



The Baobab Tree

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

Spring 2010

THE ARLINGTON HOTEL SECRETS

By Jackie Stewart

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Welcome New Members!

Shan'te Brown

Sharon Styles

Bonnie Wheatley

Horace Wheatley

In July 1983, I was returning to Hot Springs, Arkansas, for my high school reunion. The last time I had visited Hot Springs was 1972 when my mother, Irene, along with her two sisters, Ida and Janet, decided to spend a few days on a “get away vacation.” My family had left the city when I was in the eighth grade, settling in Pasadena, California.

I stood looking for a familiar face among the crowd gathered in the lobby of the Arlington Hotel. It felt good to be inside the cool air-conditioned room and out of the intense July heat. The lobby, with its winding staircase and oversized chandelier, was much smaller than I had imagined. I was amazed at the flurry of excitement generated among the crowd. There were plenty of hugs, kisses, and handshakes, enough to last a decade.

Several months before leaving California for the reunion, I received a telephone call from Mrs. Logan, the retired high school English teacher. She and her husband, Alfonso, were advisers to the 1983 high school reunion committee. She invited me to speak on behalf of the 1957 graduating class on the first night of the celebration.

I accepted the invitation never knowing why I had responded so quickly. Perhaps it was the



Arlington Hotel, Hot Springs, AR circa 1905 Souvenir Postcard

charming manner she displayed to each student.

I had mixed emotions about staying at the Arlington, which had never permitted my family to enter through the front door because of segregation laws in Arkansas. As with other black folks in the south, the back door entrance was the rule of the day. The hotel represented the best and worst of life in Hot Springs. The town was well known as the south's spa capital. It was a place where people came from all over the world for relaxation, to take mineral baths, and to gamble illegally. Like many black folks in the south looking for a better life, my grandfather, Bertrand Johnson, found his way to the Arlington and a job as a waiter. The hours were long, wages

were low, but a good waiter could make a decent living with tips. It was better than the farming life he had left in Nashville, Arkansas. The Arlington would become the financial lifeline for my family. My uncles, aunts, and grandmother would follow in the footsteps of my grandfather, working as waiters, porters and maids.

During the early 1950s my aunts became weary of the unjust employment policies of the Arlington and began to organize a workers' union. The owners threatened to dismiss them. Swallowing their pride, they continued working for the hotel until the family migrated to California. And now, here I stood wondering what in the

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to our spring edition. We thank all of our writers this month, including AAGSNC Board Chairman Bill Melson, who sent us the National Genealogical Society's guidelines for sharing information. Very special thanks to Charlene Brown Neal, the newest member of the Journal Committee, who volunteered as Layout Editor.

Your stories are touching, insightful, and always fascinating. We're excited at your response to *The Baobab Tree*. We hope that as you read this issue you will be inspired to share **your** story in the next one!

Vernester Sheeler

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



BE SURE THEY COUNT YOU!

The every-ten-years national head count is underway. As in previous U.S. Censuses, there have been arguments for avoiding being counted, some of them pretty good. As family history researchers, however, it is our duty to counter these arguments, and encourage everyone within earshot to ensure that they are counted.

Anyone who has seriously researched their family history for even a day knows how vital census data is. This is often the *only* record that some of our ancestors existed. If they are missing from the census, they are missing.

Remember the person you were trying to nail down in 1890, only to find that the census records had been destroyed by fire along with important information—to you—about the person you were seeking? Remember how frustrating it was trying to reconstruct this information by other means? Remember finding someone in Texas in 1900, but when you checked the 1910 census they were not there? They were pretty old; did they die? Did they move? Probably none of the above; the census taker just missed them! They were lost for another ten years.

When your descendants come looking for you in seventy-three years (when this year's census records become available to the public), will anyone remember the noble reason for your boycott? I doubt it. All they will know is that there is an empty space where you and your family were supposed to be in the year 2010.

It may take a few minutes of your time, but it is worth it. Not only will the data gathered be used for determining congressional districts, balancing ethnic and racial traits as required by law, it will be

By M. Howard Edwards

used to fairly allocate some federal funds. Every person counted in California brings in about \$1,400 per year from the federal treasury. Just as importantly to us who do family history research, it will establish a record of our family's existence for all time. It is one of our few shots at immortality. Let's not miss.

AAGSNC VOLUNTEER POWER

I hate the thought of accepting something from others without giving something in return, and maybe you do, too. The African American Genealogical Society of Northern California is an entirely volunteer organization. Not one single officer or committee chair gets reimbursed or paid for their efforts to keep the society strong and active. You may feel good after writing your check for your membership dues, thinking you have done your duty, but you must not stop there. We all have skills developed through our work, religious or academic lives that could benefit AAGSNC, and there's plenty you could do:

Publishing *The Baobab Tree* uses many varied talents; I'm sure one of them is yours.

The Publicity Committee could use your help to get out the word about our activities and bring in new members.

Do you like to write? **The History Committee** could use you.

There is a **Writers' Group** that convenes to swap techniques, and learn new styles and methods. It also reviews submissions for publication in *The Baobab Tree*.

The Program Committee could use your help to line up presenters and develop program content.

Do not continue to slip by and benefit from the efforts of others without giving something in return. You'll find contact information on the back cover of *The Baobab Tree*. Get in touch with the chairpersons of the committees that interest you and volunteer! Today!



The Arlington

(Continued from page 1)

world was I doing staying in the Arlington Hotel.

The bellman approached me, asking if I needed assistance with my luggage. I handed him my oversized bag thinking, "This is different, a white bellman employed at the Arlington hotel during Langston's reunion." He followed behind me to the elevator with small chatter about the hot weather, while James Brown's famous hit song "Big Payback" was playing in my head. As the elevator made its way slowly past each floor, the bellman commented, "While vacationing during the 1920's Al Capone reserved the fourth floor for himself and his gangsters." I gave him a faint smile, thinking he was attempting to impress me as an out-of-town tourist.

As a child growing up in my grandmother's house, I had heard many stories about Al Capone, George Raft, Lucky Luciano and a host of other mobsters and their associates. My grandmother had been one of Al Capone's maids when he and his mob came from New York for "family meetings" or when one of his "boys" needed a place to hide out. Located in a valley surrounded by lush mountains, Hot Springs became a perfect place for a hideout. Capone always requested the same hotel staff, one more layer of protection. Each morning one of Capone's men met the hotel staff in a different location of the hotel. He would give them a secret word to use before entering a guest's room.

One morning my grandmother went to a gangster's room to start her daily cleaning chore. She knocked, giving the secret word. After waiting a moment, she knocked a second time before entering the room. Apparently the gangster had not been aware of the secret code. He demanded to know why she was there while pointing a gun in her direction. She explained with horror that she was Al Capone's maid. To her amazement he gave her a crisp \$20 bill, instructing her to

leave for the day. One can imagine there was no amount of money that could dispel her fears as a young widowed woman. At the same time, the money was a sizeable amount during the depression, and she was struggling to raise her nine children.

The elevator came to a jolting thud as we reached the sixth floor. The bellman directed me to my room as he followed, carrying my luggage. I wondered if my grandmother and aunts ever walked the same hall on their way to clean rooms for the hotel guests. As I opened the door to the room, I was struck by its spaciousness. I guess the bellman saw the surprised look on my face since he indicated I had "one of the best rooms in the hotel with a view of Central Avenue." He opened the neatly drawn curtains as he pointed to the magnolia trees lining the street below. It looked like a scene from the movie "Gone with the Wind." The hot muggy weather seemed to prevent tourists from strolling up and down the avenue looking in store windows or collecting hot mineral water from the fountain in front of the hotel. As he turned to leave, I placed a sizeable tip in his hand. I didn't want him to think I was just another cheap Californian taking advantage of an old man.

I was tired from the long plane ride, and the four poster bed looked inviting. Before I had second thoughts of pulling back the white sheets to take a nap, the telephone rang loudly.

It was my Aunt Ida from Pasadena wondering if I had arrived safely. She bombarded me with a line of questions: who was attending the reunion, how did they look, what was my room number, had they renovated the hotel, what was new in town? I became annoyed at her excitement over my three-day stay at the Arlington. It wasn't as if I was staying at the Fairmont in San Francisco. After a brief conversation, and with the promise I would call later in the evening, she ended with a family mantra, "Now make us proud, you hear." My cousins and I heard these words often. They never allowed us to forget that we reflected the Johnson family and our parents made sure our friends' families shared similar values.

My travel alarm clock rang, alerting me that it was time to get ready for the welcome session. My heart really didn't want any part of attending the reunion program that evening. The thought of meeting friends at the hotel bar for drinks and good laughs seemed more appealing.



Jackie Stewart (far right) with Langston High School Alumni (left to right) Donna Smith, Willie "Zeke" Evans, and Johnnie "Nook" Evans, July 1983 in the lobby of the Arlington Hotel, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

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Most of my classmates graduated from Douglas Elementary School before entering Langston High. The high school had come full circle. It started as an elementary school in 1901, evolving into a high school in 1903, graduating the first class in 1910. Several graduates had returned as teachers; others mentored youngsters in the community. Soon the school acquired a reputation for producing students with a competitive academic spirit. Through 100 years of excellence, the Langston football team never allowed the world to forget the glorious day they beat Muskogee High School in Muskogee, Oklahoma. During the 1960s, Langston entered a new era, becoming a junior high school after schools were integrated in Hot Springs. By 1970 Langston High School no longer existed, except in the hearts of those whose lives it touched.

As I walked into the hotel conference room, still groggy from the plane trip, Mrs. Logan shouted my name as if she was calling the class roll. She looked as youthful as she did when I was in her seventh grade English class. Her calm, loving spirit, and wise demeanor captured your heart then as it did now. I imagine all these years practicing a healthy life style had paid off for her.

She shoved the reunion program in each participant's hand while lining us up as if we were a high school marching band. I glanced at the program, wondering if the

speech I had written on the plane reflected the theme of the reunion, "Reminiscences."

The room was ablaze with blue and gold streamers, the school colors. Each class shared a table with large signs depicting the year they had graduated. A few of my classmates called my name, giving me a thumbs up sign as they were seated. At that moment I wanted to sit with them, joking, laughing, and recalling old times. I would be happy to exchange places with any one of them rather than be on the stage with the mayor and the other Hot Springs officials.

The welcome session was called to order by the Master of Ceremonies, Garland Puckett. He asked us to stand and sing the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Suddenly I heard my family mantra ring in my ear, "Now make us proud, you hear." I had been consumed with the lingering unanswered question of why Mrs. Logan had chosen me to speak at the reunion. Suddenly it hit me like a hammer. This spectacular event had never been about me attempting to understand my emotions.

My negative attitude had prevented me from embracing the true value of what this evening represented. It was about Langston High School celebrating years of rich heritage. It was the self-fulfillment of those attending the reunion. It was about generations of families who had worked for hotels and bath houses as maids, porters, waiters, bellboys, cooks, and bath attendants, putting Hot Springs,

Arkansas, on the world tourist map. It was about my grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Through their blood, sweat, and tears we were given the right to live out a dream.

Standing at the podium, Mayor Randall recognized the importance of the evening. His robust voice echoed throughout the room with his greeting, "Langstonians of Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, welcome to the Arlington Hotel. Welcome home."



Jackie Stewart has been an active member of AAGSNC for over ten years, currently serving on the society's program committee. Her genealogy research has taken her from coast to coast uncovering seven generations of her family. A few of her family surnames: Johnson, Trotter, Ferguson, and Barrow in Hempstead, Howard, and Garland Counties, AR; and Moore, Miller, Kinloch, and Bonhomme, in St. Louis, Missouri. Jackie may be contacted at: altojackie@aol.com.

AAGSNC TOTES FOR SALE

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

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

TO ORDER

Send \$20 (includes tax and postage) to:

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Oakland, CA 94602-0985

Please indicate your style/color preference. You may purchase totes for \$15 each at AAGSNC meetings



A SEARCH YIELDS SUCCESS

By Lois V. Freeman and Diana D. Ross

Part 1: Lois's Search

I last saw my cousin, Letty Weinberg, in 1957 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, when she was 11 years old. Over the passage of time, I learned from my mother that she had married and had two daughters. In March 2006, I discovered a genealogy query database called CousinConnect.com. The website is designed to query readers for information on missing relatives, so I used it to cast my net wide and look for Letty as a descendant.

"Searching for descendants of William Henry Weinberg," I wrote, "son of James and Clara Clark Weinberg, born in 1904 in either Atlantic or Camden County, New Jersey. To my knowledge he had one daughter named Letty Weinberg who was born in Atlantic City circa 1945. I am anxious to correspond with anyone with information about this family."

Over the next three years, I researched many genealogical websites and also checked CousinConnect.com periodically with no success. In October 2009, I had discovered new information, and decided to be more specific with my query. "Searching for my first cousin, Letty Weinberg, born in Atlantic City on October 26, 1945. Letty's father, William Henry Weinberg, was the only brother of my mother, Gladys Weinberg Vass. To my knowledge, Letty has two daughters, and her married name is Williams." In the meantime, a fellow genealogist, Diana Diamond Ross, suggested that she might like to tackle my dilemma.

Part 2: Diana's Approach

Lois' story of the lost cousin was very much like my own. I had a female cousin whom I had not seen since 1947. I had even paid a locator service to find her, with no success.

In September 2007, I had joined the AAGSNC with the sole purpose of honoring the memory of a lifelong friend

by doing her family genealogy for her descendants. A totally unexpected bonus of learning how to do genealogy was that I found my cousin. Now I really wanted to help Lois find her cousin Letty.

I looked for Letty by maiden and married name in Ancestry.com, Peopledata.com and Google with no results. Then I remembered that my grandfather, who was born in Sweden in 1870, had a first wife named "Letty." Somewhere out of the past, I remembered her full name was "Letitia." I entered the name "Letitia Weinberg" with her birthplace and year into Ancestry.com, and up popped "Billie Letitia Weinberg" with a birth month of October. I immediately called Lois. She confirmed the birth month, but she had never heard the names "Billie" or "Letitia" used for her cousin.

Using Google, I tried searching "Billie Letitia Weinberg," "Billie Weinberg," "Letitia Weinberg," and finally "Billie L. Weinberg." The last combination was the magic key that took me to a single Google entry. "Billie L. Weinberg" had made a contribution to a Cancer Society, so I googled the fund's name to find its location. Using "Billie L. Weinberg" and the fund's Ventnor, New Jersey location, I used 411.com to get an address. I received the response "Result nearby but not in Ventnor City," but it was close enough for her to have made a charitable donation there, so I passed the information on to Lois. She immediately sprung into action.

Part 3: Lois Verifies the Search

In late November of 2009, armed with an address, I wrote the following letter to Billie L. Weinberg:

*Dear Ms. Weinberg,
Over the past several years, I have been engaged in genealogical research. Moreover, I have begun researching the whereabouts of members of my family with whom I have lost contact.*

Currently, I am searching for the daughter of William and Luvenia Weinberg, who was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in October 1945. The Family lived at 9 North Connecticut Avenue for many years. Letty, as she was called, was the daughter of William "Bill" Weinberg, the older brother of my mother, Gladys Weinberg Vass. With the help of another genealogist, I discovered your name, which resembles my cousin's, and current address. This may be a "blind alley," but I couldn't resist making a contact. To make the identification certain, I have attached a photo of my cousin with her



mother in front of their apartment building. I would guess that she is about three years old. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope to receive your response. May I thank you in advance for your time.

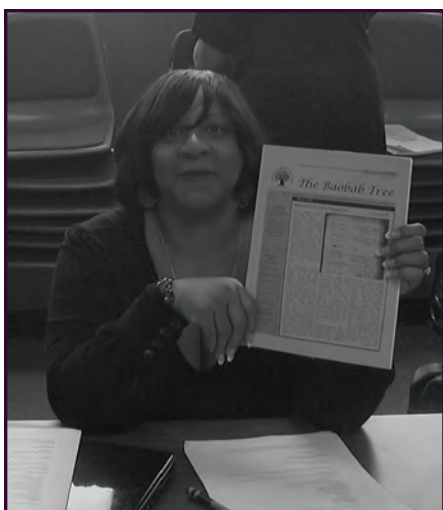
Success!

Shortly before Thanksgiving, I received a call from Letty. She was delighted to have received the letter, and admitted she had burst into tears upon reading it. Since then, we've exchanged photographs and family information. In late April, I will travel to New Jersey and spend a week reacquainting myself with my cousin and her two lovely daughters, whom I'll meet for the first time.

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Society News

On December 19, 2009, AAGSNC held our annual Black Elephant Sale and Potluck at the Oakland Public Library, Diamond Branch, in Oakland, CA. We thank all who helped make this year's event a success. Special thanks to Mrs. Electra Kimble-Price, who provided a wealth of items culled from her extensive personal library, which sold at bargain prices. The most popular items were the books on genealogy-related subjects. A special tip of the hat goes to Jackie Stewart for coordinating the food, and to Luke Collier for providing remixed Christmas music appropriate for an African-American genealogical society. Everyone had fun. All sales benefit AAGSNC. *Photos and information courtesy of Bill Melson.*



Dera Williams displays the winter edition of the Baobab Tree.



AAGSNC members John White, Ralph Abdul-Aleem, Minnie Grimes and Annette Madden



Clyde Grimes and Geri De Berry enjoy delicious refreshments.



Linda Bradley and Bonnie Collier enjoy their visit at AAGSNC's annual Holiday Potluck December 19, 2009 at the Oakland Public Library, Diamond Branch.

Society News



Event participants engaged in a Q&A session about research barriers.

This year the California Genealogical Society (CGS) invited the African-American Genealogical Society of Northern California (AAGSNC) to participate in their African American History Month celebration, held February 20, 2010 at the CGS Library in Oakland, California.

AAGSNC members Electra Price, Juliet Crutchfield, and Jackie Stewart led the morning session. These eminent researchers took an unusual approach to engage audience members in the discussion, using solely a question-and-answer format instead of a lecture. Panel members shared insights into their genealogy research, and tips in answer to questions about the “brick walls” African-American genealogists often encounter.

In the afternoon, Craig Manson delivered two presentations, one on finding African-Americans in the census records prior to 1870, and a second on military research, with an emphasis on African-American military members. Thanks to Electra Price, Juliet Crutchfield, Jackie Stewart and CGS. *Photos courtesy of Nicka Smith and Jane Lindsey.*



Left to right: Panelists Juliet Crutchfield, Electra Price, and Jackie Stewart



AAGSNC Member Diana D. Ross



Jackie shares tips with a new researcher.



Electra and Juliet share insight and research tips with event participants.



Left to right: Luke Collier; Vernester Sheeler; CGS Past President; Jane Lindsey, and AAGSNC Board Chairman Bill Melson

PEAKE HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM WINS 1948 ARKANSAS STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

By Melvyn Gillette
Class of 1957

In the summer of 2004, I joined some of my first cousins for a gathering of their cousins in St. Louis. While these other cousins are not related to me, I've known them all my life. All of us are originally from Arkadelphia, Arkansas or some nearby rural community. My cousin Florine and I planned to spend a couple of days in Chicago researching our unde, the oldest sibling of her mother and my father. Florine's sister, Pauline, and their first cousin, Marie, joined us for the train ride up to Chicago. The two of us went off to the courthouse to research, and the others remained at the hotel to rest. While we were gone, some Chicago residents who were originally from Arkadelphia came to visit them and plans for lunch were made.

Upon our return to the hotel, we all loaded into cars with the visitors and headed out to lunch. During the meal they began to talk about their days at Peake High School in Arkadelphia. Then the 1948 Girls Basketball

team's state championship came up, with the heroine of the game there with us. I was the youngest in the group and did not know the others who had joined us. In fact, everyone else at the table had graduated high school before I even arrived there as a ninth grader. I had not heard any of the story before, and as they began to talk about the game, I said, "You need to write this down." They kept talking. I repeated, "You need to write this down!" but nobody paid any attention. Then I said, "Wait! I guess I need to write this down," took out my notebook, and began to try to get the basics of the story.

Florine suggested that this could be an article for our alumni newsletter. That meant tracking down the names of the other players in this 56-year-old story. As soon as she got home, Flo began contacting schoolmates to get the information. The following is the story that I wrote, which was printed in our Peake Alumni newsletter about a year later.

In 1948, history was made at Peake High School when the Girls Basketball team won the state championship, the first state championship for Peake's girls. The leader of this championship team was a precocious 16-year old senior, Mattie Newborn, who played offense.

In those days, girls played a half-court game with six-person teams, three players at one end playing defense, and three players on offense at the other end. A player could take only three steps with the ball, and then had to pass or shoot the ball. Only the players on offense could score, so the defense passed the ball across the center line to the offense, which, of course, was being guarded by the other team's defense. The half-court game and three-step rule were precautions because girls were considered too 'weak' and 'delicate' to run the length of the basketball court, and they didn't want the girls to 'overexert' themselves.

Mattie Newborn had a brash, cocky, playing style and copied some of the antics of Harlem Globetrotter Goose Tatum. To the everlasting annoyance of Girls Basketball Coach Nathaniel B. Cooke, Mattie, like Goose, called her goals, raising a two-fingered salute after shooting the ball, but before it reached the goal. Mr. Cooke tried to restrain the exuberant spirits of Mattie, but her joyous playing style helped drive this team to the top. The Peake High team

played Corbin School of Pine Bluff for the State Championship, with the game being played in Pine Bluff at the AM&N College Gymnasium.

The score was tied as the seconds counted down to the end of the game, but Mattie was fouled as the final whistle blew. A conference was held to determine if she had been fouled before the whistle blew. The ruling was that she had been, and Mattie got a free-throw. Mr. Cooke's nickname for Mattie was "Blockhead" because she clowned so much. As she went to the line to shoot, she looked back at Coach Cooke with her usual confident antics, to which he said, "Don't play with me, Blockhead!" She said that Mr. Cooke was 'red as a beet,' but she raised her finger as usual, took her shot and made it, winning the game.

While everyone on the team was excited, Mr. Cooke was angry with her for defying his instructions. But "I was the star," says Mattie. She remembers telling Mr. Cooke afterwards that she was hungry, and his reply, "Well, you can starve." But he relented and took them to eat. "I will never forget that we had pork chops and green peas." Mattie called on her Home Economics training under Mrs. Atkinson, with mixed results. "I was trying to be sure to eat as Mrs. Atkinson had taught us, using a knife and fork to cut the pork chop. Somehow the knife slipped and peas flew everywhere." Mr. Cooke's

response was, "I'll be glad to get rid of you, Blockhead."

After winning this athletic championship, Mattie found her personal champion in Peake High Math teacher, Mrs. Lottie Snowden, who contacted President Lawrence A. Davis at AM&N College (now UAPB) regarding a scholarship for Mattie. President Davis awarded her a four-year athletic scholarship, a first for a Peake girl. Mattie attended AM&N for two years, and then moved to Chicago where she still lives. In addition to athletics, Mattie was also a budding thespian and a dyed-in-the-wool clown.

This story has been a group effort and is based on the 56-year-old memories of various participants and schoolmates. It may not be exactly as it happened in every instance, but it deserves to be told and the accomplishments remembered. Florine Wilson Bennett worked her phone overtime to get information on the game and players' names. Several of the people listed here spoke with Florine and contributed the names of players as well as information about the game.

Not all team members went to the championship game, and memories are fuzzy as to who went and who didn't. But some players on the team that year were: Mattie's sister, Millie Newborn, Dorothy Seawood, Mattie Sue Jackson, Jessie Mae McGhee, Henry Etta Horton,

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PEAKE HIGH SCHOOL

(Continued from page 8)

Ruthie T. Williams, Luvada Elizabeth Murchison, Marcusia Hendrix, Lorene Caesar, Tennie Hearn, Clarice Mitchell and Dorothy Hunter.

Florine also spoke with Mrs. Florazell Teele who is 94 years old, living in Florida. When the girls' team traveled out of town, she traveled with them and was somewhat like an Assistant Coach. She's also Mr. Cooke's niece. When they traveled to 'away' games and arrived back in Arkadelphia late at night, she often ended up taking three or four girls home with her to spend the night because these girls did not live in town, but in one of those rural communities.

Our lone male contributor, Henry Wilson, remembered that the boys' team lost before the championship round, but he wanted to go to the girls'

championship game so badly that he was willing to serve as water boy. Unfortunately, that didn't work out and he didn't get a chance to go. Me? I was barely in elementary school.



Melvyn is a native of Gum Springs, a small rural community in Clark County, Arkansas. Her path to Grandma's house led across the local cemetery. Constant exposure to names on the tombstones fostered an interest in the community's history. She began to write down her family's history in 1969 and began serious family research in the early 1990s. Her family tree has grown into a "community tree," and includes all of the Black families of Gum Springs as well as their connected families in nearby communities. All four of Melvyn's grandparents were born in Arkansas, three within the same county as she was, with various migrations to the state from AL, MO, MS, NC, TN, and VA.

GENEALOGICAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Standards for Sharing Information with Others

Recommended by the National Genealogical Society

Conscious of the fact that sharing information or data with others, whether through speech, documents or electronic media, is essential to family history research and that it needs continuing support and encouragement, responsible family historians consistently

- respect the restrictions on sharing information that arise from the rights on another as an author, originator or compiler; as a living private person; or as a party to a mutual agreement.
- observe meticulously the legal rights of copyright owners, copying or distributing any part of their works only with their permission, or to the limited extent specifically allowed under the law's "fair use" exceptions.
- identify the sources for all ideas, information and data from others, and the form in which they were received, recognizing that the unattributed use of another's intellectual work is plagiarism.
- respect the authorship rights of senders of letters, electronic mail, and data files, forwarding or disseminating them further only with the sender's permission.
- inform people who provide information about their families as to the ways it may be used, observing any conditions they impose and respecting any reservations they may express regarding the use of particular items.
- require some evidence of consent before assuming that living people are agreeable to further sharing of information about themselves.
- convey personal identifying information about living people--like age, home address, occupation or activities--only in ways that those concerned have expressly agreed to.
- recognize that legal rights of privacy may limit the extent to which information from publicly available sources may be further used, disseminated or published.
- communicate no information to others that is known to be false, or without making reasonable efforts to determine its truth, particularly information that may be derogatory.
- are sensitive to the hurt that revelations of criminal, immoral, bizarre or irresponsible behavior may bring to family members.

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TRINITY HIGH SCHOOL, ATHENS, ALABAMA

By Luke Collier
Class of 1955

Trinity High School was founded in 1865 by Ms. Frances Wells of Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was supported by the American Missionary Association (AMA) for more than 70 years. Ms. Wells was principal for 27 years. The first school was destroyed by fire, and 150 students had nowhere to go. A new school would cost \$5,000. The black community underwrote \$2,000 and the AMA did the rest. Thirteen years later a jubilant crowd cheered the first high school commencement service. One of the early graduates, Ms. Patty Malone, joined the Fisk Jubilee Singers that appeared before Queen Victoria. The second school burned in 1907. Ms. Louise Allyn became principal in 1909 and remained for 31 years.



The third Trinity High School was erected in the bowl of old Fort Henderson in which Union soldiers had sought protection during the Battle of Athens. Mr. J.T. Wright was the third principal, whose method of teaching was based on the philosophy "learn by doing." As recorded by Charles Tisdale, publisher of the Jackson Advocate and also a Trinity graduate, by the summer of 1941, Trinity was a highly respected education institution for Black youth. To implement the new education plan, Principal Wright hired a staff of competent academicians who were inspired by his zeal to push forward the theory of "learn by doing." Among these

new instructors was a young Japanese music teacher, D. Tyosho Matsumoto. In the fall of 1941, with Christmas approaching, Dr. Matsumoto began to plan a "Christmas Pageant" to be presented on the day before school was recessed for the holidays. Among the songs he taught the choir was "O Come Emanuel." It was no surprise that Trinity was directly affected by the conflict of Pearl Harbor. Trinity was thrust into the national limelight when one day during mid-afternoon, speeding cars loaded with local and federal law enforcement officials stormed the Trinity campus. Because he was Japanese, Dr. Matsumoto was arrested.

On the scheduled night, with the greater majority of the Black community present, the pageant went on as planned. It was reported that with each Christmas carol the choir became more tearful. They were determined to sing "O Come Emanuel" when in walked Dr. Matsumoto. Amidst all the applause, Dr. Matsumoto raised his baton, leading the choir in "O Come Emanuel."

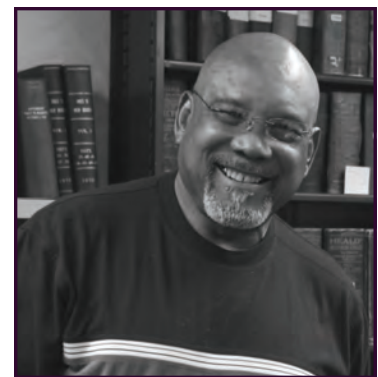
Through the intervention of the AMA, Dr. Matsumoto had been released from the Japanese internment camp.

Noted graduates of Trinity High School include Duke Professor Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, Dr. Floyd Farrell, Dr. Earline Farrell, Dr. Bernice Allen Reeves and the founder of Jackson Advocate, Publisher Charles Tisdale.

The first Black principal of Trinity High School was Rev. W. Judson King in 1942 who served until 1956. I am a proud 1955 graduate of Trinity High School. Trinity High School closed in 1970, compelling scores of black teens to carve out new identities as the new kids on the

block as they were scattered among other area schools. This was the year of integration for Limestone County Schools. At the present time, Trinity is being restored into a historical site because it sits on the site of Fort Henderson, a Civil War-era earthwork structure that was occupied by Union troops. Also, the Athens Limestone Community Association (ALCA) class of 1966 states they want to create a "historical reflection of the Browns' Ferry Street site" because of its antebellum and Civil War history and its impact on Athens.

Every two years Trinity High School Alumni and Friends plan a Grand Reunion for everyone that ever attended Trinity. The 2010 Grand Reunion will be held Labor Day weekend, starting Friday afternoon with a picnic at C. Eric Lincoln Park, a parade on Saturday morning through Athens' main streets, a dinner and dance Saturday night. Also, the class of 1955 (my class) will be celebrating our 55th class reunion. As you can see, this will be a busy weekend. Our school colors are Purple and Gold, which will be displayed all over town.



Luke Douglas Collier, a retired government computer specialist, was born in Athens in Limestone County, AL. He graduated from Trinity High School in 1955 when he was just 16 years old. Since he retired in 2001 he's lived his lifelong dream of traveling to Brazil, exploring his hometown, and getting reacquainted with family and friends

MYSTERY PHOTO

Do you need help identifying persons in old pictures?

Do you think they are persons from this area? If so, we would be happy to include them in future issues to see if anyone can help you. We would need a small black and white copy of the picture, one that you do not need returned, and any information about it that you think would be of help. Submit photos to:

AAGSNC
P.O. Box 27485
Oakland, CA 94603-0985

AAGSNC members may submit photos via email to newsletter@aagsnc.org or by mail.



Do you know any of these people? I believe they are from my Madden and Pitts family from Tulsa, Oklahoma, but I am unable so far to identify them. Submitted by Annette Madden. Contact Annette at amadden45@yahoo.com.

Queries

AAGSNC members and non-members may submit one family query for each issue of *The Baobab Tree*. There is no limit to the number of words; however the journal committee reserves the right to edit all queries. Queries are free to all AAGSNC members, and cost \$5.00 for non-members. All queries must be printed or typewritten. Begin the query with all surnames capitalized and listed alphabetically. Non-members must submit via mail with payment to: AAGSNC, P.O. Box 27485, Oakland, CA 94603-0985. AAGSNC members may submit queries via email to newsletter@aagsnc.org or by mail.

Gillette/Gillett

I never knew my uncle, James Napoleon Gillette/Gillett, who was born in 1896 in Clark County, Arkansas. I have not found him in any census since 1910, but have his death certificate from 1959. His entire family (my grandfather, wife, and children) is missing from the 1920 census, and by 1930 James is grown and gone. I am searching for any of his descendants.

James later lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, where his son, James Napoleon, Jr., was born in 1921. (I have Jr.'s SS-5 and death certificate; Jr. had no children.) The family moved to Chicago where Uncle James was a coal dealer. Uncle James

had a daughter, Mildred, whose birth information I don't have. From information given by another of my uncles more than 20 years ago, she married and had four children: Barbara, Mildred, Patricia and Lonnie. But, I don't know her married name, thus don't know the children's surname. James Jr. died in 1974. I also have the death certificate of his widow, Wilma. Contact: Melvyn Gillette at blayde67@netzero.net

Mc Gowan or Mc Gowen

I am searching for information on Bill and Elizabeth Mc Gowan, both born in Mississippi about 1835 and 1840 respectively, according to the 1880 U.S. Federal Census. On the 1900 census, Elizabeth's name appears as Elyse or Elisa Gowan and her marital

status is listed as widowed. My Great-grandfather Titus Mc Gowan, is listed as a member of the household.

Family legend states my Great-grandfather, Titus Mc Gowan, was shot on the steps of the courthouse during a land dispute. I am interested in gathering any information about this family. Contact: Vernester Bates Sheeler at ladyraider514@sbcglobal.net.

WENT or WENTT

Seeking information on Thomas Went or Thomas Wentt, owner of Lamberts in St Lucy, Barbados in 1800 – 1846. Contact: Ancestry Gal at all2gethernow@mac.com.

CHILDREN'S HOUSE

By Teresa Williams

I was born at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California on February 19, 1965. My mother was 20 when she had me and she gave birth again in 1966, 1967, and 1968. My parents had six children within the first six years of their marriage and we were living in a subterranean cavern of poverty and discrimination in West Oakland.

In 1968, my parents brought my sisters and me to hear Stokely Carmichael speak at Huey Newton's Birthday Rally on February 17, 1968. I remember Black Panther Rallies as flashes of afros, black jackets, and clinched fists pumped into the air as a thunderous 'one voice' shouted, "Power to the People!" The chants were so loud that they hurt my ears. The chanting was followed by James Brown singing, "Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud." As black, brown, yellow and white bodies bumped and grinded to a kaleidoscope of ethnic sounds, my nose was assaulted with the warring scents of exotic spices, and my eyes were captivated by the colorful tie-dye tee shirts, balloons and posters.

These rallies were sensory overload to a three-year-old child and they were my introduction to the civil rights movement in Oakland, California. After Carmichael's impassioned speech, my parents signed up to become members of the Black Panther Party. Three years later, at six years of age, I was no longer a passive observer of the civil rights movement, but an active participant.

In 1971, I sucked my right thumb, clutched my doll, Droopy, and huddled next to my sisters in our dark bedroom. My sisters and I listened to the raised voices of our parents and I knew that a violent storm was about to pelt our home with thunder, lightning, and hail. I heard a voice cry out and then heard a thunderous "boom" as a body was thrown against a wall. As the storm raged in the next room, and lightning and

thunder played with increasing intensity, I felt exposed and vulnerable next to my sisters. I clutched Droopy, cried out for my mother, and waited for the storm to abate. Eventually, the storm's energy dissipated into the night leaving behind a muffled cry on a fading wind.

Moments later, I became aware of many rushing footsteps entering the apartment followed by hushed voices. As my sisters and I listened intently to the changing weather, our bedroom door opened and light from the hallway flooded in and temporarily blinded me. As my vision returned, I saw the silhouette of a strange man in the doorway. He walked over to the bed and picked me up. As I cried for my mother, he ignored my pleas, pressed my head onto his shoulder, pulled Droopy from my hands, and dropped her on the floor. I cried and reached out for her as he carried me from the room and told my sisters to follow.

The strange man carried me and led my sisters, through the storm-ravaged living room with the blood-spattered walls past the front door that was knocked off its hinges, and away from our family home. A numbing cold front of emotion washed over me and tears flowed down my cheeks freely and without shame for the last time.

That night, my sisters and I were moved to Children's House on 29th Avenue in Oakland, across the street from the Montgomery Ward department store on East 14th Street, later renamed International Boulevard. Children's House was a military school for Black Panther Party members' children and we were indoctrinated with the party's ideology. Part of our military training was to instill in us a strong belief in the oneness of mind, body, spirit. We marched, slept, ate, and learned as one unit. When one of us misbehaved, the innocent and the guilty were issued the same punishment. This made us become "our brother's and

sister's keeper."

The girls got their ears pierced in the kitchen. We were told to form a line, and each of us was given a piece of ice on a thin cloth. We were told to hold the ice to our ears to make them numb. Then, someone would take a threaded needle, heat it over a flame, until it was red hot, cool it in water, and thread it through our ears. The thread was then knotted leaving the string loop exposed. Alcohol was applied several times a day to our ears to prevent infection. Later, after our ears healed, earrings replaced the strings. Our hair was cut into a short afro because that style was the most natural for our hair texture.

I remember when we took the iconic pictures of Black Panther children in uniform. We marched out of the house that very cold morning to begin our neighborhood chants. At the end, we marched up to a storefront that had a red blanket covering the stairs. We were told to sit on the stairs, and the tallest students were told to stand in the back row. I was tired, homesick, hungry, cold, and my throat hurt from shouting and my feet hurt from the marching. I do not remember anyone saying, "Say cheese," at the exact moment that the photograph was taken. Looking back, I think our guardians may have wanted us to look mean, but instead we looked sad, tired, and angry.

The colors of our dress uniform were symbolic. African-Americans became fascinated with Egyptian mythology in the 1970's because of popular research on the Egyptian king, Tutankhamen. The color of the Egyptian god of creative force and the goddess of air and water is sky blue. The party members believed that their children would become a boundless creative force in the world; therefore, the color of our shirts was sky blue.

(Continued on page 13)

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At Children's House, we were taught to embrace a world of creative and dynamic change. We were taught that there was no safety in the static known world, but there were infinite possibilities of a dynamic unknown world.

The party members were willing to die for their beliefs. They felt that their sacrifice would allow for the resurrection of their dreams in their children. In Egyptian mythology, the color black symbolized death and resurrection. Therefore, we wore black pants and skirts to remind people of the ultimate sacrifice our parents were willing to make for the civil rights movement.

I saw our skirts being lovingly hand made in the living room of Children's House. I remember standing in line to be measured for my skirt. These measurements were drawn on black fabric, cut out, and hand stitched together with a needle and black thread. We wore black cotton socks and black shoes to symbolize that, if the Black Panther Party was destroyed, we would march into the afterlife, retrieve their dreams, and resurrect them in the future in a new and creative way. The ultimate dream of the Black Panther Party was to bring conscious awareness of the oneness of mind, body, and spirit to all people.

On our afros we wore black wool berets which have been a symbol of resistance movements and guerilla warfare for generations. Members of the Black Panther Party were seen as Black Nationalist because we spoke about Black Pride. We were also seen as Communist because we read the "Little Red Book," by Mao Se Tung, chairman of China's Communist Party, and leader of its 1966 cultural revolution. These two political ideologies are considered right-wing political movements; hence, our berets were worn tipped on the right side of our heads.

Our school was held in the garage of Children's House. I remember the hard cement floor and suffering involuntary chills in the cold air. Inside our classroom,



there were wooden desks with storage areas under them. The desks were arranged in rows that faced toward the front of the garage. If this had been an ordinary classroom, it would have been bright and warm, and the area above the chalkboard would have contained images of America's heroes, Christopher Columbus, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln. An American flag would have hung in the right corner, and every day the children would pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. However, this wasn't an ordinary classroom. The front wall of the garage had shelves that contained the tools of knowledge like chalk, pencils, paper, and books. The walls were covered with pictures of the founding fathers and mothers of African-American resistance like Huey Newton, Malcolm X, Booker T. Washington, Harriett Tubman, and Marcus Garvey. We had a red, black, and green flag, and every day we pledged allegiance to "Black People."

After several months of school, our parents were invited to see how much we were learning in class. On this day, we were going to count to 100. An eight-year-old mocha-colored girl with large beautiful eyes and dimples was called to the front of the class. Her name was Donna. The instructor told her to count to 100. Donna began counting, but

stumbled with the larger numbers. She finished counting and took a seat.

The last counter that morning was another little girl who was seven years old. She was copper colored, small and thin for her age but she had sparkling eyes. She took her place in the front of the room. The instructor said, "Count." She started counting with downcast eyes. The teacher said, "Stop looking at the floor and hold your head up." The little girl lifted up her head and nervously continued counting. "One, two," she counted on "...31, 32, 33..." She paused, collected her thoughts, and continued counting, "40, 41, 42. "A little louder," the teacher said gently. "50, 51," and she continued, pausing at each multiple of ten. "Ninety-eight, 99," she said, paused, and then said, "100."

The room exploded with thunderous applause. The teacher knelt down next to the student and said, "That was very good, Teresa. Now go and take your seat." I walked up the aisle and took the seat next to my sister Donna. On that spring day, my teacher decided that I would become a scientist like Albert Einstein. I was told to repeat that sentence, "I will become a black Albert Einstein." I repeated that sentence hundreds of times over many months.

CHILDREN'S HOUSE

That statement became a mantra that I repeated automatically whenever someone asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I was taught many chants at Children's House, like "I'm Black and I'm proud," "I'm beautiful," "I will become a Black Albert Einstein," and my favorite, "I am somebody."

We chanted daily until our throats were sore. Chanting was done in the early

morning while standing at attention in the living room, while marching through the neighborhood, and while standing at attention at rallies and public events. Over time, a voice developed in my head that chanted automatically and I learned to listen to it. The voice said, "I am a black Albert Einstein," and "I am somebody." I believed that voice. I still do.

Teresa Williams did follow that voice and became a geology and geography instructor at Merritt Community College in Oakland, California. She received a B.A. in geology from California State University, and was the first black woman to receive a master's degree in geophysics from the University of California, Berkeley. Williams is a motivational speaker and has led many presentations and workshops. This essay is an excerpt from her work-in-progress, her memoir, "Panther Cub."

A SEARCH YIELDS SUCCESS

(Continued from page 5)

Search Tip from Lois and Diana

DOBSearch.com is a search tool we discovered after finding Letty. It is used to find a living person's city and state. We would still have had to use 411.com or Whitepages.com to get the address within the city.

DOBSearch.com allows you to use a full birth date or just the month, day or year to search. This means you could find a person with an unknown or difficult-to-spell first name using just their last name, birth date and city, or city and state if the name is more common. You will also see other names they may have used, and the people who have lived at their address.



Lois Freeman, has enjoyed a 40-year career in education, from the Niagara Falls Public Schools in New York to the University of LaVerne, San Jose State and the Postsecondary Council in California. In 2001 she was taken with genealogy, joined AAGSNC and the rest, she says, is history.



Diana D. Ross is a retired computer programmer/analyst who's originally from Los Angeles. She came to genealogy after the death of her lifelong friend, Maudester, who had shared some of her family's story with Diana. After her passing in 2005, Diana joined AAGSNC to help document Maudester's family history for her children and their descendants. She also researched her own family, and looks on her newly found family members and her friends in AAGSNC as gifts from Maudester.

United States Census 2010... It's up to us

CALENDAR

AAGSNC meets every third Saturday of the month from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Oakland Public Library, Diamond Branch, 3565 Fruitvale Avenue Oakland, California. No meeting in July and August. Upcoming topics:

- May 15—Land Records/Land Plotting
- June 19—Planning a Research Trip
- September 18—Braggin' and Lyin'
- October 16—Slave Research
- November 20—Using DNA in Research
- December 18—Christmas Party and Black Elephant Sale

June 11 -13: 41st Annual Southern California Genealogical Jamboree, Los Angeles Marriott Burbank Airport Hotel, Burbank, CA, 818-843-7247, www.scsgenealogy.com or jamboree@scsgenealogy.com

California Genealogical Society and Library offers Genealogy for Beginners, First Saturday of every month FREE at 2201 Broadway, Suite L12 Oakland, California 94612 www.calgensoc.org

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Deadlines for submission of material for publication in The Baobab Tree are: February 27 for the April issue, May 30 for the June issue, July 31 for the September issue, and October 30 for the December issue. Correspondence on editorial matters, submission requests, or permission to reprint articles may be obtained by written request to newsletter@aagsnc.org.

Articles and manuscripts acceptable for publication include:

Manuscripts/Articles:

- African and African-American genealogy, cultural traditions, and philosophy
- Church Histories
- Documentation of African oral traditions and African writings
- Documentation of African-American families
- Ancestry charts, family group records, personal family papers
- Miscellaneous topics of interest in researching African ancestors
- Resources and methods of research in Africa

Abstracts:

- Census transcriptions (federal, state, county & city)
- Church records (baptisms, burials, marriages etc.)
- Court records
- Manumission and freedom certificates
- Missionary and benevolent society records
- Military and pension records
- Newspaper transcriptions
- Plantation family papers relating to slaves
- Tax lists naming free blacks or slaves
- Voter registration lists

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All ads must be typeset, camera-ready or, preferably, a computer file.



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- 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

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