

**SHARON MCGEEIN**

Former Teacher, Charles City, Virginia

Accompanied by Students

Daysha Christian and Yolanda Wade

Before the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

On S. 2495, the National Liberty Memorial Act

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Good Afternoon. Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission. My name is Sharon MCGeein. I have come today from Charles City County, Virginia, a small county that lies on the James River between Williamsburg and Richmond. With me today are two young women who descend from Revolutionary War soldiers and patriots. We believe that a monument to slaves and free blacks who served in the Revolutionary War belongs on the Mall in our Nations Capitol and hope you will share that view.

I am a history teacher in James City County Alternative School and previously taught in Charles City. My career has been spent teaching minority students. I struggle daily to interest my students in history because they feel it does not have anything to do with them and with their own heritage.

The population of Charles City is less than 7,000 people. For the last 300 years a majority of the population has been African American. Local genealogists --- and I am not one of them --- estimate that a majority of the county's residents descend from Revolutionary War soldiers, sailors and patriots. For this reason – a monument on the Mall commemorating the service of slaves and free blacks is a matter of particular interest to our community.

Why a monument on the Mall? We see several important reasons.

Generations of historians and lineage societies have written these men out of our history books and collective understanding of the Revolutionary War. A monument is a necessary tool to re-educate America about its origins. It is necessary because this was not any war – it was the war that gave birth to our nation. There are no black faces among the Signers of the Declaration of Independence or in the Constitutional Convention, but there were black faces among the soldiers freezing and dying at Valley Forge, among the prisoners taken at Charleston and in the victorious army at Yorktown. Monuments on the Mall are icons to the millions of Americans who visit our Nations Capitol each year – including Charles City students on field trips. The monuments speak about our values and they help to form our collective understanding of America.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing the views of our community.

Daysha Christian and Yolanda Wade will speak to you briefly about their ancestors who served.

## **DAYSHA CHRISTIAN**

Good afternoon, Mr./Ms/ Chairman my name is Daysha Christian. I am a rising 8th grader at John Rolfe Middle School in Henrico County.

A monument to black patriots is important to me because I want people to know that black men like my ancestors fought to protect our freedom and create our country.

I am a descendant of two Revolutionary War soldiers --William Thomas and Sgt. Isaac Brown. I am also a descendant of a man who provided beef to the Continental Army named Abraham Brown.

When Sgt. Isaac Brown joined the army he was described this way. He was 18 years old and 5' 2" tall. He had black hair, black eyes and a black complexion. Isaac Brown was not a white man, or an almost white man – he was a black man. After the war he was required to register with the court and carry a paper proving he was a free man every where he went. He was forbidden to own a gun. I think he deserves to be honored for fighting for freedoms he could not enjoy himself.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking today.

## **YOLANDA WADE**

Good Afternoon. Mr./Ms. Chairman and members of the Commission. My name is Yolanda Wade. Last week I graduated from Charles City High School, and I will be attending Norfolk State in the fall.

I earnestly hope that the commission will recommend that land be set aside for a monument on the Mall to the slaves and free persons of color who helped to found this country by their service and support for the Patriot cause in the Revolutionary War. Today, I would like to tell you just a little about 3 of my ancestors whose service would be commemorated by this monument.

My 7th great grandfather was a free black man named Joseph Wallace who was born in James City County. He served in the 1st Virginia Regiment on the Continental line – was at Valley Forge, in the Battle of Monmouth and Siege of Yorktown. He should have received a bounty of \$150 and 150 acres of land, but his agent – shortly to be Virginia Governor John M. Gregory -- never obtained his land. Some time later he finally got what was due him.

My 6th great grandfather William Thomas was a free mulatto from Charles City County who served two terms of enlistment. On the first he also served with the 1st Virginia regiment on the continental line. He too suffered at Valley Forge and fought in the Battle of Monmouth. On his second enlistment he was made a personal servant to Gen. Peter Muhlenburg one of the area commanders in the final Siege of Yorktown. At the time of his pension application William Thomas was living on land he rented from the family of Benjamin Harrison V, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

My 6th great grandfather Abraham Brown was a free mulatto from Charles City. He was unusually wealthy for a free person of color. He owned a farm and was compensated for 500 pounds of beef supplied to the continental army.

For me – and for thousands like me – who descend from such men the monument is a personal matter, but for all persons of color a monument is a national acknowledgment that we too are Patriots and Founders.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking today.