

“The Life of Cathay Williams- The Only Known Female Buffalo Soldier,” Women’s History Month Event

By Staff 22 March 2018



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Cathay Williams, the only female Buffalo Soldier, has been honored with a monument in Leavenworth. A bronze bust memorial was dedicated to her at the Richard Allen Cultural Center & Museum in Leavenworth.

The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center is pleased to announce a unique Women's History Month commemoration event. A living history presentation, the event features historian and actress Darlene Colon, as she portrays Cathay Williams, "the first African American female to enlist in the United States Army." The free event begins at 1:00 pm on Wednesday, March 28, 2018 and is open to the public.

Other than being born around 1842 in Independence, Mississippi, the history of Cathay Williams leading up to her enlistment in the Army is not well-documented. Some sources believe that she became enslaved to a William Johnson of Jefferson City. After the Civil War broke out, the Union Army under GEN Nathaniel Lyon came to Missouri and captured

William's home. Williams went to work for the Army as a laundress and cook. She traveled to many posts in the south, even serving in support of GEN Philip Sheridan during the 1864 campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. After the Civil War ended, work became scarce for African Americans. Cathay wanted to continue to serve her country and looked to the military service. The only way she could join as a Soldier was to disguise herself as a man, enlist, and switch her first and last name to join under the false name of "William Cathay." She fit the requirements for duty as she was tall and strong, and was then assigned to the 38th Infantry, one of four all-black units newly formed that year, making her the only known female Buffalo Soldier.

Darlene Colon is a member of the Christiana Historical Society, U.S. Colored Troops Institute and Family Research Center, Society of Freedmen Descendants, African American Historical Society of South Central PA, and Lancaster County Preservation Trust. Her experiences and portrayals are vast and include portraying African American women in history programs such as, Black Horizons, God's Blessings after School Program, a PBS Documentary, Civil War Weekends for the National Park Service, and many others. She is also a community educator at Millersville University, and assists in restoring an abandoned A.M.E. Cemetery.

Come celebrate Women's History Month at the USAHEC to learn more about the life and impact of Cathay Williams! As always, the USAHEC's exhibits will be open. Stop by before the event for lunch at the Café Cumberland which is open from 10:00am to 2:00pm, and feel free to browse the Museum Store. Parking is free and the USAHEC facility is handicapped accessible. For more information about this and all other events, please call: 717-245-3972 or visit the website: