

The Key Family Has

ROOTS

...and they run far, wide and deep



Editor's note: More than 300 members of the Key family, representing four generations, gathered at the Marble Manor Community Center in West Las Vegas last Saturday. It was a sight to behold. Here was "Roots" glorified, sanctified and solidified. We have never seen anything so impressive. They came from all parts of the country. It was their second reunion. The first one was held last year. Here was true togetherness. They are indeed f-a-m-i-l-y-e.

Some members of the Key generation gathered one day and developed an idea of having a family reunion. We have always been very close. We wanted to do something in the memory of Thomas and Bertha Key. So we launched our first family reunion in June, 1979. It was a happy gathering that none of us will ever forget. It certainly brought back many, many pleasant memories.

It all goes back to the days of Thomas and Bertha Key.

Our family roots began in Georgia — our family came from Georgia and

settled in Preston, Arkansas. Thomas Key was born in Preston. Bertha Lena Wilson, at an early age, was a house-slaves daughter.

Thomas Key and Bertha Lena Wilson were married in 1904. They had 13 children. (We remembered that they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1958).

The family migrated to Fordyce, Arkansas. Shortly afterwards, Thomas "Papa" Key took on to several jobs. We remember being told that he delivered mail by horse in the early 1900's. He also served as a time keeper at the Fordyce Lumber Company, a shoe repairman, saw filer and was a sharecropper.

Bertha Lena "Mama" Wilson Key was known for her community work. She was a great lover of humanity. Bertha was "first" a mother to her children and also worked untiringly in the church. She held the position as "mid-wife" for the community.

Around that time there were very few railroads and no highways and

everything was transported by boats.

Bertha's family migrated from South Carolina and went to Camden, Arkansas in 1859. Camden was a boat landing town. Boats came up through the Mississippi River to the Osshalawpi River, then into Camden. Camden was a sharecropper's town. Bertha's parents died while she was very young. She was then raised by her sister.

There were approximately 300 on hand, including seven sets of twins. They made up the assembly for the great event. Many of them came from distant points to include the states of Washington, Colorado, California and many other locations.

The reunion last Saturday started with a march from 915 Morgan Street, the first Las Vegas home for Thomas and Bertha Key when they finally moved here. It ended at the Marble Manor Community Center.

Shortly afterwards, everyone feasted hardily from the many, many delectables served buffet style. The tables were

decorated with a blue and yellow theme embellished with beautiful fresh flowers.

A nine by five family tree chart was displayed on the wall flanked with pictures of "Mama" and "Papa" Key.

The highlight of the scheduled group of activities was a program honoring Thomas and Bertha Key along with with nine of their "living" children. Each had an opportunity to render a few words of expression and wisdom. Children present were given an opportunity to learn, during this portion of the program, many facts about their true family "roots."

A moment of silent prayer was observed in prayer offered for the memory of our dear

family members who had "gone to the great beyond."

Special presentations were made to the oldest living woman in the family; the youngest child; the oldest grandchild. Momentos were given to the nine "living" children.

They were given reproductions of old pictures taken of "Mama" and "Papa" Key.

Children present were also given an opportunity to get in a little disco at the outdoor patio area.

The overall program was climaxed with "holding of hands" with every year in the month of June. The whole family prayer offered asking God's blessing to all who all.

gathered and to those not able to at that moment.

There are 16 great grandchildren and 61 grandchildren.

Thomas and Bertha's children included: Fletcher, Margarite, Thomas, Jr., Charley, Tessie, Idell, Hugh, Cornell, Corrine, Dorothy, Bertha, Almos and Frankie.

Thomas Key was born March 12, 1879 while Bertha reached this earth April 8, 1888.

To all of the living Key children, this is a God-fearing, church loving group of people. The family plans a reunion every year in the month of June. The whole family asks God's blessings for his blessing to all who all.



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