

Our History . . .Then and Now

These pages will take the reader on a journey through the Thompson Family history. It will begin with the family's oldest recorded ancestors, learning the facts and the implications that have been recorded about them. The trip will continue with their progeny, the eight family lines from which we all have sprung. We have compiled our genealogy from those lines and have revised it to include every generation, we hope, from the oldest to the youngest. The last leg on this excursion is a look back at our reunion history. Whether oral or written, this is what has kept the Thompson Family together for nearly 200 years. Along the way, you will hear acknowledgments paid to so many family members who have been the keepers of our history.

Look How Far the Lord Has Brought Us

From the collective memories regarding our lineage of the Thompson Family, and from research, the record shows that Robert (Bob) Thompson, thus far, is the oldest documented ancestor of our family. The story is told that he and his family were slaves on the Walter Thompson plantation in Leasburg, NC, in Caswell County. As most know, after the Civil War in 1865 and after the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves were freed. Joseph Thompson said that his father, John Arch (Bob's son), told him that slaves, upon hearing that they were free, just stood around that day, not knowing what to do, whether to leave the plantation or whether to stay. Some of the slaves stayed in Leasburg, but the 1880 Census shows Bob's family in Bushy Fork, NC, and the 1900 Census shows him in the Cedar Grove Township, along with his wife Kate and his 10 children, all bearing the Thompson name.

One of the stories handed down was that Robert had fair skin and straight hair, and it is believed Walter, the slave owner, was probably Robert's biological father. Reviewing the 1870 Census, however, we find a young 21-year-old Robert Thompson with two parents, Robert and Marinda Thompson. It is highly possible that the young Robert who is twenty-one (21) in 1870 is the Robert (Bob) Thompson whom we know and have claimed down through the years. Certainly, Martha Graves, Robert's daughter, (this Robert is Bob's son) felt that the 21-year-old listed in the 1870 Census is the one whom we *know* as our ancestor, and Martha was the "griot" or the oral historian of the Thompson family, as she preserved much of our history in her memory. If the 21-year-old in the 1870 Census is the Robert (Bob) Thompson whom the family has always known, then we must admit that our lineage goes back further than 1849, the birth year of Bob Thompson. Our roots therefore would date back 30 years further to Robert and Marinda Thompson. The 1870 Census shows that Robert, the father (or stepfather of Bob), is 55 years old, and the mother, Marinda is 50. Both would have been born in 1815 and 1820, respectively, and even if Robert is not the biological father of Bob, most likely because of what we know about slavery, Marinda was Bob's real mother, and as we can see, Marinda's age goes back to the early 1800s as well.

Listed below are entries from the 1870 Census for the Leasburg Township, the 1880 Census for Bushy Fork Township (near Roxboro, NC), and the 1900 Census from the Cedar Grove Township. Looking at the Census in 1870, we see a young Robert Thompson as a 21-year-old. Ten years later in the 1880 Census, we see the Robert (Bob) Thompson, whom we know as our

ancestor, as a 32-year-old, married to Kate Nelson. Twenty years later in the 1900 Census, we see our 52-year-old Robert (Bob) married to Kate Nelson with ten known living children, 9 boys and 1 girl. (Undoubtedly, Eddie Bethel and Rainey Sanders were deceased as the family always told of 12 children: 11 boys and one girl). The age and birth of the young Robert in the 1870 Census coincide with the age and birth of our ancestor Robert (Bob) Thompson. Our ancestor Robert (Bob) Thompson was born in 1849, and, therefore, he would have been 21 in 1870. If the twenty-one-year-old Robert in 1870 is Robert (Bob), our known ancestor, the calculation of his birth is off by one year by the time the 1880 Census was taken. Being off just one year is not difficult to understand, as the census taker could have made a mistake in recording his birth or the person answering the census taker's question could have given an incorrect birth year because births and ages were subject to the memories of family members as there were no birth certificates back then, especially for black people.

Other details that point to the fact that the young Robert (21) in the 1870 Census may be the same Robert (Bob) Thompson that we have recognized over the years is that we were always told that the family came from Leasburg, near Roxboro, NC, and the Leasburg Township is the place listed on the 1870 Census where Robert is listed as the 21-year-old. Also, Robert and Marinda had several children, and three of the children have names that are repeated in our families today: Robert, Martha, and Sidney. Bob and Kate gave these same names to their children, though not in the same order (see 1900 Census).

Thanks to Ms. Kim Sholar, Orange County local history and genealogy librarian, for assisting us in researching our family. Further study on the 21-year-old Robert in the 1870's may reveal the solid evidence that he is, indeed, the Robert (Bob) Thompson whom we know as our ancestor.

1870 CENSUS DATA

Name: Robert Thompson
 Age in 1870: 55
 Birth Year: abt 1815
 Birthplace: North Carolina
 Dwelling Number: 254
 Home in 1870: Leasburg, Caswell, North Carolina
 Race: Black
 Gender: Male
 Post Office: Leasburg
 Occupation: Farm Laborer
 Cannot Read: Y
 Cannot Write: Y
 Male Citizen Over 21: Y
 Inferred Spouse: Maryrida Thompson
 Inferred Children: Robert Thompson
 Martha Thompson
 Sidney Thompson
 Senta Thompson
 Alsa Thompson
 Weldon Thompson

Household Members	Age
Maryrida Thompson	50
ROBERT THOMPSON- ¶	21 ¶
Martha Thompson	16
Sidney Thompson	13
Senta Thompson	12
Alsa Thompson	8
Weldon Thompson	5
Robert Thompson	55

1880 CENSUS DATA - Looking at the image of the actual census page (which is not shown), it appears as if the *Thompsen* spelling on the type written page below was a misreading of the census taker's handwriting.

Name: Robt. Thompsen
 Age: 32
 Birth Date: Abt 1848
 Birthplace: North Carolina
 Home in 1880: Bushy Fork, Person, North Carolina, USA
 Dwelling Number: 22
 Race: Black
 Gender: Male
 Relation to Head of House: Self (Head)
 Marital Status: Married
 Spouse's Name: Catie Thompsen
 Father's Birthplace: North Carolina
 Mother's Birthplace: North Carolina
 Occupation: Farming
 Neighbors: View others on page

Household Members	Age	Relationship
Robt. Thompsen	32	Self (Head)
Catie Thompsen	23	Wife
J. A. Thompsen	4	Son
Robt. A. Thompsen	2	Son
John A. Thompsen	1	Son

1990 CENSUS DATA

Name: Robert Thompson
 [Rober Thompson]
 Age: 52
 Birth Date: Mar 1849
 Birthplace: North Carolina, USA
 Home in 1900: Cedar Grove, Orange, North Carolina
 Sheet Number: 23
 Number of Dwelling in Order of Visitation: 446
 Family Number: 448
 Race: Black
 Gender: Male
 Relation to Head of House: Head
 Marital Status: Married
 Spouse's Name: Katie Thompson
 Marriage Year: 1875
 Years Married: 25
 Father's Birthplace: North Carolina, USA
 Mother's Birthplace: North Carolina, USA
 Occupation: Farmer
 Months Not Employed: 0
 Can Read: Yes
 Can Write: No
 Can Speak English: Yes
 House Owned or Rented: Rent
 Farm or House: F
 Neighbors: View others on page

Household Members	Age	Relationship
Robert Thompson	52	Head
Katie Thompson	42	Wife
Jacob Thompson	24	Son
Robert A Thompson	22	Son
John A Thompson	21	Son
Walter E Thompson	18	Son
George W Thompson	16	Son
Willie V Thompson	15	Son
Syney J Thompson	11	Son
James B Thompson	18	Son
Asa A Thompson	7	Son
Martha B E Thompson	5	Daughter

- It's worth noting that within each of the eight (8) family lines, there is at least one male child named Robert and one female named Kate.
- It is also worth noting that Uncle Jake played a major role in the lives of his sister and brothers. Though the 1910 Census is not listed, five children of Bob and Kate are listed under Jacob's household: Robert (30), Sidney (20), Baxter (18), Acie (17) and Martha (15), all living with Jacob, his wife Nora, and their three young children. Undoubtedly, Robert (Bob) and Kate Thompson, were deceased by the 1910 Census.
- In researching Robert (Bob) Thompson, information about his wife Kate became apparent. Perhaps the next revision of our genealogy will include Kate Nelson's family line.

Compiling and Recording Our Genealogy

In the late 60s-70s, Iris Thompson Chapman, (George Wesley Line) began compiling our family's first written genealogy. She called on members from each family line to assist in getting information for a family directory. The following people met with her and agreed to solicit information from their family lines. We could say that they were the first family-line representatives.

Jacob Arthur	Beatrice Carver
Robert Anderson.....	Martha Graves
John Arch	Joseph Thompson
Walter	Mozell Dickey
George Wesley	Ira Belle Thompson
Sidney Allen.....	Jake Thompson
James Baxter.....	Virginia Thompson Snipes
Martha	Minnieola Gainey

Once all the information was compiled, William (Bill) Chapman, Iris' husband, wrote the names in calligraphy on parchment paper, mounted the sheets between two large pieces of wood, and displayed the album at the 1972 Reunion, which was held at her parents' home in Cedar Grove, NC. For several years afterwards, the 20x25-inch wooden album was transported from reunion to reunion and from home to home. Because so many family members wanted copies of the information in the wooden album, it was typed out on legal-size paper, copied and bound so that everyone could have easy access to the family genealogy. Copies were presented at the 1983 Reunion and sold for \$3 a book. Thanks to Rosa Thompson McAfee and her husband Reginald for sponsoring that financial effort.

Our next big endeavor was an update of our genealogy in 2001. Then, we published our first computerized family pedigree. The publication was in an 8.5x11 comb-bound book containing 111 pages. Included were a Table of Contents, Index, and a How to Find Yourself section. There were pictures of each family line, a birthday calendar and even a section on family illnesses. Twelve hundred (1,200) names were listed, along with identifying information on each person in our Thompson database. Kudos to Glenda Snipes, who after completing her family line, continued to help others complete theirs for that first computerized book. The front cover of the book matched the color of the person's family line.

By the time we began the computerized book, we had to call on a new group of family-line representatives to assist as most of our initial family representatives were deceased. Martha Graves continued to serve as the representative for her family, and Minnieola Gainey remained as representative for Aunt Martha's line.

As time changed, family members who were technology savvy realized the importance and the value of an on-line version of our family's heritage, so six years ago in 2015, we attempted this feat. Brandon Phoenix, one of the youngest Thompsons, along with Cesiely Ferguson and Loretta Wynder, led this unique change for our family. Once we were added to the group, we had access to post pictures, group topics, and keep in touch with those connected to the group. Realizing that there was a whole generation born since 2001 whose names did not appear in the book in any form, the Thompson Reunion Committee* began to revise the 2001 family genealogy, hoping to complete it by the 2020 Reunion. However, we realized it was impossible to do since 2020 was our family's 75th Diamond Reunion, and we had planned a cruise to Cozumel, Mexico, and needed time to get ready for that. The COVID 19 Pandemic, however, shut down all plans in 2020, so we decided to work toward a complete revision of the 2001 genealogy and have it ready by the 2021 Family Reunion. We also were aware that we had little money to undertake such a mammoth project. We had decided early on to do a Thompson Family Birthday Calendar, an idea of Minnieola Gainey, to help defray costs. Each calendar month featured one of Bob and Kate's children. Thankfully, we finished the calendar before the pandemic struck in North Carolina.

The Committee retained the services of Cousin Loretta Thompson Wynder, former IT Manager and owner of LTC Business Solutions, who had entered the 1,200 names in our initial database, to lead the family calendar project and update our 2001 family history. Kudos to Janet Brooks for the many different capacities that she has served, but especially for selling over 60 calendars; in doing so, she welcomed so many Thompsons to the fold who have never attended a Thompson Reunion. It will be a treat to meet the new Thompsons. The family also acknowledges the following contributions by family members: Dellaphine Ivey for being a gracious host for all the meetings we had at her home until her recent declining health, Mildred Hardy for serving as our president for nearly 20 years, Wilbert Johnson for serving as treasurer for many years, and Martha Fowler for her continued outstanding service as secretary. The older reunion members have invited and still are inviting our 5th-6th generations of Thompsons to become a part of the Reunion Committee as many of the current members are nearly 70 years old or older. Lisa Brown and Cesiely Ferguson (from the John Arch Line) have spearheaded this effort.

**Contact List below*

Once the reunions were no longer held at individual homes, we had to form a Reunion Committee to plan and prepare for each year, so the contact persons became members of the Reunion Committee, serving double roles. Names with single asterisks are family contacts who served from the 2000s until recently. Those with double asterisks have served since 2000s up to the present time. Those with no asterisks recently joined the Reunion Committee.

FAMILY LINE	CONTACT PERSON	PHONE	EMAIL
JACOB ARTHUR	Mattie Atkins* Mildred Hardy* Avis Laverne Thompson** Gracie Willett** Thomas Thompson	336.509.1686 336.447.5852 704.365.9678	thompson_avis@yahoo.com gcrisp6069@aol.com tomjoann@outlook.com
ROBERT ANDERSON	Martha Graves* Robert Graves** Krystal Newkirk	919.606.2504 919.698.0198	rgraves315@embarqmail.com krystaln8196@gmail.com
JOHN ARCH	Joseph Thompson* Dellaphine Ivey** Lisa Brown** Cesiely Ferguson**	336.380.3168 336.343.5897	lmjohnsonbrown@gmail.com cesiely4@gmail.com
WALTER	Geraldine Wilson* Faye Parker* Janet Brooks** Mary Williams**	919.971.0587 704.504.5574	janetb1947@triad.rr.com mary1859@att.net
GEORGE WESLEY	Loretta Wynder* Magaline Phillips* Iris Chapman** Martha Fowler ** Brenda Blount** Clarence Thompson	919.563.4974 336.675.088 3336.584.9138 336.792.4717	iristchapman@gmail.com mfowler999@gmail.com oblount@triad.rr.com pbchoice@gmail.com
SIDNEY ALLEN	Mildred Thompson* Clara Faye Foriest**	336.227.3011	cfforiest@aol.com
JAMES BAXTER	Virginia Snipes* Glenda Snipes** Margaret Dorsett**	919.732.8606 336.228.6114	glenda.snipes@va.gov dorsettm123@gmail.com
MARTHA	Martha Moore* Minneola Gainey** Nate Gainey, Jr.	336.229.1848 609.851.9134	natenminn@bellsouth.net ngaineyjr@hotmail.com

History of the Thompson Reunion

At the 1990 Thompson Reunion, Augusta Carver, librarian and great granddaughter of Robert (Bob) Thompson and daughter of Beatrice and Henry Carver, read a commendation letter to Joe and Odell Thompson. An excerpt from that letter reads: “We are celebrating our 45th annual family reunion today, and today is set aside to pay tribute to our cousins Odell and Joseph Thompson for their legacy of “Traditional Black Music of the South.” Augusta’s comments let us know that the first Thompson reunion occurred in 1945.



*Odell Thompson (L) and Joe Thompson(R) of Mebane, NC
Photo by Wayne Martin (1990)*

Relying on the collective memories of family, Elnora Atkins of the Jake Thompson line, stated that her mother Mattie and Mattie’s sister, Beatrice, were instrumental in starting the first reunion. They felt that there were already other events such as associations for blacks to attend, but no Thompson Family Reunion, so they contacted family members, and they came. Another story is told that Uncle Jacob became very ill and was living with his daughter Mattie, who lived in the Snow Hill section of Durham, NC, and Uncle Walter gathered everyone up by the truckload and took them to see Uncle Jake, and that was dubbed as the first reunion. Some say the first reunion was held by Uncle Walter and his daughter Thelma recalled that they covered the dinner tables with white sheets for tablecloths. Even though the details of the first reunion are not conclusive, all seem to agree that it occurred on the second Sunday in June 1945, and the Thompson Family has been coming together every year since 1945 on the second Sunday in June.

Those early reunions were only one-day celebrations. Each year they rotated by invitation from one family’s home to another. The reunions were held outside in rural areas to accommodate the huge crowds of 300-400 people, as there were no hotel accommodations for blacks during those early years. Ladies cooked their favorite dishes and desserts and shared them with all who came. The meal and the fellowship took place outdoors as well. There was no official program at that

time, but when Mr. Jim Frank Harrelson's booming voice called the reunion to order, everyone participated in the devotions: singing and praying.

An attempt is made here to list and thank the families who held those reunions at their homes and farms. Some of these family members hosted the reunion over and over: Evelyn and Elton Shaw, Effie and Pete Roosevelt Vincent, Baxter and Mamie Thompson, Joseph and Hallie Thompson, Joseph and Pauline Thompson, Mozelle and Lonnie Dickey, Odell & Martha Thompson, George and Ira Belle Thompson, Beatrice and Henry Carver, Josie & Newton Thompson, Mildred and Jim Johnson, Martha & Robert Graves, Eddie and Collene Thompson, UD "Hammer" Thompson, Walter and Mary Susan Thompson, Gary Thompson (sponsored by Arch and Hattie), Virginia Thompson (sponsored by the Floyd Family), Beatrice Thompson, Bernice Richmond, Josie Thompson, Charlie Thompson and Nathaniel and Minnieola Gainey helped host reunions while living in New Jersey.

In the 90s, while some individual families continued to take the reunions at their homes, other members of the family sponsored the reunions at local schools, community centers and at Mebane and Burlington parks. In 1996, at the 51st Reunion held at Joseph Thompson's home in Mebane, NC, a surprising downpour came just as the ladies spread their food to serve. Many people were not able to eat, and even though cousins had come from far and near, hardly any fellowship took place. The 52nd Reunion, held by George Wynder and Ira Belle, was the last one held outside by an individual family.

Beginning in 2000, the new Millennium, minutes show that we added a second day to our reunion, the Saturday before the second Sunday. Also, families decided on family-line colors: Jacob (orange), Robert (fuchsia), John Arch (blue), Walter (gold), George Wesley (purple), Sidney Allen (white), James Baxter (red) and Martha (green). All families looked gorgeous in their colors, but you had to take a double take when the Baxter Family stepped in; every year, everyone – even the little ones – wore red. The following persons served as committee workers the first year that we added a second day: Mary Williams, Mattie Akins-Lee, Dellaphine Ivey, Magaline Phillips, Martha Fowler, Geraldine Wilson, Faye Parker, Virginia Snipes, Martha Moore, Clara Faye Foriest, Evelyn Shaw, Minnieola Gainey, Dennis Thompson, Martha Graves, Wilbert Johnson, Iris Chapman, Cantrice Thompson, Georgia Scoggins, Mildred Hardy, Phyllis Graves, Elvira Petty, Mildred Thompson, Glenda Snipes, and Joseph Thompson.

The 2000 Reunion was held Saturday, June 10 at Lake Michael's in Mebane and convened on Sunday, June 11 at the Mebane Art Center. Saturdays have become fun days for kids, family picnics, including a fish fry and hot dogs. From 2005-2008, we held Saturday banquets at Occasions in Burlington, NC, where families dressed up in their Sunday best.

Even though most of our reunions have been held at home in Piedmont North Carolina, we have traveled beyond our local counties. The 50th Reunion was held in Charlotte, NC, at the Hornet's Nest Park hosted by the Floyd Thompson Family (Jacob's line). The first out-of-state reunion was hosted by Shirley Thompson (Jacob's line) in Ruther Glenn, VA, in 2003. The second out-of-state reunion was hosted by the families of Aunt Martha's line in Trenton, New Jersey, in 2012. The third time the family traveled out of state was to Baltimore (Arundel Mills) in 2016 (hosted by John Arch's line), and our most recent out-of-state trip took us to Myrtle Beach, SC,

in 2018. Mary Williams and her family have to be commended as 51 people from her immediate family attended the reunion that year.

When we had to cancel our 75th Diamond Anniversary Cruise in 2020, it was Brenda Blount of the George Wesley Line, who kept encouraging the family representatives to honor the second Sunday in June 2020 despite the pandemic, as we had never missed celebrating a Thompson Family Reunion. Family representatives came together for that recognition and wore masks and stayed six feet apart from each other to honor health concerns.

In 2009, we published our first Thompson Times Newsletter, saluting everyone's accomplishments and recognizing births, deaths, and newlyweds. We thank former Senator Tony Foriest, married to our cousin Clara Thompson, for allowing us to call on him for the invocations and political knowledge.

We also added an annual auction at the two-day reunion to raise funds for our graduating high school seniors and for monetary gifts for our third generation, those family members who would have been grandchildren of Robert (Bob) Thompson. Martha Graves (Robert Anderson line) said that there were 69 first cousins in their generation, and we started recognizing those cousins at our reunions with small monetary gifts when we began the two-day celebrations. Currently, there are two of her first cousins still living, both are from the George Wesley Line: George Wynder Thompson who turned 100 on January 15, 2021, and his brother, Vance Thompson, who turned 90 on January 31, 2021. Another member of the family who holds that distinction of living to be 100 was Cousin Thelma Mayo (Walter Thompson Line).

We hope you have enjoyed this journey back through the ancestry of the Thompsons, the genealogy, and the reunions. Your current Family Reunion Committee has worked hard throughout these last 40-50 years, and many of us will be ancestors to those yet unborn, and if we are gone home to glory at the next revision of our history, we hope you who are in your 30s, 40s, 50s now, will use what we have done to guide you in keeping the torch of the Thompson Family lineage and heritage burning brightly.

Respectfully submitted,

Your kindred, Dr. Iris Vernel Thompson Chapman