

# Roots

## African Americans get tips on how to grow family trees



Jessica Miller examines a family tree.



Guests at the workshop look at pictures on display.

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Jennifer Mack's 3-year-old daughter has never known what it is like to be doted on by grandparents. By the time Mack and her husband had the child, their parents had long passed. When Mack makes regular visits to the library to look for the roots of her family tree, she does it partially for her daughter.

"I want to be able to pass this to her. I want her to be able to say, 'This is where I came from,'" Mack said.

Mack came to a workshop last weekend at the Main Branch Library to learn more about doing genealogy research. The workshop was geared toward African Americans, who often run into obstacles while tracing their roots because of slavery, poor record keeping and mass migrations.

Mack has been on her odyssey for several years now. She feels like it's a race against time. Her family gets smaller and smaller every year, she says, with many of the oldest and most knowledgeable family members leaving this Earth and taking their information with them.

"My family is getting smaller, so I'm trying to track my heritage," she said.

By digging through birth certificates and death records, she has stumbled upon a few names and even a few pictures. She even learned that her great-grandmother was white.

Mack said her journey has been fascinating and she encourages other African Americans to unearth their roots.

But Mel White, director of African-American projects at Old Salem, said many blacks think tracking their history is impossible. White admits African Americans will have some barriers when it comes to researching

their past, especially when it comes to tracking family members who lived as slaves. White suggested that blacks who dig that far should keep their emotions in check.

"In (researching) back before 1870, you have got to think about (relatives) as a piece of property," White said. "That's what we were...You have to get over this emotional thing."

White said he got over it by keeping in mind that blacks had a glorious culture and history in Africa before being brought here.

White said it was unlikely in times past that blacks would marry people from different towns or states. Often marriages took place among people on the same street. White urged those at Saturday's event to not miss the forest for the trees.

White said if African Americans relocate to another place, it's usually because someone they know lives in that place; blacks rarely move for other reasons, he said.

"Most of you have relatives that have settled someplace else; generally they are following someone they know," he said.

Jerry Brinegar, president of the Forsyth Genealogical Society, also offered tips to those who came to the workshop. Brinegar said to begin with yourself and go backward to immediate family members when doing genealogical research. She also advised that researchers use elder family member as living history books.

"They are well one day, and tomorrow they are gone," said.

*Mack has found in her research that there are few people with her maiden name, Chaskley, still living in the area. Anyone who has information about the name can contact The Chronicle; we will pass the information to Mack.*

## Helpful websites

Christine's Genealogy Website, [www.ccharity.com](http://www.ccharity.com)

Afrigenas, [www.afrigenas.com](http://www.afrigenas.com)

- Sites great source for African-American genealogy

Family Treemaker Online, [www.familytreemaker.com](http://www.familytreemaker.com)

- Site features online magazine, links and products

GenForum, [www.genforum.genealogy.com](http://www.genforum.genealogy.com)

- Site lets you respond, read and post queries for surnames

The Lest We Forget Genealogy Page, [www.coax.net/people/lwf/genes.htm](http://www.coax.net/people/lwf/genes.htm)

-Site features links to other genealogical sites

## Research tips

- Begin your research with yourself and work backward a generation at a time.

- Talk with family members and consult family records to gather as much information as possible.

- Write down all information in a consistent format and complete manner.

- Be prepared for for a long and possibly frustrating struggle if you don't know an ancestor's approximate dates, county of residence and name.

-View all sources with a healthy skepticism and corroborate.

## Atallah Shabazz will give lecture March 1 at UNC

Speech by the oldest daughter of Malcolm X is sponsored by Black Cultural Center

UNC NEWS SERVICES

CHAPEL HILL — Activist, writer and producer Atallah Shabazz, the eldest daughter of late Black Muslim leader Malcolm X, will deliver the seventh annual Sonja Haynes Stone Memorial Lecture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill March 1.

The 7 p.m. lecture, free and open to the public, is sponsored by UNC's Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center. The lecture will be in the auditorium of the Tate-Turner Kuralt Building, 301 Pittsboro Street, with a reception to follow.

Shabazz, the first of six daughters born to Dr. Betty Shabazz and Malcolm X, has followed in her parents' footsteps, becoming a strong voice for the black community. She recently penned a new foreword to her father's autobiography, and her work has appeared in newspapers and periodicals, including The Los Angeles Times, Essence magazine and El Mundo. Shabazz co-founded and produced NUCLEUS Inc., a motivational theater company that uses "edu-tainment" to teach and inspire audiences across the United States.

Shabazz has founded numerous community outreach organizations, most recently The Pilgrimage Foundation, which supports and pays tribute internationally to those who have triumphed in the face of adversity. She serves on the board of directors of the Betty Shabazz Wholistic Retreat Center in Otisville, N.Y., named for her

mother, who died in 1997 after suffering severe burns in her Yonkers, N.Y., apartment.

A supporter of the pursuit of educational and artistic excellence in children, Shabazz serves on the advisory board of the Quincy Jones Listen Up Foundation. She also is president of Jones' web-based Q Radio, a site where visitors can sample diverse African artists and styles, including hip-hop, modern jazz and gospel.

Each year, the center pays tribute to its namesake with a lecture by a black woman whose activities and values mirror those of the late Dr. Stone. Previous lecturers have included former Black Panther Kathleen Cleaver, political activist Angela Davis and Rep. Eva Clayton (D-N.C.).

Stone directed the UNC-Chapel Hill African and Afro-American Studies Curriculum from 1974 to 1979 and remained affiliated as an associate professor until her death in 1991. She dedicated her life to educating the campus about needs for a black cultural center and improved race relations in the community.

Established in 1988, the center offers academic programs and activities for all students. It seeks to bridge gaps among diverse groups at UNC-Chapel Hill through scholarly investigations of black heritage. The center serves North Carolina by fostering appreciation of African and black culture through programs that include lectures and performing arts.

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## Moments in Black History

Interviews during the month of February include:

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LIGHT

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WINSTON-SALEM GREENSBORO

• City of Timbuktu

• Maxine Waters

• Carles Dew

• Colin Powell

• Maya Angelou

Interview times are 6:50 & 8:50 a.m.  
and 2:50 & 5:50 p.m.

Also listen to interviews coming from Gospel Artists during the Afternoon Drive at 5:00 p.m. with Bobby Parker.

Guests include:

• Nysa Shenay

• Keith "Wonderboy" Johnson

• Teresa Morton

• Desmond Pringle

• Choir Boyz

• Spiritual Pieces & Others

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