

Lett Families Settlement History & Genealogy

Aquilla Lett, a man of mixed African American, European and possibly Native American heritage settled on a farm In Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio around 1819. Soon several other families with similar heritage settled on farms nearby, forming a community. The Lett Settlement was one of the earliest African American mixed race communities to be settled in Ohio.

Historical & Biographical Abstract of the Lett Family

The Lett family history can be traced to the year, 1683 with the arrival of their ancestor, Molly Welsh, an English dairymaid, who had been falsely accused of the crime of theft. Due to her ability to read, her life was spared and she was sent to the English Province of Maryland as an indentured Servant.

After seven years of servitude, Molly, a white woman of a remarkable fair complexion; probably blonde hair, was freed and eventually purchased her own small farm in Maryland. While she prospered, she knew that she would need more help with the farm and began to save money. Although Molly was opposed to slavery, her survival left her with very few options. She eventually purchased two slaves to help with the farm work, and in time freed both slaves and married her exslave named BANNAKA, who was an African prince from the ancient Wolof kingdom of Walo; located in Senegal.

Bannaka was described as "a man of bright intelligence, fine temper, with a very agreeable presence, dignified manners and contemplative habits," Molly took her husband's name as her surname, which eventually became Banneker. The couple had four daughters; the oldest of whom was named Mary.

Mary Banneker, a daughter of Bannaka and Molly Welsh Banneky, grew into a slender, very attractive young woman of uncommon intelligence and was described as being of a bright mulatto complexion and having an abundance of straight black hair, which led persons unacquainted with her to suppose she was an Indian (Native American). Mary Banneky married a former slave, named Robert. Robert had no surname name, so he took his wife's surname, Banneker, as his own. Robert Banneker was a native of the African country of Guinea and had been sold into slavery; but he remained in slavery for only seven years.

Being unruly, Robert escaped and lived with the Indians. He was recaptured several times and was sold as a slave who must be chained. He was eventually purchased by a wealthy person who believed a man with such dignity should not be in bondage and Robert was freed.

Mary and Robert Bannaker became the parents of 5 children; 1 son and 4 daughters: Benjamin, Jemima, Julian, Minta and Molly. The only known documentation for Julian Banneker is from a Baltimore tax record that mentions her as "their crippled mulatto daughter".

Benjamin Banneker is the son of Robert and Mary Banneker was self-educated mathematician and astronomer, who would become known as the first African American Man of Science. Among his credits are; building one of the first working wooden clocks built completely in the Colonies, the publication of 5 almanacs which were used to forecast tides, planting and harvesting schedules, medicinal treatments for colds and other ailments and locations of the stars used for navigation and the establishing of longitudes and latitudes for the purposes of building and corresponded with Thomas Jefferson, at that time Secretary of State, calling for Mr. Jefferson to use his position to address the issue of slavery.

James A. Guy, Sr., whose descendants would later marry into the Lett family, had seen Benjamin Banneker quite often and had made his acquaintance. James stated that Banneker was a bookkeeper for the Ellicott family and often weighed James Guy's wheat and corn for him at Ellicott's Mills. James reported that when Benjamin Banneker was in public he addressed people as "thee" and "thou". He noted that Banneker was not a black man, but a "thorn" color; perhaps what could be described as a chocolate color. James said that Banneker had little to do with colored folks generally; perhaps he was too busy. James Guy used to laugh when he would hear the Letts talking about the dollars of Uncle "Ben (Benjamin Banneker). "Humph" James would say, "The ground was too poor to raise beans on."

Jemima Banneker the sister of Benjamin's Banneker married Samuel Lett in Baltimore County, Maryland in 1757. Samuel Lett whose real name was Delaney, was a farmer of English, Irish and Native American descent. When Samuel Delaney was very young, his mother - Mary, a white woman whose last name was Delaney, married a mulatto by the name of Zachariah Lett.

Based upon Baltimore County land and church records concerning Zachariah Lett, his wife's name was Margaret. At some point in time, Samuel Delaney

took the last name of his step-father as his own and became known as Samuel Lett.

Samuel and Jemima Banneker Lett were known as people of good manners and indomitable energy, traits which they passed on to their children Samuel and Jemima had 9 children, 8 of whom lived to adulthood. Due to Samuel and Jemima being good students of the "Bible" in their day and time, all of their children were given biblical names; Aquilla (Latin) meaning Eagle; Meshach Samuel -(Hebrew)- meaning the Name of God; Elijah -(Hebrew)- meaning Jehovah is God; Mary "Mollie" -(Hebrew)- meaning Bitter; Keziah "Kizzie" pronounced Cassia - meaning Fragrant Tree resembling cinnamon; Peter - (Greek)- meaning Rock; and Benjamin -(Hebrew)- meaning Son of my right hand.

Information on Molly Welsh, Bannaka, Mary Bannekeer, Robert Banneker and Benjamin Banneker is taken from "A Sketch Of The Life Of Benjamin Banneker", from notes taken in 1836, "read" by J. Saurin Norris, before the Maryland Historical Society, (Thursday) October 5, 1854, from a Lett Family Article written by Charles Henry Lett, which is included in "Oak Grove - A Pioneer Community, Page 109 published in November 1983 and from "Baltimore County Families 1659 - 1759, written by Robert W. Barnes and published in 1989. Further information is taken from, The Life of Benjamin Banneker, by Silvio Bedini (Chapter I - Page 17 & Chapter 11- Page 25, published in 1972 from THE LIFE OF BENJAMIN BANNEKER - THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN OF SCIENCE; (revised and expanded by Silvio A. Bedini and published 1999). Additional information is taken from oral history recorded and thereafter researched by George Simpson in the early 1900's. This oral history was passed on in manuscript form to Amanda Lett who in turn passed the documents on to Charles Henry Lett, son of Judson Lett and a descendent of Aquilla Lett Sr.

Early Marriages of the Lett Siblings: Lett - Cobbler Aquilla Lett Sr., b. 1758 Baltimore County Md. d. May 1, 1848 in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio; married Christina "Charity" Cobbler on Tuesday, September 27, 1787 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Frederick Md.. Christina was b. 1768 d. March 26, 1848 in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio. They had the following children:

1. Samuel b. 1788.
2. Elizabeth "Betsey" b.1789.
3. Abraham b. 1790.
4. Mary "Polly" b. circa 1800.

5. Nancy b. 1801.
6. Susanna "Susan" b. 1802.
7. Peter b. circa 1803.
8. Aquilla Jr. b. 1805.
9. William, b. circa 1810.
10. James b. 1811.

Aquilla is the oldest son of Samuel and Jemima Banneker Lett. He owned a 79 acre farm in Meigs Township in the section referred to as the Lett Families Settlement:

Meshach Lett, b. circa 1760 in Baltimore County Md., d. March 15, 1848 in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio, . Meshach married several times: (1) Rosannah Cummins (2) Amelinza Wallace (3) Susan Stewart (4) Mary Goins.

1. Rosannah Cummins (? circa 1818 in Ohio) were the parents of 3 known children, 2 sons and 1 daughter: Jemima born 1800. Neither of the sons has been identified. Rosannah Cummins died circa _____
2. Amelinza Wallace was married on Monday, May 21, 1821 in Harrison County, Ohio. Meshach and Amelinza were the parents of 2 known children, 2 sons - names unknown. After the death of Amelinza Wallace Lett circa_____.
3. Susan Stewart (it is not known if they had any children or the date of death for wife Susan Stewart Lett).
4. Mary "Mollie" Goins a daughter of Jason Goins b. _____ d. circa 1883 in Guernsey County, Ohio. Meshach and "Mollie" Goins Lett had no children. Upon the death of Meshach Lett, Mary "Mollie" Goins Lett married Benjamin Chandler Simpson on March 29, 1849 in Muskingum County, Ohio.

Lett - Beard:

Samuel Lett b. circa 1765 in Baltimore County, Md. d. between 1840 & 1850 near Cumberland, Guernsey County, Ohio. He married Esther Beard b. _____ d. between 1840 & 1850 in Ohio. They were parents of 16 children 7 of whom have been identified by name:

1. Othias B. b. circa 1810, Mary b. circa 1814.
2. Elijah b. 1816.
3. Samuel b. 1818.
4. Margaret b. 1821.

5. Andrew b. 1828.
6. Aquilla b. Monday, January 12, 1829.

Lett - Caliman:

Elijah Lett b. circa 1768 in Baltimore County, Md. d. 1854 in Meigs Township Muskingum County, Ohio. He married Elizabeth "Betsy" Caliman a daughter of Moses Caliman and Henrietta Perrill/Pearl on April 26, 1821 in Harrison County, Ohio. Betsy was b. 1792 in Frederick County Md., d. 1870 in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio. Elijah and "Betsy" had 5 known children:

1. Moses b. 1822.
2. Margaret b. 1824.
3. Othias b. October 15, 1829.
4. Hester b. 1830.
5. Emanuel b. March 1, 1834.

Lett - Lett:

Mary "Mollie" Lett b. circa 1775 in either Patapsco Upper Hundred of Baltimore County Md, or near Frederick Township, Frederick County Md. d. circa 1840 in Saltlick Township, Perry County Ohio, or in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio. She married Charles Lett b. _____ died 1836 in Morgan County Ohio. Charles and Mollie Lett had several children but their exact number and identities are not known.

Lett - Lett:

Keziah "Kizzie" Lett b. circa 1777 in vicinity of Frederick, Frederick County Md., d. circa 1860 in Hocking County, Ohio married Solomon F. Lett b _____ d. 1834 in Brooksfield Township, Morgan County, Ohio. They were the parents of 5 known children:

1. Jemima b. circa 1801.
2. Nancy b. circa 1803.
3. Joshua b. circa 1808.
4. Susanna b. circa 1810.
5. Mahala b. circa 1812.

Lett - Unknown:

Peter Lett b. circa 1791 d. _____ in the vicinity of Frederick, Frederick County, Md... Peter married a white woman, name unknown, in Pennsylvania around 1820. His wife died between 1838 & 1850. They were the parents of 10 known children:

1. Peter b. 1821.
2. Samuel b. 1821 or 1822.
3. Betsy b. 1824.
4. Mary A. b. 1825.
5. Margaret b. 1829.
6. Susan b. 1830.
7. Hiram b. 1833.
8. Sarah b. 1835.
9. Andrew b. 1838.

Lett - Caliman:

Benjamin Lett b. 1792 in the vicinity of Frederick, Frederick Country, Md. d. October 13 or 14 1847 in Muskingum County Ohio, Meigs Township. He married Mary "Polly" Caliman b. 1790 in Frederick County Md., d. August 3, 1866 in Muskingum County Ohio, Meigs Township. Polly Caliman was the daughter of Moses Caliman and Henrietta Perrill/Pearl Caliman. Benjamin and Polly were married on January 5, 1809 in Frederick County, Virginia. They were the parents of 12 children - 11 of which have been identified by name:

1. Solomon b. 1809.
2. Samuel b. 1814.
3. Emanuel b. 1815.
4. Elizabeth b. 1818.
5. Benjamin b. 1820.
6. William b. 1822.
7. Margaret b. 1825.
8. Moses b. 1828.
9. Thomas b. 1832.

Compiled from updated research submitted by Charles J. Weiker, Tuesday April 16, 1996. * Charles J. Weiker is a 5th great grandson of Aquilla Lett Sr., and Christina Cobbler Lett and a 4th great-grandson of their daughter, Elizabeth "Betsey" Lett Stevens. Charles J. Weiker is also a 4th great grandson of Benjamin and Mary Polly Caliman Lett and a 3rd great grandson of their son, Solomon Lett.

Much of the activity which surrounded the Lett Settlement families took place near the area of Zeno. It was near Zeno that Aquila Lett acquired property in Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio in 1823. Other early African American pioneers in Muskingum County were Benjamin and Moses Caliman.

These families were active in what may be called the 'early freedom movement' largely initiated by free African Americans. This legacy may be traced to Benjamin Banneker who in 1792 engaged in correspondence with then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, asking Jefferson to use his position to address the impropriety of slavery. Benjamin Banneker was an uncle to the Lett family. Samuel Delaney Lett patriarch of the Lett family married Jemima Banneker, Benjamin Banneker's sister.

These early Ohio pioneers took strong stands in regards to their own freedom by striving to enroll their children in school and in 1846 successfully filed a law for their children's right to attend school. In 1853 when Charles Lucas (husband of Rachel Lett) attempted to register to vote he was denied and thereafter filed a law suit.

The court's ruling was that a man with more white blood in his veins than black blood and who could read and write should be able to vote. In 1864 Joseph Tate filed a lawsuit for the right to vote... During the course of having his petition reviewed Mr. Tate began to read this Law to the election Board. The committee responded that things had come to a pretty pass when a black man felt he had the right to read laws to white men.

Affiliated with the Lett Settlement families were the following African American leaders:

- David Lett, Abolitionist writer
- Joshua McCarter Simpson, of Zanesville, Muskingum County, Ohio, physician, abolitionist writer and Underground Railroad operative.
- Basel Norman of Waterford, Washington County, Ohio, African American Revolutionary War Veteran.
- Cumberland Posey of Belpre, Washington County, Ohio(steamboat engineer, riverboat captain (Ohio River) co-founder of the Pittsburgh Courier Newspaper and the Homestead Grays baseball team of the Negro Leagues of baseball.
- John R. Clifford, West Virginia's first African American attorney and publisher of that West Virginia's first African American Newspaper, 'The Pioneer Press'.
- James H. Guy Esq., the first black attorney to argue a case before the Ohio Supreme Court and later the attorney for the plaintiff's in the landmark Coffeyville vs. Kansas lawsuit, which compelled Kansas school to provide education for black students.
- Henry C. Lett, president of 2 railroads in Nebraska and later sat on the Commission that guided Utah to statehood.
- Thomas Pointer, Meigs Township, Muskingum County, Ohio, Underground Railroad Operator.