



Heritage Newsletter

March 2003

California African American Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 8442
Los Angeles, CA 90008-0442

Volume 15
Number 3
ISSN 1083-8937

General Meetings

Third Saturday monthly at 10 am (except June and August)
Martin Luther King United Methodist Church
6625 4th Avenue
Los Angeles, CA
(East of Crenshaw; between Gage & Florence)

Board of Directors

Ron Batiste - President
Charlotte Bocage – First Vice President
Daisy Saffold – Second Vice President and Membership
Gwendolyn Harris – Corresponding Secretary
June Coggins – Recording Secretary
Colette DeVerge – Treasurer
Barbara Thomas – Parliamentarian

Committee Chairs

Alva Griffith – Book Committee/Book Sales
Ronald Higgins – Special Events
Ellis Jones – Public Relations
Evelyn Ross – Librarian
Marilyn White – Historian
Monica Maurasse – Newsletter Editor

Message From the President

Ron Batiste

February was a busy month for CAAGS and the rest of the year will provide even more opportunities for us to research and to help the Society reach and teach even more genealogists.

I would like to thank everyone who helped at Jam-boree 2003 in Pasadena. This annual event always gives us a chance to demonstrate to others the depth of our efforts.

A special thanks goes out also to Charlotte Bocage and Mary Alequin, who presented a special program at the new Baldwin Hills Library. Also to Carletha LeNoir-M'fume and Ellis Jones who assisted them.

These and other CAAGS projects require all of us to volunteer and participate. We all have talents and skills that can be used to advance our common objectives and goals.

Think about serving on or even heading a committee. We are looking for someone to lead the Public Relations and the Web Page committees. All of the Summit committees will need your help this fall.

Many hands make the work light. Let's all pitch in and help each other.

The newsletter editor nor CAAGS guarantees publication of any submission. Submissions for the newsletter are due by the 20th of each month. Please email your submissions or inquiries to CAAGS@hotmail.com or submit them on computer disk to the editor.

Please join us at the general meeting on March 15th for an Old Home Week celebration commemorating the 17th Anniversary of CAAGS.

2003 Calendar of Events

On Going	Finding our Families, Finding Ourselves – Museum of Tolerance
Feb. 28 – Mar 1	Jamboree, Pasadena Civic Center
March 7	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30pm
March 15	Ward McAfee – guest speaker
April 4	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30pm
April 19	CAAGS General Meeting
April 26	Wine Tasting - Solvang, CA
May 2	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30pm
May 17	CAAGS General Meeting
October 18	West Coast Summit, Patriotic Hall, Los Angeles, CA

Don't Forget the Cookbook Fundraiser

Some of you may not be aware that CAAGS published a cookbook entitled "Jus' Vittles," which was very well received, as a fundraiser for the Society in 1994. Each CAAGS member was asked to contribute old family recipes and a brief historical note about the family member (or family line) through which the recipe was handed down.

Every year we have continued to receive requests for it, and have decided to revise, expand and reprint the cookbook this year. The Cookbook Committee will be contacting all CAAGS members soon. You will need to complete a form for each contribution of an old family recipe and brief historical note. (If you did not submit a historical note with your recipe for the original book, you may do so now and we will try to insert it.) We hope that all members will participate and recognize an ancestor with a recipe in the new edition of our cookbook. For more information you can contact Alva or Evelyn at the below email addresses or at the general meeting.

Alva Griffith (alvagriff@pacbell.net)
Evelyn Ross (Evross358@aol.com)

Wine Tasting Trip to Rideau Winery
Rideau Vineyards is the only Black female owned winery in Southern California. The Rideau Vine-

yard is known for its fine wines and tranquil setting. CAAGS member Colette DeVerge has coordinated a trip for CAAGS members and guests to visit this extraordinary winery and historical site. Please send your reservation form and payment by March 15th to Colette to join us. Rideau Winery is also featured in the February edition of Ebony magazine if you want to learn more about it.

General Meeting Potlucks - Please see Opelia Saunders, Cartellia Marie Byrant or Etha Robinson if you are interested in preparing a dish for the general meeting potlucks.

Volunteer Opportunities CAAGS is in need of individuals to assistance with various volunteer opportunities. These volunteer positions include Fundraising Chairperson, webpage design and representing CAAGS at various community events. If you are interested please see Ron Batiste or any Board member or you can email us at CAAGS@hotmail.com

Have something of interest you would like to share with CAAGS? Email your submissions to CAAGS@hotmail.com

Please Join Us....

The February meeting of the California African American Genealogical Society (CAAGS) featured Peter Mhunzi, associate professor of history at Pasadena (CA) City College discussing "Language, History and Genealogy."

Mhunzi is recipient of the Julius Nyere Award for his work in Swahili. He also was Denzel Washington's vocal coach in the role of Steve Biko in the film, "Cry Freedom." For those of you who missed the meeting you missed a great lecture. Please try to join us every month to hear other exciting speakers.

Queries

Are you having trouble finding family members? Place a query of the name(s) and location(s) you are researching. Queries are free to CAAGS members and should be no more than 25 words. Queries will run for two months space permitting.

Books of Interest

The next time you visit the Los Angeles Family History Center look for this new book, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*, by Carter G. Woodson. This is a statistical report on the free Negro ownership of slaves. Also available is *Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830*, by Carter G. Woodson.

Mark your Calendar

Celebrating A Tree of Life – Our Family
Third Annual West Coast Summit on African
American Genealogy
October 17-18, 2003
Patriotic Hall
1816 Figueroa St.
Los Angeles, CA
Keynote Speaker: Tony Burroughs
Registration: \$60

Presented by the African American Heritage Society of Long Beach and California African American Genealogical Society

For volunteer or sponsorship opportunities contact Marjorie Higgins MHIGG71503@aol.com or phone 323/755-6582.

Native American Genealogy

The Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association has announced registration for their first annual summer conference. It will be called "Freedmen Into Perfect Equality of Citizenship" and will be held May 29 through June 1, 2003. For more information, send a return email to tushkalushkaishka5@yahoo.com. Indicate your interest in an informational conference registration packet and include an address that you would prefer your packet mailed. You will receive a conference flyer, registration form along with other relevant information. If you prefer to write for this packet send a request to:

Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized
Tribes Association
Conference P.O. Box 3324
Enid, OK 73701

Genealogical Societies

Are you interested in joining an African American Genealogical Society in the state(s) you are researching? Each month the newsletter will include a few societies and how to contact them. Watch for your state in the Heritage Newsletter

- ✓ AAHGS - Little Egypt
207 Lendview Drive
Carbondale, IL 62901
- ✓ AAHGS - Patricia Liddell Researchers
P. O. Box 438652
Chicago, IL 60643
- ✓ AAHGS - Baltimore
P. O. Box 9366
Baltimore, MD 21229-3125
- ✓ AAHGS - Central Maryland
P. O. Box 648
Columbia, MD 21045
- ✓ AAHGS - Prince George's County, Maryland
P. O. Box 44252
Fort Washington, MD 20744-4252

St. Louis Death Notices available on the Internet

The St. Louis Public Library is pleased to announce that they have begun indexing death notices in the St. Louis Argus, a well known African-American newspaper.

The years currently available on their website are 1915 -1919 and 1942-1945.
<http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/argusobit.htm> .
Additional years will be added - please be patient!

For copies, email our Webref service at: <mailto:webref@slpl.lib.mo.us> or contact Kathleen Smith if you need any further information.

Kathleen J. Smith, Librarian
History & Genealogy
<mailto:ksmith@slpl.lib.mo.us>

Do You Know Your Fellow CAAGS Members?

Continued from February

Submitted by Carletha LeNoir-Mfume

In CAAGS' February newsletter, as a tribute to African American History Month, I showcased our very own Olympian, purposely omitting their name. From the responses received many of you recognized or knew of or about our amazing athlete. For those who still have no clue refer back to the article, "Do You Know Your Fellow CAAGS Members?" Examine the clues in italics. Still not sure of whom I speak? Then read on as I tell more about her.

Born in Los Angeles, California our Olympian attended McKinley Grammar School, Holy Cross Catholic School, St. Thomas Catholic School and graduated from Bishop Tonaty Catholic Girls High School in June, 1962.

In the summer of 1962, under her first coach she ran in the Los Angeles Women's Indoors Invitational Track Meet and in the 60 yard-dash, she beat my friend, US renown Wilma Rudolph, who'd previously won three gold medals at the 1960 Rome games and was considered the "World's Fastest Woman."

In early 1963, our Olympian ran in the Women's Indoor National Championship in Columbus, OH, where she set an American Women's Indoor record for the 220 yard-dash. In fall 1963, she entered college at UCLA continuing her track and field training with a coach. She qualified for the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games on the US *Team* where, as part of our women's *eminent track and field relay team* of lead-off runners, Willye White (the only woman to compete in five consecutive US Olympic Track and Field teams, 1956-1972), Edith McGuire and anchor Wyomia Tyus they won the *silver medal* in women's 4x100 yard relay.

After the Olympics she returned to UCLA to continue her studies only to be offered a track and field scholarship at Pepperdine University which UCLA was unwilling to match. Transferring to Pepperdine in 1965 she received her Bachelors Degree and later earned a Master's Degree from Cal State Dominguez Hill.

In 1988, after embracing genealogy, joining CAAGS and beginning her families research she discovered there's a probable family tie between she and her 1964 teammate Willye *White*. Additionally, she's related by marriage, in a collateral line to Jamesetta C 'Jamie' Hammons, one of CAAGS founding members and the organization's only woman president.

Our Olympian is currently a bilingual specialist at Miles Avenue Elementary School and was recently voted "Teacher of the Month" by the L A Lakers. Yes indeedee, you're right, (or are you?). Our Olympian is none other than one who has become my friend, CAAGS Historian, Marilyn White.

Brown Bag Lunch Series

The University of California, Los Angeles – Center for African American Studies Circle of Thought Brown Bag Lunch Series will be held in the CAAS Library and Media Center, Haines Hall 135.

Friday, March 14, 2003

12:00 Noon – 1:00 PM

A Choice Parcel of Country Born: New Perspectives on Slavery in Maryland
Jessica Millward Doctoral Candidate, History,
University of California, Los Angeles

Free Admission. For more information,
call 310-206-8267

Happy Birthday to You...

Darell	White	1 March
Marianna	Cushnie	2 March
Daisy	Saffold	6 March
Evelyn	Ross	22 March

Documenting your Sources

For those of you who want to document the research materials you find, CAAGS has a stamp that you can use to put on your documents and then fill in the necessary source information. So often we forget where we find certain materials that we may later need to reference again. Bring your documents and see Evelyn Ross to use the stamp.

Research Trip

Jan Jennings with the Southern California Genealogical Society will escort a research group to the Allen County Library, the second largest genealogical library in the U.S. The trip will be for one week, at the latter part of April. If you are interested please call Jan at 661-288-1813 or e-mail her at jantj@earthlink.net.

The 1930 Census

The 1930 census was taken on April 1, 1930. The official census population count was 123,202,624.

Questions Asked in the 1930 Census

The 1930 Census form called for: street, avenue, road, house number, number of dwelling house in order of visitation, number of family in order of visitation; name of each person whose place of abode on April 1, 1930, was in this family; relationship of this person to the head of the family; home owned or rented, value of home, if owned, or monthly rental, if rented; radio set; does this family live on a farm? sex; color or race; age at last birthday; marital condition; age at first marriage; attended school or college any time since Sept. 1, 1929; whether able to read or write; place of birth - person, place of birth- father, place of birth- mother; language spoken in home before coming to the United States; year of immigration into the United States; naturalization; whether able to speak English; trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, Industry of business, class of worker; whether actually at work yesterday, If not, line number on unemployment schedule; whether a veterans of U.S. military or naval force-yes or no, what war or expedition; number of farm schedule (Note: The farm schedules have not survived).

Other Significant Facts about the 1930 Census

A WPA Soundex exists for the 1930 census for the following states only: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The following counties were Soundexed for Kentucky: Bell, Floyd, Harlan, Kenton, Mehlenberg, Perry, and Pike. The following West Virginia counties were indexes: Fayette, Harrison, Kanawha, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, and Raliegh.

All of the Soundex indexes are in the traditional format, with the exception of Georgia, which is in Miracode. All of the Soundexed states, except for Georgia, list the institutions at the end of the publication. There appear to be no mixed codes for the 1930 census.

Research Tips for the 1930 Census

To effectively search the 1930 census, know as much about where the person lived as is possible.

The following finding aids will be available at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and at NARA's regional records services facilities.

- *Enumeration District Maps for the Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930.* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1930), 35 rolls
- *Index to Selected City Streets and Enumeration Districts, 1930.* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1931), 11 rolls.
- *Descriptions of Census Enumeration Districts, 1830-1950.* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T1224), rolls 61-90.

For additional information on the 1930 census, see the 1930 census website at www.nara.gov/genealogy/1930cen.html

Genealogy Quick Tip

If you do research using the census and are familiar with Microsoft Excel then create a document to keep track of what years in the census your are researching.

Separate the worksheets in the book into the families you are researching. Start with the oldest ancestor and add children, their spouses, and their children. The columns have the name, date of birth, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, then death date.

In the cell for a census year enter the person's age. This way, you can see a progression of age and might catch an error if you have found the wrong person.

**Honoring the Father of
Black History Month
Carter G. Woodson believed
knowledge was key to success**

Darrell Bowling is an MSNBC producer

As children, we joked that the only reason February was chosen was because it is the shortest month of the year. The truth is, February was chosen because of the tremendous number of African-American pioneers and institutions born in this month — from W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes to the NAACP and the first Pan African Congress.

And the answer to the question “Who is the father of black history?” is Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Woodson didn’t graduate from high school until he was almost 22 years old. But in 1912, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard, becoming the second African-American to do so. Convinced that the role of African-American history was being ignored or misrepresented, Woodson began his quest to educate America about the accomplishments of black Americans.

FROM POVERTY TO ACADEMIA

Woodson’s journey began in New Canton, Va., on Dec. 19, 1875. The son of former Virginia slaves, Woodson was born into a large, poor family whose education was sporadic at best. But he was able to teach himself, mastering the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic. Looking to further his education, Woodson moved to Huntington, W. Va., where he was forced to earn his living as a coal miner. In 1895, Woodson entered a Huntington high school, where it took him less than two years to receive his high school diploma. Two years later, he had earned a degree from Berea College in Kentucky.

Woodson became an educator, teaching high school and later serving as the dean of liberal arts at Howard University and West Virginia State College. He earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in 1908 from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1912. From there Woodson traveled to Asia and Europe, where he spent a semester at the Sorbonne in Paris. He mastered several languages, which enabled him to teach in the Philippines.

FIRST, BLACK HISTORY WEEK

In 1915, he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson realized the need for special research into the black American’s life and history. The association began pressing for a “Negro History Week” as a way to explore the contributions of African Americans. This dream became reality in 1926.

In 1976, the renamed Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History expanded Black History Week into Black History Month. In the book “Mis-Education of the Negro,” Woodson wrote:

“When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his ‘proper place’ and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.”

Woodson fought for the education of black people and the celebration of black culture. His idea of taking time to acknowledge blacks’ accomplishments is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago.

On Line Family Tree

Ancestry’s Online Family Tree is a free service that allows you to record, preserve, and share your family tree on the Internet without any additional software. In a matter of minutes you can enter several generations of your family in your own password-protected Online Family Tree. You and other family members or friends can all be adding, editing, or deleting information in your Online Family Tree at the same time! Visit www.ancestry.com for the details.

While you are there also check out The Ancestry World Tree that contains more than 200 million names in family trees submitted by their users. The Ancestry World Tree is the largest collection of its kind on the Internet. You can contribute to the Ancestry World Tree by submitting your family tree.



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Easy Documentation of Sources

By Debbie Metcalf

With the great wealth of information available to our genealogical research on the Internet, I got frustrated when I constantly had to stop my search to grab a sheet of paper, jot down notes and sources, then continue with my search. Sometimes I couldn't remember where I had actually found the information when I needed to return to that link. Always, I had lots of individual sheets to sort through and try to deal with.

Now while "genealogy surfing," I open a Word document, date it, and put some sort of title at the top, i.e. Jones County GA Wills 1810-1850. Then I'll also copy and paste the actual URL underneath my heading. Each time I find something interesting, useful, hopeful, or just questionable, I'll copy and paste it to a Word document. Sometimes I'll have several documents open to keep surnames in their own files. It saves an incredible amount of time and handwriting, and preserves the sources for later documentation.

In the "My Documents" section of my computer, I've created various folders--surnames, counties, events, etc.--where I store these documents for later use. This makes later retrieval and documentation in my database so much easier, particularly the ability to copy and paste important information in the "Notes" section of an individual's record.

Did You Know?

In the state of Massachusetts that deaths are registered where the person lived not where the death occurred.

Ancestry Digest News Quick Tip 26 June 2002

The newsletter editor nor CAAGS guarantees publication of any submission. Submissions for the newsletter are due by the 20th of each month. Please email your submissions or inquiries to CAAGS@hotmail.com or submit them on computer disk to the editor.

2003 Calendar of Events

On Going	Finding our Families, Finding Ourselves – Museum of Tolerance
May 17	CAAGS General Meeting Instructors - Jean Wright-Calhoun beginners class, Carletha LeNoir-Mfume intermediate class; Geographical Groups (no speaker)
June 21	No CAAGS General Meeting
June 21	Juneteenth Celebration-Allensworth
July 19	CAAGS General Meeting, Instructors - Charlotte Bocage beginners class, Ron Batiste intermediate class
August 16	No CAAGS General Meeting
September 20	CAAGS General Meeting, Instructors - Carletha LeNoir-Mfume beginners class, Charlotte Bocage NGS review; Show & Tell (no speaker)
October 1-11	Fall Foliage Genealogical Cruise
October 18	West Coast Summit, Patriotic Hall, Tony Burroughs keynote speaker

***Calendar is subject to change without notice**

The Book Nook

If you have ancestors from Trinidad who were members of the Merikens, a group of over 700 African American settlers of 1815 and 1816, there is a book about them which may be of interest to you. They were refugees of our War of 1812, many former slaves, who had fought for Britain as the Corps of Colonial Marines, were garrisoned after that war on Bermuda, and disbanded in Trinidad. They made their new homes in the south of Trinidad around the Mission of Savanna Grande, now Princes Town, mainly in an area known since then as The Company Village. They were proud of being American, and were known in the vernacular as “Merikens.” The community maintains its identity today and celebrates its origin annually, but is little known or discussed in mainstream history. Contact Alva, the Book Sales Chairman, at GdOIMsG@aol.com for ordering information.

CAAGS Geographical Genealogical Groups

The purpose of CAAGS Geographical Genealogical Groups is to

- promote network’s within our CAAGS community
- promote the “It Takes a Village” teaching concept
- gain overall knowledge about a common subject – genealogy
- gain specific knowledge about our states

There will be no group leader, we should remind each other that it takes all of us to succeed. Everyone that has knowledge of their state will be encouraged to share what ever they know. Those who are new are encouraged to share what they need from those in the group. Group members are encouraged to exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses. If you move between groups, please share your phone number and e-mail address all groups.

We will share beginning genealogy information and advanced information. We will share websites of interest, book lists, state archive information, and cemetery information just to name a few. In addition to having the necessary forms (ancestry chart, family group sheets, research logs, research extracts, source checklist, and correspondence logs in a binder) for each family you are researching, everyone should have a family history library research outline for your state(s). You should also have a detailed map of your state(s) with counties, cities and rivers indicated.

At least once a year we plan to get together to share in a round table discussion what was learned and what we still need to find. For the May general meeting please bring your information and your questions so we can get started on the road of genealogical knowledge. Remember each group is only as knowledgeable as it’s participants.

There are four regional groups we have divided the US into. Please check the geographical logbook to find out what regional group your state(s) is associated with.

Congratulations to the Winners of the Raffle

Lisa Lee – Grand Prize

Clarence Stubblefield – Second Prize

James Thornton – Third Prize

Thanks to all CAAGS members who helped
make the raffle a big success

Charlotte Bocage, CAAGS First Vice-President has been collecting family death certificates for quite a while and has some that are hard to read or the medical terminology seems like a foreign language to her. Charlotte is looking for a doctor or medically trained member to contact her at rbymoon4@pacbell.net or phone at 323-669-1982 for assistance in interpreting the records. Charlotte would also like to plan a meeting in the future for all CAAGS members to bring in their unreadable death certificates to be analyzed if we can find a medical professional to help.

Last Call for Recipes for the Cookbook Fundraiser

The deadline for submission of your ancestral recipes for the CAAGS Cookbook Fundraiser has been extended to Saturday, May 17, 2003. As you know, this edition will be a revision and expansion of our 1994 Cookbook. The form for recipe submissions was in last month's newsletter. Personalize your recipe by naming the dish for your ancestor ("Aunt Josie's Stew," etc), and include a very brief historical note about the individual.

Each CAAGS member is asked to be responsible for 5-10 cookbooks at \$10 per book. Family members will want to buy a copy since their ancestor's recipe will be included. You may want several to keep on hand for giving as wonderful, yet inexpensive gifts. This is also a great way to get some payback on all those candy bars and cookies you buy from friends, neighbors and co-workers. (Yes, it costs a bit more... but their taste buds will have a treat for years to come.) A prize will be awarded to the person selling the most books (over 10).

Please fill out the "reserve number of books" section on the submissions form, even if you don't plan to submit a recipe, and especially if you expect to sell more than 5 books. We will need this number to estimate how many cookbooks to order.

If you did not submit a historical note on your ancestor for the 1994 edition, you may do so now, and we will try to insert it. This note **MUST** be brief - there is a two (2) sentence maximum on the notes, please make each sentence as concise as possible.

Happy Birthday to you...

Carolyn Conway 4-May

Fred	Wilson	5-May
Gena	Weaver	6-May
Marlene	Davis	8-May
Virgilene	West	10-May
Carole	Watts	21-May
H. Rene'e	Coche'e	25-May
Gloria	Ballard	29-May
Donald	Brown	1-Jun
Alva	Griffith	2-Jun
June	Coggins	3-Jun
Bernadene	Coleman	4-Jun
Bill	Johnson	6-Jun
June	Rhinehart	6-Jun
Edward	Gauthier	28-Jun
Raymond	Marshall	29-Jun
DorothyLou	Sands	21-Apr Belated

Membership Renewal

If you know people who have not renewed their membership with CAAGS please encourage them to do so. The names of non renewing members were dropped from the membership roster effective March 15th and will be not be added back until the individual renews their membership with the organization.

Condolences to our librarian, Evelyn Ross on the passing of her mother, Mrs. Orleta C. Lawson on March 27th.

Juneteenth Trivia

On June 19, two years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Union soldiers land at Galveston, Texas, with news that the war has ended and that the slaves are free. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Annual Juneteenth Celebration at Allensworth State Historic Park will be held this year on June 21st. Support CAAGS by taking a bus ride to the all day event. The cost is \$24 for adults 18 and older and \$21 for children. Deadline for registration is June 12th. Contact Ron Higgins at 213/925-5651 for de-

tails or pick up a registration flyer at the meeting.

Allensworth State Historical Park

From the California State Park Guide

Allensworth is the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans. The small farming community was founded in 1908 by Colonel Allen Allensworth and a group of others dedicated to improving the economic and social status of African Americans. Uncontrollable circumstances, including a drop in the area's water table, resulted in the town's demise. With continuing restoration and special events, the town is coming back to life as a state historic park. The park's visitor center features a film about the site. A yearly rededication ceremony reaffirms the vision of the pioneers.

Allen Allensworth was born a slave in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1842. At the age of 12, he was "sold down river" for trying to learn to read and write. After some trading by slave dealers, he was taken to New Orleans, and bought by a slaveholder to become a jockey. The Civil War started, and when the Union forces neared Louisville, Allensworth found his chance for freedom. He joined the Navy and when he was discharged, he had achieved the rank of first class petty officer. In 1871, he was ordained as a Baptist minister and entered the Baptist Theological Institute at Nashville. While serving at the Union Baptist Church in Cincinnati, he learned of the need for African American chaplains in the armed services, and got an appointment as Chaplain of the 24th Infantry.

He had seen many African Americans move west after the Civil War to escape discrimination. With four other men with similar vision, Allensworth decided to establish a place where African Americans could live and thrive without oppression. On June 30, 1908, they formed the California Colony Home Promoting Association. They selected an area in Tulare County because it was fertile, there was plenty of water, and the land was available and inexpensive. They first bought 20 acres, and later, 80 more. The little town with a big vision grew rapidly for several years -- to more than 200 inhabitants, by 1914. That same year Allensworth became a voting precinct and a judicial district. Colonel Allensworth was killed on September 14, 1914, when hit by a motorcycle, while getting off a streetcar in Monrovia. After a funeral at

the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, he was buried with full military honors.

Since most of the water for Allensworth farming had to come underground from the Sierra Nevada mountains, and there were many other farms and communities between the mountains and Allensworth, the water supply for the town and farms began to dry up. The next blow was the Great Depression that hit the whole country in the early 1930s. Public services began to shut down, and many residents moved to the cities to look for work. The Post Office closed in 1931. By the 1940s, most of the residents were migratory farm workers, and the population was mainly a mixture of Blacks and Hispanics. Housing deteriorated, as most of the people didn't consider Allensworth their permanent home. The population had shrunk to 90, in 1972, and later dropped to almost zero.

A drive began in the early 1970s to save the town of Allensworth. Allensworth would be an historic monument and public park dedicated to the memory and spirit of Colonel Allensworth as well as a place to note the achievements and contributions of African Americans to the history and development of California. In 1976, when the town site became a state historic park, restorations began, and plans began for further preservation, restoration, and reconstruction, and for interpretation of the history of Allensworth.

DNA Testing: Why Markers Matter

By Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak

About a decade ago, the Internet started to revolutionize the genealogical world by making it exponentially easier to locate useful resources and distant cousins. Now DNA testing is ushering in the next revolution by supplementing traditional research with a technique that can sometimes help even when the paper trail runs out.

If you're like many of us, you've played with the idea, but haven't made the leap of purchasing that first test kit. Being a rather impatient person, I made my first foray into this new territory slightly about two years ago and would like to share some observations from the perspective of someone who has at least a tad of experience.

When first getting started, there are several issues

that merit consideration, not the least of which are what you hope to accomplish through your testing and which test you should order. Although DNA testing can be used to assist with the unraveling of a variety of genealogical situations, it is currently used mostly for surname or common ancestor testing. Simply put, this is when people of the same surname are tested to learn more of their origins, usually with the hope of confirming that they do indeed share a common ancestor. I hoped to do this, for instance, when I had four lines of Smolenyaks hailing from the same village examined.

For ordering purposes, this is generally referred to as Y chromosome or paternal ancestry testing by those who offer these services. Because this is the prevalent emphasis in current testing, I will leave it for another article to explore other possibilities, and focus for now on which test to order.

The Cost Factor

Virtually everyone who launches a DNA study will have more than one sample tested (frequently, a lot more), so price is a serious factor. Not surprisingly, this is what most of us zero in on when making our first order.

Fortunately, as with all technologies, competition has sparked a gradual lowering of prices coupled with an improvement in services provided, but the cost is still more than one typically pays for genealogical indulgences. Although it's difficult to make direct comparisons because of variations in test features and bundling, you can expect to pay roughly \$99 to \$245 for a single Y chromosome test.

Multiply this cost by the number of tests you expect to have done and you can see this is not a trivial decision. Still, with the benefit of a little hindsight, I have reached the conclusion that there's at least one factor that's more important than price.

Markers

When you receive your test results, you are given a report with your Y-DNA alleles, a series of numbers each indicating how many times a particular pattern repeats itself at a specific location—or marker—on a chromosome. Each marker, then, is reported as a number and it is this series of numbers that is used to differentiate among samples, or in some happy cases, to find matches.

For surname projects, the numbers themselves are not as important as how they compare with others who were tested in your study. Ideally, you'll want to find a perfect match to confirm common ancestry.

The Match Factor

When these tests first came to market, the results showed only four to ten markers. While it is still possible to purchase tests of ten markers, you now have the option of being tested for as many as 25 markers. When I first began my own study, I didn't fully appreciate why I should opt for as many markers as possible, but now I understand that more markers translate into fewer matches and more genealogically useful results.

Why would you want fewer matches? My husband's experience will shed some light on this. When we compared his initial 12-marker results to the others in our surname study, we were rather stunned to find no matches (Surprise, all Smolenyaks are not related!) -- so our next thought was to look beyond our community. When we did, we learned that he is genetically generic and had 35 perfect matches and another 356 close matches (i.e., one- and two-step mutations) in a database of only 6,400 samples. These 391 exact and near matches weren't all that helpful since it suggested that he could share common ancestry with perhaps one in 20 people.

When we had him retested for 25 markers, however, he had only one perfect match and a pair of two-step mutations in this same database. From a genealogical perspective, I'm not very interested in the 391 close matches from the 12-marker test, but I'm curious to know more about the three people whose results fit so snugly with his 25-marker results.

The Time Factor

In addition to producing fewer matches, testing for more markers makes the results more meaningful. When you are fortunate enough to find a match, the first question that naturally springs to mind is how far back that common ancestor of yours might have been. Is your link five generations ago, fifteen or fifty? There is no precise way to answer this question, but results can be presented in terms of probabilities.

For example, a 12 for 12 match tells you that there is a 90 percent probability that your common ancestor lived within the last 48 generations and a 50 percent probability that he lived within the last 15 genera-

tions. A 25 for 25 match narrows these time frames, revealing a 90 percent probability that your common ancestor lived within the last 20 generations and a 50 percent probability that he lived within the last seven generations. Additional markers clearly go a long way to bringing test results into genealogically relevant time spans!

More Markers, More Meaning

I like to refer to the merger of genetics and genealogy by my own fabricated, hybrid word of "genetealogy." For those of you who might be thinking of taking your first steps in genetealogy, I urge you to consider not only the immediate bottom line, but also what you'll ultimately be able to learn from your results, even if they don't produce the hoped-for matches. An additional investment now might save you a lot of retesting or upgrading (and consequently, money) down the road!

California Genealogy Society Cruise

Join the California Genealogy Society for a spectacular New England/Canada Fall Foliage cruise with informative genealogical lectures presented by George F. Sanborn Jr. FASG FSAC and Dave Allen Lambert.

The 10-day cruise (October 1-11, 2003) on Royal Caribbean International's Grandeur of the Sea sails round trip from Boston and will make stops in Maine, Nova Scotia, Quebec and New Brunswick. Cruise fares start as \$1300 per person. There will be eight lectures and most will be of interest to all genealogists. You will also have the opportunity to meet with the speakers informally during the 10-day cruise.

The sailing is very popular and will fill up fast. For specific cruise information, call All Cruise Travel at (800) 227-8473. For genealogy questions, email Jane Lindsey at Events@calgensoc.org

CAAGS Public Relations Team

The public relations committee is seeking members to volunteer. Currently, the committee consists of Mary Alequin, the photographer and Ellis Jones, chairperson. If you wish to be considered, please contact Ellis at (323) 290-9796 or via e-mail at ejones3858@earthlink.net.

On April 1, 2003 the Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics doubled its fees. Conducting personal research now costs \$6 per hour. Birth, marriage or death certificates are \$12 each to obtain in person and \$22 per certificate to receive by mail. The registry houses the state's vital records from 1911 to the present. *From 04-03-03 Family Tree Magazine Email Update*

The African American Genealogical Center for Youth

is looking for senior citizens to interview about their lives and families. The group is willing to go to convalescent homes, assisted living facilities or senior centers to conduct the interviews. In exchange for their interview the individual will receive a family keepsake video. Please contact the group at genealogyforyouth@earthlink.net

Volunteer Opportunities

CAAGS is in need of individuals to assist with various volunteer opportunities. If you are interested please see Ron Batiste or any Board member, or you can email us at CAAGS@hotmail.com

Genealogical Societies

Are you interested in joining an African American Genealogical Society in the state(s) you are researching? Watch for your state in the Heritage Newsletter.

- ✓ NEW YORK AAHGS - Chapter 2000
55 68th Street
New York, NY 10023
- ✓ AAHGS - Jean Sampson Scott - Greater New York
P. O. Box 022340
Brooklyn, NY 11201-0049
Answering service: (212) 330-7882
- ✓ NORTH CAROLINA AAHGS - North Carolina/Piedmont-Triad
P. O. Box 36254
Greensboro, NC 27416

Did You Know?

Before 1752 in the British Colonies, including the American Colonies the 6th month was August not June.

Nancy Carlberg Analyzing your family tree



Heritage Newsletter

December 2003

California African American Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 8442
Los Angeles, CA 90008-0442

Volume 15
Number 10
ISSN 1083-8937

General Meetings

Third Saturday monthly at 10 am (except June and August)
Martin Luther King United Methodist Church
6625 4th Avenue
Los Angeles, CA
(East of Crenshaw; between Gage & Florence)

Board of Directors

Ron Batiste - President
Charlotte Bocage – First Vice President
Daisy Saffold – Second Vice President and Membership
Gwendolyn Harris – Corresponding Secretary
Jean Wright-Calhoun – Recording Secretary
Colette DeVerge – Treasurer
Barbara Thomas – Parliamentarian

Committee Chairs

Alva Griffith – Book Committee/Book Sales
Ronald Higgins – Special Events
Ellis Jones – Public Relations
Evelyn Ross – Librarian
Marilyn White – Historian
Monica Maurasse – Newsletter Editor

President's Message

This is my last president's letter to you. The next will be from our newly elected President, Marjorie Sholes Higgins. I congratulate all the new officers and wish them success (and a little bit of luck) in their new roles.

They are about to lead what I believe is the best society in the country. I have said it many times, but it has still been an honor, a thrill and a privilege to have been your president.

The success of the recent Summit is just one of the highlights. Genealogists, researchers and other societies all across the country are discussing (some jealously) the depth and quality of the program we presented.

Our members have presented and participated in local, regional and national conferences; several have won awards for their research; and have been served on local, state and national boards.

While these may appear to be individual honors, they reflect upon CAAGS and the commitment we make to furthering research.

There are still projects and tasks ahead that we can undertake. All of us can help by serving on a committee, by writing an article or submitting a transcription for publication, by helping a new member, by leading one of our classes, by suggesting a new project.

The newsletter editor nor CAAGS guarantees publication of any submission. Submissions for the newsletter are due by the 20th of each month. Please email your submissions or inquiries to CAAGS@hotmail.com or submit them on computer disk to the editor.

Everyone has a skill or talent to contribute. CAAGS will only be as good as we make it. This is OUR society.

I wish all of you success (and a little luck) in your research. May you break through some of those brick walls -- not all -- and may we all celebrate those triumphs with you.

Again, it has been my honor and I thank you.

Ronald R. Batiste
President

2003 - 2004 Calendar of Events

On Going	Finding our Families, Finding Ourselves – Museum of Tolerance PowerPoint Class after CAAGS general meetings 2-3pm
December 6	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30PM
December 20	CAAGS General Meeting and annual Christmas celebration
January 2	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30pm
January 17	CAAGS General Meeting. Mary Alequin-Sosa beginner class instructor, Charlotte Bocage intermediate class instructor
January 12 – 16	Utah Genealogical Association quality training, Salt Lake City, UT
February	CAAGS Board Meeting 6:30pm
February	CAAGS General Meeting
April 8-10	Utah Genealogical Association, 2004 Annual Conference, Contact info@infouga.org or 1.888.463.6842

**Calendar is subject to change without notice*

A Letter from First Vice President Charlotte Bocage

The Society is only as strong as its members and therefore your opinions are of great value to all of us on the Board. If you can't make a Board meeting please volunteer for one of the many committee vacancies we have. I would like to thank Joyce Anthony for volunteering to take care of our copier's maintenance needs. I would also like to thank Melrose Bell for volunteering to be our fundraising chairperson.

While in Washington, DC I went to the African American Memorial and Museum. I saw their need and appealed to our members at the CAAGS November meeting to help and collected \$100 to send to their cause. Thanks again for your financial assistance.

When we went to the Bilbrew library in September I saw a need. I talked to librarian Rose Mitchell and she will develop a schedule for those who want to volunteer to work at the library. I will be maintaining the schedule and will present the details to anyone wishing to volunteer to sign up at the December 20th CAAGS meeting.

The class schedule for December is as follows. There will not be a beginner class. Instead we will have a group class on "What Genealogy Conferences are About" by Dorothylou Sands. In January Mary Alequin-Sosa will conduct the beginning class. I will lead the intermediate class and continue my sharing class about the NGS Conference in 2003.

As some of you know as Education and Outreach chairperson I have been conducting field trips to various genealogy libraries, the National Archives and the Family History Center. In January we will return to the Los Angeles Public Library, the Bilbrew Library, and the Family History Center. We will go to the Palos Verdes library to get library cards so we can access their website. Dates will be announced at the December CAAGS general meeting and in the January newsletter.

I became aware that much of the information available on the paid access through Ancestry.com is also available free at your local Los Angeles public library. Simply ask any of the librarians how to access their *Ancestry Plus* database. There are many more websites and databases available to you from your home computer. You need a Los Angeles public library card to access this information. You can apply online and pick the card up at the branch library you designate or you can go into your local branch library, fill out an application and receive it on the spot. You need to provide your name, address, home and work phone numbers, and your mother's maiden name.

Library cards are free. There is no residency requirement. However, you must have a valid ID to get or pick up your library card. If you don't have a val-

id ID you can show your printed personal checks with your address or a credit card.

If you apply in person you are given your card immediately. If you register on the web you have 30 days to pick up your library card at the branch library you designate. Be prepared to show your ID to get your card.

Some of the databases available from your home computer are the African American Biographical Database, the City Directory Index, the LA Times (News Bank), and the Sanborn Insurance maps (1867-1970). Unfortunately, Ancestry Plus cannot be accessed from home at this time.

Here are the directions to access the LAPL web site from home:

- 1) Go to www.lapl.org from your browser
- 2) On the right side of the web page, click on "Databases"
- 3) On the database page that states "For databases available from outside the library (Remote Access) [Click here](#) select "Click here"
- 4) On the remote access page click on the database you want to search
- 5) At the "Welcome to LAPL's Web Check Center" type in your library card number and zip code and click "enter"
- 6) If you have any problems accessing the site please contact the webmaster e-mail address, webmaster@lapl.org or call LAPL at 213-228-7000 during business hours.

NEW MEMBERS - WELCOME!

VELMA E. ANDERSON is researching Anderson.

INA J. BASSETT AND IDA J. BASSETT is researching Bassett, Coker, Grayson, Hutton, and James.

FAYE FAULKNER is researching Brown, Hall, Faulkner and Pipkin.

REVEREND DIANN L. JOHNSON is researching Johnson.

CECELIA KERR is researching Kerr.

GLORIA VERCHER-LOVE is researching Day from Tennessee and Texas; Howard from Texas; Love from

California and Georgia; Moody from Texas; Northern from California and Georgia; and Vercher from Colorado, Louisiana, and Texas.

BARRINGTON L. GOWDY SINGLETON is researching Bell, Chavis, Gibbs, Goins, Gowdy, Green, Harrison, McKie, Perry, Seabrook, Singleton, Smiling, Sullivan from Colleton/Lolleton - Edgefield - Sumter counties in South Carolina.

FRIEDA SMALLS is researching Brown and Smalls.

MARY WILLIAMS WALKER is researching Griffith, Scott, Smith, and Williams.

EMAIL CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS

Ina Bassett	bassettwins@aol.com
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Faye Faulkner	faithfaulk@aol.com
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Ernestine & Stewart Stovall	peek43@comcast.net
Mary Walker	mwilliamsw@aol.com
Gloria Vercher-Love	siglove@aol.com

SICK AND SHUT-IN

DorothyLou Sands and Joyce Sumbi
Please add these individuals to your prayer list.

CAAGS membership drive has started. Please remember to renew your current membership and encourage past members to come back and join us. Use the form on the back page and mail it back to us with the appropriate fee.

New additions to the CAAGS' library

Guide to Records In The National Archives – Pacific Southwest Region, Laguna Niguel, CA

Donated by Charlotte Bocage

Selected Documents Pertaining to Black Workers Among The Records Of The Department of Labor and its Component Bureaus, 1902 – 1969

Donated by Charlotte Bocage

African American Genealogical Research – South Carolina – Donated by Ronal Batiste

South Carolina African Americans in the Civil War: Two sides To A Story – Donated by Ronald Batiste

Congratulations to our newly elected board members. They will be sworn into their respective offices at the December general meeting.

- Marjorie Shoals-Higgins – President
- Barbara Thomas – Second Vice President
- Gwendolyn Harris – Corresponding Secretary
- Jamila Banks – Parliamentarian

ELECTION RESULTS VOTES

President

Carletha LeNoir-Mfume	16
Marjorie Sholes-Higgins	39

Vice President

Barbara Thomas Won by abstention

Corresponding Secretary

Gwendolyn Harris	42
Jamila Banks	13

Parliamentarian

Three write-ins	
Jamila Banks	2
Marietta Sue Welch	1
Marilyn White	1

Federation of Genealogical Society Delegate (FGS)

Colette Moncrief DeVerge Won by abstention

National Genealogical Society Delegate (NGS)

Charlotte Bocage Won by abstention

The votes were counted by Jean Wright-Calhoun and confirmed by Gena Weaver.

CAAGS is currently looking for someone to chair the hospitality committee. Please see any board member if you are interested.

The Secret Code of Genealogy: Abbreviations and Acronyms

by George G. Morgan: "Along Those Lines..."

Have you ever noticed that every profession seems to have its own shorthand? Having worked for IBM at one time, I can tell you that their internal language includes hundreds of acronyms which they use to designate products, services, software, processes, and such. However, we humans seem to delight in using acronyms and abbreviations to simplify communications with one another.

Our ancestors were no different than us in this respect. Beyond the simple abbreviations on maps of N, S, E, and W, they used any number of abbreviations in their everyday lives. What's more, these notations were in widespread use, despite the lack of sophisticated communications facilities we enjoy today, namely telephone, radio, television, and the Internet.

Evolution, of course, is a constant, and some of the abbreviations and acronyms become obsolete over time. When we discover these outdated occurrences in our research, they can sometimes confound us. In this week's "Along Those Lines . . ." column, I want to explore a few examples and to share some resources to help you decode the acronyms and abbreviations of the past.

United States Census Records

Few documents present so many questions about abbreviations as census records. On population schedules where relationship is listed, some codes are quite intuitive; others are not so obvious. The same holds true for such columns as occupation and citizenship. Here are some examples for you.

- Na = Naturalized
- Al = Alien
- AI = Aunt-in-Law
- AIL = Aunt-in-Law (again!)
- Pa = Papers filed (naturalization)
- Sm = Stepmother

Kip Sperry's book helps with many of the codes that were used. However, let's go to some definitive Web resources to help with these conundrums. Here are some great sites for your use.

IPUMS—Census Enumerator Instructions (1850–

2000) and its [companion page](#), which includes the Census Questions and Enumeration Forms.

Ancestor Search—U.S. Census Abbreviations Table of Census Abbreviations

The Story of “The”

I recently received an e-mail from a reader who had been studying an old Bible from the 1700s and 1800s that has been in his family for more than 200 years. He was particularly interested in uncovering the meaning of an inconsistently used notation “Y/e” or “ye” that appeared in the entries of births, marriages, and deaths. Because the reader had exhausted other resources, he was asking me if I could help.

There are a number of places to check to try and locate the abbreviation in question. The obvious place to start is with a dictionary. However, while dictionaries may provide a good starting point for many searches, you just aren’t going to find much in the way of obscure, archaic genealogy terminology. When it comes to searching the Web for such information, there are many choices, but none that specializes in genealogy-related abbreviations and acronyms. One massive reference site is Zeal, and it has an Abbreviations & Acronyms database. There’s a lot here, and it’s difficult to use for genealogy. However, another place I like to check is a website called Acronym Finder. This site has more than 300,000 acronyms and these sometimes include abbreviations as well.

Best of all, though, for genealogical use is a good, old-fashioned printed reference book. However, this is not just any book. This is Kip Sperry’s new, revised edition of his excellent reference, *Abbreviations & Acronyms: A Guide for Family Historians*. The first edition of the book was published in 2000, and the new edition, published in 2003, expands and improves on the original edition.

A search in Kip’s book for “ye” gives me what I need. The “y/e” or “ye” we’re discussing is, in fact, an abbreviation used to indicate the word “ye” which was in common use at the time to indicate the word “the.” The term “ye” might be used to indicate “the” as the phrase, “ye olde tavern” (the old tavern) where many of our ancestors doubtless spent many hours. It also might be used to indicate “you” or “your” as in the phrase, “God rest ye merry gentlemen.”

Sperry’s book does not just contain the obscure, outdated, and antiquated terms and “secret codes” of our ancestors. He includes contemporarily used terms we might encounter, along with symbols and measurement notations. I’ve had my copy of the book for less than a month and already it shows evidence of frequent use.

Summary

Many documents contain their own special code, a combination of jargon, abbreviations, acronyms, and symbolic notations. As researchers, part of our investigative process involves learning about the time period, the law, the specific profession or circumstances which caused the written material we are examining to be created, and the language or idiom used at the time. That means studying history and delving into archives to expand our understanding. By doing so, we gain an even deeper understanding of our ancestors’ lives and times.

Bibliography- Sperry, Kip. *Abbreviations & Acronyms: A Guide for Family Historians*. Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2003.

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Ten Things To Remember When Conducting A Formal Interview

by Carletha LeNoir-Mfume

A few months ago I conducted a class on “interviewing.” We learned that there are several types of interviews. Here are some pointers that you may find helpful in preparation for a formal interview:

- ✓ Purchase at least two 60-minute tapes
- ✓ Check the batteries in your tape recorder and be sure to take extra ones with you
- ✓ Always have an electrical extension cord on hand
- ✓ Pre-test the VOLUME and TONE level of your tape recorder
- ✓ Place the microphone on a table between you and the person being interviewed
- ✓ Don’t try to interview anyone in a noisy setting.
- ✓ Make sure the tape is running before you begin
- ✓ To prevent erasures, be sure to remove the tabs at the top of each cassette
- ✓ Always be the listener, hear what the person being interviewed has to say

- ✓ When asking questions, make sure your inquiries are leading ones

I hope these tips will assist you in your ‘formal’ genealogical interviewing adventures.

What to Expect from a Court Case

by Michael John Neill

Court records are wonderful sources, but they are often underutilized by genealogists. This week we focus on some non-criminal court records that were created by various county courts. I will offer suggestions to help you overcome some of the difficulties with their use.

Your ancestor might have either sued someone or been sued. While court cases can arise from a variety of circumstances, there are some legal actions that result in more genealogical information than others. These cases typically involve some type of dispute over property. These cases can involve two parties seeking to terminate a marriage, or they can involve a group of heirs fighting over an inheritance.

Some Terminology

The plaintiff is the individual or group of individuals who brings a case to court.

The defendant is the individual or group of individuals who are being brought to court by the plaintiffs.

This week we focus on a few of the most important court cases from a genealogical standpoint. A comprehensive research plan should include all court records, not just the ones listed in today's column. The records we discuss today are typically found at the county record level—most often the county courthouse.

Divorces

Divorce is not a late twentieth-century invention. While the proportion of marriages that end in divorce may be higher now than it was a century ago, divorce was not unheard of in the nineteenth century. While the content of individual divorce records can vary, divorce records frequently mention the date and place of marriage for the divorcing couple and names of minor children. Adult children are not always named.

A divorce from Chicago in the early 1920s provides the date and place of marriage of the couple and the

names and ages of their four children. A divorce from downstate Illinois in the 1870s provides the name of only one minor child, not naming the other three, and includes testimony of a child of the wife by a former marriage. The record of another divorce from the 1820s indicates where the couple was married and the child's 1827 birth date, along with areas in which the couple has lived during their marriage.

While their content may vary, divorce records are important to search for, and they can be located if court records are a part of your research plan. Even if the couple did not divorce, one party might have filed a case for separate maintenance, which could include similar information. These cases are also filed with the court records.

Property Disputes

Court records may also contain information on a variety of property disputes. These cases frequently contain genealogical information, particularly information about relationships. A partition suit is a request for the judge to partition the estate (typically real property) amongst the heirs in the most equitable fashion possible. A group of men familiar with the area are typically appointed by the judge to determine the plausibility of splitting the property. If an equitable distribution is impossible, the judge will order the property to be sold. A partition suit should mention the name of the deceased and the heirs who hold ownership in the property.

A relative died without a will in the 1890s, leaving his wife and children owning the property jointly. His wife wanted her “homestead and dower” portion of the estate marked off clearly so she knew what property was hers and what property belonged to her children. She had to bring legal action in order to do this (most likely because the children were still minors at the time). Interestingly enough, when each child reached the age of majority she bought out their share of the estate—effectively giving them their inheritance from their father. Not all families get along in this fashion.

General Reminders

We have only scratched the surface of court records this week. There are other things to remember as well. Keep in mind that during some periods, counties might have had more than one court, even though the same judge might have heard all the cases. Each of these courts kept a separate series of records with a

separate set of finding aids and indexes. Probate courts dealt with the settling of estates. Criminal courts dealt with violations of state statute. Equity or other courts dealt with cases outside these two categories, usually those involving private individuals who “disagreed” and needed a judge to reach an equitable decision. Some of these courts may have been consolidated over time. Remember that the organization of local courts is governed by state statute so systems may vary from one state to another.

Consult *Ancestor’s Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources*, edited by Alice Eichholz, Ph.D., C.G., for more detailed information on a specific state, or consult *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, edited by Loretto D. Szucs and Sandra H. Luebking, for detailed information on court records in general.

How to Find Records

Court cases maintained by court offices typically are indexed twice, once for the first defendant and once for the first plaintiff. For this reason it is necessary to search both defendants’ and plaintiffs’ indexes for as many extended family members as possible.

Wrapping It Up

Court records may mention many individuals. The problem is that these records are typically only indexed twice, once for the first plaintiff and once for the first defendant. The early records that have been transcribed and published are typically along the eastern coast of the United States. In some cases, finding aids have been created and researchers are encouraged to search library card catalogs such as the ones listed below. In most cases, however, a search of court records will require a manual search of the records before any references are located.

- Family History Library Catalog
www.familysearch.org
- Allen County Public Library Card Catalog
www.acpl.lib.in.us
- Library of Congress

<http://catalog.loc.gov>

Also, search specific library card catalogs for those libraries near where the records were originally created. State archives may hold some early court records in their collections as well.

Excerpted from MyFamily.com, Copy write 2003