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## The Search for My Roots

Karen L. Williams

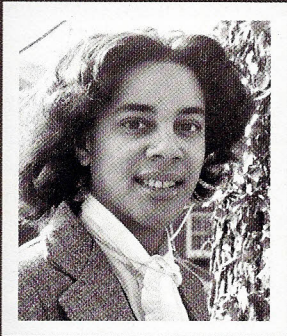
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**By Karen L. Williams**

3

In early 1977, I enrolled in Dr. J. Carleton Hayden's "Introduction to Black History" course at Howard University to learn more about myself and my people. In class, Dr. Hayden gave a detailed lecture on how a family history can be assembled. He outlined the numerous resources that the class might consult in doing the project.

At the end of the lecture, a feeling of excitement and anxiety engulfed me. I telephoned my parents to tell them about the class project, and they agreed to assist me.

On March 11, 1977, exactly 64 years after my paternal grandfather purchased his farm, I journeyed to the courthouse of Warren County, North Carolina, with my parents—Lessie Branch and Barkley Williams. We spent 10 hours gathering priceless deeds, marriage certificates, and records of land purchases. My parents were overcome with mixed emotions as they recalled their meager beginnings in Shocco township—the Jim Crow laws of their youth.

My journey to Warren County was the first of a series of visits to numerous libraries and museums, such as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the Warren County Public Library and the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, Delaware. I spent many more hours with my grandmother, Mrs. Lucinda Alston Branch, now of Washington, D.C., asking questions about the people she knew and the places she had been. I also interviewed my maternal great-uncle, Jerome E. Branch, a retired school principal who lives in Warren County. He too gave me invaluable information.

As a result of this extensive research, my father is now constructing a family heritage room in our home in Chesapeake, Virginia. Additionally, he has built a dollhouse replica of the famous Montmorenci Mansion where my foreparents lived as slaves. In doing this family history I have acquired an intense desire to know more about my true African roots.

# *The Search For My Roots*

4 Chapter I  
Building Site One

**I**n 1805, at the turn of the 19th century, the building site for the Branch family had its beginning. To slave parents whose names are unknown, a male child was born. He was named Elijah, a name that was symbolic of strength and endurance. Old slave master William Alston grinned from ear to ear as another baby was added to his lot.

Nestled among the large oak trees in Fort Township of Warren County, North Carolina, was the Alston plantation. It was here that Elijah and other slave boys and girls fought over the crusts and crumbs from massa's table. It was here also that Elijah, half-naked with only a big coarse shirt to cover his body, tried to escape the lashes of Alston's whip.

Too young to go into the fields, Elijah would steal away from the big yard and catch minnows and fish from creeks that bore such names as Sixpound, Stonehouse, Shocco, Hubquarter, Possumquarten, Nutbush and Hawtree.

Life was rugged for Elijah. From day break 'til late evening, he chopped, hoed, sowed, gathered corn, made shingles and did any other work imaginable. Most days he ate nothing until noon. Long wintery days were spent in the forest, where he felled oak trees with an axe. Night time found Elijah, trudging toward his slave quarters, where only the bare ground waited for him to sleep on.

To relax his weary muscles, Elijah would often slip away next door to the slave quarters of Doctor Bennett Alston's plantation. Hedges of wild flowers stretched for acres between the two plantations.

Mighty names in big houses and little houses controlled Warren County. Slave owners were among them, although only three Warren County masters owned more than 100 slaves. Fifty-five planters owned 20 or more slaves, the rest had fewer.

William Alston, Elijah's master, owned 105 slaves.

Elijah was a good singer and often amused himself by singing. Late at night, he would steal away to visit a female friend. As he strolled along, he would sing, "Goo-Gawd, Goo-Gawd, Goo-Gawd, Ah my ta." The next morning, as Elijah reached the gate of the big house, massa would peel out the same melody, "Good-God, Good-God, Good God, Almighty." Trembling with fear that he might be beaten for leaving the plantation unauthorized, Elijah would plead: "Naw sa massa, I a'nt gonno leev no mo."

The seasons came and went. Elijah was blessed with a baby son. Massa Alston smiled, again. Each new slave added to his property. Elijah named his son Essac. Little Essac never knew his mother, only that she had been sent to another plantation. Often he would ask Elijah, "whar's me mammy?" "Don no, she lef after suckling you fo a wek," Elijah would reply. Slave women were given no preference when it came to work or breeding. One week was all the rest-time allowed after the birth of a child.

Essac spent his early years keeping all the sticks and leaves from the yard. At times he'd watch Elijah and other slaves cut timber from the woods or roll logs from the forest. One day the cruelest of things happened to Essac. He was sold to the Branches on a plantation in Vance County. He never saw Elijah again.

As the Civil War approached, Essac experienced new problems. Peace, honor and safety of the planters had been endangered; South Carolina had seceded from the Union; North Carolina was next. Drums rolled down the streets of Warren and little boys cheered while white women wept. Slave women were frightened, yet Essac and the other slave men remained loyal to their mistress while massa was away in the army. It was during this period that Essac married a young slave girl named Sina. Their marriage was a kind of ritualistic ceremony in which the man gave a brass ring or a

toy to the woman. But the slave holder did not recognize marriage between slaves, meaning if a woman bore no children after two or three years, the man was forced to take a second or even a third wife.

The Civil War ended, and the slaves gained their freedom. Thus Essac took his wife and moved to Franklin County, where a son, Collie Benjamin, was born. "Thanks de Lawd! Thanks de Lawd," said Sina. "My chile is free." "Old massa can't wor him fo nothin no mo." A few years later Sina died and Collie was left alone with his father.

When Collie became a young man, he met and later married Emily Alston. She was 16 years old. He was 19. Her father, Ned Alston, was old Doctor Bennett Alston's slave. Her mother, Martha, was a strong woman with arms as large as a water bucket. Emily was born shortly after her parents gained their freedom, and they were thankful that their daughter did not have to undergo the torture and harshness of slavery.

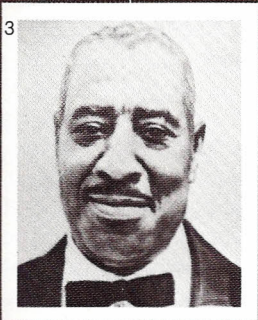
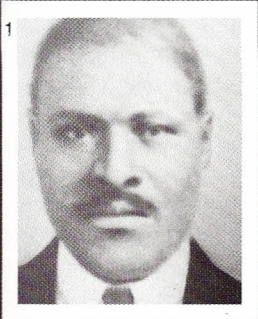
Collie and Emily Branch began life together in 1889 in Franklin County, where their children were born. But they moved to Warren County in 1913 and bought a farm there. Their fifth child and third son was named Otha. They called him "O" for short. For some reason "O" did not walk until he was four. This gave Essac, his grandfather, something to do. Having been a skilled carpenter as a slave, Essac built a go-cart for his grandson and taught "O" how to walk by rolling the cart.

Collie was strong, robust and energetic. Each day, he and his seven boys made their way to the cotton, corn or tobacco fields. Logs had to be cut for building cribs, smoke houses and stables that were needed on the farm. The girls were strong workers, too. Most of them picked more than 200 pounds of cotton a day.

Collie and Emily followed the old custom of sending their girls to school, rather than their sons. It is not known from where this custom originated as it was the tradi-

# Maternal Ancestry

- 1 Collie Branch, g-grandfather
- 2 Emily Alston Branch, g-grandmother
- 3 Otha Branch, grandfather
- 4 Lucinda Alston Branch, grandmother
- 5 Lessie Branch Williams, mother



tion of the whites to educate their sons instead of their daughters. 5

For 21 years, Otha worked with his father. The family acquired a larger farm, a well-furnished two-story house, several horses, buggies, carriages and later automobiles. The girls went away to school; two became teachers, one a registered nurse, one died while in school at age 22, and two dropped out and got married. Only one of the sons completed college.

Becoming tired of working with his father without acquiring anything for himself, Otha moved out on his own. He met and married a young Franklin County girl, Cindy Alston, who had a reputation as one of the prettiest girls in the county.

As one moves from Building Site One to Building Site Two, one can see how the cycle continues to evolve from one site to another.

6 *Chapter II*  
**Building Site Two**

**W**arren County in 1790 was the only county in North Carolina that had more slaves than free men and women. Fifty five families had more than 20 slaves each. William Alston had 105 and William Williams 42. It was on these two last plantations that the Williams Alston families had their roots.

In early spring, Elijah's mother gave birth to another male child, property of massa Alston. This young boy was called Dock. I am not certain why he was given this name unless it was short for slave master Doctor Bennett Alston. Dock grew up on the banks of Shocco Creek. He, like his brother Elijah, at Building Site One, sawed trees, drove oxen and performed other chores. Dock became the father of several children, his favorite being his oldest daughter, Rosetta. Quiet, small and humble was his nature—probably to avoid the lashes of his massa's whip. Dock withered the storms of slavery and withstood the hardship of the Civil War as well as the auction block. But one of the hardest blows of all was to see his favorite daughter give birth to a half-white child. He was named Eddie. Dock was petrified. He screamed when he saw the baby: "Dey say dis is a yankie's babe." "He can't sta in ma hous." For seven years, the boy had a very hard time. He was beaten often without reason and was made to stay hungry and ragged simply because he appeared to have been "white." His grandfather resented him completely. It could have been because he hated the image of the white man—his cruelty and brutality, or he hated the thought of the humiliation that his daughter may have suffered at the hands of the white man.

When Eddie was seven, he was rescued from his grandfather by the white family for whom Rosetta worked, Sam Hayes and Mrs. Lott. Eddie spent the rest of his

childhood there. He slept at the foot of Mrs. Lott's bed until he was 14, later moved to the attic and stayed there until he got married.

Eddie was aggressive and quick-tempered. When Sam Hayes, who had a peg leg, once attempted to whip him, Eddie grabbed him by his good leg and carried him all over the yard. You never heard such screaming. "You stop it Eddie, you stop it."

Leaving Mrs. Lott's home as a young man, Eddie married a quiet, young girl by the name of Minerva Williams. She was the daughter of Lucinda Williams, a slave from the "Pretty Billy" Williams plantation, which had a mansion called the Montmorenci. The Montmorenci, built in 1825, had a magnificent spiral staircase that was admired by all. It was the most magnificent of all the houses in that part of the county.

Eddie and Minerva started a new life together at the same farm where he was reared, at a time when the whites were still trying to hold on to their "supremacy." They struggled against all odds to raise a family. Verland Juanita, a bright-eyed and curly-haired baby girl, was born in 1901. Each successive 13 or 14 months, a new baby cried in their log cabin. To help feed his family, it became necessary for Eddie to find employment elsewhere.

#### **Tragedy and Disappointment**

Eddie joined a railroad crew and went to Richmond, Virginia. Minerva was left behind to care for the babies. One cold winter morning, Minerva left her infant child in bed and her three-year-old toddling around in the room and went across the field to a neighbor's house to get some food for herself and her babies. She was gone for only a short time, but upon her return she saw a spark of fire and frantically ran toward the spot. There she found her, daughter Verland with all her clothes burned. Only the neckband around her dress remained. She took Verland in the house, wrapped her body in a blanket and carried Verland's body and

the baby in her arms for three miles to the home of her uncle and aunt. Friends and neighbors prepared the body for burial. They dressed Verland in a long white gown and laid her in a cloth-lined box. She was buried the next day in the family cemetery.

The night before Verland died, her father had a dream. He saw her running toward him in a blaze of fire, screaming "Papa, Papa." He awoke just as she reached him. This worried him. He caught the next train home. After reaching the depot, he walked several miles to his sharecropper cabin, where upon his arrival, he was met by the mourners who were returning from the cemetery.

Minerva never got over her oldest child's death. Throughout the years, she would always say to her other children, especially her daughters, "Never leave your little chillun 'lone in the house. If you ha to leave them, put plenti of clothes on them and leev them in the ya'd. They may git cold, but they won't burn to death."

Eddie was determined to make a living for his family from the farm. His girls, all being the oldest, had to work hard. There was little time for schooling. Cindy, Tera and Eula sawed wood, cleared new grounds for additional farm land and helped with the small children.

In Franklin County, the soil was sandy. It produced an excellent quality of tobacco—a money crop. Sam Hayes and Mrs. Lott watched with pride as success came to Eddie and his family. Each day found Mrs. Lott headed toward their house in her big white apron, bearing homemade cookies for the children of Eddie and Minerva.

#### **A Dream That Failed**

For 20 years, Eddie and Minerva worked hard and saved their money. Their hope was to buy the farm and two-story house in which they lived, and eventually to build a comfortable home. Crops had sold well, World War I was at its peak, and everything was booming. Because they were not familiar with banking, they kept

their savings of \$2,000 in a small metal box inside a trunk in their bedroom. The money was sufficient for building a new house. But fate did not have it so. An epidemic of influenza struck in 1918-1919, and spread quickly throughout the country.

In mid-January, 1919, Minerva and her daughter, Cindy, were washing when Minerva, who was then seven months pregnant, said: "Cindy, you is so weakly, I hope you don't get dis flu." They next day Cindy was stricken. Not too long after that, Minerva also caught the flu. For three or four days, Minerva was at the point of death. Her moans could be heard constantly, but when they ceased, Cindy's three-year-old brother came to her bedside and said: "Cinday, Mama is dead." In a weak voice, Cindy replied, "Go away from my bed." Later in the day, Tera went into her mother's bedroom. Suddenly, Cindy heard Tera scream. Falling out of the bed and crawling on her knees, Cindy rushed into the room crying; "What's the matter, Tera? What's the matter, Tera?" All she could hear was Tera saying: "Papa you ain't got no wife now. Papa we ain't got no mama now." Her father said, "Stop Tera, don't tell me that." Cindy made it to her mother's bed, pulled the white sheet back and saw a glimpse of her mother's forehead before she was stopped and put back in her bed.

That dreadful disease caused 20 million lives, including Minerva's. "The doctor gave her too much morphine!" neighbors exclaimed. But the influenza, coupled with pneumonia and the birth of a child, were too much for the weakened body of Minerva. She was 39.

Late in the day, the hearse came to carry Minerva's body away. To console Cindy and the rest of the family, the undertaker said: "Don't cry chillun, don't cry. You ain't the only motherless children. I have buried four mothers and five other people today." It was February. But because of the scope of the influenza epidemic, Minerva's funeral was not held until May. After the funeral, the family be-

gan to reshape its life. Eddie attempted to go on with his plans to build a new home. To his amazement and disappointment, he found an empty trunk when he reached for his savings. It had slipped away during the family's illness and tragedy. One can only guess what may have happened to the money.

Life became a continuing struggle. Cindy stayed home for two more years. All hopes were shattered. To make a better life, Cindy and Tera slipped away on December 23, 1920 and got married. Thus ended the saga of Building Site Two.

8 *Chapter III*  
**Building Site Three**

**A**s sites are chosen, trees grow. Each tree springs roots, branches, leaves and foliage. Again, on the Williams plantation, the Montmorenci acquired another group of Black slaves—slaves born as chattel to be ill-fed and poorly clothed, born to make “Pretty Billy” Williams richer. The slave parents of Cid and Randall Williams helped build the Montmorenci.

Cid and Randall were born around 1860, just before the Civil War. After their marriage, Cid gave birth to her only child, a son named Nelson. Unfortunately, Randall Williams died before his son’s birth.

Cid struggled trying to rear her child. The Draper family of Warrenton, N.C., took her in. Here Nelson spent his early life until he married Sadie Hubbard, who lost her mother at a very early age. Her only recollection was that she remembers her mother lying in the floor as Sadie and her 18-month-old brother cried, trying to awaken their mother when a neighbor heard them and came to see what had happened. She found Fannie Jones Hubbard dead at age 33. Her body was brought to Warrenton on a wagon, the family followed on another wagon. She was buried in the Warrenton cemetery in 1893.

Nelson and his wife Sadie lived on a farm that he purchased in 1913, where their eight children were born. A carpenter, Nelson was also civic-minded and served as the president of John R. Hawkins High School P.T.A. and as a Sunday School teacher at Spring Green Baptist Church for 30 years. Sadie remained a housewife.

On several occasions during financial crisis, Nelson would go elsewhere for employment. One person who helped Sadie and her family during financial needs was her brother, John Hubbard, a former real estate broker in Newport News, Virginia.

He lost all of his holdings after World War I and left Virginia for Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked as a janitor for the People’s Life Insurance Company. Later he became vice president of the same company, followed by his election in 1933 as Cleveland’s first Black city councilman. He died in 1936 at the age of 51, years after he purchased a home for \$30,000 and sent his two sons—Nathaniel and John Jr.—to Washington, D. C. to be educated at Howard University.

### **The Foundation**

December 23, 1920 was cold yet festive with the approaching of Christmas. The homes were decorated with holly and pines. Fresh-scented cedar and the aroma of oven-baked cakes and pies filled the air. Amid the hustle and bustle of shoppers, Otha and Cindy made their way to the courthouse in Henderson, North Carolina, where they exchanged marriage vows. As a new bride, Cindy came to her mother-in-law’s home in Shocco Township. She romped, roamed the pastures and played hide-and-seek with Otha’s younger sisters and brothers while they grazed the cows.

In the Branch home, everyone admired Cindy’s waist-length hair. Whenever a neighbor or a friend came in, Emily, the mother-in-law, would say: “Com’ here. Look at dis chile’s hair. It’s kleen down her back.”

At first it was a pleasure being a new member of the Branch household. Having lost her own mother, Cindy was happy to have a mother-in-law, but she soon learned that a mother-in-law was not a substitute for a real mother. Within a few months, Otha and Cindy moved out to a small three-room rented house. Cindy was very happy. But nine months later, her happiness was shattered. Her favorite sister, who had eloped and married on the same day as Cindy, died after one day’s illness. This void was not filled until seven months later when Cindy gave birth to a son. He was named William Collie, after his grandfather—C. B. was his

nickname. Two years after C. B. was born, Lessie followed. She was the second child and the first daughter.

When Lessie was 11-months-old, Otha moved his family in the old slave holder’s mansion, the Montmorenci, by then a century-old building but still a center of attraction.

Life was a constant struggle for Otha and Cindy. In 1926, their third daughter was born. In addition to their own children, it became their responsibility to assume the guardianship of Cindy’s 10 sisters and brothers, after the family home burned and Cindy’s father had to leave town to find work. Fifteen months later, Cindy gave birth to her second son and fourth child.

Becoming frustrated over endless sharecropping, Otha ventured out and bought his first farm. This was in late 1920. He toiled for several years before the Depression hit. He struggled for a while and then travelled to Baltimore and Washington, D. C., to find a better place for his family. By this time Cindy’s sisters and brothers had gone out on their own—with the exception of two.

In 1931, a fifth child—a baby girl—was born. Times were not better. The stock market had crashed, soup and bread lines were forming all over the nation. It appeared all hope had ended.

### **Crisis of the Depression**

The Branch family, as did millions others, suffered with the crash of the stock market. The American farmers received very low prices for their products and many farms were lost. Banks closed as the United States encountered the most acute industrial depression in history.

New hope did not come for the people until 1932 when Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President of the United States and initiated his New Deal program.

Collie and Emily lost the large farm and all other assets. But they were able to manage with the help of their son and daughter who were employed as teachers.



Emily Alston Branch

for her younger sisters as well as being responsible for all household chores, including cooking.

A very unusual thing occurred when Lessie was in the fifth grade. She remembers receiving her report card at the end of the first six-week period. The card had been filled out for the entire year with nothing but A's. A classmate exclaimed: "Lessie, how can you have all those A's and the year haven't even ended!" Lessie, being quiet and humble, did not reply.

Between cleaning, cooking and working in the field, Lessie and her sister Elnora did find time to play with their homemade dolls in their imaginary doll houses. For doll babies, Lessie and Elnora dressed railroad spikes, and used wide-blossomed dandelions as parasols.

Cindy sent her children to church and Sunday school regularly. After church, it was customary for Otha, his immediate family and all his sisters, brothers and their children, to gather at Collie and Emily's house for Sunday fellowship. This activity continued until Collie, the family patriarch, died on February 6, 1941.

Lessie also remembers very well when her family bought its first radio. It was just before the Joe Louis-Max Schemeling bout. All the neighbors gathered in the Branch yard to listen to the fight. Radios were a rarity then, especially among Black people. With eagerness, everyone waited to hear Joe Louis knock Schemeling out, as Schemeling had been the only fighter to knock Louis out in a previous fight.

Otha was an aggressive and hard working man. He and Cindy kept their determination to succeed. In 1943, Lessie, their oldest daughter, enrolled at Winston-Salem Teachers College. She graduated in 1947 with a degree in education. Even though she had good potential in English, French, mathematics and science, her high school principal advised her mother to send Lessie to a teachers college. He said that it was much easier to find employment as a teacher. The following year, Elnora entered North Carolina College at

Durham. Only Grace and Raymond remained at home; C. B. had gotten married.

With all the children away from home, Otha and Cindy could no longer handle the farm. They left Warren County and settled in Washington, D.C. In 1952, Raymond, the youngest son, died of a kidney failure at the Walter Reed Hospital. And in 1968, Otha followed. Cindy still lives in the home, at 209 Randolph Place, N.E. Her oldest and only surviving son, C. B., died in 1974, leaving behind four children.

#### The Doors—Lessie and Barkley

Lessie Branch and Barkley Williams were high school classmates in Warren County. However, they did not become close friends until their junior year.

One night Lessie spent the evening with her uncle, who was principal at a school near the community where Barkley lived. To Lessie's surprise, Barkley stopped by to see her that night. When the uncle saw Lessie's mother, he teasingly chuckled, "Cindy, you will like Lessie's new boyfriend. His mother has hair half-way down her back. He's the kind that you will like. Ha! Ha!"

From a beautiful moonshine night on August 29, 1947 to this day, Lessie and Barkley have traveled life's road together. The road has been narrow, dusty and curvy, but in spite of it they have been able to steer the vehicle along the middle.

Ten months after their marriage, Orlando, their first son, was born in June, 1948. Living in a small four-room house that belonged to St. James Episcopal Church, Lessie dressed Orlando each morning while Barkley prepared breakfast. Off to Sadie's house, the baby was shuffled, while Lessie drove 10 miles to her teaching job. During this same year, with timber from Otha's farm, Lessie and Barkley built the Franklin Street Restaurant. For a while, business was good. Then came 1950, and the bottom began to fall out. The road became more crooked, the curves more sharper. Barkley's father, Nelson, passed suddenly; Lessie was pregnant and maternity leave was un-

With the help of his sisters, Otha let his first farm go and redeemed his parents' farm and moved in with his family in 1937. It was on this farm that Otha and Cindy's five children continued their education in public schools before going off to college.

Lessie, the oldest daughter, was quiet, yet alert. For each successive year during her elementary schooling, she received awards for being top student in her class. At the end of her fourth grade session, Lessie was given 25 cents as a token reward. Later, at the end of each elementary grade, she received one dollar.

Because of the ill-health of her mother, Lessie had to assume the role of caring



10 heard of, the restaurant business was declining and there were no good jobs available for Barkley.

Lessie's parents found it necessary to sell their farm and move to Washington, D.C. Otha had no one left to help him plant and harvest the crops. Hired labor was too costly. 1950 was a bad year for Lessie and Barkley. With no other alternative, Lessie resigned from her teaching job at the Warren County Training School and moved with Barkley to Portsmouth, Virginia, in August 1951. They settled on Green Street and Barkley got a job at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

All through high school, Barkley's ambition was to become a mortician. But due to lack of funds, he had to settle for work in the shipyard, where he became a shipfitter at the age of 18. The fact that all of Barkley's brothers, as well as his father, were carpenters may have influenced his choice of work.

On October 5, 1951, Lessie gave birth to her second child, Vernon. Both Lessie and Barkley were hoping for a daughter. In fact, they had chosen the name "Marnne Dejan." But Vernon surprised them. After the baby was old enough, Lessie took a job as a substitute teacher. Full-time teaching jobs in the Portsmouth School system were hard to get in those days without the recommendations of influential people or professional organizations. Lessie was aware of the fact that she did not fit either category, and continued to substitute until the spring of 1952. Upon the death in 1952 of her brother, Raymond, at the age of 24, as a result of kidney ailment, she traveled to Washington, D. C. for his funeral.

After the funeral, Lessie returned to Portsmouth and participated in a workshop for teachers that was sponsored by the School Board. As a culminating activity for Lessie's group, she summarized the whole workshop in poetic form. The summary so impressed the supervisor that she immediately went to Lessie and asked her where she was from. Lessie replied, "I am from North Carolina, but I

am not employed." The next day a call came from the School Board requesting that Lessie come down for an appointment. And a few days later, she got a job as a fourth-grade teacher at George Peabody School.

From a barely furnished three-room apartment, Lessie and Barkley moved into their first home. It was a three-bedroom, ranch style house in a new development called Rosedale Park. This was 1954. By this time, a car had also been purchased. And Barkley was still employed at the shipyard.

In 1958, on August 15, Karen Lesla joined the Barkley Williams family. Everybody was excited. At three weeks of age, Barkley had her riding around with him in his car. Lessie would even take the baby with her in the garden as she gathered vegetables.

In 1959, Barkley left the Naval yard and started his own business, The Williams General Contractors Firm. All went well for the first five years, after which business became difficult to get. By 1962 just as he completed the home in which his family now lives, his business collapsed. Bankruptcy was unavoidable. He returned to the Norfolk Shipbuilding and Drydock Company to work as a shipfitter and remained until 1968 when he started a home improvement business.

During 1964-1967, Lessie returned to school and completed her master's degree in guidance and personnel services. For the last five years, she has served as counselor in the Portsmouth School system.

At intervals, Barkley has returned to school for training in real estate and related areas.

After several ups and downs, Lessie and Barkley have reared three children; nearly completed payment on a \$60,000 home; purchased property in another section of town. It was not easy for them to come this far. But they kept the faith.

## Personal Impressions

As the youngest child of Barkley and Lessie, I have found life thus far a beautiful experience. My parents have instilled in myself and my brothers, Orlando and Vernon, a sense of self-pride and love—love for our family and love of mankind.

I have experienced memorable happy moments at our home, 1409 Spring Road, Chesapeake, Virginia. I have lived a life sheltered with good times, family jokes and family gatherings.

I cannot recall a Saturday night passing when mother wasn't in the kitchen preparing her Sunday dinner or when father didn't bring something special every evening. Never a day passed without the name of God being mentioned in some positive way in our home. I remember how Sunday was the Sabbath and how we were taught to keep it holy by going to church and participating in spiritual activities.

My parents supported my two brothers and me at all times and encouraged us to pursue individual interests.

When Orlando was active in the movement of the 1960s, they supported his "Black is beautiful" philosophy. And when he started a tutorial program for underprivileged children, they gave him moral support.

When Vernon had a game of football, basketball or baseball, they were always at the sidelines—cheering.

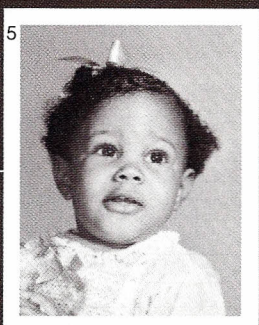
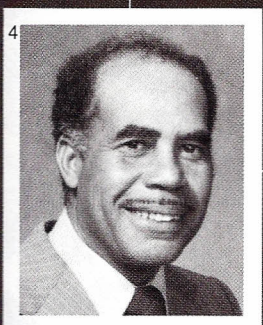
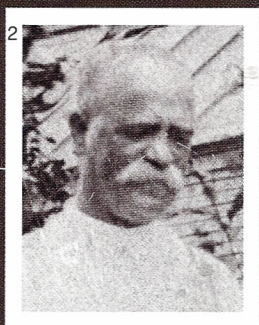
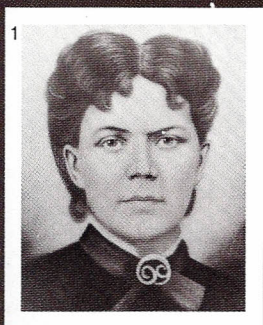
When I had a band performance or a public speaking engagement, they gave me encouragement. I remember our home as a place where guests got treated as family.

My brother Vernon is now the district recreational director of Chesapeake, Virginia. He has coached many youth teams whose members ranged from the privileged to the underprivileged, including severely handicapped children. In our community, he serves as a big brother and as a father image to many youngsters. He is active with the Portsmouth Jaycees.

# Paternal Ancestry

## Williams: The Search for My Roots

- 1 Fannie Jones Hubbard, g-grandmother
- 2 John Hubbard Sr., g-grandfather
- 3 Sadie Hubbard Williams, grandmother
- 4 Barkley Williams, father
- 5 Karen Lesla Williams at age of 18 months



Orlando, my other brother, represents a source of strength and knowledge. As a history major at Norfolk State College, he was known as "Little Rap Brown," for he could "rap" well (slang for talk) about facts concerning Black people. He is a lot like daddy.

Thatching the roof is the most difficult and important portion of building a house and of finishing this paper, for it finalizes both projects. However, I have only highlighted the most outstanding traits of my immediate family.

I began collecting this family history as a freshman student at Howard University. Indeed, I have learned many priceless things about my family's history, and the desire to know more is steadily growing. At this point, I can say that I have run out of material to completely thatch the roof, thus my search for my roots lives on, and the roof shall be fully thatched when my true African roots are found. □

*Karen L. Williams is a sophomore student at Howard University.*