

**P3 MAKE AAGSNC A BENEFICIARY**

Share the benefits and good work about the society as you research in places other than Northern California.



**P6 WE WEREN'T TAUGHT HOW TO SMILE**

Part two of the story of a family who came together to fight Jim Crow.



**P8 FINDING THE STERLINGS**

Michael Willis recounts the ups, downs, and emotions of solving a 51-year-old family mystery.



**P12 PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF**

Missed Black Family History Day? Angelo Andrews shares how attending can get you further in your research.

# the Baobab Tree

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First colored world series, opening game Oct. 11, 1924, Kansas City, Mo., Monarchs, and the Hilldale baseball team. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002719389/>

## It Runs in the Family

by Jackie Stewart and Annette Madden  
Member and Board Member, AAGSNC

John Blackwell loves baseball. He lives in Sacramento, California, and has coached Little League and served on the Board of Directors of Oak Park Little Leaguers. He had great joy from coaching youngsters, among them Kevin Johnson, now mayor of Sacramento. He still plays baseball, in a

league for men over 75, and last September went to Las Vegas to participate in the United States 75 and Over Slow Pitch World Championships. Two of the players on his team have nephews who play in the major leagues.

John came by this love of baseball quite honestly; it appears to be in his genes. It all harkens back to his grandmother, Nancy Jane (Bearden) Taylor.

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*It's Your History...*

Isn't it time you told **your**  
story?

The African-American Genealogical Society of Northern California (AAGSNC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated in its commitment to national and international African-ancestry family history research. The society provides a unique approach to education, research skills, and support to anyone interested in genealogy.

### 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

### Membership and its benefits

Any person interested in furthering the objectives of AAGSNC is eligible for membership upon submission and acceptance of a completed application form and payment of dues.

Membership categories are as follows:

- Regular Membership: Age 17 and Over
- Family Membership
- Youth Membership: Age 16 and Under
- Organization Membership: Association, Library, Society, Non-Profit Group
- Lifetime Regular Membership: Age 17 and Over
- Lifetime Family Membership

Meetings - AAGSNC holds monthly meetings that include guest speakers, workshops, seminars, and networking with other members. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of each month (except July and August) from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Dimond Branch of the Oakland Public Library, 3565 Fruitvale Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602-2326.

Field Trips and Support - Members can attend regularly scheduled trips to the Oakland FamilySearch Library and receive assistance with their research projects. Participation in organized research trips to the Salt Lake City Family History Library and taking part in events with other historical and genealogical organizations are included in our program.

Members Only Section of Our Web Site - Compiled Databases, *The Baobab Tree* archive, meeting presentations (PDFs, video, and podcasts), ancestral charts, and more.

To join, please visit [www.aagsnc.org](http://www.aagsnc.org).



# The Branch

Words from the Society President and Journal Editors

## Make AAGSNC a Beneficiary of Your Summer Research Trip



Photo courtesy of M. Howard Edwards

by **M. Howard Edwards**  
President, AAGSNC

AAGSNC may be just the vehicle to join widely separated folks from home

history research; they are researching in Northern California. The rest of us are researching in other states.

As you research during the summer let folks know about your AAGSNC membership and the benefits you enjoy from it. They should know about:

- The first-class Web site
- The journal *The Baobab Tree*, published to great acclaim
- The various Yahoo! Groups special interest groups for researchers and Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas special interest groups
- Our Facebook page

to communicate and share family information. Folks should understand that our membership researches little in Northern California, despite our name. To clarify, the Outreach and Education Committee has been doing a simply outstanding job of introducing Alameda County high school students to family

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## Hello?!?

### Family Reunions Are Research Trips Too!

by **Nicka Smith**  
Layout Editor, *The Baobab Tree*

We focus so much on taking that next trip to the National Archives (NARA), or perhaps a trip to what I refer to as the “international genealogical casino” — the FamilySearch library in Salt Lake City, Utah. Of course we promise ourselves we’ll have research findings galore, we’ll make plenty of copies, and we’ll plan our research so well that we won’t find what we’re looking for 10 minutes before the library closes. Ha! On the other hand, what if we’re not so lucky to visit NARA or Salt Lake? What other opportunities do we have?

Some of us have family reunions every year, while others have them every two years. These reunions are prime time to gather information not only

on the deceased family members in your database, but on those who are still living. As you circulate the newest copy of your family history book or report, ask for corrections and updates. Interview family members as they read their own information. Take photos of all the family members in attendance so you have them on hand if they’re ever needed.

These gatherings are not just about having a great time with your cousins. Reunions are a documentarian’s paradise. It’s almost as though you’ve recreated your ancestral place of origin decades later and perhaps in another location. Maybe you can create a get-together for the elders to talk? Or perhaps you can enlist some of the younger family members to interview the elders with their smartphones? Whatever you decide, don’t waste a great opportunity!

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## 2013 Calendar of Events

### September 21

Research Presentation, Braggin' and Lyin' Session

### October 19

Beyond the Census, Part I

### November 16

Beyond the Census, Part II

### December 21

Annual Holiday Party

For more info on our events and meetings, please visit [www.AAGSNC.org](http://www.AAGSNC.org)

# The Leaf

## Updates from the Board of Directors, Officers, Society Committees, and Blog

### AAGSNC Executive Committee Meeting Notes May 18, 2013



Photo Credit: AAGSNC

*Attending: M. Howard Edwards, Upperton Hurts, Diana Ross, Janice M. Sellers, Alvis Ward*

The meeting was opened at 12:25 p.m. by the President.

After minor corrections, the notes of the April meeting were accepted.

Alvis Ward reported that the Youth Ancestral Project is winding down for the school year, but county funding for continuing is endangered. WETA will continue through the summer. Publicity to the *Metro* is still on time for June publication. Alvis has sale T-shirts in his possession which he will send to storage for inventory.

Janice Sellers reported that she shadowed the past journal editor on the Spring issue. She will have a publishing

timeline for the next edition ready for the next meeting. She needs articles to fill the edition.

Upperton Hurts reported that we have 167 members but did not have a breakdown. The New Member Booklet for sale should be ready by the end of the hiatus.

After much discussion the committee decided not to offer *The Baobab Tree* on a subscription basis separate from membership. This would do nothing to encourage participation, would not increase revenue, and would not increase membership.

From notes taken by M. Howard Edwards.

# Genealogy 101

Researching on the Internet — There sure is A LOT to see

by Annette Madden  
Board Member, AAGSNC

So far in this column we have covered some basic information, reviewed the most popular genealogy software, discussed starting your research in your home (and the homes of your relatives), and talked about interviewing your kinfolk. Let's turn our attention now to another tool in your arsenal: your computer, notebook, or tablet.

A myriad of computer sites of various kinds will prove immensely helpful in your research. There are many more than I can list here, so do some surfing of your own. Google "genealogy", "African American genealogy", and "black genealogy" and see what comes up.

Some very useful genealogy databases are online, some of them fee-based and some of them free. These are a few:

## FamilySearch.org

This is the portal to the records of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). FamilySearch is the largest genealogy organization in the world and its library houses genealogy records from more than 110 countries, including the United States, Canada, British Isles, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Many records are digitized and can be viewed on the site. More digitized records are being added daily, as FamilySearch is in the process of digitizing its entire microfilm collection. Check back often.

A catalog of the Family History Library in Salt Lake City is also on the site. Records that are on microfilm which are not at your local FamilySearch Library (FSL) can be ordered from the main library in Salt Lake City and delivered to your local FSL for viewing. The fee for this is nominal. The library has more than 2.4 million reels of film containing a great variety of records, including census, church, probate, tax, real estate, and vital records. The collection also includes 727,000 microfiche, 356,000 books and 4,500 periodicals. Access to this site is free. FamilySearch Libraries also provides free access on their computers to several fee-based sites, such as Ancestry.com, Fold3, HeritageQuest, and World Vital Records.

## Ancestry.Com

Ancestry.com is the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world, and growing. It houses more than 11 billion records of all kinds: census records; Social Security Death

Index; birth, marriage, and death records; military records; and many more. Also on the site are 40 million family trees submitted by users.

Ancestry.com also owns Archives.com, Fold3.com (formerly Footnote), ProGenealogists, 1000memories.com, Newspapers.com, Genealogy.com, MyFamily.com, and Rootsweb.com. *Family Tree Maker* genealogy software was developed by Banner Blue Software but is now owned by Ancestry.com.

This is a paid site. The annual fee to access U.S. records is \$155.40. The annual fee to access worldwide records is \$299.40. This level of membership provides access to records of nine foreign countries, including the British Isles and Canada. (Free access at FSL.)

## Rootsweb

Rootsweb focuses on connecting people so they can work together and share genealogical research. Tools provided include mailing lists and message boards for various surnames, localities, and ethnic groups.

Access to this site is free.

## Genealogy.com

Focuses on 130 million names in 180,000 actual family trees. It also has census and passenger records, and some records that Ancestry.com does not have.

A fee-based site, there are several levels of membership, ranging from \$69.99/year to \$199.99/year.

## Fold3

Fold3 focuses on historical records and includes sections on military service, slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction and Jim Crow, World Wars, and civil rights. Its holdings also include the Dawes Commission rolls.

The fee is \$11.95/month or \$79.95/year. There is a free limited-access membership. (Free access at FSL.)

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# We Weren't Taught How to Smile

Part two of the story of how a brave family risked their lives to ensure the rights of all in America

by Nicka Smith

Layout Editor, *The Baobab Tree*

"I am a taxpayer. I want a voice in the government in which I live. I feel that is my constitutional right, and I just feel like it is my responsibility as a citizen to take whatever. If I can share it as a taxpayer and other reasons. I think I should vote." [6]

Economic coercion and physical violence immediately followed the words uttered by Rev. Atlas in September 1960. Crosses burned. Alienation and bullying ensued. His children and grandchildren couldn't return home for fear of the same treatment or even death. His wife and household were socially paralyzed.

"I'm not worried about them killing me, but I'll die before I let them run me out of my country ..." [7] he said. Whites in the area upped the ante. Merchants as far as Ouachita Parish refused to gin the cotton and process the soybeans on his farm. Rev. Atlas had no choice but to up the ante himself. It had only been a week since his testimony.

"The White House  
November 1, 1960

Dear Mr. Atlas:

The President has asked me to respond to your letter to him on October ninth.

We wish you to know that we have consulted with the Department of Justice concerning your letter and have been informed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is now actively investigating your complaints.

Please rest assured that your complaints will receive the fullest attention. Should any violations of Federal law be discovered, the law will be vigorously enforced.



Top row (left to right): Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA), Alice Thompson, and Jean Denton Thompson. Bottom row (left to right): Cora Mae Atlas Thompson, Shirley Thompson, and Rev. Francis Joseph Atlas, Sr., all deceased.

Sincerely, E. Frederic Morrow,  
Administrative Officer, Special Projects  
Group." [8]

Attorney General Kennedy responded again. On January 19, 1961, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit against area businessmen charging "serious economic coercion." One month later, the merchants relented and signed an agreement to treat Rev. Atlas fairly. [9] By July 1962, 25 eligible voters went to the polls and were allowed to vote "without incident." [10] Rev. Atlas, Rev. Scott, and Russell Nervis were among the group of 25. It took blacks in the area almost a century to vote and yet the battle was not over.

Five years after his testimony, Rev. Atlas was in debt, and nearly losing his prized land and property, but still voting, and a vibrant square on that familial quilt. "I want it understood that I am proud to be a farmer and we stand for something. I was born and raised in this [parish] ... [and am] a loyal citizen ... they will have to kill me to get me away from here," said Rev. Atlas in an April 15, 1965 issue of *Jet*. [11] He appealed to the government for help but was told to seek private counsel. Rev. Scott was nearly blown away by a shotgun blast. Yet, they still endured.

Six years after his testimony, Rev. Atlas was voted onto the parish school board. He served several terms in the position, although even he and his father were

Cedric Richmond photo courtesy of <http://richmond.house.gov>; other photos courtesy of Nicka Smith

forced to be educated through a church school. His election paved the way for a future black mayor, sheriff, and the first black parish clerk of court, Hon. Beatrice Carter, 177 years after the parish was created. It's Carter's job now to certify election results. The last one had the parish re-electing the nation's first black president, Barack Obama, to his second term. East Carroll was one of only 10 parishes in the state to do so.

United States Representative Cedric Richmond has a busy office at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. He represents Louisiana's second district, which includes New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward. The office walls are covered with New Orleanian art and Saints paraphernalia, an ode to his district and hometown. He's one of the youngest elected on the hill, the great-nephew of Russell Nervis, and the first cousin twice removed of Rev. Atlas and Cora Atlas Thompson. In 2011, Rep. Richmond honored the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Rides by giving commendations to New Orleans CORE members. Three of them were his second cousins once removed, the Thompson sisters. He's recently worked to secure redevelopment funding for his district to address the remnants left by Hurricane Katrina. It's clear his block on the quilt got its batting from the struggles and gains made by those in his pedigree.

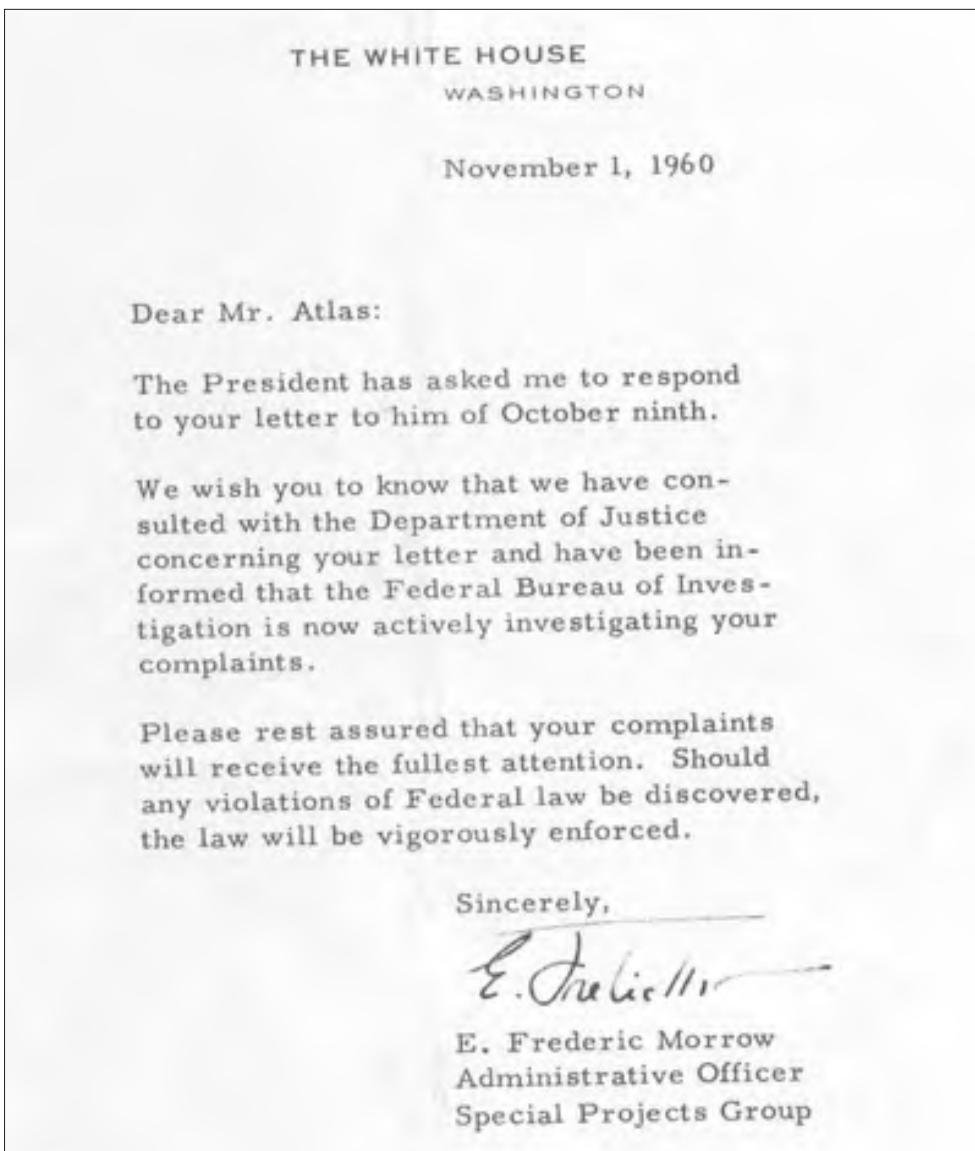
Courtesy of Florence Marie Atlas.

Rev. Atlas was 73, Cora was 73, and Shirley was 47 when they died. Jean and Alice spend their time enjoying retirement and actively speaking about the family's experiences in the movement. Looking at photos of the bunch, they appear mostly serious. Why didn't they smile? "We weren't taught how to smile," says Sewell. Indeed. They were taught to fight for equality first.

For more on the Atlas family, visit <http://www.atlasfamily.org>.

### Endnotes

[6] Testimony of Francis Joseph Atlas, September 27, 1960. *Hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights: Hearings held in New Orleans, Louisiana, September 27, 1960, September 28, 1960, May 5, 1961, May 6, 1961, Issue 11*. U.S. Government Print Office, 1961.



This letter, dated November 1, 1960, was sent in response to a call for assistance by Rev. Atlas less than two weeks after his testimony in front of the Civil Rights Commission in New Orleans, Louisiana.

- [7] "LA farmer still faces reprisals for trying to vote 3 years ago." Larry Still. *Jet*, April 15, 1962, page 14.
- [8] "The White House, Letter to Mr. Francis Joseph Atlas, November 1, 1960. [The original typewritten letter is in the possession of Florence Marie Atlas; a copy of the letter is in the possession of Nicka Smith. Letter used with permission.]
- [9] "Quiet progress seen in civil rights case." James E. Clayton. *Washington Post*, July 17, 1961, page 1.
- [10] "All 25 eligible negroes vote in Louisiana parish." Associated Press. *Times Daily* (Florence, Alabama), July 29, 1962, page 11.
- [11] "LA farmer still faces reprisals for trying to vote 3 years ago." Larry Still. *Jet*, April 15, 1962, page 16.



**Nicka Smith** is the layout editor of *The Baobab Tree* for the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California (AAGSNC). She's been researching her family for 14 years and is the great-niece of Rev. Francis Joseph Atlas, Sr. and Cora Mae Atlas Thompson; the first cousin once removed of Alice Thompson, Shirley Thompson, and Jean Denton Thompson; and the third cousin of Rep. Cedric Richmond. Email her at [me@whoisnickasmith.com](mailto:me@whoisnickasmith.com).



Photo 1 courtesy of Kirk Young; photo 2 courtesy of Sanders E. Willis; photo 3 courtesy of Vickie Young-Walker

# Finding the Sterlings: Solving a 51-Year-Old Mystery

by Michael Willis  
Member, AAGSNC

This story is a complex and emotional one involving many people and many events occurring over the course of twenty years. It's a story I have yet to share without crying. I pray I do justice to my family members, all of whom played significant roles in the story.

This story began in 1991, when I was 19. I interviewed my paternal great-grandmother, Essie Beatrice (Taylor) Mckinley, who was 84 at the time, and asked her about her lineage. She told me:

**Parents:** George Taylor and Lizzie Williams  
**Children** (in order of birth): Laura (aka "Auntie Cuzane" [coo-zane]), Nelson (aka "Uncle Butta"), Essie ("Auntie Essie B."), Earnestine.

She also told me Lizzie had had three children prior to her marriage to George: Susie Pickett, Johnny Pickett, Jeff Sterling\*.

She mentioned that Susie married George's brother, Harris Taylor (her uncle by marriage), and they had 15 children. These children were both my great-grandmother's nieces and nephews AND her first cousins.

My reply: "WHAT?????"

She continued by naming George and Harris' other siblings (at least the ones she could remember): Eliza, Sarah, Phillip,



Rosalie, Francis, Dink, Joe, Ida, Robert, and Carrie (Harris' twin). All of these children were born to Nelson Taylor, Jr. and his wife, Martha, residents of Wakefield Plantation in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.

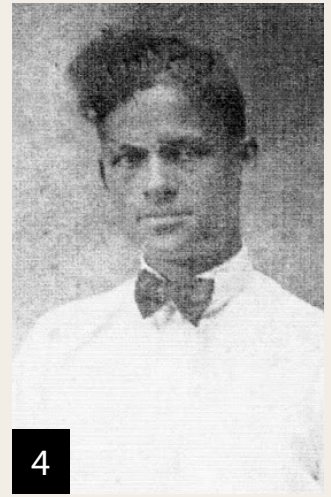
By this time, my head was spinning, but before I threw in the towel on this load she had dumped on me, I stopped to ask a few questions about Jeff Sterling, this brother I had never heard of. She said that he was much older than she was. I asked who his father was, but she said she didn't remember. Her answers were very short when it came to her brother Jeff, and at that time I couldn't understand why. In 2005, I found out.

I discovered Jeff's death in an index on Ancestry.com and ordered the record from the Louisiana State Archives. I took it to my grandmother's

house to discuss its contents (Essie had passed away in 1992). The document showed that Jeff died in an accidental fire on January 30, 1948. He is listed as the son of Vergin [Virgil] Stirling and Lizzie Taylor and divorced from Oserla [Ouslea] Cage. The informant was Laura (Taylor) Hammond, his younger sister. My grandmother, Ruby (Mckinley) Jenkins, confirmed these facts except for one: the accident. She said to me, "Baby, that wasn't no accident." When I asked for more details, she said that a friend of the family witnessed his murder by white men and for that reason alone could not report it to authorities. She went on to tell me that after Ouslea divorced Jeff, she moved to Mississippi (the place of her birth) and took the children, but she did not know where or how many children were born to Jeff and Ouslea.

I asked my father if he had any recollection of the Sterlings and he said all he remembered was Jeff's son, Jeff Jr., who was blind and who taught him how to use a typewriter. My father wanted desperately to know if Jeff Jr. was still alive. He also said that after Jeff Sr. died, the family was very worried about the children, but did not know their whereabouts.

For the next several years, I continued to investigate the whereabouts of Jeff Sterling's descendants. I asked several relatives, but no one had any information. On August 30, 2010, I received a message on Ancestry.com from Vernadette Taylor, great-granddaughter of Virgil Sterling and Kitty Reynolds of Wakefield, Louisiana. Vernadette shared information about Virgil, his brother Voltaire Stirling, and their mother, Cecille Bryant. She told me Virgil had



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Photo courtesy of Kirk Young

Photo courtesy of Vickie Young-Walker

1: Sons of Virgil Stirling. Clockwise from left: Wilson, Roosevelt (rear), John, and Jeff (seated). 2: Essie Beatrice Taylor. 3: Jeff Sterling. 4: Jeff Sterling in his early 20's. 5: Ouslea (Cage) (Sterling) Brackens. 6: Jeff Sterling's Louisiana State death certificate.

PERSONAL DATA OF DECEASED		1a. Last Name of Deceased		1b. First Name		1c. Second Name		DATE OF DEATH:		2a. Month Day Year		2b. Hour M.	
3. Sex - Male or Female?		m		4. Color of Race		W		5. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced		Divorced		6a. Name of Husband or Wife	
7. Date of Birth of Deceased		July 4 1890		8. Age of Deceased		58		9a. Birthplace (City or town)		Wakefield		9b. (State or Foreign Country)	
10. Usual Occupation		Farmer		11. Industry or Business				12. Social Security Number				13. If veteran, name war	
PLACE OF DEATH		14. City or Town - (If outside city or town limits write RURAL)		15. Parish and Ward No.		16. Length of Stay in this Community (Years, months or days)		63X		Solitude - Rural		West Feliciana	
USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED		19. City or Town - (If outside city or town limits write RURAL)		20. Parish and Ward No.		21. State		63X		Solitude - Rural		West Feliciana	
PARENTS		24. Name of Father		25. Birthplace of Father		26. Name of Mother		27. Birthplace of Mother		Vergin Sterling		Wakefield	
INFORMANT'S CERTIFICATION		28. Signature of Informant		29. Date of Signature		30. Immediate Cause of Death		31. Duration		I certify that the above stated information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.		Laura Hammond	
CAUSE OF DEATH		30. Immediate Cause of Death		31. Duration		32. Other Conditions (Include pregnancy within three months of death)		33. Duration		181-3		2-2-48	
		32. Other Conditions (Include pregnancy within three months of death)		33. Duration		34. Duration		35. Duration		2nd degree burns to both legs & thighs & it - arm & side of face.		mentally incompetent	

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Image courtesy of Michael Willis

fathered 21 children—one of them being Jeff. One of the others, his youngest child, Jeanette Sterling-Emery, was still alive at 100 years of age in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I wanted to find out if Jeanette had known her half-brother Jeff, so I asked Vernadette to contact her and confirm the relationship. Vernadette did just that, and Jeanette remembered her older brother! Unfortunately, she too did not know the whereabouts of her nieces and nephews. She knew her sister-in-law had taken the kids and moved away, but that was all.

Again I hit a brick wall.

A year later, however, something very special happened. My cousin Shawn Taylor (whom I met on Ancestry.com in February 2011), great-granddaughter of Harris Taylor and Susie Pickett and great-great-granddaughter of Nelson Taylor, Jr. and Martha Morgan, called me and said, “Michael, there is another tree on Ancestry.com that I think you ought to take a look at. Jeff Sterling’s name, his wife and kids are present on the tree.”

I immediately logged in and was astonished to see Jeff, his wife Ouslea (and her photo), and a list of children: Margie, Jeff, Jr., Mary, Maxine, and Oscar. I contacted the owner of the tree, a woman by the name of Cassie Wilson, who is a descendant of Ouslea’s sister. She explained that she had met Jeff and Ouslea’s

granddaughter, Vickie Young-Walker, daughter of Maxine Sterling and George Young, on another social network. Vickie confirmed their relationship through a mutual relative, Jeannette Wilson Evans, Ouslea Cage’s niece.

I wrote to Cassie, “I won’t ask you for Vickie’s number, since she did not give you

**“My mother was basically cut away from her dad once my grandmother left him. To this day, my mom yearns for the thoughts of what life would have been like with him.”**

permission to share it, so I will give you mine. Will you please tell her that I am her cousin and I have been looking for her and the rest of the Sterling family for the past 20 years?” Cassie agreed and after speaking with Vickie, she gave me her e-mail address. Cassie’s kindness and willingness to honor my request blessed more people and changed more lives than she will ever realize!

On August 27, 2011, after 20 years of searching and 51 years of separation, the Sterling and Taylor families were reunited! Vickie and I exchanged e-mails in which her response included the following excerpts: “Jeff was my mother’s dad and died before I was born. ... I do not recall visiting [Mama Lizzie], although mom said I did. But I do recall going to the Scotlandville funeral home to view her body. ... She was my great-grandmother.

“My mother was basically cut away from her dad once my grandmother left him. To this day, my mom yearns for the thoughts of what life would have been like with him. Here are a few items that I documented in a self-published 1998 booklet.

“Jeff’s mother was Elizabeth Brown (unsure of last name) and her mother was

she moved to Baton Rouge with Jeff’s sister Laura (her daughter).

“After Jeff’s father ‘Virgie’ Sterling left his mother (Elizabeth) she married George Taylor. Jeff has some 22 brothers and sisters between Elizabeth, Virgie, his stepmother(s), and George Taylor. Some siblings included: Laura who moved to Baton Rouge and was married to Hammond; Jeanette who married James Emery; Essiebee who moved to Baton Rouge; Emily who moved to New Orleans; Susie who had lots of children; Lebin Sterling; ‘Buddy’ Taylor who moved to Baton Rouge; Roosevelt who moved to New Orleans; Wilson who moved to New Orleans; Hunter, was killed in Louisiana over a horse settlement.”

named Mary (assumed Brown). Elizabeth was known as Mama Lizzie by her grandchildren and was crippled in the knees. She lived in Wakefield until





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7: Virgil Stirling (center) with his children. Front: Wilson Stirling and Jeanette Sterling-Emery. Rear: Roosevelt Stirling and wife Anna Mae.  
8: Left to right: Jeanette Sterling-Emery and Maxine Sterling-Young.  
9: Essie Beatrice Taylor.

By this time, both my grandmother and great-grandmother had passed away. This information corroborated details both of them and my father had provided about Mama Lizzie being confined to a wheelchair for the latter part of her life. My father never knew her to have the ability to walk. It was consistent with the story that Mama Lizzie was living with Aunt Laura at the time of her death in 1960. My father also spoke of attending Mama Lizzie's funeral, so that meant my father and Vickie saw each other at least once 51 years ago, and did not know it!

Vickie's e-mail also came with a picture of Jeff Sterling (photo #3 on page 8).

I cried my eyeballs out.

He was exactly as my grandmother had described him. I became very emotional, in part because I felt I was getting back a piece of my grandmother and great-grandmother. Secondly, it felt as if it was their way of letting me know they are always with me. Lastly, I felt that our family had just completed a journey that took 51 years to finish.

But it did not stop there.

Vickie asked if I had a picture of "Mama Lizzie", so I sent her pictures of Lizzie and Essie B. that I had found in a cardboard box in my grandmother's closet closet (#9 on this page and #2 on page 8).

This was Vickie's response:

"THANK YOU MICHAEL!!!



9

"I have been in tears looking at these pictures. Must have talked to my mom for over an hour about our communications. She was telling me of the aunts/uncles she remembered. Said she attended funeral services for Aunt Laura and that Mama Lizzie lived with Uncle 'Butta' for a while. My mom looks like her Aunt Essie. I forwarded the pictures to my siblings, mom, aunt, and Sterling cousins. ... I can see my grandfather's resemblance to his Mom.

"I can't wait to print the picture and add it to my family tree wall display.

"Thank you for making my day."

From that day forth, Vickie and I e-mailed photos of family members to each other and then forwarded them to other family members. Our family was in a complete uproar. The excitement was unbelievable and the reunion sparked much dialog and emotion.

CONT. ON PAGE 17

# Persistence Pays Off

Results from Attending Black Family History Day

by Angelo Andrews  
Member, AAGSNC

Prior to coming to the 2013 Black History Month event held at the FamilySearch Library in Oakland, California, which was sponsored by the African American Genealogical Society of Northern California (AAGSNC) I had hit several brick walls. I was not skeptical, but was hopeful for any tidbit of information that I could use to break down or start to crumble the brick walls.

I personally got started and became interested in genealogy when I was a teenager in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The spark that ignited my interest in genealogy came when I found out that my father was adopted and that his biological parents were not married when he was born. I wanted to know where I

came from, who his parents were, and if I had other relatives out there. Luckily for me, my father's maternal uncle and aunt raised him.

Of course, this research spilled over into researching

my mother's side; it is this side of the family I am currently working on. I was lucky too because I had living family historians when I started and I could approach these family elder "griots", hoping they could remember the family's history and pass their knowledge down to me. Whatever information I could gather, I soaked up like a sponge!

I thought approaching certain ancestors on my mother's side would seem insurmountable. It was more like a mountain range instead of a brick wall, though. In the beginning, I interviewed my great-aunt who lived in Sacramento, California, but I unfortunately was not able to record her voice. She told me as

much as she could remember. I just took notes and to reinforce those notes, I interviewed her again. I could go only so far with the information she had given me, however, which was some names, possible dates, and occupations.

I began looking up names on microfilm. I had learned from my great-aunt that my great-grandmother's family lived in West Columbia, Brazoria County, Texas. I knew that the name of her father, my great-great-grandfather, was Calvin Harris. The only information I found was the 1880 census, along with the names of my great-grandmother and some of her siblings.

So, after my initial exposure and records becoming available online, I was able to find the 1870 census. In it, my third great-grandparents were

**I thought approaching certain ancestors on my mother's side would seem insurmountable. It was more like a mountain range instead of a brick wall, though.**

revealed, along with my second great-grandmother's maiden name. Then the brick wall appeared to have rebuilt itself. I was stuck yet again. I had no clue where or how to locate my third great-grandmother's maiden name, let alone what happened to her daughters. Did they marry, who did they marry, and when?

I registered for the Black Family History Day knowing a huge brick wall existed and was staring me in the face. I sat through the orientation, anxious to get started and hopeful I could tear down this wall. Then I received one-on-one help from Janice Sellers, a professional genealogist who volunteered at the event that afternoon.

I had been searching like crazy online in Brazoria, Wharton, Matagorda, and Fort Bend counties for any other possible information. With Janice's assistance, we found out that my third great-grandfather Isaac Anderson, who was born about 1810 in Tennessee, had resided in Brazoria County, Texas for 26 years, according to an 1867 voter registration record. That means he had been there since 1841 and was about 30 years old then.

Toward the conclusion of my one-on-one session with Janice, she gave me homework to find my Anderson female ancestors (second great-grandmother's sisters) in an effort to locate my third great-grandmother Sallie Ann's maiden name. Just as I thought I was clear of a brick wall, it felt as if another was springing up.

After the event, I went to [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) and entered the name Alice Anderson. There she was right before my eyes, as if she were leaping off the page saying, "Here I am." She appeared with her married name, Alice Reddicks; she had married

Edmund Reddicks (sometimes spelled Edmont, and other times referred to as Edward). I subsequently located her in the 1880 census, and living with her was her mother, Sallie Anderson. I found a marriage record for Alice and Edmund; they were married on February 1, 1876 by David Blair.

I did not stop there! I decided to enter another sister's name, "Nettie", as it appeared on the 1870 census record. I did not locate Nettie, but close was Hetty "Hettie" Rhodes married to George Rhodes. They wed on December 13, 1877. In the 1900 census, her mother, Sallie Anderson, was living with her. Locating Hetty's son Lee Rhodes

(1898–1951) solidified that I had found the right person. On Lee's death certificate it listed Hettie Anderson as his mother and George Rhodes as his father. He had lived in West Columbia, Texas.

It was exciting for me to find two sisters of my second great-grandmother, their husbands, and their children! Each time I found something new I would e-mail Janice Sellers. I just could not contain my excitement.

Finally, I located another sister, Kate (Katie), married to Sam Franklin. She had a daughter named Edna Franklin who died in 1975, and her mother was listed as Kate Anderson. Kate's death certificate revealed what I had set out to accomplish with my homework assignment, which was finding my third great-grandmother's maiden name: Bates. Wow! What a find!!!

As an added clue, in researching David Blair (the minister who performed the marriage of Alice Anderson and Edmund Reddicks) in various census records, I learned that his first marriage was apparently to Ardenia Bates. Perhaps she was a relative of Sallie Ann.

Kate also had a son, with the same name as her husband. He died in May 1932 at age 45 and was married to Lizzie Franklin. On his death certificate his mother is listed as Kate Anderson, and his father as Sam Franklin. Kate Anderson died three months later in August 1932; her death certificate indicated she was no longer married to Sam Franklin, Sr.

I view this as just the beginning, and I look forward to checking other resources that will pinpoint more information about this family and other relatives in and around those areas of Texas. I plan to make a "pilgrimage" to the Texas State Archives in Austin, Texas and the county courthouses of Matagorda and Brazoria. In the future, I hope my research takes me to records of the Freedman's Bureau, the National Archives, and genetic genealogy.

While researching another line of my mother's paternal side I came across another gold mine! Online (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/marriages.htm>) I discovered a marriage records index for Matagorda County, where I found records of my great-grandparents' (George Peters and Annie McQuirter) marriage date, and found her siblings' marriage dates.

22			Willie	M M 6	S. S. Son	
23	148/148	Bucker	Ab	B M 35		
24		"	Matilda	B F 30	Wife	
25		"	Cornelia	B F 11	daughter	
26	1	Williams	Sol	B M 60		
27	149/149	Reddicks	E	M M 60		
28		"	Alice	B F 56	Wife	
29		"	Angelina	B F 30	daughter	
30		"	Beate	B F 20	daughter	
31		"	James	B M 16	Son	
32		Anderson	Sallie	B F 70	Miss Law	
33		"	Beate	B F 50	Sis in law	
34		Lee	Gertrude	B F 1	Wife	
35	150/150	Austin	John	B M 75		
36		"	Law	B F 60	- Wife	
37	151/151	Edwards	Moses	B M 60		
38		"	Elvira	B F 32	daughter	
39		"	Patsy	B F 22	daughter	
40	1	Williams	Birdie	B F 1	S. daughter	
41	152/152	Coiss	Sam	B M 30		
42		"	Peggy	B F 28	Wife	
43		"	Sallie	B F 2	daughter	
44		"	Martha	B F 1	daughter	
45	153/153	Stella	Coiss	B M 75	-	

Image courtesy of FamilySearch.org

Year: 1880; Census Place: Columbia, Brazoria, Texas; Roll: 1292; Family History Film: 1255292; Page: 153D; Enumeration District: 018. Lines 27-34, household of E. and Alice Reddicks.

In conclusion, I learned with genealogy there are turns, twists, and brick walls, but also treasure troves of information waiting to be discovered, but that information is awarded only to those who persistently dig for their ancestors in the records and resources, such as the Internet, and assistance from genealogical societies. When you persist in your search over the hurdles and brick walls, you can locate long-lost relatives, who sometimes seem to leap right off the pages!



Photo courtesy of Angelo Andrews

**Angelo Andrews** was born in Oakland, California and is the fourth of five children. His interest in genealogy developed after discovering relatives he had never known at the funeral of a great-uncle in 1979. He currently lives in San Pablo, California.

# The Master and the Slave

*Absalom and Jacob Mading — How a will and carpentry tools laid the groundwork for true freedom*



Photo courtesy of Peggy Lloyd

Antioch Baptist Church, founded in 1867 and one of the early black churches in Hempstead County, Arkansas, stands along Arkansas Highway 332, near the site of Jacob Mading's farm in the northeastern part of the county. This quiet country road was once one of the major thoroughfares in southwestern Arkansas. It led from Camden to Washington via Prairie D'Ane. Prairie D'Ane, a natural open grassland near Prescott, Arkansas, was the site of the Battle of Prairie D'Ane between Union and Confederate armies in April 1864.

by **Peggy Lloyd**  
Contributor

Absalom Mading was an early Washington, Arkansas, merchant. As is true of many of these early Arkansas figures, little is currently known of Absalom Mading but research is ongoing.

Mading was in Arkansas Territory early, in 1819 or 1820. It seems likely that he was a native of Virginia, was the son of John Mading of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, and was born in the latter years of the 18th century. An Absalom Mading served in Captain Coffey's Regiment of Volunteer Militia from western Tennessee in the War of 1812, and it seems likely this was the same Absalom Mading who came to Arkansas Territory. Members of the Mading family, as did others of the day, moved west into Kentucky and Tennessee. The name has a variety of spellings, including Madding and Maden, and finally seems to have evolved into Madden.

Absalom Mading apparently did not marry or have children as he made his way into the new lands of Arkansas Territory. He probably was a member of the early settlement of Marlbrook in northeastern Hempstead County, where he patented lands just after statehood in 1837. Mading also bought a forty-acre tract near Washington, where he became involved in the life of the new county seat. He served as a commissioner in the sale of town lots.

Mading seems to have been a man who commanded respect and who had an early role in the government of Hempstead County. By the late 1820's he was a justice of the peace and was marrying people in Ozan Township around Washington. He was also shown as a slaveholder in the 1830 census, with five slaves. He served as county judge from 1832 to 1835. He seems to have prospered, and by the time of his death in 1837, Absalom Mading owned about fifteen slaves.

Mading was a man of religious conviction. On December 1, 1830, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported the formation of a Bible Society of Hempstead County. Mading was a charter member and served as the treasurer. Like many men whose roots were in the upper South—Virginia and Kentucky—Mading freed his slaves at his death.

Death must have come fairly quickly for Mading. He did, however, make preparations. He made his will on July 2, 1837, with reputable witnesses, and it was recorded on July 31, 1837, his death having occurred sometime in that month. His attorney was Thomas Hubbard of Washington, the stepfather of Augustus H. Garland, who was later governor of Arkansas after Reconstruction (1874–1877), both a Confederate and U.S. Senator, and Attorney-General of the United States (1885–1889) under President Grover Cleveland.

Absalom Mading named the slaves in his will that he was freeing, and he specifically left carpenter tools to his former slave Jacob. This family of freed slaves mostly took the Mading name and remained together throughout the rest of the antebellum period, until they were expelled from Arkansas under an 1858 law that forced freed slaves either to leave the state or go back into slavery. Some of these free persons of color were blood relatives of their leader, Jacob Mading, but not all. They did stay together, however, and worked together with Jacob as the head of the extended family until they had to leave the state.

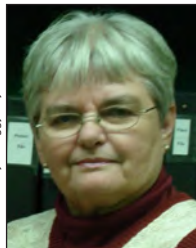
After his emancipation, Jacob Mading became a successful farmer who lived along the Camden to Washington Road via Prairie D'Ane (now Highway 332 near the Antioch Baptist Church, one of the older black churches in the county, founded in 1867). He acquired land and became one of the leading farmers in his area. He was a skilled carpenter and built a bridge for the county. His success was remarkable and noted and respected by his white neighbors. He also sought respectability by formally marrying Clara—the senior freedwoman among the former Mading slaves—in 1843. Absalom Mading must have been a benign slavemaster: Jacob and Clara named their first son after their marriage Absalom.

Jacob's hard work did not save him from expulsion from Arkansas in the overheated atmosphere leading up to the Civil War. Forced either to leave the state or go back into slavery, Jacob sold his property on less than desirable terms. The former Mading slaves left Arkansas and went to Kansas, where some remained for the rest of their lives. Many ultimately settled near Lawrence, Kansas, then a town of abolitionist sentiment. They were probably initially

in Fort Scott in southeastern Kansas and possibly also in Leavenworth. Perhaps seeking opportunity and hoping to escape the violence in Kansas, Jacob and his immediate family members went on to California and finally settled in San Jose, Santa Clara County, California. Jacob had the means for the trip across the continent. Those who remained in Kansas were not his blood relatives.

Jacob Mading returned to Arkansas in 1869 and tried to sell the lands he still owned in Hempstead County. In the aftermath of the Civil War and its economic devastation, he was able to realize only \$30 for 120 acres of land. He left Arkansas for good and returned to California. Jacob died in San Jose in the 1870's and is buried there.

Jacob Mading's journey from his birthplace in South Carolina to Arkansas, Kansas, and then California is a transcontinental saga of survival under the direst of circumstances. His wife Clara died somewhere along the way, but some of their children survived to take up new lives in California. Their descendants may be there to this day.



**Peggy Lloyd**, a native of Hope, Arkansas, is the Archival Manager of the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives at Washington, Arkansas, now a branch of the Arkansas History Commission. Peggy's research interests are the history of Southwest Arkansas, cemetery preservation, African-American history, maps, history of the land, and family history. She speaks frequently to a wide range of groups on courthouse research, local history, and black history. She is a long-time member of the Arkansas Archeological Society and works closely with its archeologists.

## President's Column

continued from page 3

- Member Nicka Smith's blog: <http://www.whoisnickasmith.com>
- Past instructional Webinars available online
- This fall, during Family History Month, we will host our sixth Black Family History Day in conjunction with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

We need to advertise more aggressively this wealth of support AAGSNC offers for its membership dollars. I cannot stress strongly enough the huge value in enlarging the critical mass of membership in the society. The more research we share with each other, the more tools we accumulate to chip away at those brick walls—sometimes even exploding them altogether. When you are back home, tell everyone about us.

## Spring 2013 Issue Correction

The author's name was accidentally omitted from the article "8th Annual African American Seminar" on page 8 of the Spring 2013 issue of *The Baobab Tree*. The author was Linda Bradley.

## Nan Taylor's obituary, printed in the *Auburn Journal* (September 12, 1963):

'NAN STRIKES OUT'— Funeral services for Nancy "Nan" June [sic] Taylor, an Auburn resident for the past 62 years and one of the city's most vociferous baseball fans, will be held at the Chapel of the Hills at 2 o'clock this afternoon. Mrs. Taylor, who was born in Neosha [sic] Falls, Kan., died at an Auburn Hospital September 9 at the age of 96. Auburn still was something of a gold boom town in 1901 when Mrs. Taylor settled here after working in the Yukon for several years. While working and often helping to "tame" many of Auburn's rugged young men, Mrs. Taylor became extremely interested in baseball. Until recent years, when the infirmities of old age forced her to slow down, Mrs. Taylor rarely missed a local ball game. The above photo was taken several years ago at James Field as "Nan" threw out the first ball to open Placer-Nevada League play. She was the only known holder of a "lifetime pass" to the Placer-Nevada League. She is survived by two daughters, the Mesdames Nellie Toney and Ruth Houston, both of Sacramento; 16 grandchildren, and 32 great-grandchildren. The Rev. Hartzell Buckner will officiate at the services. Burial will be at the Auburn District Cemetery.

Nancy Bearden was born in Neosho Falls, Kansas, on March 26, 1867. Her parents, Ephraim and Abigail Bearden, along with their eight children, were hard-working farmers. Possibly she had tired of farm life and was yearning for adventure when she left Kansas at about 30 years of age, about 1897, and made her way to the Yukon Territory gold fields. The gold-rush era brought a flood of people, including blacks, to this cold rugged climate. Opportunities for blacks included jobs as household servants, laborers, and gold miners, as well as entrepreneurship, providing various services to the miners. John does not know what Nancy's occupation was during this period of her life.

Nancy made her way back to the mainland about 1901 and married Charles Taylor. They settled in Auburn, Placer County, California. Auburn was a small gold-mining town sprinkled with a few blacks, quite a few Chinese, and Indians who lived on the nearby reservation. Charles became a dairyman while Nancy worked in private homes.

John Blackwell, Nancy's grandson and the historian in the family, shared a newspaper clipping of Auburn in 1951 when an unexpected snow storm hit the town with four inches of snow. In the background of the panoramic picture he identified his grandmother's house as well as businesses in the area. It gives a glimpse of life in the town during that period. Businesses included the Shangri-La Chinese restaurant, Mozclaw Feed and Grain store, and Tsuda's mom and pop grocery.

The Taylor family grew when Charles and Nancy adopted their two daughters, Dolly (whose name was officially changed to Nellie in the adoption papers) and Ruth Elizabeth, John's mother. Nancy embraced the small town of Auburn, becoming a mentor and extending her hospitality to many in her community. In 1950, John went to spend the summer with Nancy and loved it so much he stayed for two years.

John told of Nancy's love of baseball. She rarely missed a game. Her knowledge of the game and continued support was evident when she was awarded a "lifetime pass" by the Placer-Nevada League. The teams in the league were the Placerville Outlaws, Marysville Grants, Roseville Jiggers, and Lincoln Potters. Most of the teams were organized in the late 1920's.

The same love of baseball spilled over in John's gifted talent and of course Nancy recognized it. Both were loyal fans of the Auburn Cubs, the local baseball team. Each season they would look forward to attending the games. One day without warning, Nancy announced to the team manager that her grandson John should become their new team member, making him the youngest player in the league. Of course no one dared disagree with Nancy's very strong recommendation.

After the death of her husband, Nancy continued to live a relatively active life. Although she was unable to attend games as she aged, she managed to keep up with her favorite teams through write-ups in the newspaper until her death in Auburn on September 9, 1963, at the age of 96.



AAGSNC file photo

**Jackie Stewart** has been an active member of AAGSNC for over ten years. 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, Arkansas; and Moore, Miller, Kinloch, and Bonhomme in St. Louis, Missouri. Contact her at [altojackie@aol.com](mailto:altojackie@aol.com).

**Annette Madden** has been researching her family history since 2000 with great success. She has traced her history back to the late 1700s, has met many cousins she never knew she had, and was instrumental in organizing a reunion of parts of her family that had not been together since the 1880s. Email her at [amadden45@hotmail.com](mailto:amadden45@hotmail.com).



# Genealogy 101

continued from page 5

## GenealogyBank.com

This database focuses primarily on historical American newspapers, housing more than 6,100. It also includes some obituaries, books, pamphlets, government documents, and the Social Security Death Index. The collection is approaching 1.5 billion records.

The fee is \$9.95 for a one-month trial, \$19.95/month, or \$69.95 annually. The Social Security Death Index is free to access. (Free access at Oakland FSL.)

## UsGenWeb.org

This is a completely volunteer-run site that provides free genealogy Web sites for every state and most counties of the United States. USGenWeb has links to each state site, and each state has links to its counties. Each one is run independently and the records and information will vary from state to state and county to county.

This is a free site.

## CyndisList.com

Cyndi's List is a Web portal providing an extensive number of links to genealogical research sites. The links are divided into broad categories and further subdivided within each category. A few of interest are ethnic groups and people; immigration, emigration, and migration; localities; history; records; and African American.

This is a free site.

## Archives.gov

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) preserves U.S. government and historical records. These include many records

of genealogical interest, such as the U.S. census, ship passenger lists, and immigration records. The site contains a wealth of information including a catalog of its holdings and access to records that have been digitized.

Access to information on the site is free, though some records that are not online may require payment.

Titled *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938*, this Library of Congress site contains 2,300 first-person interviews of former slaves along with black-and-white photos of 500 of them. Even if you do not find your ancestors in it, you can learn a great deal about the conditions they lived under by reading the narratives of other slaves from their area. The narratives were collected as part of a project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

## Afrigenas.com

This site is devoted to African American genealogy. Among its resources are a surname database, message boards, genealogy chats, and a database with slave records.

This list barely scratches the surface of what is available online. Besides databases, there are blogs, mail lists, and Facebook pages devoted to genealogy. So get to surfing. There's a lot out there to discover.



Photo courtesy of Annette Madden

**Annette Madden** has been researching her family history since 2000 with great success. She has traced her history back to the late 1700s, has met many cousins she never knew she had, and was instrumental in organizing a reunion of parts of her family that had not been together since the 1880s. Email her at [amadden45@hotmail.com](mailto:amadden45@hotmail.com).

# Finding the Sterlings

continued from page 11

On August 28, I received the following e-mail from Vickie's brother, Kirk Young, with another amazing photo of Jeff Sterling (photo #4 on page 9) attached to it:

"Hello Michael,

"Vickie is my sister and she shared the email and 4 photographs that you sent. I'm pretty sure my mom (Maxine) has never seen a photo of her grandmother, the odd thing is I can easily see my mom's face in Mama Lizzie's face. This is downright surreal. My mother's birthday is next week and what a treat for her to see this picture at this late stage of her life. Too bad a few of the Sterling siblings are no longer around to see as well."

On August 31, 2011, Maxine's 79th birthday, Kirk and Vickie presented the photo of her grandmother and I was told she was overcome by emotion.

In addition, I contacted Vernadette and connected her with Vickie and Kirk. I told them that Vernadette was "their cousin on Jeff's father's side of the family. I'm related to you on his mother's side." Vernadette told them that her Aunt Jeanette (Jeff's baby sister) was having her 101st birthday and that she would love for them to come. Maxine had met her Aunt Jeanette only once before in her life and now she was getting a second chance. Maxine Sterling-Young, 79, reunited with her last living aunt, Jeanette Sterling-Emery, on October 22, 2011.

Two days later, Kirk e-mailed me about the event and attached a photo:

## Baobab Writer's Guidelines

Interested in submitting your work to *The Baobab Tree*? You don't have to be a professional writer! Just tell your story the best you can and be willing to work with the editors to polish it for publication.

Here are some helpful hints when preparing your submissions:

- Type all submissions. Times New Roman font, 12-point size is best.
- Write 1 to 3 pages. We always need some one-page stories; more than three pages is too long.
- We may edit. All submissions are subject to review by our journal committee and editors, and may be edited for clarity and to fit the space available.
- Send your bio along with your story; include your contact e-mail and phone number(s). Bio should be in narrative form if possible, not a resume; we will still edit as needed.
- Send your portrait. E-mail a JPEG photo of yourself along with your story or article. A good clear head-and-shoulders shot of you is best, in front of a solid color background that contrasts with your hair and skin tone. If you only have a shot of yourself with other people, we may be able to crop it (*i.e.*, cut out the other folks).
- Photos, documents and other graphics are always welcome, in JPEG format. Make sure pictures are at least 300 dpi (dots per inch), sharp, and clear and have enough contrast to show up well in black and white. All photos and documents must have credit and captions submitted in a separate document.
- Respect the deadlines you're given for submissions and corrections. If your material is late, it might have to be held for the next issue or drastically altered to fit the space.

E-mail us at [journal@aagsnc.org](mailto:journal@aagsnc.org).

*" Michael,*

*" I just wanted to thank you again for calling us all those weeks ago because THAT call was the catalyst that ultimately led to my mom being reunited with the Sterling family this past Saturday after a lifetime of separation. We attended the birthday celebration of her Aunt Jeanette Sterling-Emery, the last living sibling of her father Jeff. It was an emotional event for my mom and she said it's the best gift we could have possibly given her. Can't remember the last time I've seen her so happy. Thank God they both lived long enough for Saturday to be possible. The resemblance was immediately visible. Take a look at the attached photo. [#8 on page 11] We're looking forward to visiting Aunt Jeanette soon in the retirement home. I can't wait to talk to her in a calm quiet environment.*

*" The young lady holding the floral arrangement in the family picture with Virgil Sterling [#7 on page 10] is her. To everyone's amazement when I showed her the photo and asked who the young lady was, she smiled and said, 'It's me. There's another old photo of all men [#1 on page 8], not sure if you've seen it so I attached it. The young man sitting in the middle is Jeff Sterling. When I showed it to her, she immediately said, 'That's Jeff.' Many of them had seen that picture for years and never knew that he was their uncle until Saturday. Man what an awesome day!*

*" Kirk"*

My father also had the chance to speak with his cousin, Jeff Sterling, Jr., the man who taught him how to use a typewriter. My father could not stop talking about that conversation and it made me feel good knowing I was able to make that reunion happen for him.

This is a story of family torn apart by tragedy and misfortune, but composed of descendants working to complete the same mission, independently but in synchronicity. Yes, I connected with Vernadette Taylor on Ancestry.com, but Shawn Taylor's diligent and meticulous research discovered Cassie Wilson's tree and it was Cassie's beautiful, open heart that led to a reunion of families and a healing of hearts. Many lives were blessed that week and blessings continue to overflow! AAGSNC member Nicka Smith once said to me, "I don't believe anything happens by chance."

I agree.

It was not by chance we all reunited when we did. On January 4, 2012, two and a half months after Maxine and Jeanette's meeting, Jeanette Sterling-Emery died at the age of 101. When Vickie notified me of her passing, I realized we were all playing roles for a bigger purpose and none of our lives would ever be the same.

I'm proud to say I was part of this amazing experience.

*\*The spelling "Sterling" is used interchangeably with "Stirling" due to various spellings of the name in discovered historical documents.*



Photo courtesy of Michael Willis

**Michael Willis**, an Oakland native, is an IT Analyst for the State of California with more than 10 years of experience as a genealogist, primarily doing African-American genealogy in Louisiana. In addition to being a member of AAGSNC, Michael belongs to Le Comité des Archives de la Louisiane (a nonprofit genealogical support group for the Louisiana State Archives) and the Terrebonne Genealogical Society.



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Deadlines for submission of material for publication in *The Baobab Tree* are: Mar. 15 for the Spring issue, June 15 for the Summer issue, Sep. 15 for the Fall issue, and Dec. 15 for the Winter issue.

Correspondence on editorial matters, story submissions and requests for permission to reprint articles may be sent to [journal@aagsnc.org](mailto:journal@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, city, and county)
- 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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