



Debra DeBerry
Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County



"Bessie" Stringfield

(February 9, 1911 – February 1993)

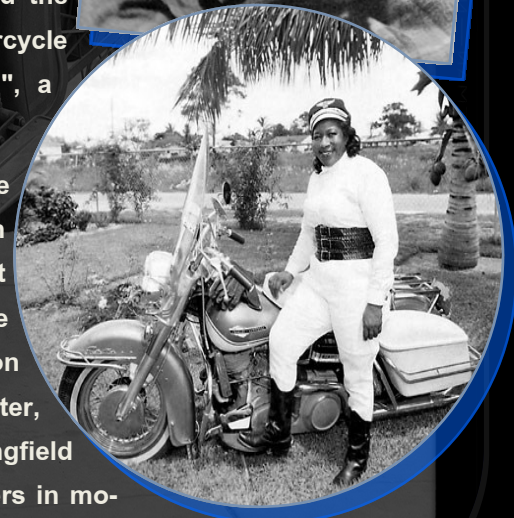
"The Motorcycle Queen of Miami"



Betsy (Ellis) Stringfield was born in Jamaica February 9, 1911, in Kingston, Jamaica, to a white Dutch mother and Jamaican father. Her parents moved to Boston after her birth and died when she was just five years old. She was adopted by an Irish Catholic woman who gave her a 1928 Indian Scout motorcycle for her 16th birthday. In 1930, at the age of 19, she commenced traveling across the United States. She made several long-distance trips in the US, and eventually rode through the 48 lower states, Europe, Brazil and Haiti. Due to her skin color, Stringfield was often denied accommodations while traveling across country, especially in the South. So during those long trips, she would sleep on her motorcycle at filling stations, using her jacket as a pillow. To earn extra money, she entered and won many flat track races, but was often denied the prize money because she was a woman. During WWII, Stringfield served as a civilian courier dispatch rider for the US Army, carrying documents between domestic army bases. The four years she worked for the Army, she crossed the United States eight times. She affixed the Army crest to the front of her blue Harley 61.

In the 1950's, Stringfield moved to Miami, became a registered nurse and started the Iron Horse Motorcycle Club. Her skill and antics at motorcycle shows gained the attention of the local press, leading to the nickname of "The Negro Motorcycle Queen". This nickname later changed to "The Motorcycle Queen of Miami", a moniker she carried for the remainder of her life.

The story of Bessie B. Stringfield is the stuff of which legends are made. In 1990, when the AMA opened the first Motorcycle Heritage Museum, Bessie was featured in its inaugural exhibit on Women in Motorcycling. A decade later, the AMA instituted the Bessie Stringfield Award to honor women who are leaders in motorcycling. And in 2002, she was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame. Stringfield died in 1993 at the age of 82 from a heart condition, having kept riding right up until the time of her death.



Altogether Bessie owned 27 Harleys in her lifetime. She's quoted as saying, "To me, a Harley is the only motorcycle ever made."