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Saturday, August 08, 2009

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## More than 230 return to their roots in Abbeville

By JENNIFER COLTON/ [jcolton@indexjournal.com](mailto:jcolton@indexjournal.com)

Sunday, August 9, 2009 12:21 AM EDT

**ABBEVILLE** -- For more than 230 people, a Saturday trip through Abbeville County made history.

"We're walking where our ancestors walked," Jerilyn Beckley said. "I think it's going to cause people to think back to all the stories they heard growing up - and that's a moving experience."

Beckley was one of the 232 people who visited Abbeville for the 150th Year Commemorative Reunion of the Descendants of Lewis and Fanny Barr, a slave couple who lived on a farm three miles from the city in the 1800s. Genealogy research by a descendant traced the family history back to the Abbeville residents, the Rev. William H. Barr and his wife, Rebecca Reid Barr, who owned the slave family while the reverend served as the minister of Upper Long Cane Presbyterian Church.

In 1859, Lewis and Fanny's children were sold and separated, moving to different homes and taking on the names of other families. Some 150 years later, members of the Beckley and Reed families reconnected to celebrate their common ancestors.

"It's going great, really great. We are all so excited to be here. For 99 percent of us, this is our first time being here and learning our history," said Melvin Collier, whose research discovered the Abbeville link. "Abbeville has done a great job preserving their history. Driving in, it was almost like going through a museum. This is a historic event for us, and that really makes it special."

More than 250 people attended the reunion's opening night dinner in Atlanta.

"If the economy was better, it would have been double that. There were a lot of people who wanted to come and couldn't," Collier said.

Saturday, reunion attendees boarded buses and traveled to Abbeville, stopping at Court Square, Upper Long Cane Presbyterian and the Lemuel Reid plantation house.

"It's perfect. We are just overjoyed to be in this town today," Vikki Jenkins said while walking down Trinity Street. "It's a beautiful, small little town, just as quaint as it can be."

Jenkins said she was most looking forward to seeing the slave area at Upper Long Cane Presbyterian Church.

"Our ancestors were members of the church, and they had quarters where the African Americans, the slaves, were able to go in and experience church and express themselves. That's very exciting to me," she said.

One of the reunion's main events was placing a memorial stone in the cemetery where family patriarch Lewis Barr is thought to have been buried.

"That's a very exciting part for us, dedicating that stone for our common ancestor," Collier said. "Not only are we coming back to where our ancestors came from, but we are two families coming together. This is the first time we have reconnected since our families were separated."

For Amelia Jefferson, placing the memorial was an emotional experience.

"To see those slave sites, it was amazing. It just blew my mind to see how they didn't even have a marker for their graves. It really gives you a sense of the way things were," she said.

In addition to the historic aspects, Jefferson said she attended the reunion for one main reason: family.

"I live in Atlanta, and my parents live in Chicago. The only time I get to see them is during the family reunion," she said. "This reunion here is great because you get to meet people you didn't know were part of your family. You get to know who your family is, and that's important."

For information on the reunion and the family history, visit [www.BarrDescendants.org](http://www.BarrDescendants.org)



Carrieanna Johnson, left, of Milwaukee, Wis., holds a brick Saturday afternoon from her ancestral home, the Reed Plantation. The trio were among the more than 230 relatives who attended the 150th Year Commemorative Reunion of the Descendants of Lewis and Fanny Barr, a slave couple who lived on the farm three miles from Abbeville in the 1800s. (Staff photo by T.M. James)

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#### Reader Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of The Index Journal All news stories will be fully posted the next day.

**Maxwell** wrote on Aug 12, 2009 8:42 AM:

" The re-union was fantastic based on what i read and what i saw on this page. You guys have done a great and wonderful job in this progammme. I cant wait to see millions of people getting there origin through this wonderful progammme. Anyway,i'm looking forward to see more of this event comming up. stay intact. "

**Dorothy Edwards** wrote on Aug 12, 2009 5:21 AM:

" Melvin, this is just GREAT!!!. If only every slave decedant could do this so that each of us could know our history and be able to tell the story of our Ancestors. You give me HOPE. I continue to search.

Many Blessing to you and your beautiful family. "

**Jermaine Beckley** wrote on Aug 11, 2009 11:48 AM:

" Just reading this was so moving...I wish I had been there. Once I'm finished with my military career I will definitely visit here! "

**Johnette Brooks-AAHGS Co-Member** wrote on Aug 11, 2009 10:07 AM:

" Melvin, you are the Boomdiggity! You and your elders are rich beyond measure. I hope to be just like you when I go up. Congratulations on the attendance, the tour and the continuations to "Always honor your ancestors in everyday, in every way."

I hope you and some of your family members can come to Milledgeville on May 8, 2010 to talk about what this experience has meant to your family and encourage others families to do the same. It is in honor of my mother, a deceased Reading Specialist, for medial and exceptional childrens. It will be the book give away for childrens and book signing for adults. And I hope to encourage families to come and tell the story about their families. It will be held in Freedom Heritage Plaza which was build to honor the Negro business on that street that were torn down. "

**Tasha** wrote on Aug 9, 2009 12:54 AM:

" That was so beautiful!! "

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