

From: bennerp@peak.org

Date: 5/14/2015 4:15:22 PM

To: lumoto@aol.com

Subject: Gorman and Bounds Family connections?

Hi, Sherry:

I am so excited about finding your wonderful website about the Bounds family. I thought that I would email you because you might have a piece or two to add to the following puzzle. I think that you might be interested in this story, too.

This is the story:

Tony (my husband) and I live in Corvallis, Oregon, and in 2004 we found ourselves saving a house.

This house was the home of Hannah Gorman (mother) and Eliza Gorman (daughter), who were black pioneers who came across the Oregon Trail in 1844 with John Thorp and his family. Eliza was around 6 years old at the time. The 1850 Federal Census listed them as living with John Thorp on his claim that was located between Independence and Corvallis, Oregon (a couple of John's sons owned adjacent land claims, including Fielden Thorp who was married to Margaret Bounds).

In 1857, Eliza bought two lots in Corvallis, and the 1860 census lists for the first time the census records list them as living in Corvallis, Oregon on these lots. Hannah was a laundress and Eliza was a seamstress, and were members of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Corvallis.

I think that Hanna and Eliza Gorman were amazing people. (I would like to send you a copy of Eliza's obituary, but I thought that I should not attach anything with this first email since it could be thought of as spam. I did paste a small version – see below).

The house was recently listed on the National Register of Historic places (see article):

http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/a-saved-history-oregon-s-oldest-house-owned-by-black/article_60180ca1-4927-5569-beae-6816ef85da0c.html. (Please note that a couple of facts are inaccurate in the article.)

Hiram Gorman, (Hannah's son), moved with his family to Oregon in the 1870s, and he seemed to have been an amazing person as well. A reference suggests that he was a slave until the Emancipation Act.

Does this fit into your ancestors' story (I hope?)? Randall Thorp, who is a descendent of John Thorp, said that Hannah and Eliza were given to Fielden Thorp and Margaret Bounds by her father John Bird Bounds (who seemed like he was an amazing person as well), as a wedding gift when they were married in about 1842.

So, now you can see how excited I am to be able to talk with someone about this past. I am sure that you can think of some of the discussion to explore, but here are the several that I can think of:

1. Do you think that Hannah and Eliza were with the Bounds family, and were given to the Thorps, as Randy says?
2. If so, do you know where there might be records of the John Bird Bounds slaves?
3. In what state did John Bird Bounds and family live -- Tennessee??
4. Hypotheses of where the "Gorman" name might have come from?

5. One newspaper source when Hannah died said that she had been married. Thoughts?
6. Eliza was supposed to be "mulatto?" Could her father have white, or more possibly mulatto as well?
7. Hiram supposedly was a teamster during the Civil War for the Union. Thoughts?

8. Could there be descendants of Hannah and Eliza still back east?
9. Is there anyone else who would be a good contact for information?

I so hope that my questions do not feel prying into your family's past -- and I am very much hoping that at least we can discover where the Gorman name came from. And, I would like to share with you what I have found, if you are interested in the material.

Take care,

Patricia Benner

bennerp@peak.org

A saved history: Oregon's oldest house owned by black pioneers makes the National Register of Historic Places



- Patricia Benner, owner of the Gorman House in Corvallis, looks through historic documents in the home's kitchen Tuesday morning. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office has announced that the Gorman House is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places



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- Homeowner Patricia Benner strolls along the outside of the Gorman House, which historians say is the oldest known existing residence in Oregon directly tied to early black pioneers.



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- Patricia Benner adjusts curtains in the kitchen area of the Gorman House.



A flight of stairs leads the way to the two bedrooms upstairs at the Gorman House.



The Gorman House in Corvallis is unique because historians say it was built by former slaves

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- The house originally rested on corner posts instead of foundation



Amanda Cowan, Gazette-Times

Patricia Benner, owner of the Gorman House in Corvallis, looks through historic documents in the home's kitchen Tuesday morning. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office has announced that the Gorman House is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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[Gorman House~Corvallis](#)

A small Corvallis house that is the oldest in Oregon to be built by black pioneers has been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The house at 641 N.W. Fourth St. originally was built for Hannah and Eliza Gorman, a mother and daughter who moved to Oregon as slaves but who built a life in Corvallis that was perhaps not typical of the times.

“They were beloved,” said Patricia Benner, a retired river ecologist and historian. She and her husband, Tony Howell, bought the house in 2004 because it was about to be burned as a fire department training exercise.

“I knew I had to rescue it.” She also wanted to tell the story of the people behind the house.

Benner and local historians Mary Gallagher of the Benton County Historical Society and Oregon State University archivist May Dasch pieced together this account over the following years:

Hannah and Eliza Gorman’s names appear in the 1844 roster of John Thorpe’s Oregon Trail Company as “Eliza, a mulato girl” and “Aunt Hannah, a negress.”

They lived for a time with John Thorpe’s family, and an 1850 census listed the Gormans as members of his household on his donation land claim in Polk County.

By 1856, however, mother and daughter had moved to Corvallis, when Eliza was about 16 and Hannah was 48. On land purchased from William Dixon, one of Corvallis’ founders, Hannah and Eliza built a modest one-story dwelling with a mud-mortared chimney (still there) where they operated a laundry and sewed clothing.

A letter written in September 1861 by Catherine Blaine of Lebanon, the wife of a Methodist missionary, reflects the attitudes of the times as it described her impressions of the Gorman home/business and of Eliza, “a mulatto girl,” who was to make over a black silk dress for her while she waited — and observed:

“I must stop here and tell how nice everything was at Eliza’s. She and her mother, Hannah, live together, take in washing and sewing. They will wash from \$1.50 to \$2.00 worth in the morning and then Eliza will do a day’s work at sewing. She has a machine and some days does \$2.50 worth in a day ... Everything about the house is as clean and neat as can be, some of the negro love of ornament displaying itself. Their bed valances, ruffled and starched, their pillow and bolster cases trimmed; such handsome bed quilts, too; then the bed was so perfect and sweet.”

Eliza died at age 30. Her obituary, published July 17, 1869, in the Corvallis Gazette, also offered insights into how she was regarded:

“Her intelligence, modesty, kind and sympathetic disposition, consistent Christian life and uniform courteous behavior has won the respect and confidence of the entire community. Herself and (her) aged mother, by industry and economy, had built them a comfortable home, furnished it in good style and surrounded it with fruit, flowers and everything necessary to human comfort and happiness. They seemed to live only for each other, and to make others happy.”

The obituary also noted "The large number of citizens in attendance and the attention she received during her illness was the strongest proof of the high estimation in which she was held. She will be missed, and her loss mourned, by nearly every family in Corvallis.”

Soon after her daughter’s death, Hannah moved to Portland and sold the house in 1875. But she returned to Corvallis and was living there at the time of her death in 1888. Both she and Eliza are buried in Crystal Lake Cemetery.

Listing the house on the National Register is honorary, but it does open the door to state and federal tax breaks and preservation grants, B.A. Beirle of Preservation Works, a Corvallis educational association, said Wednesday.

And there is plenty of work to be done. The house has been extensively modified and damaged over the years, although some original portions remain. Benner said the first order of business is to get a foundation under the house.

During that work, samples of soil will be taken to search for lye or other evidence of the laundry operation that once was there.

Tuesday, Benner's affection for the house was reflected in the way she carefully placed a frilled curtain in the window of the kitchen in what likely was the area where washing was done. A rug, table and vase of spring flowers decorated in the living room as part of showing it for the first time since its listing. It won't be its last.

In May, the house will be part of a seven-stop bus tour by the Salem-based Oregon Black Pioneers Association.

“It’s all very exciting,” Beirle said. “The modesty of the Gorman House belies its significance to Oregon.”

Theresa Novak is the city editor and opinion page editor at the Corvallis Gazette-Times. She can be contacted at 541-758-9527 or theresa.novak@lee.net.

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Tags

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