



Heritage Newsletter

California African American Genealogical Society

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California African American Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 8442
Los Angeles, CA 90008-0442

General Membership Meetings
Third Saturday monthly at 11:45am (dark July and August)

Mayme Clayton Library and Museum (MCLM)
4130 Overland Ave., Culver City, CA 90230-3734
(Old Culver City Courthouse across from VA building)

2014 Board of Directors

Dr. Edna Briggs – President
Ronald Higgins – Immediate Past President
Ron Batiste – First Vice President
Carolyn Conway – Second Vice President /Membership
Cartellia Bryant – Corresponding Secretary
Open – Recording Secretary
Christina Ashe – Treasurer
Dr. Stanley Viltz – Parliamentarian
Website – www.caags.org

Committee Chairs

Open – Book Sales and Acquisitions
Open – Public Relations/Fundraising Chairman
LaVerne Anderson – Librarian
Open – Historian
Monica Maurasse – Newsletter Editor
Open – FGS Delegate
Open – Volunteer Chairman

Discover Your Ancestors in Obituaries

By Steve Anderson

Obituaries are a treasure trove of information. Almost anyone searching for information about their family will tell you that obituaries are one of the best record sources available for getting great information about a person. That's because many obituaries contain not just dates and places, but they often provide valuable information about the children, parents, spouse, and siblings of the deceased as well as their religious affiliation, life accomplishments, and much more. In a single obituary you could find dozens of valuable clues that could unlock secrets to your family in ways you never dreamed possible. In other cases, an obituary might simply mention an ancestor's name without any additional information.

FamilySearch.org now makes it easier than ever to find out if an obituary is available for your ancestors. To get an idea of what you might find in the FamilySearch.org obituary database, go to the Discover Your Ancestors in Obituaries page. The search engine will look through a small sampling of obituaries and show you what could be in them about some of your ancestors. This search will not be an exhaustive search, but it will give a small sampling of what you could find in the millions of obituaries now in the FamilySearch.org database.

You can do a more exhaustive search using FamilySearch's database of more than 1.1 billion unique names to see what additional obituaries might exist for your ancestors. As FamilySearch.org continues to grow, millions of new obituaries will be added to its database on a regular basis. If you don't find the obituary you are looking for, check again later; it may be in one of the updates.

Neither the newsletter editor nor CAAGS guarantees publication of any submission. Submissions for the newsletter are due by the third Saturday of each month. Please email your submissions or inquiries to CAAGS@hotmail.com

So come to FamilySearch.org today, and see if you can find an obituary for one of your ancestors. Finding an obituary has never been easier.

- Taken from Family Search Newsletter March 2015

2015 Calendar of Events

On going

CAAGS Writers Group, Fourth Friday monthly 10-12
Check our website for meeting details, www.caags.org

September 19 – Welcome Back!

CAAGS Board meeting, 10 am - 11:30 am
Beginner/Intermediate Classes, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm
General membership meeting/Show and Tell, 1-3pm

October 17

CAAGS Board meeting, 10 am - 11:30 am
Beginner/Intermediate Classes, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm
General membership meeting/Guest Speaker, 1-3pm

March 17-19, 2016

CAAGS 30th Anniversary Conference

** Calendar is subject to change without notice*

CAAGS 30th Anniversary Quilt

In commemoration of our 30th Anniversary, CAAGS members Norma Bates and Tommie Mallet are creating an Underground Railroad themed quilt. Donations are being accepted to help purchase the quilting supplies. If you would like to make a donation, give at the next monthly meeting or mail us your donation. You can also contact Norma Bates, teapotnorma@yahoo.com.

Save the Date

CAAGS 30th Anniversary Conference
March 17-19, 2016
Call for Papers Coming Soon

Exploring Sanborn & Other Fire Insurance Maps Online

--- By Kimberly Powell

Fire insurance maps, produced by Sanborn® and a number of other companies, are large-scale historical city/town maps that document the size and shape of buildings, locations of windows and doors, and construction materials, as well as street names, and property boundaries. Dating back to the mid-1800's, fire insurance maps were

originally created to assist fire insurance agents in assessing potential fire risk, and setting insurance premiums, therefore they also include details such as the direction of prevailing winds, fire department locations and equipment, and the location of fire hydrants and other water supplies.

While big cities were a large target for fire insurance plans, small towns were mapped more frequently than you might expect. In many cases, fire insurance maps document structures and even towns that no longer exist. The small village of Noblestown, Pennsylvania, falls into this category. The location where this small community once bustled around booming oil wells and coal mines is now occupied by forest, a few homes and churches, and the trail head on Mill Street where I often begin bike rides on my local rail trail--a crushed limestone trail that follows the path of the former Panhandle Division--Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago (P.C.C.) & St Louis--of the Pennsylvania Railroad. If not for old maps, histories, and photographs like the one depicted here, I would never know that a railroad station, two hotels, several general and feed stores, and multiple railroad tracks existed in the spot less than a century ago.

The tiny village of Noblestown was founded about 1796, making it the fourth oldest community in Allegheny County after Pittsburgh, Elizabeth, and McKeesport.¹ By 1843, the small community had grown to a population of 250 residents, with one church, a steam grist-mill, a saw mill, and three stores.² Oil drilling and coal mining during the latter part of the 19th century caused the population to swell with people eager for work, a time when many of the buildings pictured here were built. The town thrived for several decades, but as coal mines began to close in the 1930s, the town declined and is now back to a population of about 575.³

A 1915 Sanborn fire insurance map for the nearby borough of Oakdale, Pennsylvania, includes a partial sheet on the village of Noblestown. This map is just one of many available online as part of the new collection of Pennsylvania Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in the digitized collections of University Libraries, Pennsylvania State University. As with most mining communities, the majority of the structures were of wood frame construction--signified by the color yellow. The pink building in the upper left is a brick Catholic church which still stands today, as do the other brick houses pictured nearby, but many of the other buildings no longer exist, including the railroad depot, the hotel, and the stores.

There is a lot of information packed into these fire insurance maps; for example, the two buildings pictured with an "X" are concrete block stables. Look for the map

key to provide information on the symbols, color-coding, etc. Map keys for small towns like Noblestown are fairly simple, while keys for city maps can cover an entire page. The symbols and color-coding remain standard across most map series, with new symbols added as technology advanced. Most towns and cities are covered by multiple map sheets, and the key is often, but not always, found at the beginning of the book, or first sheet of the series for a particular locality. A variety of online guides explain how to use the Sanborn map keys, such as [How to Read Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps](#), originally from the Geospatial and Statistical Data Center (GEOSTAT) of the University of Virginia. The Sanborn Map Company also published a number of booklets called *Description and Utilization of the Sanborn Map* to help people better utilize their maps, such as this [1949 version](#), free online at Hathi Trust.

The largest collection of fire insurance maps for the United States was created by the Sanborn® Map Company of Pelham, New York. The U.S. Library of Congress has the most comprehensive collection, encompassing nearly 700,000 map sheets, ranging from 1867 to the 1960s. The Library of Congress and a large number of state libraries and other repositories have been digitizing many of the pre-1923, out-of-copyright Sanborn map sheets and making them available online. See [Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps Online](#) for descriptions and links. It is important to be aware, however, that Sanborn maps *do* exist from 1923 into the 1960s for many locations. These maps are still protected by copyright, however, and are not included in the online digitized collections.

Sanborn was also not the only game in town! A variety of other companies--many of them working only in specific localities--created fire insurance maps, and you can find some of them online as well. Search "*fire insurance*" maps *locality name* and/or browse locality-specific research guides to locate available collections. Examples include the [Charles E. Goad Fire Insurance Plan Maps of Canada](#) online at Library & Archives Canada; [Hexamer General Surveys](#) of industrial and commercial buildings in Philadelphia from the [Philadelphia Free Library](#); [Dakin Fire Insurance Maps](#) from the University of Hawaii at Manoa; and [Higginson's insurance maps of the city of Brooklyn](#) from the New York Public Library. The British Library has scanned all first editions of library-owned Goad mapping of British and Irish towns and will be posting them online shortly.

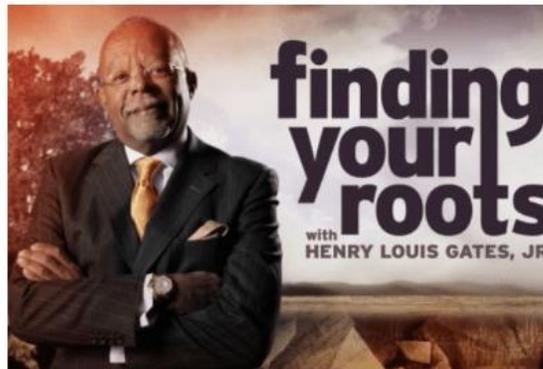
Sources:

1. Robert G. Larimer, *A 200th Anniversary of Noblestown, Pennsylvania, 1796-1996* (Noblestown: R. G. Larimer, 1996).
2. Sherman Day, *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania; Containing a Copious Selection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc. Relating to its*

History and Antiquities, Both General and Local (Philadelphia: George W. Gorton, 1843), p. 92.

3. U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010, "Community Facts," database, *American FactFinder* (<http://factfinder2.census.gov> : accessed 27 August 2013), user-defined report for "Noblestown CDP PA."

Season 3 of "Finding Your Roots" Green-lighted for January 2016 Return on PBS



The show has been off air due to a PBS decision to delay the next season of *Finding Your Roots* as a result of an internal investigation triggered by the Ben Affleck incident involving censorship of a slave-owning ancestor of his from a previously aired episode. Season 3 of the popular show, hosted and produced by Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., was put on hold until certain measures were implemented.

This left avid genealogy and history buffs wondering when the series would resume. The good news is that it's sooner than we might have thought. Originally slated to begin airing in September of this year, it's now scheduled for January 2016.

Among the celebrities we can expect to see under the ancestral microscope early next year are Patricia Arquette, Lidia Bastianich, Richard Branson, Donna Brazile, Ty Burrell, LL Cool J, Mia Farrow, Bill Hader, Neil Patrick Harris, Dustin Hoffman, Jimmy Kimmel, Norman Lear, Maya Lin, Bill Maher, Julianna Margulies, John McCain, Julianne Moore, Azar Nafisi, Bill O'Reilly, Shondra Rhimes, Maya Rudolph, Gloria Steinem, Kara Walker, and Keenen Ivory Wayans.

Those needing a celebrity roots fix in the interim can watch the seventh season of TLC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (WDYTYA) which started on July 26th and will feature Tom Bergeron, Bryan Cranston, Ginnifer Goodwin, J.K. Rowling, and Alfre Woodard.

Hey, Prince, Your Roots Are Showing

By Megan Smolenyak/August 6, 2015/Celebrities, Family History

Prince Rogers Nelson, better known simply as Prince, has the music world intrigued with rumors of a new album to be released this year. While we're in wait-and-see mode, I thought I'd share a peek into his past — and by that, I mean his pre-Minnesota, pre-purple, ancestral past. Here are a few of the discoveries I found scattered in the branches of his family tree: Among the surnames that appear in Prince's family tree are Bonnell, Brooks, Hardy, Head, Jenkins, Nelson, Phillips and Shaw, so those sharing these names could be related.

As with other gifted musicians such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z, Prince has a concentration of Louisiana roots. In fact, all four of his grandparents were born there, though Minnesota, Georgia, and Arkansas can also claim a piece of his heritage.

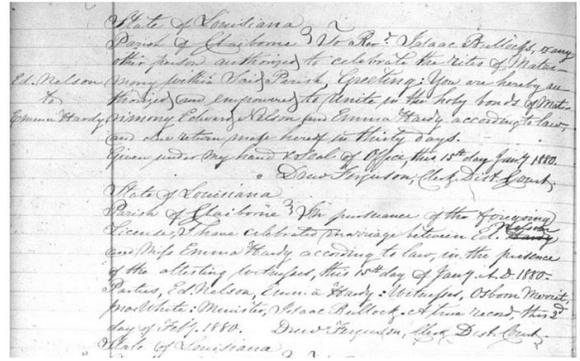
Twins run on both sides of Prince's family. His mother was one, and there were also twins in the Nelson branch on his father's side.

Due to the Great Migration, his once mostly Louisiana-based family dispersed to Arkansas, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey and Tennessee. His maternal grandfather, a Pullman porter named Frank Shaw, went north to Minnesota by way of Iowa. Though this might sound like a peculiar route, this same pattern can be seen in the family tree of Cory Booker, whose ancestors were drawn from the South to Iowa for mining jobs. And as a result of all this meandering, one of Prince's great-uncles is buried at Burr Oak on the outskirts of Chicago, the same notorious cemetery where one of Michelle Obama's uncles is buried.

Prince's paternal grandfather had 11 children by two wives over a 36-year period. This grandfather's parents also had 11 children, but in a more concentrated 14-year period. 22 offspring from just these two generations means that Prince undoubtedly has dozens, if not hundreds, of Nelson cousins in both Arkansas and Minnesota.

Six of Prince's eight great-grandparents were born into slavery, and as was unfortunately so common, one of his great-grandmothers was apparently the daughter of her one-time owner.

Within Louisiana, Prince has roots in Claiborne, Webster, Bienville and Lincoln Parishes. More specifically, the towns of Homer, Cotton Valley, Arcadia and Vienna, are all ancestral hometowns for the Purple One.



1880 marriage of Ed Nelson to Emma Hardy, Claiborne Parish, Louisiana

One of his great-great-grandmothers could be considered a 19th century version of a cougar. After her first marriage, she took a second husband less than half her age. Her new, teen-aged husband was only five years older than his eldest stepchild. Even so, she managed to outlive him.

In Search of Our Ancestors is on Amazon!

In Search of Our Ancestors is available as an ebook on Amazon now!

With over 100 true stories of the amazing luck, unexpected kindness, and unusual serendipity encountered by researchers as they explore their roots, *In Search of Our Ancestors* offers an inspirational look at the rewards of family history. No story is longer than a few pages, but most are such touchingly personal tales that you may find yourself reading just one or two at a time.

A few stories have relevant research information at the end, but the book isn't aimed at your practical side. More than anything, this collection is designed to simply share the warmth and surprises that genealogical research can bring if you stick with the hunt, keep your sense of humor, and listen to your heart.

The ebook is also available from BookBaby in both ePub and mobi formats, so you can enjoy the stories regardless of what kind of reading device you use. The book will be available soon on about a dozen other platforms (e.g., Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Scribd, etc.).

2015 Election of Officers

November is CAAGS election month. We will be looking for candidates to fill several offices. We will also be looking to form a nominations committee. If you would like to nominate yourself to run for an office or be on the committee please contact Carolyn Conway at fam.histr@yahoo.com