

# The Melungeon Heritage Archive

Kings, Healers, Folkways, and Survival

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## ■ Kings & Leaders

King Micajah Bunch (1733–c.1800): Recognized as a Melungeon/part-Cherokee leader, called King rather than Chief. His story ties directly into early Melungeon migration patterns, and his title shows how Melungeon communities adapted Indigenous models into their own naming—using “King” as a term of respect.

Mahala “Big Haley” Mullins (1824–1898): A legendary Melungeon woman remembered as a powerful bootlegger. She was “catchable but not fetchable” because her immense size made it impossible for lawmen to remove her from her home. She remains both a folk hero and symbol of Melungeon resilience.

# ■ Distinctive Traits & Medical Legacy

Physical markers noted historically among Melungeons include olive or coppery skin, dark hair, red hair in some family lines, light or piercing blue eyes, shovel-shaped teeth, the ‘Anatolian bump,’ and polydactyly (extra fingers/toes). These traits fueled speculation about their ancestry.

Condition	Notes
Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21)	Higher frequency in Melungeon families.
Turner ('Fairy') Syndrome	Female chromosomal anomaly.
Ring Chromosome Disorders	Structural changes linked to learning issues.
Behçet's Syndrome	Autoimmune vascular disease linked to Mediterranean ancestry.
Familial Mediterranean Fever	Genetic autoinflammatory disease.
Sarcoidosis	Inflammatory organ disease seen in Melungeon descendants.
Red Ear Syndrome	Cartilage inflammation, sometimes tied to autoimmune causes.
Thalassemia	Mediterranean-linked blood disorder.
Machado-Joseph Disease	Neurological condition with Mediterranean ties.
Goiter & Thyroid Issues	Linked to iodine-poor Appalachian soil.
Congenital Heart Problems	Associated with extra ribs and structural variants.

## ■ Healing & Spiritual Practices

**Blood Beads:** Traditionally made of 88–89 amber and green glass beads, used by faith healers for prayer, meditation, and healing. Placed on the crown or abdomen of the sick, each bead was touched while repeating a prayer. Distinct from decorative corn bead necklaces.

**Sin Eaters:** Ritual figures who consumed bread and drink over the dead, believed to take on their sins.

**Grave Houses:** Small log or board houses built over graves, protecting the soul and belongings of the dead.

**Door Harp:** Folk instrument and protective charm, believed to ward off evil spirits and invite good ones.

## ■ Folk Art & Storytelling

Melungeon heritage is preserved through folk art, including wood carvings, paintings, dolls, and sewing. These works depict women, children, and daily survival, blending Melungeon and Cherokee identity. As JohnAnn / Momma Wolf, you carry forward this legacy in your own art, carvings, and storytelling.

## ■ Folklore & Myth

Laughing Trees: Haunted trees believed to hold restless spirits. Sitting or dying under one bound the soul to the tree forever.

Boogeyman: Outsiders used 'Melungeon' as a scare-word, demonizing the people.

Lost Tribes of Israel: Folk speculation linked Melungeons to biblical wanderers, adding mystery and myth to their identity.

## ■ Identity & Origins

Melungeons are a mixed-ancestry group from Appalachia (VA, TN, NC). Origins debated: Portuguese sailors, escaped African slaves, or survivors of Roanoke. DNA confirms European, African, and Native roots. Brent Kennedy's work highlighted their survival against erasure and ethnic cleansing.

## ■ Cultural Themes

1. Survival & Secrecy – Isolated mountain communities preserved heritage through hidden rituals and healing practices.
2. Blending & Identity – Mixed traditions woven into every artifact and story.
3. Art as Memory – Carvings, paintings, dolls, and instruments as living records.
4. Myth & Medicine – Healing beads, protective harps, and folklore as cultural survival.

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