

Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

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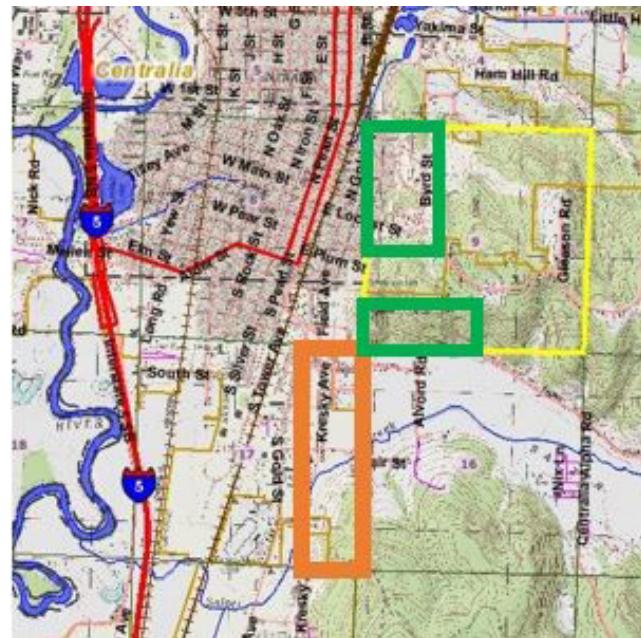


The first African-American families in Washington Territory

by Dr. Jewell Lorenz Dunn, Olympia Branch Researcher

In my research at the Archives last month, I discovered a couple of the first African-American families to homestead in Washington Territory. Lewis G. Caruthers and Civil War veteran William F. Bryan are two of the first men of color to take out homesteads and patent them in the Washington Territory. With support from Centralia founder George Washington paving the way, both men were able to secure homesteads very near George Washington's earlier donation land claim.¹ Lewis and William were enumerated as neighbors in 1871 on page six of the Lewis County Washington Territorial census.²

Lewis Caruthers' homestead was designated as the east half of the northeast quarter and the east half of the southeast quarter of section 17 in township 14 north, range 2 west in Lewis Co., Territory of Washington. Lewis applied for the No. 598 homestead application in May of 1866 with a designation of his X mark.



Lewis Carruthers' property outlined in orange and William F. Bryan's outlined in green (map from Lewis County assessors website).

Proof for his homestead required that two respectable persons of responsibility sign as witnesses. His witnesses were George Washington and James Tullis, who in May of 1866 was appointed Postmaster of Skookumchuck.

William F. Bryan's homestead was designated as the south half of the southwest quarter and the west half of the northwest quarter of section 9, township 14 north, range 2 west in Lewis Co., Territory of Washington. William applied for homestead application No. 288 in April of 1866. He too had the requirement of finding two respectable people to sign as witnesses. He chose George Washington and farmer S.R. (Solomon R.) Allred as his witnesses. Like Bryan, Allred was a veteran of the Civil War.

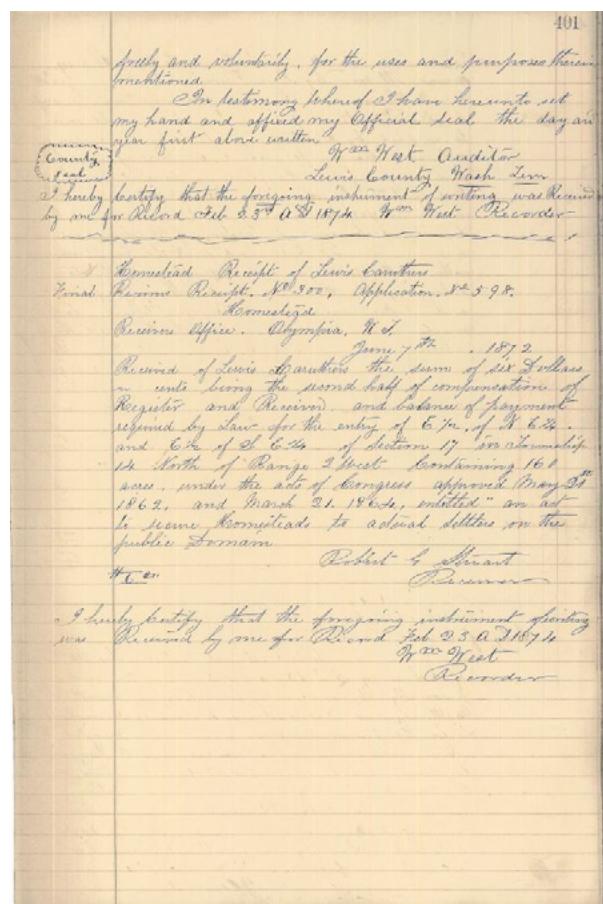
It is important to realize what effects the Civil Rights Law of 1866 had on the citizenship of African-Americans pertaining to the Homestead Act.

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was passed by Congress on April 9, 1866, over the veto of President Andrew Johnson. The act declared that all persons born in the United States were now citizens, without regard to race, color, or previous condition. Putting it into its historical context, it was most likely the catalyst for Lewis G. Caruthers and William F. Bryan to obtain their homesteads.³

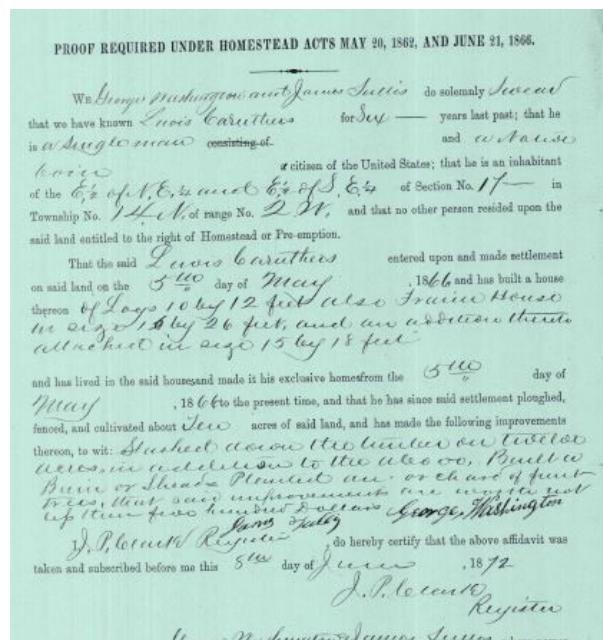
Lewis Caruthers' final certificate No. 300 was dated June 7, 1872, but was not recorded in Lewis County, Washington Territory until February 23, 1874, when he sold the property.⁴

After Caruthers moved to King County, where he was enumerated in 1881, I have not yet found records for Caruthers, so it is unknown if he ever married or where he died and is buried.⁵

William F. Bryan's final certificate No. 288 was dated November 5, 1872 in patent volume 2, page 81. William and his wife later donated a small portion of his land for the seminary in Centralia.⁶



Lewis County deed book 77, page 401.



Lewis Caruthers NARA Homestead file #300, witness statement.

Both men can be recognized for this early milestone of being among the first men of color to obtain a homestead in Washington State History.

With new research comes a lot of questions. There is still a lot of research to be done, and many things to learn about these men and the extent of Washington Territory's African-American history.

Page No. 5
Inquiries numbered 7, 16, and 17 are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are to be answered (if at all) merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in Skookumchuck Precinct, in the County of Lewis, State of Washington, enumerated by me on the 5th day of August, 1870. 158
Post Office: Skookumchuck, W. S. P. D. Moore, Asst Marshal.

Line number, numbered in the order of visitation.	Family, numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose place of abode on the first day of June, 1870, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male or female.	VALUE OF REAL ESTATE OWNED.		Place of Birth, naming State or Territory of U. S. or the Country, if of foreign birth.	PARENTAGE.		EDUCATION.	CONSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS.						
			Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.	Value of Real Estate.		Value of Personal Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.		Place of birth, naming State or Territory of U. S. or the Country, if of foreign birth.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.		Male citizens of U. S. of 21 years of age and upward.	Male citizens of U. S. of 21 years of age and upward, except Indians not taxed.					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
2664	Clark Fisher	10 m M attending School							Missouri										1
	— William E	8 m M " "																	2
	— Cornelius G	6 m M At Home																	3
2665	Bryan William	48 m M Farmer	1500	500	1500	Missouri													4
	— Jane	48 f M Keeping House							Virginia										5
																			6

1870 U.S. Federal Census, Skookumchuck Precinct, page 158 line 4
William Bryan.

47	Kruthers Lewis	41	m	farmer	500	500	Missouri												38
	Washington George	53	m	m	"	5000	1500	Virginia											39
	— Mary J	30	f	m	keeping house			Virginia											40
	No. of dwellings, 14	No. of white females, 13	No. of males, foreign born, 1																
	" " families, 14	" " colored males, 3	" " females, " "																
	" " white males, 20	" " colored females, 2	" " blind,																
									No. of insane, —										

1870 U.S. Federal Census, Skookumchuck Precinct, page 158, line 38 & 39 Lewis Kruthers (different spelling) and neighbor George Washington.

¹ Oregon Donation Land Claim Act, September 27, 1850, of Anna & James Cochran, Township 14 North, Range 2 West, portions of sections 5-8, survey #44 of Lewis County, Oregon-Washington Territory.

² 1871 Lewis County, Washington Territorial Census, page 7, line 28-30, Wm. Bryant, age 48, M, B, farmer, born Penn., Jane Bryan, age 51, F, M, born Virginia, Lewis Caruthers, 40, M, B, born Missouri.

³ Friends of Homestead National Monument of American, Homestead Congress blog, Was Homesteading only for White People? dated Friday, July 22, 2011; <http://homesteadcongress.blogspot.com/2011/07/was-homesteading-only-for-white-people.html>, accessed 2-22-2018.

⁴ Lewis County Deed Book 77, page 401, recorded February 23, 1874 by Wm. West, recorder.

⁵ 1881 King County Washington Territorial Census, page 24, line 40, Lewis Caruthers age 52, m, Blk, Farmer born Mo. Note *indexer listed it as line 39.

⁶ Blackpast.org article on Centralia, Washington; <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/centralia-washington>, accessed 2-22-2018.