

See "Black Genealogy Celebrated" below

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## BLACK HISTORY MONTH | GENEALOGY | Tracing their pasts



PHOTOS BY JANE D. LEE

Pamela E. Foster, a chapter president of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, shows an old family Bible to participants as she shares tips on researching family histories during a presentation at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Nashville.

# TSU professor helps others trace history, forge connection to past

By AILENE TORRES  
Staff Writer

Black History Month is often a time for black Americans to study their cultural heritage. Pamela E. Foster suggests they may want to reflect a little closer to home. Foster, a Tennessee State University

## On the Web

These Web sites can be used to get more information on how to research your family history:

• [www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com)  
• [www.afrogeneas.com](http://www.afrogeneas.com)



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B32m6Kf7VYqGTTk3YmRwLVZxcEU/view?usp=sharing>

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TSU professor helps others trace history, forge connection to past

Photo caption: Pamela E. Foster, a chapter president of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, shows an old family Bible to participants as she shares tips on researching family histories during a presentation at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Nashville. JAE S. LEE / STAFF

By AILENE TORRES  
Staff Writer

Black History Month is often a time for black Americans to study their cultural heritage. Pamela E. Foster suggests they may want to reflect a little closer to home.

Foster, a Tennessee State University professor and the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society's Nashville chapter president, researched

her family tree back seven generations and works to help others do the same.

To move forward, black people need to know where they came from, she said. "It's important because the stories of our families are the stories of our country," Foster said.

Yesterday, she shared her experience with tips on how to research, compile and present a family history to a small group at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church on Sixth Avenue South.

The search for a connection to the past has become an increasingly popular pastime as books such as Thulani Davis' *My Confederate Kinfolk* and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s television series *African-American Lives*, which traces the lineage of several black celebrities back to Africa, become more mainstream.

For two years, Foster traced her family's roots from Prattville, Ala., to Birmingham. With the information she garnered, she wrote a book illustrated with pictures of her ancestors. Then Foster sewed a quilt with a patch representing relatives for the last seven generations.

The research is not always an easy task, said Gloria Haugabook McKissack. She said spelling variations of the same name or incomplete records for slaves can make a search difficult. And the glimpses into the past are not always happy memories. During her research, Haugabook McKissack learned the Ku Klux Klan lynched her great-grandfather.

"You may run into things that are unpleasant," she said. "But you just have to do it."

Both women suggest sitting down with older family members to record their oral histories. From there, get documents that paint a more accurate account.

The most important thing is to not throw anything away, Haugabook McKissack said. She suggested using family Bibles and even obituaries to get information.

But whatever the size of the task, don't be intimidated, Foster said.

"It's so important it's worth the effort," she said, whose family history book, *With the Faith of Benjamin*, is in libraries around the country including the Library of Congress.

"Don't feel as if you can't do it because you can't tell the whole story. Gather what you can - some part is better than no part."

# Black Genealogy Celebrated



Pamela S. Foster

The Nashville Chapter of the Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society is celebrating Black genealogy from 7 p.m. to

7 p.m. Sunday, February 5, 2006, at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church Parish Hall, 623 South Avenue South, Nashville.

The event is to explore to the community both the importance of writing genealogies of black families and how to do it.

"When telling and preserving the African-American story, we must tell the individual stories of black families and how they evolved to where they are now," said Pamela S. Foster, who is president of the chapter and teaches genealogy at Tennessee State University. "These stories are an invaluable part of our history."

Foster's fourth and latest book is her own family genealogy, titled *With the Faith of Ancestors*, and she will discuss and explain it during the celebration. Participants also will learn such valuable information as how to conduct interviews for genealogies, how to use the Internet for genealogy research, and how to overcome research/knowledge challenges.

The Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society Inc. was founded in 1977 in Washington, D.C., to preserve African-American family history, genealogy, and cultural diversity by spreading research techniques and disseminating information throughout the community. It promotes scholarly research, provides resources for historical and genealogical studies, creates a network of people with similar interests, and assists members in documenting their histories. It has 36 chapters.

The Nashville Chapter is the newest chap-



ter and was founded in November 2005. Its founding members are Dr. Cecil Churchworth Branch, Margaret Robinson Foster-Chenoweth, Delores Foster Evans, Pamela Evans Evans, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church (The Rev. Dennis Lind, rector), Rev. Ann Dillman McCallister, Michelangelo McCallister, Dr. Gloria Ragsdale McKeith, Lisa Brown Prince, Janet Carney Smith, and Gloria Ragsdale D. White.