



From the

BAOBAB TREE

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

OBJECTIVES of the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California:

- 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 material available to all.
- To promote and maintain ethical standards in genealogical research and publications.

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MEETINGS

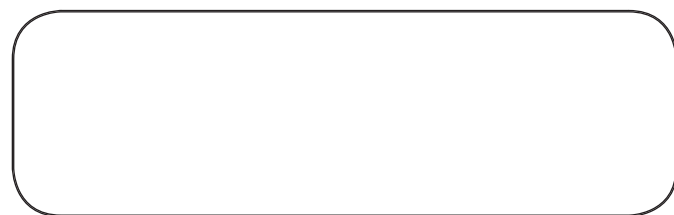
Meetings are held the third Saturday of every month, at 1:30 pm, at the Oakland Public Library, Dimond branch, located at 3565 Fruitvale Ave, Oakland, CA. There are no meetings during the Summer hiatus (July and August). Guests and visitors are always welcome to attend these open meetings. The AAGSNC Board of Directors meets immediately following the regular membership meetings (from 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm) and members are welcome to attend.

JOURNAL

From 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 25 for the March issue, May 26 for the June issue, August 26 for the September issue, and November 25 for the December issue.
- 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?

THE 1ST RULE OF GENEALOGY ...

SPELING DOUSN'T COWNT!

Don't make the mistake of overlooking alternate spellings of your ancestors names. We'll show you what you need to do to cover all the bases and find those elusive relatives. See page 6.

- Writing Contest - 2nd Place Winner, "*The Turner Family History*"
- Society News
- 4th Annual West Coast Summit on African American Genealogy - October 15-16, 2004, San Diego
- AAGSNC Events 2004
- Genealogical Codicil



The Turner Family History ENDNOTES:

1. Frank Sinatra's singing group, *The Hoboken Four*, won the Major Bowes radio show contest in 1935. Source: Turner, John Frayn, *Frank Sinatra* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1938), 19.
2. First African Baptist Church, 185th Anniversary Souvenir Booklet, April 14, 2002.

3. A. Philip Randolph became the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in 1925. After 12 years of hard work, the first BSCP union contract was signed in 1937. This was a milestone for African American workers and the labor movement. Source: "Asa Philip Randolph,": *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History*. Gale Group, 1999. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*, Famington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 2003. www.galenet.com/servlet/BioRC.

4. In 1965, Morrie Turner created the *Wee Pals* comic strip and was the first African American cartoonist to become nationally syndicated. He has earned civic and educational awards for his contributions including the prestigious Sparky Award created by the *Peanuts* cartoonist, Charles M. Schulz. Source: Morrie Turner, April 2, 2002.
5. North Oakland Baptist Church, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir Book, 1981.

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AAGSNC NEWS

UPCOMING MEETINGS

AAGSNC meetings are held at 1:30 pm on the **third Saturday** of the month at the Dimond Branch of the Oakland Public Library. Visitors are always welcome to attend.

- **March 20th**
- Tracing Native American Ancestry

Whether or not your ancestor was a member of one of the Five Civilized Tribes (Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw and Seminole), we will show you many overlooked resources for tracing your Native ancestors and how to find them.

- **April 17th**
- Organize Your Records

We know you keep *saying* you're going to clean up that mess of papers piled all the way up to the sky, but despite all of your excuses, we're going to show you the *right* way to get organized and *stay* organized.

- **May 15th**
- Heritage Albums

Heritage albums are the cool new way to preserve and present your family history. We will show you what you need to do to get started, and things to avoid so you won't damage your precious photos or documents.

STUDY GROUPS:

- The **Arkansas Study Group** will meet on Saturday, March 13th, 2:30pm at the home of Annette Madden, 961 - 44th Street, Oakland.

The group will continue their discussion of slave research. Homework: Please find out what sources for slave research are available in your county. Possible sources may include wills, deeds, inventories, appraisals, etc. Bring your success stories and brick walls. For more information, please contact Annette: amadden45@yahoo.com, or (510) 594-9062.

- The **Louisiana Study Group** will meet on Saturday, March 20th, noon-1:30pm, at the Dimond Library, immediately preceding the regular AAGSNC membership meeting.

BOARD MEETINGS

Board meetings are held the 3rd Saturday of each month, directly after the general membership meetings. Members and guests are welcome to attend the Board meetings.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAYS

March 2004

March	Rosemary Antoine
March	Barbara Dunn
March	Upperton Hurts
March	W. (Bill) Melson
March	Chery Smith
March 3	Eldoris Cameron
March 4	Robert Harris
March 4	Michele Wms-Smith
March 6	Vera Harl
March 11	Jeannette Dunn
March 29	Farnsworth Reed

April 2004

April	Mae Threadgill
April 7	Charles Brown
April 10	Bette Golden
April 16	Annette Madden
April 26	Wanda Brown
April 27	Martha Swisher

May 2004

May	Paula Easton
May 4	Dorothy Adams
May 12	Vernon Taylor
May 23	Thom Allison
May 23	Mildred Taylor
May 26	Loretta Henry
May 28	Rhonda Edwards
May 31	Khamisi Mwaniki

GENEALOGY CRUISE

Join us for the 1st Annual AAGSNC Genealogy Cruise, **Oct. 18-22, 2004**, aboard Royal Caribbean's Monarch of the Seas cruise ship. On board, you can sharpen your skills by taking one of two intensive workshops which will be taught

by experienced researchers:

Family History Writing Workshop: This intensive workshop is intended for those who have already done most of the research and are finally ready to tell their family's stories. For the purposes of this workshop, we recommend you concentrate on not more than two branches of your family and come prepared to start working on your manuscript. A list of required documentation will be provided to you so you can successfully begin writing your story.

Genealogy Software Workshop: This intensive workshop will provide you with hours of focused instruction, hands-on training, and even some one-on-one with an experienced researcher. Whether you're a PC or Mac user, we will provide experienced, capable genealogists to show you how to get the most out of genealogy software from the basics to new features, neat tricks, and ways to keep track of your ever-growing family file(s).

Five Neat Cruise Facts--

- 1) **Summit first, Cruise second.**
The cruise begins right after the 4th Annual West Coast Summit on African American Genealogy ends (see page 4 for Summit information).
- 2) **The cruise is very affordable:**
\$327.95 - Inside stateroom
\$347.95 - Outside w/porthole
\$377.95 - Outside w/window
Prices are per person, double occupancy.
- 3) **The workshops are FREE!** Your only cost is for the course materials (\$50 per workshop) which includes syllabus, books, and software.
- 4) **Your \$100 deposit is fully refundable** prior to the final payment due date (August 14, 2004).
- 5) **Booking the cruise is easy!** All Cruise Travel will be happy to handle your booking. Contact them at: (800) 227-8473



AAGSNC 2004 COMMUNITY EVENTS

BY LENORA GOBERT, AAGSNC FUND RAISING CHAIR

A big part of the Marketing Plan that AAGSNC's Board of Directors and Officers envision for our society is participation in community events. This is an excellent way for us to let people throughout the Bay Area know who we are. Events give us a way to interact face to face with a lot of fun, interesting people who, by the way, are interested in learning more about their families.

In 2003 we got started a bit late and could only quickly get the society a booth in a couple of events...the PortFest in Oakland at Jack London Square in June and the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo in Hayward in July. These proved to be wonderful events for us in terms of exposure. We also made a valuable contact with one of the radio personalities from KBLX radio. Through this contact we were able to participate in their calendar program to talk about AAGSNC.

This year, we've had a bit more time to work on checking out different events so we've expanded our community exposure to four events all around the Bay Area. We will have a table or booth at:

• **BLACKFEST**
Formerly called the Black Family

Gathering this event will be held on the Stanford University campus in Palo Alto on Sunday, May 16th. BlackFest is an annual event designed to bring the community together in the tradition of family. African and African American culture will be celebrated with entertainment by various community and campus song and dance groups, a 3-on-3 hoops basketball tournament, a step show, a domino tournament, and vendors selling arts, crafts, clothing and food.

• **JUNETEENTH**

The 7th Annual Celebration in Oakland will be held on Friday or Saturday, June 18th or 19th in Frank Ogawa Plaza downtown. We're also investigating San Francisco.

• **COLLARD GREENS FESTIVAL**

The 7th Annual Festival will be held at Bell Street Park in East Palo Alto. It features Blues, Jazz, Reggae, Zydeco music, food and information booths, arts and crafts vendors, collard green ice cream, a chef cook-off and collard greens to die for!

• **ART & SOUL FESTIVAL**

The 4th Annual Festival will be held on Labor Day weekend, September 4-6th. The entertainment is top-notch. You may

remember Ziggy Marley headlined on the Plaza Stage in 2003.

We expect these to be really fun events for us to be a part of were we can talk to people who are really interested in what we do. We will sell genealogy-related books and promotional items as well as give a few things away. We also hope to sign up some new members.

What we need are volunteers to help us man the table/booth at these events. Even those of you who feel you don't know enough about genealogy to talk to someone else about it—we need you! Even if it's just to smile at people, greet them and welcome them to chat with more knowledgeable members. We need you! Please contact me or any of the other Officers or Board Members and let us know with which event you would like to help.

Also, anyone who would like to assist me with fundraising or other marketing ideas, please contact me. I really need some assistance.

Lenora Gobert may be contacted at: fundraising@aagsnc.org

West Coast Summit on African American Genealogy - Oct 15,16, 2004

Looking to the Past to Create the Future is the theme of the 4th Annual West Coast Summit on African American Genealogy. This year's Summit, hosted by the San Diego African American Genealogy Research Group (SDAAGR), will bring together all of the independent black genealogy groups in the West, and will provide attendees the opportunity to participate in interesting workshops, meet others who share their passion, and even go on a bus trip to a nearby Indian casino Saturday night.

The Summit will be held at the **Marina Village Conference Center** on San Diego's beautiful Mission Bay. The host hotel will be the Holiday Inn Mission

Bay - Seaworld, located 3 miles east of Marina Village, where Summit attendees can receive the special rate of \$85/night. SDAAGR members will be available to shuttle attendees between the conference center and the hotel.

The featured Keynote speaker of this year's event will be William B. Gould IV, author of *Diary of a Contraband: The Civil War Passage of a Black Sailor*, which chronicles the remarkable diary of Gould's ggf, William Benjamin Gould, an escaped slave who served in the U.S. Navy from 1862 until the end of the Civil War. The diary records Gould's activity as part of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Registration Info:

Early registration: \$60 before Sept. 17th
Late registration: \$75, and ends Sept. 30th.
NO ON-SITE REGISTRATION!!

CALL FOR PAPERS - Deadline Apr 17.

Volunteer presenters are invited to submit abstracts for workshop proposals for this year's Summit. In lieu of an honorarium, the registration fee for presenters will be waived. Abstracts should be emailed to Margaret Lewis in MS Word format, or via postal mail to the SDAAGR.

For more information, contact Margaret Lewis, President SDAAGR at: (619) 262-5810 or ibemarti@aol.com; PO Box 740240, San Diego, CA 92174



Whenever I think about Aunt Bertha, I always think about food. Whether it was preparing, cooking, baking or eating, Aunt Bertha had a passion for food which was evidenced by her weight. She was about five feet tall and weighed at least 250 pounds.

Some of my best memories of her are from the Christmas holidays, when she would bake her delicious pecan cookies for Christmas gifts to family and friends. Every year, a friend in Louisiana would send her pecans and she would spend hours shelling them for her cookie batter. We would spend a whole afternoon in her kitchen shelling pecans and catching up on family gossip. After she took a batch out of the oven, she would serve me warm cookies and a cup of tea.

For our traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas Day dinners, Aunt Bertha would make two of her special delicacies — sweet potatoes with pineapple and raisins, and bread pudding with hard sauce. For the Fourth of July and Labor Day holidays she would invite people over for a barbecue and top it off with peach cobbler and homemade peach ice cream. Entertaining for her always centered on cooking and feeding people. It gave her great pleasure to watch people eat and enjoy her food.

After her husband Bennie died, she lived alone in the Herzog Street house. In January 1991, she was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery on her trachea. After her hospitalization, she went back home for a brief period of time, but her house caught fire because of faulty wiring. After the fire, Aunt Bertha was admitted to Herrick Hospital's Sub-Acute Care Unit in Berkeley, California. She was never able to live in her house again. She gave me power of attorney to handle all her affairs, and the Herzog Street home was sold in 1993. Bertha remained at Herrick until she died May 9, 1995.

Although Mamie, Rosa, Ethel, Bertha and James Edward (Uncle Ed) were really my great-aunts and uncle, they were all very close to me and I always referred to them as my aunts and uncle. Out of all the sisters, only my grandmother and Aunt

Mamie had children.

• **Deaths**

The family matriarch, my great-grandmother Nancy Turner, died on Ward Street on March 25, 1950. She is buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Oakland, California, in the Garden of Prayer section, Row 18, Space 68. On both her death certificate and headstone her name is shown as Nannie Turner.

My great uncle, James Edward (Uncle Ed), passed away in 1958. Of my great-aunts, Mamie Turner Carter Jefferson died first, on June 2, 1970; then Ethel Turner Kimble died April 8, 1969; and Rosa Turner Barnes died in 1974. My grandmother, Addie Turner Fields, died December 5, 1978, and Bertha Turner Dunn, the youngest of the Turner siblings, died May 9, 1995.

James Edward and his wife, Nora, are buried near Nancy Turner at Evergreen Cemetery in the Garden of Prayer section, Row 21, Space 64. Mamie, Ethel, Bertha, and Addie are interred in crypts at Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland, California. Ethel and Addie are located in the Garden of Revelation in Tier S-6. Aunt Bertha is also in the Garden of Revelation Tier S-5. Mamie is with her husband, Mr. Jefferson, in the Garden of St. Paul, Tier W-6. Rosa and her husband, Septimus Barnes, are buried at Rolling Hills cemetery in Richmond, California.

From cradle to grave, the Turner family members remained very close to each other.

• **In Closing**

My great-grandparents provided their family with a foundation based on a strong faith in God. The family maintained strong ties by honoring family traditions, celebrating holidays together, and worshipping together in church.

Oscar and Nancy taught their children to be there for one another no matter what. In spite of any differences they had with one another, they knew how to work together to improve their circumstances in life. Uncle Sept helped Uncle Ed get a job as a Pullman Porter. In turn, Uncle Ed helped the family out financially whenever he could. My mother, Evelyn,

worked hard and saved her money to buy her mother a ticket to come to California. In later life, the three sisters Ethel, Bertha, and Addie pooled their money together to buy the Herzog Street property.

Wherever the Turner family lived they were well-respected and highly regarded. In their moves to New Orleans and California they made a place for themselves in the community, especially through their involvement with the church. They were good neighbors, active church members, and loyal friends. They shared what they had with others and were always ready to lend a helping hand.

They were a proud working class family filled with hopes and dreams for a better life. Working as domestics and porters, they fulfilled their dreams to the best of their ability.

I am grateful that Oscar and Nancy's 1884 marriage certificate was preserved as the family moved from Mississippi to New Orleans to California. This family record gave me the inspiration to research the lives of the Turner family and to tell their story. I feel honored and privileged to be part of their lineage.

Nancy Thompson may be contacted at: ntompson46@hotmail.com





• **Herzog Street**

In 1959, Addie, Bertha and Ethel sold the Ward Street property and bought a larger home located at 6320 Herzog Street, Oakland. All three of the sisters did domestic work and they pooled their money to buy the house together. Bertha and Ethel stayed upstairs, and my grandmother stayed downstairs in the basement unit. Even though it appeared to be unfair, my grandmother said she didn't mind being downstairs because she had her privacy and didn't always have to be bothered with Bertha and Ethel.

Addie went upstairs every morning to have breakfast and sometimes Bertha and Ethel would not see her again until dinnertime. I remember going over to visit my grandmother and spending a lot of time downstairs with her. She had her bedroom, a half-bath and a front room area that also had a washing machine and storage space. On Wednesday and Saturday nights she would go upstairs to take a full bath.

After the move to their new home, both Bertha and Ethel, who were in their sixties, married for the first time. Bertha married Bennie Dunn and Ethel married Mr. Kimble. Ethel moved out to live with her husband, and Mr. Dunn moved in the Herzog Street house with Bertha and Addie. My grandmother continued to live downstairs and Bennie and Bertha lived upstairs. Both husbands preceded their wives in death.

Their sister, Mamie Carter, bought a home across the street at 6301 Herzog Street. Mamie's daughter, Octavia, and her granddaughter, Elsie Marie, lived with her and later, her second husband, Mr. Jefferson. Rosa and her husband, Septimus Barnes, also bought a home in a nearby neighborhood.

• **My Memories of the Turner Sisters: Addie**

My grandmother was fun to be around. She never took things too seriously and could always make you laugh. She was a free spirit who was well liked by her neighbors and friends. She was different from the other sisters. She walked to the beat of a different drummer. While Aunt Bertha and Aunt Ethel were always

worried about finding a husband, Addie never remarried and it didn't seem to bother her at all.

My cousin, Morrie, says: "Out of all of the sisters, Addie was my absolute favorite. She was my kind of people ... a little off the wall and I loved that."

Addie was a short, stocky woman with pretty bow legs. You could recognize her coming down the street just by her walk. She had beautiful white hair that made her stand out in a crowd.

When my siblings and I were small, she used to babysit us while my parents worked. When I was in the first grade, I was afraid of dogs. There was one particular dog in the neighborhood that would always bark and run after me. Other family members would laugh and tease me about the dog, but my grandmother never did. Instead, she would hold my hand and walk me by the dog to show me that if I didn't act like I was afraid, the dog wouldn't bother me. And she was right. We would walk right past and the dog would stay on the porch and ignore us.

When I was around twelve years old, my grandmother had a stroke and was hospitalized for several months at Fairmont Hospital in San Leandro, California. Her left side was impaired and she had to walk with a cane, but other than that she still got around pretty well. She stopped working and lived off her Social Security. She was very active in the Senior Citizen's program at the Golden Gate Recreation Center and would take bus trips with the group and participate in their annual fashion show. She remained active until she died in 1978.

• **Aunt Mamie**

After my great-grandmother died, Aunt Mamie took over the role of matriarch of the family. She was the level headed one and whenever there was a problem, the family would look to her for advice. In the 1960s, Mamie married for the second time. Her second husband's name was Mr. Jefferson and he moved in with Aunt Mamie, her daughter, Octavia, and granddaughter, Elsie.

• **Aunt Ethel**

Aunt Ethel was a petite woman who was very prim and proper. She used to dress very nicely. I remember that she loved to shop. She was not as strong willed as Aunt Bertha and she kind of went along with whatever Aunt Bertha wanted to do. It was a family joke about Aunt Ethel that after she got married, she never referred to her husband by name. She would always say, "My husband said this," or "My husband did that," as if she wanted to remind us that she finally had a husband.



"The Aunts." Child is Nancy Thompson

• **Aunt Bertha**

As a child and young adult, I really didn't have much communication or connection with Aunt Bertha. A lot of it had to do with the tension between her and my mother. It was not until I was older, and Aunt Bertha was the only surviving elder of the family, that I established a close relationship with her.



... continued from page 2

Let your family history begin with what YOU have discovered. I'm ready to add "meat" to my "bones" of data and put something in print, even a limited edition, so future researchers will have a foundation on which to start building. Or perhaps like the houses we see lifted and new construction added beneath, they will go back rather than forward, into the ancestral history that I don't have, and change the foundation. At this point, though I don't know much, I know more about my ancestors than anyone in the family, and it would be a shame for someone to have to reinvent this wheel later on. How about your story??

In Genealogy, "Speling Dousn't Cownt!" -We're talking about publishing our family histories, and "Speling Dousn't Cownt!" you say. You add that in the olden days, folks spelled words however they sounded to them, maybe spelled the same word different ways in one document. "Why they sometimes even wrote their own names two or three different ways in one

document!"

That was then and this is now. When you start writing that family history, it's important that you pay attention to spelling. A book full of misspelled/ misused words can be very difficult to read. Watch out for those words that sound alike, but don't spell alike, and have totally different meanings: "I can cite a list with many a site that is an awesome sight to see. The effect of visiting a site such as Yosemite, and seeing the wondrous sight that it is, can affect us in many ways. It can even effect a change in our lives."

Before I had began this letter, I all ways new I had a flare for righting. Hear is my chance to show the world it's knot hard too do. Yes, their are spell checkers that will ketch errors four yew. But remember, if you use a reel word, spell check want fine it. "Candidate for a Pullet Surprise"*** is a poem which is a humorous example of what havoc can be wrought by too heavy reliance on a spell checker.

When your in a hurry, it's easy to make a error in you're typing. Proofreading is a must. You should always reed over your wrok carefully before handing it to someone esle, looking for typos, misspelled words to. When you take a break from proofing, try to find were you were before you stopped.

All right. You've read the letter. How many errors did YOU spot??? Send your responses to the editor....

Melbyn L. Gillette
AAGSNC President 2004
president@aagsnc.org

** <http://ifaq.wap.org/computers/spellcheck.html>

GENEALOGICAL CODICIL

This email has made the rounds on the internet recently. Considering all the hard work we've done documenting the lives of our ancestors, it would be a shame for all this to be destroyed once we die. You might want to consider adding a similar statement into your own Last Will & Testament, in hopes that the legacy of your work will live on. - Ed.

To my spouse, children, guardian, administrator and/or executor:

Upon my demise it is requested that you **DO NOT** dispose of any or all of my genealogical records, both those prepared personally by me and those records prepared by others which may be in my possession, including, but not limited to, books, files, notebooks, photographs, or computer programs, for a period of two years. During this time period, please

attempt to identify one or more persons who would be willing to take custody of said materials and the responsibility of maintaining and continuing the family histories **[If you know of family or friends who are likely candidates to accept these items, add the following point]**. I suggest that the persons contacted regarding the assumption of the custody of these items include but are not limited to ... **[and list the names of those individuals with their addresses and phone numbers]**. In the event you do not find anyone to accept these materials, please contact the various genealogical organizations of which I've been a member and determine if they will accept some or all of my genealogical materials **[List organizations, addresses and phone numbers]**.

Please remember that my genealogical

endeavors consumed a great deal of time, travel and money. Therefore, it is my desire that the products of these endeavors be allowed to continue in a manner that will make them available to others in the future.

Sign and date this codicil. Have at least TWO witnesses also sign and date this. Store this codicil with your Will and other important papers.



“SPELING DOUSN’T COWNT”

BY LISA B. LEE, EDITOR

I started doing my own genealogy over 30 years ago, inspired by a visit Alex Haley paid to my high school prior to the publication of his landmark book, *Roots*. At the time, I was 14-years old, with far more enthusiasm than good sense, so when I started trying to document the lives of my ancestors, I made **tons** of mistakes.

Thirty years later, I **still** make mistakes. I just try to make *new* ones, and every time I think I’ve made every sort of genealogical mistake possible, I’m often amazed to find there are still more mistakes to be discovered and experienced first hand.

That said, I have come up with a set of genealogical GOLDEN RULES that I try to obey at all times. Had I known this in the beginning, I would have saved myself tons of grief and months of searching down the wrong paths. Over the next few editions of *From the Baobab Tree*, I’ll share these rules with you and I invite you to write me and let me know of your OWN rules and any suggestions you may have about mine.

GOLDEN RULE No. 1: SPELING DOUSN’T COWNT

Either intentionally or unintentionally, many of our ancestors’ names have been changed over the years. In many cases, it was simply due to a mispronunciation or a local official who couldn’t spell. Since many newly freed blacks were illiterate (it was illegal in most states to teach a black to read or write), when it came time to create a vital record or other document, they simply didn’t know how to spell their own names and the local official did the best he or she could to decipher how to spell the person’s name.

It was not uncommon to add an ending “s” to a name, so that the surname **PITT** became **PITTS**, or vice-versa, changing **COLES** to **COLE**. In other cases, simply the pronunciation of a surname could lead to a totally different spelling. In the case of **VERDUN**, if the accent was placed on the first syllable, the spelling could range anywhere from **VIRDUN** to **VERDON**

to **VIRDEN**. However, if the accent was placed on the second syllable, the spelling could, and did, range from **VIRDINE** to **VERDONE** to even **VIDRINE**. And in every case, the spelling is *correct*!

On a visit to my mother’s hometown of Richmond, VA years ago, I asked my aunt for directions to a local shopping mall. She told me to take I-95 and exit at what sounded like “PAIR-em Road.” Off I went on my merry way, but I didn’t see an exit that looked like what I’d expected to find. When I got near the **PARHAM ROAD** exit, I thought to myself, “Is *that* what she meant?” I’m from a suburb of Detroit, MI, where **PARHAM** is pronounced, **PAR-ham**, certainly not **PAIR-em**. Had I been a census enumerator back in the day, who knows what kind of damage I could have done to people’s names?

But do you see my point?

What this means to a genealogist is that you *must* expand your searches and even your thought processes if want to be successful in documenting your family’s history.

Vital records are fraught with errors, and the census is probably one of the worst records when it comes to accuracy of information. Don’t get me wrong, the census is a very valuable tool, but it must be used as a guideline which you can use to obtain *other* independent sources of information to verify anything you find in a census record.

The job of the census enumerator was often given out as a political plum by the local powers-that-be, and there were no educational or other requirements for the job. If you could fog up a mirror, you could be a census enumerator. Ask anyone who’s ever done any census work and they’ll tell you about all the chicken scratch they’ve had to try to decipher, words and names that were misspelled, and even the racial prejudice that found its way onto a census page. In one case, I found a census record in Cape Girardeau, MO with the notation from an obviously annoyed enumerator which stated, “These

colored people don’t know nothing, don’t do nothing.”

Ouch! I guess he was in a bad mood that day. Can you imagine how his obvious displeasure from dealing with those “know-nothing” black folks could cause him to get sloppy with his record keeping?

When the Soundex system was first created in 1935, its original intent was to facilitate the indexing of birth information for the newly-created Social Security System. The Census Bureau hired the Rand Corporation to devise a phonetic system for coding like-sounding surnames in order to deal with variant spellings and outright spelling errors.

Though the Soundex system was a great improvement, it’s not perfect, and many surnames have multiple Soundex codes based on either the way they are pronounced or the way they’re spelled. I recently did some family research for a friend. His great great grandmother’s surname was **DOWDY** (Soundex code D300).

But some public records for this family appear as **DAUGHTERY** (Soundex code D236), **DOUGHTY** (Soundex code D230), **DORTY** (Soundex code D630), **DORTRY** (Soundex code D636), or **DAUGHERTY** (Soundex code D263).

Some online genealogical databases allow you to do Soundex searches (i.e. FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, Ontario Cemetery Finding Aid) and I recommend you take advantage of this whenever possible. Even if you use a Soundex search, there are no search engines that will do a cross-Soundex search, as would be needed with the **DOWDY** example, above.

Whether you do your research online or in an archive/library, make sure you check for variant spellings in order to maximize your results. It may take a bit more time in the short run, but in the long run, you’ll be glad you did.

Write me at: newsletter@aagsnc.org



to take me to the meeting.”

Later in life, Morrie Turner grew up to be a nationally known cartoonist whose name is recognized by thousands of people for his comic strip “Wee Pals.”⁴

• **Cousin Morrie’s Visits to New Orleans**
Morrie: “My dad would get railroad passes and we went back to New Orleans in the Summertime to visit. I remember staying at Grandma’s house. She was a very sweet woman. My father’s brother George, nicknamed ‘Brother,’ lived upstairs from Grandma and we would visit with him as well. One of my most vivid memories are the butts that would be flying around at night. They scared the living daylights out of me!!”

• 1940’s – The Turner Family Moves to California

On February 3, 1943, Uncle Ed paid for my great-grandmother Nancy, Berth, and Evelyn to come out to California. When they first arrived, they all lived with Aunt Rosa and Uncle Sept. They Evelyn went to stay with Uncle Ed and his family. “I didn’t want to come to California because I was in love with a young man in New Orleans and I didn’t want to leave him. But my grandmother insisted on me coming with her. It was during the war and I didn’t like being in California. I cried almost every night when I first came here. Because of the war, everybody had to have blackout shades so it was very dark.”

“There was an Army camp with barracks right there at Ashby Ave., behind Heinz Cannery. People came out here to work, but there were not enough places to live. Folks were sleeping in garages. Or two or three people would rent a room and sleep in shifts. Most of the older women with rooms to rent wouldn’t rent to young, single women because they didn’t want those young women to be around their husbands.”

My mother worked and saved her money, in order to bring her mother to California. The first job she had was at

Ambassador Laundry on 35th Street and San Pablo Avenue in Oakland. After that, she worked at Heinz Cannery. She bought a train ticket for her mother and Uncle Ed sent money for Aunt Ethel. My grandmother, Addie, and Aunt Ethel came to California at the end of 1943, right around Christmas time.

• Ward Street

After all the women had finally arrived in California, they decided to pool their money together to buy a house. Uncle Ed saw a two-bedroom house in Berkeley at 1207 Ward Street that he wanted them to buy. The house cost \$3,500. With Uncle Ed’s help, they came up with \$1,000 for a down payment.

Four generations of women, including Aunt Mamie’s five year old granddaughter, Elsie Marie, lived in the Ward Street house. Eventually my mother moved out and in 1944 she married my father, James Thompson. My great-grandmother died in 1950 and the sisters lived in the Ward Street house until 1959. Then they bought another house on Herzog Street in Oakland.

As a young child, I remember my great-grandmother was sick and stayed in the bed a lot. When I came over she would always say, “Come on over here baby, and give Nana a kiss.” I was shy around her because I could tell she was ill, but I always liked to go over and visit her because she would tell my mother to give me graham crackers and milk.

My cousin, Elsie, remembers all the sisters doubling up for sleeping. Two slept on the chesterfield in the living room and two slept in a double bed in one of the bedrooms. My great-grandmother slept alone in the main bedroom.

The family had a vegetable garden and raised chickens in the backyard. On Saturdays, Aunt Bertha would kill a chicken for Sunday dinner. She would cover the chicken’s head with a paper bag and wring its neck.



Nannie Boze

Both Aunt Ethel and Aunt Bertha worked at Heinz Cannery on Ashby Avenue. They would walk to work from Ward Street.

• Backyard Socials

The family spent a lot of time entertaining in the backyard on Ward Street. We had barbeques, Sunday dinners, birthday parties, teas, and baby showers there. Pictures taken in the backyard during the late 1940s and early 1950s show the Turner family and their friends all dressed up in their best Sunday outfits, fancy hats and all.

The backyard had a spacious lawn, fancy lawn furniture including a lawn swing, and a large table complete with umbrella and matching chairs. Family and friends would sit, eat, laugh and talk with each other, while others played the lawn game, croquet. Aunt Bertha was an excellent cook, and she prepared most of the food. We would have gumbo, fried chicken, ham, potato salad, greens, cornbread, yams, and macaroni and cheese. For dessert, there would be pies, cakes, and homemade ice cream.

In spite of what else might be going on with the family, those times spent together in the backyard were enjoyed by all. For their friends and fellow church members, the Turner family’s backyard was the place to be on Sunday afternoon.

• North Oakland Baptist Church

In 1944, the Turner family joined the North Oakland Missionary Baptist Church in Oakland, California and remained faithful and active members until their deaths. In 1904, the church started with twenty-three members in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Richard Clark. At the time the Turner family became members, Rev. A. O. Bell was the pastor. In 1960, a new church was built with a seating capacity of 942 people.⁵

Addie, Evelyn, Bertha, and Ethel all sang in the Women’s Choir. Evelyn and Bertha often sang as lead soloists. They also sang duets together. All three sisters, Mamie, Ethel, and Bertha met their husbands at North Oakland Baptist Church and all were married at the church.



Later, when I was growing up, I remember my mother singing solo in the choir. She was always one of the featured soloists in special musical programs at North Oakland Baptist Church. During the 1950s, she worked as a soloist for Baker's Mortuary in Oakland, California. She sang at funerals and at other community events.

• **The First African Baptist Church**

The Turner family attended First African Baptist Church in the 1920s and 30s in New Orleans. The church was and is still located at 2216 Third Street, just around the corner from where the Turner family used to live. Founded in 1817, it is the oldest existing African-American church on record in Louisiana. The church has withstood the challenges of slavery, Pre-Civil War, Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, voting discrimination and the Civil Rights movement.²

Evelyn: "We went to First African Baptist Church. We called it Old Baptist, but the full name was First African Baptist. I sang in the junior choir, Bertha sang in the senior choir, and Ethel was an usher. While the entire family were regular members, I was never baptized there. I was baptized after we came to California."

• **Aunt Rosa and Uncle Sept Come to California**

Aunt Rosa had married Septimus Barnes. In the early 1920s they were the first family members to move to California. Uncle Sept worked as a Pullman Porter and encouraged his brother-in-law, James Edward (Uncle Ed), to come join them in California. Uncle Ed's son, Morrie, remembers: "Uncle Sept and Aunt Rosa lived in West Oakland on Eighth Street. I used to go to their house a lot because I had a paper route and they were one of my customers. Aunt Rosa was a very good cook and I would often eat with her. She made this great dish that was kind of like bread pudding. I don't know exactly what it was but I haven't had it since."

"Uncle Sept looked like a white man. He was very light-skinned with blue eyes and straight hair. When I worked at the Oakland Police Department, he would come down to my office and ask to see his nephew. People would be very

surprised to find out he was looking for me. They would ask me, 'That's you uncle?'"

Both my cousin, Morrie, and I remember Uncle Sept as being kind of gruff. In fact as a little girl he scared me. He would grab me and pick me up and he talked really loud. I used to cry whenever he held me. When I told this to Morrie, he laughed and said, "Yeah, he could be kind of rough. I was grown and sometimes he scared me too."

Aunt Rosa had a great sense of humor. She had a dry wit and would crack great jokes in a very low key way. "Aunt Rosa and Uncle Sept" were always referred to as a unit. They were a very good looking couple.

• **James Edward (Uncle Ed)**

Uncle Ed was married to Nora Spears and they lived in Natchez, Mississippi, before moving to California in 1922. Prior to his marriage to Nora, Uncle Ed had three sons, James #1, James #2, and Edmo. Two of the sons, James #2 and Edmo stayed in touch with their father and Edmo actually lived with the family for several years. Together, James and Nora had four sons, Joseph, Edward, Marion, and Morrie Turner.

Uncle Ed's son, Morrie, states that when the family first arrived in California in 1922, they lived in West Oakland on Eighth Street down the street from Cole Elementary School. Morrie, the baby of the family, was born in 1923. He remembers that Uncle Ed shined shoes for a couple years before he became a Pullman Porter. Later, his brother-in-law, Septimus Barnes, who was already working as a Pullman Porter, helped Uncle Ed get his job.

Uncle Ed started working as a Pullman Porter in the mid-1920s. He was headquartered in Chicago and was gone for seven days at a time — three days out, one day in Chicago, and three days back. Morrie remembers he and his brothers going down to the train station to meet their father after many of his long runs. "My brothers and I would go down to the old 16th Street Southern Pacific railroad station to meet my father. He would always have a lot of food that he got from

the cooks, so he needed all those hands to help carry it. We had plenty of food in those days."

Uncle Ed's character is best exemplified by a story Morrie likes to tell:

"The reason my dad came to be named George was because of the Pullman Company. It was company policy to call all the porters 'George.' The name 'George' was used by white passengers in a very derogatory and condescending manner. It was like using the 'N' word. So my dad legally changed his name to George. When one of the passengers would say, 'Oh, George,' he would reply, 'Wow, how sis you know my name? What can I do for you?' He refused to be called out of his name and since he needed the job, that was his way of dealing with it."

I was one of Uncle Ed's favorite nieces. He was very nice to me and would give me money, candy, kisses and hugs. He always made me feel very special. I just loved him. He was a kind and generous man who loved his mother and was very close to his family. He also liked to party and have a good time. He was a sharp dresser and loved to wear hats. His son Morrie said that he thinks his father liked to think of himself as a black James Cagney. My mother was fond of him, too. "Uncle Ed felt more like a father to me than an uncle. He was there whenever I needed anything. When I found out I had to have a Caesarean operation with my first child and we didn't have the money for it, Uncle Ed took us down to Morris Plan and took out a loan for us. He was very much like his mother who was also a very kind and generous person."

• **Going to See A. Philip Randolph**

One of Morrie's fondest memories is the time his father took him to meet A. Philip Randolph³ at a union organizing meeting in Oakland, California. Morrie recalls: "I remember my dad taking me to a union meeting to meet A. Philip Randolph when I was about seven years old. They opened the meeting with the song 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' Mr. Randolph had this great voice. His voice and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice were the greatest voices I've ever heard. I felt very privileged and special that my dad chose



1ST ANNUAL AAGSNC WRITING CONTEST - SECOND PRIZE

The **Turner Family History**

by Nancy Thompson

• **1884 Marriage Certificate**

On October 4, 1884 in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi, Oscar Turner and Nancy Boze committed to each other in marriage. Both in their early 20s, they vowed to start a life together, have a family and be there for one another in good times and bad.

Now, 119 years later, I am sitting at my kitchen table holding their tattered and torn marriage certificate and thinking about my great-grandparents' lives and about the lives of their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

This marriage certificate has passed through many different hands as it traveled from Mississippi to New Orleans to California. It marks the beginning of the Turner family, their history and legacy. Now some six generations later, I seek to document their lives for the generations yet to be born. Being named after my great-grandmother, I feel honored to be the one to tell their story.

• **1900 Census Record**

At the Mormon Temple's Family History Center (FHC) in Oakland, California, I was able to locate the Wilkinson County 1900 Federal census records for my great-grandparents. At the time of the census, Nancy and Oscar were still living in Woodville, Mississippi. Oscar's occupation was listed as mail handler. He was 37 years old and Nancy was 36. They had seven children ranging in age from fourteen years to eight months. Andres (July 1885), Mary J. (Nov. 1888), James Edward (Feb. 1890), Rosa L. (April 1893), Mamie (Dec. 1895), George J. (Dec. 1896), and my grandmother, Addie (Oct. 1899), who was eight months old at the time. After the 1900 census, two more daughters were born: Ethel (circa 1903) and Bertha (circa Dec. 1905). According to my great aunt Bertha, Andrew and

Mary both died at an early age.

To illustrate how easily names changed during that era, my great-grandmother's name was listed as Nancy on her marriage certificate, but the census record lists her name as Nannie. Since my mother told me my great-grandmother asked that I be named after her, I assume that Nancy is correct and will refer to her as Nancy throughout this story.

• **My Trip to Woodville in 2002**

While visiting New Orleans in 2002, I decided to take a Greyhound bus to Woodville. The town is located at the Southern end of the state, very close to the Louisiana state line. It was only a three and a half hour bus ride from New Orleans.

Since I only had one day to visit, and most of that time would be taken up by travel, I decided the goal of my trip would not be to do research, but to just experience the town where my ancestors lived — the place they called home.

The bus dropped me off right on Highway 61 in front of the Buckhorn Store.

The store employees were very friendly and assured me that if I came back, I could find out more information about my great-grandparents in the town records. After talking with them for a while, I went outside to a large grove of oak trees, poured libations and said a prayer for all my ancestors — acknowledging their trials and struggles as well as their joys and triumphs. Even though I only stayed in the town for an hour, just being there on the land where my family had once lived was good enough for me.

• **Early 1900s – Family Moves to New Orleans**

Sometime in the early 1900s, Oscar and

Nancy, along with Bertha, Rosa, Ethel, Mamie, Addie, and George moved from Woodville to New Orleans, Louisiana. James Edward had married and was living with his family in Natchez, Mississippi.

Upon their arrival in New Orleans, the Turner family first lived on Constantinople Street, then at 2303 South Liberty Street. After Oscar's death in 1927, the family moved to nearby Second Street, and lived there until they left for California in 1943.

My mother, Evelyn Fields Thompson, states, "The only house I remember before we moved to Second Street was on South Liberty Street, between 1st and 4th Street. I can't remember the address of that house, but from there we moved to Second Street, a very sophisticated, integrated neighborhood. There were four white families on the block."

"We were about four blocks from St. Charles where all the rich people lived. So you only had about four blocks to walk to go see the Mardi Gras parade. It was a very nice neighborhood.

A minister, two teachers, and a doctor lived nearby. My grandma, my momma, Aunt Bertha and Aunt Ethel all lived there together."

• **Oscar Turner**
Oscar Turner was born in Woodville, Mississippi in November 1862. he was the son of Minton Stroder, a white man who sired several children with a black woman. His children and grandchildren described him as a very good looking light-skinned man with "good hair" and greenish-gray eyes.

According to family members, Oscar dearly loved his wife, Nancy, who was a dark-skinned woman with distinct African features. He was remembered by all as being a good provider for his family, and



Oscar Turner



well respected in the community.

While the occupation listed on his death certificate is “minister,” my mother remembers her grandfather driving a wagon for the local funeral home. She said he also dispensed herbal medicines.

Evelyn: “They used to call him Dr. Turner, because he used to make medicine out of different herbs. People with pains and aches or ills would call on Dr. Turner. He would make up potions and put them in little bottles. We had what we called billweed in New Orleans. He would make stuff out of that.”

“Grandpa picked up everything. If he was walking down the street and saw something on the ground, he would pick it up. We had an old keg in the back filled with nails, pennies, spools, buttons, a little bit of everything. Whatever he found, he put in that barrel.”

• 1927 Oscar Turner Dies

On August 18, 1927, Oscar Turner died of stomach cancer in his home at 23030 South Liberty Street. To illustrate how loosely facts about birth dates were maintained or remembered, even among close family members, the age listed on his death certificate is 58. However, based on the birth date listed on the 1900 census record, he died at the age of 65.

My mother, Evelyn, remembers it well: “I was five years old at the time of my grandfather’s death. The night he died I was sleeping on the floor and I saw what I thought was a ghost in the bedroom where my grandfather was. Then I heard my grandmother holler and start to cry because Grandpa had just died. When I told my grandmother what I saw, she said it was just an angel that had come to take my grandfather away.”

• Nancy Turner

Nancy Boze, also known as Nannie Bruce, was born in Woodville, Mississippi on December 25, 1863. None of my great-aunts remember their mother taking about her parents or siblings or her life growing up. My cousin, Morrie states that he heard that his mother, Nora’s family lived on the same plantation as Nancy’s family. However, no one in the family ever really discussed it.

My mother remembers her Grandma as a loving, giving person — a very religious, Christian woman. She grew all her own vegetables and when the neighbors came to visit, she would give them vegetables from her garden. She did this both in New Orleans and after the family moved to California.

My great-grandmother also used herbs for healing. Evelyn remembers: “When I would get my period, I’d get the cramps real bad and Grandma used to make some stuff for me to help relieve the pain. There was a big fruit that she grew in the backyard. I can’t remember if it was yellow. Inside, it had big red seeds, and I think she poured whiskey or gin on it. She gave this to me when I had my cramps.”

My mother says when she was eight years old, her grandmother decided to go back to school to learn how to read and write. Nancy was about 67 years old at the time. Two nights a week, she and my mother would go to class at Thomy Lafon Elementary School. With my mother’s help, Nancy learned to read and write. She went as far as the third grade.

On Sundays after church, everybody, including the minister, wanted to go to the Turner’s house for dinner. My mother remembers that the adults would get all the good pieces of chicken and she would end up with the chicken wings and necks. Even now, as an adult, my mom can’t stand chicken necks.

One of my favorite photographs of my great-grandmother was taken by my mother around 1938 in front of their house on Second Street. My great-grandmother had on a black dress with a fancy collar. Her hair was pure white. According to my mother, “We had one of those little Kodak box shaped cameras and I took Grandma’s picture after we had come home from church. I was about sixteen years old at the time.”

• Addie Fields

My grandmother, Addie Turner, married Ira Fields around 1920. From this union, my mother, Evelyn Beatrice Fields, was born on November 2, 1922. After a brief marriage, Addie and Ira divorced, and at age 23, Addie and her

two year old daughter moved back into her parents’ house. At the time, the household included Oscar and Nancy and Addie’s two younger sisters. Ethel was 21 and Bertha was 19 years old. Ethel worked as a maid and was paid \$5.00 per week. Bertha was a maid and a cook and was paid \$7.00 per week. Evelyn remembers the tension between Addie and her younger sister, Bertha: “My mother, Addie, did not get along very well with Bertha. That was very hard for me because Aunt Bertha was often mean to Momma and would say, ‘You were pregnant and had to get married. You left but you had to come back home without that man.’ As a child those words were very hurtful to me and that is why, even as an adult, I have always had a problem getting along with Aunt Bertha.”

I was told that things got so tense around the house, that my grandmother moved out, but my great-grandmother would not let her take her daughter, Evelyn, with her. In reviewing the 1938 New Orleans directory pages, my grandmother, Addie L. Fields, was living at 2232 Wirth Place, New Orleans. Her occupation was listed as maid.

• Ira Fields

My search for my grandfather has taken several years and has been filled with many surprises and frustrations. After extensive research, I think I have found the right Ira Fields, but I can’t be certain. There are still many unanswered questions. In running a search in the Social Security Death Index records, I found an Ira Fields from New Orleans who was born August 7, 1892 and died in July 1966.

I then wrote to the Social Security Administration for his Social Security card application. The application, dated March 17, 1937, listed Ira’s mother and father as Charles and Sophie Hart. The most significant thing I learned from this document was that the last name Fields was not his parents’ name but the name of the relatives who raised him.

Armed with a date of death, I requested a copy of Ira Fields’ obituary from the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library. Six weeks later, I received a copy of his obituary which had been

published in the Picayune Times which stated in part: “Died Thurs. July 21, 1966 at 5:30 p.m. ...Beloved husband of Mrs. Louise Norris Fields: father of Elenora Jones ... Services from the Pure Light Baptist Church, Tuesday July 26, 1966. ... Internment at Providence Memorial Park.”

The obituaries I received from Providence Memorial Park indicate that Ira Fields had two other wives besides Addie, one of which he married before he married my grandmother. His daughter, Elenora, was born in 1919, three years before Evelyn was born.

Unfortunately, in all the research I conducted, I was not able to establish any direct connection of that Ira Fields to Addie or to my mother, Evelyn.

• Aunt Mamie

Aunt Mamie was five years older than my grandmother. While living in New Orleans she was married to Clarence Carter who worked as a longshoreman. They had three children — Octavia, Shirley, and Clarence, Jr. (“Brother”). Uncle Clarence died tragically in a fire aboard the ship on which he was working.

Evelyn: “Aunt Mamie was good to me. Her husband had a very good job, he made a lot of money and my cousins were some of the best-dressed kids in the neighborhood. Aunt Mamie would always give me the clothes that Shirley outgrew.”

“I remember when we got the news about Uncle Clarence’s death. A man knocked on the door and Octavia went to see who it was. The next thing we knew Octavia was screaming and the man was holding onto her telling her, ‘Don’t cry.’ The man told us that during the fire, Uncle Clarence had been caught on a ladder and the rungs of the ladder got so hot he couldn’t hold on and he fell back into the flames.”

“It was so tragic. I was probably in junior high school when this happened, because Octavia was a teenager. She was the eldest of the cousins. She was two years older than me.”

• Evelyn’s Childhood

My mother states that she had a wonderful childhood. She grew up with her extended family which included her

grandmother, mother, and two aunts, Ethel and Bertha. She didn’t know her father and there was never any discussion about him. She was told that he had been present at her high school graduation, but he did not come up and make himself known to her.

Evelyn attended Thomy Lafon Elementary School, Hoffman Jr. High School, and McDonogh 35 High School. She graduated from high school in June 1941. Evelyn recalls: “Even though we didn’t have a lot, I had a beautiful childhood! We didn’t have a telephone. We would go to our neighbor’s house to use her phone. We loved to sit together in the evening and listen to the radio. Some of our favorite radio programs were Major Bowes Amateur Hour, Amos & Andy, and Fibber McGee & Molly. We also had a piano. Aunt Bertha had taken lessons and she would play the piano for us.”

My mother remembers her grandmother as strict but not mean: “Grandma didn’t spoil me. She put the rod on me, when needed. I wasn’t a bad kid, but when I did wrong, my grandmother would whip me.”

“I was an only child and I just loved to be at home with my grandmother. She was the first person to teach me how to use a sewing machine. When I was in the 5th grade at Thomy Lafon Elementary School, I took sewing classes. My sewing teacher was Louise Smith. And she was very good. You know how kids wanted to wear exactly what everyone else is wearing, just to be in style? Not me! I did not want to see someone else with the same thing I had on. I wanted to be different so I made my clothes.”

These early sewing lessons served her well later on in life. She was an excellent seamstress. I remember the beautiful outfits she made for herself and the pretty



Sunday dresses she made for us. She was always getting compliments on the things she made because they were so unique and different.

• Evelyn’s Friend Queen Esther

My great-grandmother would not allow Evelyn to spend time at other people’s homes, but her friends could come to her house. My mother fondly recalls her friend, Queen Esther: “When I was in high school, I had a girlfriend named Queen Esther who was in college. She would get me to go out, but I’d say, ‘No, I can’t go because I have chores to do.’ Grandma’s rule was, you come home from school, you do your chores and then you could go out. So Queen Esther would come and help me clean the house. We’d start at the front of the house and clean all the way to the back.”

“Queen Esther was a good friend and we had a lot of fun together. We remained friends up until the time she died in the 1980s.”

• Evelyn’s Singing Career

My mother had a beautiful singing voice. She was very dedicated to her music and I think given the right opportunity earlier on, she could have had a successful singing career. “I started singing in elementary school. I sang ‘Trees’ for my sixth grade graduation. In junior high school, I was part of a group that would go to different classrooms and sing on assembly days. I was also in a dance group with Mrs. Durgin. We had a review every year and I sang and danced in that.”

“When I was around thirteen or fourteen years old, I sang in the junior choir at church. The church wanted to collect money to send me to New York to sing on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour but my grandmother said, ‘No.’”

“When I was about seventeen or eighteen years old, I would sing at the Palace Theatre on Saturday night. Then I sang at a little nightclub called Walkertown, right outside of New Orleans. I got paid \$2.50 for a Saturday night performance plus the audience would throw money onto the stage. Grandma did not like me performing in night clubs, so Momma would always go with me.”



Evelyn Fields Thompson