The AFRO celebrates its 88th birthday Aug. 13

THE MERRITT FAMILY

Here is the story of a family of that era

By Bertram Merritt, new principal, Diggs-Johnson Junior High School No. 162

(EDITOR's NOTE- Mr.Merritt accidently discovered a lead to his family roots while searching through the AFRO microfilm files at Pratt Library. Thus unfolded a history which led back to Civil War.)

PART I

Gabriel Newton Merritt was my paternal great-grandfather. Born a slave in New Hanover County, sometime during the 1840's, he was the first Merritt.

When the Civil War broke out in April, 1861, Gabriel was a teenager in Wilmington, N.C.

Various documents disagree as to his exact age, but he was somewhere between 15 and 18.

On Nov. 26, 1861 a United States Naval vessel, the U.S.S. Monticello, was blockading his home port on the Cape Fear River.

Somehow he ran away, got out into the water and entered the ship. On that day he joined the U.S. Navy and consequently served for three years. That act also led to my birth in Baltimore.

A lot of history happened before and after, but that is what this is all about, the story of how I came to find Gabriel Merritt, the slave who ran away.

Like other persons, I became involved in checking my roots a few years ago.

I haven't gone too far as such studies go, only to 1813, but the story of Gabriel Merritt is the most unusual one I have uncovered about my ancestors so far.

Equally unusual is the fact that no living member of my family knew the story of the slave who ran away.

Strangely enough it is also entirely possible that his own children, including my grandfather, may not have known about it.

It would seem that my great-grandfather would tell the story to their children so that the story would have been passed down to me by oral tradition - but this did happen.

To understand why this tradition was not passed on, you have to understand the psychology of the newly freed Negro.

Unlike Alex Haley's family, most black families did not pass down the story of slave life from generation to generation.

When slaves let the era of degradation, they wanted to wipe out this period and leave all traces behind.

Even the beautiful Negro spiritual was abandoned after slavery.

Consequently, when the Fisk Jubilee Singers attempted to carry it on as an art form, many blacks objected, calling it the symbol of slavery they wished to forget.

It was this feeling about slavery and almost everything connected with it that prompted some not to pass on very much about this period of their lives.

As a result, very few black families of today have much of a family oral tradition about their particular slave ancestor, so Alex Haley's is the exception - not the rule.

HOW IT STARTED

I really backed into my genealogical studies.

It all started with an assignment for the 25th reunion of my high school class, Douglass High Class of '46.

Delving into the microfilm copies of the Baltimore AFRO-AMERICAN in Pratt Library, I found much history on my alma mater. There are copies of the AFRO dating back to 1893.

The historic information there and the idea of reading history as it happened became so interesting that I decided to read every copy starting from 1893.

One of the first issues noted the 20th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Cabell Calloway, grandparents of famed Cab Calloway.

Around 1898 Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the celebrated Poet, came to Baltimore for the wedding of a member of the Murphy family, publishers of the AFRO.

In 1912, a young teacher Herbert M. Frisby, took his class to the White House and was received by President Howard Taft. I spoke to Dr. Frisby about it recently. He remembers it well.

In other issues, I discovered how overwhelming was the outpouring of grief at the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915.

To the black community, this was a greater event than the end of World War I a few years later.

Six years and many issues later, I had reached February, 1932 when my eyes lighted on a small article about the death of Sarah Merritt age 92, burned in a fire at 509 Dolphin St.

I knew this was one of my father's relatives, but I did not know which one at the time.

The story of her death had been told to me over and over again.

The piano on which I had been taught as a young boy had scorch marks on it, and a piano tuner found water marks inside. It had survived the fire.

Rushing to my mother's home, I showed her a copy of the article. She recounted the story again.

Sarah Merritt was my late father's paternal grandmother. She resided at 509 Dolphin with her son Clarence Merritt. The house was directly across the street from Sharp Street Methodist Church but was torn down not too many years ago to build the McCulloh Homes.

SARAH MERRITT.

Sarah was partially blind and alone in the house on that day in February, 1932. It is thought that she turned on the gas stove and her shawl probably caught fire.

She most likely whirled around hitting at the shawl and, thereby ignited other things in the room.

A second son, Oliver Merritt, and his family lived next door. They saw the smoke and called the fireman.

The fire was put out, but finding Sarah was another matter. She could not be located.

Everyone said she was blind and never went anywhere, so she couldn't have left the house.

The fireman finally gave up and started to leave. On the way out they found her - pushed behind the front door.

Again the best guess is that she made her way to the front door but died there and when the front door was pushed open, she was shoved behind it and not seen.

I was only four years old at the time, so I do not remember her at all.

The piano, however, is still in my mother's house at 1718 Ellamont St. It was given to my father, and I was taught Rachmoninoff, Beethoven and Chopin on its keys.

To digress a little, for two years preceeding this I had been listening to the tales of a writer named Alex Haley on radio and television and reading articles about his research.

I eagerly devoured the story of his "roots".

My interest in my own roots was developing so I began to do a little research in the Pratt Library.

The Maryland Room of the main branch contained copies of the Baltimore City Directory from 1963 on back to 1796.

For a long time on Saturdays, I commuted between the Maryland Room and Microfilm Reading Room eagerly studying the AFRO and tracing my ancestors in the City Directory.

I found myself in the 1965 Directory listed - MERRITT, BERTRAM L. TEACHER P.S. No. 130 H 3503 ROSEDALE ROAD, and then followed my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents back as far as I could.

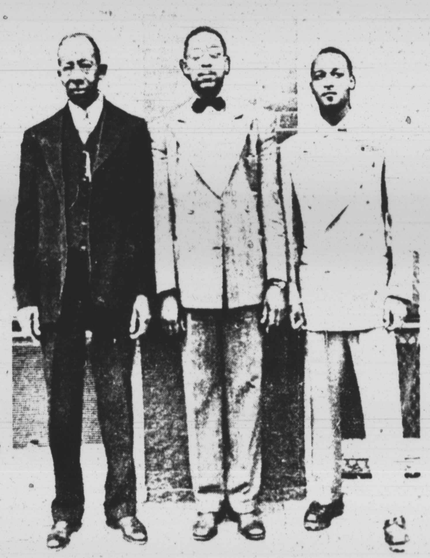
some branches of my family back to 1840 in the Directory and to 1835 on my wife's side.

It was most interesting to find that my ancestors resided in Baltimore back that far and, moreover, were free. Since the Directory only listed "free householders" the inclusion of my ancestors in the book automatically signified their freedom.

I had traced my father's family back to about 1900, until I saw my grandfather, Eugene Merritt, living in the same house with a Gabriel Merritt. I did not know who Gabriel was, but I surmised that it must have been his father or an older brother.

I knew nothing of the art of genealogy at the time, and I did not know where else to go. I was tracing my roots as best I knew. More Next Week

THE PHOTO THAT STARTED IT ALL — Bertram Merritt, the author, re-photographed this Merritt family photo which was taken in 1884. From the 96-year old picture came his interest in further searching for his "roots." (L to R) are Oliver Merritt, Della Merritt, Sharah Merritt, Mozella Merritt, Gabriel Merritt, Clarence Merritt and Eugene Merritt, "my grandfather" of whom Bertram writes.



LAST PHOTO of Eugene Merritt, oldest son of Gabriel Merritt taken in 1951 when Bertram Merritt was a senior at Morgan College. Eugene Merritt died in May, 1951. (L to R) are Eugene Merritt who died in 1951; Betram Merritt Sr. who died in 1974 and Bertram Merritt Jr.

HAVE ANY STORIES OR PHOTOS?

When AFRO was a kid in the 1890's

By Elizabeth M. Oliver, City Editor

AFRO microfilm files at the Pratt Library show happenings from the AFRO's birth Aug. 1892 on through the period when the AFRO was a kid in a four page newspaper and up to the 88th year.

AFRO's is therefore a files and archives. [illegible] AFRO's [illegible] ever, we need to have more and more.

Wouldn't you like to add your family to these historic pages. How about your old family photos from long ago? Let us hear from you.

WRITE Elizabeth M. Oliver, City Editor, AFRO, 628 N. Dolaw St., Baltimore, Md. 21201. There is no charge. Be sure to give specific information and return address and phone number. All must be in writing. Do Not Call.

A LITTLE BOY OF THE LATE 1800s

ANOTHER NOTED FAMILY

Mrs. Addie Bumbry was 88 years when she died

Mrs. Addie Bumbry Scranage of King George, Va., was 88 when she died June 14. She was born in 1892, the same year as the AFRO's birthday.

Her obituary read at the June 17 funeral at Greater New Little Ark Baptist Church, Owens, Va., reveals many members of her family are Baltimoreans and persons now residing on the East Coast and across the United States.

Among them is the Oriole star Al Bumbry, a nephew; Mrs. Sylvia Cooper, niece, a Baltimore court commissioner; Dr. Cecelia DeFord, daughter of Mrs. Rachel Pryor Eaton, who is a Harvard U. graduate and member of the diplomatic pool in Washington.

Movie star Richard Pryor is also a relative as well as Baltimoreans England Pryor, Nelson Pryor Jr., Louis and Herbert Eaton.

Mrs. Scranage was the daughter of James P. and Mary Bumbry of King George County, Va. and was an active member of the Little Ark church over 75 years. Her husband of 65 years, Edward B. Scranage, survives her.

Mrs. Scranage's grave is in the cemetery beside the historic church where many of the Bumbrys are buried. Col. Nelson Pryor, Mrs. Rachel DeFord's father, is buried in Arlington Cemetery beside President John F. Kennedy.

Over 500 close relatives filled one side of the church at the last rites.

The deceased woman, Mrs. Scranage, had seven children, Juanita Washington, Clara Bland, Charles Scranage, Perry Scranage, Mary Clark, Margie Bumbry and Pansy Bumbry.

Also three sisters, Mamie Scranage, Stafford, Va.; Lucy Bumbry Thomas, Baltimore; Maude Culloway, Philadelphia; four brothers, Lomax Bumbry, Matthew Bumbry, James Bumbry (formerly a Baltimore restaurant owner) all of King George County and Woodrow Bumbry of Washington.

Other relatives are Nathaniel Washington, James Bland, Frank Clark, Richard Bumbry and William Bumbry, also of King George.

And Rev. Virginia Bumbry, King George; Lillian Bumbry and Sarah Bumbry, Washington; Rev. Irvin Bumbry and Rev. George Bumbry, Upper Marlboro, Md.

Also surviving are 21 grandchildren, 29 great grandchildren and over 100 nieces and nephews. Pallbearers were her grandsons, Donald Scranage, Perry Scranage, Sterling Bumbry, Richard Bumbry Jr. and Frank Clark II. Rev. John W. Chapman officiated at the church and graveside services.

THE AUTHOR, Bertram Merritt, is shown looking over logs from the Civil War ships on which his great grandfather served during the Civil War. They were brown and dusty but interesting in the Reading Room of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Captain Milton S. Taylor

Corporal Edward P. Brown

Corporal William H. Arrington

3 state troopers promoted

State Police commandant Col. Thomas S. Smith recently announced the promotions of three state troopers who were promoted to captain and corporal.

Milton S. Taylor, who was formerly first lieutenant was promoted to captain and assigned to field operations bureau. He was appointed to the state police July 1937 and after graduating from the police academy was assigned to the investigation division.

Captain Taylor was named assistant commander of the automotive safety enforcement division in November 1978. While working in the field operations bureau, he will be responsible for the primary patrol and investigative functions performed by 75 percent of the uniformed force throughout the various barracks and posts across the state. He is the highest ranking black state police officer.

William H. Arrington, who was a former trooper first class was promoted to corporal. He was appointed to the state police in September 1974 and after his basic training was transferred to the John F. Kennedy Memorial Highway.

Corporal Arrington worked on the Kennedy Highway until promoted to trooper first class in October 1977. The Kennedy Highway barrack is responsible for the interstate travel of the north and south corridors encompassing the counties of Baltimore, Harford and Cecil.

Edward P. Brown was appointed to the state police in July 1973 and was assigned as trooper first class to the Annapolis Barrack for routine patrol after graduation.

In August 1976, he was transferred to the Prince Frederick Post and two months later. In October 1979 Trooper First Class Brown was transferred to the personnel management division in Pikesville and took on responsibility of a recruiter.

Brown, who was promoted to corporal has received letters of appreciation and is married and has two children.

Council crushes gay rights bill

Harvey Schwartz says the City Council betrayed him and other gays by killing a bill that would have outlawed discrimination against homosexuals.

"They are telling us to go back in the closet," said Schwartz, director of the Gay Community Center. "We will have to lead double lives. If we try to be honest, we could be fired from our jobs or disenfranchised."

Schwartz was among nearly 200 gays who filled the council gallery Monday to watch a measure that would have outlawed discrimination by sexual preference die in committee.

A few gays cried after the bill was killed, and Gail Vivino, their chief lobbyist, vowed to reintroduce it.

Frank Gallagher, Judiciary Committee chairman, spoke for many opposed to the bill when he said enacting it would be equivalent to dictating a moral code for employers.

He also said school superintendent John L. Crew feared the bill would make it impossible to fire homosexual teachers who attempt to "indoctrinate" their students.

The Judiciary Committee reported unfavorably on the bill, which would have banned discrimination against gays in employment, public accommodation, health and welfare, and the council voted 12 - 6 to accept the report.

Ten council members, enough votes for passage, sponsored the bill, but many votes were changed by what some members called the strongest attempt to defeat a bill in memory.

Religious leaders said at public hearings that approving the bill would legitimize behavior they consider immoral. They also called or wrote most councilmembers asking them to vote against the measure.

The issue generated such controvery that Council President Walter Orlinsky banned television and still cameras from the meeting on grounds they might prompt a disturbance.

"People resist change, but there is nothing more constant than change. (The issue) will rise again and again and when the time is right this bill will pass."

Mrs. Adams was joined by the bill's chief sponsor, Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, in denouncing the council action.

"This bill is a civil rights issue. It makes no moral judgment," Ms. Clarke said. "The guarantee of civil rights for any group of citizens strengthens the civil rights of all citizens."

But Frank Gallagher, Judiciary Committee chairman, spoke for those against the bill when he said employers who morally oppose homosexuality should not be forced by law to accept it.

Councilman Clark Fitzgerald, one of the few "no" votes who chose to speak, added, "I am being asked to approve something that is totally against natural law."

A supporter of the measure, Council Thomas Waxter, said "The natural order of things is diversity. This city has got to come to the point where we give people who don't look or think like us a fair shake."

Baltimore food prices up

Grocery prices in the Baltimore area jumped 1.4 percent in June, the largest monthly increase since January, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Wednesday.

The rise means Baltimore - area consumers paid 6.8 percent more for groceries last month than they did a year ago. Groceries that cost $10 in 1967 now costs $24.98, officials said.

Alvin Margulis, the bureau's regional commissioner, said higher fruit and vegetable prices are the chief cause of the price rise. Produce cost 4.6 percent more in June than in May, led by higher prices of oranges, apples and potatoes.

Meats, poultry and fish rose 1.4 percent in June, led by big boosts in chuck roast, ham and pork chops. Chicken prices also increased as the heat wave in the southwest killed an estimated 8 million to 10 million chickens, and agriculture industry officials warn poultry prices in Maryland will go higher.

But despite the increases, the price of meat, poultry and fish are 1.4 percent lower than a year ago, Margulis said.

Hughes won't can Spector

Barring "unforeseen circumstances," District Judge Allen B. Spector will stay on the bench while he appeals his bribery conviction.

Gene Oishi, a spokesman for Gov. Harry Hughes said this week the governor has no plans to dismiss Spector while he appeals his conviction.

"Lacking any unforeseen circumstances, the governor is inclined to wait until the appeals process is over," Oishi said. But he added "It is the governor's expectation that during the appeals process that Judge Spector will perform no judicial functions."

Spector and two co-defendants were given two - year suspended sentences Monday and fined $15,000 each for their roles in a bribery scheme involving the granting of sewer permits during a 1974 - 75 Baltimore County sewer moratorium.

The three men, including co-defendants Maurice R. Wyatt and Donald H. Noren, have notified Howard County Circuit Judge James MacGill they will appeal.

Attorney General Stephen Sachs ruled Hughes could immediately suspend Spector and appoint a replacement, but Oishi said the governor believes such an action could create a serious problem if Spector's conviction is overturned.

Oishi said Hughes had not discussed that "expectation" with either Spector or his attorney, but that the governor may discuss it with Chief District Court Judge Robert Sweeney.

"He won't want to interfere with the Judicial Administration, but he would like to be informed as to what Judge Sweeney has in mind," Oishi said.

At the time of the alleged bribery scheme, Spector was a member of the Baltimore City Council.

Wyatt was then appointments secretary for former Gov. Marvin Mandel, and Noren an assistant attorney general assigned to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

In suspending their sentences, MacGill said imposing prison terms would have been a "vindictive act."

BILL SIGNING CEREMONY — A law to expedite discrimination complaints against state agencies has been signed into law by the governor. Pictured are front row, (L to R) Senate President James Clark, Gov. Harry Hughes and House Speaker Benjamin Cardin. Second row includes (L to R) Delegate Sylvania Woods; Human Relations Commission Executive Director David Glenn; Sen. Edward Conroy; Curtis Johnson, executive director AFSCME Council 92 and Sen. Tommie Broadwater.

Carlton is lowest.

Carlton Box— lowest of all brands, Less than 0.01 mg. tar, 0.002 mg. nic.

Carlton 100's Box— lowest of all 100's, 1 mg. tar, 0.1 mg. nic.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

Make the best of the rest of your summer.

Plan your fall schedule today!

✓Over 800 graduate and undergraduate courses begin September 3.

✓Special Saturday class schedule is now available.

✓Convenient mail registration deadline is August 1.

✓Call 321-2022 for schedule information.

Division of Continuing Studies & Graduate School

TOWSON

United. The only nonstops going.

DENVER

The friendly skies are your fastest way west to Denver from Baltimore.

Our earliest nonstop leaves for the Mile-High City every morning at 7:35. And arrives in Denver at 9:10 a.m.—with the better part of the day still ahead of you.

For information and reservations, call your Travel Agent. Or call United at 766-7600.

Partners in Travel with Western International Hotels.

Nonstop to Denver

Leave	Arrive	Flight #
7:35 a.m.	9:10 a.m.	213
6:20 p.m.	8:05 p.m.	177

And back

Leave	Arrive	Flight #
11:10 a.m.	1:50 p.m.	163
4:45 p.m.	6:45 p.m.	121

Schedules subject to change.

Get aboard little nonstop.

Fly the friendly skies of United.

Call United or your Travel Agent.