

Profiles in Meriden's Black History -
Martha M. Franklin, founder of the National Association of
Colored Graduate Nurses.

In 1929, Adah B. Thomas wrote "Pathfinders, A History of the Progress of the Colored Graduate Nurses." The first edition of her book, available on the African-American Biographical Database, contains a picture of Martha Franklin, founder of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. Martha spent much of her childhood and young adulthood in Meriden.

An article in the Meriden Daily Republican dated 6/21/1884 listed Martha as having had perfect attendance for the last term at room #13 of the Corner School. Another MDR article (6/29/85) reported her admittance into Meriden High School. "Pathfinders" details her nursing education - Martha graduated from the Women's Hospital in Philadelphia, the only woman of color in her class. Relegated to private duty upon her return to Meriden, Martha headed first to New Haven for more private duty nursing but was able to obtain post-graduate work at Lincoln Hospital in New York City. The opportunities available for her advancement at Lincoln Hospital, and not in her home town or home state, were available only because Lincoln Hospital was an African-American institution. Pathfinders described her achievements - an appointment as a public school nurse in NYC, post-graduate work at Columbia University, and the almost unbelievable diligence she displayed in founding the NACGN.

She began by writing letters. By 1907, after undertaking a survey the year before, she sent out one thousand five hundred letters pushing for an assembly of what was then referred to as "colored graduate nurses." Via the Lincoln Hospital Alumni Association and St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church, the NACGN met in NYC on Aug. 25, 1908. Martha was elected as the first president. Her goals were to: "develop leadership ... promote higher standards along administrative and educational lines and secure cooperation, and more professional contact with nursing leaders of the world." (Pathfinders, p. 203) The organization flourished, as the picture of the 1921 convention attests to, and Martha at one point was historian for the organization.

"The Encyclopedia of African-American Civil Rights - from Emancipation to the Present" speaks of the NACGN under an entry for Mabel Staupers, the organization's last president. Ms. Staupers disbanded the NACGN in 1951 after desegregation had occurred in many of our nation's nursing institutions, including "most of the formerly all white nursing schools."

Martha Franklin's family history proved to be just as fascinating as she was - in fact it was researching her family roots that led to the discovery of her strength and major accomplishments. Originally from New Milford, Martha's family had settled in Meriden by 1875 when the 1875-76 Meriden City Directory listed her father Henry as a teamster living on 22 High School Avenue. On 10/18/1877, the M.D.R. wrote a blurb on "The Colored Church" in which Henry Franklin was noted as a trustee of the A.M.E. Zion Mission in Meriden. At age 18, Henry had enlisted into Co. K of the 29th Ct. Regiment. In 1879 he joined Merriam Post #8, GAR of Meriden. Eventually forced by disabilities to claim a Civil War pension, Henry Jay Franklin died at age 49 on Nov. 29th, 1892, having returned to his home on 44 Cooper Street from the soldier's home in Noroton. He was survived by his wife and three children.

According to a copy of his marriage license in his civil war pension file, Henry Franklin married Mary Gauson in New Milford on Nov. 7th, 1866. She worked as a laundress both before and after the death of her husband, dying at age 86 in New Haven on 6/20/1934, the daughter of Mason Gauson and Abigail Wilder. Born in New Milford on Jan. 11th, 1848, Mary was listed in that city's 1850 census as living with her parents, brother William, half-brother George Carpenter and paternal grandfather Nathan Gauson.

The surname Gauson was sometimes noted to be spelled Gawson or Ganson. Mary's grandfather died on her birthday in 1853 in New Milford - a 77 year old stone mason who had been born in Canterbury, Ct.

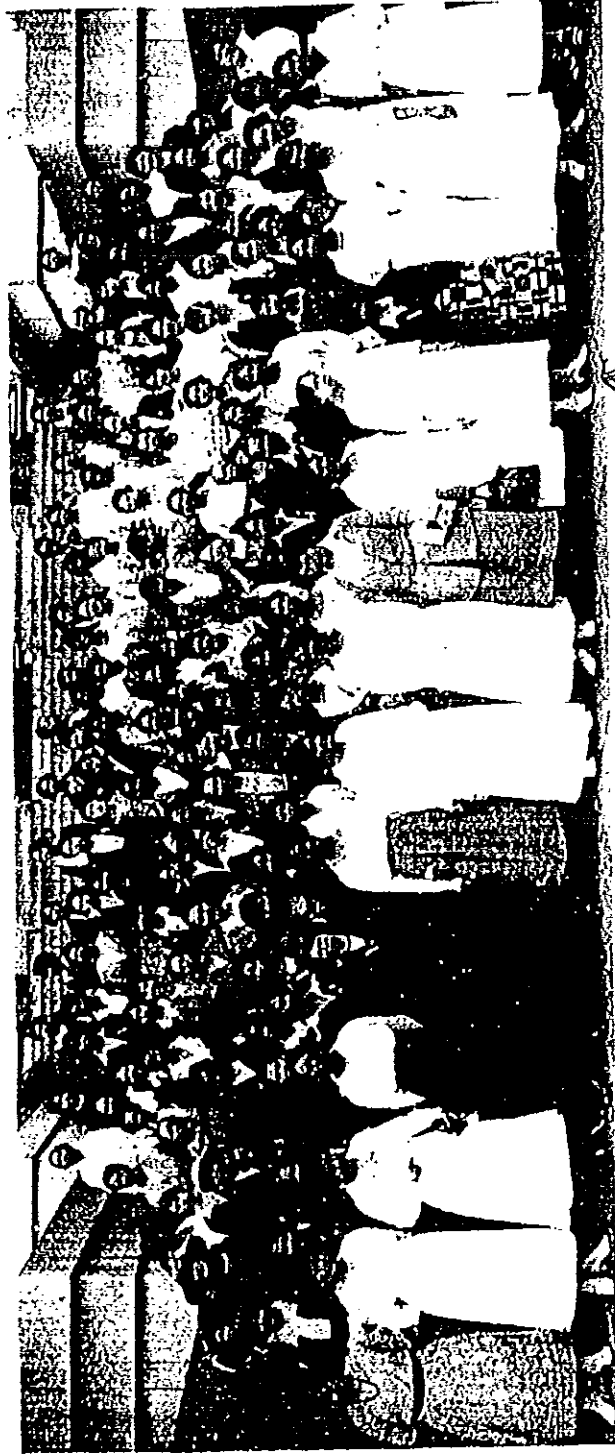
Mary's mother, Abigail, died in Meriden at her daughter's home on 44 Cooper Street on Feb. 12th, 1900. She had been born in New Milford on Aug. 28th, 1813, the daughter of Peter Wilder. She married first in New Milford on 1/23/1830 Stanley Carpenter at age 17. She then married Mason Gauson on New Year's Day of 1840. At the time of her death in Meriden she was survived by, besides her daughter Mary, a son in New Milford. Her husband Mason had died in New Milford, aged 69, on Dec. 28th, 1881.

Henry Franklin, according to his death certificate, was born in New Milford in May of 1845 to Charles Franklin (born Long Island) and Minerva Phillips. Charles Franklin had married Sally Minerva Phillips on Oct. 28th, 1829 in New Milford. The Hale Collection of Ct. Headstone Inscriptions refers to his dying 5/10/1849 at age 44 - two of his young sons are buried near him and Minerva. New Milford's 1850 census found Minerva raising four children, one of them Henry, and living with her mother Patty Phillips, age 90, and her brother Samuel, aged 57. Samuel Phillips, son of Reuben and Patty Phillips, died in New Milford on March 31st, 1874 at age 79. Reuben Phillips is referred to in "Two Centuries of New Milford" as a New Milford man of color who served in the Revolutionary War, and as the ancestor of Chester Phillips, who died at Petersburg, Va. serving with the Ct. 29th. Minerva Phillips is buried next to her husband Charles in New Milford - she died there Oct. 5th, 1882 at age 80.

The 1880 census of Meriden found Henry and Mary Gauson Franklin living with their three children - Florence W., age 11, Martha M., age 9 and William H., age 6. Florence W. Franklin graduated from Meriden High School in 1888 and as late as 1939 was living in New Haven. A series of articles in the MDR from early March of 1886 detailed charges of theft falsely brought against a youth of color named "Willie Franklin." Rose Brothers of Meriden ultimately printed an apology on 3/8/1886. By 1895, William was a printer for A.J. Converse and serving as Chaplain to the Charles Upham Camp of the Sons of Veterans. He married Annie Marie Pace 8/14/1901 in Meriden but died of consumption on January 16th, 1905.

This chronicle of Martha Franklin and her family history has only just begun - Vicki S. Welch, a certified genealogist, is certain there are Native American roots. However, this article is a first step towards giving Martha recognition and her place amidst our local resources.

Colleen Cyr
Meriden resident
Member of the Afro-American Historical
Genealogical Society



DELEGATES ATTENDING THE NATIONAL CONVENTION IN 1921, WHICH WAS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D. C.
Miss Franklin, founder of the Association, may be distinguished on the front row, fifth from the right. Miss Maborey,
the first colored graduate nurse, stands at her left.

"Pathfinders, A History of the Progress of the Colored Graduate Nurses,"
Adah B. Thomas, 1929