

“If it doesn’t happen this time, I won’t give up.”

Shari Worrell, campaigning to have a Presidential Citizens Medal given to her great-great grandfather



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Shari Worrell of Lake Barrington dedicates herself to seeing that her great-great-grandfather James John Howard Gregory gets presidential recognition a century after his death.

She fought to clear witch's name

Now genealogist wants national honor for another relative



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Persuading the White House to dole out a 2014 Presidential Citizens Medal to a guy who made a name for himself in the 1800s selling seeds and sowing good deeds may seem like a longshot. But 66-year-old grandmother and activist Shari Kelley Worrell of Lake Barrington has accomplished far more difficult tasks.

She's poured hot coffee 30,000 feet in the air while wearing high heels, written books, founded organizations, and helped clear the name of a relative who was hanged as a witch in 1692.

"I'm passionate," says Worrell as she stands in front of her latest crusade — an exhaustive array of letters, books and photographs,

some mounted on two large, folding displays that she carries with her whenever she talks about her great-great-grandfather.


Worrell says she was so amazed by the man, she compiled his accomplishments in her book titled, "Remembering James J.H.

See **HONOR** on **PAGE 21**



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Honor: 'Seed King' supported poor, funded churches

Continued from Page 1

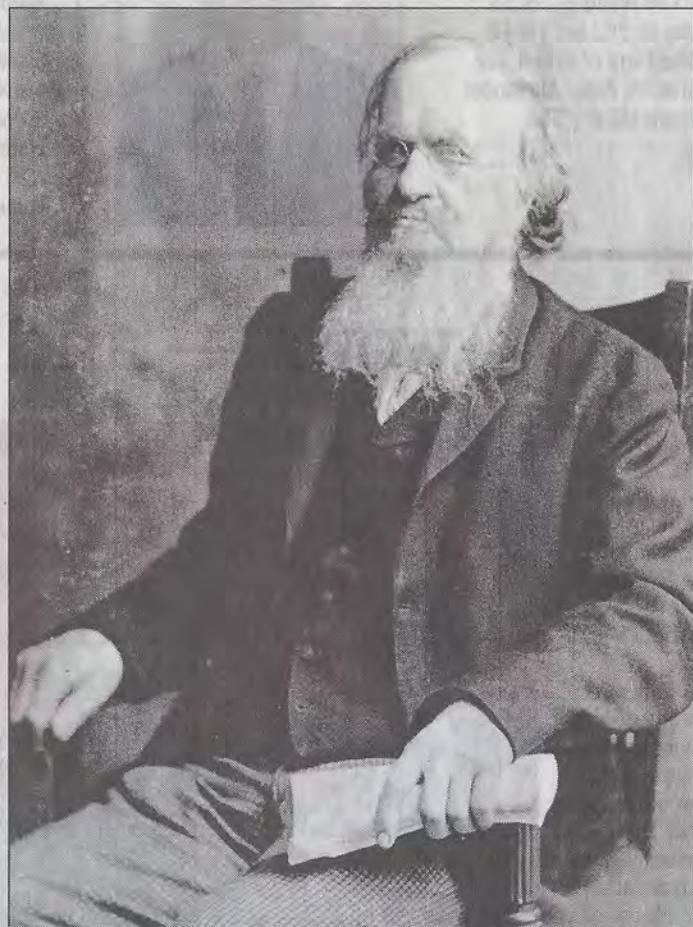
Gregory: The Seed King, Philanthropist, Man."

Born in 1827 in Marblehead, Mass., Gregory graduated from Amherst College and was working as a school principal when he decided to go into the seed business full time. His biography accompanying his inclusion in the online "Seedsman Hall of Fame" credits Gregory with introducing hundreds of vegetables and plants, developing the "Blue Hubbard squash" and first cherry tomato, popularizing the "Danvers onion," and buying and selling the "Burbank potato," which helped launch the career of famed botanist and horticulturist Luther Burbank.

But wait, there's more, Worrell promises.

"It means so much to me to have people know about him. I'm so passionate about this," says Worrell, launching into story after story to illustrate the man's progressive thinking and generosity.

"He decided he'd live on \$300 a year and give the rest away," Worrell says, explaining how he donated more than 30,000 books to schools, libraries and orphanages for black children in the South and white children in Appalachia, how he started bread stations for the poor, funded churches and schools, and donated buildings and parks.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHARI WORRELL

This early 20th century photograph shows James John Howard Gregory shortly before his death.

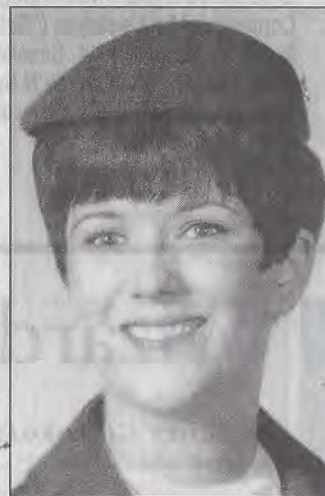
He bought homes for his seed employees and treated them more as family than workers.

"They worked on the honor system," Worrell says, explaining how Gregory would leave the money in the till, and his seed employees would come in at the end

of the week, take what they earned and give Gregory what was left.

"My great-grandfather did that too, until the 1930s, when he got embezzled," Worrell says.

That wasn't the worst injustice done to Worrell's



After her graduation on May 1, 1968, Shari Worrell became a "stewardess" for United Airlines in an era that demanded she wear a skirt, high heels, false eyelashes and a girdle.

ancestors.

Susannah Martin, Worrell's great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, was hanged on July 19, 1692, after being convicted of being a witch in Salem, Mass. Puritan minister Cotton Mather proclaimed the 67-year-old widow "one of the most impudent, scurrilous, wicked creatures in the world."

Developing an interest in genealogy, Worrell joined the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1986 and traced her lineage back to Clovis the Riparian, King of the Franks at Cologne in about

420 A.D. After discovering she descended from accused witches on both sides of her family, with Martin and Mary Easty, who was hanged on Sept. 22, 1692, Worrell joined the Associated Daughters of Early American Daughters.

"How would I feel, dying as a Christian martyr and having people think I worshipped the devil?" says Worrell, who joined the fight to clear the accused witches. Easty had been exonerated in 1711, but it wasn't until Halloween of 2001 that the Massachusetts Legislature and governor officially exonerated Martin.

Worrell attended a Christian funeral for Martin in 2002, and has sat on a bench bearing Martin's name in the Salem Witch Trials Memorial.

Worrell's dogged determination and work ethic might stem from her career as a flight attendant with United Airlines.

Working at a United counter after graduating from Forest View High School in Arlington Heights, Worrell moved into her "stewardess" position during the sexist era before flight attendants.

"We had girdle checks," remembers Worrell, who says she always wore one even while meeting the requirement to keep her weight between 105 and 118 pounds. "We got weighed in before every flight."

Heels, false eyelashes and

stockings also were mandatory. "You couldn't even pick up your paycheck unless you were wearing a skirt," she remembers.

As a stewardess, she co-founded the Young Women's League for the Muscular Dystrophy Association and organized fashion-show fundraisers featuring other stewardesses and her.

She's also been a volunteer with Immanuel Lutheran Church and School in Palatine, Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, the Boy Scouts and the YMCA.

Following the example of her great-great-grandfather, Worrell says she remembers trick-or-treating at 8 and collecting money for UNICEF children instead of candy for herself.

"All I wanted to do was to help those kids," she says.

A member, and often an officer, in more than 60 lineage groups, Worrell is gearing up for next year's 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta.

In the meantime, she'll keep pressing the White House to bestow a Presidential Citizens Medal on her great-great-grandfather. She's confident the evidence on her side is as convincing as it was in the cases of her accused witch relatives.

"If it doesn't happen this time, I won't give up," Worrell promises. "I just hope it's not 300 years."