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[The following genealogical list is also a part of the G. W. Cook file]

great grandfather was cousin of George Washington

George W. Cook
 Sarah Mills
 |
 Flora Alice Cook
 William Giebrich
 |
 Doris E. Giebrich
 Donald Kast
 |
 Geraldine Kast
 Merlin Humpal
 |
 Timothy Humpal
 Kimberlee Buddenberg
 |
 Angela Humpal

The Melungeons of East Tennessee

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.

A two-part series in *Tennessee Ancestors* will feature articles by two authors—one a professional genealogist and the other a noted family researcher. Together, they will demonstrate how the riddle is being unraveled—generation-by-generation, one family at a time. The first in the series is by Pat Spurlock Elder of Kingsport, Tennessee, 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 will appear in the December 2002 issue of *Tennessee Ancestors*. Jack will outline 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*.

Opening Doors In Melungeon Research

by Pat Spurlock Elder

Melungeons have always been a controversial topic. Many consider the task of researching their history and genealogies a test of patience and endurance. Others wonder how to start or how to determine which families were or are Melungeon. Some may even wonder what a Melungeon is. Widespread misinformation has caused an evolution, or more precisely, a revolution, of the term's former usage and the families to which it originally applied. I hope this article will help open doors to an exciting investigation of the legendary dark-skinned people of northeast Tennessee.

Researching Melungeons from a genealogical standpoint is identical to researching any other family. The object of your investigation should not be to find a Melungeon but to begin with the known and work backward to the unknown. If you have a Melungeon ancestor, he or she will eventually show up.

If the purpose of your Melungeon research, however, is not genealogy but, instead, uses a sociological, medical, or historical approach, you will also need a viable definition of your project and a statement of purpose or goal. Regardless of the discipline, a preliminary survey is the first step. It will tell you exactly what information researchers and historians have already discovered. The information gleaned from the preliminary survey will allow you to make the correct decisions about how to proceed and how to double-check the validity of what others have already written.

Let's begin by evaluating a popular preliminary survey tool and door opener—the Internet. With its advent, the problem of relying on unfounded information or information provided by inadequately prepared and uninformed sources has caused some people to decide their family was Melungeon when in reality it was not.

The Internet is a place to spend a lot of time having fun and there are several excellent on-line articles and links to useful information. Search engines will turn up enough material to keep a researcher busy for two lifetimes, but researchers need to know how to separate the reliable from the not so reliable. If you are interested in your family history, chances are you want facts, not a mass of hopelessly misinformed speculation. Much of the data on the Internet is undocumented, meaning the sources of information are missing and the reader has no way of verifying the data. Use Internet information judiciously and don't get your foot caught in the door of Melungeon verbiage found on many Internet web sites.

Apply these same cautions to other references used in your preliminary survey. Your local library, historical or genealogical society, and interlibrary loan, will open many doors to vast storehouses of material. But, like the Internet, books and published genealogies are only as good as their sources. Melungeon research has long suffered from the "my-opinion-is" or "heard-it-through-the-grapevine" school of research. Hearsay evidence is rarely accurate and using it generally leads to lost time and money spent needlessly on worthless information. Many published genealogies are rife with errors and even the most meticulous researcher can make mistakes, so look for consistent documentation using first-rate source citations and good bibliographies.

True research proceeds from the preliminary survey phase to active fieldwork that will include a hands-on approach to interviews and primary documents. Genealogists will need dependable organizational and analytical skills coupled with logic. Reference librarians are experts at answering questions about where and how to find needed information and will be more than happy

About the Author: In her book, *Melungeons: Examining an Appalachian Legend*, Pat Spurlock Elder analyzes the various traditions and stories surrounding East Tennessee's mysterious Melungeons. Her roots in the state go back more than 225 years. A confessed workaholic, she worked part-time as a professional genealogist from 1978 to 1992 and has published the *Spurlock Family Quarterly* since 1982. For the last 10 years, she has devoted herself to full-time research and writing, having authored or transcribed six books. Pat lectures and has written several articles for a variety of genealogical and historical publications, is a Kentucky Colonel, and is a member of the Appalachian Writers Association and Lost State Writers' Guild. She is currently studying to become a certified genealogist and lecturer through the Board for Certification of Genealogists. She is a former banker who returned to college and received a formal education in history and criminology, she is also a retired hairdresser and salon owner. Pat Spurlock Elder, her husband, Shannon, and their five dogs live in Northeast Tennessee. They are co-owners of Continuity Press.

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True research proceeds from the preliminary survey phase to active fieldwork that will include a hands-on approach to interviews and primary documents. Genealogists will need dependable organizational and analytical skills coupled with logic. Reference librarians are experts at answering questions about where and how to find needed information and will be more than happy

to assist in selecting instructional books. Take time to hone your research skills so that your work is as reliable as you can make it.¹

In some branches of Melungeon study, the researcher will need a hypothesis, which is an idea that includes a logical definition of the subject. You will likely need this as your research progresses, but after completing a reliable preliminary survey, you may have discovered enough information to develop a theory (a well-developed hypothesis). Researchers need a significant amount of evidence before their hypothesis becomes a theory.

A major obstacle in Melungeon research is failure to realize that opinion is not necessarily fact. A good researcher will analyze information and sort fact from fallacy in an unbiased manner. Perhaps you are reasonably sure you already know what the word Melungeon means, who the first Melungeons were, or that your family was Melungeon. You may decide to set out to find evidence to prove what you already believe. Thinking that your opinion is right, you find evidence to prove it and disregard any evidence to the contrary. You firmly decide that until someone can prove you wrong you will not budge from your "theory." This is called *proving the negative* and, dumb luck aside, using it results in false positives and invalid conclusions, not to mention wasted time, effort, and money. Don't be sidetracked by preconceived notions; let your research guide you to logical conclusions based on a body of quality, logically evaluated evidence. Seeking proof for what you already believe is not research, and it is a quick way to get your foot caught in the door!

If you are doing genealogical research, accurately evaluate the information gathered in the survey phase so you can proceed with confidence. Failure to learn research skills, plus neglecting to properly document findings has been the biggest pitfall in Melungeon studies. Speculation about Melungeons runs rampant and most of that speculation seems based not on proof but on opinion. You must develop a firm body of evidence before forming your theory or stating family connections. Don't allow yourself to contribute more misinformation to the mumble-jumble of so-called Melungeon "research."

Defining Melungeon

A great paradox is that until a few years ago, no one wanted to be a Melungeon, although many now relegate the connection to an almost club-like status. Based on my research, I can only conclude that most Appalachian family groups were not historically thought of as being Melungeon. Go back far enough and we may all be related but that is a sociological-and-biological puzzle, or

maybe even a religious debate, but it does not fill the huge gap between then and now. Genealogical and historical research must systematically trace a chain of events, never skipping a generation just because answers do not easily appear or because we don't like the answers.

By the 1850s, some considered anyone with dark skin as being African American or having a degree of black ancestry. Many dark-skinned people did have African roots, but it is just as true that southeastern Indians were also inherently dark. That dark skin is not fundamentally accountable to black-Indian intermarriage. Not all tribes freely mixed with runaway slaves or free Negroes, a circumstance seen most often in mid- and deep-South tribes, so we must also be careful not to assume that being "free colored" necessarily meant "free Negro." Maybe it did; maybe it didn't.

Detribalized Indians who refused to live on court-appointed reservations and who had not married into prestigious white families often headed for the fringes of frontier society where the social and political system tossed them into a vague, free-colored, riff-raff classification. This was partly due to prejudice, partly due to bureaucracy, and, in the case of census records, partly due to the options given the census taker. If you had a non-reservation Indian family in your district from 1790 to 1860, your choices were to select one of three categories in which to indicate race: "all other free persons" (sometimes qualified by "except Indians not taxed"); "fpc" (free person of color); or "mulatto." The "Indians not taxed" were those living on reservations. If they lived off the reservation, if enumerated, the census taker often considered them either as white or free people of color and sometimes mulatto.²

By the 1830s, more than one Tennessee politician applied the term to their political opponents, indicating that usage had expanded to include free-colored people *en masse*, especially if they would be voting in the next election!

Researchers have varied opinions about the origin of the word Melungeon and its myriad spellings. The *M-e-l-u-n-g-e-o-n* spelling is modern, evidence of its first use being long after the 1880s. Historically, the most accepted root word was *melange*, from the French, meaning a mixture. Based on my research, I have suspected that *melongene*, another French word meaning blackish-purple and pronounced similarly as our modern word, played a major part because of the many references to the unusual color of Melungeons.³ The word may have developed into an Americanized version of an old pejorative, perhaps stemming from the Middle English *malengin*, which is likewise pronounced similarly.⁴ Add to this one of the earliest historical guesses that it was a

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combination of *mal* (bad) plus *Injun* (Indian) and things get interesting!

Just like trying to decide if a real event triggered oral history within a family or whether reading an outside story at some point started a family tradition, the puzzle is determining whether Melungeons received the name because of their color, because of their perceived trickster conduct, or because of a play on words of some or all of these.⁵ Knowing these things sheds light on James Aswell's folkloric *God Bless The Devil*. Aswell writes,

...The old grannies say one time Old Horny got mad at his old shrew-wife and left Hell and wandered all over the earth till he reached Tennessee. He set on a high bald and looked around him.

"I declare to Creation!" he says. "This place is so much like home I just believe I'll stay awhile."

So Old Horny found him an Injun gal and started in housekeeping. Time came and time went. Everybody knows the Devil's always busy, and soon the house was full of children. And mean! Law! They was every one as mean as the Devil—which is natural, seeing as he was their pappy—and as dark and treacherous as their mammy. They beat and hammered at Old Horny day and night. They tricked and mortified him till it was pitiful. Finally he just couldn't stand it no longer at all.

"I might as well be in Hell with my old crabby wedlock wife," says he. So he packed his traps and sneaked out of the house and went a-skillyhooting back to Hell as fast as ever he could. And they do say it was them offsprings of Old Horny that growed up and started the Melungeon kind.⁶

In Aswell, we have Spenser's devil-from-the-bowels-of-hell and a "dark and treacherous" Indian gal—it is convincing evidence for a good hypothesis. Many colonists perceived all Indians as bad Indians and anyone old enough to be reading this article knows that being a Negro was not beneficial either. Such real or imagined perceptions generated many *boogey-man* tales that probably had more to do with keeping children in line than in describing real people. In addition, there is no evidence Melungeons ever self-identified with the term. In fact, they, quite understandably, rebuked the term.

Eventually, after the last historically identified Melungeons died out in mid-1800s, the word quickly evolved into a full-fledged social-class definition that

was firmly in place well into the 1940s. The word became a belittling attitude toward mountain people in the Appalachians in general, especially if they used public social services. Dark skin seems to have played little, if any, part in determining who was a Melungeon after World War II.

Such phenomena as given above create problems for those researching original Melungeons. There is no evidence that the general Appalachian population thought of every person with Indian or Negro ancestry, dark skin, and real or imagined criminal behavior, as being a Melungeon. In the last 10-15 years, usage has become such an ambiguous, multi-ethnic catchall that it is rarely used in relation to original Melungeons or their descendants. Modern custom seems based on the power of positive thinking and an expectation that, rather than prove one's Melungeon ancestry, it is up to others to disprove it. It is the responsibility of the claimant to prove his or her own ancestry. While an ambiguous definition may seem to unite every family with Appalachian roots, it does little to encourage or promote accurate history or genealogy. Proving the negative is an unacceptable research method that could slam the door on your research.

Melungeon Locales

The center of Melungeon settlement was Hancock County, Tennessee. They dispersed from there. Today, residents of the county seat of Sneedville and surrounding rural area hold a festival every October that includes Melungeon history vignettes and booths related to Melungeon history and genealogy. You are invited to attend, as it may open many doors in your quest for knowledge. Members of the Hancock County Historical and Genealogical Society have much information at their disposal, and you want to consider joining this organization.⁷ County courthouses and repositories in Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, Hawkins, Sullivan, and Washington Counties in Tennessee and Lee, Scott, Washington, and Wise Counties in Virginia are storehouses that will open doors to myriad information.

Before coming into northeastern Tennessee, Melungeons can be traced to counties bordering Virginia and North Carolina and up the New River. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., as well as county repositories in these borderline areas, also have original records covering Melungeon families. North Carolina counties such as Ashe, Wilkes, Rockingham, Person, Granville, Warren, Halifax, Orange, Catawba, Alamance, Bertie, Guilford, and any county along the Dan or Yadkin Rivers might just turn up that long-lost clue or proof. These records are virtually untapped. They

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are gold mines waiting for discovery.

As you work backward, keep in mind that historical boundaries have changed, and Tennessee's political and boundary history is particularly fretful. Although geared toward census work, Thorndale and Dollarhide's *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Census Records, 1790-1920* provides excellent help for establishing which county you need to work with in land, tax, and other records.

It is unlikely most researchers can travel to each county so learn to rely on your librarian and the microfilm readers at your nearest library. The Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia State Archives have interlibrary-loan programs for microfilm, as does the National Archives. You may also find that colleges in these areas have academic libraries and regional archives that are wonderful for researching Melungeon history.

For the 1770-1800 era, repositories in Virginia counties bordering North Carolina, and especially Grayson, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Halifax, Mecklenburg and Brunswick, have invaluable resources. Louisa County, Virginia and her parent counties are important. Be sure and check any county bordering the New, Dan, James, Meherrin, Staunton, and Roanoke Rivers. Other important locations are the Germanna Colonies near the Rappahannock River (1714), French Huguenots at Manakin Town (1690-1700) and Governor Spotswood's Fort Christanna (1714) in modern Brunswick County, Virginia.

Melungeon Family Surnames

In recent years, some researchers have erroneously added many family names to Melungeon name lists, making such lists a revolving door. When I first started researching, the tentative name list was short. As I dug deeper, the more the evidence indicated that there were, indeed, only a few original surnames considered Melungeon. These were the core-group families, which I define as descendants of the original families and the secondary groups who married into these Melungeon families so early that the two are effectively considered as one. The recent tendency to add more surnames after-the-fact is a disservice and frustration. This brings us to the BIG QUESTION! What names are Melungeon?

The verifiable primary names are Collins and Gibson. They seem to be the original Melungeon families, and researchers universally accept both names as such (although not all persons with these names are Melungeon). Early secondary core-group names who married in long before 1750 include Bolen/Bolden/Bolton (and other variant spellings that probably includes some Baldwin families), Bunch, Denhan/Denning/Denham, Mullins, and Williams. Purported connections between the Pocahontas Bolling line and Melungeons are

unproven and highly speculative.

The Goins and Minor families were interacting with each other as early as such records exist for them. Ironically, I am unaware of any evidence showing that either family interacted or intermarried with the Collins/Gibson group until relatively modern times (circa 1830 and after). This trend continued even after arriving in Hancock County, where the two groups lived 15-20 miles apart.

A few others may have married into these families at an early period. Experienced researchers rarely consider names that first entered after the American Revolution as being Melungeon because there is no evidence for it. Many surnames have married into Melungeon families but there is little or no proof that supports the idea these were inherently Melungeon surnames. Those who seem to have become "Melungeon-by-association" present a perplexing problem in trying to determine the original Melungeon families. The best example is the Sizemore family.

One Sizemore branch claims Cherokee ancestry, while another branch can be connected to the Catawba Indians. A male Sizemore from England may play a part—or he may not. A man named Owen Sizemore even lived on Newman's Ridge in early days. The problem is that there is no evidence that historical people considered any of these Sizemores as being Melungeon, although assuredly some of them were Indians. Furthermore, no one has connected very many of the various Sizemore lines genealogically. They were intertwined with the Riddle family and both are known to have been Tories during the American Revolution. One researcher told me she thinks politics may have played a part in defining some of the Melungeon families. This Tory connection may prove to be a part of that.⁸

Opinions are not evidence, and neither are they facts. Even truth is not always a fact, since we often base "truth" on perception. Let's summarize the facts surrounding Melungeons.

No one knows the exact meaning and origin of the word Melungeon. First extant evidence of written and oral usage of the word Melungeon was on 26 September 1813 at Stony Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Scott County, Virginia. One church member accused another of "harbouring" Melungeons. The church was roughly 20 miles northeast of Hancock County. Although the church minutes show several accepted Melungeon surnames on the member rolls, there is not enough information in the record to determine exactly who the mentioned "malungins" were.⁹

If you were looking for Melungeons prior to 1990, people who knew about them would have directed you to Hancock County, Tennessee. Historical usage as applied

to universally accepted Melungeon families places them in Hancock County about 1798-1805. The term followed them after migrations began in the circa 1830s, but I am unaware of any historical references to Melungeons (by any spelling) that mentioned them being anywhere except in or near Hancock County or Hancock's bordering or parent counties.

Lewis Jarvis, born 1829 and writing in 1903, listed the earliest surnames as Collins, Gibson, Bunch and Goodman, "[who were] chiefs and the rest of them settled here about the year 1804, possibly about the year 1795, but all these men above named, who are called Melungeons, obtained land grants and muniments [*sic*] of title to the land they settled on and they were the very first and came here simultaneous with the white people not earlier than 1795. They had lost their language and spoke the English very well..." Jarvis, also mentions Bolin/Bolden, Williams, and "perhaps a few other" whose names had been forgotten.¹⁰

Historical evidence (deeds, tax, court records) places the Collins/Gibson group in old Surry and Ashe Counties, North Carolina, by at least 1798 and along lower New River Counties in Virginia. The Goins/Minor group was in Rockingham County, North Carolina before 1810.¹¹

In the last 35 years, I have interviewed numerous descendants of families from Hancock and surrounding counties who told me their families were Indians. Most did not know of a tribal name, and a few said someone in the family had told them they were Cherokee. Others said they had read somewhere that their family was Cherokee. Additionally, many traditional Hancock County Melungeon family names are traceable through public records that state they were Indians.¹² Most of these people were also listed as free-colored (or one of its variations) on extant census records.

The Portuguese ancestry tradition for the Melungeons has appeared in many forms since its publication in a Louisville, Kentucky newspaper in the 1840s. The anonymous journalist in the 1840s said they *could be Portuguese based on what he knew about the Portuguese and other people like them* (my emphasis).¹³ This is opinion and without knowing the journalist's name, we cannot determine if he was qualified to make such a judgment. In a letter written circa 1911 to Miss Martha Collins from her uncle, he says he thinks they are Portuguese.¹⁴ His statement came decades after the Portuguese idea appeared in print. Although anecdotal evidence states that Vardy Collins' wife, Margaret "Peggy" (probably Gibson) was called "Spanish Peggy," I could not document this outside the oral tradition. Regardless, Spaniards and

Portuguese are different nationalities.

Melungeons are listed as free-people-of-color on the earliest census records, and the earliest writings say they were called Melungeons because of their color. There is no evidence to indicate they gave the name to themselves; there is evidence that plainly states they did not.¹⁵

They voted. They owned land. They paid taxes.¹⁶

The Collins/Gibson group lived separately from the Goins/Minor group.¹⁷

Evaluating Possible Ethnic Connections

Melungeons were probably the "friendly Indians" mentioned as helping build Fort Blackmore near Stony Creek in Scott County, Virginia.¹⁸ We can document that families with early Melungeon names traveled with Fort Blackmore families into Tennessee and westward into what are now Middle Tennessee and south central Kentucky.¹⁹

From secondary evidence, we can infer the following. Please keep in mind these statements are conjecture based on research, yet not proven facts.

The courts in colonial Virginia probably gave them their English-sounding surnames, or else they chose their names from English neighbors in the 1600s.

They are likely descendants of the Indians sent to Fort Christanna in 1714 by Alexander Spotswood. They dispersed from there when the fort closed after only a few years.

The word Melungeon evolved from a play on words about skin color and social status.

Over the years, other families became Melungeon by association. The cutoff date was more than 200 years ago. Everything after this is broad supposition, based on anecdotal evidence overpowering fact. Such speculations often started as opinion but snowballed into "fact"—much like the proverbial story containing a grain of truth. Don't let your feet slip through the door of anecdotal evidence. It leads to needless difficulties.

After reviewing the facts and conjectures, where does this leave Melungeon researchers? We surely must avoid the Monty Hall approach of selecting a door at random and being satisfied with what has piled up behind it, with or without documentation. The answer is that we must rely on our own research.

My research leads me to conclude that the descendants of the first people called Melungeons were historically affiliated with colonial Virginia Indians living along the New River, particularly the Saponi band and their descendants. Possibly other surnames "became" Melungeon at a very early date, but only a handful of those are verifiable.²⁰

to universally accepted Melungeon families places them in Hancock County about 1798-1805. The term followed them after migrations began in the circa 1830s, but I am unaware of any historical references to Melungeons (by any spelling) that mentioned them being anywhere except in or near Hancock County or Hancock's bordering or parent counties.

Lewis Jarvis, born 1829 and writing in 1903, listed the earliest surnames as Collins, Gibson, Bunch and Goodman, "[who were] chiefs and the rest of them settled here about the year 1804, possibly about the year 1795, but all these men above named, who are called Melungeons, obtained land grants and muniments [*sic*] of title to the land they settled on and they were the very first and came here simultaneous with the white people not earlier than 1795. They had lost their language and spoke the English very well..." Jarvis, also mentions Bolin/Bolden, Williams, and "perhaps a few other" whose names had been forgotten.¹⁰

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In early days, the Saponi lived on the upper James River in an area later settled by the French at Manakin Town (named after the Monacan tribe).

The most noticeable factor defining Melungeons from other similar contemporary groups appears to be tribal affiliation: Siouan versus Algonquian versus Iroquoian. There is only space for a simplified overview of this supposition.

Virginia's Siouan speakers lived on the fringes of Virginia's colonial settlements and did not adapt to colonial English lifestyle, as did the Algonquian speakers (of whom the Powhatan realm was a part).²¹ Many of the Siouan-speaking members of the Monacan Nation formed wandering bands and often relocated.

The Algonquian-speaking Powhatan were tributaries of colonial Virginia government who stayed, generally, on their original lands, which included reservations proscribed by the English. In addition, they had mixed with white Europeans more so than other southeastern tribes. In fact, many Powhatan descendants were among Virginia's "First Families."

Except for a few scattered bands, the Iroquoian-speaking Tuscarora went north after the Tuscarora Wars. The Cherokee (also Iroquoian speakers) lived near the Tennessee/Georgia/North Carolina border and were called the Lower, Middle and Overhill Cherokee. For the most part, they were not intimately involved with Virginia colonists. The Cherokee still live in these same areas and have always maintained formal tribal communities.

It was the disbanding and forced relocations of Virginia's Siouan speakers that may have contributed to their reputation as a fringe-element, thus fitting the presumed descriptions *melongene* and *malengin* and possibly becoming a *melange* of various detribalized Indians. After this presumed mixing, they migrated with backcountry pioneers who ever moved on to the next frontier.

There is little wonder that many people are confused about where Melungeons lived. The answer depends on which period one researches. Evidence shows Melungeons were in Claiborne, Hancock and Hawkins County, Tennessee and lower Lee and Scott County, Virginia circa 1800. Contrary to legend, no evidence has been found to suggest that they were in any of these places before the first white adventurers came through, pre-1760. Before the circa-1790-1800 era, Melungeons lived in border counties along the modern Virginia-North Carolina boundary. It is possible, even probable, that Melungeon men were among the first exploration teams, particularly with Spotswood's ventures and later, the longhunters.

If your ancestors were historical Melungeons, you will eventually find a pre-1840 document that describes the person or family as some form of free-colored such as mulatto, Xwhite (meaning half-white or "crossed" in archaic shorthand), fpc, fc, Indian, and other similar terminology. Later documents may also occasionally use these terms.

Very dark skin is a criterion and without being considered a free-colored person, whatever that may have meant, the person or family would not have been considered Melungeon. Just as being of white European descent does not necessarily prove your family was German, being listed as a free-colored person does not necessarily prove your family was Melungeon.

A significant clue is local perception. Is there evidence of historical neighborhood thought about the person or family being Melungeon? This is an especially important determinant, as the word's usage has changed greatly over time. Many families who now claim to be Melungeon would never have been considered so 100, 200 years ago, or even ten years ago.

Because of variance in the many claims made in some popular writings, many people often ask why I say that Melungeons are Indians. My reply is, because that is what the preponderance of the evidence says. It is not my opinion or my speculation. It is an evidentiary conclusion. Melungeons who were born before 1850 self-identified as Indians long before Melungeons appeared in popular literature, and they have passed down that tradition. Extraneous evidence affirms their claims. I am unaware of evidence showing they originated in any foreign country—unless one insists on adopting a prehistoric view of Melungeon studies.

Besides the Saponi, there may be other Siouan-speaking tribes or tribal-member neighbors defined as Melungeon. In the Goins and Minor families, the Meherrin, Nansemond, Nottoway, and Tuscarora, all Algonquian- or Iroquoian-speakers, likely account for their presumed Melungeon ancestry. I do not have enough information to speculate on the origins of the Gibson line and cannot include them in this brief statement.²²

Tribal mixing occurred in the early-to mid-1700s and especially at Fort Christanna. Some Melungeons later married into families who had Cherokee ancestry and, effectively, after a few generations, some families remembered themselves as being of Cherokee descent. It is hard to say with any certainty exactly what the tribal makeup was for any tribe after English encroachments and various ensuing wars forced their removal, disbanding, and recombining.

The Catawba Indians are probably the most important peripheral American Indian connection.

Their associations with the Cherokee may help account for traditions of Cherokee ancestry found in some Melungeon families and their associations with the Lumbee may do the same. The Catawba are Siouan, thus "cousins" to the Saponi.

I do not know of any evidence showing that the Shawnee help account for Melungeon ancestry. They may account for some of the traditional Cherokee of Scott County, Tennessee, which is west of but near Hancock County. They certainly account for many mixed-blood families in the modern counties along Kentucky–Virginia–West Virginia borders. Their history is separate from that of the Melungeons, but just as interesting.

Another tradition concerning Melungeon origins is that they are Portuguese. This is because of testimony given by some historical people stating they were Portuguese, "Portygee," or other variation, or at least that is what the listener thought was said. Hopping from 1750 Virginia and North Carolina to the Mediterranean or anywhere else takes more than a leap of faith. To my knowledge, no researcher has yet documented these stated ties to Portugal. Assuredly, many Americans whose families came to this country hundreds of years ago may have originated in Portugal, but "Portuguese" is not an ethnic catchall to apply randomly to hearsay evidence, or even worse, to no evidence at all.

Statements made before 1900 referring to the Melungeons as Portuguese cannot, to my knowledge, be traced to original Melungeon oral history, church, civil, or legal documents. Any such post-1900 statements likely came from ideas found in newspapers and popular magazines. Researchers must thoroughly investigate any assumed, presumed, or claimed ethnic makeup, especially if one supposes the Melungeon component is anything other than American Indian.

Christopher Everett of Vanderbilt University presented an interesting idea. He noticed that the Potuskite (variously spelled) Indians, who were a non-Christianized branch of the Nansemond tribe, could very well have been misunderstood when asked to which tribe they belonged. It takes little stretch of imagination to think English ears heard Po-chuck-key and thought the speaker said "Portuguese" or "Portygee." The Po-chuck-key pronunciation is very close to the pronunciation of the anglicized tribal name. This concept may be especially relative to the Goins–Minor clan.²³

A few people in Melungeon neighborhoods and surrounding communities, for reasons known only to them, reported that they considered some local "white" families to be of Black descent, but of uncertain

degree. Whether or not these were Melungeon families remains to be seen. Gossip notwithstanding, historical Melungeons did not live in local African American communities, nor did they claim black ancestry, worship in their churches, or attend "colored" schools. The ambiguity of the term "free-colored" clouds the ethnic history of the people to whom it applied. Some blacks were freed slaves and some had never been enslaved. Yet, others were American Indians, East Indians, or other dark-skinned people of diverse origins.

There is a vast amount of preserved oral history from "colored" people stating that their families had always lived as Negroes, even when family members mixed with Indian, white, or other groups. I know of no such testimonies from Melungeon descendants.

Pre-1850 Hawkins County court documents that involved Melungeons indicted on counts of violating so-called Negro or mulatto laws show verdicts of not guilty or else the charges were dropped. Historical usage of the words Negro and mulatto was ambiguous, but we can infer that if there was a chance the defendants were black, then the courts would have ruled them as such. Social definition, of course, may have been something else entirely.

Another important fact remains. There is neither evidence nor tradition indicating that Melungeons were ever enslaved. This points to another possibility for research errors—we must not analyze historical actions from a modern viewpoint. Not all Blacks in America were slaves, and not all slaves in America were Black. Even the 1930s Registrar of Virginia Vital Records, Walter Plecker, refuted claims of Indian ancestry for many of Virginia's dark-skinned families by saying they were Negroes trying to pass as Indians. He never said how he knew this as fact. Plecker may have been correct in some cases but it is just as likely that many of these families were Indians and not pretending to be anything other than what they were.

By the 1930s, too many centuries had passed for Plecker to claim anything with assuredness. Modern anthropologists have since coined the term *tri-racial* as an identifier for those descending from a combination of Indian, black, and Caucasian ancestors, and they added *isolate* to those who lived in static populations caused by geographic or cultural barriers or by choice.

Determining the degree of possible African American ancestry in a particular family is outside the scope of this article, but there is not enough evidence to state that historical Melungeons had significant amounts of black ancestry, if any at all.²⁴ Furthermore, we must research individually and exhaustively each family before making claims about ethnic origin.

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Fact versus Fantasy

Some of the most common fantasies concerning Melungeons have almost become urban legends. Many of them originated with anecdotal evidence, and some have their origins in personal opinion that snowballed into truth. Believing in these legends will often lead to aimless meandering instead of opening doors to new leads and trustworthy evidence. Some of these are:

FANTASY: Melungeons came from a Mediterranean country. That is how they got their name.

FACT: There is no evidence supporting that claim, and I know of no evidence indicating that they self-identified with the term. Speculation aside, the meaning of the word is unknown, although it is plainly Indo-European in origin. It is doubtful that its etymology would have any bearing on the origin of Melungeon ethnicity. Such an examination would likely say more about the person using the word than the person to whom it was applied.

FANTASY: Melungeons were a mixture of several ethnic groups.

FACT: Oral traditions passed down to Melungeon descendants clearly state that their families were Indians. Outside documents support those claims. In the Minor family, and in some peripheral lines, there are traditions of being *Black Dutch*, a term not clearly defined, although it is suggestive of meaning some type of German ancestry or perhaps a connection to the Netherlands. I know of no evidence suggesting that Black Dutch and Melungeon are interchangeable.

FANTASY: Certain hereditary diseases indicate you may have Melungeon ancestry.

FACT: There is no scientific link between Melungeons and any specific disease. I know of no quantitative study showing any such relationships. Having a hereditary disease proves you inherited the tendency or disease, which may or may not be exclusive to certain ethnic groups. It does not prove you are a Melungeon.

FANTASY: Melungeons were poor, low-class, illiterate people, prone to all sorts of antisocial, non-law-abiding behavior.

FACT: Journalists who wrote local-color articles made these claims many years ago. Such stories created interest in the writer and his or her employer's publication but they were not based on verifiable information. If evidence says anything at all, it shows that many Melungeons were prosperous, intelligent landowners, soldiers, teachers, preachers, business owners, and active in their community and local politics. Assuredly, they had their share of lawbreakers and asocial members but the record shows they were no more criminally minded or antisocial than any one else.

FANTASY: Melungeons were scattered all over the South.

FACT: Various mixed ethnic groups were scattered all over the South. Not all are traceable to the same ethnic group, community, or ancestor, nor did the community or neighbors call all of them Melungeons.

FANTASY: Melungeon is synonymous with Black Dutch, Red Bones, Brass Ankles and other regional labels.

FACT: The term Melungeon applies to a specific group of people who removed to northeast Tennessee from neighboring counties in specific areas of Virginia and North Carolina. All such regional groups are neither identical nor inherently related.

FANTASY: DNA and blood test studies can prove Melungeon ancestry.

FACT: DNA testing is not a silver bullet. No DNA or scientific blood study exists that can prove whether or not a person is a Melungeon. Currently, if scientific methods are used, DNA testing is useful for determining paternity, for determining the probabilities or generalities between two groups, or as forensic evidence. Neither Y-chromosome nor mtDNA testing has yet developed to the point of being able to prove lineal descent.²⁵

FANTASY: Having a specific surname from a specific region means you are probably a Melungeon.

FACT: Having a specific name from a specific area does not mean you are Melungeon. Researchers must study each case individually.

FANTASY: If your surname is on a Melungeon surname list, you must be a Melungeon or a Melungeon descendant.

FACT: Most such lists were compiled after 1930 using every regional free-colored name found in early records or by using community histories that listed all families in the neighborhood, Melungeon or not. Some include every anglicized Indian name in the Southeast or anyone wanting to be Melungeon who believes, for various obscure reasons, that his or her family is or was Melungeon. Check the sources used to compile and define the name lists.

FANTASY: Melungeons could not vote and their lands were taken away.

FACT: They did vote and they left records of voting in Hancock and Hawkins County, Tennessee, even after the 1834 Tennessee law that took away voting rights of free-colored people. Please note that there is no "Melungeon Law" denying Melungeons the right to vote (suffrage). I wish there had been such a law, for it would have meant a copious legal definition in the Tennessee Code for the meaning of the word Melungeon. Judges have interpreted Tennessee's 1834 law to mean that its

intent was to eliminate the vote of recently freed Negro slaves and other free Negroes who had recently taken refuge in our state. Obviously, the law did not consider any Melungeon voting after that date (and before the repeal of so-called Negro laws) to legally be a Negro.²⁶

As for real property, much of the original lands owned by Hancock County Melungeons in the early 1800s has remained in the hands of family members. There are no records showing Melungeons ever lost their lands, either in Hancock County and surrounding counties or in places they lived prior to moving to this area. This could be a variation of the theme from when the Indians were forcibly moved to reservations or causing others to head for the backcountry.

FANTASY: Melungeons had strange burial customs, including grave houses.

FACT: Melungeons practiced the same burial and funeral customs as other mountain people. Grave houses do not suggest or prove Melungeon ancestry, nor does "decorating" the graves. Drive through Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, or many other states during the months of May and June and you will see more decorated graves than you thought could be possible.

FANTASY: John Sevier found Melungeons in East Tennessee before the Revolutionary War and said so in a letter.

FACT: This is probably the longest-running myth. No pre-Revolutionary War letter by John Sevier saying any thing about finding Melungeons or Portuguese has ever been found. To my knowledge, there are none stating any such thing after the war. Some have said that a copy of a copy of this mysterious original letter was in the hands of one of Sevier's cronies but that it burned in a house fire in the 1800s.²⁷

An entry was recently found in a circa-1805 Sevier journal that is housed, presumably, somewhere in the Sevier collection at the East Tennessee Historical Society. In the transcribed copy furnished to me by Jack H. Goins, Sevier apparently wrote that he and his survey party stayed at the home of a Gibson man near what is now northeastern Hancock County or southwestern Lee County, Virginia, near Blackwater, a few miles from Clinch Mountain. There are several Blackwater Creeks in these areas. Until further investigation, it is impossible to say if this was a Melungeon Gibson, especially since a prominent white Gibson family was in the same area many years before and after 1805. If proved a Melungeon Gibson, it will certainly refute some of the disparaging claims made about historical Melungeons, since it is my opinion Sevier would not have stayed with them if those claims were true!

FANTASY: Melungeons spoke Elizabethan English.

FACT: Many historical mountain people of mid-Appalachia sounded like they spoke Elizabethan English and not just those in Melungeon neighborhoods. We can find remnants of the dialect yet today in all parts of mid-Appalachia.

Although genealogists and historians may never find direct answers to every question about Melungeons, they should make a reasonable effort to gather what is available and realistically evaluate their findings. Research based only on cursory investigation is not research at all—it only closes the doors on the factual history and genealogies of Melungeon families.²⁸

¹Through years of experience, hard lessons, and dollars spent, I have found that a few books stand out as significant aids in genealogical research. They are the ones researchers use repeatedly. The authors also keep them up-to-date in revised editions. These are *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* by Val D. Greenwood; *EVIDENCE! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian* by Elizabeth Shown Mills; *The Handy Book for Genealogists* published by Everton Publishers; and *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920* by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide. This last title is also useful as a quick finding aide for historical boundaries in deed and court records work, as well as for census research. Guides published by state archives and societies are of tremendous value, as are the research guides published by Dr. George K. Schweitzer. Most libraries with genealogical sections will have one or more of these titles.

²I might add that it has been reported that some Melungeons told the census taker they were "Portuguese" and that the census so shows that. I have searched several census records and cannot find that notation on any Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky or North Carolina census records through 1910. If any reader has a citation that can point me to a census showing a Melungeon who identified his or her race as "Portuguese," please write me in care of Continuity Press, P.O. Box 567, Blountville, TN 37617-0567.

³See Microsoft Bookshelf '95 Dictionary and others for *mel*□□□*gene* (mèl'en-jên') *noun*. See EGGPLANT. [French *mélongène*, from Old French *melanjan*, *melonge*, from Medieval Latin *melongēna*, from Old Italian *melanzana*, *melongiane*, from Medieval Greek *melintzana*, *melanzana*, alteration (influenced by Greek *melas*, dark), of Arabic *bādinjān*, from Persian *bādingān*.]

⁴Family genealogist and Melungeon researcher Joanne Pezzullo recently found this word in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, 1590-1596, and brought this usage to my attention. See also John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 1393 A.D. Obviously, *malengin* was a well-established word in English-speaking vocabulary at a very early date. The word is no longer in use as such and to my knowledge, no one has an estimated or firm date it left common usage. In both pieces of literature, the pejorative describes people of low character or a noun meaning the same thing, even persons who are the Devil incarnate.

⁵Oral tradition set down in written form (see Jarvis below) says Melungeons took their last names from their white neighbors. Early researchers also noted that Melungeons had English-sounding last names. The shoe certainly fits if English-speaking colonists carried over to so-called Melungeons their common usage of *malengin*.

⁶Aswell, James, et al. *God Bless the Devil! Liars' Bench Tales*, pp. 207-208, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1940. The folkloric "Old Horny" is a quaint euphemism for the Devil.

⁷The Hancock County Historical & Genealogy Society, P. O. Box 307, Sneedville, TN 37869, 423-733-0140.

⁸Personal correspondence from Virginia Easley DeMarce to author, 1996.

⁹Baldwin, Bobbie M., transcriber, *A Church Book for Stony Creek Church*, Nevel Wayland, church clerk, p. 37, March 1970, rewritten from an original transcript done by the late Emory Hamilton, a copy in my possession from the Kingsport Public Library, Kingsport, Tennessee. The minute taker gave no names except Sisters Kitchen[s] and Stallard, the two church members at odds with each other over the "harbouring" incident. The original minutes are in private hands. Ironically, the Kitchen[s]/Kinchen surname is often linked to the Lumbee Indians.

¹⁰Jarvis, L. M. *Hancock County* [Tennessee] *Times*, 17 April 1903. Lawson-McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, clipping copy in the Melungeon vertical files. Jarvis was born in 1829 and was a lawyer who lived in Hancock County.

¹¹Copies of the stated public records are in my possession and fully cited

intent was to eliminate the vote of recently freed Negro slaves and other free Negroes who had recently taken refuge in our state. Obviously, the law did not consider any Melungeon voting after that date (and before the repeal of so-called Negro laws) to legally be a Negro.²⁶

As for real property, much of the original lands owned by Hancock County Melungeons in the early 1800s has remained in the hands of family members. There are no records showing Melungeons ever lost their lands, either in Hancock County and surrounding counties or in places they lived prior to moving to this area. This could be a variation of the theme from when the Indians were forcibly moved to reservations or causing others to head for the backcountry.

FANTASY: Melungeons had strange burial customs, including grave houses.

FACT: Melungeons practiced the same burial and funeral customs as other mountain people. Grave houses do not suggest or prove Melungeon ancestry, nor does "decorating" the graves. Drive through Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, or many other states during the months of May and June and you will see more decorated graves than you thought could be possible.

FANTASY: John Sevier found Melungeons in East Tennessee before the Revolutionary War and said so in a letter.

FACT: This is probably the longest-running myth. No pre-Revolutionary War letter by John Sevier saying anything about finding Melungeons or Portuguese has ever been found. To my knowledge, there are none stating any such thing after the war. Some have said that a copy of a copy of this mysterious original letter was in the hands of one of Sevier's cronies but that it burned in a house fire in the 1800s.²⁷

An entry was recently found in a circa-1805 Sevier journal that is housed, presumably, somewhere in the Sevier collection at the East Tennessee Historical Society. In the transcribed copy furnished to me by Jack H. Goins, Sevier apparently wrote that he and his survey party stayed at the home of a Gibson man near what is now northeastern Hancock County or southwestern Lee County, Virginia, near Blackwater, a few miles from Clinch Mountain. There are several Blackwater Creeks in these areas. Until further investigation, it is impossible to say if this was a Melungeon Gibson, especially since a prominent white Gibson family was in the same area many years before and after 1805. If proved a Melungeon Gibson, it will certainly refute some of the disparaging claims made about historical Melungeons, since it is my opinion Sevier would not have stayed with them if those claims were true!

FANTASY: Melungeons spoke Elizabethan English.

FACT: Many historical mountain people of mid-Appalachia sounded like they spoke Elizabethan English and not just those in Melungeon neighborhoods. We can find remnants of the dialect yet today in all parts of mid-Appalachia.

Although genealogists and historians may never find direct answers to every question about Melungeons, they should make a reasonable effort to gather what is available and realistically evaluate their findings. Research based only on cursory investigation is not research at all—it only closes the doors on the factual history and genealogies of Melungeon families.²⁸

¹Through years of experience, hard lessons, and dollars spent, I have found that a few books stand out as significant aids in genealogical research. They are the ones researchers use repeatedly. The authors also keep them up-to-date in revised editions. These are *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* by Val D. Greenwood; *EVIDENCE! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian* by Elizabeth Shown Mills, *The Handy Book for Genealogists* published by Everton Publishers; and *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920* by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide. This last title is also useful as a quick finding aide for historical boundaries in deed and court records work, as well as for census research. Guides published by state archives and societies are of tremendous value, as are the research guides published by Dr. George K. Schweitzer. Most libraries with genealogical sections will have one or more of these titles.

²I might add that it has been reported that some Melungeons told the census taker they were "Portuguese" and that the census so shows that. I have searched several census records and cannot find that notation on any Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky or North Carolina census records through 1910. If any reader has a citation that can point me to a census showing a Melungeon who identified his or her race as "Portuguese," please write me in care of Continuity Press, P.O. Box 567, Blountville, TN 37617-0567.

³See Microsoft Bookshelf '95 Dictionary and others for *mel[on]gene* (mèl'en-jèn') *noun*. See EGGPLANT. [French *mélange*, from Old French *melanjan*, *melonge*, from Medieval Latin *melongēna*, from Old Italian *melanzana*, *melongiane*, from Medieval Greek *melintzana*, *melanzana*, alteration (influenced by Greek *melas*, dark), of Arabic *bādīnjān*, from Persian *bādingān*.]

⁴Family genealogist and Melungeon researcher Joanne Pezzullo recently found this word in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, 1590-1596, and brought this usage to my attention. See also John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 1393 A.D. Obviously, *malengin* was a well-established word in English-speaking vocabulary at a very early date. The word is no longer in use as such and to my knowledge, no one has an estimated or firm date it left common usage. In both pieces of literature, the pejorative describes people of low character or a noun meaning the same thing, even persons who are the Devil incarnate.

⁵Oral tradition set down in written form (see Jarvis below) says Melungeons took their last names from their white neighbors. Early researchers also noted that Melungeons had English-sounding last names. The shoe certainly fits if English-speaking colonists carried over to so-called Melungeons their common usage of *malengin*.

⁶Aswell, James, et al. *God Bless the Devil! Liars' Bench Tales*, pp. 207-208, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1940. The folkloric "Old Horny" is a quaint euphemism for the Devil.

⁷The Hancock County Historical & Genealogy Society, P. O. Box 307, Sneedville, TN 37869, 423-733-0140.

⁸Personal correspondence from Virginia Easley DeMarce to author, 1996.

⁹Baldwin, Bobbie M., transcriber, *A Church Book for Stony Creek Church*, Nevel Wayland, church clerk, p. 37, March 1970, rewritten from an original transcript done by the late Emory Hamilton, a copy in my possession from the Kingsport Public Library, Kingsport, Tennessee. The minute taker gave no names except Sisters Kitchen[s] and Stallard, the two church members at odds with each other over the "harbouring" incident. The original minutes are in private hands. Ironically, the Kitchen[s]/Kinchen surname is often linked to the Lumbee Indians.

¹⁰Jarvis, L. M. *Hancock County [Tennessee] Times*, 17 April 1903. Lawson-McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, clipping copy in the Melungeon vertical files. Jarvis was born in 1829 and was a lawyer who lived in Hancock County.

¹¹Copies of the stated public records are in my possession and fully cited

passim in *Melungeons: Examining An Appalachian Legend*. I gathered them from sundry Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina county courthouses and repositories or they were from contributors and correspondents interested in Melungeon research. The list is far too long to cite here.

¹²Ibid. More similar testimony is found, variously, in the William P. Grohse unpublished papers, 1610-1974, 43 volumes on four reels of microfilm, Tennessee State Library and Archives Ac. #501-1,2,3,4.

¹³This article was reprinted in "Littell's Living Age" March 1849, under the byline of an unnamed correspondent.

¹⁴A copy in my possession, courtesy of the late William P. "Bill" Grohse. Miss Collins, a Sneedville native and president of the bank there (as was her father), was a woman with Melungeon ancestry and a prominent citizen. This is only one example that refutes the disparaging claims made against Melungeon people as a whole.

¹⁵Jarvis.

¹⁶Elder.

¹⁷Elder.

¹⁸Jarvis. Note by PSE: Generally, in early times, people considered Indians living east of the Blue Ridge as "friendly Indians" and they were so called. It did not apply to one specific tribe. Those west of the Blue Ridge, especially the Shawnee and the Cherokee, were considered to be foreign or unfriendly Indians.

¹⁹Personal Spurlock and Carter family papers and their documented genealogies, plus Melungeon family genealogies compiled by me. See also Lewis Preston Summers, *Annals of Southwest Virginia 1769-1800*, 1929, Johnson City, Tennessee: The Overmountain Press, reprint 1992, two volumes, *passim*, — *History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786, Washington County: 1777-1870*, 1903, Johnson City, Tennessee: The Overmountain Press, reprint 1989, *passim*; L. M. Jarvis, "Hancock County Times," 4 April 1903, typescript, McClung Historical Collection, 1956. NOTE: Fort Blackmore, although in Scott County, Virginia, lies only a few miles from Hancock County, Tennessee. See John Rice Irwin, *Alex Stewart: Portrait of a Pioneer* for wonderful descriptions on foot travel within and out of the area before 1900. The book also provides information on life and culture in olden times in Hancock County.

²⁰See Rosalie Davis, *Louisa County, Virginia Tithables and Census 1743-1785*, *passim*, privately published, Missouri, 1981. Louisa County court and civic records are invaluable to Melungeon studies and a research trip to Louisa County will prove quite profitable to those who can do so. Be careful not to conclude that all such names listed in court cases are related or that they even lived near each other. Historical families along the North and South Anna Rivers, especially near the northern/northwestern Louisa County border, are of particular interest. I hope this article will inspire some reader (or readers) to tackle a study of these families!

²¹See Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia. Their Traditional Culture*, Norman, Oklahoma and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989, — *Pocahontas's People. The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries*, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990; and Helen C. Rountree and Thomas E. Davidson, *Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland*, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997.

²²I thoroughly explain this in *Melungeons: Examining An Appalachian Legend*.

²³In many areas of Kentucky and Tennessee, the word Portuguese, at least before 1970, was often pronounced something like *Po' tuh ghee* or *Po' tucky*. People barely spoke the r. When writing (and probably when conversing), the tendency of historical English settlers to interchange *T's* and the *Ch* sound, as well as adding *R's* in Indian words where there are no *R's*, is often cast off as poor spelling by modern researchers. However, most English speakers could no more duplicate fluent Indian dialect and accent than a Northerner can duplicate that of a Southerner. German, French, and other languages in the colonies compounded this linguistic conundrum. Most important is the fact that tribal names brought into common use by the English were usually not the same as those used by the tribes themselves. Everett's idea is a viable hypothesis. I might add that Melungeon researchers would find a wealth of information in his articles found in the *Appalachian Journal. A Regional Studies Review*, Volume 26 Number 4, summer 1999, pp. 358-409 and Volume 27 Number 2, winter 2000, pp. 120-140.

²⁴My research only turned up rumored Negro ancestry for the Bell and Minor families, none of which I could verify outside of traditional neighborhood gossip, the "Plecker list," and a few census listings using "the ambiguous 'fpc' or 'mulatto' terminology," especially those enumerated after 1860. A local color fiction piece by Will Allen Dromgoole specifically separated "Nigger Melungeons" from "Indian Melungeons." See Will Allen Dromgoole, *Nashville Daily American*, newspaper, writing under the name "Will Allen," in "Land of the Melungeons," 31 August 1890, page 10 and "The Melungeons," *Arena*, volume 3, 1891, pages 470-479 and 745-751. To me, this indicates that Melungeons, whichever ethnic group was meant, were dark. It also implies that "Melungeons" meant something more than color, which I suspect indicates a play on words that includes *Malengin*.

²⁵The following example illustrates why mtDNA and Y-chromosome studies will not prove Melungeon ancestry. Consider a hypothetical figure named

Joe. Joe is a Melungeon with traditional Melungeon physical characteristics and can trace his Melungeon heritage to Vardy Collins, a universally accepted Melungeon. All the folks in Hancock County call him "Melungeon Joe." His mother's maiden name was Helga Swenson. She was born in Oslo, Norway, but moved with her parents to Sneedville in 1930. Melungeon Joe did not get his Melungeon characteristics from his mother. If we test his mtDNA (if his mtDNA is discernible at all), it will show he is related to Norwegians. Joe got his Melungeon characteristics from his late father, "Melungeon Bob," who inherited his Melungeon characteristics from his late mother, Betty, who was a great-granddaughter of Vardy Collins. It is impossible to test Melungeon Joe for Betty's mtDNA since Joe's mtDNA came only from his mother Helga. We can test Melungeon Joe for his paternal grandfather's Y-chromosome DNA since Joe's is essentially the same as his father's and his paternal grandfather's Y-chromosome DNA. However, Joe's paternal grandfather was Hirohito Yamaguchi, a native of Japan. If we test Melungeon Joe's Y-chromosome DNA, it leads back, at best, to the Japanese. Within one generation, Joe lost the mtDNA trail back to Melungeons. He lost the Y-chromosome Melungeon trail within two generations. The only way for DNA studies to be useful in proving Melungeon heritage is by first tracing individual ancestry using standard genealogical research techniques. We have to know who the Melungeon ancestor is before we can test for a link to him or her. If we do that, we gain no benefit from DNA testing because we will already know the lineage before doing the test. If we do not know the lineage, we need a DNA sample from a long dead, verified, historical Melungeon and that will not likely happen!

Although you do not need a DNA test to find your ancestry, it can be a fun toy to use in exploring generalities, if you feel so inclined. A few things to ask before submitting to or using DNA testing or existing reports are:

Did or will the research team properly define the project and require proof that donors meet prerequisite standards?

Did or will the research team properly advise me of the definition and what my sample will be used for, including information about signing releases and agreements about how my sample will be used and my legal rights and possible ensuing implications?

Did or will the researcher use "clean samples" or will samples be gathered in less than laboratory conditions? Who knows—there is always a chance the family comedian decided to swab the family dog's cheek lining and submit it for analysis!

How many unique samples will be tested? There should be several hundred for the results to be meaningful, unless the test is for possible connections to one only one suspected or proven ancestor.

Will a control group be used? If so, how will participants be selected and what standards will the researcher use to select them?

Will it be a blind study?

Are the researcher's credentials compatible with the qualifications needed to properly collect and analyze DNA data?

Most importantly, participants should know there is a lack of understanding about how genes combine in the nucleus of human cells. We do not inherit characteristics exclusively from either the father or mother. They come through the interaction of nuclear DNA from both parents. This is a major obstacle in using DNA to prove lineal descent.

²⁶There is not enough room to discuss events precluding Tennessee's 1834 decision nor did I intend this article to do so. Very briefly, the impetuous had been legislation in other states, particularly North Carolina that, in essence, commanded free or recently freed Negroes or "colored people" to leave the state within six months or face re-enslavement, jail terms, or worse! Before 1834, Tennessee had no such suffrage laws.

²⁷I speculate this could have been Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, whose father was a friend of Sevier's. Dr. Ramsey, author of *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, is reputed to have had many original Sevier documents, but they reportedly were destroyed when the Ramsey home burned. Years ago in speaking with the past-president of the Sevier family association, he told me that there is no hard proof of exactly what Ramsey may have had before the fire. He had heard the story about the supposed Sevier letter or journal and Melungeons only in recent years (the 1990s).

²⁸It is impossible to cover every aspect of Melungeon research in a short article. Interested readers can find a wealth of published information. It should be noted, however, that the books vary considerably in accuracy and usefulness. Some of the more scholarly ones will feature excellent bibliographies. Some are fiction; some are non-fiction. Others feature an Appalachian studies theme, and thus may be useful for Melungeon research. Of particular interest are three excellent articles by Virginia Easley DeMarce, published in the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*: "The Melungeons," Volume 84, No. 2 (June 1996), pages 134-149; "Looking at Legends—Lumbee and Melungeon: Applied Genealogy and the Origins of Tri-racial Isolate Settlements," Volume 81, No. 1 (March 1993), pages 24-45; and "'Very Slightly Mixed.' Tri-Racial Isolate Families of the Upper South—A Genealogical Study," Volume 80, No. 1 (March 1992), pages 5-35.