, a young man named William Henry Byrd, graduated from [McClain High School](#) in 1935 when Franklin D. Roosevelt was president. He attended Wilberforce University for a year then went to Lexington, Ky. to study electronics. He graduated and entered military service in September 1942 as a Tuskegee Airman. He served in World War II and received an honorable discharge in 1946. He also served in the U.S. Air Force Reserves for three years after that. He died Jan. 18, 2004 and was buried in Cleveland.

Another family member, a cousin to Connie named Harvey Bayless, was from Frankfort and also served as a Tuskegee Airman. President George W. Bush awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to Major Bayless and the other 899 Tuskegee Airmen who were African American pilots, navigators, and flight support personnel who served in the segregated armed forces during World War II. However, it was President Franklin D. Roosevelt who personally intervened to have the unit formed.

This group of men consistently distinguished themselves in combat during the war. Their success resulted in President Harry Truman signing an executive order in 1948 officially ending racial segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. As an aside, Connie remarked that she had a special fondness for President Roosevelt because he was president in the year she was born. Many of the freedoms she enjoys today were just beginning during the time of the Tuskegee Airmen and their service to their country.

A more poignant story emerges about recent presidents. Connie preserved a 50th birthday party invitation for President Bill Clinton that her mother received. Connie's mother was excited about the party and planned to attend, but unfortunately was killed in an automobile accident prior to the date. President Clinton wrote a personal letter to Connie offering his condolences on the loss of her mother.

"I was so touched by his letter and concern and even today I treasure it," Connie said.

A happier occasion was in November 2001 when Connie was presented a U.S. flag that flew over the White House on Sept. 11 of that same year. George W. Bush was then living in the White House. The flag was presented to her by the U.S. Congress and signed by Ted Strickland in recognition of her efforts in preserving Highland County history.

*Several years ago Connie **Ford** portrayed her third great-grandmother Lucretia during the Greenfield Historical Society's annual Ghostwalk. That was a labor of love and living proof that Connie was her family's "Keeper of the Stories."*

Now, as then, Connie has a family story to share. It may be about Lucretia and Greenfield or it may be about another possible Revolutionary patriot she is searching for. Regardless of the story, there will be a president woven throughout. That president, just as the presidents from the past, will be the anchor that cements her family history to the history of the United States.