

See "Black Genealogy Celebrated" below

BLACK HISTORY MONTH | GENEALOGY | Tracing their pasts



PHOTOS BY JANE G. 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.

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By ALINE TORRES

Staff Writer

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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
- www.ancestry.com



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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
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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 E. Foster

The Nashville Chapter of the African-American Historical and Genealogical Society is celebrating Black genealogy from 1 p.m. to

2 p.m. Sunday, February 3, 2008, at First Trinity Episcopal Church, Parish Hall, 1017 South Adams Street, Nashville.

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

"When telling and preserving the African-American story, we start off the individual stories of black families and how they evolved to where they are now," said Pamela E. Foster, who is president of the chapter and teacher-instructor at Tennessee State University. "They stories are an intrinsic part of our history."

Foster's fourth and latest book is her own family genealogy, titled "With the Wind of Memories," 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 maintain genealogical relationships through e-mail.

The African-American Historical and Genealogical Society Inc. was founded in 1975 in Washington, D.C., to promote African-American family history, genealogy, and cultural diversity by providing research tools, support, 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 serves as a resource in documenting their families. It has 26 chapters.

The Nashville Chapter is the newest chap-



er and was founded in September 2005. Its founding members are Dr. Linda C. Green, Humphrey Johnson, Rev. Charles Jenkins, Pastor Foster, Pamela Foster, Rev. Jerry Daniels, Emmanuel Church; Dr. Rev. Dr. James Lloyd, pastor; Rev. Dr. Julianne McCullough, St. Mel's Episcopal; Dr. Clinton Randolph, McCallum; Rev. Rev. Dr. Prince, Rev. Dr. George Smith, and Rev. Dr. Rev. Dr. White.