

**Martha “Patsy” Harvey Whitaker (1772-1840), Ancestor 95<sup>1</sup>**  
**By her great great great great granddaughter, Linda R. Horton, 21 January 2022**

In 2004, several descendants of Martha Harvey Whitaker, led by Robert “Bob” Whittaker,<sup>1</sup> dedicated a memorial to this ancestor in Magoffin County, Kentucky in a cemetery near Swampton.<sup>2</sup> It is a counterpart to a memorial to Martha’s husband, the Reverend Mark Whitaker, in Castlewood, Russell County, Virginia, described in his biography. That biography also describes memorials to his parents in North Carolina and his paternal grandparents in Maryland.



The Martha Whitaker memorial consists of two inscribed granite tablets on either side of an obelisk. It also includes seating, as shown in the photograph. The tablet on the right<sup>3</sup> reads:

***Dear Patsy***

*We graciously place this marker to honor you, a founding mother of this area. Somewhere farther up on this scenic hill, and lost to time, is your grave.*

*We have some knowledge of your life. You were born between 1760 and 1770 in Tennessee. It is likely you married your beloved Mark Whitaker, a circuit riding Methodist preacher, when he located near Jonesboro, Tennessee in 1793-1795. In 1802 you and Mark moved your small family to Castle’s Woods, the first settlement in what is now Russell County, Virginia. In 1805 you bought 100 acres on the south side of the Clinch River. Mark established the first Methodist Church in 1786 in Castle’s Woods and remained its pastor until his death.*

*We wish we had known you. There is no doubt you were a strong pioneer woman. After burying Mark in 1812 you lived nearly 40 years a widow. You raised your children in Virginia and came*

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*to this beautiful wilderness land with five of your children. Family tradition says you were a teacher to the early settlers' children.*

*Bishop Francis Asbury said of Mark, "I wish his wife may not love him to death." We think this says much about you.*

*We thank you for the life you lived and pray we are as blessed as were you.*

*With love,  
Your descendants*



The stone on the left is entitled ***Children of Martha "Patsy" and Mark Whitaker:***

*Francis Asbury born 1796 Tennessee, died 1863 Kentucky  
Wife Margaret*

*Mary "Polly" born 1798 Tennessee, died Virginia.  
Husband Robert W. Smyth*

*Susannah born 1800 Tennessee, died 1877 Kentucky  
Husband Morgan R. Puckett*

*Johnson born 1802 Virginia, died 1871 Kentucky  
Wife Susannah Howard*

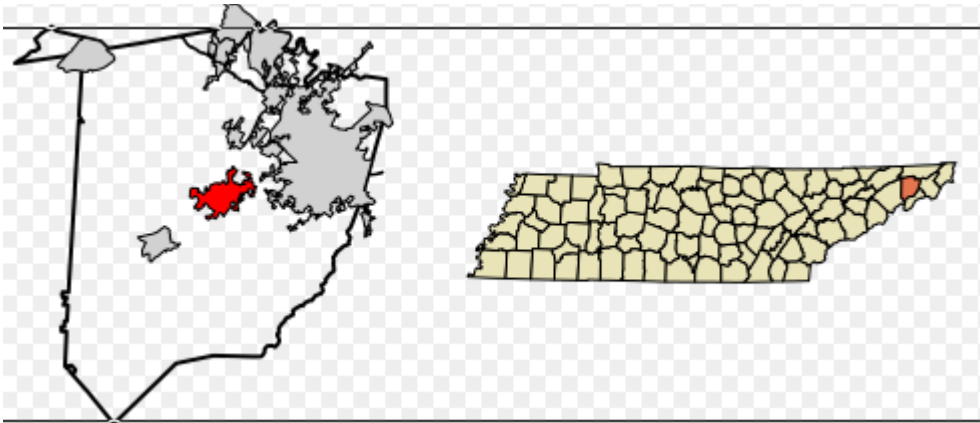
*James O. born 1804 Virginia, died after 1880 Kentucky  
Wife Lurana Marshall*

*Mark R. born 1806 Virginia, died 1833 Virginia  
Wife Nancy Smyth*

*Matilda born 1808-10 Virginia, died 1854 Kentucky*  
*Husband James Harvey May*

### **Martha's birthplace**

There are many unknowns about Martha, whose nickname was Patsy. It is believed that she was born in about 1772 in Jonesborough, a town in Washington County in eastern Tennessee. At the time of her birth, the town was in North Carolina, whose borders from colonial times until 1789 stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. From 21 November 1789 to 1 June 1796, the land that today is Tennessee was a Federal territory that had been ceded by North Carolina to the national government for establishment of new states. Following Tennessee statehood on 1 June 1796, Jonesborough has been known as the oldest town in the state. The modern map of Tennessee shows the location of Washington County in Tennessee and of Jonesborough (in red) in Washington County. The gray areas are lakes.



### **Martha's surname**

There is no definitive proof that Martha's maiden name was Harvey. I am using that name for lack of an alternative. The identity of her parents is unknown, so she is what is called a brick-wall ancestor. Most family history researchers believe her surname was Harvey, based in part on a reference in a journal written by the Methodist evangelist Francis Asbury. Asbury was a mentor and colleague of Martha's husband, Mark Whitaker (1760-1812), a Methodist itinerant minister in Virginia, the Carolinas, and eastern Tennessee.

Also, the owner of the farm next to the one in North Carolina owned by Mark Whitaker's parents was a man named John Harvey, who also witnessed the will of Mark's father, Thomas Whitaker.<sup>4</sup> If John Harvey was the father of Martha, did he move with his family to eastern Tennessee, where Mark Whitaker encountered his former neighbors (including Martha) while proselytizing in the east Tennessee area?

### **Martha's marriage to Mark Whitaker**

Most Whitaker family historians say that Mark met Martha while preaching near her home during one of his circuit-riding mission trips to Jonesborough. They married there between 1793 and 1795 (no records of the marriage survive), just before Tennessee statehood. They remained



there until 1802, at which time they and their three eldest children moved to Castlewood in Russell County, Virginia, where Mark Whitaker had earlier in his career established the first Methodist church in that community. Among the children born in Tennessee was their third child, Susan or Susannah (1800-1877), the author's great great grandmother. In Castlewood, Mark bought 100 acres on the Clinch River, shown in the photograph below, and four more children were born.



*This is a water fall on the Clinch River standing on Mark Whitaker's property*

Mark died in 1812, leaving Martha as a 40-year-old widow with children ranging in age from two to 16. The Whitaker property was near the spot where wagons carrying settlers to Kentucky crossed the Clinch River, at a shallows just downstream of a waterfall (shown above). At some point the widowed Martha accommodated paying guests for meals and a place to sleep.

In 1820 or 1821, five of Martha's children migrated to Floyd County, Kentucky (today Magoffin County): Francis "Frank" (1796-1863), Susan (1800-1877), Johnson (1802-1871), James (1804-1858), and sister Matilda (1810-1854). The exact date of the Whitaker siblings' move from Virginia to Kentucky is unknown. What is known is that they arrived before 1822, because on 24 January 1822, Susan married Morgan R. Puckett, the author's great great grandfather. Martha remained in Castlewood for a number of years, likely maintaining her bed-and-board business. She migrated to Kentucky in the 1830s, probably after the death in 1833 of her son,



Mark Whitaker, Jr. Martha settled in the Puncheon Creek<sup>5</sup> area of today's Magoffin County. She taught the children of local families. After Martha died in 1840, she was buried in a cemetery across the Licking Creek from the mouth of Puncheon Creek. The cemetery identified by Bob Whittaker as a suitable place for a memorial to Martha, which is located on the Matt Wireman farm and shown in the photo below, is very close to where she was buried.



#### **Martha Harvey Whitaker's mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) haplogroup**

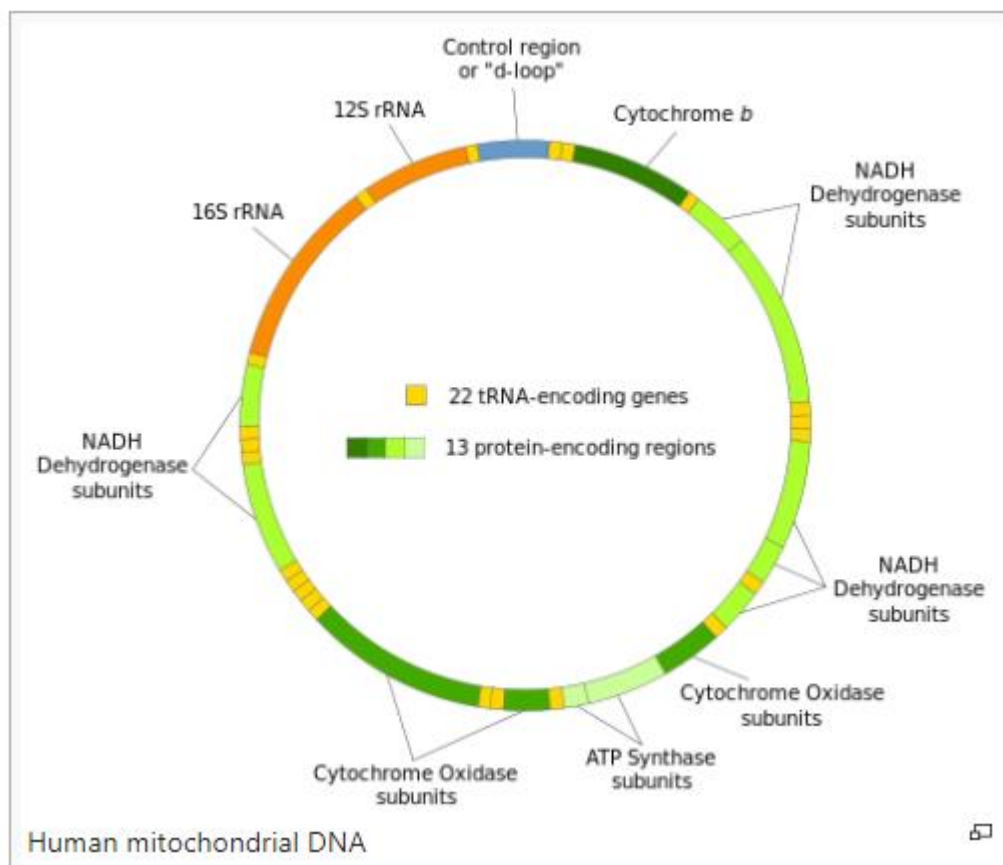
As is evident from this biography, there are many things we do not know about Martha. We are uncertain about whether her surname was Harvey; the identity of her parents is unknown; and her birthdate of 1772 is a guess. The one thing we do know about Martha is her mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) haplogroup, and it is an interesting one. There are three types of DNA testing: autosomal, YDNA, and mtDNA.<sup>6</sup> Autosomal testing includes that done by AncestryDNA, 23andMe, and FamilyTreeDNA through its FamilyFinder test. YDNA testing is of males only and, because the patriline often correlates with surnames, provides genealogically useful

information about a family's patriline (father, father's father, father's father's father etc. to ancient times. mtDNA testing provides analogous information about an individual's matriline (mother, mother's mother, mother's mother's mother etc.). Each of us receives our mtDNA from our mothers but only those of us who are females pass down this mtDNA to our children.

One reason why most genealogists have embraced genetic genealogy testing is the promise it holds to break down brick walls and identify unknown parents and other ancestors of the most distant known ancestor.

### What is mitochondrial DNA?

The International Society of Genetic Genealogy<sup>7</sup> provides this explanation of mtDNA:<sup>8</sup>



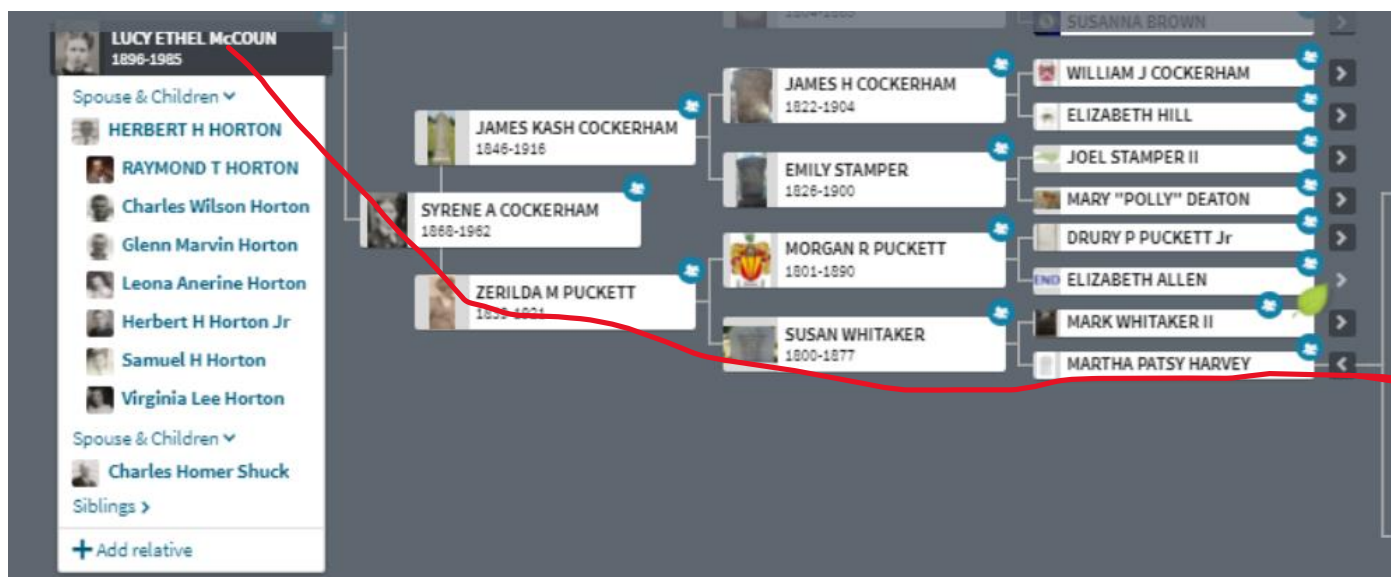
**Mitochondria** are small organelles that lie in the cytoplasm of eukaryotic cells, such as those of humans. Their primary purpose is to provide energy to the cell. Mitochondria are thought to be the vestigial remains of symbiotic bacteria that were once free living. One indication that mitochondria were once free living is that they contain a relatively small circular segment of DNA, called **mitochondrial DNA** (mtDNA). The overwhelming majority of a human's DNA is contained in [chromosomes](#) in the nucleus of the cell, but mtDNA is an exception. Individuals inherit their cytoplasm and the organelles it contains exclusively from their mothers, as these are derived from the ovum (egg cell) only, not from the sperm. Males inherit mtDNA from their mothers but do not pass it on to their children. Consequently, when a [mutation](#) arises in the mtDNA molecule, the mutation is passed on in a direct female line of

descent. These rare mutations are derived from copying mistakes – when the DNA is copied it is possible that a single mistake occurs in the DNA sequence, an outcome which is called a [single-nucleotide polymorphism](#) (SNP).

As is explained in the box on the previous page, a mother passes down her mtDNA to her daughters and sons, but only the daughters pass it down to her children. The consequence of this inheritance pattern is that we can, by viewing a family tree, ascertain which people in the tree shared a certain haplogroup.

I know from my own testing not only my own mtDNA haplogroup (V2c) but also that of other family members who share this same haplogroup: my children, my daughter's son, my siblings, our mother, our maternal grandmother, her mother, and all the female ancestors in her matriline. Thus, I knew all about the mtDNA of my mother and her matriline from my own testing. But to have similar information about the mtDNA of my father, testing would be needed either by one of his sisters or a child of one of his sisters. A first cousin who is the daughter of one of my father's sisters agreed to do mtDNA testing so we could expand our knowledge of our family's genetic genealogy.

The excerpt below from our family tree is marked by a red line, starting with our grandmother Lucy Ethel McCoun Horton Shuck ("Ethel McCoun"), that traces her matriline. Each ancestor along this line passed down her mtDNA to her children. The most distant known ancestor in this lineage is Martha Harvey Whitaker, the author's four times great grandmother and the subject of this biography.



We know from my cousin's testing the haplogroup of Ethel McCoun (and all of her children including my father). The haplogroup was L2a1-G143A-T16189C!-G16309A! This is a distinctly African mtDNA haplogroup, a result I found surprising considering that the known ancestry of our grandmother's forbears is 100% European, almost entirely English or Scottish (including Ulster Scots, sometimes referred to as Scots Irish). The author has no ancestors who

arrived in North America after the U.S. Revolutionary War. All arrived during the colonial era, including the ancestors of Ethel McCoun. Our English ancestors arrived in the 1600s and Ulster Scots ancestors (like the McCouns) in the 1700s.

Although our family has no known African ancestry, other than the fact all humans originated in Africa<sup>9</sup> many millennia ago, ancestors in the McCoun quartile of our family tree either owned slaves or lived in close proximity to enslaved people. Knowing this, I considered the possibility that Ethel's matriline included a black woman in British colonial America or an early U.S. state. I had heard about settlements in Appalachia of mixed-race people known as Melungeons, and I wondered whether Martha Harvey might have been a Melungeon, a term explained in a note.<sup>10</sup>

The image is a screenshot of a Google search results page. The search bar at the top contains the text "melungeon jonesborough tennessee". Below the search bar, there are tabs for "All", "Images", "News", "Shopping", "Maps", and "More". The "All" tab is selected. Below the tabs, it says "About 7,520 results (0.46 seconds)". The first search result is from "https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net" and is titled "Melungeons | Tennessee Encyclopedia". The snippet below the title says: "The term appears again in October 1840 in the Jonesborough (Tennessee) Whig, where 'an impudent Melungeon' from the nation's capital, then called Washington ...". Below this is a section titled "People also ask" with four questions: "What are common Melungeon last names?", "How do I know if I am Melungeon?", "What does a Melungeon look like?", and "Who is the most famous Melungeon?". Below this is another search result from "http://melungeon.org" dated "2016/10/14" titled "'Negro Speaking!' 1840 article from The Whig, Jonesboro ...". The snippet says: "Oct 14, 2016 — Tennessee politicians, particularly in the post-Civil War era, would use the term 'Melungeon' to describe opposing politicians, particularly ...". Below this is a third search result from "https://www.dandb.com" titled "MELUNGEON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. - JONESBOROUGH, TN". The snippet says: "Since 2009 the company has been providing Historical Society. Melungeon Historical Society, Inc. is incorporated in Tennessee, has 2 employees and estimated ...". Below this is a fourth search result from "https://en.wikipedia.org" titled "Melungeon - Wikipedia". The snippet says: "Historically, the Melungeons were associated with settlements in the Cumberland Gap area of central Appalachia, which includes portions of East Tennessee, ...".

Google

melungeon jonesborough tennessee

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About 7,520 results (0.46 seconds)

<https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net> › Entries

**Melungeons | Tennessee Encyclopedia**

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People also ask

What are common Melungeon last names?

How do I know if I am Melungeon?

What does a Melungeon look like?

Who is the most famous Melungeon?

Feedback

<http://melungeon.org> › 2016/10/14 › negro-speaking-1...

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<https://www.dandb.com> › businessdirectory › melungeo...

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**Melungeon - Wikipedia**

Historically, the Melungeons were associated with settlements in the Cumberland Gap area of central Appalachia, which includes portions of East Tennessee, ...



A Google search for “Melungeon Jonesborough, Tennessee,” the latter town being Martha’s birthplace resulted in the image shown on the preceding page, an eye-opener. The second known usage of the term Melungeon occurred in Jonesborough in 1840,<sup>11</sup> and the headquarters of the Melungeon Historical Society is in Jonesborough!

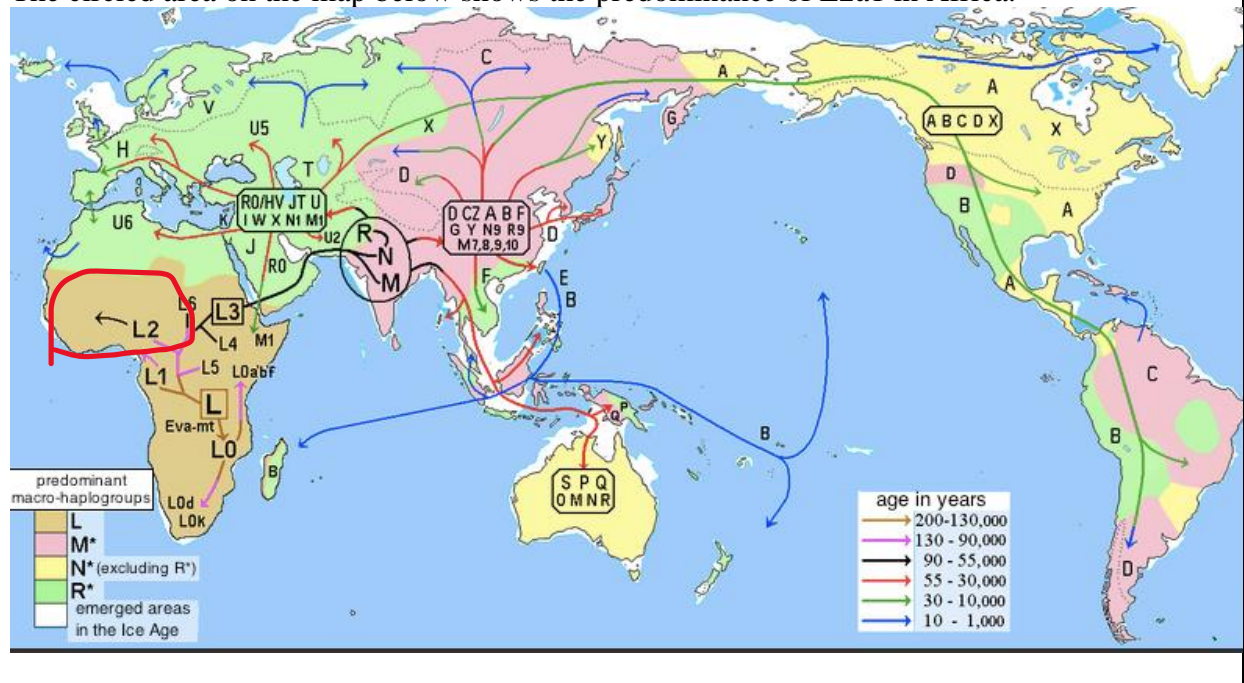
It seemed to me that, although Martha’s mother and maternal grandmother were unlikely to have possessed evident African traits, her maternal ancestry in her ancestors’ earliest residence in America likely included an African woman of the haplogroup L2a1-G143A-T16189C!-G16309A! Perhaps Martha’s parents or grandparents had sought refuge in the then Tennessee territory of North Carolina because of the presence there of communities of mixed race people.

There is just one problem with my Melungeon theory: *it is almost certainly incorrect*. According to the volunteer administrator of the relevant haplogroup project<sup>12</sup> under FamilyTreeDNA, the mtDNA L2a1 Project, Ethel’s haplogroup L2a1-G143A-T16189C!-G16309A! is not known to have been prevalent among the sub Saharan African people brought to North America as slaves.

### The mtDNA L2a1 Project

*We are a fascinating and diverse lot who all trace from an African "mother" who lived 25,000 years ago. Who was she? Where was she? By what path through history did she lead to all of us? That's what this group is going to discover! BTW, you'll note there are no surnames listed because frankly, surnames are not very relevant to the connections in this group. For example, most Jews didn't even take surnames until the 1800s and most African-Americans have the surnames of their original slave-owners. Our common ancestry within ethnic groups and across ethnic groups therefore predates surnames in almost all cases.*<sup>13</sup>

The circled area on the map below shows the predominance of L2a1 in Africa.<sup>14</sup>



The project administrator's advice was to seek family history information from each of the cousin's five haplogroup matches, which I have done. None of the matches is close. Of the five, one has a genetic distance of two biomarkers, which suggests that the most recent common ancestor lived in about 1250 AD. The other four matches have a genetic distance of three biomarkers, which suggests a common ancestor who lived even further back in time.

The administrator had this to say about the haplogroup L2a1-G143A-T16189C!-G16309A!

...There are many branches of L2a1 where I could have given you a useful and in some cases very detailed answer....

But [your family's] is not one of them! Her maternal branch is exceptionally rare...and you may notice she only has 5 full sequence matches and the closest one is a genetic distance of 2, which means the common ancestor with him lived about 1250 CE. This match...has an Arabic first name but gives no other personal info and so you'd have to write him to learn anything more about his personal ancestry. The other matches appear to include a Jew, another Arab and someone of European descent...but again, you have the bad luck that none of these people have bothered to include ancestry info, so you'd have to write them to get it.

Then, in my research, there is a study participant from Yemen (so yet another Arab!)

So what I can conclude at this point is (your cousin's) maternal lineage goes back to an African woman who became involved (via marriage most likely) with an Arab tribe in North Africa. From the timing to common ancestor estimating, I can make an educated guess that her descendant daughter(s) ended up in Great Britain sometime after about 1100 CE, but I can't really say HOW.

The Arab slave trade was a big factor in "migration" since medieval times...but also, there was a significant movement from North Africa to Iberia as the Muslims conquered Spain. As Spain was reconquered by the Catholics in the later middle ages, some African-Arabians might have converted...some will have married into Jewish families and likely fled Spain ca 1350-1500....and some might have migrated from Spain (converted or not) to western France and from there to England.

I might add that, during the Roman era, both Africans and Romans of African descent are known to have settled in Britain.<sup>15</sup> Some were brought as slaves.

But I continued to press my Melungeon theory upon the project administrator, and she responded, convincingly:

Just a quick added note that what I was saying in terms of this particular subclade is that it wasn't particularly prevalent among enslaved African women brought to the USA during the slave trade era. So, I think it's likely your particular African maternal lineage came over "disguised" as a European woman in the sense that she was so many generations removed from the original African ancestress that there were no external features or family memory that would give a clue to that heritage.

Having said that, your Melungeon theory is not impossible, just less likely in my mind. Also, the lineage may indeed have a Melungeon connection, just not via the direct maternal (mom's mom's mom's mom's etc.) line...at any generation, a marriage on that lineage with a Melungeon descendant would add the latter's heritage to the mix.

So, there you have it. We are unlikely to ever know the history of how the very European and very British ancestry of the author's paternal grandmother includes this fascinating hint of a black ancestress. I loved the haplogroup project administrator's take on the situation:

What I feel sure of is your maternal line story must be fabulous and movie-worthy.... if it ever could be revealed. The only real hope for that is for you to do a combination of tracing back even farther on that line...plus learning the family histories back several centuries for your (cousin's) mtDNA matches.

Following her advice, I have written to each of the mtDNA matches seeking to exchange family history information. I am not optimistic that any has more information than we do, but any information I receive might expand our understanding of this part of our ancestry.

\* \* \*

I hope you enjoy reading these family histories as much as I enjoy writing them.

Linda Horton, Rockville, Maryland, lrhorton@comcast.net

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<sup>1</sup> Robert "Bob" Whittaker descends from two of Mark Whitaker's children, his son James O. and his daughter Susan who married Morgan Whitaker. Bob is the author's fourth cousin.

<sup>2</sup> The cemetery is on the Matt Wireman farm near Swampton.  
<http://sites.rootsweb.com/~kymhs/columns/2006/041306.htm>

<sup>3</sup> A closeup image of the inscribed table to the right of the obelisk appears on page 14 of this biography.

<sup>4</sup> Ruby Whitaker-Buck stated that Martha was the daughter of John Harvey who owned property adjoining Thomas Whitaker's property in Surry County, North Carolina, where his son Mark Whitaker spent his youth before joining the Methodist ministry. John Harvey was a witness to Thomas Whitaker's will. Whitaker-Buck, Ruby Mae, *Mark Whitaker, Baltimore County, Maryland (c1670-1729) and Allied Families*, Sacramento, California, 1992. Family Search, <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/196963-mark-whitaker-baltimore-county-maryland-ca-1670-1729-and-allied-families?offset=1>

<sup>5</sup> "A puncheon floor is a floor made of logs split lengthwise which are pegged, flat side upward, to joists to make floors in log houses. A puncheon camp is generally thought to be the logging camp where loggers split the wood prior to delivering it." Kentuckian Clyde Davenport identified a folk tune called "Puncheon Camps." [Puncheon Camps - Traditional Tune Archive](#)

<sup>6</sup> [LESSON 1: An Overview of the Types of DNA Used By Genetic Genealogists | Wheaton Wood](#)  
<http://donnarutherford.com/dna-what-when-how-why-faqs-for-beginners/>



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<sup>7</sup> [Welcome to ISOGG... | International Society of Genetic Genealogy](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Mitochondrial DNA - ISOGG Wiki](#)

<sup>9</sup> In response to the question, “Do all direct maternal (mitochondrial DNA) lineages trace to Africa, Family Tree DNA responded:

Yes, so far, all direct maternal (mitochondrial DNA) lineages of women alive today trace back to a common ancestor who lived in Africa 100,000 to 180,000 years ago. Further back, the mitochondrial lines of *Homo sapiens* connect with other hominin groups, such as Neanderthals. These early groups left Africa long ago. We have not found their mtDNA in modern populations, but we know their mtDNA lineages from gravesite remains.

About 60,000 years ago, some groups of *Homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa, while others remained. Our direct maternal lineages trace these migrations.

The path that our ancestors took tells a story about human history. Testing one’s own and relatives’ DNA can help you understand both the diversity and commonalities of your part of the human story.

<https://help.familytreedna.com/hc/en-us/articles/360004593056-mtDNA-Migration-Maps-Guide#viewing-all-mtdna-haplogroup-migrations-0-4>

<sup>10</sup> For findings about DNA of Melungeons, see Estes, Roberta J., et al, “Melungeons, a Multi-Ethnic Population,” *Journal of Genetic Genealogy*, Vol. 7 No. 1 Fall 2001. [71.006.pdf \(jogg.info\)](#)

What follows is an excerpt of an article by Ann Toplovich in the *Tennessee Encyclopedia*:

Since the late 1700s observers have pondered the who, what, why, and where of the people in Tennessee they called Melungeons. In earlier American eras that focused on racial pedigrees, any group that did not fit into easy identification as white, African, or American Indian was often called mulatto, mestizo, or mustee, depending on the perceived racial mix. These words, as does the French-derived “melungeon,” share their root in the Latin verb miscere, “to mix.” The theories on the origins of the families termed Melungeon have changed through the years. As one scholar has noted, the history of the Melungeons may ultimately be the individual histories of many families, rather than of one people.

The most well-known location for Melungeons in the state is in the Clinch River area of Hancock and Hawkins Counties. Other groups of people called Melungeon can be found in the Graysville area of Rhea and Hamilton Counties and in Davidson and Wilson Counties in Tennessee, as well as in the states of Virginia, Kentucky, Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana. One estimate is that approximately forty nonwhite/nonblack communities similar to the Hancock County Melungeons live in the South.

From the earliest days of the exploration and settlement of the southeastern United States, tales abounded about exotic civilizations lost in the wilderness. Hernando de Soto explored the area looking for cities filled with gold and pearls. Others believed they would find a lost tribe of Israel, remnants of a Welsh Prince’s empire, races of pygmies and giants, and tribes of “White Indians.” The imaginations of many of the first settlers of Tennessee were filled with such legends, including Tennessee’s first governor, John Sevier, and first historian, John Haywood.

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At the same time, the rich mingling of English, French, Spanish, and other European colonists, free and enslaved Africans, and native Indian tribes on the Atlantic seaboard resulted in new Americans who were of mixed ethnicity and race. The distinctive appearances of such persons gave rise to descriptive names such as mulatto or Melungeon, and mixed race communities were sometimes associated with the legends of “mysterious” peoples. One group of these families arose before 1780 in the piedmont of southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina. Their movement into the Hancock-Hawkins County area of Tennessee about 1790-1810 can be traced through genealogical and public records, including land grants for service in the Revolutionary War.

The earliest documented use of the term “Melungeon” found to date is in the Stoney Creek Baptist Church (Scott County, Virginia) minutes for September 26, 1813. At a church service, Sister Susanna Kitchen complained against another church member “for saying she harbored them Melungins.” The term was derogatory, used by an outsider for those in the community she disapproved. The term appears again in October 1840 in the Jonesborough (Tennessee) Whig, where “an impudent Melungeon” from the nation’s capital, then called Washington City, was identified as “a scoundrel who is half Negro and half Indian.” Through the nineteenth century, the word “Melungeon” appears to have been used as an offensive term for nonwhite and/or low socioeconomic class persons by outsiders. The people called Melungeons on the whole denied the existence of such a group and when pressed on their racial lineage would claim Indian ancestry. Documentation on the use of the word within the group reveals that even those likely to be classified as Melungeons themselves used the word as an insult.

In the 1890s a new interest in exotic origins for the Melungeons arose along with the popularity in magazines and fiction of colorful stories of the mountain people of the Appalachians. Nashville writer Will Allen Dromgoole wrote many short stories and novels on Tennessee characters, and her articles in *The Arena* in 1891 are credited by most historians for popularizing the “mystery” of the Melungeons. By her account, the Melungeons arose from African, white, Indian, and Portuguese ancestry, with an emphasis on the latter two. (In the post-Civil War period, some persons of color commonly claimed Portuguese blood, associated with dark skin, as they sought to escape oppression as African Americans.) Similar works of fiction and human-interest stories recounted romantic origins for Melungeons well into the 1900s.

Some authors attempted to factually trace the origins of the Melungeons in the late 1800s. Dr. Swan Burnett wrote recollections of stories he had heard about them for the *American Anthropologist* in 1889, and although he saw a mixture of white, Indian, and black in the group, he noted that they resented the name Melungeon and called themselves Portuguese. Dromgoole included some family history in her articles and postulated the same mix as Burnett, adding a Portuguese progenitor named Denhan. In 1894 the U.S. Department of the Interior, in its Report of Indians Taxed and Not Taxed, noted that the Melungeons in Hawkins County “claim to be Cherokee of mixed blood.” Folklorists and novelists would continue to explore the possible origins of this mix for the next century.

An especially important scholarly work emerged in 1950 in the form of cultural geographer Edward Price’s dissertation on “Mixed-Blood Populations of the Eastern United States as to Origins, Localizations, and Persistence.” Thoroughly analyzing census and other archival records, Price determined that the Melungeons had descended from free persons of color who moved into Hancock County in the late 1700s and early 1800s from the Virginia-North Carolina piedmont. Children of European and free black unions had intermarried with persons of Native American descent. These conclusions have been largely upheld in subsequent scholarly and genealogical studies.

