


Slide 1

*My Research Journey to Home:  
Miles Lassiter, An Early African American Quaker*  
Margo Lee Williams



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Slide 2

Who Did I Think I Was?

- **I Knew a lot about who I was as a Williams**
  - Actually not as much as I thought, but
    - That's another story
- **Didn't know a lot about who I was on my Mother's side**
  - Did know the family was from North Carolina

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Slide 3

Starting at the Beginning: Oral Tradition

- **Working backwards**
  - My mother: Margaret Lilly Lee Williams
    - Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, but never lived there
    - Lived in Greensboro, NC briefly (where her sister, Vern, was born)
    - Moved to New Jersey after her mother died
    - Moved back to Asheboro, NC when her great grandmother Ellen fell ill
    - Moved finally to Elizabeth, New Jersey after Ellen died



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Slide 4

Oral Tradition (cont)

- **Her mother: Elinora Phillips Lee**
  - Born in Asheboro, NC
  - Died in the Flu Epidemic of 1918
  - Died on Armistice Day itself
  - Died in Greensboro, NC
- **Her mother (grandmother): Mary Louise Smitherman Phillips Floyd Ingram "Mama"**
  - Born in Asheboro, NC
  - Died in New Jersey
  - Married 3 times, DIVORCED her first husband (for adultery) at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then widowed twice



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Slide 5

Oral Tradition (cont)

- **Her mother: (great grandmother): Ellen Smitherman Mayo – "Grandma Ellen"**
  - Didn't know much about Smitherman
  - Didn't know his first name
  - She did know a few things about him, but they are not important to this story

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Slide 6

Oral Tradition (cont)

- Did know the second husband, Charlie Mayo
- She had some nice memories of her great grandmother "Grandma Ellen"
- Didn't know her maiden name or who her parents were

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Slide 7

Starting the Research

- **Initial Research Plan**
  - Find out her maiden name
  - Find out who her parents were
- **Without a maiden name**
  - No point in checking the census
  - But could check vital records
    - Look for a marriage record for Ellen ?\_ and ?\_ Smitherman
      - Not sure if I should send a request to the court with so little information
    - Look for a death certificate
- **Request for DC returned a certificate that named her parents**
  - Nancy Lassiter and Calvin Dunson
  - Asked my mother if she knew those names – “No”
- **Requested Grandma “Mama” Louise’s DC also**
  - Gave me Anderson Smitherman’s name
- **Look for a Deed for her home in Asheboro**

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Slide 8

Research

- **NOW I could request a marriage certificate AND go to the Census**
- **Found Calvin and Nancy Dunson**
  - In 1870
    - No Ellen, but based on her age probably already married
- **Request returned marriage certificate for 1865 for Ellen and Anderson Smitherman**
- **In 1860**
  - Ellen IS in the household
  - This is a FREE FAMILY OF COLOR




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Slide 9

Research(cont)

- **So what about 1850?**
  - Miles Lassiter!
    - With NANCY LASSITER in the household!
- **And 1840?**
  - No Miles
    - Remember only heads of households are named
    - Did it mean he wasn’t free?
    - Did it mean he lived with someone else?
- **Okay, for fun – what about 1830?**
  - LOL!! There he was!!
- **There is no 1820**
- **1810 – he was probably too young**
  - No Lassiters of color noted any earlier

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Slide 10

Research (cont)

- **I Just Looked at everything**
  - I knew by now there were a lot of Quakers in Randolph County, North Carolina
  - Looked in Hinshaw's *Encyclopedia of Quaker Genealogy*
    - There is a Miles Lassiter, who requested membership in 1845
- **Hmmmm**

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Slide 11

Research (cont)

- **Meantime, I requested copies of deeds in Grandma Ellen's name**
- **There were some, BUT**
  - Not the house IN Asheboro
    - That belonged to **Charlie Mayo**
  - Land in the COUNTRY – Lassiter Mill Community
  - Notation says "Division of Lands of Miles Lassiter"
    - Definitely shows Ellen is his descendant – **YEAH!!**
    - She was selling the land to Kate and Harold's brothers, Will and Colon




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Slide 12

The Journey Begins

- **AND then in 1982**
  - After discussions with my friendly county historian
- **I learned about a Lassiter family of color still living in Lassiter Mill area**
- The names she gave me matched my census research
- I made a phone call – talked to Kate Lassiter Jones
- Your grandfather and my great great grandmother were brother and sister!
- **She said,**
- **"Come on Down!!"**




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Slide 13

The Journey

- Made a trip to North Carolina
  - Met cousins I never knew
  - Saw a community I'd never seen
  - Learned this was my ancestral home!
  - Learned **THEY** knew there was a Quaker connection, but they only knew about their grandfather, Collier, being a Quaker.
  - **Nothing about Miles being Quaker**
  - Some thought his wife **MIGHT** have been Sarah
  - But Harold Lassiter said her name was "something like, 'Hilly'"




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Slide 14

The Journey

While there, Will who bought Grandma Ellen's land, showed me where it was




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Slide 15

Back Home in Maryland

- A request to the Friends Historical Collection at Guilford College returned information that he was formally accepted into Back Creek Meeting.
  - Technically a member of Uwharrie Meeting, which was a "Preparatory" Meeting.
  - located on what is now Lassiter Mill Road, about a mile north of the Lassiter property
- Miles Lassiter was **OFFICIALLY** a Quaker!
- But, they couldn't tell if any other people of color from the area were officially members
- (Future Research Project!!!)




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Slide 16

Solving Brick Walls or "Following the Bread Crumbs"

- Miles Lassiter
  - My 4<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather
    - According to the 1850 census owned \$500 worth of Real Property
- Okay – look for some deeds
  - While in North Carolina I looked for deeds
  - Found: A deed in 1815 for 100 acres
  - But sold in 1826 with co-grantor, Sarah Lassiter, the same 100 acres to Henry Newby, a Quaker
    - No other purchases noted
- More "hmmmm"



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Slide 17

Following the Bread Crumbs

- So if he sold his land in 1826
- No evidence he bought other land
- But he owned land in 1850
- And there was land ultimately divided that Grandma Ellen inherited
- WHAT LAND?????

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Slide 18

Following the Bread Crumbs (cont)

- Randolph County *Journal* article: "Heirs of Healy Phillips OR LASSITER"
- Who's that? (Remember what Harold said the wife's name was?)
- Names all the children associated with Miles
  - Emsley, Abigail, Colier, Wiley, Susannah, **Nancy**, & Jane
  - Calls them "Phillips or Lassiter"

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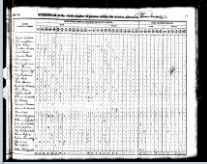
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Slide 19

Following the Bread Crumbs (cont)

- **1840 census**
  - A free family of color headed by HEALY PHILLIPS
  - Compare it to the 1830 census with Miles
    - Matches well for individuals
  - Is this truly his wife?
    - Children have her last name
    - Usually, children of Free woman have her name




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Slide 20

Back to the Quaker Connection

- So I'm still wondering, "What Land??"
- Randolph County Genealogical Society ran series on the journals of Thomas Newby from his visit from Indiana in 1857
  - He commented he visited with Calvin (suspect it actually said Calier - handwriting issue) Lassiter **"Where Father Used to LIVE"**
  - His father was HENRY NEWBY!
    - Henry Newby apparently returned the land to Miles when he went west to Indiana
- **BUT, it was somehow considered HEALY's land legally. WHY?**

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Slide 21

Slave or Free

- **Miles was Free wasn't he?**
  - He seemed to be Free when named to the Road Crew in 1807
  - He seemed to be Free when he bought land in 1815 and sold it in 1826
    - Although there was this curious thing that he Bought it in his own name, but SOLD it with a co-grantor, Sarah Lassiter
      - Sarah was white
      - No indication Sarah was Quaker
      - Records indicate her family was Methodist
  - Hmmmm

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Slide 22

Slave or Free (cont)

- He seemed to be Free in 1830 in the census
- BUT the 1840 census had Healy's name, oh well
- He was definitely Free in the 1850 census.
- Sooo, he was Free! Right?
- Not sure, because...

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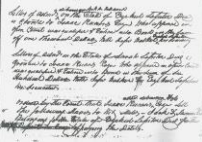
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Slide 23

Slave or Free (cont)

- In the Court Records
  - In 1840, Letters of Administration for Sarah Lassiter – nothing unusual
  - Same day – Letters of Administration for Ezekiel Lassiter and his ONLY Property –
    - Miles Lassiter
    - Jack Lassiter
    - Samuel Lassiter




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Slide 24

Slave or Free (cont)

- Healy bought Miles for \$0.05
- Colier bought Jack for \$12.50
- Poor Samuel went to Sawney Cranford (a Quaker) for \$262.25, because he had run away, was apprehended in Raleigh, and the debt to retrieve him had to be paid
- HUUUUHHHHH????

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Slide 25

The Quakers Again!

- Lots of theories
- Then one night ...
  - On the internet found an article in *Journal of Negro History* about BLACK QUAKERS
    - Named Miles Lassiter!
    - Mentioned his OBITUARY in *Friends Review*, a prominent Quaker journal
      - Got a copy via a friend at LOC
      - Answered almost ALL my questions!

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Slide 26

The Obituary

*Friend's Review*



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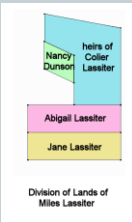
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Slide 27

Miles Lassiter

- Born a slave
- Slave owner died (Ezekiel Lassiter)
- His will said that Miles would be in the control of his widow (Sarah) until her death then revert to the estate and then be sold
- It said he was married to a Free woman (Healy)
- It said he was Sarah's business manager
- It said that together with his WIFE's resourcefulness they had amassed a large amount of land
- It said his wife bought his freedom
- It said he was THE ONLY BLACK QUAKER in NC at the time of his death 22 June 1850!



Division of Lands of Miles Lassiter

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Slide 28

More Bread Crumbs

- This all agreed with, and expanded on, a January 1851 letter preserved in the family that said
  - Healy was free
  - She was married to a slave
  - They had 7 children
  - Together they had acquired a lot of property
  - She died about 5 years before that (circa 1845)
  - He died in the summer of 1850
  - AND, for good measure, a NEW Brick Wall!!!
    - She had been MARRIED BEFORE
    - AND had 4 other children –UN-NAMED!!!

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Slide 29

Along the Way

- We had reunions and celebrations
- I pestered EVERYONE I could
- I became good friends with the Historical Society staff
- We had DNA tests done –both mtDNA and Y-DNA
- Learned I have no direct Revolutionary or Civil War soldiers in this family
- And I combed the microfilm records for vital stats, court minutes, wills and inventories, deeds, census, military records, County historical society, and devoured every journal from the county genealogical society, and hounded them as well.



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Slide 30

Advice?

- This is a Marathon, not a sprint
- Expect the unexpected – you never know what will fall in your lap
- Read everything
- Talk to everyone
- Visit as many places and people as possible
- Email everyone, phone everyone, write everyone
- DON'T worry about rejection –
  - You only stand to learn something new
  - You will never know LESS than you knew before you asked the question
- Don't rely on hearsay – DO YOUR RESEARCH –
- Be your OWN Expert!
- WRITE IT DOWN! (Use a software program!)

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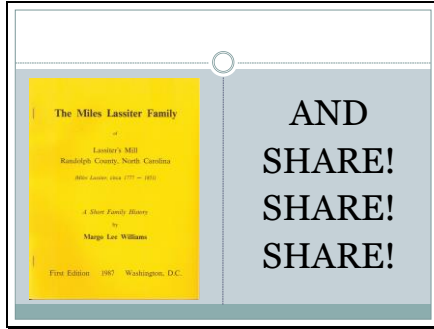
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Slide 31



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