

An Intriguing Heritage: The Story of How the Dowdys and Their Kindred Stood Up to Life

Harry Kendall Dowdy Jr.

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An Intriguing Heritage is the thorough genealogical record of one Black American family.

Harry Kendall Dowdy Jr.'s detailed family biography *An Intriguing Heritage* is presented as a microcosm of Black American experiences since the country's founding.

Featuring genealogical data (names, dates of birth, and death dates) for over 600 individuals whose lineage traces to Thomas Dowdy, born around 1748, this is an often esoteric project that also makes broad historical claims. It highlights pivotal moments in the lives of Dowdy descendants, set in the context of slavery, the Civil War, and contemporary events. Photographs, charts, and images of original documents round out this genealogical work.

Organized in the style of a family tree, the book begins with Thomas Dowdy and follows his line in a thorough manner. As the years stretch on, other family names are added, as with the Scott, Clark, and Shiver families. But even as the tree grows, the book's style remains consistent, resulting in long piles of dates—and annotations to include the available factual information about family members.

Chapter summaries help when it comes to holding all of this information. Notes from Harry Kendall Dowdy Jr. invite a wider audience in here too: he fleshes out chapters' themes, for example commenting on experiences of slavery and sweeping social changes. Elsewhere, family memories play in, with Dowdy family members speaking about their relatives in candid terms.

Still, many Dowdy personalities are honored with brief entries alone. There are professors, librarians, and preachers among them. A few members of the family receive more particular attention—often, to flesh out historical points of interest. For example, the story of a white man who married a “mulatto” woman four years after the Civil War is used to highlight period issues of colorism and to meditate on how Black people with lighter skin could “pass” and what that meant. Here and elsewhere, there's an enlivening flavor of homespun wisdom in the text.

The text closes with a series of heartfelt poems by Harry Kendall Dowdy Jr. that focus on natural themes and ideas about life. The poems, which honor the Dowdy family further, function as a reflection of the work that came before—a delightful spiritual foray into the power of a family tree to anchor people's individual realities.

Featuring tales of grit and perseverance and spanning hundreds of years, *An Intriguing Heritage* is a thorough genealogical record of a Black American family.

JEREMIAH ROOD (September 12, 2023)

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