

MIND THE
ONION
SEED

NELLIE EILEEN MUSSON

BLACK "ROOTS" BERMUDA

Presented during Bermuda's First Heritage Week,
May 1979.

Donors of photographs, also individuals who made available family libraries, private collections, books, etc.

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"Packing Onions"



"Just Cotton"

The Onion was to Bermuda What Cotton was to America



Dr. Marion Robinson

FOREWORD

"*Mind the Onion Seed*" is a highly commendable addition to that small, but growing list of books about Bermuda's history written by Bermudians.

However, this book has other special characteristics. First, it chronicles a portion of the contribution of Blacks—Black women primarily—to Bermuda's growth and development. In this respect, it makes an invaluable contribution to the explosion of the myth that Bermuda has no history of its own and to the legitimate pride which Black Bermudians can experience in their discovery of their rich and enviable heritage.

A second notable characteristic of this book is the fact that its author is a woman. It is very appropriate that the idea for the book grew from a lecture which Mrs. Musson was asked to deliver during International Women's Year 1975—a year in which a number of nations throughout the world accepted and promoted the ideal of complete recognition of the contributions of women to the development of their respective countries. Through "*Mind the Onion Seed*," Mrs. Musson has done her part admirably to promote this ideal.

The book sketches realistically the challenges met and confronted by Black women from the era of slavery to the present day. What emerges from the vivid sketches of slave women is first the indomitability of the human spirit, even in circumstances of the greatest adversity, and the unconquerable desire for freedom which transcended considerations of mere physical survival. These slave women were heroines who exhibited qualities of character and transmitted values to their descendants, helping to pave the way for the achievement of Black women in the post-slavery period. In fact, they are still heroines—they have a message which is relevant to today's young Black women who are striving to achieve a sense of identity which will enable them to function as fully integrated and successful individuals in Bermuda now. And in this catalogue of courageous

women with a dream of self-fulfillment and fulfillment for members of their families Mrs. Musson must take her place. She, too, has promoted a sense of pride and the will to achieve in members of her family; she, too, has professional achievements to her credit, and "*Mind the Onion Seed*" may be seen as her crowning achievement—at least until she moves on to her next major success.

"*Mind the Onion Seed*" thus has great significance for Black Bermudians. However, its relevance extends to white Bermudians who may still benefit from another scholarly validation of their recognition of, and respect for, the contribution of their Black compatriots to the growth and development of these islands. In fact, this book would make a very valuable addition to local school libraries and to classrooms where Bermudian History is taught. It is, after all, during the school years, the formative years, that one's attitudes and values are nurtured and in a society which has racial harmony as one of its primary goals, this book could provide the kind of knowledge which frees Black children from a lack of self-respect and frees white children to respect children different from themselves. The book might also encourage some young Bermudian student to pursue further research into his/her history and contribute to this growing body of literature. Alternatively, it may simply, but importantly, awaken a respect for the quality of scholarship which "*Mind the Onion Seed*" exemplifies, and nurture the desire to emulate this scholarship in a quite different area of research. The impetus to achievement in any worthwhile sphere is the desirable effect that perusal of this book must bring.

In conclusion, I wish to confirm publicly my immense personal respect and admiration for Mrs. Musson's achievement in the compilation of this book. I regard as a very great privilege her invitation to me to write this foreword. My only hope is that it has done justice both to her efforts and to the book's social and historical significance and relevance.

Dr. Marion Robinson*

Dear Mrs. Musson,

Thank you for showing me your manuscript material. Your work promises to meet a real need, particularly regarding the African presence in Bermuda and the academic treatment of Afro-Bermudian women. I look forward to seeing your book in print, especially so because it could, I venture to believe, be used in our classes in African and Afro-American studies to provide useful information in

*Author's Note: Dr. Marion Hodgson-Robinson, a leading educator, in 1978 was promoted to the position of Senior Education Officer for Curriculum Development in the Department of Education, Bermuda.

Bermuda Government Scholarship

B.A. (Hons.) English, McGill University, Canada

M.A., English, University of Manchester, England

British Commonwealth Scholarship

Ph. D., English, University of Exeter, England

Postgraduate Certificate in Education, University of Manchester, England

M.A., Education Administration, New York University, New York

Principal, Prospect Secondary School for Girls

Member of Bermuda's International Women's Year Committee

Afro-Bermudian life and culture which constitutes yet another facet of the total life and culture of the African world."

Professor Keith E. Baird, Associate Professor
Anthropology Department and Director of
African and Afro-American Studies Program,
State University College, Buffalo, New York

Dear Professor Baird,

Mrs. Nellie Musson has shown me your letter to her in which you support her manuscript. The research she has done in these archives has covered, even in International Women's Year, material that is not usually used, and the facts that she has turned up are extremely useful. The few books (Bermuda History) that have been available virtually ignore the existence of Black people. Mrs. Musson's researches will redress the balance, and perhaps lead to a revival of enthusiasm in the teaching of local history.

Leonard J. McDonald
Archivist to the Government of Bermuda (1975)

"I have found your fine book "*Mind the Onion Seed*" an interesting, soundly researched book on Bermuda and Bermudians. The market there should be very strong also a strong interest in your work, wherever there has been a heavy Bermudian or West Indian immigration."

Marie D. Brown
Senior Editor
Anchor Press/Doubleday

Mrs. Nellie Musson's book on Bermuda is the first extensive work on this Island nation that has been published in recent years. Her emphasis on the role of women is more than appropriate. This is the subject of the hour all over the world. In the making of what is called the new world, African people were dispersed in the West Indies and North America. This book tells how Bermudian Blacks survived and continued to prosper from the founding of the Colony to the present day.

Dr. John Henric Clarke
Professor of African History
Hunter College, New York City.



About the Author

'Some men see things as they are and ask why?
I see things as they could be and ask why not?'

These immortal words of Robert F. Kennedy might have been said of Nellie Eileen Musson, a woman endowed with a keen intellect, a thirst for knowledge, a strong determination to achieve, and an extraordinary perception of the lives of people in their everyday circumstances. Mrs. Musson received her high school education from Sandys Secondary School, Bermuda, and is an alumnus of the Chicago School of Nursing Extension Division, Wilfred Academy of Beauty Culture, and John Fonda of Advanced Cosmetology, both of New York City.

During the nineteen fifties and sixties she worked as a relief nurse in private duty with the elderly. For perhaps a year (1957-1958) she worked as a resident volunteer counselor with the New York State Department at Children's Center, while studying cosmetology. Upon returning home to Bermuda she opened a beauty salon and also the LaNel Beauty School which catered to Bermudian as well as foreign students. For years the only hairdressing school on the island, the facility also provided a Day Release Program for the country's high school students. From August 1967-August 1968, Mrs. Musson was employed by the Bermuda Government as an instructor in special education. A well known community and church worker, she has been involved with group camping, career exhibitions, educational tours, and other activities too numerous to mention here. The subject of several newspaper feature stories, as early as 1964 she was listed as one of the Island's ten most outstanding businesswomen.

Obsessed with a desire for learning Mrs. Musson completed several courses by way of Summer study through extension programs with the University of Maryland and Queen's University, Canada. She entered State University College at Buffalo in January 1974 and in 1976 was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education. Then, in January 1979 she enrolled at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, where she was awarded a Fellowship for graduate studies. As a writer and as a gerontologist, one of Nellie Musson's interests is to inspire others to research their family background through utilization of knowledge derived from the elderly members of the family. The production of this book is the outcome of her own personal search into her family "roots" and the "roots" of other Bermudians.

As a teenager she wrote poems and plays which were used in church productions; she later wrote bedtime stories for her six children. Since going to college, she has produced several manuscripts, including a scientific study of Bermuda and its centenarians, stories and poetry for youth and age, and many song lyrics, some of which have been set to music by Dr. James Bowman of Rochester, New York, and sung by a youth choir, also of that city.

The fourth of ten children, from experience the author knows the meaning of sacrifice and hard work. Having lost her mother during her (Mrs. Musson's) child bearing years, she assumed the responsibility of seeing that three teenage brothers, Oscar, Edgar and Mack Wilson obtained a college education. She has also been able to inspire, and tangibly assist, many other young people to enroll in academies and colleges outside of Bermuda, and her own children have each achieved in their own right. Therefore, *Mind The Onion Seed* is not only a study in Bermuda's Black culture with an emphasis on women in general; though not intended it is also the summary of the trials and triumphs of one particular Black woman whose life has been devoted to serving others.

Marjorie Guishard-Richardson



L-r) Ruby Musson-Bowman, a teacher and the Bowman children, Claire and Jamison; Dr. James Bowman, a Rehabilitation Counselor and Hospital Administrator; Celia-Ann, a third year dental student; Sylvan Duerden Musson I, a businessman; Mrs. Musson; Roseclaire Musson-Bulgin (the bride) a former instructor at Konola Academy, Liberia, West Africa, and at the Warwick Secondary School, Bermuda. In 1978 she became the Dean of Women at West Indies College, Jamaica; Pastor Samuel Bulgin of West Indies College (the groom); Paul Henri, a second year medical student, recently married to Teresa Jo Tibbs, a psychology major, from Huntsville, Alabama; Sylvan Duerden II, an alumnus of Oakwood College and Andrews University; Dr. Wilburn Duroseau M.D. assistant professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Chief of the Reproduction Endocrine section at Charles Drew Medical School, Los Angeles California; Lillaurie Musson-Duroseau a registered nurse; the three Duroseau children (1-r) Kathleen, Rosemary, and Sharon.

Documentation on the first Musson, who arrived in Bermuda in 1746, may be found in several Bermuda history books. Originally White, through intermarriage they had evolved into a Black family by the late 19th Century. The present family resides in a two-century old home-stead on Musson Point, Paget, Bermuda.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with a sober and humble mind that I write this page—and perhaps of all the pages in the book, it is the most difficult to write for many people did many things in many selfless ways. They gave me courage during the difficult periods when I was tired and discouraged and tempted to procrastinate. Persons like Merle Brock Swan-Williams, a very intellectually moving and spiritually powerful woman, and one of my dearest friends, who kept saying, "Nell, I know it's tough, but you've got to finish it."

Without the help of numerous supporters and well-wishers who visibly shared my enthusiasm, this book would not have been written. I sincerely thank Bermuda's old folk whom I have mentioned in chapter two; also nurses, educators, and politicians; lodge members, musicians, and artists; photographers, sportsmen, and domestics; Government officers, organizations, and individuals of both races.

I am particularly grateful to the Bermuda librarians and archivists; the late Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson, Mrs. Terry Tucker, and other historians; a number of individuals who placed at my disposal their family files and private collections; to the Bermuda National Trust, the *Royal Gazette*, the *Recorder*, and the Capital Broadcasting Company. Also special thanks to the readers, typists, and editors for their willing assistance and objective criticisms.

I owe a great debt to my instructors at the State University College at Buffalo, New York, who showed me how to find my source materials and how to project my themes; to Dr. Marion Robinson, a member of Bermuda's International Women's Year Committee, an efficient school administrator and Senior Education Officer in the Department of Education, who wrote the foreword; to Mrs. Marjorie Guishard-Richardson, another school administrator and educator, for her descriptive comments in the blurb; to Dr. John Henric Clarke, an author, philosopher, editor of *Freedom Ways*, professor at Hunter College, City University (New York), and a visiting professor at several universities, who assisted me in many ways; to Miss Marie Brown of Anchor Books/Doubleday for her sincere critique of the final product; to staff members at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee; to my friends—you know who you are—who have assisted me in getting the book published; and to my family for their loyalty and patience during these four years of study and research. Finally, but primarily, I give thanks to God for the health and strength to get the job done.

—Nellie Eileen Musson

INTRODUCTION

Why in this "day of togetherness," with Bermuda moving toward "total integration," would anyone write a book that deals primarily with one segment of the Island's population—in this instance the Black populace? Have not the Island's women, both Black and White, been getting together in recent years to discuss topics concerning justice for all Bermuda women, particularly women's rights and the rights of their children? They have. Isn't there a oneness in the women's movements seeking equality for all women? It is. Then why this material which emphasizes the roles played by Black women? And, why is this material so important at this point in time?

Since the beginnings of Bermuda's educational history around 1670, hundreds of books and other literary works have been penned relating to Bermuda life and culture. Many of these books have been used as essential readings in Bermuda schools. Although all Bermudian school children have been required to explore such material in great depth, rarely did the authors include historical data on the Black Bermudian. When it was included, the material, with few exceptions, was either glimpsed over, or written with a negative slant.

Writers failed to show the early Blacks as nurses or as teachers; as architects, builders and contractors; as businessmen and artisans; as land developers or as some of the Island's top engineers, shipwrights and navigators who helped provide communication with the rest of the world through the ships Blacks built and often sailed.¹

When Africans arrived in Bermuda they brought one particular trade with them—farming—and for the next three centuries their descendants were also the Island's farmers. "Coloured" people were made to believe that their ancestors had little to do with the Island's colonization. They had no way of knowing that by keeping their feet and hands in the soil, and by being "jack-o-bo" for all and sundry, their ancestors became the supports that helped to stabilize the country.

This had two great disadvantages. First, it left Black children ignorant about their past, which limited them in regards to establishing any real identities. This in turn tended to make them indifferent toward future involvements. Second, by placing a standard of value on a history which provided background information primarily on one segment of the population, created in the minds of the people the assumption that anything that was not included was not important. Therefore, it was only natural for White children and Black children to assume that Blacks had no real culture of their own. These misconceptions inflicted a dual handicap on Black children—one of color and of class—which resulted in the perpetuation of discrimination not only against the Race, but also within the Race itself. Typical of the handicaps imposed on Black children is expressed here in her own words by Miss Grace Rawlins, the first professional Black woman at a Bermuda library. As a girl growing up she gave no thought to library work because "being a Black person, I had no one to steer my thoughts in that

direction." Many times over similar statements have been made by Black leaders who had to make it to the top the hard way.

In recent years Bermudian educators have made attempts to alter the situation. Before any significant changes can be fully implemented, however, more and more writers are needed to produce the kinds of literary works which can give Black children some self-identity and self-fulfillment.

The first of such works, a book entitled *The Berkley Educational Society's Origins and Early History* by Dr. Kenneth Robinson, was published in 1962. Five years later, Eva N. Hodgson's *Second Class Citizens, First Class Men* appeared on the scene. This was an in-depth study of the political activities of Blacks—their trials and triumphs—covering a ten-year period from 1953 to 1963. In 1972 Gerald Brangman published *Thank You, Dr. E. F. Gordon* which outlined activities leading up to the founding of Bermuda's first labor union. The following year a little booklet, "The Life and Works of Charles Lloyd Tucker"—the story of one of the country's leading artists—was published by Lois Smith. Then toward the end of 1975, about the time of the completion of the first draft of "Mind the Onion Seed", Cyril O. Packwood presented to the people of Bermuda *Chained on the Rock*, the first concise work on Bermudian slavery. These authors are to be commended for their work of presenting factual data which emphasized the strengths of the Race rather than its weaknesses.

One is not saying that non-Afro-Bermudian writers have produced no written works about Blacks. Some have. But rather, that some educators have found that the greater portion of literature written about Blacks by non-Blacks have not been presented in a manner that would instill pride into the Black child, make him (or her) aware of the achievements of the Race, or encourage him to search out his Afro-Bermudian birthright. There is one noticeable exception, however—that of *Slavery in Bermuda* by James E. Smith (1976). In my opinion, this White author made a sincere effort to present an unbiased portrayal of early Blacks. Yet, even here, James Smith's approach seems to suggest the need of the viewpoint of someone on the inside.

Because little was written in previous years to capture the imagination of Black children or to assist Blacks in living fuller, richer, more fruitful lives, it is hoped that "Mind the Onion Seed" will help facilitate a suitable program that can effectively tell these children of their heritage, and which will recount the fascinating stories and folklore of their people.

But perhaps an even more important motive for this work is to show how invaluable the knowledge of one's heritage and one's early training is for the setting of goals, and for the furtherance of one's accomplishments during adult life. The following story reiterates this point:

A stalwart African youth stood straight and tall as he went about his work. Though a slave on an American plantation, he performed his duties with dignity and poise. Day after day, the other slaves bent low over their tasks, but not this youth. He endured repeated cursings and beatings—still he refused to bend. He remained upright in stature and mind. When asked why, he answered, "Because I am the son of a Chief". He knew whom he was, and though thousands of miles from his homeland, the knowledge of his heritage gave him a sense of identity and security.²

So that Bermuda's Black children may also stand tall with a poise indicative of their identity and sense of security; that misapprehensions of the Race be eliminated; and that a greater trust, be generated by Blacks, in the other Race—this book has been so designed that it is more than just an exposition on Black history. In fact, it goes beyond a history covering events from the arrival of Blacks in Bermuda up to the present day. In discussing the spiritual, social, political, and economic influences of Black women and their contributions to the country's growth and development, "Mind the Onion Seed" has embodied within its pages some information on practically every phase of Black Bermuda life.

Throughout this book may be found many heretofore hidden areas; some of which have been documented for the first time. In view of the material that has been presented here, a new kind of Bermuda history—distinct from what has been previously taught—can now be introduced into the Island's schools; a history that can only be enhanced as it seeks to encompass, impartially, the heritage of both Races. Hopefully, "Mind the Onion Seed" will help to "redress the balance, and lead to a revival of enthusiasm in the teaching of (Bermuda history)" as stated in the foreword by Mr. Leonard J. McDonald, archivist to the Government of Bermuda prior to and during the compilation of much of this material.

The author has tried to produce this material in an interesting and informative way. The attempt to place this segment of Bermuda's history in its true perspective was not easy, owing to the fact that very often portions of files (in some instances whole files) and valuable documents were missing. However, as other researchers delve further into this history, its reliability and authenticity will be reinforced.

Concerning the book's title, used in its context, the phrase "mind the onion seed" is an idiom arising out of slavery times, meaning "take care of", "watch over", "preserve" the Bermuda onion—one of the Island's primary exports that is deeply rooted in the Black woman's heritage.

The terms "Black" and "White", used as proper nouns, are not capitalized when they appear in a quotation with a lower case letter; the words "Coloured" and "Negro" are placed within quotation marks except when written within the context of a quoted source. Black Bermudian, Afro-Bermudian and Black(s) are used interchangeably. So as to avoid tedious repetition of these terms, such persons are not always ethnically identified, whereas the ethnic origins of White persons (also American Indian, except when speaking of slaves) are always classified so as to avoid confusion.

The idea to put this material in book form was for its preservation. Although the work, basically speaking, ends with IWY, throughout the book there are a few notations concerning events that have taken place since 1975.

I have tried to write objectively, that is, to present the Black woman as she was seen centuries ago and as she is seen today through the eyes of a visitor to the Island. Therefore, the pictures which accompany the work do not show the Black woman exclusively; while the names of others are mentioned, it is the Black woman who is really represented here.

Great care has been taken to avoid errors. In the event that an error is found in a

name, place, date or statement and if called to their attention, the publishers will be happy to correct such errors in future editions.

Chapter One follows with a brief overview of Chapters Two to Twenty-One. Included in the Appendix is a listing of the names of individual women, and organizations, from the Colony's founding to the present day.



"A Family Picnic In The 1880's



Bermuda's First Black Girl Guides—1931/32

1

AN OVERVIEW

A Synopsis of Chapters Two through Twenty-One

CHAPTER 2

THE ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING—A biographical sketch relating to the author's early childhood and upbringing. It tells how her fight to survive rheumatic fever, her father's strength, and her mother's constant recounting of her heritage—especially the mentioning of Rebecca, a slave ancestor—influenced her as an adult to become involved in the cultural and spiritual uplifting of her Race, to make a trip to Africa in 1969, to go to college in 1974, and finally to write this book.

CHAPTER 3

"MIND THE ONION SEED"—It is from this chapter that the book gets its title. It contains the narrative of one particular ex-slave who each year for eighty-three years, on the day of Emancipation celebration, called her family together and recounted her life as a slave and the story of that first Emancipation Day so that they might never forget from whence they came.

CHAPTER 4

ANCESTRAL MATRIARCHS—The chapter outlines a few of the indignities Blacks had to suffer and of their various attempts through secrecy and intrigue to free themselves through slave uprisings, often braving the dangers of the ocean in order to escape. This chapter also projects the Black woman as heroine, often giving her life for her people.

CHAPTER 5

BLACK RELIGION—PRE-EMANCIPATION TIMES—Without going into philosophies and beliefs, this chapter discusses why the Black man's religion became his way of life; why the Black religious heritage is inseparable from Black history; and some ingenious ways in which slaves used their religion as a means of self-preservation.

CHAPTER 6

EMANCIPATION—A record of events leading up to Emancipation in Bermuda, showing how both Black and White abolitionists fought to save slaves during

those final days of sale. The chapter also historizes the strengths of the Black male, particularly those Black Bermudian sailors who fought in the American Revolutionary War. Also discussed are various events which followed the Emancipation and some symbolic victories gained by Blacks.

CHAPTER 7

BLACK WOMEN IN THE ARTS, PRE-1900—This chapter tells of the origins of the Gombey dance in Bermuda, of the Negro spirituals in America, and of the calypso in the West Indies. It also draws some comparisons between the minstrels in America and the minstrels in Bermuda. Theater of the period is mentioned. The chapter brings to the public eye for the first time some famous women artists of the late 19th century and also reveals how Blacks of the period were able to develop and maintain cultural assimilation.

CHAPTER 8

NINETEENTH CENTURY NEWSPAPER WOMEN—An account is given of a family whose early newspaper became the main vehicle for Black communication.

CHAPTER 9

BERMUDA'S BLACK CENTENARIANS—A short thesis on Black women centenarians.

CHAPTER 10

WOMEN IN THE LODGES AND FRIENDLY SOCIETIES—This chapter reveals how the lodges began liberating their women a century before Women's Lib. It also chronicles the different functions, organizations, and movements that grew out of the lodges (distinct from the Masonry) which became the very core of the Black family's existence.

CHAPTER 11

BERMUDA'S BLACK NURSES—Presented here is an historical review of nursing from the Colony's founding to the present day. Included are the profiles of several outstanding nurses from 1855 to 1975.

CHAPTER 12

THESE WOMEN GAVE ALL—Because of the women mentioned here, this chapter is probably as noteworthy as anything ever written about women anywhere. It presents the profiles of a number of women who dedicated their lives to serving humanity. The story is told of one lad, better known as a "wharf rat" because he lived with other homeless boys on the docks which were at that time infested with rats. A woman's hand gently placed on his shoulder stopped him as he was about to jump into the dark waters below. This youth later became a prominent citizen. The woman who saved his life founded Bermuda's first home for needy children.

CHAPTER 13

WOMEN GARVEYITES AND THE U.N.I.A.—Here another important segment of

Black history has been introduced to the Bermuda public. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), founded by Marcus Garvey in America, had a number of followers in Bermuda. Garvey's visit to the Island and the activities of the Bermuda branch are outlined here.

CHAPTER 14

BERMUDA'S BLACK RENAISSANCE—A freshly-coined phrase for Bermuda heretofore unheard of. The period, placed between 1920 and 1940, is yet another aspect of the Black islander's history that has lain dormant until this printing. What has made the writing of this chapter so interesting was that the author was told time and time again that no such period existed in Bermuda. Not only did this cultural era exist, but it also saw music, art, poetry, and prose burst into full bloom, and compares closely with the Harlem Renaissance of the same period in America.

CHAPTER 15

WOMEN AS TRAILBLAZERS—This chapter begins with the political activities of a White woman, Gladys Misick-Morrell, Bermuda's first woman of political prominence. Her profile has been placed here because it was the activities of the Women's Suffragette Movement, of which Mrs. Morrell was leader, that paved the way for the Black woman to enter politics. Without the inclusion of this material the reader would encounter some difficulty in trying to determine through which avenues Black women were able to get into politics. Therefore, the omission of this data would make any comments on the Black woman's political activities incomplete. This chapter also enumerates some other areas where Blacks (Black women in particular) fought against discrimination; discusses the origins of unionism in Bermuda; and lists some women in labor history and public relations.

CHAPTER 16

SOME WOMEN LEADERS—These women in this chapter represent the many outstanding Black women leaders. Included are the profiles of the country's first Black woman in Parliament; the first Minister of Health, who was also the first woman in the Legislature; the first Black in a top Government post; also the profiles of several other women leaders.

CHAPTER 17

LINKAGE AND LINEAGE—The profile of Dr. Marjorie Bean has been placed here by design to show the relationship between women leaders and women educators. The ancestry of Dr. June Hill has been charted here to emphasize the connections between Bermudians, Americans, and West Indians.

—Conchita Williams Ming.

CHAPTER 18

BLACK WOMEN IN EDUCATION—Almost without exception Black women (and men) who became leaders were, at one time or another, either teachers or involved in education in some way. These teachers are shown to be strong

women who controlled the classroom for more than a century. Highlighted are Adulcie Eve, a 19th century educator, and the struggles of one family who lost considerable wealth and going bankrupt in an effort to establish a school for Blacks. This has been documented for the first time. The profiles of several teachers—their defeats, their victories, their rewards—have also been placed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 19
RECREATION AND SPORTS—A pictorial summary showing groups and individuals engaged in various activities, spanning the years 1840 to 1975.

CHAPTER 20
THE BLACK WOMEN'S SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS—Shown here is an area in which Black women have been able to display their skills with few hindrances. The chapter categorizes the various organizations founded by Black women and lists some of their achievements and contributions to Bermuda life. Included also is a procession of Black beauty queens from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER 21
SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY ARTISTS—This chapter centers around art and beauty. Featured is one whom the author has called "Bermuda's Songbird of Black Drama"; also mentioned are other vocalists, entertainers, and church women and their music. The chapter ends with the profiles of Florence Webb Maxwell and Edna L. Williams Tucker.

APPENDIX

2

THE ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING

*An autobiographical sketch of the author's childhood,
written in the first person.*

Remembering the heritage——"Trimere"——a tin roofed cottage——
they called her "Lily"——a Black Princess——Portuguese friends——a
life well spent——hot baths and cold sheets——the whale oil——a whale
rib——"Resting Nuke"——tender 'roots'——"Smiling Mike"——
Ashanti Woman——"Lift Every Voice"——an untapped reservoir——
Rebecca——Rebecca's Silver——the generations.

Remembering the Heritage

As did our fathers of old during the periods of ancient African history, Bermuda's Black families handed down their family names, folklore and genealogy from generation to generation, preserving their history with amazing accuracy.

My foreparents were Africans West Indians, Americans, an Irishman and Bermudians. My mother told me of my ancestry in such a way that I would never forget it. She filled my mind with a strong sense of patriotism for my Race and for my country; my father gave me a zest for love and for living. Both were Christian parents. Together they taught me how to be grateful for just being, and not to expect more out of life than I was willing to put into it.

The fourth of ten children, I was born on August 3, 1926, at "Wentworth Cottage" Hog Bay, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda. On that day there was sadness at the homestead of my great-grandmother Rebecca Wentworth—suffering from infantile disease, the doctor was certain I would live no longer than three days. Because Bermuda was in the throes of a flu epidemic, there seemed to be little hope for the almost lifeless baby lying on a pillow in a back bedroom. But Lillian Ainsworth Wilson, my mother dared to hope.

At that period in medical history convalescing mothers were required to remain in bed for two weeks or more. On the second day after my birth, however, Mother arose at dawn and carried me to the west seashore away from the

flu-infested neighborhood. Later in the afternoon she returned with me to Wentworth Cottage.

Three agonizing days passed. Although the daily trips to the seaside continued, there seemed to be little sign of progress. On the third day a family friend, concerned about the mother's weakened condition exclaimed, "Lily, why don't you let that child die? Who will care for your other children if you become ill? Your own life is in danger." But Lillian Wilson softly answered, "If God wills, the child will live and I must do all that I can to help Him."

That August seemed unbearably hot, as August in Bermuda sometimes is. Three days passed; then three weeks. Still each day with the ill baby cradled under one arm, a Bible under the other, and some food in a basket, Mrs. Wilson would trudge the distance to the seaside. After bathing her child in the cooling sea waters she would sit under the spreading branches of a tall cedar tree, reading passages of Scripture and watch her baby breathe in the life-giving breezes that blew in from the ocean. Another week passed and, as the mother further extended herself, she and the child began to grow stronger.

"Trimere"

My father, Granville Trimmingham Wilson, better known as "Trimere", owned a track of land which included the partly enclosed, basin shaped Sinky Bay located to the South of Gibb's Hill Lighthouse in Southampton Parish.

Shortly after my birth, my father, on returning home from work, stood in the doorway of the tiny Hog Bay apartment and surveyed his fast-growing family; he realized that he would have to find bigger accommodations for his brood. Silently he ate his supper. Then picking up his hat, a bag of tools, and a lantern he walked the few miles to Sinky Bay and there by the light from his lantern and a fading moon, began digging the foundation for a home for his family.

A Tin-Roofed Cottage

Later he moved his wife and children to a small tin-roofed, white-stone cottage, set on a hill overlooking the shallow waters of Sinky Bay. A few years passed. The tin roof was replaced with Bermuda stone-slate cut out of the hillside. Gradually a room was added here and there until the home became large and spacious. Lillian Wilson and the children helped to build those rooms and to keep the roof and walls lime-washed white.

I had a reasonably happy home-life in spite of periods of illness. The day's activities ceased soon after sunset, except on family nights when we stayed up a little longer. My father would arise at early dawn; after preparing a hearty breakfast, which often looked more like dinner, he would call us for morning prayers. For several decades he was a church elder and also the priest in his home. Having been well disciplined by "Ma Fanny", his grandmother, he believed that he could be the priest only as long as he obeyed the One over him. Therefore, Granville Wilson could discipline his family. He was careful of what he took into his body, and of the words that were uttered from his lips. As long as one remained within the walls of his home, that person must adhere to the high standards that he set for himself.



They Called Her "Lilly"

They Called Here "Lily"

Lillian Ainsworth Wentworth-Wilson was indeed a flower of the earth; one that grew, budded, and blossomed into full bloom.

In 1928 when the family moved to the little two room cottage, one of the first things that the young mother did was to take some flowered cretonne and section off a part of one room as a study area for her children. As each new child was born, the infant was dedicated to do a special work—the gospel ministry, teaching, or some other mission which would uplift humanity. While other women bought clothing and house furnishings, she purchased books, musical instruments; built fish ponds, birdbaths; and planted flower gardens. It was all a part of her "children's education," she would say.

A "Black Princess"

In the nineteen twenties and thirties many country folk considered such things as luxuries, and the young mother was severely criticized for trying to be "uppity." Some folk called her the "Black Princess." That was sarcastic terminology in the thirties. Any country-woman who dared talk about educating all of her children was considered either less than normal, or just "putting on airs." In 1937-38 when her eldest daughter was preparing to go abroad to further her education, Lily Wilson had to hide the girl's traveling bags under her bed until it was nearly time for her daughter to leave for the college. A well-meaning relative sent a reprimanding note to Lily for "wasting poor Granville's money", and severely criticized her when Mrs. Wilson tried to talk the relative into sending her own daughter to college as well.

In order to obtain the necessary things for her children, Lillian Wilson at times sat on the ground in the hot sun and boxed farm produce. She would go to the seashore with her children and bag seaweed which they buried in their own gardens for fertilizer. She also took in washing and made hats artificial flowers. Because there were few public eating places in those days, she sold homemade soft drinks and baked goods to tourists who frequented the Lighthouse-Sinky Bay area.

This frugal, God-fearing woman was part of a long line of Black cooks and many a person ate a delicious meal at her table which might have been cooked "scurvy grass" (a hardy green plant that grew along the seashore), corn meal muffins made from homeground corn meal, rice pudding, carrot bread, fish chowder or baked pumpkin.

Portugese Friends

Although mother did not reach her life's ambition to become a trained teacher, she basically came from a family of teachers (and cooks). She privately tutored a number of Portugese friends who lived in the Glenrose and "South Dawn Farm" areas. These farms lay to the east and southwest of Gibbs Hill Lighthouse. Many of the Portugese had reading problems. Besides assisting them with the three R's, she often read their incoming mail and wrote their letters. How thrilled she was when her first adult pupil was able to write her own letters. These Portugese proved to be true friends.

Although a good cook, there were times when the family had very little food on

the table. On one such occasion, during an illness of her husband, Mrs. Wilson sat her family down to the table as usual. She, however, had not prepared the few potatoes left in the kitchensafe (cabinet). At her bidding, napkins were placed on laps, and as though unmindful of her children's stares, proceeded to say the blessing, thanking her God for the food that she was sure that He would provide. Before the "Amen" was said, the sound of horses' hooves were heard pounding the path that led to the home. It was the Yuletide season and bells on the horses' harnesses chimed out Christmas cheer. In such discouraging circumstances her faith seemed undimmed. Surely, on Christmas her God would give her children better than a meal of only potatoes! The family received enough food and other necessities to carry them through that holiday season—gifts from her Portugese friends.

One summer around 1940 she and her children built a fountain for their front lawn. The base of the fountain had been chiseled from Bermuda stone. Along came a millionaire who said that the structure was so uniquely crooked that he wanted it for his own lawn! Mrs. Wilson was happy to give up her lop-sided fountain and accept the badly needed twenty-five dollars which the man offered her.

A Life Well Spent

Lillian Wilson had high ideals. She held her head high and let the folk talk, and laugh too, if that was what they wanted to do!

In 1941-42 it was she who, with a church pastor, rode the hills of Bermuda encouraging members to send their children to the newly formed Seventh-day Adventist School in Southampton. The Bermuda Government had turned down a petition for a non-segregated school; therefore, if the project was to be successful it was important to enlist the support of all the Black membership. Later Lillian and Granville Wilson provided means to help erect the present Bermuda Institute in Southampton Parish.

In 1950 Mrs. Wilson's physician advised that she forget about educating so many children (eight children survived infancy) and begin thinking of her own health. But to her no sacrifice was too great for the "salvation of her brood." Instead she, with her husband, left the Colony and traveled to Jamaica, West Indies, where she placed five children in West Indies College*, a denominational institution in Mandeville. Three years later, at the age of 51, she lay on her death bed; the final words that escaped her lips were "Keep the children in school."

Hot Baths And Cold Sheets

Because of poor health, I remained a sickly child. By my seventh birthday I had already contracted all the usual childhood diseases, and with a body "paper thin", I came down with the dreaded rheumatic fever. Five years later I suffered another attack, the latter being more severe than the former.

A few years previously, a sister of mine had died of pneumonia at King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Paget. Because I lay in a semi-conscious state the doctor

*Twenty-seven years later a granddaughter was called to West Indies College as that institution's Dean of Women.

advised that I be hospitalized. My parents, however, believed that I would also die if taken to the hospital; therefore, they refused to consent to my hospitalization. Unfortunately like many people of that period, my father eyed the prescribed doctor's medicine with suspicion. He was convinced that my recovery depended not on the doctor's experience and prescribed medicines but on "tried and proven home cures" and Divine providence.

For centuries Bermuda's nurses had used herbal baths, also herbal leaves applied to the body as fever remedies. Although the house had been placed under quarantine by the Island's health department, at night neighbors crowded in to help. Some came from miles around, arms filled with green herbs, roots, castor oil, tree leaves and wild grasses. Supervised by an old relative, whom we called 'Aunt Russell', these leaves, grasses, herbs, and roots were boiled in large kerosene tins. The dark mixture was then strained, poured into a wide wooden tub, and allowed to cool somewhat. Then into the mixture my feverish aching body was immersed amidst screams of intense pain. This would be followed by cold fomentations. I suffered not so much from the hot liquid or ice cold sheets, but from the agony of stiffened joints and ligaments. Two old women kept the bath water moving by a quick, swirling motion of their hands, which gave the feeling of a mini-hot-water whirlpool. A block of ice sitting in another tub kept the sheets cold.

Tins filled with the herbal mixture were kept boiling in the kitchen chimney; periodically pans of the hot liquid were added to the bath. Then, the aqueous treatment over, I was returned to the bed and wrapped in soothing warm "Match-me-if-you-can" and paw-paw (papaya) leaves. Every day this ritual was repeated with neighbours bringing fresh leaves, grasses, herbs, and roots. They also brought food and firewood. Faithfully and freely they gave their help. Some kept fires burning; others sat with Mother during the long nights praying and reading comforting Scripture and drinking hot lemon-grass tea.

Almost a month passed and recovery seemed impossible. Then one day on awakening from a long night of semi-consciousness, as beams from the early morning sun streamed through white organdy-curtained windows, there sat my mother in a wicker armchair fully dressed and asleep. The house was amazingly quiet; the neighbors had gone home. I raised my arms under the bed covers and discovered the action no longer caused pain. Though rid of the pain and the rheumatic fever, I was left with partially crippled limbs and an acquired heart condition; therefore, the family physician warned that I might never again play like other children.

The Whale Oil

My father was a firm believer in whale oil for therapeutic purposes. My Bermudian ancestors had obtained whale oil by boiling whale blubber in large iron pots over an outdoor wood fire. They used the oil primarily for massaging arthritic and rheumatoid limbs, and as fuel for lamps.

The whaling season, in the spring of the year, was one of Bermuda's most looked-for events. Schools of whales traveling from cooler climates would frequent the warm waters around Bermuda made warm because of the nearby gulf stream. The mammals would feed on the moss they grow on the off shore

reefs. This was a time when hundreds of islanders and tourists would sit with lunch boxes, along the hills of Bermuda's south shore and watch the huge ocean mammals at play. Not infrequently a whale would be close enough to the shore for its mooing to be heard. A whale spout, resembling a small water spout, would bring thunderous cheers from the crowds. While the older folk watched for these aquatic animals, children flew multi-colored kites or played a game of marbles or hop-scotch.¹

My latest illness had occurred in the late spring. Not having any whale oil on hand my father and Gunnison Astwood, along with some other whalers, went whale-hunting several miles off the Sinky Bay shore. Harpooning these cetacean creatures was not an easy task. It was on this occasion that an attack from a ferocious mammoth bull-whale caused severe damage to the whale boat. A man thrown from the boat was miraculously saved from the jaws of the huge fish.

The whalers returned with a young whale which they brought in at the Boat Bay located a few hundred yards west of Sinky Bay. From this whale they procured a dozen gallons of whale oil. My father took a whale rib and made an arch in a front yard flower garden.

A Whale Rib

Many times I stood in our garden and stroked the smooth surface of the rib from that baby whale. Twelve years later when my parents went to Jamaica, my father took the whale rib along. While traveling over the hills of Mandeville, he would display his whale bone, telling stories of the huge ocean creatures and the amazing power of whale oil. He would tell how during one whale hunting voyage, while attempting to harpoon a whale he was caught in the rope that held the harpoon. For a few minutes he was suspended over the water between the boat and the harpooned whale. Though the bones of his left hand had been severely crushed, he managed to swing himself back into the whaleboat.

Three times each day my father would come in from working in the stone quarry or from the farm to massage my limbs with warm whale oil. Mother would follow this ritual with a lighter, soothing massage from a lighted electric light bulb. As she did so she would tell the story of America's Jesse Owens who had recently become an Olympic champion.

"Resting Nuke"

As already stated, our house, my second home, was erected on a hill overlooking the bay. A few yards away from the house was a park-like area which we called "Resting Nuke" (nook), sheltered by a circle of cedar trees from which hung "grandfather's beard," a gray mossy plant. Between the house and "Resting Nuke," a small vegetable garden, partly hedged by oleander trees, a chicken coop and a cow shed, provided easy access to many different kinds of vegetables and edible plants. In a corner of this garden Mother built a little rock garden and fish pond around a natural spring in which tiny fish, baby turtles, and tadpoles swam among water-lilies.



"Whale Rib"



Ma Fanny (Rowling) of American Indian Ancestry, a relative of Dewey Smith, a 19th Century Southampton Bermuda family. Ma Fanny is supposed to be the matriarchal ancestor of the Sinky Bay Wilson clan through her son William. Ma Fanny brought up Benonie, William's daughter and some of her children.

During the months following my first attack of rheumatic fever my father, who had once been a marathon runner, often carried me around on his back. He would run in and out of the trees and along the Sinky Bay trails that led down to a well by the seashore. There I would watch as the cows were watered, pick a handful of cedar berries, or gather a bunch of oleander flowers or wild daisies for our dining room table.

After my second illness, being too old for "piggy-back-rides", I generally sat in 'Resting Nuke' on a seat naturally formed in a low branch of a cedar, watching relatives down in the bay with pitchforks furiously digging out long black slithery "cockworms" from the muddy sands of Sinky Bay. They would have to hurry before the tides returned if there was to be sufficient cockworm bait for fishing that day. When the tide came in I would watch the children swimming and long to be with them.

During the afternoon Mother would bring pencils and brown paper cut from a treasured paper bag; together we would write poetry, stories, and short plays. These were often used for our family night at home, or for a church or school concert. Though I was unaware of it then, Mother used these writing exercises as therapy sessions for my weak and partially crippled fingers. Though considered the family invalid, my daily chores were to help water the flowers which we grew in abundance and to feed the chickens. Occasionally I was allowed to feed fennel to my brothers' rabbits or to milk our nanny goat. A supper of sweet potato and

fried fish with a tin mug of warm goat's milk and a "hunk" of bakin' iron bread was a Sinky Bay household favorite.

Tender 'Roots'

That July in 1937 my only sister, Naomi, was preparing to enter West Indies College, Jamaica, and every penny was needed. Ways had to be found to supplement monies earned by my father and my older brother. Therefore, while Naomi sold religious books from door to door (besides doing many other things), my mother and my younger brothers and I went to South Down Farm, located in a valley southwest of the lighthouse, and for a few hours each day, boxed carrots and onions for shipping overseas.

While resting on a crocus bag (burlap) and munching a raw carrot, a raw potato, or one of mother's tasty oatmeal cookies, I would take onions from a nearby pile. Mother would cut off the tender roots and hardy tops, and my brothers would pack the produce in onion boxes. For each crate filled, another six-pence would be added to the family's educational fund.

That summer was a long and tedious one, but each day had its bright moments. Although our family owned several acres of property, with a dozen mouths to feed, and at times a foster child or a stranger sitting at our table, we were kept relatively poor. I, however, fared better than others in the family for, being much smaller than a normal twelve-year-old, "hand-me-downs" from my cousins gave me an ample supply of clothing. In return, our family gave them farm produce and fish. There was real joy in the home when someone brought us an armful of garments, though these had to be altered by mother's adroit fingers.

Whenever Daddy arrived home from a thrift-shop sale or an auction with a bag filled with shoes, dishes, or books slung across his back, we felt like rich people. These are some of the joys of being poor! Most well-to-do folk don't experience such pleasures.

My father hated to pass up a bargain. Once he was badly in need of a horse. What can a poor farmer do without his horse? But there was no money to buy one. One night a man came to our door leading a white horse. He offered to swap (trade) his horse for some of our chickens. My father knew a "good deal" when he saw one! Therefore, without thinking to acquaint my mother who actually owned the chickens, he eagerly made the exchange. The next day a sixteen-year-old cousin came flying head-first through my bedroom window, chased by my father's newly-acquired crazy white horse. Needless to say, the sick animal had to be destroyed.

"Smiling Mike"

In January 1938 after I had been away from school for several months, the family physician gave permission for me to return with instructions that I should participate in no strenuous activity because of the acquired rheumatic heart.

A few weeks later students at the school began preparing for the school's annual Sports Day. Like my brothers and male cousins whose running abilities were well known, I had previously won a number of trophies*. Now lying on a

*In recent years runners in this family have included marathon champions—Thomas Smith, Calvin Bean, Russ Ford, his brothers and sisters, and the young football star Derrick Scott.

mat on a slope at the edge of the school field, my former competitors "tortured" me for not being able to participate in the forthcoming events.

" 'Smiling Mike,' " they teased, "looks like you won't be taking any trophies home this year!" "Smiling Mike" was a nickname given to me by my first grade teacher because there was usually a grin on my face.

Though younger and smaller than many senior students, the school principal made me the Red House team captain, partly to boost my morale, and partly because it was a team that few persons wanted to captain, for this team was usually the loser. This, however, did not help my state of mind, therefore, Alison DeRosa (Golding) an ex-scholar discussed with me the possibility of my entering the forthcoming events.

Though aware of the dangers, but perhaps because of my obvious depression, my parents agreed that I could begin training. Each day after resting at the DeRosa residence, located near the school, I would go with Alison to the nearby school field, a grassy valley which lay between Turtle Hill and the school. Extreme caution was taken. While watching for danger signs, Alison would put me through the paces. For a few minutes each morning and afternoon the sessions continued. Each night my father would massage my legs and arms with the warm whale oil and my mother would again repeat the story of Jessie Owens. With the aid of these very strong people "rooting" my corner, I, too, grew stronger.

The big day finally arrived. As 'whoops' and 'hurrahs' of expected victory by Green House team-members filled the air, our 'miserable and fearful lot', met under the shade of a 'match-me-if-you-can' to repeat our team's motto 'To The Finish Line' and for last minute instructions. Team members prayed, not that they would win, but that they would do their best.

During the trials and practice periods, Red House members did not measure up to even the minimum standard of performance. Now for some 'unexplained reason' throughout the duration of the events, they displayed amazing teamwork and endurance, thereby nearly equalizing the scores of the two teams.

The sports announcer, using a megaphone, called the last race, a House Flag Relay, involving three members of each team. I was the last runner for the Red House team. The scoreboard showed that the Red House was four points behind the Green House. In this race, the winning team would score six points. The swifter Green House runners took the lead. When the Red flag was passed to me, the last runner carrying the Green flag had already started on the final lap around the field. The young woman was tall and brawny and with long legs. Physically, I was no match for this sprinter.

Now I ran as never before or since. The pounding in my chest seemed to tear my whole body apart; yet I ran as though my very life depended on winning. Hundreds of voices were all screaming at once, yet above the din I heard my name—'Nellie, Mike, faster, faster'.

Crossing the line, I fell on the soft green grass; for a moment there was complete oblivion. Then somebody put an ice cloth to my forehead as a voice, Allison's said, 'Nellie, we won'!

Though unaware of it at the time, in one last spurt I had touched the finish line just a step ahead of the other runner.

Thanks to Alison, to Mrs. Winifred Browne, the school's principal, and to my

parents, who did not attend the events that day, but remained at home, fully dressed—waiting and ready for any emergency. Not only did our team win the House Cup for the first time in seven years, as well as The Boys Championships—but I won the Southampton East School's girls' championship for the second time, a position that I was able to retain for three years in succession. Oftimes, I look back to those days. I think of the many people who touched me, and who helped me as I grew into womanhood, to live a richer, fuller, and more fruitful life. Surely each of these dear folk are partly responsible for what I am today.

Ashanti Woman

On several occasions, as a child growing up, my mother took me back to the westside seashore and told me the story of my birth. Then we would go to Wreck Hill a short distance away where she walked with me along Wreck Road, retelling a story told for generations about an ancestor named Rebecca, a slave sold and taken away from Bermuda on a slave ship. I used to hear that she was an Ashanti woman.

In 1969, ill and exhausted from overworking in order to help educate my children, I was badly in need of rest, therefore, drawing my last few pounds from the bank I boarded a plane for the first leg of my flight to Ghana. I did not expect to find my mother's family tribe nor was that the purpose for my going; I simply needed to regain my mental equilibrium; to walk and talk with the African people; to procure works of African art; and to bring back to Bermuda some of the African cultural heritage.



(Center) the author, holding a Girl's Championship Cup—1938. The Southampton East School's House Cup, and the Red House Boy's Cup as held by two young men.

What joy was mine as our plane winged its way over the Sahara en route to West Africa. I had a beautiful feeling of going home! Later as I sat on a queen's stool in a Kumasi village a few miles from Accra, a village chieftain accorded me the greatest honor when he said, "You have the features of an Ashanti woman."

For a long time I sat before the Chief and listened as he talked of those years of slavery, of the new independent Ghana, and of his people's hopes and dreams. For several days, wearing the national dress of hand-woven Kenti cloth, I walked among "my people" and along the paths from where my ancestors were once taken.

On one occasion I sat in a crowded church, amazed, as several interpreters, each standing before a group of people, interpreted in his own tongue a sermon that was being preached in English. Later, I was even more awe-struck. While waiting on the outside of another church, many watched as seventeen women's choirs came toward the church to participate in a choir festival. The women in their many varieties of African dress, walked in step, to a gentle beat of drums and singing. Each woman held a pastel coloured handkerchief over her head, waving it gently in the breeze. One particular choir was led by the village chief who was transported above the heads of four men in a palm-covered chair-sedan.

Some choirs had walked for many miles to get there. Then, each had waited on the outskirts of the village for a drum to give a signal for them to proceed, that they might all arrive, simultaneously, and in a particular formation. Though the church could not hold all of the participants, there was no confusion. The majority of the choirs stood on the outside of the open-walled church and sang from where they stood. Some choirs were accompanied by drums; most sang a *cappella*, and never was heard anything more beautiful.

FROM THE AUTHOR'S DIARY—Feb, 28/1969

"Singing Rally (choir festival) 17 choirs wearing different dress—Dorcas Welfare choir led by woman ringing a bell. The ladies are singing, dancing and waving handkerchiefs. Very interesting service, the singing is most beautiful—if the preacher says something that reminds folk of a song they burst in song and the minister has to stop preaching—one choir is coming in, others march around the tent singing. Methodists and Adventists combined to form a mass choir—Kona choir, drums—many colours, magnificent sight. The village chief, honoured guest. We have to stand in line to shake his hand. Fine good-looking man—"bush choirs" are now singing—It is interesting to hear the singing intermittent with the preaching. Young mothers have their babies in the choir with them, older children sit nearby. A mother stands nursing her baby as she sings. Beautiful, nothing interferes with baby's feeding. An usher with stick walks quietly along aisles touching people who go to sleep. The service began at 11 A.M., it is now 3 P.M. Hundreds sitting under palm roof—lizard in thatch, over my head, hope it doesn't fall on me! It is going to rain hard—here it comes—not a drop inside—as a guest I am seated on the platform—was introduced to congregation—the Methodist preacher in an effort to bestow

upon me one of the highest honours that their men give to their women, gave me his blessing so that I might have a baby (already had six), to them children are more precious than gold—sometimes a bride and groom are presented with two or three children as a wedding gift!

Feb. 29th

When the festival was over the choirs left the church in different directions, one led by the ringing of a bell, another by the village chief, others sang to the beat of drums—this was Africa, the way I had expected it to be."

A few days later while walking along a country road, I saw a sign. It read, "Bermuda Cottage." That served to rid my mind of any guilt that I might have felt for having used funds that I had originally set aside for my children's education.

On returning to Bermuda, in consultation with the Department of Education, and assisted by my husband, I initiated an Afro-Bermudian Cultural Arts Exhibition in an attempt to remind Bermudians of the cultural roots of Black people.

Hundreds of school children participated in the Art Exhibition which hundreds more attended. Many artists young and old—of both races displayed their creations. The most outstanding exhibit was perhaps, "Lift Every Voice" a painting, specially done for the occasion by the renowned Charles Lloyd Tucker (deceased).

My life had always been filled with numerous challenges; the Fall of 1973, two months after the last of my six children had gone to college, I found time to take inventory of my own skills. In doing so, a new challenge—to further my education, presented itself to me. Therefore, a few weeks later, in January of 1974, I entered the State University College at Buffalo, New York, where, by heavily programming my studies, and taking advantage of acquired background knowledge, I was able to complete a four-year degree program in Education in a little more than two years, and do a special concentration in Afro-Bermudian History. This accomplishment, in so short a time, in spite of numerous hurdles which appeared to block my progress, was certainly the result of my early up-bringing, years of practical involvements, and an unlimited source of Divine help, from which to draw.

In March of 1975, the Buffalo Business and Professional Women's Club invited me to speak at an International Women's Year function. They requested that the talk be centered around the Bermudian Black woman and the role that she has played in the development of her country. When I began to research the subject area, in Bermuda History books, the majority of which had been written by non Afro-Bermudians, I found little that concerned Black people. I pored over those few books written by Blacks, which spoke with pride of the Race. But while the latter proved to be invaluable as reference material concerning the activities of various Black men, they also, shed little light on the Black woman, or her family.

I became increasingly aware that if I was going to find anything worthwhile about the Bermudian Black woman or her family that I would have to do some



"Life Every Voice" Charles Lloyd Tucker—Artist

Prepared especially for the author in 1969 for an Afro-Bermudian Art Exhibition, the painting shows a couple in the foreground raising their voices in song.

*Title taken from the poem "Lift Every Voice" by James Weldon Johnson

intensive looking. Thus, I began as it were, moving rocks that had fallen from decayed walls and clearing weeds which had covered long-forgotten paths. I must trudge many miles over hills; thousands of photographs must be seen; volumes of old newspapers and many books must be read; visits to archives in Bermuda and in the United States of America must be made in search of original documents.

An Untapped Reservoir

In my quest, I sat at the feet of many of Bermuda's old folk as hour after hour they recalled the past. In checking sources of oral history, the accuracy of the information given to me by Bermuda matriarchs and patriarchs amazed me.

Blacks had always been made to believe that "coloured" people had little to do with the Island's colonization. But the Black Islander's history—long hidden from view—had only appeared to be non-existent.

Had this history not existed, Bermuda would have been the only place in the world where African descendants had lived and where they would not have left any tangible evidence of their past.

While doing my researches throughout Bermuda, I found family archives, official registers, legal documents, oral history, and other diverse sources, that yielded valuable information concerning the Black man's heritage. Some folk had boxes, trunks, and stuffed sacks, that had not been opened for as long as half a century. Many reluctantly took down the old relics—but oh, what joy I saw on their faces as they brought forth the beautiful experiences of the past—a marriage certificate, a love letter, an old deed, a will, an early 19th Century photograph, a three centuries' old Bible—yes! The lists were long and everything told something about a Black family's history.

One woman brought out an old family newspaper in which a poem, written by her grandmother, told about the death of a grandchild. Soon after the re-discovery of this old 19th Century poem, it was read again, nearly one hundred years later, at the funeral of another young descendant. The newspaper and poem bridged two centuries of family togetherness that had almost been forgotten.

Yes! I knew how vital this research was, for very soon many of these old people who came from all walks of life, and from every race, would have died carrying their knowledge with them. How regrettable that many contributors to this work would not be around to see its publication. Within the depths of Bermuda's coral sands lie the untold sufferings, and the glories of her Black folk. Carefully, as if fitting pieces in a puzzle, I began to reconstruct the Black family's past. The Spirituals that I had sung all my life suddenly took on new meaning. Then, one day while visiting a Black family in the ghettos of Buffalo, someone there suggested that the material be placed in a book so that it could be preserved for future generations.

Out of my researches evolved this book, "Mind The Onion Seed," a study in Bermuda's Black History, covering the period 1617-1975, with particular emphasis on women. Thus the year 1975, IWY, became for me one of revelation and celebration. A revelation—in getting to know myself a little better; in

celebration—for having been given the privilege of learning more about my people. Therefore the purpose for writing this book was three-fold:

- (a) To preserve its contents for future generations, and to give Black Americans and Black West Indians an example of our cultural and lineal ties;
- (b) To help provide suitable material which Bermudian educators could use in the preparation of curriculum development for Bermuda History, and to help the ordinary Black Bermudian to learn more about his roots;
- (c) For self-fulfillment. The enjoyment that I have received from doing these researches cannot be expressed in words.

Nehru, the great Indian leader, once remarked that people want “some cultural roots to cling to”; that “in every country with a growing nationalism there is this search. . . . this tendency to go back to the past.”²

Following the same trail another philosopher, in speaking of the developing African countries said, “Every nation builds its future on its past, so the African must not only instinctively have faith in his own existence, but must satisfy himself by scientific inquiry that it exists.”³

A final statement that may well be applied to Bermuda and the uncovering of the Black Bermudian’s historic background is this: “the real meaning and significance of a great civilization is not to be discovered in any one expression of its life. . . . to find this the student must study all of its parts so that he may see it whole.”⁴

Reconstructed from an interview with Mr. Irene Wentworth-Wilson, an 88-year-old great-granddaughter of Rebecca, from church records and other sources

Rebecca

Rebecca had no last name—she was “just” a twelve-year-old bare-footed Black girl with long pigtails, but she would never forget the day the traders came and took her mother away. She told the story to her children and to her children’s children and they passed it on, and it continues to be told for generation after generation.

Rebecca’s mother, Rebecca I, and her slave children were owned by a prominent Somerset family who also owned many other slaves. These Blacks were scattered over estates located around Wreck Hill, Daniel’s Head and Long Bay in Sandy’s Parish.

One day there was to be an unusual sale; unusual because the woman they were selling was a most unusual woman. She possessed a noble bearing and beauty. Perhaps her own mother was an Ashanti Queen; or perhaps she was the daughter of a Chieftain. When the woman spoke there was authority in her voice; her accent also showed her to be no ordinary slave.

When the traders began to bargain for her, they knew that the price would be high. That day as each man bid with the intensity one has for a prized mare, Rebecca’s thoughts certainly wandered back to her childhood days and to this day when they would take her from her family.

How many times had she stood on the Wreck estate and looked across Elys Harbour to the naturally-carved cathedral rocks at Gibbs Point; or listened to what appeared to be the deep-throated sounds of a pipe organ caused by the wind

as it raced through the rock-like cathedral spires? How many times had she walked barefoot along the pink coral sandy beach at Wreck Bay or waded out into the water to meet fishermen as they returned from fishing. She would help them dump their live fish from wooden tubs into a fish pond built among the rocks at the water’s edge. There they would be kept alive until needed. They might bring home a moray, a turtle or a hefty shark. She would fry some of the shark liver over a wood fire in the chimney, to obtain shark oil, or hang it in the sun and let the oil drip in a pan; then she would place the oil in a bottle, seal the top, and hang the bottle outside the door of her little one-room stone house. For many months it would be her weather barometer, remaining as clear as fresh sparkling water when the weather was fine and then clouding up to indicate bad weather.

How many times had she walked up Wreck Hill to the Old Fort and watched the slave children racing to and fro trying to outrun the wind, or hear them whooping down in the marshy inlet below as they played sailors and pirates? How many times had she stood on the hill waiting for the menfolk who had gone on a whaling trip after they had deposited their catch at Whale Bay, Southampton, a short distance away. Would they bring back sufficient whale flesh to supply enough meat for all the slave families? Or how many times had she stood on the hill looking toward the northwest horizon wondering what land of freedom lay on the other side of the ocean?

An extremely high price was paid for Rebecca, and somebody wanted her badly enough to pay it.

The slaveholder did not sell the younger Rebecca; perhaps he decided to keep her for a housemaid, or perhaps her mother, the woman they sold, pleaded with them to let her stay, knowing that within a few short months her daughter would be free.

When the hour came for the buyers to take Rebecca I away, she did not weep, scream or fall on her knees and beg for mercy as many others had done. She would give the traders no cause to use a whip on her—they would not dare mar her beauty! With the kind of dignity and poise that comes only from someone of nobility, this woman held her head high and for the last time walked the dusty cart-road which ran from Wreck House out on the point near Harbour’s mouth and which wound its way along the marshy shoreline of Pilchard Bay. One one side of Wreck Road grew a hedge of ‘prickly pears’. The cacti were in full bloom. On many occasions this queenly woman had paused to taste the red juicy fruit of the ripe prickly pear or gather a leaf for a savory cactus dish. Today, however, she walked on, ahead of the horse and rider. She did not seem to notice a herd of cows resting in the shade to her right or the low mooing of newborn calves; she did not smell the fresh scent of Bermuda onions growing in a road-side garden; nor did she notice little children and old women who paused from their hoeing to wave goodbye.

The traders led Rebecca and other newly-purchased slaves down the little rocky slope cut out of Bridge-Hill and across the tiny wooden bridge spanning the opening at Sandys Narrows. The bridge first mentioned in 1620 would become famous as ‘the smallest drawbridge’ in the world—the Somerset Bridge. Sailboats with white sails impatiently fluttering in the breeze would have to circle the waters north of Hog Bay Flat and wait for the group of captors and

Fifth	— Nora	— Bermudian
Sixth	— Lillian	— Bermudian
Seventh	— Nellie (the author)	— Bermudian
Eighth	— Lillaurie	— Bermudian
Ninth	— Kathleen	— American

At the time of this printing, the author had five American-born grandchildren, who were ninth generation descendants of Rebecca I.

The ancestry of Dr. Marjorie Bean, another descendant, may be found in Chapter Sixteen under "Linkage and Lineage."

3

“MIND THE ONION SEED”

A Story Told for Eighty-three Years

Grandmother Ashie—Master yelling in the lock-up—stone under her mother's feet—freedom, but no place to go—Emancipation Day—gold medallion—a family tradition—onions.

A Slave Narrative

as told by Mrs. Julia Place

In 1975, 85-year-old Mrs. Julia Place, a former newspaperwoman, sitting beside her husband, Mr. A. B. Place at their home in Cavendish Heights, Bermuda, recounted past events as clearly and distinctly as if they had happened only yesterday. This story, written in the exact manner as she told it, was corroborated by David Pitt and others.

Grandmother Ashie

My great-grandmother, Mrs. Mary Elsie Tucker, was very dear to me. I knew her quite well. I should say so—she did not die until after I was married! Everyone called her Grandmother Ashie. Her mother Alice was purchased on the auction block in Virginia and brought to Bermuda as a slave; that also made Elsie a slave. She told us many stories of her childhood—but some are too terrible to repeat.

“Elsie, or Ashie as she was called, was born about 1813; she died in 1917 toward the end of the year at 104 years old. She was twenty-one years old when Emancipation came, therefore, she knew all about slavery and how the slaves got their freedom. She told us the family history over and over again. Some things stand out in my memory—things which she repeated for eighty-three years.

“Just prior to Emancipation the slaves were filled with rejoicing. They had worked hard to get their freedom. They had fought, petitioned (and begged) to be set free. Life had not been easy for them. Alice worked in her Missus' kitchen; Ashie generally worked in the garden. The Master and Missus—no need to mention their names—owned all that portion of land just past Somerset Cricket Club field.

“One hot summer day, Ashie was told to go and ‘mind the onion seed’—that meant to keep the birds away from the garden. In those days palmetto trees grew in abundance. Many items such as brooms and fly and bird swats were made