

## Family Saga: From Slavery to Disneyland

By PAULA PARKS

"From curiosity and love," said family reunion initiator Lettie Mae Ross, came the first Weiss-Sledge family reunion six years ago in Montgomery, Ala. Last weekend in Los Angeles, about 90 members of the family held their fourth biennial reunion.

Saturday night at the Airport Marriott, after a weekend of Disneyland and socializing, they held a banquet. As the oldest family member, Kitty Reese, 94, of Meridian, Miss., noted, family reunions are more popular since Alex Haley's search for his family heritage led to the novel and miniseries "Roots."

Like Haley, Ross was inspired to research her family because, through the years, she had overheard her grandparents recount stories of the past. While searching through courthouse records and

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BOB CHAMBERLIN / Los Angeles Times

Family matriarch Kitty Reese, 94, talks with Levin Alexander Sledge, 70, at Weiss-Sledge reunion.



BOB CHAMBERLIN / Los Angeles Times

Oldest family member Kitty Reese, center, with youngest, 9-month-old Ashanti Smith, at fete.

## FAMILY: From Slavery to Disneyland Reunion

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questioning Kitty Reese, her aunt, Ross traced the family line back to slavery.

The family members are the descendants of the children born to slave master Levin Sledge and four of his slaves, Kittle, Hettie, Easter and Martha. Ross named it the Weiss-Sledge reunion because many, like she, are descendants of the union of Martha's daughter, Ellen Sledge, and Anthony M. Weiss.

About the time Ross was beginning to research the family history in Montgomery in the early '60s, Kitty Reese's daughter, Rita, met the slave master's grandson in San Francisco. Rita Reese was working in a post office and noticed that a white customer was named Levin Alexander Sledge. She struck up a conversation with him and discovered that he and her mother had the same grandfather, Levin Sledge.

In 1962, Sledge began corresponding with Kitty Reese. He had been doing independent genealogical research on the Sledge family dating back to the 1600s, and gladly shared it with Ross, a professor at Alabama State University, when she contacted him more than 10 years later.

The only white family relation in attendance at the reunion, Sledge, 70, praised the family: "I think they're wonderful. They have nothing to do with slavery."

### 'An Act of God'

Kitty Reese, whom all respectfully refer to as the family matriarch, was aglow. "It is an act of God that we come together," she said.

Even though Mrs. Reese often uses a wheelchair because of her arthritis, she would not be left out of her first Disneyland trip. She said she rode the Monorail and saw "America the Beautiful".

Because of the reunions and new family connections, she said, she has gotten many letters and cards on special occasions. "You have to know someone to begin to love them. I think we've shown our love for each

other with each reunion."

Gregory Routt, a physics student at Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich., and whose mother is a Weiss, also noted the love at the reunion. Being part of a close family that cares, he said, gave him "a real nice feeling, a sense of belonging."

Bernetta Smith of New Orleans, the mother of the youngest member, 9 month-old Ashanti, thought the reunion was especially important because family members are spread across the country. But, she said, the reunions allowed them to be reminded that "other people care."

### An Invaluable Network

The networking and new connections led to more than just looking up a family member when vacationing. Mayme Ross Oliver, the chairwoman of the Los Angeles reunion, a first-grade teacher at 96th Street School and sister of the reunion initiator, recounted an incident when a large family proved invaluable:

One sister, from Springfield, Ill., was stranded in a St. Louis airport. She called sister Lettie Ross in Alabama, who called Kitty Reese in Mississippi, who knew the number of Kitty Reese Lemons in St. Louis, who helped the family until they could get a plane.

This year, close friends of the family were included in the reunion. A friend, Westley T. Logan, a retired industrial arts teacher and baseball coach from Washington High School, was impressed with the warmth the family members showed one another. "It will enhance the growth of the younger ones and will help the family succeed. It's all about the strong taking care of the weak."

Sunday morning, at the family's business meeting, the site of the August, 1985, reunion was decided. It will be held in Meridian, Miss., home of Kitty Reese.

*Parks, a graduate of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, is an intern with The Times.*

Mrs. Eris Reese, Loa, Utah, (interested in the Griffin family) may possibly have some REESE(E) data.

George Davidson b. 1726 m. Catherine or Penelope Reese about 1749; had children George Davidson & his bro. John, during the yr. 1748, emigrated to the Yadkin River in N.C. John Davidson was on of the Signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, May 20, 1775. John and his brother George came from Hertfordshire, England ca. 1745. (Ref. Am. Incyclopedia)-Mr. C.W. Holstein, 214 N.E. 6th St., Oklahoma City 4, Oklahoma. George Davidson's family in the 1750's consisted of his wife Margaret and sons George, William Lee (b. 1748 in Lancaster Co., Pa.) & Samuel. Wm. Lee was youngest. One other son - a manor in 1765.

Nat'l Intelligencer, 1830: In Kent Co., Del. Sept. 17, 1865 - at the residence of James Frasher, Mr. Jas R. Rees to Mrs. Martha E. Downs, all of Delaware.

Index, Brunswick Co., Va. Deeds - Josiah Reese from John Quarles & wife 1780. George Reese - 1824. (George Walton, 1732).

Write to Mr & Mrs. J.H. Andrews Sr., 4158 Beaverbrook Lane, Dallas 29, Texas. (they visited Mrs. Rich'd Orenshaw and are interested in REESE.

Southampton Co. Va. Order Book: Edward Reese adm. on his est - 175  
same 162

Jno. Reese & Jerome ordered to bind(?) out -183  
Edward Reese - Inv. 194  
Reese vs. Reese - 256 - 208  
Reese vs. Bass - debt - 293  
Reese vs. Adams - debt - 317

ANDREW REESE - on 1810 census, Montgomery Co., Va.

Vol I Onslow Co. N.C. - pgs. 3 & 29: D.B. A - 1734-38 - 1740-44.

DANIEL REESE - admsr. of Elias Kingston vs. John Burnais.

DANIEL REESE vs. Wm. Wells, Sr. 20 Jan. 1741, Geo. Cooper planter to Gibbin Jennings - mtgt for 300 lbs. 320 g. New div. part of 640 a tract grtd. to Uriah Rees Feb. 20, 1735. Christian Cooper releases her dower rights in land - Test - John Starcken, James Foyle.

Lancaster Co., Pa.: Samson D. Reese b. 1830 Manor twp.

Samson M. & Caroline (Snyder) Reese of Harford Co., Md. & Lane. Co., Pa. pilot on Susquehannah, 40 yrs to Pa. when 18 - d. 1875 at 85

David Reese - paternal gr-f of Samson D. b. in Scotland; to Harford Co. Md. when a young man.

p. 979 - A bram Reese b. Martin twp Lanc. Co. ch.. lat b. 1800

Ashe Co. N.C. m. bonds 1799-1800:

1817 - Hiram Reese & Rhoda Smith  
1821 - Daniel Reese & Lucretia Smith  
1825 - Jacob Reese & Patsy McGall  
1834 - Samuel Reese & Lusidia Church  
1842 - James Reese m. Nancy Madern  
1842 - John Reese, V.L. Synthia Isaacs  
1847 - John Jones - m. Sally Reese  
1848 - Caswell T. Madra m. Joannah Reese.

Reese (2)

Desc. of Jas. Thweat, Esq. of Dinwiddie, Va.: Kinchen Peterson Thweat, Esq. of Upton Co., Ga. b. 4 Jan. 1789, d. Jan. 1840 m. Let ELIZABETH REESE, sister of JOEL REESE Esq. OF Sumpter Co. & of JORDAN REESE Esq. of Meriwether Co., Ga.

Roger Reese b. 1769, Washington Co. N.C. d. 1841 age 73.

Rachel Watkins, b. 1769, Washington Co. N.C. d. age 78. Ch: 6 - all d. early except: 1. Rowell (Bapt. preacher & farmer. 2. Anselm, farmer, age 31; 3. Joseph John, b. July 20, 1812. 4. Sarah, m. Thos. Glover, Washington Co. N.C.

Roger Reese, Junr and Roger Reese, Sr. on 1704 Quit Rent Rolls, Prince George Co., Va. (Earliest record I have on the Reese family).

Someone writes: "Sir David ap Reese from Wales came to New Castle, Del. in 1700. His son was Jordan--" (no authority for this statement).

Land Grants, Greene Co., Ga.: JOEL REESE, 60 acres Fort Creek, 1795  
Joel Reese, 28 acres Fort Creek, 1795  
Joel Reese, 115 acres, Fort Creek, 1795  
Joel & John Reese, Washington Co. (part to Greene 1786 )

John Reese on 1810 census, Monroe Co., Va.

THOMAS REESE was among early Va. immigrants - to Isle of Wight Co. 1648.

Dr. David Addison Reese b. 1794 d. Apr. 1871 m. Mary Gaines Meriwether, 1819. Issues: Frank M., George, Ann S., Rebecca M. (from Meriwether Gen.

John Boddie in his record of Bristol Parish (Henrico, Prince Geo & Dinwiddie) gives: John, 1741, s. of Hugh & Eliz. Ray  
Elizabeth, Apr. 26, 1743, s. of Hugh & Eliz. Reese  
Neill, Feb. 10, 1745-46, s. of Hugh & Eliz. Reese  
James, s. of Hugh & Eliz. Reese b. Aug. 29, 1741

Mrs. Margurite L.C. Lund, 4369 Depew St., Denver 18, Colo. (Reese)

S-232 - Mrs. Vann B. Stringfield; P.O. Box 345 -- Wm. Shearer & Thomasville; N.C. - w. Ann Reese  
Frances Shearer, w. of Joel Reese & sister of Henry Cook left Watauga Co. N.C. ca. 1850 for the West.

David Reese of "Little Creek Hundred" and the descos. of John Reese, his son" was compiled & published by Thomas Hale Streets, Phila. Pa. 1904  
There is also a book, "Rees, Irvine & Wilkinson Families" by G. Lawrence

Charles Milton Reese m. Anna Miller (Judge in Washington, Ga. b. 1818)  
Children: 1. ~~Milton Pettus m. Miss Hudson~~ 2. Sarah m. George Willard  
William Miller m. Lucy Pettus  
Children: 1. Milton Pettus m. Miss Hudson  
2. Sarah m. George Willard  
3. Sidney C. m. Caroline Arden.  
Children: Marion m. Jeff Lane; Anna; Charles S. m. Vada Boatwick; Julia m. A.A. McPuffie  
5. Lucy.

Charles Milton Reese m. 2nd, Mrs. Meriwether & had  
3. Jane m. S n G. Williams  
4. Anderson m. Viola Reese (who had Elwell)

Reese (3)

Charles Milton Reese m. 3rd, Mrs. Dr. Gardine ne Elizabeth Woodson.

(Charles was b. to Roger & Eliza Reese in 1733 in Va. This Charles may be forerunner of family listed above.

Ga. presented Count D'Estaing 20,000 acres, Athens, Ga. for Rev. war service. He sold land to rich French merchant, Gauvain, who married the widow of General de La Perriere. A dau., Marie Antoinette Claudine Rose m. Dr. R.R. Harden. Their dau. Caroline, m. Sidney C. Reese.

Record from Clerk's Office of Frederick Co., Winchester, Va.: Nov. 7, 1769, Matthias Gossett & Mary his wife made a deed to JOHN REES for 350 a. of land (D.B. 13/260)

David Reese, Signer, Becklenburg Dec. of Ind. in 1775, had son, George Reese, who had son, Edward Reese (Plantation owner, Auburn, Ala. d. 1881. Children: 1. John Lewis Reese, lawyer & math professor, Auburn. Richard Pope Reese, Fla. Lawyer who had John Lewis Reese, (lawyer in Pensacola, Fla.)

Tax Record Book, Washington Co. Ga. shows that Benjamin & John Rees had land there in 1818.

Ebenezer Hasler Rees b. 1790 d. 1842; buried Marietta (M. McIntosh Co.) Ga.

Elias Benjamin Rees graduate medical College of Ga. 1873. He d. in Lexington, Ga. on 11-8-1920 at age 76. He was a clergyman as well as a physician.

WILL OF SARAH A. REES

State of Georgia,  
Snapter County.

In the name of God, Amen, I, Sarah A. Rees of said County and State, being of sound mind and memory but advanced in age and knowing that I must shortly depart this life, do make, declare, and publish this my last will and testament hereby revoking all others heretofore made by me.

Item first. I desire and direct that my body be buried in a decent and Christian like manner. My soul I trust shall return to rest with God who gave it.

Item Second. I give and devise to my two daughters, Micoe Rees and Sarah L. Rees, share and share alike, the same to be for the sole and separate of use of said Micoe and Sarah L. and free from the debts, liabilities or control of my husband either of them may ever have. The house and lot where I now live in the City of Americus containing 6 or 7 acres except one fourth of one acre in the northwest corner of said lot, said lot which is sold to Dr. E.J. Eldridge, this request is intended to cover and embrace and does embrace the whole of said lot wherever I now live whether the same is enclosed or not.

Item Third. I give and bequeath to my said two daughters, Micoe and Sarah L., share and share alike, all my kitchen furniture of every name and description. This request also to be for the sole and separate use of said Micoe and Sarah L. and free from the debts, liabilities or control of any husband either of them may ever have, and it is my wish and desire that the said Micoe and Sarah L. shall remain on the place given them in the Second Item of this will and take care of Dr. Albert Rees, my husband and their father, in his old age.