

THE GENEALOGY SOCIETY - IT'S ALL RELATIVE

By Bill Newell

I had long believed that a pursuit as esoteric as genealogy was something carried out in isolation. While the research methods were common it was always their own ancestors and my own ancestors, and the two were never the same people. When I found out that the Tracy ancestors of a friend of mine, and WCGS member, Sherlene Bartholomew, lived right across the street from my Lathrop ancestors in Norwich, Ct., some 325 years ago I was not prepared for the indescribably strange feelings I experienced. That the paths of two different families, who had been neighbors in times long past, should cross again after eleven generations was, to me, extraordinary. It was not an event that I had ever considered or expected but which was very exciting to experience. This is my first indication that someone actually knew these people. That they were real people - not just names in a book.

Last spring I was at one of the Genealogy Society meetings and Sherlene was sitting next to me. As the committee reports droned on and on, and as the chair seemed to get harder and harder, Sherlene gave me a lineage chart and said that she had discovered some more Connecticut ancestors. As I went down the list of names on the chart I came to John Hall and Jane Woolen of New Haven and Wallingford. Hey, these are my ancestors! I finally had a relative located through genealogy. Sherlene and I are 9th cousins through our Hall family connection and we have since found another connection through Capt. Nathaniel Merriman (Merriam) another early settler of Wallingford.

By using the Surname List I have since found that I am related to Jean MacIntosh through Paul Peck of Hartford and his wife Martha Hale. Jean had Martha's maiden name and the names of her parents, Thomas Hale and Joan Kirby. This was new information for me. Lois Lober, who arranges our field trips, turns out to be a cousin through the family of Robert Seabrook and Alice Goodspee, who married in England in 1596. This is the first time that I've found a cousin where our common ancestry does not begin here in America. On the Surname List Thelma E. Smith and I matched on 13 names. At least seven of these lines are common ancestors. I knew of Samuel Sedgwick and Mary Hopkins and Thelma gave me information that added the Stone, Blake, Howe, Strong and Bronson families to my growing list of surnames. Since I haven't had the opportunity to really check with all of the 18 WCGS members who had surnames matching my own I am sure future surprises await.

In November I had some displays at the meeting, including the will of George Hubbard. Barbara Beaudry walked up and said that George Hubbard was an ancestor of her's as well. Since then we have been unable to reconcile our information about George Hubbard but the debates have been great fun. It now appears that there were two Georges, who were contemporaries, but that genealogists have been confusing them as the same person, or as father and son, for generations. Along the way we found common ancestors in the Bulkeley family of Fairfield, Ct., and Concord, Mass., and have been adding to each other's knowledge of that family, and its royal connections, back into the early middle ages - some fifty-one generations ago!

Now - Please show this and give a copy of my family letter to Nancy. All the rest I mailed to the rest of the family - but somehow I lost Nancy's copy and addressed envelope. Sorry for delay, sorry. Sherlene

Discoveries of common ancestors can take place in the most unexpected places. On Rte. 84 going to our Connecticut Historical Society field trip Fran Gilman and I, in the course of the conversation, found that we were related through Rev. John Lathrop, whose house, built in the mid-1600s, is now a part of the Sturgis Library at Barnstable, Mass. We also have other surnames and locales in common that need to be checked. By the way, another of Fran's ancestors lived in the house right next to Sherlene's Tracy ancestors in Norwich. Three of us in the same car and 325 years ago our three different, uncommon, ancestors were all neighbors. The world, and the distance of time, seem to get smaller and smaller.

The Surname List has also given me some possible cousins in the Society. Gloria Wiltse, who handles the queries submitted to the Newsletter, is a descendant of Thomas Beach of New Haven. Some genealogists, such as Donald Lines Jacobus, believe that Thomas was probably a brother of John Beach, my ancestor. This, unfortunately, has yet to be proven conclusively so Gloria and I are "probable" cousins, to use Jacobus' term.

Eleanor Skinner recently did a genealogy for her daughter-in-law going back to Stephen Hopkins of the Mayflower. Thelma E. Smith and I have a Hopkins family which one source traces back to that same Stephen but a connection which Eleanor was unable to confirm. This shows what a wonderful check the Society can sometimes provide in helping to keep our research sound. Thelma and I now have to go back and double check our sources and information to be sure that they are really accurate. After all, who wants to spend time researching the wrong Hopkins family.

Dorothy Keiser, who greets you as you arrive for the WCGS meetings, was able to give me information on Thomas Dickerman, an ancestor of mine who came from England in 1635. An aunt of her's had married a Dickerman and Dorothy had copied the information down long ago while visiting at the aunt's house. Dorothy isn't herself related to the Dickermans but was able to be of help when she saw my interest in that name on the Surname List.

Lastly, while at the April WCGS meeting I overheard Marjorie Renino say that a collateral line of one of her families specialized in axe murders, mostly of themselves. I responded that they sounded like one of my families - they were the same family! Need I say more?

The old saying is that you can choose your friends but you can't choose your relatives. The WCGS greatly improves on that old maxim. Some of the people who start out as your friends may well turn out to be your relatives as well.

P.S. I don't think they'll let us all in under one family membership.

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If you have not submitted your list of surnames for the Master Surname File, there is still time for inclusion in the updated list to be done August 1984. Your list should be composed of surnames only--no dates, places, etc. Send list to Fred Skinner, 335 Pelhamdale Avenue, Pelham, NY 10803. (Please note that submission of list signifies permission to release your name and address to members and your name and code number to non-members who may contact you for exchange of family information.)

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