

COLONIAL DAMES 17th CENTURY: Tennessee

WOMEN'S GROUP WORKS TO PRESERVE PAST

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For those interested in their ancestry, there are a variety of organizations to join, however there is one that is a little tougher to join than the rest:

Colonial Dames 17th Century.

Members must be female and able to prove their ancestry back to one of the 13 original colonies before 1701.

(Pictured: Sandy McRae and Lana Davis portray Mrs. Elbridge Gerry and

Mrs. John Adams in a one-act play about the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia called "Tea for Two" at the Tansi Family, Community and Education Club).

It's a tricky and time-intensive task. Some records are hard to track down, and some records even contradict each other. It takes someone with a passion for ancestry to be able to have enough patience to put the puzzle pieces together and figure out a provable lineage. At this time, there are only a little more than 11,000 members of Colonial Dames 17th Century in the whole United States.

"That sounds like a lot, but by comparison, Daughters of the American Revolution's active membership is almost 180,000," member Lynn Constan said. "But they don't have to prove their lineage as far back."

The local branch, John McKnitt Chapter, was founded in 2008 by Kandy Smith after she found that she could trace her lineage back far enough. However instead of joining the Nashville chapter, she decided to start one in **Putnam County**. Today there are a little more than 30 members who participate in the meetings that are held four times a year.

"Even though you have to prove your lineage to join, that's not really the point of the organization. It's a service organization," Constan said.

Locally, one of the main objectives of the group is to support veterans. They regularly make care packages, give money and donated time to area veterans hospitals, homes and organizations. They also collect supplies for Fisher House, which provides a free place to stay for the families of veterans admitted at the VA hospital in Murfreesboro.

“Patriotism is one of the key things with the organization, along with education and historic preservation,” Smith said.

As a part of their quest in historic preservation, they recently donated two books to the Putnam County Library: “The Extraordinary Suzy Wright: A Colonial Woman on the Frontier” by Teri Kanefield, and “Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia” by Lyman Chalkey.

The local group has also succeeded in getting White Plains, the plantation home near Algood, put on the National Register of Historic Places. The home provided a key stopover along the Walton Road, an early stagecoach road connecting Knoxville and Nashville, and in 1854 served as a temporary county seat for the newly-formed Putnam County.

“Even though this is not a colonial building, our group thought it was an important historical site that needed to be preserved,” Smith said.

Nationally, the organization supports the Poccahantas Project, which raises money for the maintenance of the famous Native American’s grave in England. They also fund the Poccahantas Scholarship which is given to Native American students studying in the medical field. The national group also maintains a collection of historical documents from the colonial time period.

The John McKnitt Chapter is one of 13 chapters of the National Society Colonial Dames of the 17th Century located in Tennessee. The chapter meets four times a year, alternating between locations in Cookeville and Crossville.

For more information about the local chapter of the society, contact Constan at 970-946-8480 or lynncon530@hotmail.com.

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