

## A Spiritual Legacy in Hard Places

By Wanda G. Anderson

Meet Isabella Banks Russell and George Washington Russell.



Photo courtesy of Wanda G. Anderson

Isabella, the matriarch sitting in the center of the photo and flanked by her beautiful daughters, has a story that continues to be told. Born into slavery in 1858, in Bedford County, Virginia, she was a formidable woman who endured many of the usual hardships of African American women during that time. She was known as a deeply spiritual person and midwife who delivered many of her own grandchildren, as well as other children in the community.

Isabella met George W. Russell, the handsome gentleman to the right, who was born into slavery in 1840. Despite threats to his life, George voted with his father, Nelson, in the first election open to African American men in 1867, several years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Isabella and George fell in love and became founding members of the West Dublin Baptist Church in Dublin, Virginia, where they were deeply involved in discipling and raising a family. They disciplined their family first, and then their discipling efforts spread throughout the community.



Photo courtesy of Wanda G. Anderson

Even now, the impact of George and Isabella Russell's legacy continues to be felt in the small town of Dublin, Virginia, where a street bears their last name. The church they built still stands, and many family members actively serve in the community. My great-great-grandmother Isabella, the midwife, reminds me that I can assist people in the spiritual birthing process through intentional discipling. It's not always easy or painless work, but the satisfaction of knowing God can use me to ignite and mobilize others to come to faith in Christ is the same feeling of jubilation experienced at the birth of a baby.

My great-great-grandfather, George, reminds me that I don't have to be defined, nor restricted by society's labels. I can use my voice for advocacy and be a proponent of freedom for the oppressed, the marginalized, and the enslaved. This was the mission of Jesus when he announced to his hometown church in Nazareth in Luke 4:18 that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the brokenhearted; to preach deliverance to the captives; the recovery of sight to the blind; and to set the prisoners free. Much of the mission articulated in Luke 4:18 remains the focus of the pastoral ministry my husband, Ben, and I share today. This legacy of servanthood and discipleship is my Black history.

As Navigators, we have an opportunity to determine our spiritual legacy. What will the Navigator historical records say about this present generation of Christ followers? As we desire to abide more deeply in Christ, may we see an increased prayerful dependence on Jesus; a growing love and unity with one another, and increased faith and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. May our spiritual legacy be one of lasting fruitfulness for generations to come as we seek to advance the Kingdom of God, particularly in the hard places. May this be the God-honoring history by which others who come after us remember The Navigators.



Wanda Anderson is a native New Yorker who eventually settled in Colorado. A licensed attorney for 30 years, Wanda serves as The Navigators Director of Corporate Affairs and Risk Management where she combines her legal training, corporate governance background, and pastoral experience with her passion to see people empowered and professionally developed in the workplace. Wanda also serves as co-Pastor with her husband, Ben, of the Solid Rock Christian Center in Colorado Springs. She and Ben have four daughters and ten grandchildren.