

“What could not sustaine them but ye spirite of God and his grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this willdernes; but they cried unto ye Lord, and he heard their voyce, and looked on their adversitie...” William Bradford

WHEN I FIRST READ THESE WORDS, a shiver went up my spine. “May not and ought not the children of these fathers...” He was speaking to me, a child of the father’s father twelve generations ago. Because I know that this part of American history is my family’s own history, it has grown to mean so much more to me than a dry story of the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth Rock. I owe this sense of history to the love of genealogy that invaded our family years ago.



*Mayflower replica (above)
Historic White family photo (left) photo provided by Cynthia Howe*

Roots Running Deep

By Cynthia Howe

MY THANKSGIVING STORY

If one could claim a holiday as their own, I would declare Thanksgiving as mine. It's not just a celebration of an important event, or a day set aside for family and friends or even a day to show off my Paula Deen culinary skills. To me, Thanksgiving marks my family's first celebration of God, life and family.

Last year I had the distinct privilege of meeting my family's storykeeper, the family historian. For years I have heard about my family's history and these

stories and colorful vignettes were all afforded me through a cousin in Lakin, Kansas, Shirley Henderson. She is my grandmother's niece and lived far from my hometown of Mountain View, California. Nevertheless, her discoveries and stories traveled the miles and inspired me at a young age.

All of her research was done the old-fashioned way, without the benefit of computers or the Internet. She researched microfiche, libraries, court and county records and family photo

boxes. She stands in the family as a true hero of the past, enriching our future. Through her findings, I have tried incessantly to put flesh and bones to the characters buried in my family's past, and my family does have some wonderful characters.

Leaving Leyden, Holland in the fall of 1620, (after fleeing religious persecution under King James I years earlier), a small and courageous group of pilgrims set sail for America in pursuit of religious freedom. They founded the Plymouth



James L. Johnson in Civil War uniform (above);
Lawrence & sister, Jennie Johnson
photos provided by Cynthia Howe



Colony on the shores of Cape Cod Bay. Out of the forty-one pilgrims, I claim no less than eleven ancestors.

At the first Thanksgiving meal, they must have celebrated this baby, cooing and tottering around their legs.

The most distinctive family character among the pilgrims was William Bradford. He served as Governor from 1621 until his death in 1657, save five years in which he chose to step down to rest. He was the family's first historian, having written the first history book of the voyage and this new land entitled *Of Plymouth Plantation*, still in print today. He was a man of passion, purity and purpose. He built positive relationships with the Indians, served as judge and comforter to the people of Plymouth and was written about by his peers as a good man and friend. After the sickness

and starvation during the winter of 1621 a number of orphans were left behind. It was William Bradford who began the first orphanage, as he took them all in to care for and nurture.

Peregrine White was the first baby born in the new settlement, although not on dry land. The Mayflower was adrift, insight of land when Peregrine was born. Although his birth must have been somewhat difficult under the circumstances, the year that followed filled with hunger, illness and death must have been horrendous. At the first Thanksgiving meal, they must have celebrated this baby, cooing and tottering around their legs as they gratefully prepared their cherished dishes.

William Mullins, a devout and pious man, came with 250 shoes and 13 pairs of boots, along with his wife Alice and

two children, Priscilla and Joseph. It was Priscilla that inspired Longfellow years afterwards to write *The Courtship of Myles Standish*, but she didn't marry Captain Standish, she married John Alden. John Alden had not joined the pilgrims on their voyage as a fellow separatist, but as a cooper who had been hired in Southampton, England, the pilgrim's last stop before crossing the Atlantic. He was the first convert to Separatism in this new land. The story of their blossoming affair goes like this: Captain Myles Standish lost his wife in the sicknesses that ravaged them the winter of 1621. To fill the family void he decided to ask for Priscilla Mullins' hand in marriage. He sent John Alden to deliver the message to Priscilla's father, who was agreeable to the arrangement. However, William loved his daughter

and wanted her consulted first. After Priscilla entered the room and listened to John deliver Captain Standish's offer of marriage, she raised her eyes to him, with a glow about her face, and said, "Pray thee John, why do you not speak for yourself?" With that he blushed, bowed and took his leave. Soon after he returned to visit the Mullins family and within the year Priscilla and John were married. Their courtship was marred however by the deaths of her parents and brother that horrid winter.

My family tree serves as my own history book with characters who tell me what life was like throughout America's history.

Some pilgrims were not always so pious. Edward Doty came across as a servant of one of the families and later became an entrusted citizen of the Colony. A historical figure having been personally involved in the first duel fought in the new land, with sword and dagger to be precise. Although he was a rough character, he must have had positive traits as well, for William Bradford spoke highly of him and ensured that he receive a portion of lands equal to that of the other colonists, despite his "station" in life.

Not all my relatives were Separatists. Thomas Rogers was a businessman who had enjoyed a lucrative relationship with the pilgrims during their stay in Holland. He was in the number of those who passed away within the first year. Another businessman, Richard Warren, had seven children who all lived to adulthood and had children of their own. Needless to say, many Americans could and can call him relations, including Presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

This is my history, our history as Americans. As Alex Haley stated, "... for each discovered United States family history becomes a newly revealed small piece of American history. Simply stated:

a nation's history is only the selective histories of all of its people." My family tree serves as my own history book with wonderful characters. Throughout America's history I have my own characters who tell me what life was like, how decisions affected them, what was good and right, what life is all about.

Another of my favorite family characters taught me just how severe the early colonists moral social structure was. I love my great^{x12} grandfather, Gawin White. He arrived fifteen years after the Mayflower when "less than pious" arrivals began to negatively affect the Separatists' lifestyles and aspirations. He was somewhat of a naughty character having stood trial for no less than lying about someone and again being brought before the Judge for traveling from Weymouth to Scituate on the Lord's day. Can you imagine that!

One of my familial heroines was one of Gawin's granddaughters, Mary White. She fell in love with the African slave that served her on her farm in Conihasset. It was reported, "She had the singular fancy to marry her slave. Tradition speaks of him as a respectable man. Their children, Joshua, James, Hezekiah, and four daughters, were born from 1691 to 1706." Interestingly enough, a Captain George B. Dennett of Portsmouth, Maine had married a descendant of one of the Newell daughters. Capt. Dennett had a home that served as a station on the Underground Railway. Mary White is one of my favorites because she had a strong mind and followed her heart, against the social norms of her time. The positive affects it had in the moral convictions of her descendants served to eventually change the tide of American society.

Manifest Destiny had a tendency to run over a few family members. Another beautiful character was my great^{x5} grandfather James Johnson, a Cherokee Indian that everyone just called "Skillethead." He was born about 1790 somewhere then known as "the land of the Cherokee." Due to the merciless pressure from frontiersmen, many Cherokee sought refuge north of the Ohio and thereby avoided the later Trail of Tears. Skillethead made his way to Indiana where he met and married his thirteen-year-old bride, Hester Light.

They had nine children and despite the hardships of life, patches of poverty and social prejudices, they both lived long enough to grow quite gray. A cousin remembered Skillethead in a letter to Mary Grindstaff, (another cousin). She wrote, "All I ever heard my parents say was that Skillethead would go to church, lean on his cane and pat his foot to keep time to the music." He was also remembered in other letters as kind, gentle and forever fatherly.

His daughter-in-law, Rhoda Ellen Dean, married Lawrence Johnson when she was eighteen-years-old and Lawrence, 32. Like many other men who survived the Civil War, he was never quite the same and they were forced to move quite a bit, trying to find work that he could do despite his physical sufferings and chronic illnesses. He had lost most of his health during the war due to sleeping on the damp, cold, hard ground. Rhoda buried two babies under the age of one, had two that lived and died by the age of 26. Her short life paralleled the turmoil and devastation the war created. Shortly after the death of her daughter Estelle, she wrote a beautiful poem:

*They ask us why we weep for thee,
So brief with us thy stay,
But much we loved thee, baby ours,
'ere thou didst pass away.
We saw thee suffer, saw thee die,
We weep, oh! Wherefore ask us why.*

*When thou didst lie upon the breast
In sweet and gentle sleep,
We prayed that Heaven our innocent one
Pure and sinless keep;
Our prayer was heard, the mandate given,
That call'd thee, sinless, back to heaven.*

*We saw Thee in thy little shroud,
Of pure and stainless white,
We pressed thy tiny lips so pale;
While angels blessed thy sight.
Our heart is sad mid song and flowers,
Dear was that, little babe of ours.
-Rhoda Ellen Dean*

Not all of my relatives were angels, many were outlaws. One was hanged for stealing, two were sent to prison

Our Family Tree



for killing their wives; one intentionally, another just had a bad day. Even these are interesting as they enrich our understanding of human nature. We cannot be stained by it, but we can learn from it. Those who made good choices lived good lives, and those who made bad choices suffered for them. Many made choices that changed future generations for hundreds of years.

These stories inspire, enrich and speak to me, to my children and to the children my children will have. I want to leave this ever-growing tapestry of characters to future generations, for it is vivid, beautiful and quite alive.

WHAT IS GENEALOGY?

Genealogy is defined as the study of family ancestries and histories to discover who our ancestors were and who our relatives are today. It has become the fastest growing hobby in the United States.

Genealogists are detectives, historians and adventurers, but most importantly, genealogists are family storykeepers. Lineage represents race, culture, power

and station. The book of Matthew distinguishes the lineage of Jesus; Kings were confirmed only through their bloodline and inheritances were made or lost based on the abilities or inabilities to prove genealogies. Today's family genealogists discover the heroes, role models and villains of their own family lineage.

The gift genealogy provides is the prologue to your own story. Why do you look the way you look and act the way you act?

To truly do their jobs affectively, family genealogists need to attempt to understand their descendants. Not just who they were, but what they experienced, where they lived, in what era and some of the whys ... why did

they live where they lived? Why did they leave? Research into political boundaries, religious movements and historical trends can make all the difference in re-establishing someone's character and life.

When families are separated by war, immigration, adoption or death, genealogists can step in and help re-assemble families and re-establish family traditions. Sometimes in doing so, they reveal family secrets, only proving someone's shame may be another's blessing.

The greatest gift genealogy provides is the prologue to your own story. Why do you look the way you look and act the way you act? Was it nature or nurture? Can you learn from your past, including your ancestor's lives? There are heroes, role models and intriguing characters right from your own family lineage that will inspire and enrich your life; they are just waiting to be brought back to life.

WHY THIS LABOR OF LOVE AND CURIOSITY?

When asked, "Why do you study

genealogy – what drives you?” the answers are quite varied, yet maintain a common thread.

“I do genealogy to leave a mark. I would hate to think we pass through this lifetime without leaving some sort of a mark so that other people know we passed.” – Bud Miner

“The bottom line is I enjoy playing detective and sharing my finds with any and all relatives who care to have the information.” – Wayne Thomas

“I just plain love a good mystery and this is my chance to play detective!” - Marge Jodoin

“...it’s the ‘knowing who you are’ feeling that is important and so satisfying.” -Joanne Hunt

Those who search out their family lineage often discover links to their own sense of self. Portions of the past, characters that lived out their lives on the canvas of history, often nourish the soul of the present. For many it begins with a curiosity, a desire to solve the mystery of these people who affected where you live, what you look like, what you suffer from and for many, what you believe.

Tracey Tousley has worked tirelessly reconnecting the pieces of her family. When asked why she does it, she stated, “Genealogy is a people puzzle. It is a tangible connection to history. We don’t know where we are going until we know where we have been. Genealogy helps me connect with who I am, where I came from and who I might be in the future.”

I met Tracey online more than five years ago. A part of my family tree stretched across to her family tree via our great^{x2} grandfather. It was very interesting to get to know her, to discover similarities and family lore. Genealogists, new or seasoned, often form these bonds of familiarity with other storykeepers, some due to family ties and others due to common passions.

The excuses to study genealogy are limitless and sometimes provide current day benefits. There are numerous college scholarships for Cherokee Indian descendants, particularly in Oklahoma, and other tribes as well. Members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, otherwise known as Mormons, believe they can pray for their long-deceased family members’ salvation. My cousin, Shirley, is



Extended family members



photos provided by Cynthia Howe

a member of the Society of the Mayflower Descendants, and I will be applying for membership to the Daughters of the American Revolution. Being a member of such an organization is quite interesting and helps build a sense of belonging and camaraderie.

Once a substantial amount of information is collected, start a scrapbook that, when complete, becomes a valued family treasure.

Genealogy should come with some form of warning and should not be undertaken by the weak of spirit or short of patience. You have to be committed to filtering through overwhelming materials that refer only to dates and places. You have to want to know... like searching for life among the dead. The only life

that remains are the stories they've left behind. And, aren't stories what we long for, to know subliminally that we're not alone?

GENEALOGY FOR BEGINNERS

Where to start? Start at the beginning: you. Begin with what you know and work through what you don't know. In addition, prepare and organize yourself with proper materials and get to know helpful research methods.

There are some basic genealogy materials, such as pedigree charts, binders and scrapbook organizers, available in stores and online. A good website to become acquainted with is www.misbach.org. It has numerous forms to review and download. A good binder will hold your pedigree charts, as well as your proofs, family letters, copies of birth, death and marriage certificates and other items you find important or interesting. Once a substantial amount of information has been collected, start a scrapbook for originals or copies of originals. Another organizing tool is a good software program found in

computer stores. These scrapbooks, when complete, become valued family treasures. My aunt made a beautiful scrapbook for my father full of old family pictures, labeled with facts, written stories, colored copies of certificates, old greeting cards and theater tickets.

There are a number of pedigree charts available online, but the first chart you should use is a simple fan chart. It is limited by generations in space, but it's a great tool to organize yourself, establish your numbering system, (described later) and basically get your root ball established in the dirt of genealogy. The second chart you need to familiarize yourself with is an Ahnentafel chart.

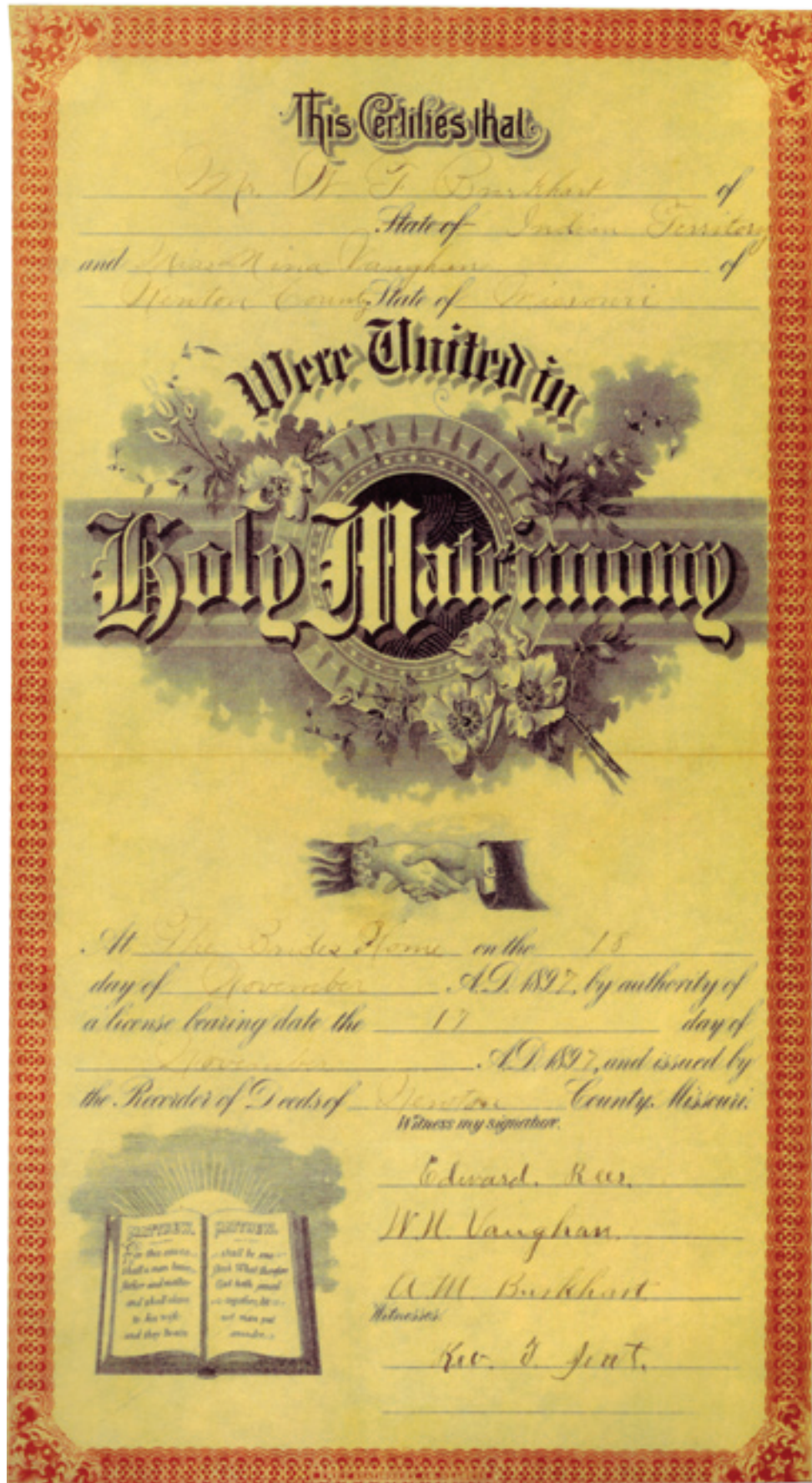
The "Ahnentafel Chart," (Ahnentafel is a German word meaning ancestor table) is the best way to list a lot of ancestors in a little space. The chart should include the full name of the descendant along with the dates and places of birth, marriage and death, for each listed individual (when known). The Ahnentafel numbering system is invaluable when jumping from generation to generation to make connections

between family members. On your own Ahnentafel chart, you would be number 1. Your father would then be number 2, being the first even number available. Your mother would then be the next odd number available, number 3. Other than the first person on the chart, (#1), males always have even numbers and women (wives) have odd numbers. To find an individual's father, you would multiply the individual's number by two, and to find the mother you would multiply the individual's number by two and add one. Your children can be listed under you and your spouse in this section as well. They will be fractions but including them will be gratifying.

After you have researched and gathered your materials, put on your family detective hat. Start with your parents, grandparents and elderly aunts. Ask them about family stories, where did the family come from, what do they remember from when they were little? Remember the often-used question of our parents generation, "What did you do in the war Daddy?" Did their great great grandparents house Jessie James and his gang in their old pig barn while they hid out? Or had they moved to the California Valley because of the Oklahoma Dust Storms? You would be surprised at the stories that lie in the hearts of your loved ones. When you make time to listen they will share more of themselves than you would have ever dreamed, and you will walk away the richer for it.

PROOF AND EVIDENCE

Genealogical proof is another term for tangible evidence. After you've written and gathered all the information you already know and combined it with what you've gathered from immediate family members, you need to prove your facts. Genealogical proof is usually made up of birth, marriage and death certificates; copies of Census indexes; land deeds; county records; vital statistic



Historic family marriage certificate

provided by Cynthia Howe

records; Army and Navy records; war records from the Revolutionary War, Civil War, WWI, II and Vietnam; church records; and even Ellis Island records. There are numerous other sources as well. I cannot stress enough how important it is to establish and maintain proof for all of your family connections. Each time you prove a fact make sure you take notes on how you proved it. Your own birth certificate will be the first document to go into your Proofs section of your binder, so don't forget that. You always want to think of leaving a path for future genealogists.

A fantastic place to research in North Texas is our own Frisco Public Library. Many of the librarians have a passion for genealogy and would love to help new adventurers. Furthermore, you have full access to www.ancestry.com there. If you are an old time "Friscoian," there is quite a bit of local history available at the library as well.

While some researchers love to put the pieces of the family puzzle together, matching dates, names and births, others want to put flesh to the facts. That is when additional research is required, but the fruits of your labors are so flavorful. Take a look at where these relatives were born, or take a trip to experience it yourself. This becomes the backdrop of the story you are looking for. While getting a clearer picture of where they were, look at the dates. Research what was happening in our nation during those dates, and more importantly in the area they lived. If you physically go to the area, drop by the library or the county courthouse. Many libraries maintain local histories and



John Elias Burkhart and baby, Blanche

photo provided by Cynthia Howe

sometimes even newspapers. Many of my more colorful relatives, I must admit, made the court records and the Judge's roll. You'll be thrilled when your family story begins to take color and shape.

A new genealogical method, called Genetic Genealogy, has yet to become well known, however for many a ray of hope has dawned with the possibilities. Businessmen are teaming up with scientists to establish a genealogical database built on DNA. Numerous services are available online, such as www.familytreedna.com and www.familytreedna.com. In addition, if you want to research a certain racial line, you can look to www.americanindiandna.com.

www.americanindian.com for American Indian or www.africanancestry.com for African Americans looking for African tribal connections. These services run anywhere from \$100 to \$400+, but are priceless to those who can make the connection, not only to who their ancestors were, but who their relatives are today.

As you settle down for your holiday meals this year, you may get the inspiration to start your search. Give your children the gift of family stories that you remember and ask them to ask others to recall their favorite stories. "What did you do in the war Grand Daddy?" is a great place for them to start. Ask for stories and memories and give them time to unfold. As you commit yourself to being a family storykeeper, you may just find a treasure chest imbedded in the hearts of your family that you never before knew existed.

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There are numerous research tools available to dig deeper into your family roots, but to begin with use research websites. Here are my top three picks. I have personally used these and found them to be quite interesting and helpful.

www.ancestry.com
www.allfamilytree.com
www.familysearch.org