

Thinking Resolutions

About

2014



“Gee, Santa!” December, 1955.

Thomas MacEntee has a great post for December 30, 2013, entitled “2014: Putting the “Gee” Back in Genealogy,” at <http://geneabloggers.com/2014-putting-gee-genealogy/>. In this post with a great leading image, Thomas shares his genealogy goals for 2014, and talks about “Reclaiming the Wonder of Genealogy.” I like how he talks about a kinder, gentler genealogy community too, sort of like in the good ‘ole pre-computer days of a SASE with every query. The article is a good read and provides some food for thought, as do so many of Thomas’ posts. I am definitely a follower of his blogs and always enjoy and learn from his webinars.

As an aside, I really like his title because it suggests the ‘proper’ way, i.e., the way *I* think, “genealogy” should be pronounced. All those phonics lessons in a midwestern Catholic school would require that first “e” in “genealogy” to be a long vowel- if a short vowel, it would be spelled

“gennealogy.” Additionally, since the first syllable is “ge-,” again, Sister Mary Phyllis would insist that “e” be long. It seems these days that the short-vowel “gennealogists” are now out-numbering the long-vowel “genealogists,” and now dictionaries include both pronunciations. (Long “e” first though in all I checked.) So I guess I just need to move on and direct my energies to finding the parents of Wiley Anderson Murrell (1806-1885, see <http://heritageramblings.net/2013/12/09/mystery-monday-the-murrells-of-virginia-and-iowa/>), rather than worrying about pronunciation of my favorite hobby.

Happy 2014 to all!

Mystery Monday- Roberts Family- School Picture



Class photo found in with George Roberts' and Ella V. Daniel's photos and papers.

This photo was found in with pictures and papers of the George Anthony Roberts and Ella Viola Daniel family who lived in Prairie City, Jasper County, Iowa. We don't know who any of the people are in the photo, but the boy who is the third from left in the front row may possibly be their son, George Anthony Roberts, (Jr.) born 1889 in Iowa. That child also looks similar to George Sr., who was born in 1861 in Illinois. Would be very interested in learning more about this photograph and the people in it.

Please contact us if you would like a higher resolution image.

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Five Family Photos for Friday- A Green Family Photo Album



Unknown people in a photo album probably owned by Bess Dorothy Green, p.22.

Very old family photo albums are such delights to find, but so maddening too! Usually people are not labeled in the photos, and seldom are dates or places noted- after all, the person who made the album already knew all that information that we now so desperately seek. So it is up to the family historian to try to decipher the clues found in these albums.



Unknown people in a photo album probably owned by Bess Dorothy Green, p.17. [*Click on image to enlarge.*]

This album is chock-full of pictures of many different people, which was typical for the time, probably the very early 1900s. Happily, we recognized one of the person in the photos as Bess Dorothy (Green) Broida. Bess was born in 1891 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Abraham M. Green and Rose Brave. Bessie married Phillip Edwin Broida in 1910. On page 17, she may be the young girl in the oval portrait just to the bottom left of the center circle; we have positively identified her at an older age in other photos in the album. Using some detective work, we have been able to determine the names of a few of the others. (More on those folks in another post.)

Following are some photo album pages of people we would like to know more about. Please contact us if you can help identify any of these persons.



Unknown people in a photo album probably owned by Bess Dorothy Green, p.31.



Unknown people in a photo album probably owned by Bess Dorothy Green, p.33.



Unknown people in a photo album probably owned by Bess Dorothy Green, p.34.

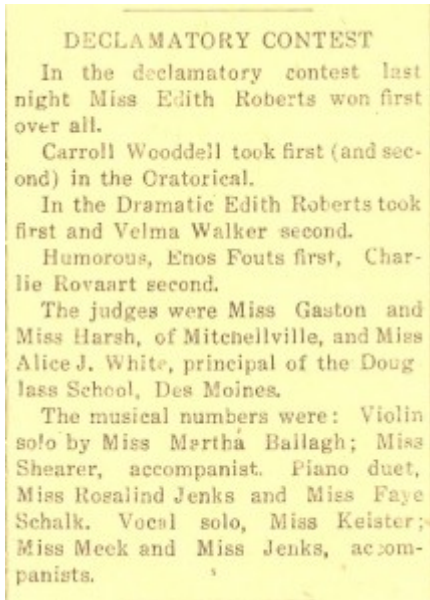
Notes, Sources, and References:

- 1) Green family photo album.
- 2) Family oral history.

Please contact us if you would like higher resolution images.

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Stories - A Family Legacy, Part 2



Edith Roberts- Declamatory Contest. *Prairie City News*, Prairie City, Jasper Co., Iowa, shortly after 2 Feb 1917. (From a clipping without date)

Telling the family stories is a wonderful legacy to pass on to your children.

But I can't find ANYTHING about my ancestor ANYWHERE...

Don't know much about the actual stories of the lives of your ancestors? There are many resources available, both online and at specific places that can help you piece together a life and/or a family. If you are not lucky enough to have many family stories, you *can* learn more about your ancestors to help put their lives in context.

Newspapers

Newspapers are a great resource for learning the stories of ancestors, or the places and times in which they lived. Newspapers of 50+ years ago included who was visiting where, long or one-line obituaries, detailed political and voter information, etc. The obituary of Jefferson Springsteen (1820-1909) tells of him running away to join the circus as a boy- how could he then be upset when his son Abram Springsteen ran away to join the Union Army as a drummer boy at age 12? There is a story there... A short note about Miss Edith Roberts (1899-1982) taking first place in the Declamatory Contest as well as "the Dramatic" is on the same page as the notice of the "Death of Grandma Roberts" (her paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts, 1835-1917). What mixed emotions Edith must have felt that day! Such information from newspapers allows us to realize and then understand the challenges and triumphs of those who have gone before, and help us tell the stories of our ancestor's lives.



"Death of Grandma Roberts"- Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts. *Prairie City News*, Prairie City, Jasper Co., Iowa. Undated newspaper clipping but Elizabeth died 02 Feb 1917.

Genealogy Bank is my favorite newspaper website for ease of use and breadth of papers held, though it is a for-pay website. Ancestry.com also has newspapers, as do a few other for-pay websites. Some favorite free websites are chroniclingamerica.loc.gov, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc> for California newspapers, and <http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html> for New York state and other newspapers, postcards, etc.

If you can't find articles about your own family, read through the headlines, ads, and social columns of the newspaper from where they lived and during that time period- it will help to put your ancestors into the context of their times.

Books

There are many books that can be found in the history section of the bookstore or library that can help you to piece together more information about your ancestor's probable daily life. (*Jane Austen's England* by Roy Adkins is on my list to read- it tells about everyday life in the late 18th and early 19th century England.) Used or out-of-print books may be found at abebooks.com, alibris.com, or a local used bookseller can do a search for you. Many other family or social history sources can be found on Google Books (books.google.com), such as county histories. Although your ancestor may not have had the money or inclination to buy a writeup in a county history (AKA "Mug Books" since they sometimes required a payment to be included), just reading about the area in the first part of the history can give an idea of the topography, religion, economics, goods and services provided, social groups, etc. Google Books may give you a snippet of information from a book so that you can determine if you would like to buy it, or it may provide an ebook for free to download. The Internet Archive (<https://archive.org>) has millions of pages of books, videos, etc. available for free. (Sadly, some of them are OCR'd images and may be hard to read, but may still be useful.) They also offer "The Way Back Machine" to help you

find old web pages from now-defunct websites. Another good free online book source is hathitrust.org.

WorldCat (<http://www.worldcat.org>) is a great place to find a book, and then your library may be able to get it on interlibrary loan for you if it can't be found locally. College libraries that include manuscript or special collections and dissertations may provide wonderful information. Some may be dry and/or scholarly, but you may be able to find information that can help you enhance the date and place information you already know about your family.

Here are some social history questions to ask, and research, about your ancestor's time, place, and life:

What events were going on locally, nationally?

What was the economy like? Boom time or bust, or just a long struggle like in the 1890s?

What were prevailing religious views?

What were political leanings and issues of those in the area where your ancestor lived?

What provided income to your ancestor, and how common was that occupation?

Some of the answers can help provide family stories. We inherited some strange tools- they were very old and it was hard to tell what they were used for. They belonged to descendants of George Lee (1821-aft 1880) who lived in Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire, England, which was a large shoe-making center. George and his sons all came to America, and at least one son, Josiah, was a shoemaker. With the knowledge that shoemaking was important in their hometown in England, and then the US Federal Census that listed shoemaking as an occupation for Josiah, some online research for shoemaking tools helped us identify the purpose of the

artifacts. The tools we have were probably Josiah's, and now we can add shoemakers to the family stories.

When telling your family stories, whether in print, electronic form, or oral stories, it is important to ALWAYS differentiate general facts from those known specifically about your family. Also, document sources with proper citations, so that you or others may revisit those sources to verify or disprove ideas and 'facts.'

Adding social history to your research can give a deeper understanding of the lives of our ancestors, and enrich the family stories we leave as a legacy to our descendants.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) Newspaper clippings are from the Prairie City News, around 02 Feb 1917.

2) I have no affiliation with any of the websites listed, and do not receive any benefits from them financially or in product. (FTC Disclosure.)

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Stories - A Family Legacy,

Part 1



Edith Roberts McMurray with Son, about 1924.

Family historians have a saying:

Genealogy without sources is just 'mythology.'

We really should go a step further and say:

Genealogy without **stories** is just... well, BORING!

A recent New York Times article, "This Life. The Stories That Bind Us," discusses developing a "strong family narrative." The article (and book) is based on research by the Emory University psychologist Marshall Duke and his colleague Robyn Fivush. Their studies showed that children who had a strong sense of their family history had a higher sense of control of their life and greater self esteem. They also found these children were more resilient when faced with challenges. This research hit home with me- at tough times in my life, my grandmother would tell me, "You come from strong pioneer stock- you can do anything you set your mind to." Knowing those pioneer stories, and knowing the family support I had, helped me get through those tough times and use it as a lesson in my own life, and helped some of those times become a story

for our own family.

When I started doing genealogy back in the 1960s (I really was a teen then, so not quite THAT old now), pedigree charts, family group sheets, and Ahnontafel and Register reports full of names and dates and places were what genealogy was all about. What really hooked me, though, was a trip to the county library where I found a book that actually told a story about my ancestors. I had family bible, obituary, and other information that my grandmother helped me find, but they were just cold, hard facts (mostly). When I saw the Benjamin name in a book I was browsing in the library stacks, however, my heart skipped a beat. I didn't think it could possibly be *my* ancestors in a library book. Then I saw the name Brown, and because of the place and dates, knew it had to be my ancestors! The book was a reference book, so I could not check it out. I couldn't stop reading, even though I knew my mother would be sitting out in the car waiting to pick me up. (See, I really wasn't that old- couldn't drive yet.) The story was about an Indian massacre of the Brown and Benjamin families in Loyalsock, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, in May of 1778. Many family members were killed, others taken captive and later released. (More in an upcoming post.) I copied the information by hand- copiers were still new-fangled machines back then and not readily available- and rushed breathlessly to the car. My mother was not happy she was kept waiting, but thrilled when I told her what I had found about my father's family. She was somewhat disappointed that it was not *her* family, and felt that since her ancestors were probably poor immigrants from Ireland and Germany, we would not find much about them. Little did she know what wonderful stories were to come about her family- one of her "poor immigrant" ancestors was actually a physician, John H. O'Brien (1808-1887). Dr. O'Brien came to America shortly after receiving his medical degree at the University of Dublin, Ireland, around 1830, in the midst of a cholera epidemic in Pennsylvania. He survived and married Jane Neel (1823-1895) who came from a family of early pioneers in

this country. (More about them in another post too.)

Social History

Telling the stories of the common people is a part of 'social history.' Scholarly historians have long looked down on genealogy as a mythology of name seekers who want to be related to someone famous, but are finally realizing that the everyday life of everyday people has as much importance as famous generals, battles, and political figures. (I think even more important.) This movement began with books such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, and continues with the hundreds of books more recently published by both scholarly and family historians. Some of the books are biographies, but others are scholarly studies on events or places. These books can help us place family in the context of the times. Tip: Check the index to see if your family is listed. Indexes do not always pick up every individual, however, so skim through the book and you may find a treasure. Even if your family member is not listed, other information in the book may apply to your family. I had ancestors in northern New England in the late 1600s-early 1700s, so another Ulrich book, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, had much information to help me gain a sense of what their daily lives would have been like.

To be continued...

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) New York Times article "This Life. The Stories That Bind Us" published online 15 Mar 2013 at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2. "Bruce Feiler's recently published book, "The Secrets of Happy Families: How to Improve Your Morning, Rethink Family Dinner, Fight Smart, Go Out and Play, and Much More."

2) Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (Knopf, New York, 1990)

3) Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (Knopf, New York, 1980.)