

# STORIES TO TELL

## THROUGH HISTORY’S PAGES

### Researchers unravel the puzzle of finding Black data

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The difficulty in researching a census of enslaved people in Washington County in 1860 — when records revealed only numbers, not names — was the topic of May’s History Happy Hour in Jonesborough.

But there is a way, according to William Isom with Black in Appalachia.

At the event, sponsored by the Heritage Alliance, Isom told those present, both in the boardroom of the Chester Inn and on Facebook, how his agency had obtained an accurate census of both the free and enslaved population of the county.

Black in Appalachia is a non-profit entity that works in collaboration with public media, residents, university departments, libraries, archives and community organizations to highlight the history and contributions of African-Americans in the development of the Mountain South and its culture. The group accomplishes these objectives through research, local narratives, public engagement and exhibitions. Black in Appalachia is a community service for Appalachian residents and families with roots in the region. The census work on which Isom’s talk was based is being conducted by historian Kathleen Kelley. It is supported by the Federal 400 Years of African American Commission.

Figures that Isom shared reveal the following: the free population of color amounted to 313 people; those enslaved amounted to 909 with a population total then of 1,222. The 313-figure appeared in the 1860 census records which had an enslaved population of 290 and when totaled with the slave schedules this put the figure at 532. The number of slaveholders in the county totaled 67. The largest slaveholder in the county had 22 slaves.

When asked about the reason he thought there were a number of free persons of color in Washington County before emancipation, Isom pointed out that there was anti-slavery sentiment in the county.

As stated in the Tennessee Encyclopedia: “Published by Elihu Embree at Jonesborough in 1820, the Emancipator was the first newspaper in the United States solely devoted to the abolition of slavery... According to Embree, the purpose of the Emancipator was ‘to advocate the abolition of slavery and to be a repository of tracts on that interesting and important subject.’”

Isom also said that when the State of Virginia freed a person of color, he or she was then required to leave the state — with Washington County in nearby Tennessee an area where settlement was permitted.

The number of Black people in Appalachia statistically varies according to Isom, both because of what researchers consider as the area it encompasses and the method used for research.

The Appalachian Region, as defined by Congress and used by the Commission, includes all of West Virginia and portions of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Black in Appalachia has not researched this large an area in gathering their statistics.

Statistically, the number of enslaved people in Washington County in 1860 comprised 6.7 percent of the population; in Sullivan County it was 8 percent and in Knox County, 16.6 percent.

The details in the Black in Appala-



PHOTO FROM THE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

chia report introduced to Thursday’s audience is amazing. Isom handed out an eight-page statistical report that listed the district where an enslaved person lived, the dwelling number, the family number in the census, last and first names, age, birth years, gender, race and occupation — for example field hand, servant or blacksmith.

Speaker Isom’s interest in Black history was explained in an earlier article written by Herald & Tribune Staff Writer Marina Waters in June 2020. Isom said he looked through black and white photos of his ancestors in his personal research. Little did he know it would help him discover and educate others on the history of Black history in the Appalachian region.

He gave a presentation titled “Black Cultural Spaces: Holding on, Loss and New Use” to an audience at the McKinney Center.

“My family’s been here (in Appalachia) for a really long time,” said Isom, who is originally from Hamblen County. “I wanted to show this picture particularly because researching my own family was how I kind of cut my own teeth. It was kind of the training ground for the work I’m doing right now.”

May was the first time he had given a program at the History Happy Hour.

Isom said that if your family lived in the Buffalo Ridge District of Jonesboro, Washington County, Tennessee in 1860, you have a research bonus. William H. Crouch recorded the Census for Buffalo Ridge that year, but he did not follow the guidelines to document only free individuals. Instead, he listed white, Black and free Black individuals. The Black individuals were later crossed out, but the information is still visible and provides the researcher with the name, age, gender, profession, and place of birth of enslaved individuals. Crouch was a postmaster, farmer and minister. For additional information, see also on the web: “African American Genealogy Research in Washington County, Tennessee” by Rose Tate.

Speaking of accomplishments

1860

- 909 Enslaved People in Washington County
- 64 Free People of Color in Jonesboro

**Fifty Dollars Reward**

**R**UNAWAY FROM THE SUBSCRIBER at Jonesboro', Washington county, Tenn., on Monday morning, Dec. 8th, a girl named **MOLLIE**, 16 years old, about 5 feet high, weighs about 120 pounds, and is rather copper color. I bought her last February at Morristown, at the sale of Blevins & Franklin. Her mother belongs to Dr. Drake, at Bull's Gap. She may be lurking around his premises. I will pay the above reward if confined in jail so I can get her, or delivered to me. If she is caught in the county, I will pay \$20.

dec12dtf

**Z. L. BURSON.**

by Black individuals, Isom showed a slide of the historical marker in Johnson City honoring Dr. Hezekiah B. Hankal. This Tennessee Historical Marker is located at the intersection of West Market Street (State Highway 91) and Whitney Street, on the left when traveling west on West Market Street. The marker, which can be somewhat difficult to locate, is at or near this postal address: 243 W Market St, Johnson City and reads: “Ordained by Boones Creek Christian Church in 1866, Dr. Hezekiah B. Hankal established five churches in the region. A physician, his medical practice was confined to the African-American and the Cherokee-Dutch communities until the 1873 cholera epidemic desegregated his practice. Certified to teach in the public schools by the State of Tennessee in 1873, he served as one of the supervisors of ‘colored schools.’ In 1887, he was elected as an alderman for Johnson City. Dr. Hankal was one of the 1893 found-

ers of Langston Normal School. His house was located on the corner of Market and Montgomery Streets. He is buried in West Lawn Cemetery.”

The Washington County Health Department, 219 Princeton Road, is named for Dr. Hankal.

Additional information about Isom’s organization with a home office at 8004 Andrew Johnson Hwy in Whitesburg, Tennessee, can be found at <http://www.blackinappalachia.org>.

The June History Happy Hour will be held Thursday, June 16, from 6:30 until 8 p.m. Curtis Buchanan, known for making Windsor chairs in much the same way as they were 200 years ago, will speak about, “Traditional Spoon Making.” His home is in the heart of Jonesborough’s Historic District. Buchanan has published numerous articles on chairmaking and has taught in craft schools both in the United States and abroad. His chairs are in the permanent collection of the Ten-

nessee State Museum, the Southern Highlands Craft Guild, the Tennessee State Governor’s Mansion and Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson.

Dr. Bill Kennedy, who was in the audience at the May History Hour, will be the July speaker. His topic is titled, “Jonesborough’s 19th Century Brick Buildings: Handmade Beauties.” Kennedy said he will explain how 19th century designer craftsmen carefully selected locally available materials, shaped the materials into bricks and mortar and assembled those structural components into the enduring brick buildings still in use in Jonesborough today.

Kennedy says the physical characteristics of natural materials help people understand how Jonesborough’s historic buildings differ from more modern buildings and how the historic buildings should be maintained and repaired. He plans to show examples of this antique, handmade artwork.

Washington Co. TN Population of Color							
Who Appears on the Census				Who Appears on the Slave Schedules			
	Listed Only On Census	Slave Schedule Crossover	Total		Listed only on Slave Schedules	Census Crossover	Total
Free Population of Color	313	0	313	845	0	0	0
Enslaved Population	290 *	242	532		377	242	619
Slaveholders	N/A	67	67		95	67	162