



## 1ST ANNUAL AAGSNC WRITING CONTEST - THIRD PRIZE

### The Puzzle

by Loretta Henry

World War II ended returning the soldiers home. The Great Depression was over making jobs available. No more ration books meant everyone could buy what they could afford. A feeling of good times and happy days was in the air in the Summer of 1948. It was time to celebrate by holding a Shoecraft Family Reunion at the McCabe Park in Dayton, Ohio. Invitations had been sent to the family members in nearby Springfield and Xenia. Excitement swelled when the family learned that their mother's Uncle Harry and Aunt Olive were coming from Richmond, Indiana. Now that gas was available again, they wanted to reconnect with the family whom they hadn't seen since the war began. The family hired a photographer to record the event. Who knew they would all be together again?

All through that hot Summer day, anxious eyes kept watch on the road for their relatives from so far away. Finally lookouts saw clouds of dust on the road. But wait! It wasn't a car, but two busloads of people. "They must be lost," everyone thought.

Surprisingly, Uncle Harry alighted from the bus and introduced the Indiana Shoecrafts to the Ohio Shoecrafts. Everyone was shocked. They had no idea there were Schoecrafts in Indiana. Everyone knew that great-grandpa Paul Shoecraft was a German immigrant with no family in this country. His three sons, William Paul, Harry and Clarence had married black women. The Ohio Shoecrafts stood staring wondering who were these people? Their colors ranged from chalk white to black coffee. Where did these Shoecrafts come from? How could there be so many of them? After the food and activities a group picture was taken. The Hoosiers got back on the bus and were never heard from again.

Staring at the photo in my hands all memories flood over me. How many times had I heard that story? Gently touching the photo's surface, I called my mother.

She said, "I sent it to you so you can clear up this mystery before I die. I want to know if those people are really related to us. No one ever told us great-grandpa had family in Indiana. But you haven't heard the worse. Cousin Rollin wrote to the Shoecraft website and was told there were no black Shoecrafts in the United States.

I don't understand how they can say that because I am a Shoecraft and I certainly am black. Now that you are into this genealogy thing, I want you to find out before I die."

"Okay, but according to all the books I read, I need to start at the present by writing my biography and expand to my husband and children, then collect information about you, Dad, the girls, and Roy, Jr. Then I need to interview Aunt Charlotte and all the cousins before researching my grandparents."

She exclaimed, "Who cares about them? I know all about them. You need to find out how we are related to the white Shoecrafts and who those people are that crashed the 1948 family reunion."

Against every rule of genealogy, I started at the beginning. My parents and my aunt insisted that I discover the family's early history. Receiving my great-grandfather's death certificate only caused more tension. It stated that he was born in Muncie, Indiana and his parents were Putum Shoecraft and Martha Goins.<sup>1</sup>

"No, no!" they said, "Mama didn't tell us that. You have the wrong Paul Shoecraft. Keep looking. Putum! How could we be related to anyone called Putum?"



"Shoecraft Family Reunion 1948," McCabe Park, Dayton, OH. Loretta Henry is the seventh person, second child from the left in the first row of standing people, held in her mother's arms. Virginia Anderson Crenshaw (vest and white blouse). Her grandmother, Nida Shoecraft Anderson McKnight is fourth, in the same row, with her arm around her second husband, Aurelius McKnight. Loretta's aunt, Charlotte Anderson Garrett is standing just to the left of Loretta and Virginia.



One of my earliest memories was asking my grandmother, "Where were our ancestors held in slavery?"

"Oh no, honey," she replied. "We were always free and we were always here."

Late one evening, while searching the website on Free African-Americans in Colonial Times, I discovered that there were free black Shoecrafts living in what would become Virginia since 1640 and that they had later migrated to Muncie, Indiana.

This made more sense than the German connection. The time period was correct. In fact, by the early 1900s several branches of Shoecrafts were in the Dayton, Ohio area. For several months I unsuccessfully searched trying to find a connection between great-great grandpa Paul and the Shoecrafts in Muncie. It appeared that he might be a son of a William Tatum Shoecraft. Perhaps the clerk wrote Putum instead of Tatum. But William Tatum had no son named Paul in the 1850 census, which was the last time he was listed. My relatives were still unconvinced of this possible connection. After all, there was no Putum in THAT Indiana family and everyone knew Paul had never lived in Muncie.

Early one morning, I decided to check a message board at Ancestry.com. It seemed as though all of the first 93 notes concerned white Shoecrafts. My eyes were closing but something told me to keep looking. I woke up when I saw an inquiry for black Shoecrafts in Ohio that had been made two years earlier. At 3:00 AM I took a chance and sent an email asking if the author had heard of a Paul Shoecraft. At 8:30 AM I opened an email from a Dr. George Waldrep III. The first line stated, "I know Paul and all his brothers and sisters." He was writing a book about tri-racials and had been studying the Shoecrafts for many years. Documents concerning testimony given by some family members were in the National Archives. The family was famous and he was shocked that I had no idea of my history. But not as shocked as my mother and aunt to discover they knew so little of their family history.

Using the information Dr. Waldrep provided,<sup>2</sup> I was able to confirm his

findings, build on my initial research and add new data. In a little over one year I was able to connect my great-grandfather to his Muncie relatives and to discover a part of the answer to the question who were those people who attended our family reunion in 1948?

### PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

Shoecraft family history is as old as American history. According to their well documented past, the family was established in what would become the United States long before it became a country. They helped to develop the country, fought in its wars and were involved in several historical events which have been well documented and preserved in the National Archives in Washington, D. C.

There are two major Shoecraft families with long histories in this country. For the purposes of this narrative, it is important to understand that these two groups have no known shared history. The larger family has been traced to Johan Petrus Shoecraft who migrated from Germany to what would become New York State in about 1740. By 1840 most of his descendants remained in New York, while some moved to Canada, Michigan, and Connecticut. Recent descendants also live in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Florida and Arizona. The Johan Petrus Shoecraft family has "acknowledged" the existence of an "Indian" Shoecraft family with earlier roots in the United States, which predates their family by about 50 years.

The earliest Indian Shoecrafts were first documented in Virginia in the 1600s before moving to North Carolina. By the 1840s most had moved to Indiana. Today, known descendants of this group can be found in Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, California, Washington State, Georgia and Florida. My family lineage derives from those so-called Indian Shoecrafts. Commonly seen variations of the name are Shewcraft and Shucraft. The surname Shoecraft was first recorded in 1697 in Virginia colonial records.<sup>3</sup>

In each of the twelve documented generations there has always been a William Shoecraft. While the history of the first generation is interesting and explains black Shoecraft history, I needed

to learn who were those unknown Indiana relatives and why we knew nothing about them.

The first clue to the mystery can be found in the third generation. William Shoecraft was born about 1749 in Bertie County, North Carolina and was listed as "a free Mulattoe," as the illegitimate son of an Ann Suecraft and an unknown free Negro, the Bertie County Court apprenticed him at age of nine to James Boon on October 24, 1758. They were probably living in the section of Bertie County that later would become Hertford County, North Carolina, as his master. James Boon had signed a petition to form Hertford County. Following his apprenticeship he was given his freedom twenty years later. As an adult he was listed as having taxable property on one poll in Hertford County while he was serving in Capt. Harrel's Company in 1784. He was also listed on the tax roll in Hertford County as the head of a household of eight "other free" in 1790 and also listed in 1810, 1820 and 1830 census rolls.<sup>4</sup> William was described by his granddaughter, Sarah Weaver, as being a full blood Indian with straight hair and a reddish complexion.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most important fact of his life that would affect his descendants was his marriage to Bicey Nickens that took place about 1760. She was a Cherokee Indian doctor who was born about 1746. According to her grandchildren, she was welcomed into black, white and Indian homes throughout the district. The local citizens trusted her to cure them using her herbs and traditional healing methods.<sup>6</sup>

The name Nickens is the shortened version of Yoconohawcon, an ancient Native American name.<sup>7</sup> The family also originated in Lancaster County, Virginia. One of Bicey's ancestors was a Richard Nickens who was born about 1660 and called, "Black Dick," when he was listed on the tax poll in 1699. Two of her relatives were blacks who had served during the Revolutionary War. One Robert Nickens served as a soldier while another, Nathaniel, served as a seaman. Both are listed as black in Jackson's Negro Soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Later, another relative, Malachi, would petition the North Carolina General Assembly in 1822 to repeal an act which



declared slaves to be competent against free African Americans.<sup>9</sup>

The Shoecrafts and Nickenses shared a documented history dating back to the 1700s. Two of William's uncles had had legal contacts with the Nickenses. According to court records filed in Northumberland County Court on July 18, 1723, Abraham Shoecraft was indebted to Edward Nickens for 1,500 pounds of tobacco. His younger brother Simon Shoecraft later had witnessed Edward Nickens' Will.<sup>10</sup>

Both families were from the Chicacone Indian District of Virginia. The two families migrated together for over 200 years with others from the Tuscarora, Chowanoac, Saponi, and Meherrin tribes. Evidence suggests that they were mixed race people who were tolerated by their Native American relatives and shunned by whites. Mixed race families often moved together for support and to provide a pool for future marriages.<sup>11</sup>

The Shoecraft and Nickens families were probably tri-racials. Tri-racials have had a long history in the United States. Black slaves and white sailors were shipwrecked in the New World before the founding of Jamestown. Blacks frequently fled to Indian societies to escape bondage. Non-conformist whites left established towns seeking a less restrictive atmosphere. Each tribe had guidelines of intermarriage with blacks or whites. The offspring of these marriages were bi-racial. These bi-racials usually married into other mixed race groups. Their offspring would become known as tri-racials or those of black, white and Native American heritage. Tri-racials usually lived together away from disapproving white society. These communities were in swamps, wilderness areas, foothills and other undesirable lands.<sup>12</sup> The Shoecrafts, Nickens and others had farms in the mountain region of North Carolina near Cherokee settlements.

William Shoecraft's marriage to Bicey Nickens produced four children — two sons and two daughters. The eldest son, James Shoecraft was born about 1766 in Hertford County, North Carolina. He was the head of a Hertford County family in 1810 and head of an Orange County

household of "free colored" in 1820, and a "Negro" head of a Guilford County household of "free colored" in 1830. He married Mary Anna Milton, sister of Mills Milton. The Miltons were also free tri-racials.

James appears to have been cantankerous. He was involved in several legal actions. In February of 1832 he secured a peace warrant against his brother-in-law Miles Milton. In August of 1836 he sued Allen Carter for Assault and Battery. The Judge dismissed the case at James' cost. A Guilford Court indicted him for petit larceny in 1837 but ruled it was not a true bill.

His brother, Silas E. Shoecraft was born in 1783 in Hertford County. He served in the 16th Company of the Haywood County (NC) Regiment in the War of 1812. From the literature, one can assume that Silas and his family were probably light-skinned mulattos who identified more with the white culture. According to one granddaughter he voted and mustered into the military as a white man.<sup>13</sup> Silas and his first wife Mary "Polly" Tester had at least eight children, his eldest, Abram Shoecraft, married two white women, was a slave owner in North Carolina and was listed as white on the Census and tax records.

William and Bicey Shoecraft also had two daughters. Sarah Shoecraft married Miles Milton, the brother of her brother James' wife, Mary Anna. The Miltons were probably the children of a free colored, Josiah Milton who was born about 1742. Their oldest brother James was listed as a man of color who served in the American Revolution.

The youngest daughter Tabitha Shoecraft married Josiah Robbins, a free colored man, in 1820, and lived in Orange County, North Carolina. One of the Robbins' daughters would later marry into the Weaver family.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, the larger society would not let them live in peace. Over time Native American leaders came to realize that their traditional ways conflicted with the larger white society and they tried to adapt. In the Eastern Mid-Atlantic States, the "five civilized" tribes were the Choctaw, the Chicasaw, the Cherokee, the Creek, and

the Seminole, who had existed there for centuries. They were settled communities of farmers who grew their own food and had homes made of wood. Children were sent to schools to learn white ways, members dressed in white clothes and learned English. But that was not enough. Whites resented the successful farms and mixed heritage of the Native Americans so much that the whites confiscated the Native Americans' land. In the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, the Federal government promised to compensate the Cherokee for their lands. However, all the treaty did was provide a means to force the Indians off their land. Tribal members were herded into "pens," given spoiled food, contaminated drinking water and forced to sleep in the open. Once their spirit was broken, the tribe agreed to give up claim to their land and was sent into exile to Oklahoma in the late 1830s. Many became ill and died along the way. The event became known as the Trail of Tears.<sup>15</sup> While the Shoecrafts did not live in a tribe, they had maintained close contacts with tribal members and were considered Indians by their community.<sup>16</sup> Soon they went from being successful, productive members of society to being outcasts.

Not only were the Native Americans harassed and forced from their homes but free blacks also faced problems. Many blacks felt compelled to move to escape the Black Codes. North Carolina instituted restrictive laws in the late 1830s which took away many of the freedoms free coloreds had enjoyed. Under the new rules, they needed a white person to guarantee their land purchases. People of color and free blacks were required to register in any town in which they lived or visited. They could not engage in any skilled labor or trades, hindering their ability to earn a living.<sup>17</sup>

As it became more uncomfortable, Quaker friends advised the Shoecrafts to leave the area and to move to Northeastern Indiana. Many free coloreds were finding it easier to live in the Western wilderness states along with dissatisfied whites who were seeking refuge from the confines of Eastern European society. Several tri-racial families had already settled in the area of what would become the cities of Muncie, Marion, and Kokomo, Indiana.



The Shoecrafts, Miltonses, Weavers, and others left North Carolina with their Quaker supporters. Along the way, some settled in Tennessee, while the larger group continued West. In the early 1840s, the family would help to establish a new community, Weaver, Indiana (Liberty Township, Grant County), a farming community of free mulattos, Indians and whites. There they controlled their own local government, established schools, formed small businesses and founded churches.<sup>18</sup>

**S**ilas E. Shoecraft moved to Wayne County, Indiana with his wife and children, became a farmer, and died in 1865. His second son, William S. Shoecraft, also a farmer, later became a preacher in Richmond, Indiana. The third son, Jeremiah Shoecraft, became a minister in Liberty Township, and was considered one of the major founders of Weaver. The fourth son, Silas Shoecraft II, was born in 1816 and became the first member of the family and the second person of color to move to Muncie, Indiana in 1850, helping to establish the African Methodist Episcopal Church there.<sup>19</sup>

He used his Indian heritage to gain access to the courts at a time when blacks could not sue a white in the courts. Several whites owed him money and refused to pay for his blacksmith services. They stated that he was a black man and could not testify against them. Presenting evidence of his Cherokee heritage, he was entitled to testify the same as a white, winning his case.<sup>20</sup> Later he owned a barbershop, served on the city's first black jury and was a leader in the black community.<sup>21</sup> He died in 1894 after having been bed ridden for several years.

The two Shoecraft daughters and their families also moved to Indiana. Tabitha Shoecraft had married Josiah Robbins and one daughter had married into the Weaver family. The Weavers were also long-time associates of the Shoecrafts. Like the Shoecrafts, the Weavers' earliest documented history was in Lancaster County, Virginia, when Richard and Elizabeth Weaver witnessed the Will of Edward Nickens. The four families, Weaver, Shoecraft, Milton, and Nickens, all moved together to North Carolina. By

1820, there were 164 members of the family in the state. Most were in Hertford County with the Shoecrafts. Like the other families they were listed as free Mulattos or free coloreds in the census. They were instrumental in the creation of the new town in Indiana that still bears their name.

Tabitha's and Josiah's grandson Owen Franklin Weaver was born in North Carolina about 1845 and later moved to the Weaver settlement in Grant County, Indiana where he lived in Jeremiah Shoecraft's household. He enlisted in the Civil War in 1865 and married Henrietta Shoecraft in 1869. Valuing his Indian heritage, he moved West and purchased 162 acres in Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1895. Following the massacre of African Americans in Tulsa in 1922, he moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where he died in 1929.

Also making the trek was my ancestor James Shoecraft, William's eldest son. In 1840 he moved to Wayne County, Indiana where he was listed as a mulatto farmer along with his wife Anna. According to his grandson, William D. Shoecraft, "he lacked one day of being 99 years of age when he died, and voted in the general elections."<sup>22</sup> James and his wife Mary Ann Milton had six children and all were listed as mulattos.

Learning my family descended from James and his oldest child focused my research on his lineage. The first son was William Tatum Shoecraft who was born about 1815. The second son, James Shoecraft II, was born about 1825 in North Carolina and moved to Wayne, Indiana. He and his family lived next door to his father. A daughter, Martha Shoecraft, was born in 1826 and married her cousin, Jeremiah Shoecraft, son of Silas E. Shoecraft. Other children include Richard Shoecraft born 1829, Betsey Shoecraft born 1821, and Sally Shoecraft born 1814.

William Tatum Shoecraft was born in 1815 in North Carolina. It appears that he took after his father James Shoecraft I. He was taken to court on unspecified charges. The first trial ended in a mistrial, while he was found guilty in the second and fined 6-1/4 cents. He, his wife Martha Goins Shoecraft (born in 1817) and their

eldest children moved to Wayne County, Indiana in 1844. In the 1850 census his family was counted as mulatto. Their son, William David Shoecraft, described his mother Martha Goins Shoecraft as a white woman. His father, William Tatum Shoecraft was a farmer who lived near his sister Martha Shoecraft and her husband Jeremiah in New Garden, Indiana. His descendants later moved to Muncie, Indiana. He died in 1871 and his wife, Martha, died in 1888.

The family settled in Northeast Indiana and became successful citizens active in community events. Their peace was disturbed when the United States became embroiled in conflicts over the issues of slavery and state's rights. They supported the Union side during the Civil War. Several of the family's young men either volunteered or were conscripted into the U.S. Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.). Two of William Tatum's sons fought in the war. Their cousins Daniel, Elias John D., John and Marshall also served on the Union side.

**W**illiam Tatum's eldest son, William David Shoecraft, was born in 1839 in North Carolina and moved with his parents to Indiana. He served as a Private in the U.S.C.T. in Company A of Unit 27 during the Civil War. Following the war, he was one of the first family members to move to Montgomery County, Ohio where he was listed as a day laborer. He and his wife Mary had nine children.

John Shoecraft was born about 1844 in Indiana. He lived in Muncie and was a day laborer. He and his wife Emma Simpson, born about 1855, had seven children. He died in 1904.

William Tatum Shoecraft and his wife also had two daughters, Malica born 1848, and Mary born 1850.

The youngest son George Shoecraft was born 1863. He moved to Xenia, Ohio in 1908 and in the 1910 census was living at 618 E. Market Street with wife Leah and their three sons.

The next to last son was Paul J. Shoecraft, my great-grandfather, who was born about 1858 in Muncie, Delaware County, Indiana. He married Jane Cooley, a mulatto in 1872 and had three sons.



Following her death in about 1879, he moved to Dublin Twp, Wayne, Indiana where he and two of his sons lived with his older brother, William D. Shoecraft. The youngest, Harry, was with his Cooley grandparents nearby.<sup>23</sup>

Several economic and social events occurring at the turn of the century would cause another migration for the Shoecraft family. One was the general economic situation in the United States. In the late 1890s the country was in the grip of a depression forcing many businesses into bankruptcy. The Shoecraft males were employed as farmers, day laborers, blacksmiths and barbers and in the service sectors that depended on the economic well-being of the community to survive. Less spending money meant fewer crops were sold, construction projects were halted and customers saved money by not having their shoes shined or their hair cut as often. Skilled craftsmen were also having a difficult time. The society was moving from an economy based on agriculture to one based on manufacturing. It became cheaper and more efficient to produce products in factories located in the Northeastern United States than it was to have them produced locally. Independent shoemakers who made shoes by hand could not compete with those that were mass-produced. It was cheaper for a blacksmith to purchase ready-made horseshoes than to make them in his shop. These factors lead to a decrease in the jobs available in an area.

Racial tensions and discrimination against people of color was at an all time high. Many whites resented the progress that blacks had made since the Civil War. Violence was increasing against them and their property with the birth of the Ku Klux Klan. Even in the North, the movement of blacks was again being restricted. The increase in immigration of foreign workers who were willing to work for less also caused a decrease in black employment.

To survive, family members moved, looking for more opportunities. Given the general hostility of whites, the family looked for a community where they would feel safe. The Shoecrafts were educated people who had achieved a degree of middle class values and had been leaders

in their Indiana communities. Not only were they looking for protection, but also for a community that shared their values and where their mixed heritage would not be a hindrance. They found what they needed in the larger cities along the border between Indiana and Ohio. Some of the family moved to Richmond, Indiana. Others moved to Xenia, Springfield, Toledo, and Dayton, Ohio.<sup>24</sup>

Allison Shoecraft was farming outside the city of Dayton, in Montgomery County, Ohio after the Civil War. He probably wrote to his brothers telling them that the area was experiencing an economic boom — there were many jobs and an educated population. Blacks in the area could live well. One of them was a nationally recognized poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar. The city was a major transport center with six railways, and the interurban electric railways had their transfer depots located there. The Miami and Erie Canal also ran through the city. The city needed workers to build roads, to help construct new buildings, to farm the fertile surrounding land and to provide support services. Between 1890 and 1900 the population grew by about 24,000. In 1900, it had a population of 85,333, and of those, 3,387 were Negroes. People from other countries had begun to move to the Midwest. In 1900 there were three times as many foreign born (10,053) as blacks. Most of the foreign immigrants were from Germany (6,820), and Ireland (1,253). With their light skin, straight hair, and surname, the Shoecrafts would have no problem fitting in.<sup>25</sup>

Paul J. Shoecraft answered his brother's call and moved to Dayton, Ohio sometime in the 1880s. He found employment as a skilled laborer working in a brick factory as a mud temperer mixing the wet clay and straw together. When the mixture was the correct consistency, then it would be formed into blocks that were baked in hot ovens. The city needed all the new bricks the factory could make to build new homes and businesses that were going up all over the area. He made a good living and was able to support his family, sending his sons to local schools where they received an elementary school education. He also remarried. In 1910 he is living with his second wife Nancy Milton. Clarence Shoecraft (his youngest

son, born 1879), and daughter-in-law Anna.

The second son Harry Shoecraft born 1875 had returned to Indiana when he became an adult.

Paul's eldest son, William Paul Shoecraft, was born in Muncie in 1874 and married Iva Middleton, a black woman who was the second daughter of Edward and Sarah Middleton. She was born in 1879 in Felicity, Ohio and had moved to Dayton with her family at the turn of the century. They had three children. He worked in the Keller Coal Yard on Bolander Avenue. The couple was successful in that they bought a large home and lived a comfortable middle class life.<sup>26</sup>

According to Dr. Waldrep (who had studied tri-racials and the events surrounding the Trail of Tears), by 1900, members of the Shoecraft family had decided with which race they would identify. Some became legally white, most became legally black, and others went back and forth between black and white. A few moved West and became Indian. The family members in Indiana and Ohio had gradually allied themselves with the African-American communities in their respective towns. Some branches of the family strongly resisted, while others appear to have used their education, property and positions to become leaders in their respective black elite societies. Most of the family members had accepted their black heritage. Their physical appearance helped them to move between white and black communities. Their education and position provided them with leadership skills. The Shoecrafts had settled into comfortable lives.

In time, two events took place which would change the family forever. The first took place in Washington, D.C. The Cherokee nation had never forgotten the injustice done to them when they were forced from their tribal lands in North Carolina almost a century before. Over the years they had taken legal action seeking payment for the unlawful seizure of their lands. In the early 1900s the tribe won a class action lawsuit against the U.S. government entitling their heirs to compensation for their lost lands. Persons living on Indian lands would receive a





parcel of land. Anyone else who could prove a blood tie to the tribe would receive a one-time payment of \$133.33 as his or her share of the settlement. Cherokee are proud people. Preference was given to those whose ancestors were listed on the tribal rolls established in 1839.<sup>27</sup>

The events of 1907 and 1908 tore the family apart. In order to benefit from the lawsuit, the family members had to document their claim as bonafide Cherokee descendants by providing extensive information concerning family history. Most claims by Indians with black heritage were denied. Some of the family filed claims while others did not. The more members who joined the suit, the stronger their case would be. One can imagine the letters that were sent back and forth demanding that those in Ohio renounce their black heritage and join the suit. Cousins Jeremiah Shoecraft, Samuel Shoecraft, and William S. Shoecraft and others filed claims and listed their siblings as co-claimants.<sup>28</sup>

In hearings held locally, family members testified that they recalled their grandfather William telling them that he was a full-blooded Indian and while he didn't live with them he did spend time in the Indian community. All stated that they had never received any payment for their Indian land, that there was no black blood in the family and that they had never been slaves. One relative claimed they came to Indiana because there were Indian reserves there. Jeremiah Shoecraft's son Alvarian said the reason why some family members were dark was because of their Indian blood.<sup>29</sup>

John Paul's older brother William David applied. He said his father had told him that his grandparents (James and Anna) were full-blooded Indians. The family had come to this state (Indiana) because free people had to leave the state (North Carolina) and not be among the

slaves there. His "mother (Martha Goins) was white and I am colored. My father (William Tatum Shoecraft) passed as Indian."<sup>30</sup>

Jeremiah Shoecraft, a minister, and husband of Martha Shoecraft (sister of William Tatum Shoecraft), gave most of the testimony. Jeremiah lived in Marion, Indiana and went to great lengths to support the family's claim to Indian ancestry. He claimed that the family was part of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation. They were an ancient people who called themselves the Yesah ("the people"). He recalled interacting with the Catawba Indians in Orange County, North Carolina while he was a child.

To distance the family from their black heritage he noted that his brother Abram Shoecraft was a slaveholder who had passed for white and who had married two white women in North Carolina. He stated that his father Silas Shoecraft I had been

Richmond City, Wayne County, Indiana for calling him "colored." Silas, Jr. had called Joel Hubbard, a white Quaker minister, who had known the family while they were in North Carolina to testify that the family was white and Indian with no black ancestry.

But the most disturbing facet was Jeremiah's claim that he and his side of the family had no Milton blood. The families had been inseparable both in Guilford County, North Carolina and Wayne County, Indiana. It was the Miltons who had brought colored blood into the family, he claimed.<sup>31</sup> He seems to have forgotten that his grandfather William Shoecraft was a mulatto. Moreover, William had married into the Nickens family who were listed as colored, and Jeremiah's aunts had married black men. It is interesting to note that in other documents, the Miltons also claimed to be exclusively of white/Indian descent and blamed the Shoecrafts for bringing African blood into their line. The court rejected the claims of both families for having no direct Cherokee ancestor.<sup>32</sup>

One can only assume that no matter the results of the hearings, the ill feelings brought by the procedure must have caused a split within the family. The Dayton family members had accepted their blackness and were part of the Negro community. Jeremiah's attack on the Miltons probably caused John Paul Shoecraft a great deal of pain as both his grandmother and second wife were Miltons. His daughter-in-law, Iva Middleton Shoecraft, was black. Not only did the applicants need to have written documentation as to their heritage, but they had to testify in open court. It was one thing to write untruths, but another to swear on the Bible that you had no black blood. That was going too far! Perhaps for these and other unknown reasons, he and his son William Paul never mentioned either the suit or their relatives in Muncie and Marion, Indiana again. John Paul's great-grandchildren Charlotte Anderson Garrett and Virginia Anderson Crenshaw had not heard of these events until data were being collected for this family history. Until then they were under the assumption that John Paul had migrated from Germany.<sup>33</sup>

The second event happened at home. In



William Paul Shoecraft (center) and his grandchildren, ca. 1930. Clockwise from top left: Loretta's aunt Pansy Anderson Harris Holmes; Aunt Bessie Anderson Hines; Aunt Charlotte Anderson Garrett (who just died in May 2004); Half-uncle Howard McKnight; Loretta's mother Virginia Anderson Crenshaw (finger in mouth). Baby on Shoecraft's lap, cousin William Wallace Shoecraft. In 12 generations, there has always been at least one William in the family.

a member of a white church. His brother, Silas, Jr., had taken someone to court in



1913, Dayton was hit with a disastrous flood. Warm Spring weather melted an unusually deep snow and the excess runoff quickly filled the streams and creeks leading to the five rivers surrounding the area. The rivers overflowed their banks pouring raging waters into the city streets. Homes were washed away, crops destroyed and animals perished. Stories were passed down telling of family members sitting on their roofs watching animals swim by and furniture bobbing in the waves.<sup>34</sup>

When the floodwaters receded the city was decimated. The Shoecraft men were out of work because the factories were filled with mud. Banks were flooded. They didn't have money for a long time. Not only was the family left homeless, but they had lost all their documents, photographs and other items that might have offered clues as to the family's origins. Memories of the events of 1907-1910 faded. What was done, was done. There was no time to worry about the relatives in Indiana. The family in Dayton had to survive. They had to begin again. The past was not important — the present was. They had to struggle each day to make the future brighter.

## EPILOGUE: Putting the Pieces Together

My mother was very upset with me. "No, this cannot be right. Why didn't Mama and Grandpa tell us about this? I called your Aunt Charlotte and she knows nothing about it either. Are you sure all this happened?"

"Yes, I know it did happen and it upset me at first," I told her. "When I began my research I was proud to discover that my ancestors had had such a long history, had helped to found a town and were community leaders. But learning that one of them owned slaves and later some of them denied their blackness made me very angry."

"But then I thought about it and realized I was looking at it as a child of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. When I looked at it from their viewpoint, I could understand. They had faced discrimination for so long, had been forced to leave their homes to come to a wilderness and start over from scratch."

I continued, "They had to use what worked. Silas couldn't use his black heritage to take his debtors to court, but he could use his Indian heritage. I can understand them wanting to profit from the settlement. A few years ago, many blacks who had never set foot in a Denny's joined a class action suit against the restaurant chain. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, \$133.33 probably brought about the same as each Denny's share of \$10,000. I guess they saw a chance to get justice."

She still was not convinced, "Yes, but I cannot get over the fact that no one in the family told us about it. We had to find it out from someone outside."

"Mother, I don't think Dr. Waldrep had any reason to lie. Don't forget I have been researching the family for months. What I discovered supports what he shared with me."

"Why would they tell me great-grandpa was German?"

I replied, "I don't know. Perhaps because Shoecraft sounds German, everyone just assumed he was of German descent."

"Last night I couldn't sleep. I was up all night pacing the floor," she said. It's like everything I was taught was a lie. It doesn't make any sense."

I tried to reassure her. "I think with your parents' divorce taking place just before the Great Depression and World War II, the Cherokee suit probably took a back seat. Grandma had to focus on feeding her children and not giving history lesson."

"Didn't you ever question Grandma?" I asked. "Surely you must have wondered how an immigrant from Germany could have three sons with different skin tones?"

"I was brought up to never question my elders. Whatever we were told, we accepted. It was not my place to question. It's not like nowadays when you young people question everything. I am sorry you started this genealogy thing. It's upset the whole family. Your aunt and the cousins are just as confused as I am. We are having a hard time accepting this."

"Funny, that is what Dr. Waldrep wrote in his last email. People are writing him all the time because they find it hard to accept

the results of their research. Everyone has 'romantic' notions about their past and find it hard to adjust to the realities."

"Well, I still am not sure if knowing the past is a good thing. I am not sure if anything good is going to come of it," she sadly replied.

"Yes, I know, but Mom, now I know what Grandma meant when she told me, "We were always here and we were always free."

"You are right. I am happy to know we took part in all of its wars and helped to develop the U.S."

"Not only that," I chimed in, "but I found the answer to who those people in the reunion picture are. They really are our long lost relatives. Now I have to discover their names and life stories. I wonder if their children know about us? That's what I love about genealogy — solving one puzzle leads to another puzzle."



Loretta Henry was born in Dayton, Ohio, the child of Roy W. Crenshaw and Virginia Anderson. Later this year she will retire from teaching computers and will work for an

oral history project part-time so she can devote more time discovering her roots. She became interested in genealogy in 2000 following the discovery of her husband's family's Bible, dating back to 1843. They also discovered old bills, letters, school notes, pieces of cloth and drawings that were stored in a collection of old books.

The first weekend in October 2000, her husband stopped at the Oakland FHC to buy a copy of their Freedman's Bureau CD. One of the staff told him about a local black genealogy society (AAGSNC), which was holding a conference the same weekend. That evening, she found the AAGSNC's website and joined on-line, a decision she has never regretted. "It felt like I had found a home."

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