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The Melungeons of East Tennessee, Part II

Editor's Note

"With all the light possible to be thrown upon them, the Malungeons are, and will remain, a mystery... They are going, the little space of hills, 'twixt earth and heaven allotted them, will soon be free of the dusky tribe whose very name is a puzzle, and whose origin is a riddle no man has unraveled. The most that can be said of them is, 'He is a Malungeon,' a synonym for all that is doubtful and mysterious..."

Will Allen Dromgoole, *The Arena*, March 1891

The story of the Melungeons, a dark-complected people who lived in Tennessee's Hancock County and surrounding area, has long piqued the interest of both historians and the general public. Legends and disputes abound as to their origin. Over the years they have been variously ascribed backgrounds of Indian, Phoenician, "Welsh" Indian, African American, Carthaginian, or Turkish descent. Some writers have gone so far as to describe them as possible survivors of the Lost Colony of Roanoke or the Lost Tribe of Israel.

Much of the mystery surrounding the Melungeons was created by local color writers from the nineteenth century who visited the Melungeons and wrote titillating, sometimes unflattering, descriptions of them for the enjoyment of their readers and to help promote their magazines. An unknown author, writing in a magazine called *Littell's Living Age*, March 1849, said that the Melungeons were "a society of Portuguese Adventurers" who moved to the Tennessee mountains "to be freed from the restraints and drawbacks imposed on them by any form of government" and that they now lived in "a delightful Utopia of their own creation, trampling on the marriage relation, despising all forms of religions, and subsisting upon corn." Another local color writer, Will Allen Dromgoole, in an 1891 series in *The Arena*, described them as "a colony of dark-skinned, reddish-brown complexioned people, supposed to be of Moorish descent, who affiliated with neither whites nor blacks, and who called themselves Malungeons, and claimed to be of Portuguese descent."

Even as late as 1947, an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* examined the many theories of origin and concluded, "About the people of Newman's Ridge and Blackwater Swamp just one fact is indisputable: There are such strange people. Beyond that, fact gives way to legendary mystery, and written history is supplanted by garbled stories told a long time ago and half forgotten."

Court cases in which their origins were called into question have added to the legend. One example is the 1846-48 Hawkins County cases in which eight Melungeon defendants were charged with voting in violation of a state law prohibiting Negroes from voting. After two of the defendants were found not guilty in separate jury trials in January 1848, charges against the other six were dismissed. In another trial, this time in Chattanooga in 1872, the right of a daughter to inherit her father's estate was questioned by his family who claimed the girl's mother was a Negro, and thus prohibited by law from inheritance. The defense lawyer argued that the family was actually Carthaginian or Phoenician, and the jury decision was in favor of the daughter.

Portuguese, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Indian, Negro, white? The debate continues even today. Historical and genealogical research, however, is shedding new light on this centuries-old mystery.

This article concludes a two-part series in *Tennessee Ancestor* featuring articles by two authors—one a professional genealogist and the other a noted family researcher. Together, they demonstrate how the riddle is being unraveled—generation-by-generation, one family at a time. The first in the series was by Pat Spurlock Elder of Kingsport, Tennessee, and was printed in the August 2003 issue of *Tennessee Ancestors*. The author of *Melungeons: Examining An Appalachian Legend*, Pat examines many of the theories and weighs them against current historical and genealogical research. Her conclusions are derived from more than three decades of Melungeon historical and genealogical research.

The second article is by Jack H. Goins of Rogersville, Tennessee and appears in this issue of *Tennessee Ancestors*. Jack outlines his research journey as he traced the ancestry and migrations of several of his families, considered to be Melungeon, from the time they arrived in East Tennessee back to their earliest known residences. He is the author of *Melungeons and Other Pioneer Families*.

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Examining Melungeon History through Genealogy: A Personal Journey

by Jack H. Goins

I was born in Hancock County, home of East Tennessee's fabled Melungeons. This familiarity with the area and its people has been an advantage to me in researching the history of individual Melungeon families and kinfolks. Of course, growing up, I didn't know I was Melungeon. In fact, during those early years, I never heard any one person actually identified as a "Melungeon."

"We are not Melungeons," I remember Grandpa Harrison Goins explaining to a group of neighbors about 1950, insisting, "We are not related to those folks at Sneedville." The Melungeons, to hear Grandpa and the old folks tell it, always lived "somewhere else"—over on the next ridge or beyond was how some of the older folks accounted for the people called Melungeon by their white neighbors.



Harrison Goins 1880-1954,
photo date 1940s

Our family, Grandpa always said, was Indian. Why, his own grandma Minor "was about three-quarters Indian and his Grandpa Goins was about one-half." Grandpa Goins was six feet tall, slender, dark-skinned, and looked a lot like the Cherokees we had seen on the reservation in North Carolina.

I was intrigued by the possible Indian heritage, as well as the reference to the mysterious people called "Melungeons." Later, I stumbled across several articles written about the Melungeons. One, an article in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1947, entitled "Sons of the Legend," focused the nation's attention on rural Hancock County. Residents who had talked freely to reporter William L. Warden were surprised upon reading the article to see their names in print and to discover that they were the Melungeons the author was writing about.

Asa Gibson, then 75 years old, when asked by Warden if his ancestors were Welsh warriors, Phoenicians, or survivors of Roanoke's "Lost Colony," had replied "an Indian." I remember talking with a lady, also interviewed for the article, who told me that there was no such thing as a Melungeon. She laughed as she assured me that the whole thing was a myth. Like Grandpa Goins, she claimed to be Indian, as have many other Melungeon descendants

with whom I have since talked or corresponded, including members of families now considered as Melungeon, such as Collins, Gibson, and Bolin.

My curiosity about the Melungeons was further stirred when I read two articles written by Will Allen Dromgoole, a local color writer from Nashville. The articles were from 1891 issues of *The Arena*, a progressive monthly magazine published in Boston.² Dromgoole had actually lived with a Melungeon family on Newman's Ridge for a short spell and based her writings on firsthand interviews and observations. This is especially meaningful when you realize that her Hancock County sojourn took place about 1890 and that some of those interviewed were either close descendants of the first settlers or else had known them personally.

Having grown up satisfied that I was part Indian, I was surprised to see the names of two of my great grandfathers and several of my distant relatives referred to in the articles as Melungeon. And I wondered again, "Just who were these Melungeons, and what is their origin?" In search of an explanation, I combined conversations with my own family members with interviews of descendants of other families in the Clinch River Valley area of Kyles Ford, Blackwater, Newman's Ridge, and Sneedville. Then I turned to the county, state, and federal records to see what I could find to either prove or disprove the tangled oral traditions.

Amazingly, I began to uncover useful and important records to document many of these families. As I examined the basic records of genealogical research—census records, deeds, wills, court records, tax lists, church minutes—a picture of these families began to take form. Eventually, I was able to trace and document, generation-by-generation, the origin of several of my families who were considered to have been Melungeon.

My research has brought me to the inescapable and thoroughly documented conclusion that Hancock County's early Melungeon settlers can be traced to the Pamunkey River in Louisa County, Virginia, with some located there as early as the late 1600s. Eventually, I found that these and neighboring families, over the course of two or three generations, migrated to the Flatt and Haw rivers in North Carolina, then to the New River border settlements of Virginia and North Carolina. The years 1790-1804 found them moving to the adjoining border counties of Russell (now Scott) County, Virginia and Hawkins (now Hancock) County, Tennessee. Some are listed on early Lee County, Virginia, records, although apparently, some of these were actually living in what is today Hawkins County, Tennessee at the time.³

This article will emphasize research on eight families, five of whom were considered Melungeon. Two of the other families—Riddle and Sizemore—are considered to be Native American. We will take a look at the descent and migration of these families over the space of two or three generations from Louisa County, Virginia, to the Clinch River Valley area on the Virginia-Tennessee border. Finally, the eighth family, Bledsoe, illustrates the interconnectedness of the above families with neighboring white families. My own descent is from five of these families. For the purposes of this article, I have listed my entire descent through the Goins and Bledsoe families, and for the other families I will show only the earliest known ancestor and then document the migration from Virginia into North Carolina and then into the Clinch River area. In the interest of space, these examples follow only one direct line and do not list the often extended network of families that migrated together.⁴

County Genealogy

	Created	Parent County
Virginia		
New Kent County	1654	York
Hanover County	1720	New Kent
Louisa County	1742	Hanover
Lunenburg County	1746	Brunswick
Halifax County	1752	Lunenburg
Pittsylvania County	1766	Halifax
Henry County	1776	Pittsylvania
Washington County	1776	Fincastle
Montgomery County	1776	Fincastle, Botetourt
Russell County	1785	Washington
Grayson County	1792	Wythe, Patrick
Lee	1792	Russell, Scott
Scott County	1814	Lee, Washington, Russell
North Carolina		
Granville County	1746	Edgecombe
Orange County	1752	Granville, Bladen, Johnston
Montgomery County	1778	Anson
Guilford County	1770	Rowan, Orange
Wilkes County	1777	Surry, Burke
Rockingham County	1785	Guilford
Ashe	1799	Wilkes
Tennessee		
Hawkins County	1786	Sullivan
Claiborne County	1801	Grainger, Hawkins
Hancock County	1844	Claiborne, Hawkins

As frontier migration spread and population increased, new counties were created. To follow the migration trail of these "Melungeon" families, it is very important to understand the evolution and creation of these new counties. For the convenience of the reader, this information is included here.

My Goins Family

Generation (1): William Going, born about 1665, was my tenth generation grandfather.⁵ William died in 1725, and the land he had owned in Stafford County, Virginia, fell into Prince William County when it was formed in 1731. His widow, Catherine, remarried about 1728 to a Patterson. Catherine's will, probated 23 July 1739 in Prince William County, appointed her "beloved son" John Going as her executor and named a son Alexander Goins and daughter Susanna Goins.⁶

The Goins family is also mentioned in a 1767 land dispute case of Carlyle vs. Alexander in Stafford County, Virginia. Charles Griffith testified (1767, Fairfax County, Virginia) that 43 years prior, he had heard Major Alexander say "he had a mind to run the Mulatto rascals off his land," referring to James and Thomas Going, believed to be brothers of William Going.⁷

(2) John Going, Sr., son of William Going, was my ninth generation grandfather.⁸ He married Mary Keife, daughter of Cornelius Keife. John and Mary Going's various deeds can be identified by John's peculiar mark in which he made the initial J over a G, and Mary's mark was "M." In 1742, Fairfax County was formed from Prince William, and the land John Goings inherited from his father, William, fell into the new county. On 5 March 1744, John Goins and wife Mary Keife sold this land.⁹ John Going next appears on a 1750 tax list of Lunenburg County, Virginia. He received a land grant there, dated 14 February 1761.

(3) John Going, Jr., born 1735, (son of John Going, Sr. and his wife Mary Keife) was my eighth generation grandparent.¹⁰ John, Jr. married Elizabeth (maiden name unknown). As evidenced from his many land holdings and his will, John, Jr. was a man of some substance. At the time of his death in 1801, he and Elizabeth had eleven children "then living." I descend from two of them, Zephaniah Goins who married Elizabeth Thompson, and Elizabeth Goins who married Hezekiah Minor.¹¹ While most tax and census records list John and Elizabeth's children as white, others show them as free persons of color.¹²

(4) Zephaniah Goins, son of John, Jr. and Elizabeth Goings, was my seventh generation grandfather. In his Revolutionary War pension application, dated December 18, 1834, Hawkins County, Tennessee, Zephaniah stated that he "was born in the county of Halifax and state of Virginia and living in the county of Henry when called into service." He married Elizabeth Thompson on 20 June 1790 in Henry County, Virginia.¹³ About 1812 he moved to the area of Blackwater, Virginia (just over the line from Kyle's Ford in today's Hancock County, Tennessee).

A breakthrough discovery in my quest for the origin of the Goins family came when I found Zephaniah Goins in the Blackwater Primitive Baptist Church. He is shown in the minutes as joining by dismissal letter from an unnamed church. Also in the Blackwater Primitive Church

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Washington County	1776	Fincastle
Montgomery County	1776	Fincastle, Botetourt
Russell County	1785	Washington
Grayson County	1792	Wythe, Patrick
Lee	1792	Russell, Scott
Scott County	1814	Lee, Washington, Russell
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Orange County	1752	Granville, Bladen, Johnston
Montgomery County	1778	Anson
Guilford County	1770	Rowan, Orange
Wilkes County	1777	Surry, Burke
Rockingham County	1785	Guilford
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George Washington Goins and Susan Minor Goins ca. 1910

minutes, 1816-1834, I found three other seventh-generation grandfathers—Thomas Bledsoe, Henry Fisher, John England (all of whom served in the Revolutionary War).

Zephaniah Goins, born 1758, was enumerated as a "free person of color" on the 1830 census of Roane County, Tennessee, and Zephaniah's brother Zachariah was listed as "a free man of color" on the 1800 tax list of Lee County, Virginia. Some of the grandchildren of Zephaniah Goins and Hezekiah Minor were enumerated as mulattoes in the 1870 and 1880 censuses of Hancock County, Tennessee. It should be noted that there is a strong tradition of "Portuguese" descent in this family.

My line from Zephaniah Goins (great-grandson of William) is as follows:

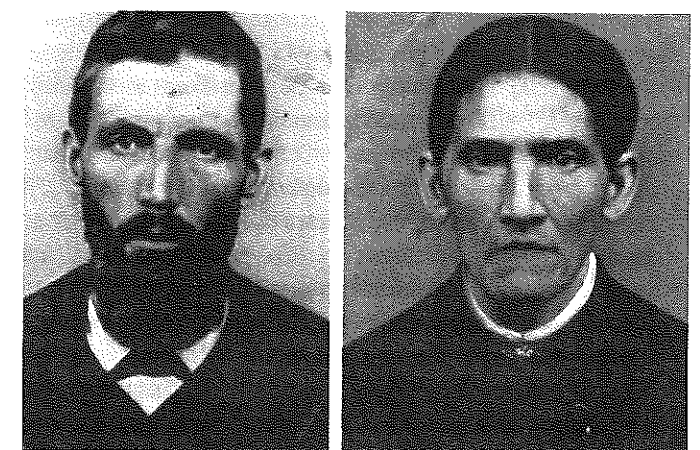
(5) Zephaniah's son Isaiah Goins (born 1795 in Rockingham County, North Carolina, died 1880 Hancock County, Tennessee) married in 1830 to Arminta Lindsey who was born 1800 in Virginia and died in the 1870s in Hancock County, Tennessee.

(6) William Goins, son of Isaiah Goins and Arminta Lindsey, was born 1835 and died 4 January 1865 in Hancock County, Tennessee. He married Susan Minor 16 September 1856 near War Gap in Hawkins County, Tennessee.

(7) Hezekiah Goins (born 1857; died 1945) was the son of William and Susan Minor. He married in 1876, Hancock County, to Sarah Ann Hurd (March 9, 1856-June 21, 1936).

(8) Harrison Goins (son of Hezekiah Goins and Sarah Ann Hurd) was born 21 August 1880 in Hancock County, Tennessee, and died 16 July 1954 in Hawkins County, Tennessee. Harrison married Martha Bledsoe in 1904. She was born 15 May 1884 in Hancock County, Tennessee, and died 9 August 1918 in Hancock County from burn complications.¹⁴

(9) Harrison's son McKinley Goins was born 18 July 1911 in Hancock County, Tennessee and died 18 May 1994 in Hawkins County, Tennessee. He married Ona Mae Arrington Oct 28, 1934 in Scott County, Virginia, Ona Mae Arrington Goins died 6 March 2002 in Hawkins



Zachariah Goins

Elizabeth Minor Lawson Goins

County, Tennessee. McKinley Goins and Ona Arrington Goins are my parents.

Gibson

While most of these early families migrated from the Pamunkey River area of Virginia to North Carolina and then to the Clinch River area of in a series of moves over two or three generations, Charles Gibson holds the distinction of being the only person I have documented to have made the entire journey in his lifetime.

When Charles Gibson filed his Revolutionary War pension application in 1839, he was probably the oldest living Melungeon on Newman's Ridge. In his own words, he stated he was born in Louisa County, Virginia, and enlisted in the Revolution near Salisbury, North Carolina. Benjamin Collins, Jonathan Gibson, and Jordan Gibson testified that Charles Gibson was commonly believed among those in the neighborhood to have been a Revolutionary War soldier.¹⁵

Charles Gibson was the son of Thomas, Sr., and Mary Gibson, who in 1749 sold their land on the south side of the Pamunkey River in Louisa County, Virginia, adjoining the land of Gilbert Gibson (Gilbert Gibson's exact relationship to Thomas is unknown, but proximity, migration patterns, and continuing interaction indicate a close relationship). Gilbert Gibson had sons Gedion, Jordan, and George Gibson.¹⁶

Thomas Gibson sold his land on the Pamunkey River in 1749 when he made his mark with a distinctive "T." In 1750 he is on the tax list of Granville County, North Carolina (which later became Orange County). He sold this land in 1770 (again with the distinctive "T") and moved to the New River area where his children and cousins were living.¹⁷

Thomas Gibson made a land entry 9 June 1780 in Wilkes County, North Carolina for land on Obed's Creek at Cranberry Path, both of which were branches of the New River. This land was near the south fork of the New River in present-day Ashe County, North Carolina.¹⁸

Gibson's family migrated to Fort Blackmore before 1800 and can be found in the records of the Stony Creek

Baptist Church, beginning in 1801. Most of this family moved to Newman's Ridge in Hawkins County, Tennessee, beginning 1803-1804, and most disappear from the church records by 1808. The church minutes record them coming back for meetings and some, such as Charles Gibson, were brought before the church for drinking and fighting.

Tax and land records indicate that these families were dark complected. The 1754-55 Orange County, North Carolina tax records, for example, refer to them as "mulatto" or Indian. A 1761 North Carolina grant for land in Orange County refers to "700 acres to Thomas Collins on Dials Creek of the Flat River," with chain bearers George Gibson and Paul Collins (mulattoes).¹⁹

When Gedion Gibson migrated to South Carolina, it caused a disturbance in Craven County. Governor Robert Johnson of South Carolina summoned Gedion Gibson and his family to explain their presence in the area and after meeting them reported,

"I have had them before me in council and upon examination find that they are not Negroes or slaves but free people, that the father of them here is named Gedion Gibson and his father was also free. I have been informed by a person who has lived in Virginia that this Gibson has lived there several years in good repute and by his papers that he has produced before me that his transactions there have been very regular. That he has for several years paid taxes for two tracks of land and has seven Negroes of his own. That he is a carpenter by trade and is come hither for the support of his family. I have in consideration of his wife being a white woman and several white women capable of working and being serviceable in this country permitted him to settle in this Country."²⁰

Gedion Gibson was the son of Gilbert Gibson. Some of these Gibsons were among several families who migrated circa 1790s from the New River area of Wilkes County, North Carolina to Fort Blackmore in Virginia and joined the Stony Creek Church, 1801-1802. Most of these families had left the area by 1810.²¹

Riddle (Ridley)

My eighth generation grandparents, Moses and Mary Riddle (Ridley), were of Indian descent. They are on the 1755 tax list in Orange County, North Carolina, and are identified as mulatto. It is likely that Moses did not move, but his land fell into Orange County when it was created from Granville in 1753. Moses Riddle was closely associated with Charles Gibson, Thomas Gibson, Sr., Thomas Gibson, Jr., Thomas Collins, Joseph Collins, William Bolin, and John Brown and appears on the Granville and Orange County tax lists with them. Moses

later moved to Pittsylvania County, Virginia, where he is recorded on the 1767 Pittsylvania County tax list, John Wilson's company, as "an Indian."²² William Ridel (believed to be his son) is on this same list. Moses and Mary were the parents of William and John Riddle.

William Riddle married Happy Rogers, and they lived in Pittsylvania County, Virginia before moving to Montgomery County, Virginia, where his brother John Riddle also lived. Siding with the British, William was a Tory captain during the Revolutionary War. He was wounded and/or captured in a battle on Riddle Knob in the spring of 1781. One report says he was shot and killed by Ben Greer, while another says that William Riddle, along with five other men, one of whom was his son, were taken to Wilkesboro Meeting House and hung on the Tory oak. William's wife, Happy, saw her husband and son hanged. Happy is mentioned in the Montgomery County, Virginia court records when she demands that a milk cow taken by William Love be returned to her. William and Happy were the parents of seven children, some of whom were bound out following their father's death. Happy eventually remarried to William Ingraham and they moved to Hawkins County, Tennessee. After Happy's death, the children went to live with relatives in Russell County, Virginia.²³

John Riddle, son of Moses and brother to William, filed a Revolutionary War pension application stating that he was born in 1750 on the Flatt River. Randall Riddle, thought to be John's son, is listed on the 1830 Stokes County, North Carolina census as a free person of color. In 1840 he moved to Hawkins County, Tennessee.

Bunch

Micajer "Cage" Bunch is the first of the "Melungeon" settlers to appear in the records of the Clinch River area. Certainly, he was there by 1792 when he is listed with land adjoining John Rice on the waters of Joseph Wallings Mill Creek, a branch of the Clinch River. The land was near present-day Kyles Ford in Hancock County, Tennessee, very near the Virginia border. This proximity likely accounts for his signature on a 1792 petition to form Lee County, Virginia, as well as his presence on a 1795 Lee County tax list. Many of those with records in Lee County, Virginia, were actually living in what is now Tennessee.

Micajer Bunch descends from (1) John Bunch, who was born in 1630 and came from England to Lancaster County, Virginia in 1651 as an indentured servant. He later moved to New Kent County, Virginia where he bought land on the Pamunkey River. John had at least two sons: John, Jr. who had a large family in Louisa County, Virginia, and Paul, born 1670, who moved to Chowan County, North Carolina.²⁴

(2) Paul Bunch (son of John) received a land patent for 265 acres on the south side of the Roanoke River, 1

Baptist Church, beginning in 1801. Most of this family moved to Newman's Ridge in Hawkins County, Tennessee, beginning 1803-1804, and most disappear from the church records by 1808. The church minutes record them coming back for meetings and some, such as Charles Gibson, were brought before the church for drinking and fighting.

Tax and land records indicate that these families were dark complected. The 1754-55 Orange County, North Carolina tax records, for example, refer to them as "mulatto" or Indian. A 1761 North Carolina grant for land in Orange County refers to "700 acres to Thomas Collins on Dials Creek of the Flat River," with chain bearers George Gibson and Paul Collins (mulattoes).¹⁹

When Gedion Gibson migrated to South Carolina, it caused a disturbance in Craven County. Governor Robert Johnson of South Carolina summoned Gedion Gibson and his family to explain their presence in the area and after meeting them reported,

"I have had them before me in council and upon examination find that they are not Negroes or slaves but free people, that the father of them here is named Gedion Gibson and his father was also free. I have been informed by a person who has lived in Virginia that this Gibson has lived there several years in good repute and by his papers that he has produced before me that his transactions there have been very regular. That he has for several years paid taxes for two tracks of land and has seven Negroes of his own. That he is a carpenter by trade and is come hither for the support of his family. I have in consideration of his wife being a white woman and several white women capable of working and being serviceable in this country permitted him to settle in this Country."²⁰

Gedion Gibson was the son of Gilbert Gibson. Some of these Gibsons were among several families who migrated circa 1790s from the New River area of Wilkes County, North Carolina to Fort Blackmore in Virginia and joined the Stony Creek Church, 1801-1802. Most of these families had left the area by 1810.²¹

Riddle (Ridley)

My eighth generation grandparents, Moses and Mary Riddle (Ridley), were of Indian descent. They are on the 1755 tax list in Orange County, North Carolina, and are identified as mulatto. It is likely that Moses did not move, but his land fell into Orange County when it was created from Granville in 1753. Moses Riddle was closely associated with Charles Gibson, Thomas Gibson, Sr., Thomas Gibson, Jr., Thomas Collins, Joseph Collins, William Bolin, and John Brown and appears on the Granville and Orange County tax lists with them. Moses

later moved to Pittsylvania County, Virginia, where he is recorded on the 1767 Pittsylvania County tax list, John Wilson's company, as "an Indian."²² William Ridel (believed to be his son) is on this same list. Moses and Mary were the parents of William and John Riddle.

William Riddle married Happy Rogers, and they lived in Pittsylvania County, Virginia before moving to Montgomery County, Virginia, where his brother John Riddle also lived. Siding with the British, William was a Tory captain during the Revolutionary War. He was wounded and/or captured in a battle on Riddle Knob in the spring of 1781. One report says he was shot and killed by Ben Greer, while another says that William Riddle, along with five other men, one of whom was his son, were taken to Wilkesboro Meeting House and hung on the Tory oak. William's wife, Happy, saw her husband and son hanged. Happy is mentioned in the Montgomery County, Virginia court records when she demands that a milk cow taken by William Love be returned to her. William and Happy were the parents of seven children, some of whom were bound out following their father's death. Happy eventually remarried to William Ingraham and they moved to Hawkins County, Tennessee. After Happy's death, the children went to live with relatives in Russell County, Virginia.²³

John Riddle, son of Moses and brother to William, filed a Revolutionary War pension application stating that he was born in 1750 on the Flatt River. Randall Riddle, thought to be John's son, is listed on the 1830 Stokes County, North Carolina census as a free person of color. In 1840 he moved to Hawkins County, Tennessee.

Bunch

Micajer "Cage" Bunch is the first of the "Melungeon" settlers to appear in the records of the Clinch River area. Certainly, he was there by 1792 when he is listed with land adjoining John Rice on the waters of Joseph Wallings Mill Creek, a branch of the Clinch River. The land was near present-day Kyles Ford in Hancock County, Tennessee, very near the Virginia border. This proximity likely accounts for his signature on a 1792 petition to form Lee County, Virginia, as well as his presence on a 1795 Lee County tax list. Many of those with records in Lee County, Virginia, were actually living in what is now Tennessee.

Micajer Bunch descends from (1) John Bunch, who was born in 1630 and came from England to Lancaster County, Virginia in 1651 as an indentured servant. He later moved to New Kent County, Virginia where he bought land on the Pamunkey River. John had at least two sons: John, Jr. who had a large family in Louisa County, Virginia, and Paul, born 1670, who moved to Chowan County, North Carolina.²⁴

(2) Paul Bunch (son of John) received a land patent for 265 acres on the south side of the Roanoke River, 1

January 1725, in Chowan County. In his will, probated 10 March 1727 in Chowan County, North Carolina, Paul Bunch left his land and eight slaves to his son John and to his daughter Fortune Holdbee and her daughters Keziah and Jemima. Daughter Elizabeth Bunch and a daughter whose last name was Russell received one shilling each.

(3) John Bunch, born 1695, was the son of Paul Bunch. John died in Chowan County, North Carolina.

(4) Gedion Bunch, son of the John Bunch born in 1695, was mentioned on the 1750 tax list for Granville County, North Carolina.

(5) Micajer Bunch (son of Gideon) was listed as a tithable of Gedion Bunch on the 1749 Lunenburg County, Virginia tax list and later on the 1750 Granville County, North Carolina tax list in the area that became Orange County in 1753. In 1779 he had a land entry on Elk Creek in Wilkes County, North Carolina.²⁵

Collins

Thomas Collins, Sr. was born in 1710 and is believed to be the ancestor of the Collins family, who are considered to be Melungeon, in Hancock County, Tennessee. Thomas was living in New Kent County, Virginia, as early as the 1720s. His land adjoined the land of other families who were later to become known as the Melungeons of Newman's Ridge in present-day Hancock County. Others of the Collins name listed in the New Kent and Louisa County records were Samuel, John, and William Collins, believed to be brothers of Thomas.

Descendants are lucky that the Collins men had a penchant for trouble and therefore left a paper trail. On January 25, 1745 in Louisa County, Virginia, William Hall, Samuel Collins, George Gibson, and Thomas Gibson were among a group of men called to answer an indictment for concealing tithables.²⁶

John Collins, thought to be a brother to Thomas, is mentioned as an Indian in the following record: "Alexander Machartoon, John Bowling, Manincassa, Capt. Tom, Isaac, Harry, blind tom, Foolish Jack, Charles Griffin, John Collins, Little Jack, Indians being brought before the court for stealing Hogs. Ordered that their Guns be taken away from them till they are ready to depart of this county, they having declared their intentions to depart this colony within a week."²⁷

In 1747, Thomas Collins sold 184 acres south of the Pamunkey River in Louisa County, Virginia and migrated not long after to North Carolina. Thomas Collins, Samuel Collins, and John Collins were living on the Flatt River in Granville County, North Carolina by 1750.²⁸ Orange County was created from Granville in 1753, at which time they were shown on the tax list for the new county. A land warrant to John Dunnagan in 1760, recorded in Granville Proprietary Land Office, mentions the land as "including Thomas Collins, George Gibson, Paul Collins Mulatto Improvements."²⁹ In 1777, Caswell County was formed

from Orange, and it included the Flatt River land where some of the Collins families lived. The 1777 Caswell County tax list shows: Paul Collins 1 tithable, Martin Collins 1 tithable, Middleston Collins 1 tithable, Obadiah Collins 1 tithable, John Collins 1 tithable.

Thomas Collins was not listed in the new county because he had died about 1770. The Collins and Gibson families sold their Flatt River land, 1767-1770, and moved to the backwoods sections of the New River, where some were listed on tax records in Fincastle County as "living on Indian lands." Most of Thomas' children joined this migration. A 1771 Botetourt County, Virginia tax list records their arrival: number of males over 16 years—Charles Collins 1, John Collins 4, Samuel Collins 2, and Mckegeer Bunch with 1.

With the establishment of Fincastle County from Botetourt in 1772, the Collins family once again found themselves in a new county without ever moving. The following are shown on the 1773 Fincastle tax list: David Collins (on Indian lands), Ambrose Collins, John Collins, John Collins, Jr., Charles Collins (on Indian land), Elisha Collins, Samuel Collins (on Indian land), Lewis Collins, George Collins (on Indian land), and Micajer Bunch (on Indian land).

A tax list of 1778 Wilkes County (the area that became Ashe in 1778) records: Ambrose Collins, Charles Collins, Samuel Collins, Micajer Bunch, David Collins, George Collins, Julius Bunch. Montgomery County was formed from Fincastle in 1777, and thus, in 1782, the Montgomery County tax lists shows the following: Martin Collins, John Collins, Sr., John Collins, Jr., Lewis Collins, Milton Collins, Ambrose Collins, David Collins, and David Gibson.

Lewis Collins was the son of John Collins, Sr. He made an application in Hawkins County, 16 August 1834, for a Revolutionary War pension, in which he outlines the migration of the family. He was living in Grainger County at the time of the pension application and stated that he "first entered the service in 1778 while living on the Broad River in South Carolina. Moved back to the New River in Montgomery County, Virginia where his Father lived and enlisted there in 1780."

Lewis omitted a vital part of the story from his application. He was actually a Tory in 1778. An 1834 affidavit names Lewis Collins as among a group of Tories who raided the home of Captain John Cox on New River, and were captured by a Captain Martin at a Rock House on the New River in 1780. Two of them, Lewis Collins and David Gibson, escaped. The deponent, Joseph Collins, stated, "I am intimately acquainted with both men and have heard them tell how they made their escape." The Revolutionary War pension application of John Speltz confirms the story and adds that nine were captured and two, Nichols and Riddle, were hung on their return.

Many of these families, later referred to as Melungeon, began to migrate to the Clinch River Valley

area on the Tennessee-Virginia border in the 1790s. The first record of a Collins in this area was for Daniel Collins with 4 tithables on the 1798 Hawkins County tax list.

By 1801, a host of Collinses were here. At this time, most of the settlers north of the Clinch River were listed in Lee County, Virginia. This was because the dividing line between Virginia and Tennessee was not yet fully established.

Vardeman Collins, known as "Vardy," is one of the best known and most colorful of the original Melungeon settlers. He is on the 1800 census of Ashe County, North Carolina with four free colored in his family. He is in Hawkins County, Tennessee by 1810, at which time he appears on the tax list. Since he is generally accepted as being the first settler on Newman's Ridge, this establishes the community's date as after 1800. Vardy is believed to have been the son of Samuel Collins. His first name of Vardeman is likely derived from his mother, thought to be the daughter of John Vardeman who, along with Samuel Collins, appears on the 1770 Botetourt County, Virginia, tax list, Captain William Herbert's company.

Sizemore

The first record we have of Edward "Ned" Sizemore, born about 1725, is when he enters 400 acres on the south side of the Banister River in Lunenburg County, Virginia (later Halifax) in 1746. An Edward Sizemore was with the New River settlers near the Fincastle/Montgomery County, Virginia and Surry County, North Carolina border. He likely was with the group who moved in 1767, as he appears on the Surry County, North Carolina tax lists, 1771-1774. Ned Sizemore's sons were Owen, Edward, and George. Owen is shown on the 1780 Montgomery County, Virginia delinquent tax list as "moved to North Carolina."

This Edward Sizemore on the 1774 Surry County tax list is the only Sizemore listed in the area and is likely the same as Edward "Ole Ned," the father of Edward, George and Owen. It is also likely that he is the Sizemore hung by Colonel Benjamin Cleveland in a cornfield near Wilkesboro, North Carolina about 1780. The account comes from a letter written by James Gwynn, an eyewitness to the hanging, to historian Lyman Draper. Unfortunately, Gwynn recalled only that the man's last name was Sizemore. Several Tory uprisings are recorded in this New River area. At the request of Captain John Cox, those who were engaged in the insurrection, Edward Sizemore, Owen Sizemore, David Smith, and Thomas Penorese, and James Green were allowed to take the oath of allegiance and post bond for good behavior.³⁰

Owen, Edward, and George Sizemore moved to South Carolina about 1781, perhaps fleeing North Carolina because of the insurrection that led to their father's death the previous year. Military records show that all three were paid as Royalists in the Revolutionary War. (Payroll record of South Carolina Royalist)

Owen was probably living in South Carolina on July 28, 1784 when his daughter Lydia was born. He soon after moved back to North Carolina and purchased land on Praters Creek, Wilkes County. He sold this farm to his brother George and moved to Hawkins County, Tennessee about 1800. Owen lived in the Clinch, Pumpkin Valley area of Hawkins County, near the present Hancock County, Tennessee line.

Family tradition says Edward "Ned" Sizemore was an Indian full blood. More than 2,000 of his descendants filed Cherokee claims beginning in 1906. All of these were denied because the family did not appear on any of the previous Cherokee rolls.³¹

Minor

Hezekiah Minor (1770-c.1840) was born in Virginia. His parents are not known. He married on 19 September 1795 to Elizabeth Going, the daughter of John Goings.³² Hezekiah is enumerated in the 1810 census of Rockingham County, North Carolina. He is on the 1814 Lee County, Virginia tax list and was enumerated on the 1820 census for that county. They were probably living in the Wallen Creek area where Hezekiah had a survey of 200 acres, dated 28 November 1818.³³ Wallen Creek is in the valley between Wallen Ridge and Powell Mountains, about 15 miles from Kyles Ford in Hancock County, Tennessee. Hezekiah Minor joined the Blackwater Baptist Church at Kyles Ford, 2 May 1824, and was laid under censure in February of the next year for non-attendance.

Hezekiah Minor and wife Elizabeth Goings were the parents of at least four sons, three of whom—Zachariah, John, and Lewis—have been identified, and four daughters whose names are not known. The sons settled in Hawkins County, Tennessee about 1822, in the area that later became Hancock County, about 1822.

Zachariah (son of Hezekiah) married Aggie Sizemore 18 October 1824 in Hawkins County. They were the parents of 11 children. I descend from their daughter Susan (14 May 1835-16 November 1914), who married her first cousin William Goins on 16 September 1856. Susan Minor and William Goins had five children, and I descend from their son Hezekiah Goins, who was my great grandfather. William died at the hands of Rebel soldiers in January 1865.

Bledsoe

Abraham Bledsoe and wife Mary Catherine Wilcox came from North Carolina to settle on Reedy Creek, about seven miles from the Long Island of the Holston River in about 1776 (now Sullivan County, Tennessee, site of present-day Kingsport). Of a prominent frontier family, Abraham was a brother to Isaac and Anthony Bledsoe, who moved to the Cumberland settlements where they were massacred by Indians in 1788 and 1793. This Bledsoe line of descent is included here as an example

area on the Tennessee-Virginia border in the 1790s. The first record of a Collins in this area was for Daniel Collins with 4 tithables on the 1798 Hawkins County tax list.

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of intermarriage of a Melungeon family (Goins) to neighboring families.

Abraham's son, Thomas Bledsoe, born March 1760 in North Carolina, was my fifth generation grandfather. Thomas Bledsoe, was stationed at Fort Blackmore during one of his enlistments in the Revolutionary War. Built by Captain John Blackmore before the Revolutionary War to protect the settlers from Indian attack, the fort was located on Stony Creek in Washington County, Virginia, about eight miles southwest of present-day Dungannon in Scott County, Virginia.

In his Revolutionary War pension application, filed in Hawkins County, Tennessee, April 24, 1834, Thomas Bledsoe stated that one of his commanding officers was John Sevier. He also mentioned an Indian leader named Logan who broke into the settlement and took prisoners, one of whom was Abraham Bledsoe, Jr., Thomas' brother. They trailed them and exchanged prisoners at the Ohio River.

Thomas Bledsoe married Margaret McDonald, and their son Abraham (born 17 May 1790), married on 12 December 1816 to Millicent Wallen (born 4 January 1797), the daughter of James C. Wallen (born 18 March 1771) and Mary Johnson (born 5 September 1773), daughter of Moses Johnson and wife Sarah Powell.

Joseph Bledsoe (born 26 September 1817) was the son of Abraham and Millicent Wallen Bledsoe. He married in 1883 to Margaret Bledsoe Parsons (born 1848). Their only child, Martha (born 15 May 1884), married in 1904 to Harrison Goins, and their son McKinley Goins (born 18 July 1911) was my father.

The Records Tell the Story

Several men whose descendants later migrated to Hancock County were neighbors in Virginia around 1730—John Bunch, Gilbert Gibson, Thomas Gibson, and Thomas Collins. They began selling their land in Louisa County, Virginia, in 1747 and migrated to the Flatt River Area of then Granville County, North Carolina (became Orange County in 1753).

The 1750 tax list of Granville County, North Carolina lists the following: William Bowling 1 tithable, James Bowlin 1 tithable, Gideon Bunch 2 tithables (Micajer & William), Thomas Collins 1 tithable, Samuel Collins 1 tithable, John Collins 1 tithable, Thomas Gibson with tithables Charles and George Gibson.

Land grants in the Granville District of North Carolina, 1748-1763:

William Churton, 640 acres on the south side of Flatt River joining John Collins on the Rocky Branch. Grant is for warrant issued to Thomas Gibson (#3775).

Thomas Gibson, 1752, a 250-acre grant on the Flatt River. Joseph Collins, 1752, a grant for 640 acres on the southwest side of the Flatt River; witnesses: Thomas Collins and James Lilkemper.

Orange County, North Carolina was formed from Granville in 1753 and the Flatt River area was in the new county. A 1755 Orange County tax list showed the following:³⁴

Gedion Bunch 1 tithable (a mulatto)
Micajer Bunch 1 tithable (a mulatto)
Thomas Colens 3 tithables (a mulatto)
Thomas Colens, Junr., (a mulatto)
Samuel Colins (a mulatto) & son 2 tithables
John Colins 1 tithable (a mulatto)
Moses Ridley (Riddle) 1 tithable & wife Mary (mulattoes)
Thomas Gibson 3 tithables (mulatto)
Charles Gibson 1 tithable (mulatto)
George Gibson 1 tithable (mulatto)
Mager [Micajer] Gibson 1 tithable (mulatto)

Land grants, Orange County, North Carolina:

William Combs, 1756, on Flatt River, joining Thomas Gibson, Joseph Collins, and John Wade; chainbearers: Thomas Gibson, Jr. and Moses Ridley. Thomas Collins, 1761, 700 acres on Dials Creek of the Flatt River; chainbearers: George Collins, and Paul Collins (mulattoes).

A 1760 warrant lists John Brown with 700 acres on the Flatt River, which included the Bolins, Riddles and Collins improvements.

A few of these families stayed on the Flatt River; some migrated to the territory that became South Carolina; some to Pittsylvania County, Virginia. A Collins family, along with Moses Riddle and some of the Bolens, moved to Pittsylvania County, Virginia before 1767 and had land entries on the Sandy River. The 1767 tax lists of Pittsylvania County record Moses Riddle (an Indian), William Riddle, Peter Perkins, Christopher Bowlin, Jr., James Bowlin, and Joseph Bowlin.³⁵

Caswell County was formed from the northern section of Orange County, North Carolina in 1777 and it included part of the Flatt River. The 1777 Caswell County tax list shows: Paul Collins, 1 tithable, Martin Collins 1 tithable, Middleston Collins 1 tithable, Obadiah Collins 1 tithable, John Collins 1 tithable.

The Thomas Collins children settled in what is today Grayson County, Virginia, and Ashe County, North Carolina. George Collins testified in an 1808 land dispute case in Grayson County that he had settled on the land about 1767-68.³⁶

A 1771 Botetourt County, Virginia tax list records their arrival on New River: Number of males over 16: Charles Collins, 1; John Collins, 4; Samuel Collins, 2; Charles Sexton, 1; Mckeger Bunch, 1; William Sexton, 1.³⁷

Fincastle County was formed from Botetourt in 1772. The 1773 tax list includes David Collins (on Indian lands), Ambrose Collins, John Collins, John Collins, Jr., Charles Collins (on Indian land), Elisha Collins, Samuel

Collins (on Indian land), Lewis Collins, George Collins (on Indian land), Micajer Bunch (on Indian land).

A 1778 tax list of Wilkes County (the area that became Ashe in 1778) lists: Ambrose Collins, Charles Collins, Samuel Collins, David Gibson, Micajer Bunch, David Collins, George Collins, Julius Bunch. The 1782 list of Wilkes is the same as the 1778 list except for Thomas Gibson.

Montgomery County was formed from Fincastle in 1777, and the 1782 tax list includes: Martin, Collins, 1; John Collins, Sr., 1; John Collins, Jr., 1; Lewis Collins, 1; Milton Collins, 1; Ambrose Collins, 1; David Collins, 1; David Gibson, 1. The majority of the Melungeon families began to migrate to Hawkins County, Tennessee in the 1790s. Vardy Collins was still in Ashe County, North Carolina, however, in the 1800 census. The first recorded Melungeon settlers in this area were on the Lee County tax list, 1795-97. Some had land entries in adjoining Hawkins County, Tennessee: Micajer Bunch, Isreal Bunch, Solomon Bunch, Claiborn Bunch, Jesse Bowlin, and Zachariah Goins. The first Collins on the 1798 tax record was Daniel Collins with 4 tithables.

The 1802 tax list for the lower district of Russell County, Virginia (part that became Scott County in 1815): Number of males 16 or over—Valentine Collins, 1; Charles Gibson, 1; David Gibson, 1; James Gibson, 2; James Gibson, 0; Martin Gibson, 1; Molly Gibson, 2; Reuben Gibson, 1; Samuel Gibson, 1; Sharud Gibson, 1; Thomas Gibson, 1; William Gibson, 1; Willis Gibson, 1; Benjamin Bolin, 1; William Bolin, 1.

Stony Creek Baptist Church minutes show that most of the Melungeon families had left by 1813 and joined Blackwater and Mulberry churches in Hawkins County, Tennessee. The minutes also record a few Gibsons coming back and causing a disturbance by drinking and fighting. The Stony Creek Church again removed Gibson and wrote that the Mulberry church had also dismissed him, and they had been notified.

Other Research Revelations

By compiling this data about my own families with information on other families historically considered Melungeon, I have been able to discern patterns of migration and kinship and to begin the difficult task of sorting fact from the folk history long associated with the subject.

Contrary to popular legend that says the Melungeons were living here when the first white settlers came, my research shows them to have migrated here at roughly the same time as their pioneer neighbors.³⁸ The Melungeons were not a separate group who kept to themselves, nor were they discriminated against in matters of property rights. Land records prove they owned land in all the places they lived and that their farms often adjoined the lands of white neighbors. They attended the same churches and schools as their neighbors, intermarried with them, and fought beside them in war.³⁹ I found no record

to indicate that the Melungeons were ever driven from their land or into the mountains.⁴⁰

It is also interesting to note that considerable confusion regarding these families can arise from the inconsistent designation of race in early records. My ninth generation grandfather, Moses Riddle, for example, is referred to in various records as white, mulatto, and Indian. He is on the 1750 Granville County, North Carolina tax list as white. On the 1755 Orange County, North Carolina tax list, he and his wife are referred to as mulattoes. Finally, in 1767, he is listed on the Pittsylvania County, Virginia tax list as Indian.

Through research on my own family, I have succeeded in answering many difficult questions about some of the other Melungeon families. But every question answered begs a new one. The heretofore-unsolvable mystery that still drives my research is the origin of the name. Did the 1700s Melungeon forefathers of Louisa County, Virginia and Orange County, North Carolina refer to themselves as Melungeons, or was the name coined by their neighbors after they arrived in Tennessee? This is an important distinction in light of today's popular trend for many with mixed ancestry but no historical ties to the Melungeons of this area to refer to themselves as "Melungeon."

Was the name coined by the local people? If so, then the name would apply only to those of mixed ancestry living in that particular area. This theory is supported by a 1903 interview with Sneedville attorney Lewis M. Jarvis, who said, "Much has been said and written about the inhabitants of Newman Ridge and Blackwater at Hancock County, Tennessee. They have been derisively dubbed with the name 'Melungeon' by the local white people who have lived with them; it is not a traditional name or name of tribe of Indians."⁴¹

The Historical Melungeons

The first known record that uses the term Melungeon is an entry in the 1813 minutes of Stony Creek Baptist Church in which a lady was accused of housing "them Melungins," an act of which the church obviously disapproved. The earliest known specific reference to a group of people referred to as "Melungins" and living in Tennessee is a court case against Vardy Collins and Lewis Minor. It was alleged that the two men were considered "free persons of color" and were not eligible to vote under the 1835 Tennessee Constitution which permitted only free white men to vote. These records also pinpoint their location. Interestingly, the charges were dropped against some of the men, after the others were found not guilty.

When Will Allen Dromgoole queried some Tennessee state senators about the Melungeons prior to her 1891 article, they knew nothing of such a race living in the state. One senator, not named, finally told her that the "Malungeons" lived in his district. "Only upon the records of the State of Tennessee does the name appear," he told her.

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Montgomery County was formed from Fincastle in 1777, and the 1782 tax list includes: Martin, Collins, 1; John Collins, Sr., 1; John Collins, Jr., 1; Lewis Collins, 1; Milton Collins, 1; Ambrose Collins, 1; David Collins, 1; David Gibson, 1. The majority of the Melungeon families began to migrate to Hawkins County, Tennessee in the 1790s. Vardy Collins was still in Ashe County, North Carolina, however, in the 1800 census. The first recorded Melungeon settlers in this area were on the Lee County tax list, 1795-97. Some had land entries in adjoining Hawkins County, Tennessee: Micajer Bunch, Isreal Bunch, Solomon Bunch, Claiborn Bunch, Jesse Bowlin, and Zachariah Goins. The first Collins on the 1798 tax record was Daniel Collins with 4 tithables.

The 1802 tax list for the lower district of Russell County, Virginia (part that became Scott County in 1815): Number of males 16 or over—Valentine Collins, 1; Charles Gibson, 1; David Gibson, 1; James Gibson, 2; James Gibson, 0; Martin Gibson, 1; Molly Gibson, 2; Reuben Gibson, 1; Samuel Gibson, 1; Sharud Gibson, 1; Thomas Gibson, 1; William Gibson, 1; Willis Gibson, 1; Benjamin Bolin, 1; William Bolin, 1.

Stony Creek Baptist Church minutes show that most of the Melungeon families had left by 1813 and joined Blackwater and Mulberry churches in Hawkins County, Tennessee. The minutes also record a few Gibsons coming back and causing a disturbance by drinking and fighting. The Stony Creek Church again removed Gibson and wrote that the Mulberry church had also dismissed him, and they had been notified.

Other Research Revelations

By compiling this data about my own families with information on other families historically considered Melungeon, I have been able to discern patterns of migration and kinship and to begin the difficult task of sorting fact from the folk history long associated with the subject.

Contrary to popular legend that says the Melungeons were living here when the first white settlers came, my research shows them to have migrated here at roughly the same time as their pioneer neighbors.³⁸ The Melungeons were not a separate group who kept to themselves, nor were they discriminated against in matters of property rights. Land records prove they owned land in all the places they lived and that their farms often adjoined the lands of white neighbors. They attended the same churches and schools as their neighbors, intermarried with them, and fought beside them in war.³⁹ I found no record

to indicate that the Melungeons were ever driven from their land or into the mountains.⁴⁰

It is also interesting to note that considerable confusion regarding these families can arise from the inconsistent designation of race in early records. My ninth generation grandfather, Moses Riddle, for example, is referred to in various records as white, mulatto, and Indian. He is on the 1750 Granville County, North Carolina tax list as white. On the 1755 Orange County, North Carolina tax list, he and his wife are referred to as mulattoes. Finally, in 1767, he is listed on the Pittsylvania County, Virginia tax list as Indian.

Through research on my own family, I have succeeded in answering many difficult questions about some of the other Melungeon families. But every question answered begs a new one. The heretofore-unsolvable mystery that still drives my research is the origin of the name. Did the 1700s Melungeon forefathers of Louisa County, Virginia and Orange County, North Carolina refer to themselves as Melungeons, or was the name coined by their neighbors after they arrived in Tennessee? This is an important distinction in light of today's popular trend for many with mixed ancestry but no historical ties to the Melungeons of this area to refer to themselves as "Melungeon."

Was the name coined by the local people? If so, then the name would apply only to those of mixed ancestry living in that particular area. This theory is supported by a 1903 interview with Sneedville attorney Lewis M. Jarvis, who said, "Much has been said and written about the inhabitants of Newman Ridge and Blackwater at Hancock County, Tennessee. They have been derisively dubbed with the name 'Melungeon' by the local white people who have lived with them; it is not a traditional name or name of tribe of Indians."⁴¹

The Historical Melungeons

The first known record that uses the term Melungeon is an entry in the 1813 minutes of Stony Creek Baptist Church in which a lady was accused of housing "them Melungins," an act of which the church obviously disapproved. The earliest known specific reference to a group of people referred to as "Melungins" and living in Tennessee is a court case against Vardy Collins and Lewis Minor. It was alleged that the two men were considered "free persons of color" and were not eligible to vote under the 1835 Tennessee Constitution which permitted only free white men to vote. These records also pinpoint their location. Interestingly, the charges were dropped against some of the men, after the others were found not guilty.

When Will Allen Dromgoole queried some Tennessee state senators about the Melungeons prior to her 1891 article, they knew nothing of such a race living in the state. One senator, not named, finally told her that the "Malungeons" lived in his district. "Only upon the records of the State of Tennessee does the name appear," he told her.

This term "Malungeons" also shows up in *The Whig*, a Jonesborough, Tennessee, newspaper, October 7, 1840. It was used as a pejorative in describing a mixed race individual who had dared to publicly debate a political issue. The word surfaces again in the celebrated Melungeon trial of 1872, in which a girl whose mother was a Bolton was denied the right of inheritance because she was considered a free person of color. In denying the charge, attorney Lewis Shepard of Chattanooga declared, "She is related to a group of people living in the mountains of East Tennessee known as Malungeons." Shepard went on to say that "The term 'Melungeon' is an East Tennessee provincialism; it was coined by the people of that county to apply to these people and is derived from the word, melange, meaning mixture and has gotten into most modern dictionaries." The argument presented in the trial was that this family was not Negro, but pure-blooded Carthaginians.⁴²

Several mixed racial clans in the eastern United States existing in the 1940s-1950s are now recognized. Some of these were the Redbones, Croatans, Brass Ankles, Guineas, Ramps, and Melungeons. Of these, my research of known Melungeon families indicates that the Ramps of Fort Blackmore were related to the families that became known as the Melungeons of Hancock and surrounding counties. The term "Ramps" seems to have been applied to those living at Fort Blackmore, while "Melungeons" was used in the Hancock County area.

Ramptown, as the community is referred to by locals, is located between Fort Blackmore and Dungannon, in Scott County, Virginia, just across the line from Hancock County, Tennessee. Was the term "Ramps" used by locals for those families who remained near Fort Blackmore, while the term "Melungeon" was applied by those in the Hancock County vicinity to refer to the families living in their midst?

Taken together, the terms "Ramps" and "Melungeons" provide intriguing possibilities as to origins of the words. Is it only coincidence that an old definition of the word *Ramp* meant "to rob or swindle," and *malengin* was defined as "evil machination, ill intent; fraud, deceit, guile"? Or does the word Malungeon derive, instead, as many believe, from the word "mélange" meaning mixture?⁴³

Journey Full Circle

Researching the lives of these pioneer families has been a joyful and painful experience and walking the roads they walked through the wilderness and Indian land where they formerly lived has been a fantastic journey, as I have followed them from East Tennessee to their origins on the Pamunkey River in Louisa County, Virginia.

My research journey includes actually locating and going to many of the sites where the Melungeon families lived before coming to the Clinch River Valley area. Several photos of these rivers and landmarks are in my book *Melungeons and other Pioneer Families*. One of my most memorable visits was in 1997 to see the Flatt River Primitive Baptist Church. The present building (1930s) sits on the same site as the first church, established in 1750. Unfortunately, most of those families later considered Melungeon had left the area to settle on New River by the time of the first existing church minutes in 1770.

These people settled these beautiful hills and valleys of the Clinch River area two centuries ago because there was plenty of water and an abundance of wildlife. Many of the hillside farms they once cultivated have returned to the wild and look much as they did when the first Melungeons and their white neighbors moved here from Virginia and North Carolina. Due to intermarriages with their white neighbors, there are no Melungeons today, only descendants.

¹ Grandpa's great-grandmother was Aggie Sizemore. Some 2,200 Sizemores and related families filed Cherokee application claims, beginning in 1905. They were denied because the Sizemore names did not appear on the Cherokee enumerations of 1835-38.

² *The Arena* was a progressive era magazine of opinions on progress, social issues, and literature, published in Boston, 1889-1909. "The Melungeons" appeared in the March 1891 issue, followed by a second article in May, "The Malungeon Tree and Its Four Branches."

³ Some of these, such as Micajer Bunch, had grants for land in Tennessee but also signed the petition to form Lee County, Virginia.

⁴ The Bolin/Bolden/Bowlin family, one of the best known of the Melungeon families, is not included here because I have not personally researched the line. The Bolins, as well as the Bunch, Gibsons, Goins, and many other families are also documented and described in Paul Heinegg's *Free African Americans in Colonial Virginia and North Carolina* (Baltimore, MD, 2001).

⁵ Editor's Note: To denote the different generations for all families

in this article, the author follows a system commonly used by Goins family in which generation one is the author's parents; generation two is the author's grandparents; and generation 3 is the author's great-grandparents, etc.

⁶ John F. Dornan, abstractor, *Prince William County, Virginia Will Book C, 1734-1744*, pp. 180-181.

⁷ Ruth & Sam Sparacio, abstractors, *Deed Abstracts of Fairfax County, Virginia (1742-1750)*, 1988, p. 36.

⁸ Fairfax County, Virginia Deed Book A, p. 351.

⁹ Ruth & Sam Sparacio, abstractors, *Deed Abstracts of Fairfax County, Virginia (1742-1750)*, 1986, p. 36. Deed is 5 March 1744 between John Goens of parish of Truro and wife Mary Thomas Ford. It is "part of a greater tract containing 112 acres granted William Goens, Deceased, father of said Goens...by deed 12 November 1725..."

¹⁰ June Banks Evans, abstractor, *Lunenburg County, Virginia Deed Book 6, 1760-1761* (New Orleans, LA, [no date]), p. 40. Deed dated 10 June 1761 from John Going, Senr. & wife Mary of Lunenburg Co. give 100 acres to "son William." A second deed, also 10 June

1761, is from John and Mary Going to "son John Goin, Junr. of same place." Witnesses to both deeds were Richard Brown, Sarah Going, Susey Hubbard.

¹¹ The will of John Goins 1801, Henry County, Virginia, reads, "It is my desire that all my lands lying in Henry and Patrick Counties, Virginia be sold and the money arriving from said sale to be equally divided amongst all my children that is to say Zephaniah Goin, Nancy Goin, Susanna Goin, Zedekiah Goin, Simeon Goin, John Goin, Isaiah Goin, Zachariah Goin, Claborn Goin, Littleberry Goin, Elizabeth Minor wife of Hezekiah Minor. To them and their heirs forever and I do hereby appoint my friend John Stone and John Cox Jr my executors of this my last Will and Testament." John Going died before May 26, 1801.

¹² Zachariah Goins, a brother to Zephaniah, is listed on the 1800 Lee County, Virginia, tax list as free man of color. Zephaniah also appears on the 1830 census as a free person of color.

¹³ Henry County, Virginia Marriage Book I.

¹⁴ Her dress caught fire while making soap, and she lived about six months after this accident.

¹⁵ Revolutionary War Pension Application #R3995.

¹⁶ Nancy Chapelear & Kate Binford Hatch, abstractors, *Louisa County, Virginia Will Book, 1743-1801* (Washington, DC, 1964), p. 14. For deed, see Rosalie Edith Davis, abstractor, *Louisa County, Virginia Deed Books A & B, 1742-1759*, Bellevue, WA, 1976, p. 53. Thomas is referred to as "Thomas Gibson (alias Wilburn)."

¹⁷ This Thomas Gibson can be identified from among the other Thomas Gibsons of the period by his distinctive mark—a T inside a parenthesis (T), as well as by his neighbors..

¹⁸ #1858. Wilkes County, North Carolina Land Entry Book, 1778-1781.

¹⁹ William D. Bennett, *Orange County Records, Vol. VI, Granville Proprietary Land Office Deeds & Surveys, 1761-1763* (Raleigh, NC 1989), p. 52.

²⁰ Heinegg, *Free African Americans in Colonial Virginia and North Carolina*, pg. 172. South Carolina Parish Transcripts, Box 1, Folder 4, p. 24, by Jordan.

²¹ The will of Gilbert Gibson was probated in 1748 in Louisa County, Virginia. The 1750 Granville County, North Carolina tax list establishes Charles and George Gibson as sons of Thomas Gibson.

²² Maud Carter Clement, *The History of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA 1929), p. 277.

²³ Lyman C. Draper, *Kings Mountain and Its Heroes* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 444. The author descends from William and Happy Riddle's daughter Happy, born 1776 in Montgomery County, Virginia. William Riddle and Happy Thompson had children Moses, James b. 1773; John b. 1775; Happy b. 1776; Isaac & Joseph (twins) b. 1777; William b. 1779; Thomas b. 1781. A Montgomery County, Virginia court record, May 1782 shows the children bound out. Happy was living with a Goss family when she married Henry Fisher, 11 February 1799, Russell County, Virginia. Fisher was born 1 January 1759, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; died 3 February 1839 in Fishers Valley, Hancock County, Tennessee.

²⁴ Alice Crandell Park and Mrs. Garland King, *Park/Bunch*,

²⁵ Micajah Bunch was in the East Tennessee area as early as 1787 when he and his wife Lydia joined Bent Creek Baptist Church (Hawkins County) on the third Saturday of August. See Glenn Alfred Toomey, *Bent Creek: Journey into Century Three: The Post Bi-Centennial History of First Baptist Church, Whitesburg, Tennessee, Organized June 12, 1785 as Bent Creek Baptist Church* (Morristown, TN 1988), p. 43.

²⁶ Rosalie Edith Davis, editor and compiler, *Louisa County, Virginia Tithables and Census, 1743-1785* (Manchester, MO [no date]), p. 7.

²⁷ Orange County, North Carolina Court Record Book, p. 3.

²⁸ 1750 Granville County, North Carolina tax list

²⁹ William D. Bennett, editor, *Orange County Records Volume I, Granville Proprietary Land Office, Abstracts of Loose Papers*, (Raleigh, NC, 1987), p. 33.

³⁰ James Gwynn's letter in the Lyman Draper Manuscripts at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 5DD110: 1-2. For those who signed the Oath of Allegiance after taking part in the insurrection, see Lewis Preston Summers, *Annals of Southwest Virginia, 1769-1800*, Vol. I (Johnson City, TN, 1992), p. 720.

³¹ An example of one of these claims follows this article.

³² Henry County, Virginia Marriage Book I.

³³ Lee County, Virginia Surveyor Book 2.

³⁴ The "1755 Tax List of Orange County, North Carolina" was compiled by William Perry Johnson and printed in *The North Carolinian, A Quarterly Journal of Genealogy and History*, Vol. 1, #4 (Dec. 1955); (Raleigh, 1955).

³⁵ "A List of Tithables for Pittsylvania County, Taken by John Wilson, Gentl in year 1767," VA GenWeb, Pittsylvania Primary Records, Pittsylvania Co., Virginia,

³⁶ Lyman Chalkley, *Chronicles of the Scotch Irish Settlement in Virginia, Extracted from the Original Court Records of Augusta County, 1745-1800*, Vol. II (Baltimore, 1965), p. 143.

³⁷ Mary B. Kegley and F.B. Kegley, *Early Adventures on the Western Waters, Vol. I, The New River, Virginia in Pioneer Days, 1745-1800* (Orange, VA, 1980), p. 94.

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³⁹ John Collins and Micager Bunch are listed in the 1774 Militia, Captain David Looney's Company, of Fincastle County, Virginia. Collins served 35 days and Bunch 29 against the Shawnee Indians and both were at the Battle of Point Pleasant. See Mary B. Kegley, compiler, *Soldiers of Fincastle County, Virginia*, (Roanoke, VA 1974)

⁴⁰ *Walk Toward the Sunset*, an outdoor drama staged in Speedville, Hancock County, was a romanticized version of the Melungeon story and may have either begun or perpetuated many of the myths concerning the Melungeons.

⁴¹ *Hancock County Times*, April 17, 1903.

⁴² Betsy, the girl involved in the case, was the only child of a Barton man who married a Bolton, the daughter of his tenant and a descendant of the Bolin/Bolden/Boltons, considered to be Melungeon. The couple slipped over the state line and married in Georgia. Both parents died and left Betsy as the only surviving child. Betsy's right of inheritance was challenged by the father's relatives on the grounds that her mother was Black. The young attorney, Lewis Shepard, gathered depositions to show that the Boltons were not Black but Melungeons from East Tennessee and that their ancestry went back to ancient Carthage. Shepard won the suit, and Betsy, then 15 years old, inherited her father's property.

⁴³ *The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition* (Oxford, England), 1989, Vols. IX & XIII. The dictionary provides many examples of various forms of the word Melungeon, the first as early as 1390. A 1492 example was "Withoute fraude or male engine." From a 1502 writing was the phrase "He was a good and honest marchant without fraude or malengyne." A verse from Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* says, "For he so crafty was to forge and tongue, So light of hand, and nimble of his pace, So smooth of face, and subtle in his tale, That culd deceive one looking in his face; Therefore by the name Malengin they him call, Well known by his feates, and famous ouer all." (Also see the website: <http://hometown.aol.com/malengine1813/myhomepage/index.html>)

1761, is from John and Mary Going to "son John Goin, Junr. of same place." Witnesses to both deeds were Richard Brown, Sarah Going, Susey Hubbard.

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Family & earliest known location	Migrations	Clinch River settler & settlement date
BUNCH John Bunch, Sr., was in New Kent Co., VA in 1670 (became Louisa County in 1742).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) John Bunch, Sr., was on the Pamunkey River in New Kent Co., VA by 1670 (became Louisa Co. 1742) 2) John's son Paul had 1725 land grant Chowan Co., NC; Paul's will probated 1726, Chowan Co. 3) John (s/o Paul) believed to have died in Chowan Co., NC. 4) Gedion Bunch (s/o John) is on the 1749 Lunenburg Co., VA tax list and on 1750 Granville Co, NC tax list. 5) Micager (s/o Gideon) on 1749 Lunenburg Co., VA tax list as tithe of Gideon and later on 1753 Granville Co., NC tax list; 1755 Orange Co., NC tax list (created 1752 from Granville). 1771 Botetourt Co., VA tax list; 1773 Fincastle Co., VA tax list. 	Micager Bunch had 1792 land grant, Hawkins Co., TN; signed 1792 petition to form Lee Co., VA (adjoining Hawkins Co., TN -now Hancock Co.)..
COLLINS Thomas Collins, Sr. was in Louisa Co. VA 1743.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Thomas Collins in Louisa Co., VA 1743; sold Louisa Co. land on Pamunkey River in 1747; 1750 Granville Co., NC tax list; 1761 deed Orange Co., NC. 2) Samuel (s/o Thomas) on 1771 Botetourt Co., VA tax list (became Fincastle 1772); on 1778 Wilkes Co., NC tax list (became Montgomery Co.) 3) Vardeman "Vardy" Collins (s/o Samuel) in Ashe County, NC 1800 census. By 1810 on Hawkins County, TN tax list. 	Vardeman "Vardy" Collins, in Hawkins County, TN by 1810 when he was on tax list.
GIBSON Thomas Gibson, Sr. & wife Mary sold land on Pamunkey River, Louisa Co., VA 1749	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Thomas Gibson in Louisa Co., VA 1749 2) Son Charles to Wilkes Co., NC 1790s; to Fort Blackmore (Russell County, VA) by 1801. 	Charles Gibson, s/o Thomas, at Fort Blackmore by 1801.
GOINS William Goings made his will in 1725 in Stafford Co., VA (became Prince William Co. 1731 and Fairfax Co 1742).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) William Goings (born 1665) was in Stafford Co., VA by 1725 (became Prince William Co. 1731) 2) John Goins, Sr. (s/o William) sold Fairfax Co. (earlier was Prince William Co.) land 1744. On 1750 Lunenburg Co., VA tax list. 3) John Goin, Jr. (s/o John, Sr.) in Lunenburg Co., VA 1761. 4) Zephaniah Goins in Lee Co., VA by 1812 (just over state line from Hawkins Co. TN—now Hancock Co.) 	Zephaniah Goins in Lee Co., VA by 1812 (just over state line from Hawkins County - now Hancock Co., TN)
MINOR Hezekiah Minor, born VA; married 1795 Henry Co., VA.	Hezekiah Minor b. VA; married 1795 Henry Co., VA; 1810 census Rockingham Co., NC, 1814 Lee Co., VA tax list.	Hezekiah Minor was on 1814 Lee Co., VA tax list.
RIDDLE Moses Riddle 1750 Granville Co., NC tax list (became Orange 1753)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Moses Riddle, 1750 Granville Co., NC tax list; 1755 Orange Co., NC tax list; 1767 Pittsylvania Co., VA tax list. 2) William (s/o Moses) hung Montgomery Co., VA 1776 for being a Tory. His widow and children moved to Hawkins Co., TN 1790s. 	William's widow Happy remarried; she & children to Hawkins Co., TN 1790s with new husband
SIZEMORE Edward "Ned" Sizemore in Halifax Co., VA 1755	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Edward "Ned" Sizemore in Halifax Co., VA 1755; to Fincastle-Montgomery County, VA 1767; Surry Co., NC 1771 tax list; to South Carolina with sons George & Owen c.1781; back to Wilkes Co., NC c. 1785 2) Owen (s/o Edward) back to Wilkes Co., NC after 1784; in Hawkins Co., TN (War Gap) c.1799-1800. 	Owen Sizemore in Hawkins Co., TN c.1799-1801.