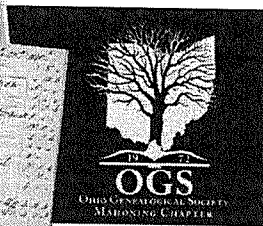


MAHONING MEANDERINGS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
MAHONING COUNTY CHAPTER OF THE
OHIO GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

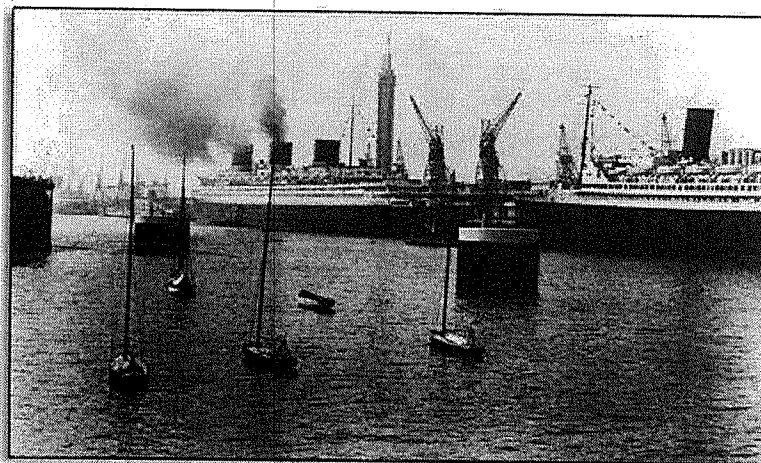


First Quarter: March 2023

A JOURNEY TO AMERICA

Over the next few issues of this newsletter, we will explore the typical experience of a European ancestor who emigrated to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Before a steamship ticket could be purchased, some countries required their citizens to have a valid passport. It's interesting to note however that the United States did not require incoming immigrants to have a passport until the enactment of the Quota Act of 1924. With passport in hand, the next step for our immigrant ancestors was to secure transportation to the port. Fortunately for our ancestors, by the early 1900s Europe had an extensive rail system that wended its way vertically and horizontally on the continent. Even in the smallest of villages, a rail station would be located within reach by foot or an animal driven cart.



Residents of the more remote mountain villages may have needed to start out on foot down the mountain path to another village where a ride on a mule cart could be secured to carry them to the train station. The most common European emigration ports were Rotterdam, The Netherlands; Antwerp, Belgium; Hamburg, Germany; Goteborg, Sweden; Bremen, Germany; Naples, Italy, and Le Havre, France. If you look at a map of Europe and identify the nearest port for your ancestors, you may be surprised to find that the port was hundreds of miles away! Imagine the amount of effort one had to expend to just get to the seaport, and this was just the first part of the trip with a two-week or longer transatlantic journey still awaiting the traveler.

Once the traveler arrived at the port, he or she would usually have to find lodging as it was quite unlikely that the steamship

and train schedules aligned, an overnight stay could be expected. However, sometimes the port stay could be several days or even weeks. Some governments subsidized and supervised "port boarding houses" for travelers. They were not five-star accommodations but did offer a "safer" place to sleep and meals while the immigrant got his or her paperwork in order and the steamer was readied for the journey. I would like to make note here that for many of our ancestors, the trip to the port was likely the very first time any of them had been further than a few miles from their birthplace. When they arrived in a busy port city like Naples, it would have seemed completely foreign to them and yet they were still in their own country.

In port, the immigrant was subjected to a health examination by a doctor who worked for the United States Public Health and Marine Hospital Service. The United States had strict rules that persons who had fauvus (skin disorder), trachoma

(eye disorder), a "loathsome disease" or any disability that would likely make him or her unable to provide for themselves (the term is a "likely public charge") would be refused entry. Steamships had an incentive to cooperate with ensuring the health of its passengers. If a passenger were refused entry, the steamship company would be responsible for returning the passenger to the embarkation port. Most immigrants passed the health examinations but there were always exceptions, and these poor souls would be refused boarding. One can imagine what a devastating blow that would have been after all the effort and cost of planning the journey. In our next issue we will continue to journey to America and explore life aboard a steamship.

By Roslyn Torella

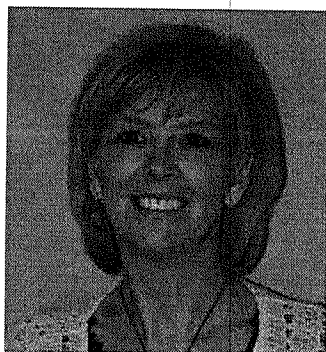
WHEN GENEALOGY FRIENDS FIND OUT THEY ARE FAMILY

When I started researching my family over 20 years ago, there were a couple things I knew. First, that my maternal side came to Ohio from Virginia, my paternal side was from South Carolina and yes, I am a descendant of enslaved people.

I will always remember my maternal aunt, Jessie Preston. A proud, "all about business" woman who instilled in me a sense of pride in knowing that my great great grandfather had founded the Third Baptist Church in Youngstown in 1874. It has been a journey going through records, newspapers, and other documents trying to learn more about him and others in my family. It is also hard to come to grips that I may never know everything about everyone who helped make me who I am. With the availability of more records online, more research tools and DNA testing, it has become easier to research and connect family, however lost, destroyed and missing records are still a challenge.



Stacey Adger



Cheryl Hudson Passey

Over the years I have met and made a number of genealogy friends, and one, Susan Perhala, put me in touch with Cheryl (Cheri) Hudson Passey clear back in 2015. I was searching for my paternal side of the family with ties to Clarendon and Williamsburg counties. With a business called Carolina Girl Genealogy, I couldn't go wrong. One of the things I learned about her right away was that one of her big things was building a bridge between descendants of enslavers and the enslaved.

Long before the polarized nature of today's society, it was already a touchy subject to begin with. How do you begin to start the dialogue between someone whose ancestors may have owned your ancestors? It is jarring as an African American the first time you see your ancestors listed among the furniture, animals, and other property, to be divided up and given away upon the owner's death. I still catch my breath every time I see the following; "...to my son/daughter I leave my wench, Sucky (my James) and her increase, to hold forever." It becomes clear that once the importation of Africans ended in 1809, other means of increasing the slave population needed to be found and in the plain wording of those documents, slavery was not meant to come to an end.

When the story of the descendants of Sally Hemings and President Thomas Jefferson became widely known, it piqued my interest. How do blacks with ties to a former President and others start that conversation and begin wading through all of

that emotion to start a dialogue? Myself, being 12% something other than African, I wondered where and how do I start?

I am almost certain I saw it on television, but there was a story on a group called Coming to the Table (CTTT). It's goals were something that spoke to my heart. The Coming to the Table vision for the United States is of a just and truthful society that acknowledges and seeks to heal from the racial wounds of the past-from slavery and the many forms of racism it spawned.

The Mission: Coming to the Table provides leadership, resources, and a supportive environment for all who wish to acknowledge and heal wounds from racism that is rooted in the United States' history of slavery. I followed them, read up and joined as a member/donor. I found out that Cheri was a member too. A short time later, Ancestry.com started a short lived but popular feature called "We're Related," that was based on your DNA test results and people you were likely related to. I got linked to Michelle Obama, Mitch McConnell and a number of musicians, politicians and others. There was one, Benjamin Reese Gibson, who popped up a lot. My father's side had Gibson/Gipson all in that region of South Carolina. He piqued my interest because I had relatives who maintain that tennis great Althea Gibson, who was born in Silver, SC was a cousin. My father's side was tied to Historic Liberty Hill AME Church in Summerton. Based on documents, it appears that many were likely enslaved at Cedar Grove Plantation in Summerton. The church was integral in objecting to the segregated school system and met with a young attorney, Thurgood Marshall, who was representing the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. That Briggs v. Elliott case was one of 5 merged into Brown v. The Board of Topeka, Kansas.

Jump ahead to 2022 when we began soliciting proposals for the 2023 Ohio Genealogical Society Conference and I see submissions from Passey. She had just done a bridging the gap talk. OGS often tries to think outside of the box when it comes to sessions, and this would be different for us. After discussing it with Conference Coordinator Marleen Applegate and Co-chair Rebecca Plank, I approached Passey and she was a go.

I can't remember when I became aware that Benjamin Reese Gibson was one of her ancestors. Initially the thought gave me pause, but what happened in the past was nothing that we could change, and who better to have that discussion than two genealogists... who find out they are cousins? While peeking at her tree I noticed something else, Richburg. That was my great grandmother's surname.

Another link? Likely she has Richbourg going way back. While talking to a new DNA cousin, Benjamin Reese Gibson's name comes up again. He had fathered several children with at least one enslaved female he owned. January was the one that was Althea Gibson's grandfather.

It is a complex, complicated, emotional, and raw issue. Some on both sides of the issue may never want to acknowledge or address it. I am grateful to those willing to at least try to bridge the divide.

By Stacey Adger