

Owned!

The word sticks in my throat.
Fingers hesitate over the keys.
My mind struggles with hard reality:
**five generations ago a man with my name
owned – *owned!* - another man**
of the same last name but of different blood.

That man became real to me
after this recent discovery:
**During those five generations the two families
sundered by war and by circumstance
one a victim of birth into slavery
the other a victim of birth into a slave-holding culture
yet within their separate realities
equally industrious and self-reliant
prospered, educated their children
held respected positions of civic responsibility
suffered tragedy
survived
prevailed.**

And finally I can look back on both family histories
with abundant admiration, equal pride, and shared sadness.

*Caveat: I have found no written proof of the connection between the two families described here, but based on circumstance of time and place, and especially of name (Dendy and **Young**), such a connection seems probable.*

~1785-1847, Laurens District, South Carolina

John Dendy and wife Sarah (Sally) **Young** Dendy,
raising cotton and corn and eight children. The
oldest, born 1789, was named "**Youngsett**."

Turpin Dendy, one of a few slaves on the farm, a
talented carpenter raising his own family in slavery.

~1826-1840: Youngsett leaves South Carolina

Moves his family first to Georgia, then to
Tallapoosa County, Alabama. Son Thomas
Daniel Dendy born 1828.

No slaves made the move as far as is known.

1847: John's will is proved in Laurens District SC

The will bequeaths, to two of his children,
two female adult slaves with four children.

Turpin is not mentioned in the will so may have been
sold or given to one of John's children before 1847. His
son Fayette **Young** Dendy was born in 1859 "into slavery"
according to his bio. Turpin may have ultimately bought
his family's freedom with his carpentry skills after 1859.

1863-1877 Reconstruction

Thomas Daniel Dendy, a Private in the Confederate States Army, wounded, uses a cane for the rest of his life. He was a Justice of the Peace, Tallapoosa County. He has 11 children including son John Harvey Dendy, born 1871.

Out of slavery, Turpin is appointed to the Laurens County Board of Commissioners¹ during Reconstruction. His son Fayette **Young** Dendy learns the carpentry trade from his father.

1878-present: Hard work, success, tragedy

1880: Four families including the Dendys move in covered wagons north to Alabama's Sand Mountain, 120 miles, 11 days, rivers to cross. John Harvey Dendy, age 9, walks barefoot. The four families help each other build new log homes. Their 160-acre farms prove highly productive and life prospers by comparison to previous locations.

1892: John H Dendy marries Eugenia Davis. He buys 50 acres from his father but the land “plays out” as in Tallapoosa and in Laurens. He buys an old place on a nearby mountain, farms it for five years just getting by, then learns from a distant relative of incredible cotton yields in Louisiana. He sells out and with wife and four young children takes the train to Bernice LA, buys an old plantation, makes a good living until malaria strikes. Sells out after five years; the family, now larger with the addition of my father Cecil, returns to Sand Mountain. Cecil would struggle with bouts of malaria for the rest of his short life. John buys a 100-acre farm with “a sorry old house.” Ten years later he buys Eugenia’s mother’s fine 150-acre place. The family prospers.

John and his boys build a substantial new house on the property. They donate money, labor and land to build schools and churches. John runs for sheriff, comes in second. Of seven children, four graduate from college. The family was not without its sadnesses: one son suffered from multiple sclerosis, another committed suicide.

1878: Fayette **Young** Dendy² is called to preach the gospel. Over the next four decades he goes to college, is awarded a D.D. degree, holds high positions in African Methodism throughout South Carolina. One of his children, Joseph E. **Young** Dendy, known as “**Young**,” learns the carpentry trade from his father.

1886: Young Dendy marries Martha Duckett. He begins building and designing houses for both black and white customers. Martha contracts to do laundry for a local white college. They have nine children all of whom receive some college education. One becomes a dentist, one a school principal, etc. Son Norris follows his father in the contracting business. The family is highly respected by the entire town except for some who are angry when they build a nice two-story house for themselves in a part of town where only white folks live³.

1933: Norris Dendy, 35 years old with five children, highly successful as a building contractor, is lynched⁴ by a group of white men in probable retribution for being “uppity” and prosperous. The family pursues justice in both criminal and civil courts but this proves impossible in the still-racist political environment of South Carolina. One of Norris’ sons is named **Young Dendy**.

[illegible]

References (internet search)

1. (search for Turpin Dendy) Reports & Resolutions of the General Assembly to the State of South Carolina...
2. History of the American Negro and His Institutions Vol 3
3. Clinton, a Brief History – Nancy Snell Griffith
4. The Lynching of Norris Dendy: Civil Rights & Restorative Justice Project report

Subsequent Generations

Of 13 grandchildren, 9 graduate from college:
scientists, engineers, executives, artists, musicians.

Members of the family still reside in the nice two-story house on North Adair Street in Clinton, SC.