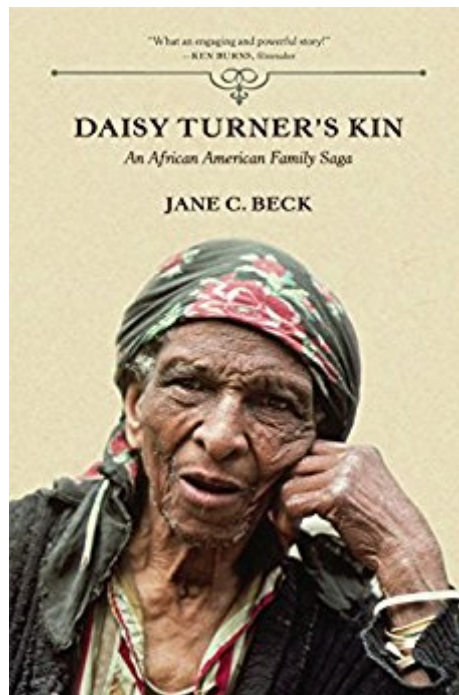


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# Daisy Turner's Kin: An African American Family Saga (Folklore Studies In A Multicultural World)



## Synopsis

A daughter of freed African American slaves, Daisy Turner became a living repository of history. The family narrative entrusted to her--"a well-polished artifact, an heirloom that had been carefully preserved"--began among the Yoruba in West Africa and continued with her own century and more of life. In 1983, folklorist Jane Beck began a series of interviews with Turner, then one hundred years old and still relating four generations of oral history. Beck uses Turner's storytelling to build the Turner family saga, using at its foundation the oft-repeated touchstone stories at the heart of their experiences: the abduction into slavery of Turner's African ancestors; Daisy's father Alec Turner learning to read; his return as a soldier to his former plantation to kill his former overseer; and Daisy's childhood stand against racism. Other stories re-create enslavement and her father's life in Vermont--in short, the range of life events large and small, transmitted by means so alive as to include voice inflections. Beck, at the same time, weaves in historical research and offers a folklorist's perspective on oral history and the hazards--and uses--of memory. Publication of this book is supported by grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the L. J. and Mary C. Skaggs Folklore Fund.

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## Customer Reviews

What an incredible service author Jane Beck has done for Vermont as well as for African-American history. "Daisy Turner's Kin" is not so much the story of Daisy Turner (although Beck spent a great deal of time with Daisy and learned her history through a series of long conversations when Daisy was 100 years old), but rather the story of the entire Turner family from slavery in the South to a family farm life in the hills of rural Vermont. Vermont has always been known as one of the whitest states in the country, if not the whitest. There may be many reasons for this: its tiny size and small population, its lack of large cities with big industries which might have attracted workers from the South (think Detroit), or possibly just the fact that there was never a high enough concentration of people of color to attract and hold others. Because of this, any look into the history of African-American or Native-American Vermonters is always important. Jane Beck is Executive Director of the Vermont Folklife Center, and her background made her perfect for the oral history project highlighting Daisy Turner and her family. Oral histories have always been important in families, and no more so than in African-American families where, during slavery times, there were no other ways to ensure that family history got passed on. Beck has supplemented Daisy's oral history with deep research as is evidenced in the nearly fifty pages of end notes and bibliography in the book. The Turner family settled in Grafton, a small town in southwestern Vermont. The state was chosen by the family patriarch, Alec, who remembered that during slavery, his young mistress taught him how to read and always told him that if he went to Vermont, he could be free.

Jane C. Beck, founder of the Vermont Folklife Center, has preserved the remarkable journey of one African American family from the shores of West Africa to the hills of Vermont. Daisy Turner's stories covered 178 years of her family history, her father's stories dating back to his father's life in Africa. Beck spent several years interviewing Daisy, resulting in the 1990 Peabody Award winning documentary film *Journey's End: Memories and Traditions of Daisy Turner and Her Family*. After Daisy's death Beck continued her research, investigating the authenticity and recorded history behind the stories. Daisy's father Alexander (Alec) Turner (1845-1923) told tales of the family history every night after dinner. His father Alessi was the grandson of a Yoruban chief. His mother was a European woman who survived a shipwreck off the coast of Nigeria. Alessi traded with Europeans; around 1830 traders kidnapped him. After a torturous and eventful passage he landed in America and was illegally sold into slavery to the wealthy and sporting Jack Gouldin of Port Royal, Virginia. Gouldin made Alessi his champion in boxing and cockfighting. Alessi married Rose, who was Cherokee and was knowledgeable in herbal remedies. Alec felt a strong connection to the Gouldin

family; he later named his daughter for the kind granddaughter of his master. But he longed for liberty. During the Civil War he ran away when he was fourteen, and took the name Turner. He was mentored by surgeon and Northern Abolitionist Ferdinand Dayton. As contraband Alec could not join the army but worked as Dayton's personal servant and orderly, carrying wounded men from the field of battle to the hospital. After the war Dayton helped Alec get an education and found him employment.

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