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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 10, 2026

Georgia Archives to Host “First in Our State: A Revolutionary Achievement” Exhibit

The Georgia Archives will host “First in Our State: A Revolutionary Achievement,” a special exhibit as part of its America250 commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, on loan from Sugar Hill Historic Preservation Society and The City of Sugar Hill, from September 12 through November 20, 2026.

The exhibit highlights the life and work of Michael Nolden Henderson, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy (Ret.), whose decades of genealogical research led to his becoming the first African American member of the Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution.

Through Henderson’s research and experiences, the exhibit explores genealogy, documentation, family history, and the effort to bring greater recognition to overlooked Patriots of color. It highlights Henderson’s leadership with the Sons of the American Revolution, his appearance on the PBS series *History Detectives*, and his book, *Got Proof! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation*.

Henderson is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, and began researching his family’s history nearly four decades ago using various archival repositories. During his research into the life of an enslaved woman named Agnes who lived in Spanish Colonial Louisiana, he located her manumission document (freedom papers) dated December 16, 1779, years prior to the colonies winning independence from Great Britain.

She was assisted by a Frenchman named Mathieu Devaux, who years earlier had signed an oath of allegiance to Spain and served in the New Orleans militia under Governor/General Bernardo de Gálvez. When the contentious year-long case was brought before Gálvez, he signed the manumission, granting freedom to Agnes. Mathieu Devaux and Agnes are Henderson’s fourth-generation great-grandparents.

Henderson has also been nominated for a Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council Award for Excellence in Advocacy and will be the featured speaker for the Georgia Archives’ October 9 Lunch & Learn program.

Sugar Hill Historic Preservation Society and the City of Sugar Hill originally produced the exhibit. The Georgia Archives is pleased to host the exhibit for this limited engagement. The

exhibit is free to view and open to the public during regular Georgia Archives hours: Tuesday—Saturday, 9 a.m.—4 p.m.

About the Georgia Archives

The Georgia Archives is a unit of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. The Georgia Archives identifies, collects, manages, preserves, provides access to, and publicizes records and information of Georgia and its people, and assists state and local government agencies with their records management.