

# Confederate pomp amid burial of slave's daughter

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*National Park Service curator Kim Robinson holds the photo of Selina Gray, right, who was in charge to care for Arlington House where Gen. Robert E. Lee had lived in for 30 years, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2014, at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. The National Park Service has acquired a rare Civil War-era photograph of an enslaved woman at Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's home in Virginia. The previously unknown photograph depicts Selina Gray, the head housekeeper to Lee and his family. The photograph was unveiled Thursday at Lee's Arlington House plantation overlooking the nation's capital. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)*

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — When the ashes of Mattie Clyburn Rice, the daughter of a slave, are buried Saturday in her father's grave in the North Carolina piedmont, a color guard of Confederate re-enactors will be in attendance. So will members of the United Daughters of Confederacy.

That the daughter of a man enslaved in the 1800s should live to see the 21st century seems almost extraordinary enough — but equally remarkable is the record of her father, who went to war to cook for his master, saved the man's life and ended up drawing a pension for his wartime service.

The lives of Rice and her father, who was in his early 80s when she was born, illustrate the tangled threads of history in connection to slavery, the Civil War and its aftermath.

Members of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans who knew Rice say she regarded her father as a Confederate soldier, but historians and his pension papers say that's not exactly the case; he was a slave who went to war to serve his master.

“There’s really no debate about the question of whether African-Americans fought for the Confederacy. We know they didn’t,” said author and historian Kevin Levin of Boston, who blogs about the rise of the belief in black Confederates.

But Rice, who was 91 when she died in September in High Point, devoted her energy to confirming his Confederate service, said Tony Way, an SCV member who is arranging the funeral Saturday at Hillcrest Cemetery in Monroe.

“People didn’t believe her when she said he was a Confederate soldier,” Way said. “She spent years searching records until she found his pension record approved by the state of North Carolina.”

Way led the push for a marker in Monroe honoring the Civil War service of nine slaves, including Clyburn, and one free Black. Before a 2012 ceremony unveiling that marker, Rice dismissed historians who consider Black Confederates a myth.

“A lot of people ask me if I’m angry,” she told The Charlotte Observer. “What do I have to be angry about? There’s been slavery since the beginning of time. I’m not bitter about it, and I do not think my father would be bitter about it.”

A paternalistic 1930 obituary for Weary Clyburn said he was buried “in the Confederate uniform of gray” — yet it also called him “Uncle Weary Clyburn” and described him as “a white man’s darkey.” His grave remained unmarked until the SCV lobbied the Veteran’s Administration for a headstone that was placed there in 2008, Way said.

Rice asked that her cremated remains be buried in her father’s grave, Way said. The UDC state presidents of North Carolina and South Carolina are scheduled to speak at her funeral.

Records show Clyburn received a soldier’s pension, yet they also classify him as something else. The pension records say “his services were meritorious and faithful toward his master and the cause of the Confederacy.” They describe Clyburn as a bodyguard for his master who performed personal services for Robert E. Lee and “that at Hilton Head, while under fire of the enemy, he carried his master out of the field of fire on his shoulder.”

Yet a letter dated June 18, 1930, and signed by state Auditor Baxter Durham refuses to award Clyburn’s pension to his widow because “negro pensioners are not classed as Confederate Soldiers ...”

“It’s unfortunate that we can’t remember these men for who and what they were,” said Levin, the historian. “They lived through the end of slavery. Now imagine being dragged into war. Because they were enslaved, they were forced to deal with the horrors of war. These were men forced to comply with their master’s wishes as they had always been forced to do.”

“This is not a story about the Confederacy as a progressive nation in terms of relations” he added. “If they had won the war, they would have furthered slavery and extended it. Thank God they lost.”

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Kevin Levin’s blog: <http://cwmemory.com/>

Sons of Confederate Veterans: <http://www.scv.org/>

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