



The Baobab Tree

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

The Collins Family of Tallahatchie County

By Judith Collins

Spring 2011

AAGSNC

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The Baobab Tree is published quarterly by the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California, Inc.
www.aagsnc.org



Top to bottom: Elvira Collins, Crawford Collins with Elvira's brother David White, Crawford Collins.

When I studied the U.S. Slave Narratives in high school, I had no idea a member of my own family had participated in the interviews. But many years later, I searched, and found my paternal great-grandmother's story in that historical record.

In August of 2008, I located her in the slave narratives. There was her name, Elvira Collins of Charleston, Mississippi, plain as day. I was completely blown away!

The effort begun at Fisk and Southern Universities and Kentucky State College and continued by the Federal Writer's Project from 1936 to 1939, is a historically significant project. It recorded the recollections of African-Americans about their lives as slaves. Here is the story I found:

Reference: *Elvira Collins, Charleston, Miss.*
State: *Mississippi*
Interviewee: *Collins, Elvira*
Circa: *1936*

Elvira Collins, an old Negro slave, was born on Captain Wynn's (Benjamin Littleton Wynn) place about five miles up the valley from Charleston, Mississippi. Elvira was born about two years before the slaves were freed and is now around seventy-four years old.

*She remembers very clearly hearing her mother talk about the Civil War, and especially does she remember one incident when the Yankees came through the valley. Her mother grabbed her up at this time and wrapped her up in her apron to hide her from them. Upon coming into her home, one of the Yankees took his sword and cut a piece out of the old log fireplace, while another one cut off her pet rooster's head.**

Once I found my great-grandmother's story, this single piece of information led me to multiple credible documents and resources and brought me very close to the last slaveholder!

Both of my paternal great-grandparents, Crawford and Elvira White Collins, were born in Mississippi prior to the end of the Civil War. Crawford's estimated date of birth is December 1855 and Elvira's is March 1858. My great-grandmother's parents, David White, Sr. (1831) and Mary White (1833), were

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NEW EDITORS, NEW LOOK

We start this new challenge with the advantage of standing on the shoulders of the previous editors, including Lisa Lee, who laid the foundation, and Vernester Sheeler, who took the lead in building a sturdy structure on that foundation. Like many of our ancestors, we are following a trail that was blazed for us by their pioneering work. Charlene will continue as co-editor, and brings a whole new look to The Baobab Tree with this issue. We hope you like the "makeover," and we ask that you continue to support our efforts. Let us know what you would like to see in the Baobab, and continue to contribute your articles, pictures, queries and mystery photos. There is no Baobab without your support and contributions.

Charlene Brown

Annette Madden

Message from the President

By M. Howard Edwards



PRIDE IN OUR SOCIETY

We should all be proud of the AAGSNC members who spent time volunteering during this past Black History Month. Our indomitable founder, **Electra Kimble Price**, and committee members **Judith Collins**, **Jackie Stewart**, and **Diana Ross** developed a remarkable Black Family History Day celebration with the staff of the Mormon Church's Family History Center in Oakland.

Bill Melson, **Upperton Hurts**, **Annette Madden**, **Lois Freeman**, **Vernester Sheeler**, **Patrice Anderson**, **Rainie Smith**, **Diane Mitchell**, **Juliet Crutchfield**, **Lisa Lee**, **Geraldine DeBerry**, and **Carol Miller** volunteered along with **Judith**, **Jackie**, and **Diana** to help attendees with their family history research. The Publicity Committee, chaired by **Rhonda Edwards**, did a bang-up job publicizing the event, and the turnout was excellent.

Jackie Stewart made an exceptional presentation at Downs Memorial AME Church in Oakland, and **Melvyn Gillette** made an equally good one at the Palma Ceia Baptist Church in Hayward.

Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson requested help from AAGSNC in exposing the students at McClymonds High School in Oakland to family history research. Members **Felicia Addison** and **Nicka Smith** stepped right up to help.

If I've failed to acknowledge you by name, the omission is not intentional, and my appreciation is complete. The work of these members spreads interest in genealogy, and enlarges the membership of our society, enabling us to do even more outreach and educate even more people about the joys of family history research. We do good work!

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Our organization is the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California. For anyone who might think we do not relate to them, let me clarify our mission.

Our members do little Northern California research. We treasure those who do because the African-American presence in Northern California was extremely thin prior to World War II, and those with roots here prior to that time are searching true pioneers.

The African-American population exploded with the war, so our membership is overwhelmingly from other states, mainly in the South. AAGSNC is eager to share what we've learned from many years of searching. We are a *Society* of members doing *African American Genealogy*, located in *Northern California*, and we have members from other states. If you join us, you're sure to learn new things about your family and enjoy the experience.

It's A Small World Afterall

By Vernester Sheeler and Janette Utsey

Editor's Note: In this story, AAGSNC member Vernester Sheeler and her cousin Janette Utsey share the story of how they first met, and how their separate quests to find family converged on a college campus in New Mexico.



VERNESTER

You never know where the trail will lead when you're searching for family. Sometimes it leads to connections that are closer than you think. A family reunion showed me what a small world it really is.

In preparation for the 2007 Utsey Family Reunion, I mailed 200 family group sheet packets to family members across the country, hoping to fill in more details on our family tree. A few weeks later, it occurred to me that since I was not an official member of the Reunion Committee, I'd have a better chance of winning their support if I let them know what I was doing and offered to help with the planning.

So I called my cousin, Delton Utsey of Kansas City, Missouri, who was on the committee, and asked if he had received the packet. He said yes, but that he hadn't filled it out yet, and promised to send it back as soon as possible. To save him some time, I offered to take his information over the phone.

During the conversation I shared that I was born in Arkansas and now lived in California. Delton asked, "Do you have a son in college?" "No, I don't have children," I explained.

"Oh, my daughter met a nice young man from California and I thought perhaps it was your son," he said. "His last name is Utsey, but I can't remember his first name. I will ask my daughter. She has his contact information and they keep in touch. They have become friends."

"I wonder who that could be. I have not met an Utsey yet that is not related to us," I joked.



JANETTE

I can remember being a little girl wondering about the Utsey side of my family. My father's father died when he was about nine years old, and his mother remarried a man by the name of Burns. I never knew the Burns family or the Utseys.

In fact I never really thought I would even meet any Utseys. I was born and raised in California and I never met another person with the name Utsey other than my immediate family. One year I went to Arkansas with my parents and I met two of my father's aunts—two of his father's sisters—but that was it. I never met anyone after that.

Around 1993 or 1994 I got my license as a manicurist and started working in that field. I rented space from a woman who subleased space from a guy named William James. He also went by the

name William Utsey, using his mother's maiden name.

We talked, and after an exchange of information we found that we were cousins. I saw William many years later and he told me that he was on his way to an Utsey family reunion and wanted me to go, but the notice was too short and I couldn't make it. I made up my mind, though, that I would attend the next one.

Seeing William revived a hunger in me to meet more of the Utseys, so I called him and he gave me a number for Lisa Willingham, a family member in Kansas City, Missouri. I called Lisa, who told me to call her mother, who told me I needed to talk with Cousin Vernester because she has a lot of information.

Vernester: I finally met my cousin Delton for the first time as he rushed into the hotel for the Meet and Greet night at the 2007 Utsey Family Reunion. He looked exactly as I had pictured him and he was very nice. Later that evening, I met his daughters Schnina and Delischa, and sons Delton, Jr. and Delron. During the banquet on Saturday, his young grandsons performed an original rap, to the family's delight. It was wonderful!

Janette: One day my son called me from the University of New Mexico where he was a student, and asked if we had family in New Mexico. I told him that I did not know. He said he'd just met a beautiful young lady there whose last name was Utsey.

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The Collins Family



John Elmore and America Collins and family, circa 1911



Orien "Love" Collins and family, circa 1970

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 born in Virginia. As recorded in the Colored Marriage Records of Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, District #1, Crawford Collins married Elvira White on December 24, 1872.

Great-grandpa Crawford went into substantial debt to pay the enormous two hundred dollar marriage bond to wed his bride. Their union lasted almost 60 years!

The 1880 U.S. Census lists Crawford and Elvira living on property owned by Civil War officer, Captain Benjamin Littleton (B.L.) Wynn and his wife, Fannie E. Leigh Wynn.

The Leigh family, wealthy planters from Yalobusha and Tallahatchie counties, originated from Amelia County, Virginia. The Leigh family migrated to the Mississippi Delta from Virginia during the 1840s

and 1850s during the South's "Cotton Is King" era.

Family oral tradition remembers Crawford and Elvira as loving, yet stern parents. They had nine children, all born between 1875 and 1896: Mary Frances, John Elmore, Joseph Howard (my paternal grandfather), Addie Lou, Lane Lee, Hattie, Adolphus, Orien ("Love"), and their youngest child, son Lacy.



Left to right: Joseph Collins, the author's paternal grandfather; Mary Frances Collins Simmons; Lane Lee Collins

The Collins Family



Lacy Collins



Adolphus and Mabel Collins



A Priceless Treasure

Walter Bradford, Jr. and his sister, Bettie Mary Bradford, are pictured in Charleston, Mississippi circa 1924. They are the great-nephew and great-niece of Elvira and Crawford Collins.

Walter is also the 91-year-old family member who shared his vivid memories of Crawford's work as a butcher. These and other priceless recollections of what life was like back then helped author Judith Collins fill in a great deal of her family's history.



Collins family home circa 1976, Mitchell Lake Blue Cane area, Charleston, Mississippi

Continued from page 4)

Following the Civil War, the family worked as sharecroppers in Tallahatchie County. During the later part of his life, Crawford relocated his family to the small town of Charleston, Mississippi,

and the family resided in "Black's Quarters," a predominantly Black area once owned by a white man named Black.

The 1920 U.S. Census cites Crawford's occupation as a laborer for a meat company. Family members recall Crawford working for the Fox Meat Company as a butcher. An elder family member, now 91 years of age, remembers my great-grandfather butchering the meat in the rear of the store, but being forbidden to interact with the store's white customers because of the color of his skin.

In spite of the intense racism, Crawford was a proud, confident and honorable man. He died around late 1929.

At varying times in their careers, the Collins sons worked for Lamb-Fish Sawmill, a major Charleston employer in the early 1900s.

The sawmill, which opened in 1908, was located on the

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It's A Small World Afterall



Julius Utsey



Lewis Utsey



Delischa Utsey



Steven Akrim

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Vernester: A few days after I returned home from the family reunion, I received a telephone call from a woman who said she was looking for her family and had been referred to me for help.

She said, "My name is Janette Utsey, my father was Willie Miles Utsey, and his father was Robert Lewis Utsey. I am told that my Dad was named after his uncle, who was executed by the State of Arkansas for a crime he did not commit. I am looking for my family, and Lisa Willingham suggested I contact you."

My heart was beating a mile a minute. I was practically speechless. Finally, I answered, "Hello, Cousin. You have found the right family, and I can tell you all about your great Uncle Willie."

Janette: *I called Vernester, and Lisa's mom was right; Vernester had a bunch of information. It was so good to talk with her because she was so welcoming to me, and we talked and talked again and again. I started to feel like we really were family.*

That feeling became even stronger sometime after we first talked. Vernester was on her way to China for a vacation and her plane was transferring through Los Angeles, so I picked her up and took her to her hotel.

We were able to visit that day, and when she got ready to leave, she left something at the hotel for me to pick up, and in case anything went wrong on her trip, she entrusted me with some important information to pass on.

That act of trust created a bond to Vernester in my heart. At that point, she truly became my family. It was more to

me than just being tied together by name, it became blood. That's the best way I know how to explain it.

Vernester: During that first conversation Janette asked if I had a daughter in college. "No, I don't have children," I said, "Why do you ask?" Janette explained, "My son, Steven, attends the University of New Mexico. One day, he told me about an experience he had in the cafeteria on campus.

"Steven said he was eating lunch in a section of the cafeteria that's reserved for athletes. As he was about to leave, he noticed the name Delischa Utsey on the monitor, and asked one of the staff members if they knew her. They said yes, and pointed her out.

"Steven walked over to her table and asked if she was Delischa Utsey. "Yes, I am," she replied. He asked where she was from, and she told him

It's A Small World Afterall

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she was from Kansas. Steven explained that he was from California, and that he has family living in Arkansas. Delischa shared that she also has family in Arkansas.

She said that after a little more conversation, Steven showed her the tattoo on his arm, which reads "Utsey." At this point, neither one of them could make the connection, but they agreed to exchange numbers and talk to their parents to find out if there was a family connection."

Janette: *I told Vernester about my son's experience and she said, "Wait, that story sounds familiar to me. Wait, did I hear that at the last family reunion? Daughter?" She told me the story about a young lady and the young man that she*

met at school who had the name Utsey tattooed on the back of his arm. I said yes, that's my son! He has the name tattooed on his arm.

Vernester: Oh my goodness! I was giggling and giddy with excitement as I told Janette about my conversation with Delton before the reunion. I explained that I had met Delischa and her entire family at the reunion.

In a few minutes, I was able to explain the family connections between Delischa Utsey and Janette's son, Steven Akrim.

Cincinnati Utsey and Nancy Brown had ten sons--Henry, Peter, George, William, John, Robert, Harvey, Lewis, Elmo, and Julius —and one daughter, Charlotte. Delton and Delischa are

descendants of the youngest son, Julius Hatley Utsey, or "Uncle Doc," as he is known by most of the family. Uncle Doc had five boys and three girls. His youngest daughter, Glenda Dean, is Delton's mother and Delischa's grandmother.

"Janette," I said, "Your father, Willie Miles Utsey, was the only child of Robert Lewis Utsey. Robert's father was Lewis, who was known to the family as Ada. So your great-grandfather Lewis and Delischa's great-grandfather Julius were brothers." The two young people who met for the first time at college are third cousins once removed. In the end, it was our Utsey reunion that brought them together as family, even though only one of them had been there.

Your Ad Could Be Here In Our Next Issue

Unbound inserts up to 8-1/2" x 11"	\$100
Full page	\$75
One-half page	\$50
One-quarter page	\$35
One-eighth page or business cards	\$20

Computer files preferred for all ads
Typeset or camera-ready acceptable



Contact:
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P.O. Box 27485
Oakland, CA 94603-0985
Email: newsletter@aagsnc.org

Welcome New Members!

William Dawkins
Antoinette Farmer
Vernon Foster
Patricia Hardy
Marie Johnson
Darlene Mims
Patrick Sturgis
Alvis Ward, Jr.
Allene Warren
Michelle Watson
Michelle Williams
AAMLO Library



Livin' in the Big Easy

By Lenora Gobert

AAGSNC Member Lenora Gobert recently relocated from Oakland, California to New Orleans. The Baobab Tree will periodically publish her journal entries as she adapts to life in "The Big Easy."

December 2010

I ended up renting a room in a house from a guy I contacted on Craig's List before I left Oakland 'cause I didn't know the city neighborhoods that well and I was getting sick of looking.

I live seven minutes from work. It's a small city so everything seems so close to me. I'm working for a small non-profit called the Louisiana Bucket Brigade which is an environmental health and justice organization. They help community groups that live next to refineries sample the air when the refineries have flares and dump chemicals into the air.

My priority project right now is working with their New Orleans Earth Day Festival. This organization established the first New Orleans Earth Day Festival in 2009, which is amazing to me considering we had been doing it in California since forever.

OK...so let me talk about the things I like, being a "newbie" here...

It's so green. I have to remind myself I'm in a semi-tropical environment, which will generate summer rain storms, so it will be green all the time. I love it! Most of the bigger streets have a green belt down the middle, which is called "the neutral ground" here, unless the freeway (expressway) goes down the middle of it. There are oak trees on most streets. They are huge and hang over the street. Beautiful! Bad thing, of course, is that they wreck the side-

walks and the street, and sometimes the branches fall down onto your car.

You drive or walk down the street and run into little parks. Unexpected (to me) little parks. Love it!

The architecture! New Orleans has been so good about preserving its heritage that most of the houses and buildings in the parish (read county) have been preserved (if not washed away by Hurricane Katrina). The styles, the colors...amazing!

The people are friendly. I remember it was like this a few decades back in Oakland. You would say hello to a complete stranger while walking down the street, and they would say hello back. But now, I would say maybe 60% percent of the people will speak to you...if that many.

A Californian will look at you as he or she is walking toward you, but as soon as they get within speaking distance, the eyes are lowered or fixed on something far beyond you, and they walk by without so much as making eye contact. Not here. People will speak to you on the street, in your car...anywhere. I love it!

Everyone is "ma'am" or "sir" no matter your age. I have to get used to that. I got invited to Thanksgiving dinner by a friend's cousin (thank you) and was invited to someone else's house on Christmas Day for old movies and dinner. Most of you know how I LOVE old movies! Another thing is that there are activi-

ties going on all the time. There's always something to do, often for free.

Something else that is different, and that I like, is more of an the emphasis on things with a French heritage. Of course, street names (like mine, Fleur de Lis Drive) are in French, or reflect the southern Civil War culture with names such as Jefferson Davis and General so-and-so.

In December I walked to the levee on Lake Ponchartrain. Never been near a levee before. This one was dirt, not a wall. It is huge, maybe 20 feet tall. I walked up and sat on top. It's just a big mound of earth that goes for miles. On the other side was a beach and fishing area—very nice—then, the huge lake. Big like Lake Michigan in Chicago.

The TV programming has much more that is French and/or Catholic and/or high school football. There's only one Spanish language TV station here compared to the Bay Area, which has three or four.

They use terms like "banquette" for sidewalk. The culture here is palpable. The place envelops you in its French and Spanish heritage.

Now, the things I found curious or that I have had to deal with: They only need to have one license plate here, in the back. Makes me mad that I had one plate on my car for over 10 years until an overzealous highway patrolman on Interstate 5

Livin' in the Big Easy

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gave me a "fix-it" ticket for not having the front plate. I got here and no one has a front plate!

They don't use the turn signals on their cars here. No turn signals, no warnings of any kind. It's kind of scary. On busy streets like Canal Street where there are school zones, they have a flashing light that makes drivers slow down to 20 mph.

Oh yeah, I assume—I hope—it's because of Katrina but, finding your way around here while driving can be a challenge. It's somewhat dark because when you don't have all of the houses or businesses on the street with lights on *and* street lights, it's dark.

In addition, street signs are missing! Many of the signs on smaller streets (and even on some bigger streets) have not been replaced, so

even with a Mapquest or Google map, you can't always figure out what street you've passed!

I finally figured out the north/south designation of the streets here. The streets north of Canal are, yes, north; and south of Canal, south. However, since the streets are kind of like a fan from the top of the city to the Mississippi River, streets can cross each other when you assumed they were parallel. There's so much more to this place than the Vieux Carre, the old quarter where the French Creoles first settled, better known as the French Quarter.

For my genealogy compatriots, I've been too busy in the few months I've been here to do much research, but I'm so excited about being here and the potential researching I will do! It took me a few tries going to my storage facility to find all of my family binders and "next steps" for re-

search, but I have it all now. I spent all of the time between Christmas and the New Year doing my genealogy. Couldn't wait! With all of the archives and libraries and courthouses within easy reach, I'm in the belly of the beast! Whoopeee!



Moving to New Orleans has taken Lenora Gobert back to her roots, since her family is originally from Louisiana. She enjoys sharing her New Orleans adventures with Baobab readers, as well as sharing the family stories she is able to find.

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. Submit photos to:

*AAGSNC, P.O. Box 27485, Oakland, CA 94603-0985
Members may e-mail photos to journal@aagsnc.org or send by postal mail.*

Howard Edwards posted this photo of his paternal great-grandparents' family in the Fall-Winter 2010 Baobab and requested help matching the children to the names he had, and identifying his grandmother, Bina Dee Reeves. Depending on whether the photo was taken in 1904 or 1907, she would be one of the two girls to the right of their father. At an AAGSNC meeting, members decided Bina is the second child from the right, but Howard received this conflicting reply from his cousin, fellow AAGSNC member Arlene Blanks Polk:

I believe the infant in the mother's arms is Annie and that Bina is the child on the end at 10, the photo taken in 1907. Why? Because the infant's outfit is made from the same material as the mother's. Boys that age were dressed in long shift-like outfits ("like girls," we think today), but no mother back then would have made an outfit for her male child from the same material she used to fashion a blouse or frock for herself. The mother is holding a female infant. Bina is the girl on the end sitting next to her father.

If you can help solve this mystery, please contact Howard Edwards at journal@aagsnc.org.

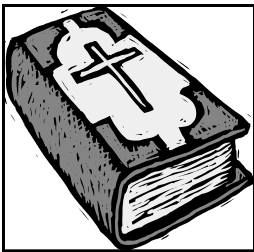
Leaving A Trail Behind

Making Sure Your Family Documents and History Stay Alive

By Nicka Smith

We've all heard the stories. This grandparent had so many pictures. That cousin knew all the family history. This aunt had the family bible that had everyone's information in it. At the same time, we've also heard about how natural disasters, the onset of dementia, and family scandals have kept those prized resources from surviving the test of time.

In my own journey to collect genealogical information for my maternal line, I have not been exempt from the same circumstances. My centenarian great aunt recounts a story about how she meant to get the family bible from her parents'



home, but forgot. The bible burned up in a house fire that also destroyed all the childhood pictures and documents for her and her 10 siblings. I've also

heard how most of the documents that recorded family members' involvement in the civil rights movement were destroyed by the floods after Hurricane Betsy, and what was left was destroyed by the floods after Hurricane Katrina.

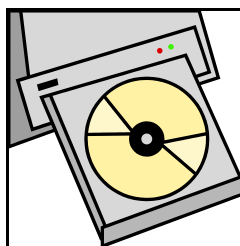
All of it made me wonder. Is there any way I can do something to ensure that our ancestors' documents will survive for our future generations? How in the world can I recapture all that was lost, especially if people have died, records may not be available, and I'm doing all of this by myself? That's when I decided that it was going to be my job to maintain a safe repository for family documents and photos, as well as to make sure more than one copy of everything is available.

The first thing I did was transcribe most of the documents I had and put the transcriptions into my genealogy database in a person's notes section. This included census information, draft cards, obituaries,

and anything of interest I could find on my family members. This way, when the family history book was printed, all of the information would be included and accounted for. It also meant that since we all lived in different places of the world, all the copies of the book weren't in one place and were not subject to be destroyed at once, God willing.

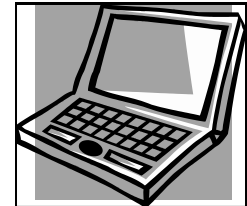
Second, I utilized the server space we had available for our family website. At the time, we were using only a very small fraction of server space, even though we were paying for a large amount of it. In lieu of this, I scanned all the hard copy documents I had and created a portable document file or .pdf for each of them. I then uploaded them to our website. In the end, not only did I have both a paper and digital copy at home, I also had one available on our web server. The documents could also be saved by family members on their own computers, which added another place for safekeeping. More importantly, it also gave family members the ability to view documents that related to their direct ancestors without having to leave the confines of their own homes to see them.

Next, I created backups of my genealogy database, as well as all the scanned documents, and placed them onto a CD. I then mailed the discs to a cousin who does not live in the same geographical area that I do. Backups of the database and the documents also exist on an external hard drive that is easy to transport in case something happens at my own home.



Lastly, the most important step I took was to make sure that all of my interviews that were handwritten were transcribed into a word processing document. Of course I can

read my own handwriting, but what about the person who takes on this project after me? These interviews proved to be valuable because as I transcribed them, I noticed that a number of relatives that I had interviewed had died. I would never get a chance to talk to some of these cousins again. I was grateful that I was led to interview them when I did. As with the genealogy database and the scanned documents, these interviews were also included on the discs that were sent away to a cousin.



In the end, what started as a salvage project also turned into an angel project. The release of more documents online made it possible for me to replace most of the family's Civil Rights Movement documents. It felt awesome to be able to give my cousins something that they never thought they'd get back. It also felt great to know they most likely wouldn't have to suffer through the same circumstance again.



Nicka Smith is the lead researcher and family historian for the Atlas family from Lake Providence, East Carroll Parish, LA. In addition to her genealogy research activities, she maintains a website, blog, and YouTube channel to continue to draw interest in the family history. To see her work, please visit <http://www.atlasfamily.org>

Slaves in Church Records: An Update

By Bill Melson

A mystery is solved with this update to the story "Slaves in Church Records," published in the Summer 2010 issue of The Baobab Tree. That story ended with author Bill Melson still uncertain whether his ancestors, newly emancipated and allowed to break away from the white congregation of their owners, had founded Bethel Heard Baptist Church in Georgia. That African-American church still exists today.



A bush arbor



Bethel Heard Baptist Church, Franklin, Georgia

In 1866, the white congregation of Bethel Baptist Church in Franklin, Georgia, gave their freed African-American members permission to form a new church of their own, and followed through on their commitment to assist their colored brethren.

The July 11, 1868 minutes of Bethel Baptist document their instructions: "trustee to deed one acre of land of said church... given to the colored church exclusive for religious worship." The land was deeded to Bethel Baptist Church II, known today as Bethel Heard Baptist Church.

The minutes for September 11, 1869 document continued assistance from the

white Bethel Baptist Church. Those minutes state: "...on motion agreed to build an harbor [sic] on Thursday next. Bro Wood, Ware, Melson, Tomlin agrees to haul a load of lumber for seats with the understanding that the colored brethren & friends build the harbor and after the apposition adj. [teaching adjourns] the seats are to be given to the colored church for the use and completion of their house. Agreed to send three dollars for."

A Bush Arbor

The arbor and those seats are long gone, but Bethel Heard Baptist Church lives on, less than 300 feet from the white Bethel Baptist Church. My family attended a service there during our 2008 reunion, unaware how closely we're tied to its history. The current Bethel Heard Baptist Church was constructed in 1945.

My Great-great-grandfather Lewis Melson's role in the early Bethel Baptist Church II is not known. He was a member of Bethel Baptist and therefore was a strong candidate for membership in Bethel Baptist II, but membership records have not been found. The only indication of original membership is the list of 52 people dismissed from Bethel Baptist Church, which included my great-great-

grandfather. He probably had a role in the construction of the arbor and the original church building.



W. E. "Bill" Melson is currently AAGSNC Board Chairman. He was born in Old Hickory, TN, but moved to California after graduating from high school. He earned an Associate's Degree in drafting from Modesto Junior College, followed by a B.S. in Engineering from California Polytechnic University. He then went to work for IBM, and retired from there in 2002. Bill is an avid boater, and founder of Ebony Boat Club of California. Since he started doing genealogy in 2000, Bill has traced several of his ancestral lines to their last slave owners. He can be contacted at BillMelson@aol.com.

Society News

BLACK FAMILY HISTORY DAY

By all accounts, AAGSNC's first Black Family History Day was a rousing success, drawing an estimated 200 enthusiastic African-American visitors to the Mormon Church's Regional Family History Center in Oakland. They were eager to try their hand at genealogical research or pick up tips from the AAGSNC members who generously volunteered their time—and every volunteer was needed. They enjoyed watching others see their families in the census for the first time. It was especially rewarding to see a large group of young people from the local Jack and Jill chapter take part, some of them phoning their parents for more information. Many were interested enough to take AAGSNC membership applications.

The guest speaker was author Antoniette Broussard, who wrote *African-American Holiday Traditions: Celebrating with Passion, Style and Grace*. She regaled attendees with a presentation about her research on her great aunt, Dr. Nettie J. Craig Asberry. Dr. Asberry, known as "The Militant Matron," was a community activist, and music teacher who earned a doctorate from the University of Kansas.

The décor of flowers and African artifacts put visitors in mind of the Motherland. At a special volunteer gathering before the event, the center honored AAGSNC founder Electra Kimble Price with a cake honoring her many years of service in genealogy. The event went so well and had such a good turnout, the center is hoping to hold a similar event in the near future for the general public. If they do, expect to see AAGSNC lending a hand once again.



Visitors kept almost every computer busy at Black Family History Day.



The décor of flowers and African artifacts brought to mind the Motherland.



AAGSNC Member Judith Collins (center) helps new researchers.



AAGSNC Member Bill Melson tells Maurice Wysinger how it's done.

Society News



The Black Family History Day Celebration was the brainchild of Electra Kimble Price (above, holding certificate), who also co-founded the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California. AAGSNC and the Family History Center presented her with a certificate of appreciation and a cake honoring her many years of outstanding service teaching genealogy. The entire group celebrated at a reception before the Black Family History Day event began. Congratulations, Electra, and thank you for everything!



Guest speaker **Antoinette Broussard**, author and historian, regaled the audience with stories of her own genealogical research.



Teens from the local chapter of the Jack and Jill club were excited to learn more about their families. Left to right: **Tahje Hobson, Julian Ryles, Karl Ray Rogers II, Brandon Willhite, Tatiana Hobson and Justin Scott.**



(Continued from page 5)

outskirts of Charleston in the "White Bottom" area. The sawmill/processing plant was reported to be the world's largest producer of hardwood.

At that time, Charleston was alive and bustling, and work was plentiful for everyone. Following World War I, however, most of the Collins children left Mississippi for better employment opportunities in New Orleans, Memphis and St. Louis. By the late 1920s my paternal grandparents, Joseph H. and Alice L. Simmons Collins, had migrated to the small township of Belgrade (Massac County) in southern Illinois.

As with so many southern African-American families during the 1920s, the Collins family's personal "Great Migration" to the North had a significant impact

upon the structure of the family. Life on the farm and in the fields was steadily being replaced with life in big cities and work in steel mills, auto plants and factories. Elvira never left the south, however, and she died between late 1941 and early 1942 in Charleston.

My personal journey in discovering my ancestors has been simply phenomenal. I have learned patience, humility, diligence, and thankfulness. The search has brought a newfound appreciation for my family, myself and those who came before me. In essence, they have taught me how to love and seek truth at the same time.

**Slave Narratives: Elvira Collins from Source Material for Mississippi History, Tallahatchie County, from microfilm, page 49.*



The history bug bit Judith Collins when she was just a child in elementary school, so her mother, a former teacher, introduced her to African-American literature and history. Judith progressed from there to genealogical research and membership in AAGSNC. In September 2010, Judith succeeded AAGSNC founder Electra Kimble Price as the instructor of the African American Research workshop held at the Regional Family History Center in Oakland.

Queries

Readers may submit one family query per 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, cost is \$5.00 for non-members. All queries must be typed or neatly printed. 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 journal@aagsnc.org or by mail.

Smith/Crockett

Looking for information regarding my great- great- grandmother: Daphne Smith Crockett. Her first husband was named Prince Smith and her second husband was named Henry Crockett. She was born Nov, 1857, in South Carolina, moved to Pope County, Arkansas, sometime between 1884-1890 and died in Arkansas sometime after 1920. Her daughter, Carrie Belle Smith Wilson (1884-1923) is my maternal great-grandmother.

If you have information to share contact Carol Miller at carolmlr5@sbcglobal.net

CALENDAR

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

2011 topics:

- September 17 - Braggin' and Lyin' (What I Did This Summer)
- October 15 - Beyond the Census: Other State and Federal Resources, Newspapers
- November 19 - Slave Research
- December 17 - Christmas Party and Black Elephant Sale

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.

The Baobab Tree is published four times a year and is provided free to all members. Additional copies and past issues may be purchased for \$5.00 per copy. All articles and manuscripts submitted for publication are evaluated and may be edited. Authors retain copyright. AAGSNC does not assume responsibility for errors of fact or interpretation. Deadlines for submission of material for publication in The Baobab Tree are: February 27 for the Spring issue, May 30 for the Summer issue, July 31 for the Fall issue, and October 30 for the Winter issue. Correspondence on editorial matters, story submissions and requests for permission to reprint articles may be sent to journal@aagsnc.org. For Writer's Guidelines, send request to journal@aagsnc.org or on the web at www.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

Visit the AAGSNC Website...

Read the blog, post ancestor charts, read back issues of The Baobab
Check our Resources Section, Calendar of Events, Society Information
Link to Amazon.com—AAGSNC receives a percentage of all sales!

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OBJECTIVES

- To promote interest in genealogy, biography and related history in African ancestry research
- 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

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

