

COUSINS

Dorothy Granberry, Geneva Miller Historical Society

The role of cousin, a person related to you from your parents' sisters and brothers, has a unique meaning in African American communities in Haywood County and throughout the South. These communities acknowledge kinship as long as a local living person knows of a blood tie or as long as members of a family recognize another person as their cousin, although no one may know the direct blood connection.

The most familiar cousin bond is the one between cousins who are age mates. These are people born in the same year and who live in the same community. Usually they are the same grade in school and each other's best friend. If one is a cheerleader, so is the other. If one plays basketball, usually the other does also. Pictured are Ollie Bond and his cousin, Neely Bond, from the Beech Grove Community in their WWI uniforms. They were born, maybe a month apart, in the same year. They joined the US Army within weeks of each other. Also pictured are Carolyn Granberry and her cousin, Barbara Greer, from the Douglass Community in Stanton, another cousin pair. While bonds are strongest for same sex cousin pairs, opposite sex pairing is not uncommon.

Probably the most unique feature of the cousin relationship is the marriage taboo. In African American communities across the South, from Texas to Virginia and the Carolinas, a person does not marry his/her cousin, no matter how far removed the kinship bond. Many readers may recall, as a teenager, being quizzed about the family of a new romantic interest and then told by a parent that they could not have that person as a girl/boy friend as they were cousins.

Louvenia Boyd of the St. John Community in Stanton used to tell about when she and her husband, Sonny Boyd, were thinking about marrying and discovered they were both related to a particular person. They sought out a knowledgeable older member of the St. John community to determine if they were in fact blood relatives, a condition which would have precluded their getting married.

Readers with information regarding the origin of the marriage taboo are encouraged to share this information with the GMHS by sending it to dgrnbry@aol.com.