

○ Winter 2008

# Gene

**“A PEOPLE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF ITS HISTORY, IS LIKE A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS” ~ MARCUS GARVEY**

## news

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Chairman & Founder of the Family Reunion Institute of Temple University



## Back to Basics

### A Message from the Editor:

The end of 2007 is fast approaching and as we think about the coming year, “2008”, it is time to think about how confident we feel about our basic genealogical research skills. We can refresh our genealogical knowledge and expand our research horizons by attending genealogical conferences and workshops.

Perhaps it's time to dedicate some effort toward organizing the years of materials you have gathered in the pursuit of your ancestors. The unfiled copies from research trips, the documents you have received from your queries to family members, and all those scraps of paper containing information about the family that you keep promising to make sense of are all likely in need of our attention.

There is no better time than now to begin making sense out of all the research we have conducted. Basic organization is the key to both enlightening us to new paths of exploration, and in clearing problems we thought we had. An added bonus to organizing is that we will be able to share our new findings at those family reunions and gatherings taking place in 2008 and later.

Next, we need to spend a little time and effort ensuring your collection survives through the next generation.

Your efforts will mean that your children's children will benefit from your research and get a sense of who you were.

Basic ways this can be accomplished are publishing your research, organizing it enough to have it accepted by a genealogical library or repository, or committing your family papers to compact disc (CD) or other electronic medium.

Finally, we need to make the effort to involve your people in the discovery of their heritage. The enjoyment and fulfillment we continue to get from doing genealogy is the same satisfaction that is awaiting our children and grandchildren. Besides the food feeling that comes from sharing a truly exceptional pursuit, involving young people in genealogy helps instill a basic appreciation for history and the necessary interest in preserving the records that document their heritage.

~Robert Scott

## MEETING INFORMATION

African American Genealogy  
Group  
P.O. Box 27356  
Philadelphia, PA 19118  
Tele: 215-572-6063  
[www.aagg.org](http://www.aagg.org)

Our group meets the second  
Tuesday of each month (except  
July and August) at the  
Community College of  
Philadelphia located at 4725  
Chestnut Street in West  
Philadelphia  
Tele: 267-299-5838

## Would you like to be a speaker?

AAGG receives a number of speaking requests throughout the year, and in order to provide the requested speaking support the Speakers Bureau needs genealogy speakers. The Speakers' Bureau is a volunteer-driven service to promote genealogical research in the African American community. If you are interested in being a speaker for the Speakers' Bureau, please contact Tom Davis via e-mail at: [tg.davis@comcast.net](mailto:tg.davis@comcast.net) or phone at 215-365-3077.

### AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGY GROUP OFFICERS'

**President**  
Robert Scott

**Vice President**  
James Moore

**Treasurer**  
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**Recording Secretary**  
Melissa Holloway

**Corresponding Secretary**  
Robert (RJ Hammett) House

# Announcing AfricanDNA.com

Innovative Partnership Offers African Americans Unprecedented Choices in Search for Roots

BOSTON -- **AfricanDNA.com**, the first company dedicated to offering both genetic testing and genealogical tracing services for African Americans, is being launched this month by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University, in partnership with the Inkwel Foundation and Family Tree DNA, the world's leader in genetic genealogy.

The precedent-setting site is the only company in the field of genetic genealogy that will provide African Americans with family tree research in addition to DNA testing.

Gates, a celebrated author, educator and social critic, is a strong advocate of the value and benefits of genetic genealogy for African Americans. Noting that the process is still in its infancy, he says: "Most people don't realize it, but their roots are on the tips of their tongues.

The available DNA data are not by any means complete, and these tests will not yield the names of any of the individuals on our distant family trees—just the general geographic areas in which our ancestors lived. Sometimes the tests yield multiple exact tribal matches, making it necessary for historians to interpret the most plausible result."

AfricanDNA.com is the only company that offers the service of scholars interpreting multiple matches when compared to the database. A board of historical consultants will include Dr. Fatimah Jackson, Professor, Applied Biological Anthropology, University of Maryland; Dr. Linda Heywood and Dr. John Thornton, both African historians at Boston University; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Professor of History and of African and African American Studies (Chair) at Harvard University; and Dr. David Eltis, director of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database at Emory University.

Gates comments that "sometimes African Americans will discover that their DNA can be traced to a white ancestor,

especially on the father's side, because of slavery. About 30 percent of the African American male population has a white male ancestor."

AfricanDNA.com offers two premium tests. The Maternal Test (Female-mtDNA) is a high-resolution mtDNA test that looks at the mitochondria received by both men and women from their mothers. The Paternal Test, exclusively for males, is a Y-DNA test that details the inherited Y-chromosome. Both tests' results will include placement in the ancestral tree of humankind.

Tests will be processed at the Genomic Analysis and Technology Core laboratory at the University of Arizona, headed by Dr. Michael Hammer. The renowned geneticist has been associated with Family Tree DNA since the company's inception. Both Family Tree DNA and the University of Arizona lab are respected for their commitment to stringent scientific standards and privacy guidelines.

Singular in the world of genealogy and genetics is AfricanDNA.com's Genealogy Package. This unique product offers documented genealogical tracing of lineage as far back as records permit. Although former slaves, freed at the time of the Civil War, first appeared in the Federal census in 1870, many other records of African Americans under slavery still exist.

Genealogists even discovered that Gates' 4th great-grandfather—a Free Negro named John Redman—fought in the American Revolution, leading to Gates' induction into the SAR (Sons of the American Revolution). DNA test takers who opt for the Genealogy Package will receive a customized family tree prepared by the AfricanDNA.com genealogy services group.

Genetic results of AfricanDNA customers will be compared with the database of Family Tree DNA, the most extensive comparative database of DNA test results in the world, including African results provided by leading anthropologists worldwide. *(continued on page 3)*



(cont.) These comparisons will point many AfricanDNA clients toward their African origins. DNA testing, Gates is the author of *Finding Oprah's Roots, Finding Your Own*, (Crown, 2007) and the forthcoming *In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed Their Past*, to be published next spring (Crown, 2008).

A percentage of all profits will be donated to the Inkwell Foundation, dedicated to reforming the teaching of science and history in inner city schools using genetic and genealogical ancestry tracing. Long interested in genealogical research and

### *Hammett Heritage 2007*

*Excerpt from Common Threads from Cotton Picking Dayz by R. J. Hammett*

NAT (NAB) HAMMETT~ b. 1801; d. 1880; Married KATE; Clarendon Co., SC value \$150.00

KATE HAMMETT ~b. 1810; d. 1920; Clarendon Co., SC - Value \$700.00

ROBERT HAMMETT~ b. 1830; d. 30, JUNE 1915; Married LIDDIE b. 1852; Clarendon Co., Value \$100.00

RUFUS HAMMETT ~ b. 1853; d. 1920; Married MARGARET (HUMPHIES); Clarendon Co. or Greenville, SC

SCOTT HAMMETT~ b. 1859; d. 24 NOV. 1930; Married LOTTIE; Clarendon Co., SC

JANNY/JAMMY (JANUARY) HAMMETT~ b. 1858; d. Unknown; Clarendon Co., SC Value \$300.00

\* Value of Captives obtained from State Dept. Archive in Columbia South

## Editor's Voice

### Lessons I Learned from Big Mama

By R. J. Hammett

My Mother's Mother died as she was born yet I had many Big Mamas. First, there was Auntie Lillie, formally known as Lillie Ballard. Auntie Lillie lived in Summerton, South Carolina and worked as a cook and homemaker. Lillie and my Mother were sisters about 18 years difference in age. Today, she would be called an extended family member or a guardian. Our families often spent time together right up until her death in 1973.

I remember the many bedtime stories Aunt Lillie read to me such as, Tar Baby and Brer Rabbit. Before bed she made certain I bathed brushed my teeth, cleaned my face, but most of all she taught me how to pray. At night the prayer she taught me was: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen."

My Father's Mother was Carlotta Dixon House. Grandma was born 1896 in Davis Station, South Carolina. Grandma was a cook extraordinaire. She prepared meals such as chicken dumplings utilizing only the freshest vegetables and seasonings. What was special about her is she taught by example, to make do with what you have. We rarely saw a Doctor for illnesses - if we had indigestion we were given "azfizziti." For an earache, Grandma gave us a few drops of "sweet oil in our ears. Both Auntie Lillie and Grandma taught all of us children to always show gratefulness and appreciation and, of course to say "Thank you."

This being the season of thanks and a time of giving - I look back and remember those who helped to make way for all of us, by becoming a link in the chain of progress. At the end of the day, I hope that I have touched someone like my Aunt Lillie and Grandma, the way they have touched me; and perhaps you to want your descendants to thing of you as an important link in your families' chain. Seasons Greeting!

# Fast Chat with Ione Vargus

- Chair and Founder of the Family Reunion Institute at Temple University

(Bill Clark/Gannett News Service) Many families these days are scattered. Children move away for college or jobs. Their children do the same. For some, the word "hometown" has lost its meaning because they've lived in many places they call home.

But now -- perhaps more than at any other time in history -- relatives have the ability to stay connected. E-mail gets delivered in seconds. Cross-country phone calls are inexpensive. And many people have the financial means to travel to see their kin.

Genealogy, researching one's roots, is a hobby and a passion for many people, whether their families have been in America for one generation or 10.

Ione Vargus, chairwoman of the Family Reunion Institute, noticed that families, especially black families, latched onto the idea of three-day formal reunions after Alex Haley published "Roots" in 1976.

She started studying family reunions in 1986 and founded the institute at Temple University in Philadelphia in 1990.

**Clark:** What prompts many families to have reunions?

**Vargus:** Families just like to get together. The older ones remember the days when they probably lived near their family and probably did have a picnic. The older people remember the good times that came from that and being able to see cousins and relatives.

Very often they want the younger generation to get to know their relatives because one of the things that happened through "progress" (is that) people now have moved all over the place. The younger generations don't know their cousins and relatives in the same way that we in the older generation knew our cousins and relatives. What traditions have you seen through the years that have become your favorites?

I think one of the traditions that most families do is recognize those who have gone on through the years, the people who have passed. And they have a lot of

different ways to do that. Some people light candles. Some people have testimony about the deceased. Some have whole worship services.

How do black family reunions differ from reunions in other ethnicities and traditions?

The major thing is the fact that it's not a picnic. Although it's a fun kind of thing, it's a very spiritual kind of a thing.

Usually there's some kind of theme that speaks to love and unity and knowing your history.

What do you think should be a part of every family reunion?

The fact that families get together, period, I think is wonderful. I'm talking mainly about the extended family ... not just the parents and children. I'm talking about that whole system of relatives.

The very fact that they make the time, and the energy and money to get together is really in and of itself very important. Then once they do that I think it is an important thing to share the history, the genealogy, where people come from. I think it helps a lot in helping people to identify who they really are and to have a sense of identity.

That's extremely important with young people and it gives them a sense also of self-esteem, especially with African-American families. When you share those stories of what happened after slavery -- and that's how far most African-Americans can get -- if you talk about what the slaves did, how they found their families, how they went about finding their families, talk about what they did in terms of the sacrifice, (it's powerful).

There are many families who give awards, well, recognition, to young people who have graduated from high school and college. That sends a very powerful message as to how important education is.

## 2008 Federation of Genealogical Societies Conference Blog

The next FGS Conference will take place from September 3-6, 2008 in historic Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

This four day "Footprints of Family History" educational conference honors the host city as the place where the ancestors of millions of Americans first set foot on the continent. Family historians like to keep up with additional news and details about the annual FGS Conferences. The 2008 conference committee has a blog to provide that.

It is easy to join in on the knowledge -- just go to [www.FGS.org](http://www.FGS.org), click on Conferences, then on 2008 Conference, and on that page click on Blog. Direct access to the blog can be reached via [www.fgsconference.org/blog/index.php](http://www.fgsconference.org/blog/index.php).



(cont.) Some families now are ... getting scholarships together to help kids. It may not be a lot of money. It's just the idea that you really value education.

A lot of people worry about the state of the black family. How do family reunions fit into that picture?

Those kinds of issues are certainly there. That's why I think it's so terribly important to tell the other side of that story.

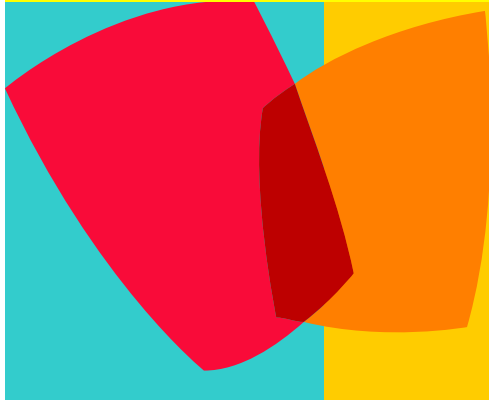
I was already in the process of doing this research when Bill Moyer came out with his documentary in 1986 on the vanishing black family.

And I said, "Uh-oh, you've got to hear the other side of this. This is what families are doing." We don't tend to look on the family as the mother, father and two kids. We tend to look on the extended family. That's a big difference. We're talking about the aunt, the uncle, the grandparents, and all those other people who may be in the picture.

How has today's changing family of any race - with marriages, divorces, adoptions, living together - affected family reunions?

They all come. You have the blended families there. You have the divorced parents. Maybe the mother and father have divorced but they still claim that family. That helps to keep people knowing who is part of the family.

For more information about Temple University's Family Reunion Institute, please visit them on the Web at: [www.temple.edu/fri/familyreunion/](http://www.temple.edu/fri/familyreunion/)



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you have not already done so, please choose a committee and volunteer your services. Each of us has full, busy lives and the level of commitment is different for everyone. Any amount of help will be appreciated because Every Little Bit Helps. We look forward to hearing from you.

### AAGG Committees

- |                                      |   |
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