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Archivist for Haley's 'Roots' is remembered for life's work

By **Stephanie Hanes**
Sun Staff

Most people know Phebe R. Jacobsen as the archivist who helped Alex Haley find his roots.

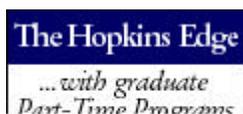
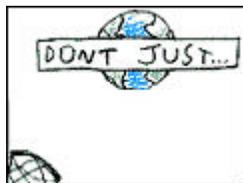
They've heard how she was on duty the day in 1967 when Haley walked into the [Maryland State Archives](#) searching for records of his ancestor, Kunta Kinte. They've heard how she found the handwritten port ledger noting the "cargo of choice, healthy slaves" from Gambia on the Lord Ligonier, how that record formed a pivotal link in Haley's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Roots." They may even know about the long friendship she maintained with the writer and his family. But for the roughly 100 people who gathered at the Maryland State Archives yesterday for a service in memory of the archivist, who died in April, Jacobsen's impact went beyond that one significant chapter in African-American history.

Chris E. Haley, the author's nephew who has been the associate director of reference services at the Hall of Records since 1993, and Nancy M. Bramucci, the archives' director of special collections, knew from the time Jacobsen died that they wanted to hold an event to pay tribute to the breadth of the late archivist's accomplishments.

"Phebe is known for that single incident," Bramucci said. "But she was much more than that. She would have built that relationship with any serious researcher."

The speakers and attendants at the Hall of Records yesterday reflected on the three decades of Jacobsen's accomplishments - her work creating extensive church and military records, her much-used guide to Quaker documents, her work searching and categorizing Native American and African-American records.

"This is the foremost place for black research," said Agnes K. Callum, a historian and genealogist who worked with Jacobsen for nearly 30 years. She noted how Jacobsen had transformed



Maryland's collection of African-American documents from a haphazard jumble in unmarked boxes to an organized research system.

"There were plenty of records about black folks, but she put them in a position where they could actually be used," Callum said.

Researchers who had found essential material through Jacobsen's assistance mixed with archivists inspired by their colleague's passion for documents and records. Genealogists who have been able to trace their history because of Jacobsen's attention to histories mingled with family who remember her interest being sparked at an early age by her aunts' Civil War stories. Members of the Haley family, whom the Jacobsens have stayed close with, also attended.

"She was the type of person who took you into the family," said Julius C. Haley, Alex Haley's brother. "She would insist I go home and have dinner. It was such a loving and embracing atmosphere, I just simply felt at home."

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