

Editor's Musings

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Far too few of us, who by mere quirk of parental fate became members of what was called the White Race, can ever begin to understand the challenges those with parents of African American ancestry encounter in the search for their roots. The story so eloquently told in the epic series “Roots” is a very rare one. Most of today’s Black American citizens will forever be limited to learning some very basic facts about only a few earlier generations of their family.

Many of us frequently toss around the phrase “brick wall”. I submit that most researchers will never sense the lonely “Black Hole” of a total records vacuum. In my genealogy classes over the past years an occasional participant of African American ancestry caused me to more directly address this challenge. I was also inspired to personally take on a bothersome uncertainty about the lady lovingly holding my own elder daughter in this photograph made in 1961.

I always knew her as Seelie Cheek. As a youth, I played with her grandchildren who lived on a nearby farm. But just who was Seelie, this lady who had worked for three generations of my family, and was now holding a fourth? Who was her family? I now had to know. Armed with the skills so many of us develop to locate obscure records and form stories from them, I was able to learn about some of Seelie’s ancestry: She was born Celia Golston on 13 Mar 1886. I found the names of her parents and husband, and her siblings’ names - when she died and where she is buried.

But I was not able to go back beyond her grandparents, both born in the 1820’s. There all records of this family stopped. I came to personally feel that deep frustration of likely never being able to know more. I do take some comfort that I had belatedly learned some of the ancestry of this great lady, and know she would have been grateful for my preservation of that part of her heritage. I now proudly include her family in my collection as tiny repayment for all Seelie did for mine. Is there a Seelie in your life? Have you researched her? Might it enrich your genealogy skills, and your life to try?

- **Bill Kivett**