

THROUGH THE YEARS

AFRICAN - AMERICAN HISTORY IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

SUMMER 2001

Exhibit, "This Legacy is Yours," opens at Early American Museum

This Legacy is Yours: Celebrating the Lasting Contributions of African American Women opened June 2nd and will remain on display through September 30th. It is a joint project of the Early American Museum and the National Council of Negro Women and marks the beginning of the 20th anniversary of the local chapter of NCNW. In addition, this exhibit includes a number of quilts representing life experiences and memories shared.

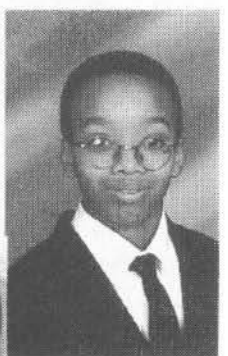
Astriana's History



I, Astriana Pierson, am the 10-year-old daughter of Anita J. Lomax and Stacey Pierson. My grandparents are Debrae A. Phillips and Leon N. Lomax. My granny Lomax told me this story about my great-great-grandfather Charles E. Phillips and his family. Charles E. Phillips, Sr. was born May 26, 1889 in Kansas City, Missouri. His parents were Eliza Johnson and Jack Phillips. Great-great Grandpa Phillips married Juanita Overton on October 29, 1908 in Danville, Illinois,

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Continuing Memories Shared.....



Just as in *The Legacy* exhibit, it is important to preserve the history of our families, where we came from, family memories and our role in the community. For example, Mathia Wheatfall Sanders is recording her memories for her grandson, Carlton Gregory Bruett in a book titled "Grandmother's Book of Memories." In this book, she shares that she was born July 3, 1942 at home on Libby Street in Ft. Worth, Texas. The house she was born in was built by her grandfather. Her nickname as a little girl was "Marble Eyes." Mathia's mother, Iola, was a strong self-determined woman who, with a fourth grade education, taught herself to sew and made beautiful clothes for her children. Her father, James Wheatfall, died when she was two years old so she does not remember very much about him. The ancestors of the Wheatfall family were slaves in Alabama. Earl Wheatfall, however, was able to amass several acres of land which is still in the family today.

As a young girl, Mathia attended the Strangers Rest Baptist Church which was pastored by her Uncle R.W. West. She was baptized in the river at

the age of 7 or 8. Reflecting back on her younger years, Mathia recalled being part of the Easter programs; celebrating the 19th of June or Juneteenth Day in Texas as well as the 4th of July; big family dinners on Thanksgiving and sweet potato pie; the exchange of gifts and the family dinners at Christmas; and of course the "Watch-meeting" in Church on New Year's Eve.

Mathia attended grade school, Junior High and graduated from junior high in 1954. She attended senior high school at Lake Como in Texas for three years and earned her high school diploma in Omaha, Nebraska. She then attended the University of Nebraska in Omaha and received a Bachelor's Degree in Social Welfare with a minor degree in Psychology. With these skills in hand, she worked as a Counselor with pregnant and parenting teens; provided hospice care to the terminally ill and home health care to the elderly.



The Donaldson Family



I, Ryan Donaldson, am the son of Mae Nunnery and Carlos Donaldson, Jr. and the grandson of Willeta and Carlos Donaldson, Sr. My mother was born July 9, 1962 in Magnolia Mississippi, where she attended grade school. Her family moved to Chicago where she attended the George Westinghouse Area Vocational High School. She participated in The Future Business Leaders of America Club and graduated in 1980. In 1981 she moved to Champaign-Urbana to attend the University of Illinois and upon the completion of her studies here, she was employed as an Accountant at the U of I. According to my mom, Champaign-Urbana is a good place to raise a family.

My dad, Carlos Jr., was born July 15, 1960, in the hospital at the Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. My grandfather, Carlos Donaldson, Sr., was in the Air Force. Dad attended kindergarten at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Thomas Paine, and Brookens Junior High School and graduated from Urbana Senior High School in 1978. He joined the service and after finishing his tour of duty, he returned to Champaign-Urbana where he was employed at the University of Illinois College of Agriculture.

Willeta Hassell Donaldson, my grandmother, was born in

Champaign, Illinois, October 6, 1940. She attended elementary, junior high and Central High School and graduated with honors with the class of 1958. She was employed as a stenographer at the University of Illinois and progressed through the ranks to become the first African American woman to be an Administrative Assistant in her department.

My grandfather, Carlos Donaldson, Sr., was born February 17, 1934 in Spring City, Tennessee. He walked to school during the elementary and junior high years. For high school, he attended the Booker T. Washington High School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he was a member of the Glee Club. He graduated in 1951.

In 1958, he came to Champaign-Urbana with the military where he met my grandmother, Willeta Hassell and they were married. He remained in Champaign-Urbana and was employed as a mail messenger at the University of Illinois in 1962. From 1962 to 1981, he worked under three supervisors - Mr. Raymond Scott, Mr. Clarence Taylor and Mr. Fred Thomas. Beginning in 1981, he became the Supervisor and remained in that position until his retirement. During his years of service at the U of I, he completed his course work and graduated from the U of I in 1979.

ASTRIANA
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and to this union was born five children, all of whom are deceased except for my great grandfather, David R. Phillips, who lives in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Great-great Grandpa Phillips, at a very early age, became interested in politics and moved to Springfield, Illinois. From 1917 to 1939, he was an inspector for the Department of Registration and Education and worked with the Council of Social Agencies and the Springfield Urban League. He organized and promoted the Frederick Douglass Savings and Loan Association along with his own Mutual Insurance Company. He returned to Champaign in 1939 and promoted low-cost housing in Carver Park, Burch Village, Dunbar Court and Attucks Place. He was active in the Arrowhead Council and Troop 11 of the Boy Scouts of America for 25 years. He was appointed by the City Council to the Champaign Housing Commission and served as honorary Vice President of the Champaign County Urban League. He was elected to the board of the Francis Nelson Children's Home, now the Francis Nelson Health Center. He also served with the Council of Social Agencies and the Champaign-Urbana League of Women Voters.

I was proud to find out that the city of Champaign named a street in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Subdivision in his honor. My other great-great grandfather, Cecil Nelson, also has a street named after him. Great-great Grandpa Charles E. Phillips, Sr., died at 86 years of age on June 19, 1975.

I also learned that my great-great-great-great grandfather David Johnson was one of the founders of the Second Baptist Church (now Salem Baptist Church) and donated the land on which the present church was built. In his honor, a charcoal sketched picture of him hung in the church for a very long time. This was a great way to learn about the history of my family as I didn't know there was so much.

The Webb Family



I, Kenisha Webb, am the daughter of Ollice and Kenneth Webb. My mother was born in Brownsville, Tennessee and lived there most of her life. My father was born in a small town in Mississippi. Both of their families moved to Chicago, Illinois, when they were very young. In Chicago, my dad attended Harper High School and played football and baseball and participated in wrestling. My mom attended Haywood High School where she was a cheerleader; a member of the Student Council and was the editor of the newspaper. Because of my dad's job with K-Mart Corporation, he was transferred to this area in 1994 and Urbana has become our home. My parents feel that the Urbana School District is very strong academically and that this area provides a lot in sports, theater and other recreational activities for kids.

My mom attended the University of Tennessee at Martin. She was initially interested in a nursing career however later, she changed her major to social work. She started working at Christie Clinic in Patient Accounts in 1994. My dad just received his Master of Arts in Teaching from Olivet Nazarene University this year. He and my mom are both sports enthusiasts and believe in staying physically fit by walking and

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From the Grandmother of Talonda Giboney

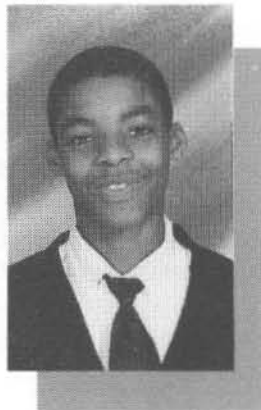
I, Irene Phillips, was born July 17, 1939 in Yoma, Tennessee. My family consisted of my father, mother and five children. Our house was in the country on farmland my parents had bought. It was a happy home, interesting and exciting, also very creative and educational. I attended grade school for grades one through eight in a one-room school and graduated from high school in Yoma, Tennessee. I liked my teachers because they were concerned with my progress. My favorite subject was math because I liked numbers.

In 1958, I was married to Russell Phillips and we had four children: Shawn, Lee, Glen and Ronnie. They are all grown up now. In 1965 our family moved to Champaign where I attended Parkland College and studied Accounting. My present job is with the State Department of Natural Resources as manager. Technology has changed our lives and if I could give a youngster one piece of advice it would be to work hard, get good grades and stay in school because if you do not, you will not be able to get a decent job.

I am a member of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Church pianist and lead singer in the choir; Sunday School teacher in the Youth Department, Secretary of the Women United of Mt. Olive Baptist Church; Director of the Praise Dancers and I serve as the Assistant Secretary of the Woodriver District Association Women's Auxiliary.



To Be Remembered!



Terry Lewis:

helpful, cheerful, brave;
wishes to have the eyesight of an eagle;
dreams of making an amusement park;
wants to find a cure for AIDS;
who wonders about what's going to happen next;
who fears drowning;
who is afraid of going to hell;
who likes pepperoni pizza;
who believes that Jesus died for us;
who loves God;
who loves dogs;
who loves to play football;
who loves ice cream;
who plans to be a football player;
who plans to be a faithful husband;
who plans to win the super bowl ten times;
who became a millionaire and a great football player.

THE WEBB FAMILY
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running. They both encourage me and my sister, Krystal, to do the same. He has coached both of us in tennis since we were very young. The highlight of my tennis career thus far came two years ago when I qualified as one out of the top sixteen players in the Ten and Under Division to be in the tournament held in San Diego, California. Dad also coaches me in basketball. He often brags about his running in the Chicago Marathon.

We are members of the Bethel A.M.E. Church and really feel that we are part of the Church family. Overall, my parents are extremely pleased with this community.

African-American History:
Today and Tomorrow

The lifeline of any newsletter is the reaction of its readers. Please help us spread the word! Xerox and share this newsletter with others. Send your comments c/o Early American Museum, P.O. Box 1040, Mahomet, IL 61853 or phone 217-586-2612. If you would like to be included on our mailing list, please call 217-586-2612. More importantly, share in our mission by writing and sharing your reflections of our local history. We need YOU!

Visit our website at:
www.advancenet.net/~early

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