THE TAYLOR BRANCH is represented by Mr. and Mrs. John Taylor of Cherry Hill, Baltimore and Chester Lee Taylor, Norfolk, Va.

SOLOMON A. BRIDGEFORTH branch includes Mr. Bridgeforth himself, Miss Barbara A. Bridgeforth, Baltimore, Mrs. Lorraine Swan, Severn, Md. and Mr. and Mrs. George Perkins, Baltimore.

Virginia family claims over 3,300 members

By
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Baltimore AFRO City
Editor
All photos by
Glasco Ryales

The November, 1979 gathering of the noted family which boasts roots deep in Virginia's colonial history brought to Baltimore's fabulous new Convention Center relatives from Africa, 17 states, the District of Columbia, and five of their native counties of Virginia.

The reunion of the group which claims it is the nation's largest black family revealed it has many, many clans including the Shells, the host family from Brunswick County plus the Stiths, Morgans, Bridgeforths, Taylors, Hickses, Blackwells, Carters, Tisdales, McCoys, and Christians whose counties are Dinwiddie, Northumberland, Lancaster, Lunenburgh and Brunswick.

The near 1000 representatives of the family arrived by car, jet plane, and train from all Maryland, Tennessee, Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Georgia, Michigan, New Jersey, Arizona, Georgia, Massachusetts, California, Rhode Island, and the Distriet of Columbia.

The descendants of Lagos, Nigeria, are residents of the District of Columbia. Relatives who are studying in U.S. colleges came from Tennessee, New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

According to the records compiled over 14 years by Mrs. Thelma Doswell, a recognized authority of family history and her Blackwell clan, the family is traced back to the line of Ama, a woman of the Soninke tribe of Senegal. Ama was bought as a slave by James Glenn Blackwell of Yorktown, Va. The Individual records of the other clans also reveal ancestry as far back as the early 1700's.

The Blackwell family tree branches out to show the relationship of all the clans and how they were joined together into the vast network of some 12 generations.

When they get together as in October for the 1,000 Blackwells and the others in Baltimore in November, those led by the Shells and the Bridgeforths, they answer the call "from everywhere" and more and more mysteriously appear to the amazement of the rest. As Mrs. Bettye Shell Graves, one of the hostesses of the November reunion says, "It always snowballs and we meet more relatives we have only heard about through the years."

The family has indeed left its mark upon American history and the members who are distinguished in all walks of life are legend. The late Dr. John M. Ellison, first black president of Virginia Union University, Bill Cosby, the famed TV and screen star and Arthur Ashe, the tennis champion are a few of the well-known descendants.

Others are widely known ministers, educators, doctors, lawyers, federal, state and city officials and administrators, teachers, builders, farmers, scientists and historians.

THE SHELLS record their history from the root of Sonk Shell born in 1844 in Lunenburgh County and married to Viana Jones in 1864. The family whose members have spread throughout the nation includes the chief of an Indian tribe, prosperous farmers, carpenters, builders, ministers and other church officials. There are over 30 grandchildren and countless great-great-grandchildren.

THE BLACKWELL BRANCH is represented by Mrs. Thelma Doswell and her son Stephen of Hyattsville, Md. The only black woman in the nation who has documented families with roots back to Africa, Mrs. Doswell has the family tree listing over 3,300 members from their Virginia Counties, the family coat of arms and the printed history.

THE BRIDGEFORTHS have records from the early 1800's in Lunenburgh County from the line of Edmond Bridgeforth and his seven sons. The history read at the November reunion listed over 400 descendants from their marriages and their children's children.

THE TAYLORS descended from John Mark Taylor one of 10 children of the union of James and Susan Carter Taylor of Northumberland County and through their marriages branched over into Lancaster County to later join with the McCoys and the Hickses.

THE MORGANS of Southside Lunenburgh County trace history to 1820 and list over 200 descendants who were joined with the Hicks clan and other branches of the family.

THE CARTER'S and the Christians stem from the marriage of James Carter and Amanda Woods Carter. Their children, Samuel Carter and Amanda Woods and his wife, Betty Alice Taylor Carter had four children, one of whom, Frances, married Isaac Christian to join the two branches which now forms the Carter-Christian family group of some six generations.

THE STITHS trace ancestry back to the late 1700's in Dinwiddie County where Junius and Betty Stith settled in the area called Corcoran. Their records show the ancestors migrated from Jamaica in the Carribeans and their offspring migrated later from Virginia to states from the West Coast to the Eastern seaboard. Some of them are prominent citizens of Arizona, Georgia, California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New York. They are joined with the Taylors, Hickses and some sons marrying two sisters in other branches are what it is termed as double cousins.

Is your name here?

Bobby Bell
Authur Bridgeforth
James T. Bridgeforth
James T. Bridgeforth Jr.
John E. Bridgeforth
Llarsha Bridgeforth
Elroy Bridgeforth
Loretta Bridgeforth
Robin Bridgeforth
Daryl Bridgeforth
James E. Bridgeforth
Cassandra Bridgeforth
Leonard Bridgeforth
Kevin Bridgeforth
Agar Bridgeforth
Tanya Bridgeforth
Authur Bridgeforth
William Bridgeforth
Deana Bridgeforth
Beaches Bridgeforth
Dorothy Bridgeforth
Tanya Brown
Edith Brown
Chalai Brown
Troy Brailey
Chessy Brailey
Virginia Billy
Jacqueline Billy
Nathaniel Billy
Mrs. Bridgeforth
Ernestine Bridgeforth
Joyce Bridgeforth
Maxine Bridgeforth
Edith Brown
Margaret Buchanan

C

David Cofield
Inez Cofield
Elsie Carter Cooper
William Christian
William Chambers
Gladys Chatman
Zeola Christopher
Diane Christopher
Jackie Christopher
Alice Cooke

D

Angela Davis
Hershaw Davis
Kathy Davis
Charles Davis
Pendora Davis
Woodrow Darley
Wilbur Drew
Elnora Drew
Kyre Drew
Avon Davis
Etta Davis
William Davis
Hershaw Davis Jr.
Chris Drew
Cheryl Dinkens
Thelma Doswell

F

Ella Fowlkes
Dorothy Felton
Wanda Felton
Gail Felton
Deborah Fuster