

THE ETERNAL SEARCH

"Genealogy becomes a mania, an obsessive struggle to penetrate the past and snatch meaning from an infinity of names. At some point the search becomes futile – there is nothing left to find, no meaning to be dredged out of old receipts, newspaper articles, letters, accounts of events that seemed so important fifty or seventy years ago. All that remains is the insane urge to keep looking, insane because the searcher has no idea what he seeks. What will it be? A photograph? A will? A fragment of a letter? The only way to find out is to look at everything, because it is often when the searcher has gone far beyond the border of futility that he finds the object he never knew he was looking for."

Henry Wiencek, *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White*