

Mary E. Owens

Mary E. Owens works full time as a Compliance Manager for a local manufacturing firm. She has a broad intellectual curiosity and, thus, a desire to continually learn. Mary earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina and an MBA from the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia. She is the proud mother of two young adult children. Her hobbies include reading, gardening, walking/hiking, learning about history, and wine tasting. Mary's personal genealogy includes ancestors from Germany, England and Ireland. One interesting finding from her family's genealogical research - her paternal great grandfather, a German immigrant living in Baltimore, Maryland, fought with a Wisconsin regiment in the Civil War in order to more quickly attain U. S. citizenship. He was captured during a battle and held as a prisoner at the Libby Prison in Richmond until a prisoner exchange allowed him to return to Baltimore.

1. Why did you choose to volunteer as a biographer?

As a long-time resident of Richmond, Virginia, I have read about and been aware of the declining state of some traditional black cemeteries in the city. However, I never felt that there was a way for me to get involved in the cemetery restoration efforts until I heard about the Enrichmond Foundation's volunteer writer program. It seemed like a good fit for me, a way to use my communication skills (particularly while quarantined during the COVID-19 pandemic). This opportunity also coincided with my discovery of the PBS program "Finding Your Roots" where Henry Louis Gates, Jr. helps celebrities uncover missing pieces of their genealogy. Viewing those stories helped me understand the importance of giving voice to our ancestors.

2. Why did you choose Estelle L Dalton?

I chose Estelle Dalton mainly because of her headstone. There was something about it that drew me in and made me want to know more. I also thought that her long lifespan would mean there would be plenty of research material to draw from in writing the biography.

3. What interesting thing did you learn while writing about Estelle?

During this project, I learned so much about doing genealogical research. Or, rather, I learned how much I don't know! Probably the most interesting thing I learned is what a gift the Richmond Planet newspaper was at the time of its publication and continues to be today for learning the history of black people and understanding everyday aspects of their lives in the early 1900s.