

An amazing grace

Agnes Kane Callum, my mother, is a wonder to behold. Historian, genealogist and researcher, she was born in Baltimore, the fifth child among 12. Her parents were the late Phillip Moten and Mary Kane (nee Gough) of St. Mary's County in southern Maryland. She was educated in Baltimore public schools, and at age 44 she returned to school and earned her bachelor of arts and master's degrees from Morgan State University in 1973 and 1975, respectively, while maintaining her full-time job with the United States Postal Service. In 1973, she was designated a Fulbright-Hayes Scholar, which led her to study at the University of Ghana at Legon, Accra. In 2008 she received an honorary doctorate degree in history from St. Mary's College.

As an undergraduate she wrote a paper for a Black History class titled "The Acquisition of Land by Free Blacks in St. Mary's County Maryland." Through her research in the Maryland State archives, she discovered information regarding her family, which was confirmed by her parents. This research enabled her to begin to investigate and document the genealogy of her own family. She can now trace her family roots, a very difficult task for most African Americans, to the mid-17th century in St. Mary's County. Flower of the Forest was the name of land her grandparents purchased there.

Much of what is known about the history of Historic St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in East Baltimore is the result of research and writings by Callum. St. Francis was the first and is the oldest Catholic Church officially established, in 1863, for Negroes. Her paternal grandfather, Henry Kane, was born a slave on the Sotterley Plantation in Hollywood, Md., in 1860. In 1896, he joined St. Francis Parish. His direct descendants, including Callum, are and have been continuous, active members of the parish for 117 years.

A frequent columnist for The Catholic Review, Callum has written about Colonial Maryland and the role played by people of African descent, including Mathias de Sousa, one of nine indentured servants brought by Jesuit missionaries on the Ark when it arrived in St. Mary's River in March, 1634. He completed his servitude in 1638 and later became a mariner and fur trader. In 1642 he was a member of the legislative Assembly of freemen. He was the first man of African descent and

Catholic to participate in an assembly of English America.

Additional articles in The Catholic Review by Callum include the stories of the two St. Peter Claver Parishes, one in southern Maryland the other in Baltimore City; the Oblate Sisters of Providence; and Father Charles Randolph Uncles, to name a few.

In 1979, Callum published her first book, "Kane Butler Genealogy - History of a Black Family." This was followed by 25 volumes of "Flower of the Forest," a black genealogic journal published annually for 25 years. A tenacious researcher, she produced additional books, including "7th Regiment USCT of Maryland (United States Colored Troops)," documenting the names of those colored troops who served in the Civil War; "Slave Statistics"; "Black Marriages of St. Mary's County" and "Black Marriages of Anne Arundel County Maryland."

In 2006, a complete collection of her work was donated to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture in Baltimore. In 2007, the local chapter of the Baltimore Afro American Historical Genealogic Society was named the "Agnes Kane Callum Chapter." She is a founding member of the chapter.

Callum, 86, will travel Nov. 19 with the annual Black Catholic History Pilgrimage to St. Mary's County. On Dec. 1, at 12:15 p.m., Callum and I will present a lecture on ancestry research at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

Martina P. Callum, M.D., is an emergency medicine physician, freelance writer and the daughter of Agnes Kane Callum.