



The African American Genealogical Society of Northern California, Inc. (AAGSNC) was founded in Oakland, CA in 1996, under the leadership of Kathryn Burgess Smith.

AAGSNC FOUNDING MEMBERS:

Kathryn Burgess Smith	Charlesetta Braggs-Ford
Ranie G. Smith	Jeanette Braxton Secret
Electra Kimble Price	Rayford Bullock
Charles T. Brown	

OBJECTIVES of the AAGSNC:

- To promote interest in genealogy, biography and related history among African Americans.
- To supplement and enrich the education of African Americans through the collection, preservation and maintenance of African American genealogical materials.
- To promote the accumulation and preservation of African American genealogical and related historical materials and make such materials available to all.
- To promote and maintain ethical standards in genealogical research and publications.

- Correspondence on editorial matters, submission requests, or permission to reprint articles may be obtained, at no cost, by written request to the editor (newsletter@aagsnc.org).

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It's Your History ... Isn't it Time You Told Your Story?

MEETINGS

Meetings are held the third Saturday of every month, at 1:30 pm, at the Oakland Public Library, Dimond branch, located at 3565 Fruitvale Ave, Oakland, CA. There are no meetings during the Summer hiatus (July and August). Guests and visitors are always welcome to attend these open meetings. The AAGSNC Board of Directors will meet quarterly, immediately preceding the regular membership meetings, in March, June, September and December. Members and guests are welcome to attend.

JOURNAL

The Baobab Tree is published quarterly (in March, June, September, and December) by the AAGSNC and is provided free to all members. Additional copies and past issues may be purchased for \$10.00 per copy.

• Membership categories are:

- Regular \$25
- Youth (16 and younger) \$15
- Family \$35
- Organization \$45
- Life Membership - Individual \$200
- Life Membership - Family \$300

- The AAGSNC accepts no responsibility for statements of fact or opinion made by contributors. Deadlines for submission of material for publication in From the Baobab Tree are: February 5 for the March issue, May 6 for the June issue, August 6 for the September issue, and November 5 for the December issue.

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The Baobab Tree

Quarterly Journal of the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California, Inc. • Founded 1996



RESEARCHING THE UTSEY FAMILY: HOW I GOT STARTED

- Vernester Sheeler

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I have always been curious about my family. As far back as I can remember my mother shared stories of how much I was loved and spoiled by my great-great-grandmother, Gertha Williams Redmond. Everyone called her "Mo Pank-e" or "Pank-e Redmond." According to my mother, Mo Pank-e went to town on the first of the month and when she came home she would always have something for me; a new dress, ribbons for my hair, a new pair of socks; something. She always had some little gift for me. I was Mo Pank-e's favorite because I was her first great-great-grandchild. My great-grandmother, Mary Morris Jackson, was Mo Pank-e's oldest daughter. Her great-grand-children knew Mary Jackson as "Grand Maw." Grand Maw called me "Doll" because she said when I was born I looked like a little brown big eyed doll. The only name she ever used for me was Doll. I have very fond memories of Grand Maw and her husband "Daddy Jackson," but I do not remember Mo Pank-e at all. I have a couple of photos with the two of us but, unfortunately, they are not very good and I was too young to remember.

Growing up I knew my paternal grandparents. My brothers and I visited my grandmother, "Big Mama," and her husband, "Mr. Gene," almost every day until 1963 when we moved to Malvern, Arkansas. Until that time, we lived in Camden, Arkansas, down the street from them, and if my parents needed a babysitter, we went to Big Mama and Mr. Gene. My dad's father, "Grandpa Luther," lived in New Orleans, Louisiana. I remember meeting him at least once

when he came to Camden for his brother's funeral. My brothers and I were playing in Big Mama's front yard when my dad drove up with Grandpa Luther in the car. As I got older, we exchanged letters from time to time.

I was living in Greece in 1976 when the movie, *Roots* set record numbers as the most watched television drama. I was very curious to see what could generate so much interest and conversation about the African slave trade. My then-husband, Michael, was in the Air Force and we were newlyweds living in a foreign country. A television set was not in our budget as we had very little money at the time. When we moved back to California, I remember watching a couple of the episodes as reruns and I loved it. I started to think about, and ask questions about my own ancestry. I remember having conversations with my father and my maternal grandmother about their grandparents and their great-grandparents. As they talked, I quickly made notes on several sheets of green notebook paper thinking "one day I am going to create our family tree with this information." After the initial conversations I rewrote my notes, being careful to clearly outline the relationships and connect the dots of my family tree. Again my thoughts were "one day I am going to come back to this." I carried those sheets of paper around with me for years, always promising myself to find time one day to work on the tree.

My parents, Harron A. Bates and Mary McGowan, were married June 16, 1954, in Ouachita County, Arkansas. Thirteen years later they divorced and my mother moved our family to Oakland, California. Twenty-six years after the divorce my father moved to Oakland, and on August 4, 1993, my parents remarried.

In June 1990, one of my father's favorite first cousins, Ollie V. Wesley, chaired the first Harper-Bates family reunion. When I asked Ollie V. what motivated her to take on that challenge she said "I don't know. One



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Got Genealogy Academy Insert

The Baobab Tree is published quarterly in Oakland, CA and mailed to every black genealogy society in North America, and most genealogical libraries and archives in the United States. Your published works will be read by thousands of people, possibly one of your relatives.

As always, we welcome our members to submit their stories, accomplishments, questions, suggestions, letters, photos, etc., for possible inclusion in a future edition. We reserve the right to edit submissions and not all submissions will be published.

Submissions: newsletter@aagsnc.org or via postal mail to our PO Box 27485, Oakland, CA 94602-0985.



West Coast Summit 2008... Sadly, the End of an Era

In 2001, the AAGSNC hosted the first *West Coast Summit on African American Genealogy* here in Oakland, and to our great delight, this idea of bringing together all of the independent black genealogy societies for a weekend of research, networking and fellowship continued for seven more years, culminating in this year’s *Summit*, which was held October 10-11 in Seattle, WA. What we started here in Oakland resonated with the thousands of genealogists who have continued to support the *Summit* as it moved from Oakland to Seattle by way of Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas and Phoenix.

This year’s *Summit* may possibly be the last, and though the Seattle Black Genealogy Research Group did a phenomenal job with the *Summit* this year – a fitting end to a wonderful idea – I’m really saddened by the thought that this year’s *Summit* marks the end of the line for this event.

Next year, rather than just gathering all of the West coast black genealogy groups, we were hoping to combine our efforts to host the *International Black Genealogy Summit* (IBGS) in Ft. Wayne, IN, at the Allen County

Public Library. The hope was that the IBGS would be truly international and bring together black genealogical and historical societies from all over the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean. But it’s not turning out that way. **A bit of history:** The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS), a national organization, was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1977 and has local chapters in 18 states plus the District of Columbia. AAHGS holds a yearly conference of their own, but they have agreed to suspend their conference next year and, instead, join with us in the IBGS. Never before has there been a genealogy conference centered on black genealogy which included **all** of the black groups in the U.S., and the addition of Canadian and Caribbean groups meant that this could have been truly something special.

At the conclusion of last year’s *Summit* in Phoenix, about a dozen of us volunteered to work on the IBGS, but for reasons unknown, both of our conference co-chairs have been missing in action and despite a verbal commitment, no one from AAHGS has stepped up to the plate to take on any of the needed tasks in order for the IBGS to actually take place.

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PRESIDENT’S CORNER

- M. Howard Edwards

After five years shepherding the society as President, Ms. Melvyn Gillette has decided to step down. She will not disappear, however. Mrs. LaVetta White has resigned as Treasurer after a four year period of service, and Ms. Gillette has elected to assume her position. Both have served the society with distinction, and their service has been greatly appreciated. Howard Edwards, Vice President, will serve as interim President until the Board of Directors has completed its search for a replacement for the President position.

- M. Howard Edwards



GotGenealogy.com’s Golden Rules of Genealogy

- Rule No. 1 – “SPELLING DUSN’T COWNT”** - Folks couldn’t spell and many could barely write, so check all variant spellings of names.
- Rule No. 2 – ASSUME NOTHING** - Check all your facts, don’t assume that any particular document is right or wrong, and always try to find other independent sources to corroborate your facts as much as possible. Verify, verify, verify. For instance, don’t assume that:
- your ancestors were married
 - census information is accurate
 - vital (or other) records were correct
 - your ancestor’s life events were recorded
 - your ancestors were enslaved
 - newly freed slaves in the same vicinity with the same surname were related
- Rule No. 3 – USE DISCRETION** - Never lie in your genealogy reports, but use discretion when reporting family information, as it may affect living relatives.
- Rule No. 4 – ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER** - Over time, you will compile more data and those once seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence may prove to be just the pieces of the puzzle you need to prove or disprove your theory. But be consistent as you cite your sources. There are all sorts of standard citation formats that you can follow, but even if you just make up your own form for listing your sources, be
- consistent with it. Future researchers (your descendants) will thank you.
- Rule No. 5 – MOST DATES ARE APPROXIMATE** - Prior to the 20th century, anyway. It’s okay to state that someone was born “abt. 1845” or died “May 1915” if you don’t have an exact date. And even if you have an exact date from one document, another document may have a different date.
- Rule No. 6 – IF YOU’RE UNSURE, SAY SO** - Future researchers will thank you for being honest if you simply say that you cannot prove a specific fact, yet you “suspect” such and such is true.
- Rule No. 7 – NOT EVERYONE WILL SHARE YOUR ENTHUSIASM** - And in many cases, they will question your motives and may even attack you for asking about family business. Though you’ve worked long and hard to document the lives of your ancestors and tell their stories, many of your relatives will be wholly unimpressed with your work and won’t even acknowledge the importance of what you’ve done. Just “shake it off,” take a deep breath and continue on with your quest. Then, see Rule No. 8.
- Rule No. 8 – REMEMBER WHY YOU’RE DOING THIS** - Tell the stories as completely and as accurately as possible. The legacy of your ancestors rests in your capable hands. Always remember that **you** have been chosen to tell their stories. Do it well.

www.GotGenealogy.com

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hotel room Norma pulled out her portable photo printer and we went to work. We were up half the night printing copies of the photos for everyone. The next day at the picnic and auction, Norma handed out the photos from the Meet and Greet. Everyone was very excited and happy to get the photos. I was meeting people and frantically making notes of the names and relationships. Amazingly, family waited in line to talk to me while I worked to capture every detail. Saturday evening we attended a banquet and the family talent show. I was very impressed by the wealth of talent in my family: there are preachers, singers, and gifted musicians. In fact, Cousin Delbert has written, produced and arranged the Utsey Family Song, which Cousin Cassandra sang beautifully. During the

talent show Betty's mom, Rosalie, joined her grandchildren and great-grandchildren to sing a song they performed as a family years ago. It was a magnificent evening.

At one point Earthie, one of Betty's sisters, left the banquet and went home to get several old photos to share. She had a photo of her grandfather, Joseph Utsey, her mom, Rosalie, and her Aunt Ida (Rosalie's sister) as young girls, plus a photo of Betty and Earthie as young women. Rosalie was 75 years old at the time and honored as the oldest family member in attendance at the 2005 reunion. Sadly, she died on January 25, 2007. On Sunday, we attended Betty's church as a family and had lunch before it was time to say goodbye. Cousin James



shared a photo of his grandparents, and my great grandparents, Cincinnati Utsey & Nancy Brown.

I was not able to solve the mystery at this reunion. Most of the family members at the reunion were not much older than Norma and I. I tried to couch questions about my grandparents, but most of the family at the reunion did not know my grandparents. Some of them knew my dad but not his parents. I admit I was a little disappointed, yet the weekend was far better than I ever dreamed. Norma and I had a great time at the reunion and we met so many wonderful people. We marveled at the large family network that neither one of us knew. Since that time, I have met or at least contacted several of the descendants of Cincinnati Utsey. I am working on the 2009 Utsey family history book in preparation for the reunion.

Vernester Sheeler may be contacted at: vernestersheeler@sbcglobal.net



SOCIETY NEWS

Our Prayers Are With Faye and Tolbert Young

I received this email from long-time AAGSNC member, Tolbert Young, regarding his dear wife, Martha Faye. I wanted to share this with our members to keep this family in our prayers – Ed.

As you all know Faye has a brain tumor which is cancer. She had two surgeries, radiation therapy and two rounds of chemotherapy. The treatments have not worked as well as was expected. She has put up the good fight for the last 18 months. The doctor's recommendation is that she go into an experimental program at The University of California's San Francisco Medical School. We considered that but I have rejected that idea. Today she is in the local hospital here in Tracy and in a few days, when she gets out of the hospital she will go into the hospice program here at home. She has been given from three to six months to live.
- Tolbert

AAGSNC MEETINGS 2008

Held at the Oakland Library, Dimond Branch (3565 Fruitvale Avenue) from 1:30pm - 4:00 pm. Guests welcome!

- **October 18** - Two topics:
 - 1) Resources at the Family History Center, Online Library Catalogues
 - 2) Finding the Last Slave Owner
- **November 15** - Two topics:
 - 1) Publishing Your Family History
 - 2) Finding the Last Slave Owner
- **December 20**
Annual "Black Elephant" Sale and Potluck

OTHER EVENTS

- The California Genealogical Society (CGS) library is free and open to the public during the month of October (Family History Month). They are also hosting several free classes, on a variety of topics such as:
 - Introduction to Genealogy
 - Vital Records & Calendar Change
 - State and Federal Census Records
 - Using Google for Genealogy

The CGS library is located at 2201 Broadway, Ste LL2, Oakland, CA Call them or view a complete schedule of classes on their Web site: www.CalGenSoc.org • (510) 663-1358

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Maybe the task was too great – Perhaps we just didn't want it badly enough. For those of us who have been working to make the IBGS a reality, nothing is more frustrating than to send out a request for information or feedback and have it met by complete and utter silence. As the clock keeps ticking down, their silence is deafening. At this point, it will take a minor miracle for the IBGS to happen and all our hard work will have been for naught.

I hope I'm wrong ... sigh.

- Lisa B. Lee, Editor

International Black Genealogy Summit '09



"Reconnecting Lost Links"

Allen County Public Library
Fort Wayne, IN
October 29-31, 2009

www.BlackGenealogySummit.com

AAGSNC TOTES FOR SALE \$20 EACH



We have two different styles of tote bags, each with a flat bottom, heavy canvas fabric with sturdy handles.

- Beige with burgundy trim, AAGSNC logo (left)
- Beige with black trim, AAGSNC logo (left)
- White with dark blue trim, baobab tree photo (right)

TO ORDER: Send \$20 (includes tax and postage) to: AAGSNC • PO Box 27485 • Oakland, CA 94602-0985 Please indicate your style/color preference.

You may also purchase your tote/s (for \$15 each) at the next AAGSNC meeting.

WRITING FAMILY HISTORY IN SMALL BITES

- Dera R. Williams

Many of us who attempt to embark upon writing our family histories may feel the task is massive and overwhelming. How do you write about any family whose story could possibly span three centuries or more? Writing family history does not always have to be as daunting as expected. Let us get an understanding of the different facets of family history, which includes your very own history.

You are a part of your family's story, past and present. Why not look at the short story form as a way to begin writing memories, including your own? Writing stories about your life is a way to document history for your descendants and other relatives. That is the beginning of writing family history. Your childhood stories

and the stories you heard from parents, grandparents or the oral history of your favorite auntie all make up family history. This is another avenue to complement the genealogical research you have so diligently accumulated over the years.

Writing the stories that strengthen, entertain and define family life are rewarding for many reasons. Getting them published for family or even for a public audience means your family history is being documented. The genealogist has several avenues through which to be published. Local newspapers crave family interest stories, especially in the summer when families gather to celebrate another year together. Stories that celebrate local life and lore or that are local to a newspaper are especially wanted, particularly small-town papers where you or your ancestors grew up. Regina Spencer hit gold when her series, "Mile Lane Memories," a collection of stories about her family and hometown in Ridgely, Tennessee, was published by *The Lake County Banner* last summer. Genealogical magazines and genealogical society journals, local and national, also publish

family stories. If you have documentation and pictures, all the better. Many local and national genealogy societies publish journals that have an interest in stories of childhood memories that may tell of an old local neighborhood that no longer exists or has been changed by urban renewal. One such publication is *The Baobab Tree*, our own quarterly journal, edited by Lisa Lee.

Additionally, there are hundreds of literary journals and anthologies published each year that thrive on memoirs, the telling about one's life and that of their family. How does a writer seeking to be published approach these markets? As writers, you must do your homework and seek out opportunities to write your memoirs or family stories. You should subscribe to online newsletters and join groups for writers and generally be connected to the literary world. After all, whether you write family history or your own memoirs, you are a writer and it would benefit you to attend writing workshops or become part of a writers group with the ultimate goal of finding avenues for publishing. It is as simple as using your favorite search engine and typing in "memoir submissions" or



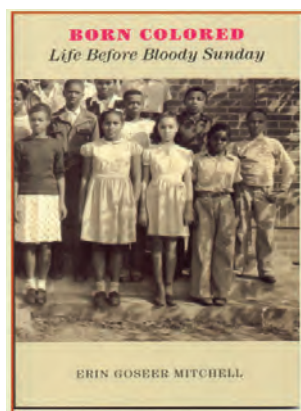
“call for submissions for family stories” or any combination of key words. You must follow the guidelines, present a well-written story and hope for the best. So, what happens if you do not get an acceptance? You still have a story that you can polish or revise, resubmit, or share with your family. You will find that you have a treasure trove of stories, whether memoir or family history. Soon you will have a compilation of writings that can either be stand-alone stories or linked together as a memoir.

My first publication six years ago, “Quilting a Legacy”, was about the quilt my ailing grandmother started during the last stages of Alzheimer’s disease. My mother lovingly completed the quilt, leaving Grandmother’s distinctive touches.

Writing this story was not only a small part of my family history, but tells of a place and time in a small town in rural Arkansas. To have my story featured in a national publication validated not only my writing but documents oral history. I have since gone on to publish several stories in print and online, some from childhood memories and countless family stories. Of course, I have much more that has yet to be published as there are always stories to be told and written.

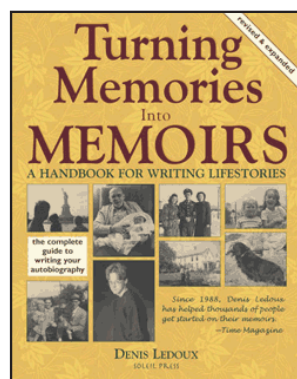
With the advent of self-publishing, writers can gather stories and self-publish through a print-on-demand (POD) publisher. This method is an ideal method for family reunion books and family history books

which allows one to have as few or as many printed for a small audience or sell to the public. Some writers’ memoirs or family stories have been so compelling that traditional publishers have offered them publishing contracts. Clifford Taubert turned his childhood experiences in rural Mississippi into the best selling memoir, *Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored*. After writing a series of childhood memories over the years for her daughters, Erin Goseer Mitchell self-published, *Born Colored: Life Before Bloody Sunday*, in 2005, which has gone into its fourth printing. Blogs, online diaries, have exploded on the Internet over the last few years. Telling your family history on a web site or blog is yet another avenue to



publication. You can whet the appetite of readers who will fall in love with your family.

The important thing is to get out that notebook and pen or sit at the computer and start writing, share with your family, get feedback and write those memories, those history-making moments, one story at a time.



Dera Williams, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas, has lived in the Bay Area since she was two years old. She is the family historian and keeper of stories. She works in curriculum development at a local community college and is a freelance writer working on many projects. She is a board member and recording secretary of the AAGSNC. Ms. Williams may be contacted at: secretary@aagsnc.org.

Ten Resources to Get You Started

- **The Baobab Tree** - Quarterly journal of the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California (AAGSNC). Submit articles to sweetlisa@yahoo.com
- **Afrigenas Writers Forum** - www.afrigenas.com/forum-writers/
- **Family History Family Lore** - familyhistoryfamilylore.wordpress.com/
- **Anthologies Online** - sign up for newsletter www.anthologiesonline.com/index.html
- **Writing Opportunities** - join Kalamu@yahoogroups.com
- **Publish Family History/Memoir** - Gateway Press - www.gatewaypress.com/
- **Writers Weekly Class** - writersweekly.com/wwu/courses/memories.html. Sign up for newsletter- writersweekly.com/
- **Writing Your Family’s History** (Cyndi’s List) - www.cyndislist.com/writing.htm#Pubs
- *Turning Memories Into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Lifestories* by Dennis Ledoux, Soleil Press, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-0974277349
- **Blogging Your Family History Search** - genealogy.about.com/od/publishing/a/blogging.htm

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was Uncle Ada’s daughter. Looking over Carrie’s notes, I could not find an Ada. I asked, “Who is Uncle Ada?” She explained that “Ada” was Uncle Lewis’ nickname. In fact, Mom said “Carlee’s daughter Norma Jean lives in Suisun City, California.” “You are kidding! Do you have her phone number?” I asked. She said, “Yes, somewhere around here. Oh, yeah, your folks are having a reunion.” “What are you talking about?” I asked. She explained that the Utseys were having a reunion and a package addressed to my father was delivered a few days earlier. When I asked for the packet she offered her standard reply, “it’s somewhere around here.” I asked Mom to find Norma Jean’s phone number for me and she promised she would look around for it. In the meantime, I could not stop thinking about the fact that my grandparents were first cousins. Which one of those Utsey boys is Luther’s father?

I decided my baby sister, Lori, and I would crash the Utsey Family reunion and find the link to our great-grandfather. I made all of the arrangements. I was particularly excited about traveling with my sister; this would be our first time to travel together. I thought we might solve the big mystery and have a great adventure.

A few days later Lori was informed her son needed surgery on his knee and it was scheduled at the same time as the reunion. The procedure was slated as a minor procedure but we talked about it and decided it might be a little too much for my brother-in-law to handle alone. I was disappointed but confident we made the right decision. The same night Mom called back with Norma Jean’s phone number. I called and left a voice mail message for Norma to explain about my research project on the Utsey family, and to ask for her help. She called back the next day and told me that her mother had died. In fact, Carlee died the same year as my dad. Norma was very close to her mom. She explained that her mother had shared some family information with her and she had made some notes in a family bible. Norma was very excited to connect with me and offered to help in any way she could.

During the course of the conversation, I mentioned the Utsey family reunion. I explained I was scheduled to leave in less than two weeks. Oh, she said that is too soon. “Do you want to go?” I asked. I explained that I had purchased my sister’s ticket with my frequent flyer miles and, now that my nephew needed surgery, my sister would not be able to go. “The miles will go to waste. I have already paid the fees, reserved a hotel room with two beds and I have a rental car.” “Hang on,” she said. A few minutes later, she came back on the line and said “count me in. I checked with my husband and we do not have any plans that weekend.” I explained “the only thing it might cost you out of pocket is whatever the airline charges to change Lori’s name to your name.” We agreed to meet at the gate Friday August 5, in time for our 6:00 AM flight. I was thrilled!

A few days later, I started thinking, “I do not remember what Norma looks like. How will we know each other?” I called her and asked “How will we know each other?” She said “Why don’t we carry red roses?” I hung up thinking ‘great plan. Why didn’t I think of it?’ Late Thursday night while packing I suddenly remembered I needed a red rose. I dashed out to Safeway to buy one. I was so excited I felt like a kid at Christmas. As I checked my luggage, a couple of people asked about the rose. I explained I was meeting my cousin for the first time in years and it was how we would identify each other. I made my way to the gate and sat nervously waiting for her to arrive. There were not very many people in the Oakland airport at 5:00 A.M., but every time someone walked in my direction, I looked for a red rose. Finally, in the distance I saw this little short woman walking toward the gate. I get more and more excited as she made her way down the corridor and when I spotted the rose, I jumped out of my seat, waving frantically. “Cousin, Cousin, here I am, Cousin!” She walked up and hugged me and said, “Cousin you have freckles too!” and we both laughed. Here we are with similar coloring,

we are both short (we teased each other about being the shorter one) and we were wearing our hair braided. The most amazing thing is we are both nurses working for the same company. Imagine that! It is a small world after all.

We talked the entire first leg of the trip but once they turned on the movie, we both fell fast asleep. When we stopped in Chicago, I started to feel a little anxious. I realized “Oh my we have come this far and we don’t know a soul here except each other, and we just met a few hours ago.” “Cousin,” I asked, “what if they are not nice? What if all of these Utsey people are mean to us? What are we going to do?” With great authority, she said, “they will be nice we are family. Besides, if not, we will just clown.” I thought: “Okay, I could do that.”

I had put together a little book with a few documents to outline who we are and how we relate to the family. Norma added photos of her grandparents, Lewis (Uncle Ada) and Minerva Jones Utsey. She collected her digital camera and off we went to the first family event, the Meet & Greet.

Norma and I attended our first Utsey Family Reunion in South Bend, Indiana. Betty Porter and her siblings hosted the reunion. Betty is the great-granddaughter of John Utsey, brother of Elmo Utsey. We met cousins A.C., Morris and Steven Matthews in the parking lot of the hotel. They were very warm and friendly. As we made our way inside and found A.C. and Steven’s sister, Betty, we looked at each other and giggled like little girls on the playground. Betty has freckles. When we are together, it is obvious we are related.



Norma played photographer while I went around the room introducing myself and talking about the Utsey Family Project. It was fabulous. When we got back to our



day I just decided we needed to have a family reunion.” “Simple as that?” I asked, and she replied, “Yes ma’am, simple as that.” The Harper-Bates Family Reunion is held every two years. My father tried for years to convince me to attend the reunions with him but I always found an excuse not to go. I am not sure why I did not want to go. Ironically, I eventually became the family historian.

In June 2000, my parents attended the Harper - Bates Family Reunion in Tampa, Florida. My cousins Jeffrey and Regina Green created a family souvenir book to mark the event. When my parents came back, my dad was very excited to share with me the names, pictures and stories about the different family members. I remember being curious about the name of the person listed as my great-grandfather, John Bates. It seemed odd to me that there was no statistical information about him: no birthdates, no death date, no middle initial; just his first and last name. Generally, I would have asked questions about things like this but, for some reason I did not and again, I am not sure why. A few weeks later the excitement died and I did not think much about it anymore. On occasion I would run across the pieces of green paper on my desk. I might read through my notes and then I’d put them away again, always with the promise that “one day when I have time, I will use this information to work on our tree.”

In September 2001, my dad was diagnosed with a recurrent anal cancer and despite a 70% cure rate, he died December 22, 2001. In April 2005, while cleaning out his home office, I found family group sheets that outlined his paternal ancestry along with my grandmother’s Bible. The notes outlined the family of John Bates and Emma Smiley. The names of their children were vaguely familiar. As I read the document, I learned my grandfather had five older brothers and one half-sister. The curious thing to me was my grandfather’s birth date is listed as April 1, 1909, and John Bates’ death date was listed as 1906, in Arkansas. I remember thinking that must be a typo, and kept reading. The most interesting thing was the notes written on the second page, about the woman named

Emma Smiley. The outline read:

- Emma Hatter Smiley was the third wife of John Bates.
- Emma was very healthy, “healthy as a horse.”
- Had some white banker holding some money for her.
- When she was 81 years old, she went to get the money.
- She disappeared for 3 days possibly kidnapped.
- No one knows what happened
- Finally found and could only say 90, 90, 90, start laughing.
- Dad (Grandson Harron) went to Banker Patton, President of Commercial Bank, to find out about it.
- Let him know who he was asked about money.
- Banker said “She never made deposit”

I was baffled and very curious. I asked my Mom “who is this, and what is this about? Who wrote this?” She just looked a little dazed and said “I do not know.”

I was anxious to learn more. I called Ollie V to ask if she could remember any specific details about John Bates and shared with her the information outlined in the notes. She said, “Vernester, you do know that Grandpa John was not your Grandfather’s father?” Shocked and surprised I asked, “what do you mean?” Ok, so I know it sounds pretty obvious, but I did not get it; just call me “Polly Plank Head!” She went on to say, “Grandpa John died while Emma was pregnant with Earl.” Therefore, Earl never knew his father. (Earl is Ollie’s father). “They tell me Luther’s father is one of those Utsey boys.” I replied “Utsey boys, that can’t be right, that’s Big Mama’s maiden name.” “Baby, do you want to hear the story?” she said. Sheepishly, I replied “Yes Ma’am” and she began.

“Now you know when I was growing up

kids did not sit around and listen to grown folks talking. You didn’t have no pencils to write nothing down and we ain’t had no computers. Nevertheless, the story is it’s one of those Utsey boys. It was a bunch of them; I do not know which one.” It is thought that perhaps Emma gave Luther the surname “Bates” when he was born because she and the children used the name. As we said goodbye I thought “how could this be?” If this is true, that means my grandparents were first cousins. “Oh my, how can I find my “real” great-grandfather?”

I contacted another one of my father’s favorite first cousins, Carrie Mae Utsey Mayes, of Cleveland, Ohio. Carrie and I had met over the phone the year before while I was in Cleveland on business. Funny, up until that time I had never heard of her. I called Carrie and asked if she remembered talking to me the year before. She said, “Yes, how are you?” I explained the reason for my call and then asked if she had ever heard the story before. Carrie explained that we are related on my father’s maternal line. She said, “That is his father’s side, so baby, I can’t help you. I have never heard that story before.” Curious I asked “Well, could you tell me about “Big Mama’s daddy? I don’t know Big Mama’s daddy.” Carrie proceeded to tell all about her grandfather and my great grandfather, Elmo Utsey. Elmo was Big Mama’s daddy and his father was Cincinnati Utsey, my great-great-grandfather. A few weeks later an envelope arrived with notes, pictures, and obituaries with information about members of the Utsey family. Carrie outlined Cincinnati Utsey and Nancy Brown’s ten sons: Henry, Peter, George, William, John, Robert, Harvey, Lewis, Elmo, and Julius. The information Carrie shared was fascinating and I have been researching the Utsey family of Union County, Arkansas for almost three years.

A few weeks after I received Carrie’s packet I was looking over the notes and I remembered a cousin I played with as a little girl. Surprisingly, I remembered her full name, Norma Jean Flowers, and her mother’s name, Carlee Flowers. However, I did not know how we are related. I called my mom and she explained that Carlee

CENSUS BUREAU PLANS TO “EDIT” DATA IN 2010 CENSUS

The Census Bureau recently reported that in completing the 2010 Census, it will “edit” the data from same-sex couples who accurately report that they are legally married, and that it will instead re-classify them as “unmarried partners,” the same procedure used by the Bureau during the 2000 census, when no states yet recognized same-sex couples as legally married. That kind of “editing” undermines the Bureau’s mission to provide accurate and high quality data about the U.S. population, and according to a paper on the Bureau’s own website, creates a distorted picture of same-sex households.

“There are legally married same-sex couples in the United States,” said People For the American Way President Kathryn Kolbert. “It’s a fact that can’t be ‘edited’ out of existence. It’s time to stop faking the data for the sake of people who want to pretend that same-sex married couples don’t exist.”

The paper, *Unbinding the Ties: Edit Effects of Marital Status on Same Gender Couples*, was written in 1999 by two members of the Census Bureau’s Fertility and Family Statistics Branch, Population Division. The authors looked at data from the 2000 Census “dress rehearsal,” and drew the following conclusions about the effects of “editing” the responses of same-sex

couples from “married” to “unmarried partners”:

“It is clear from the examination of [the] unedited data that households which are identified as ‘married couple’ same gender households are a distinct group from households which are identified as unmarried partner same gender households. By combining these households . . . we [that is, the Census Bureau] are **distorting the picture for both of these groups of households.**”

And that was before there were same-sex couples recognized in any states as legally married — continuing to “edit” out married gay and lesbian couples in the next Census would create an even greater distortion.

There’s an online petition where you can urge the U.S. Census Bureau to reverse this decision and leave the facts alone: www.kintera.org/site/apps/ka/ct/contactcustom.asp?c=feIJKQMEF&b=4356265.

You can also postal mail a letter to the Census Bureau at the following address: **Director Steve H. Murdock
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233**

The issue at hand has really nothing to do with same-sex marriages, rather the integrity of collected data. For the sake of accurate recording of information, the facts must be allowed to stand as they are and not edited to conform to the political winds of the day.

Politics should have no place in the Census. Accuracy should be the only criterion. Legally married same-sex couples who report themselves as such should be counted that way.

You can read the complete report, “*Editing Unmarried Couples in Census Bureau Data*,” on the Census Bureau’s Web site: www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps07/twps07.pdf

As genealogists, we’re often confronted with facts that don’t coincide with the “story” we’ve been led to believe, yet these stories, as difficult as they may be, must be told completely and as accurately as possible. There simply can be no place for changing vital government records for political reasons. Urge the Census Bureau to reverse this decision. Do it today!



WHO WE ARE IN THE STATES ON CAPITOL HILL IN THE COURTS PROGRESSIVE VOICE

Tell the Census Bureau: Stick to the Facts and Stop Playing Politics!

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Dear Director Murdock:

I was dismayed to learn that, in taking the 2010 Census, the Bureau intends to "edit" the accurate responses of legally married same-sex couples to report them falsely as "unmarried partners." Such "editing" would not only be highly offensive, it would lead to the reporting of inaccurate demographic data, completely contrary to the Bureau's mission and goals.

Politics should have no place in the Census. Accuracy should be the only criterion.

Legally married same-sex couples who report themselves as such should be counted that way.

Sincerely,

* required information

First Name:*

Last Name:*

Email:*

Address Line 1:*

Address Line 2:

City:*

State:*

ZIP/Postal Code:*



FINDING OUR ROOTS: ONE PERSON'S TALE

- Howard Corey

Due to the fact that white society dominates and controls the images African Americans receive, we have spent years trying to build a foundation as individuals because we do not have the history of the accomplishments of our race, let alone of our families. Even today with all the changes that have taken place in our society, African Americans know very little of their ancestral history because the centuries of slavery and racism in this country have gradually diluted our sense of identity.

From the time we were children we were told about aunts, uncles and cousins, but seldom did we write down who they were or how they were related. We usually were too small or too busy wanting to play to understand or really care about who these people were, but we knew these were our uncles and aunts. As we grow older we often forget about these people or lose touch as we pursue careers and raise families.

The one exception to this happening is at family reunions and funerals.

My curiosity in my family was aroused about 1986 when I attended a family reunion of my wife's family, the Benjamins and the Flournoys in Savannah, Georgia. Because of my interest in the number of double marriages in my wife's family, I plotted out what a family tree for her family would look like. As we worked on

the tree I was amazed about two things. First, the amount of verbal information Pastor Cheevers, Willie Mae Pryor, Allie Van Jones, Doretha Owens, and Mary Grant had; secondly, how little I knew about my own family. I left there vowing to learn more about my own family and to make sure that my two kids always had a written history of their genealogy. After 14 years, thousands of dollars, and hundreds of new friends, I have in my family tree database about 5,000 family members of my wife and myself. My web page deals primarily with my family, but since my database uses my kids as a starting point, my wife's family is also included.



From the author's Web site, www.geocities.com/corey_tyson_henry/, which failed to identify the names of those pictured above.

The major branches of my family are the Coreys, Blantons, Taylors, Collins, Goldens, Henrys, Tysons, Balls, McElroys, and Perkins. Although my point of reference is Mississippi, I have traced them back to Africa, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Although my earliest information came from Carrie Corey (who is now 88) and the person I call my "human genealogy machine," Jolly McElroy Marshall, I have been blessed to have met and talked to hundreds of people who have helped

me with my research. I will not start to mention names so as not to make myself look like a fool by forgetting someone.

COREY (Maternal)

Carrie told me that her grandmother lived to be over 110 years old and died in the 1930s in Bolivar County, Mississippi. Several other family members have said that a quite elderly lady and her son William Yancy Corey had lived close to my grandfather in an area around the sand pit near Choctaw in Bolivar County. Since I have never been able to verify her last name, my search for a record of her has

been futile. According to Carrie, her name was Amy, Emma, or Carrie Burns and she was the daughter of a slave master and the plantation cook. William (or Yancy) Corey and his brother Felix were also sons of a white male connected to the same plantation.

Having said all of this, the first "Cory" that I find is Felix Cory age 14 in the 1870 census living with a couple of aunts, two Blantons who are identified as his brothers, and Lerone Townsend who is identified as his grandfather. Felix is said to have been a mulatto and a schoolteacher. I was

told he has descendants in Vicksburg and a son Don, who my Uncle James Corey knew.

The first trace I find of William Yancy Cory is the 1880 census of Wilkinson County, Mississippi. He is living with his stepfather Benjamin Young, his mother Charlotte, and some other brothers and sisters. In the 1900 census, he is residing in Wilkinson County with his wife Mariah and children Garfield, Feltus, Carrie, Amy, and Wallace, my grandfather. By 1910, this branch of the family had moved to Shaw, Mississippi where it still has members today, including

my mother Mabel Corey Cole.

Some of the known branches of this family are the Heards, Jeffersons, Harris's, Laurys, Branches, Braswells, Byrds, and the Coles. Large numbers of family members are located in Tennessee, Texas, California, Nebraska, Illinois, and Mississippi. This branch of the family has owned land in the Mississippi Delta since the 1930s, produced several small business owners, preachers, and business executives.

TAYLOR and TYSON (Maternal)

The Taylors and Tysons are from Winona in Montgomery County, Mississippi. I have traced the Taylors back to Frank born in 1824 in Virginia and Alice born 1835 in Tennessee. The Tysons have been traced back to Frederick born in 1815 and Judy born in 1820 in North Carolina. These two families are from my maternal side of the family. Branches of the Taylor family include the Collins, Goldens, Watsons, Henrys, Johnsons, and the Coreys.

Family members are located in areas around Memphis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Boston. Except for grandfather Richard "Dick" Tyson and wife Delphia Taylor and their children, I have never been able to trace any other Tysons.

These branches of the family produced several college graduates from Rust College who went on to serve as educators in the South. Dr. Charles Golden received his Ph.D. in the 1940s and was first of several Ph.D.s in the family. This branch of the family also includes a member of the popular Earth, Wind, and Fire music group.

McELROY (Paternal)

Mike McElroy, born in 1800 in Georgia and his wife Susan, born in 1802 in Virginia or South Carolina, were brought to Lauderdale County, Mississippi in the early 1800s. He is found in the 1880 census where he lists his parents as being born in Africa. She is found as late as the 1900 census living with her daughter, Amanda Semmes or Sims. At some point in time it was said that the McElroy branch of the

family intermarried into either the Cherokee or Choctaw tribe. In the early 1900s one branch of the McElroy family migrated to the Cleveland, Mississippi area where my grandmother Emma McElroy met my grandfather Napoleon Perkins.

Known surnames in this tree are Perkins, Williams, Cooks, Semmes, Sims, and Andersons. This branch of the family is concentrated in the St. Louis and Chicago areas.

PERKINS (Paternal)

Charles Perkins, born in 1854, is the oldest member of this family that I have been able to find. In the 1870 census he is living in Lauderdale County, Mississippi. His son Allen Perkins, my great-grandfather, married Laura McDonald and they moved to Bolivar County, Mississippi. There were at least two marriages between their children and children of the McElroy family that I can find. Allen Perkins and his family later migrated to Fort Dodge, Iowa and from there to Chicago Heights, Illinois where he died in the 1930s. His widowed wife and family then moved to 12th Street and 5th Avenue in Chicago Heights and established the Perkins and McElroy compound. Several members were outstanding baseball players in the 1930s and 1940s. One was said to be the equal of Lou Boudreau (later of the Cleveland Indians) with whom he played in high school. However, this was before the integration of the major leagues so he was unable to play at any higher level.

Most of the known Perkins family members are located in the Chicago area. Other surnames in this branch are McElroy, Lee, Gerron, Swanigan, Buckner, Posey, and Combes.

CONCLUSION

I am now completely addicted to genealogy research. I spend hours each week on the computer at either Ancestry.com or Afrigeneas searching for new family members, climbing another wall, helping someone else, or just chatting to people about research techniques. However,

because of this addiction, I am now closer to my family than I ever was and on several occasions family members have been able to use my information in cases of emergencies.

My biggest regret is that I started down this path too late to talk to some of the elders of the family such as Magnolia Corey Laury, Francis Perkins Combes, Dr. Charles Golden, and Emma McElroy James. They would have been able to fill in a lot of blanks that I am still researching.

My next goal is to visit Natchez, Woodville, Lauderdale, Waynesboro, and other Mississippi sites where my ancestors lived and toiled.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Our first family reunion in 1990 in Greenville, Mississippi.
- Discovering the rich background and history of the family.
- Having several family members thank me for my effort.
- Meeting hundreds of new family members and fellow genealogists along the way.
- Leaving a history for the next generation to build upon.

LOW POINTS

- Members of the family who have died.
- Not being able to visit a lot of the county seats to research information.
- People not providing information on their families.

This article was originally produced in 2004. It has been edited and reprinted with the written permission of the author. Mr. Corey may be contacted at: HCorey1@aol.com