Last August in this space, ***Sandi Royal*** of Virginia, told the family story of her great great grandparents, one a former slave and one a slave owner's daughter, who defied the social mores of the 1800s, married and raised a family. In the 21st Century descendants of this couple, ***Isaac*** and ***Anne Gray Holliman***, gather regularly in southeast Virginia to celebrate their history and family. In October 2012, my son, ***Christopher Holliman***, and I joined several of these descendants to explore our shared history in Isle of Wight County, Virginia.

This is a story of America. A story of both slavery and freedom, inhumanity and human love and bonds of family. During the early 1700s, Africans by the tens of thousands, manacled in chains and stuffed into filthy, over crowed, diseased ships were brought to the English colonies in North America. These persons were sold into a vicious form of bondage - slavery from which human beings lost their freedom, their culture, their family ties and the right to determine their own futures.

As the tobacco and later cotton culture of the southern colonies and later States took hold in the 18th and 19th Centuries, some Holliman (and various spellings) families, descendants of **Christopher Holyman** (d 1691 who died without owning other human beings), purchased slaves and in their Wills devolved these persons in bondage to their off-spring. In some cases, children were separated from their parents and wives from husbands.

As generations passed these African-Americans who had lost their language, their religions and their very names, adopted English names and melded the remains of their African culture with the emerging culture of a new United States. Persons held in bondage took the names of their 'owners', and hence today, especially in southeastern Virginia, one will find numerous African-American Hollimans.

Below some descendants of Isaac Holliman and Anne Gray. Right to left are **Cyndi Barnett**, **Tammy Hunt**, **Doris Knox** and **Robert Royal**, husband of **Sandi Royal**. This photo was taken October 2012 on a bridge overlooking the Blackwater River in Isle of Wight County, Virginia where Isaac and Anne lived after the Civil War. The original Christopher Holyman plantation was established along the Blackwater River and Mill Swamp bordering Surry County. Hollemans today of African and English descent still live in these first settlements of what became the United States.

[](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-TNcnzIKMxHU/UYPBENnfd9I/AAAAAAAAF9U/h2Kx45KnWrw/s1600/2012+10+Isle+of+Wight,++on+the+Blackwater+River,+Robert+&+Sanid+Royal,+Tammy+Hunt+and+Cyndi+Barnett.JPG)

Next posting, more of the amazing story of Isaac and Anne Holliman and their American legacy....

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| **WILL**  [[http://userdoc.ancestry.com/userdocstore/download.ashx?fileid=366d2715-9cce-4119-bf62-1d92babac7b3&mac=8CF6B8C1C7BD4000000SueY8r0HSpA=.60x80](javascript:$Anc.load(%7btype:'miniprofile',%20onSuccess:function(config)%7b$MP.showMiniProfile(config);%7d,ucdmid:'00d5d63f-0003-0000-0000-000000000000',contextType:0,contextValue:'',id:'88c069d3'%7d);)stuffnsuch50](javascript:$Anc.load(%7btype:'miniprofile',%20onSuccess:function(config)%7b$MP.showMiniProfile(config);%7d,ucdmid:'00d5d63f-0003-0000-0000-000000000000',contextType:0,contextValue:'',id:'88c069d3'%7d);)added this on 5 Aug 2012  Southampton County, Virginia W. Book II, Page 136 dated October 3, 1763 I Josiah John Holleman of Southampton County do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following -- that is to say -- First I recommend my soul to Almighty God. Item: I give my loving wife Ann Holleman my negro slave named Sam, to her and her heirs. I give my said wife the plantation wherupon I am now live and all the lands I am possessed with, and after my wife's death it is my will that my executors sell the said plantation of land for the most to be got for same and the money arising on sale to be equally divided between my four daughters, Mary, Lucy, Sara and Martha and in case any of my daughters die before such division her equal part to be equally divided between her children. I give my daughter Lucy Andrews a negro boy named Tom to her and her heirs for ever. Item: I give my daughter Mary Clayton one negro named Jacob to her and her heirs.Item: I give my daughter Sara Moody one negro girl named Beck to her and her heirs. Item: I give to my daughter Martha Hough one negro girl named Aga to her and her heirs. Item: I give unto my said wife use of the following negroes, that is to say Rose, Phillis, Charles and Will and also what other personal estate that I am possessed of during her natural life and after her death my will is that if my daughters cannot agree between themselves upon a division then my executor to sell my estate to the highest bidder and the money equally divided between my said daughters and in case one or more of my said daughter die before my wife then her or their parts to be divided equally between their surviving children and do make this my last will and testament and do appoint my friend and son in law John Clayton to be my executor. Recorded March 14, 1765, signed Josiah John Holleman, his mark   * [Report Abuse](http://community.ancestry.com/reportabuse.aspx?refpage=http%3a%2f%2ftrees.ancestry.myfamily.com%2ftree%2f44918492%2fperson%2f6277765209%2fcomments%3fpg%3d32768%26pgpl%3dpid) |

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| |  | | --- | | **Glenn Holliman** | | 6:35 AM (5 minutes ago) |  |  |
| |  | | --- | | to Jeanette, zovieroyal, hunttl\_sept2571, desabla1, parkerjg635, bobhmawson | | | |

Jeanette,

Thanks for these thoughts and work, and Tammy thanks for your email.  Yes, Jeanette kindly built the Isaac Holliman and Ann Gray ancestral tree with materials provided by Nonnie who may have found the items in Ancestry.com.

That lineage does work and it may be the correct ancestral tree of Ann Gray.

However, I continue to noodle on the following:

1.      Note p. 210 of the Holleman/Peddie book which Sandi brought to my attention.  Under Josiah Holleman, this person’s will of 1848 leaves part of his estate to his grand daughter Ann Gray and daughter Virginia Gray.  At the end of his will, Josiah refers to Ann again as his grand daughter and but Virginia, this time as a grand daughter, not a daughter.  Which is it?

2.      In his will, Josiah leaves Isaac Cofer land adjacent to Mill Swamp Baptist Church.  So Josiah is still living on the land of Christopher Holyman, Sr. (d 1691).  The Isaac Holliman family lived in the late 1800s near the property, and descendants do so to this day in Winsor and Ivor.

3.      Are Ann and Virginia daughters or daughter and mother?  If daughters, then is Matilda Gray their mother and the Nonnie/Ancestry linage, as Jeanette prepared, the accurate one for the Gray family?

4.      Joe rightly points out in the 1660s, Christopher Holyman married Mary Gray, an early prominent family of the greater Jamestown/Isle of Wight settlements.  The Grays and Hollimans must have interacted during the generations and according to Josiah’s will, intermarried.

5.      DNA testing reveals Nonnie Holliman is not a genetic descendant of the Christopher Holyman, Sr. line.

So my working thesis at this point:

A.     Isaac Holliman, (according to the 1880 census born 1824) was not fathered by a Christopher Holyman descendant but adopted as his name Holliman from a descendant of Christopher Holyman who enslaved him.

B.     That descendant and owner may have been Josiah Holliman, d 1847, Isle of Wight who lived along the Mill Swamp and Blackwater River.

C.     Isaac’s wife may have been the Ann Gray listed in Josiah’s will, probated in 1848.  Date and birth of children work for a marriage of Isaac and Ann Gray around 1870.  (It would tie this up in a ribbon if Josiah had mentioned enslaved persons in his will: he did not according to George Holleman, but perhaps we need to read the original and not just the abstract!?)

D.     Family oral tradition continually states Isaac was a slave and Ann, the slave owner’s daughter.  The Josiah Holliman will in time, place and names comes very close to duplicating this story.

E.      The 1880 census lists Ann as a mulatto.  This may have been a dodge by the census taker or Ann and Isaac to avoid any problems pertaining to a mixed marriage, i.e. such was illegal during that time of very extreme racial prejudice and fear.  In other words, as family tradition states and physical evidence bears out, Ann was white.

F.      Isaac was mulatto.  We do not and may never know who his parents were but his father was not a descendant of Christopher Holyman, Sr. So it was not Josiah or his sons (whose names I do not know).  It is safe to say, he was fathered by a white man and mothered by an African-American slave, a not unusual occurrence in ante-bellum days.  Isaac’s mother could have been a slave in Josiah’s household, and over time, Isaac would have met and befriended Ann Gray, a grand daughter of Josiah’s.  This is plausible.

Isaac’s father could have been a neighbor – a Cofer or Gwaltney who lived near the Josiah Holliman home.  Hmmm….now that would be a DNA test!

G.     After the trauma and confusion of the Civil War, Ann, now of age, must have been attracted to the older and obviously charming Isaac.  In the 1880 census, Ann lists herself as age 37 and Isaac as 56 and the first child born in 1871.  Therefore, the former slave and the grand daughter of a former slave owner, moved through life together, smashing social taboos, and founding a family that has grown and prospered in an America that is much freer than the one of an 150 years ago.

So more work to do:

1.      Read the original Josiah Holliman will and other Holleman wills of that time period in the Isle of Wight area looking for the servant name Isaac.

2.      Review the Gray family lineage carefully looking for Anns and Virginias.

Tina, please forward this to Nonnie.  Sandi and Tammy, any oral or written materials you can add to the above, most welcome.  The above my working thesis subject to all the errors that flesh and mind are heir to!

Glenn

Hey Glenn, as the facts would have it , you seem to have everything in order thus far. I'd personally like to say" thank you" for taking the time and effort to help us sort out our amazing family!!!!!!!! Sorry, that I couln't be there yesterday as I started having car rouble, but there will be other times in the near fuure where we will gwt to meet, and sit down to talk about the family history. I've touched bases with Sandi, and she's going to pass on a lot of the nformation that ya'll discussed yesterday to me, and if you don't mind; would you be so kind as to do the same?????? Wel, I'm gonna finish reading the emails that you sent me, and I'll be in touch real soon. Hope that your time was well spent and enjoyed with your daughter  the grandkids!!!!!!!!!!!!

                                                                                        Talk to you Soon

To All,  
  
I spent about two weeks setting up a tree for this family on my Ancestry account just to "map it out" and get a better understanding of the tree dynamics. It is a fascinating story, but heartbreaking that Isaac and Ann had to go through so much. I will be interested in hearing more discoveries as your research reveals the history of this family. Again, all I know is what the records reveal to me. I do not have the advantage of knowing some of the family members intimately, which makes a world of difference in research.  
  
Here are some notes I would like to share with you that influenced my "train of thought" as I worked on this tree:  
  
In the 1900 Census, Ann is listed as a widow. That makes me believe that Isaac died before 1900.  
  
I noted in my research of their children, I need to look at the 1920 and 1930 Census records to see if Ann was living with one of them. This would be worth looking into as Sandi shared Ann probably died in the 1930's.   
  
I believe it was Nonnie that shared that Ann's parents were thought to be William and Matilda Gray. When I looked at Census records for Ann, William and Matilda appeared in the Eastern Division of Isle of Wight. William and Matilda are listed for the first time in the 1870 Census in the Newport, Isle of Wight area. Maybe they moved due to the family disturbance? Ann did not move with them.  
  
I cannot find Isaac or Ann in the 1870 Census. I cannot find a marriage record and do not expect to, other than perhaps a family bible recording. Perhaps in the slave records??  
  
Glenn, you mention Josiah Holliman's granddaughter Ann. Do you feel that Ann was a Holliman and not a Gray descendent?   
  
The 1850 Census doesn't list Ann as a mulatto. I would take this with a grain of salt. Census recorders were not know for their accuracy at all. In the 1880 Census she is listed as a mulatto.   
  
I learned from watching Louis Gates series on PBS that wonderful records can be found for the slaves and free colored during the time period we are interested in. Someone needs to visit IOW to search for these records.  
  
Please keep me posted of your progress.  
  
Jeanette Holiman Stewart

Glenn, this account you have here is my first full accounting of this family.  It is interesting, and worthy of note, and hope that it continues.  I have really no further knowledge of it, BUT, let's go back to 1668, when Christopher, Sr. became the second husband of Mary Gray - her first husband had passed, and the courts set up a guardianship, for Mary Gray and her son, Walter Gray.  At that time, Walter Gray was in Dorsett, England - reason unknown - and Chris was ordered by the courts to be the guardian for Mary and Walter.  He later married her, it does appear.  If you follow all the paperwork on land dealings, court minutes, etc., in and around Isle of Wight Co., VA at that time, and thereafter, you will note that there is a Walter Gray who is living in very close vicinity of the Holliman families of that area and time.  They continue to do so until the mid 1700's, and there are Gray family members living in NC in later years not too far from Hollimans.  I have no way of knowing if these are the same associated families, or not.  All this is noted in Court papers, Court Minutes, and land dealings as recorded by various counties in that area in those times.

My records - and by no means complete - show a child named ANN who is being born to Josiah Holleman & Nancy Clark in Isle of Wight Co., VA.  I show only ten children being born in this family, and that is about a low average number for families of those times.  My last listing for a child was for Elizabeth Holliman, born 06 March 1809.

We are still having problems with the VISTA model PC.  It failed five times last week, and corrected itself five times.  All failed times indicated program fault that the machine self-corrected.  One of these days..............

Joe

**From:** Glenn Holliman <[glennhistory@gmail.com](mailto:glennhistory@gmail.com)>  
**To:**[zovieroyal@aol.com](mailto:zovieroyal@aol.com)  
**Cc:**[hunttl\_sept2571@yahoo.com](mailto:hunttl_sept2571@yahoo.com); [desabla1@yahoo.com](mailto:desabla1@yahoo.com); [parkerjg635@yahoo.com](mailto:parkerjg635@yahoo.com); [stuffnsuch50@hotmail.com](mailto:stuffnsuch50@hotmail.com); [bobhmawson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bobhmawson@yahoo.co.uk)  
**Sent:** Sunday, July 15, 2012 5:26 AM  
**Subject:** Isaac and Ann Gray Holliman

Sandi,

Great to share a long lunch and several hours of exploration and discussion with you this afternoon.  A pleasure to meet your husband, Robert, and share politics with him for those few minutes.  Hope to chat with him further in the future.

Sorry the storms that brought much needed rain inhibited you from coming Tammy.  I hope to take another field trip to the Blackwater River to visit Ivor and Winsor communities.

Sandi, I am copying this to our four chief researchers in the extended family, asking again for their feedback.  They are Tina, Joe, Jeanette and Bob.  Here is what I think we know.  Please correct any mis-statements and please, please add any other facts or traditions that I have omitted.

1.      You and others, including Tammy and Noonie in upstate New York are descended from Isaac Holliman, b. sometime in or around 1824, and Ann Gray, younger than he, perhaps born in 1843 (per the 1880 census for both of them).

2.      Coming forward from this couple, the family lineage is full and complete and an excellent booklet on the family since then exits.  There is an exception – the exact death dates of Ann and Isaac are not known nor the exact location of their graves.  Isaac died after 1900 and Ann in the 1930s, according to Sandi.  They are both buried in Winsor, Virginia.

3.       George Holleman’s book lists a Josiah Holliman who in 1847 had a grand daughter named Ann, and a daughter named Virginia.  Josiah lived in Isle of Wight Co. near the homestead of Christopher Holyman, Sr. (d 1691).  This Ann may or may not be Isaac’s future wife.

4.      Family tradition is that Isaac was a slave and not a Free Man of Color, the 19th century designation for a non- African-American slave.  We do not know to whom Isaac was enslaved.

5.      In the 1880 census, Isaac and Ann are living in Isle of Wight Co.  Both Isaac and Ann are recorded as being mulatto, but according family tradition Ann was white.  As Sandi points out, many of the descendants have a fair complexion and some have blue eyes.

6.      The exact date of Isaac and Ann’s marriage is not known, but family tradition states they ‘jumped over the broomstick’, a pre-freedom day rite of marriage for slaves.

However, one might hazard an estimate that the marriage took place by 1870 because their first child was born in 1871, the last in 1888.  Isaac is listed as having fathered a child in 1854, not through Ann.

Sandi remembers her late mother, a Holliman, telling of Ann and Isaac running from her family after she ran away with Isaac.  They hid in the woods and remained in hiding until the first child came, and then the Gray family gave up trying to break up the couple.  My observation is this had to a be an intense love match for the couple to break rigid social taboos and Virginia law.  It was not until 1967 that blacks and whites could legally marry in Virginia.

7.      Unless Isaac was fathered by a Holliman, he would not carry the DNA of the Holliman family.  Obviously, his enslavement was to a Holliman; hence his last name which has been carried through the family with various spellings.

So what to be done with this mystery?

A.     Try to ascertain who Isaac’s owner and father was.

B.     Nail down Ann Gray and her ancestors.  Ancestry.com states her parents were Malinda and William of Newport News.  Perhaps, they were but more research is necessary.  What is the source of the Ancestry.com statement?

C.     Learn more about Isaac prior to Ann.  Was he in the Union Army in the Civil War?  There is family tradition Ann had a widow’s military pension.

D.     Gather all the data one can about the couple after marriage.  Are there family letters or written histories.  Sadly there seem to be no photographs of either one.

E.      Ascertain their death dates and exact location of graves.

This is a fascinating story.  Ann and Isaac braved a very, very hostile public to  have a life together, which they lived out in Isle of Wight County, Virginia.  He was a farmer.  African-American men were bodily injured and murdered for just looking at a white woman, even until the 1950s in the South, much less marrying one.

Sandi, have I captured the facts as we know them to this point?  Wonderful to be with you and I look forward to researching this further with you and our colleagues.  An amazing American love story!

Glenn

Jeanette Stewart

Aug 30 (9 days ago)

to me

Glenn, you may have already seen this or we discussed this, but I cannot remember if we did. Josiah Holleman's will (Josiah married to Nancy Clark) mentions a daughter Virginia who married a Gray, then he mentions granddaughters Ann and Virginia Gray. Josiah's dtr Elizabeth married a Josiah Gray and they in turn had daughters Virginia and Ann. I don't have a thing about them other than Elizabeth's birthdate from Joe. Just wanted to throw that out as we collect info about this family. JHS