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## Phebe Jacobsen, former archivist, leaves rich legacy

By MARY P. FELTER Community News Editor



Phebe Robinson Jacobsen, 78, retired senior state archivist, who helped "Roots" author Alex Haley determine that his ancestor Kunta Kinte landed at City Dock, died April 19 at her Annapolis home from complications of diabetes.

At the Maryland State Archives, Mrs. Jacobsen found an advertisement in the Oct. 1, 1767, issue of the Maryland Gazette about the arrival of the Lord Ligonier in Annapolis on Sept. 29, 1767. The ship had carried Kunta Kinte. "She was an inspiration to people doing any type of genealogical research," said Chris Haley, associate director of research services at the archives and the late author's nephew.

"She was a font of knowledge of Maryland in general," Mr. Haley said. "She just had an open and inviting heart to anyone who would ask her advice in their quest for knowledge of their ancestors."

Mr. Haley said Mrs. Jacobsen became part of his family and was not afraid to give her opinion.

"If she agreed with you, wonderful, and if not, she'd let you know."

Edward Papenfuse, state archivist, said Mrs. Jacobsen had a knack for dealing with people, and for guiding people back from the wrong research path.

"She was an extraordinary individual with an intense love of the records who wanted to teach people to make them accessible and meaningful," he said.

Mrs. Jacobsen also was particularly interested in the experiences of American Indians and blacks, Mr. Papenfuse said. The archives will establish a summer internship focused on those topics in her name.

"She's going to be missed enormously," he said.

But her singular, high-profile achievement with Alex Haley was but one moment in a 37-year career.

Mrs. Jacobsen, a Baltimore native, majored in history and English at American University and Western Maryland College. When her husband, Bryce DuVal Jacobsen, was jailed for his conscientious objector status during World War II, she traveled to where he was imprisoned to teach. After his release, they lived on a farm near Gettysburg, Pa. She worked for the Pennsylvania Division of Records, vacuuming and sorting Civil War records that had been stored in a coal hold.

In 1958 they came to Annapolis, where her husband taught at his alma mater, St. John's College. She was an archivist for two years for Historic Annapolis Foundation and then joined the state archives.

Among her quieter achievements was the acquisition of invaluable Catholic church records, a project she pursued endlessly before the Archdiocese agreed to copy them.

She was willing to put in "years of tenacious work" to get something done, "just because it should be done," said Greg Stiverson, former assistant state archivist.

With Mr. Stiverson she was the author of "William Paca, a Biography." After she retired, the archives established the Phebe R. Jacobsen Conference on Maryland History to be held annually and named her one of its only two Senior Scholars.

In addition to her interest in blacks and American Indians, she enjoyed her rose garden.

Mr. Jacobsen died in 1998. The couple had been married for 54 years.

Surviving are one son, Eric G. Jacobsen of Riva; one daughter, Kristin Onyeme of London, England; one sister, Joan R. Holman of New Bloomfield, Pa.; five grandchildren;

and three great-grandchildren.

A private family service will be held tomorrow, with a memorial service in June to be announced.

Donations may be made to the Archives of Maryland Endowment Fund for Phebe R. Jacobsen, in care of the Maryland State Archives, 350 Rowe Blvd., Annapolis, MD 21401.

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