



The legacy of Martin Humphrey

Daisy Humphrey Furbush

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Not so long ago, a cousin asked me to ponder on how to write a book about our great grandfather, Martin Humphrey. He was not our earliest known ancestor, but he was most fascinating. “My tall and old daddy was very smart and had a head for figures (math)”, remarked Thomas Settles Humphrey, my paternal grandfather. Thomas Settles often said, “my daddy used figures when he was a blacksmith, and when he saved money to buy our land!” Between 1867 and 1873 Martin Humphrey purchased over 300 acres of prime farmland.^{1,2} Although he was born into slavery, Martin Humphrey was an intelligent and industrious man³ – who would have made his ancestors proud of his skills and character that helped their descendants survive in the United States. It was so long ago, that cold winter night in 1949, when my father told stories about how Martin Humphrey knew how to count and solve basic math problems. As a child growing up on our family farm, I heard my father and other Humphrey elders talk about my great grandfather, Martin Humphrey – and how he loved solving math problems and repairing metal farming tools. I never connected the math and metal working skills of my brothers to Martin Humphrey – and I was not interested in my Humphrey roots. Four decades later in 1986, I had the opportunity and privilege of attending the family reunion of Alex Haley, author of the epic novel *Roots*. That memorable day inspired me to discover my own family roots – and this was the beginning of several years of research and participation in genealogical workshops. Eventually, my research led me to visit the plantation where Martin Humphrey was born and enslaved. In 1994, a brother and I visited the Humphrey/Williams/Smith Historical Plantation where Martin Humphrey worked as a skilled slave blacksmith. Tour guides informed us that some of the slaves were born in Africa, while others were children of African-born slave captives. I was overwhelmed with emotion after I picked up some of the tools that were used by the blacksmiths – which my ancestors surely must have touched!

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