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US Courthouse Records

By Pamela Erickson

Thorough genealogical research requires visits to local courthouses where our family lived to see *primary* public records that tell the story of the lives of our ancestors. From their earliest days, courthouses recorded events about a persons' life, including marriage, divorce, land purchase and sale, taxes, disputes, wills/probate, and much more. Some of this material has been microfilmed and is available through the Family History Library catalog at www.FamilySearch.org or digitized at www.pilot.FamilySearch.org. (Be aware that not all loose papers or files have been microfilmed by the Family History Center, so you may need to find someone to research on site or make the trip yourself.) Some of the information has been accumulated in books, either transcribed or abstracted and some has been posted on the Internet. The compiler may have misread the information, transposed dates, or caused any one of a number of mistakes. At some point in your research, you will probably need a trip to a specific courthouse to retrieve information buried in the records. A good thing to remember is that you know your family better than anyone; therefore, it's better for you to do the research.

What you can expect to find in a courthouse

Courthouse records were not created with the genealogist in mind. Therefore, it is important to learn what type of records are kept and the specific laws or history of the creation of those records. Another consideration is to know if any destruction of courthouse records has taken place. A great example of this is in *Courthouse Fires and Disasters in Tennessee* www.tennessee.gov/tsla/history/county/lost.htm. The state of Virginia has compiled a list of discontinued counties and burned courthouses that include three categories: hopeless, almost hopeless, and difficult. Check these out at http://myvirginiagenealogy.com/index.htm.

I suggest that you contact the local historical or genealogical society to find out what they recommend for getting the most out of your courthouse visit. One of my students did that prior to a trip to Texas and found material set aside for him when he arrived. Also, ask the society who has the various records. They often have more up-to-date information than what is found in books, such as those listed at the end of this article. Be aware, too, when the county was created, so you know if you are looking in the right area. Ask if the records are available, or are they out for microfilming, repair, or in some manner unavailable.

Vital records (births, marriages, and deaths) can provide facts and clues about your family. Most births were not recorded before 1900, but some counties started much earlier. Also look for delayed birth certificates, often filed in the year of filing, not in the birth year. Marriages provide information about bonds, intent, and the filing of the actual license. When the license is not completed, it doesn't mean that the marriage didn't take place. It simply may not have been recorded.

In addition to vital records, **land records** can offer the greatest wealth of information. Land purchases and sales often include other family names. Some other categories of land records include: plat maps, mortgages, and tax records. Indexes to land deeds have surnames listed by "Grantee or Grantor." These are located in the county where the land is located, not necessarily where the family lived. By following the tax records, for example, I found out when the family improved its wealth standard and when they were assessed road improvement (provide manpower to fix the roads in addition to paying the tax).

Most counties required probate, even if there was no will. You can gain insight into a family's wealth by reading the inventory, the attitude of the person writing a will by what he has to say about recipients named, and much more. Terry Kanago, in a 1995 article published at www.sff.net/people/kango/research.htm, gave an example of what you could stumble across:

"To my wife I leave her lover, and the knowledge that I wasn't the fool she thought I was. To my son I leave the pleasure of earning a living. For 25 years, he thought that pleasure was mine. He was mistaken. To my daughter, I leave $100,000. She will need it. The only good piece of business her husband ever did was marrying her. To my valet, I leave the clothes he has been stealing from me. To my partner, I leave the suggestion that he take some other clever man in with him at once if he expects to do any more business...."

The probate you find may not be as colorful, but you should learn about the family members, possible married names of daughters, how the wife should be cared for, how the inheritance should be shared.

(Continued on page 18)

What's Inside

SpiderWebs 19
Illegitimacy In England 20
Of Interest 21
Stranger than Fiction 23
Information/Classes for 11 April 2009 back

Migration and Naturalization records help open other possibilities for research in new locations. Applications for naturalization may provide the hometown and country or other important information as you seek to find the next generation.

Other types of records you may find include:

- **Divorce** (may include marriage date and place and if there are minor children, their names and ages)
- **Separate maintenance** (where there is no divorce)
- **Adoptions and Guardianships** (these may be filed in probate or land records instead of their normal court location) Older adoption records may be available, more recent ones may be sealed; guardianship records should be available.
- **Bastardry and Fornication** (Before 1900, these cases were pursued to insure that fathers paid for the care of their offspring created outside wedlock. Names of fathers appear in no other record.)
- **Civil cases** (private individuals versus private individuals); **Criminal cases** (violation of state statute); and, **Equity Actions** (cases where there may be a more "equitable" solution outside the letter of the law) (descriptions taken from Brenda Kellow's article, mentioned below)
- **Jury Lists**
- **Voter Registration Records**
- **Military Discharges**

And many more.

Brenda Kellow, B.A., CG, CGI[SM,] wrote an article, *County Courthouse Research Pointers & Tips***,** that lists a more detailed compilation of possible courthouse records. You can find her article at www.geocities/genfriendsghl.

How To Prepare for a Courthouse Visit

Create a research plan. You first need to decide what you need to learn through this visit. Make a list of what you know about a person and what you hope to learn about them. When you list what you want to look for, record the type of material you want to search and the time period of the event or events.

Check out the courthouse on the Internet. What information do they provide on their web site that explains their policies and procedures and their organizational system. Learn what part of their collection is not available elsewhere and concentrate on those records.

Contact the courthouse before your visit to verify their dates and times open. For most courthouses, the beginning and ending weeks of the month are busier than the middle. Clerks emphasize today's business over requests for genealogical information. Remember to respect their time and not ask too many questions. If you can, plan to go during the middle of the month. In your letter, state briefly and concisely what you hope to accomplish. You may get a response stating that you are looking too far back in the county history and that material is located in a local library or historical society. Or, you may find that records are kept in different offices and you need to contact each one independently.

Ruby Coleman, in an article entitled, *Challenging the Courthouse*, noted that "some courthouses do not admit genealogists into their files and storage areas unless accompanied by a member of local genealogy society." She adds that sometimes there are time limits to access material.

Ask if you can take photos. A digital camera can collect pages of information that you can study more carefully at home. You may want to photograph the courthouse itself, any old photos hanging on the walls, and large plat maps in the land office. If you cannot photograph pages, ask if you can pay for copies.

Most records have good indexes, but not all the indexes are found in the same place. Learn how to use the indexes for each type of record and make careful notes of what you find. For example, search civil suit indexes in the Superior Court by plaintiff or defendant.

Courthouses are often small and cramped, so keep your belongings to a minimum. Ask what you can bring in, such as pens or pencils, notepad, laptop, camera, and money for copies. You may not find any place to plug in your laptop, so make sure it's battery is fully charged. You may not find tables and chairs, so your time spent there is on your feet or sitting on the floor.

I recommend learning as much as you can about where records are kept. A couple of books that will help you include:

- *County Courthouse Book***,** Second Edition, Elizabeth Petty Bentley, Genealogical Publishing Co., 1996
- *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures* (Paperback), by Christine Rose, Heritage Books, 2004
- *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, 3rd edition, by Val D. Greenwood (Genealogical Publishing Co., 2005)
- *The Handybook for Genealogists*, 11th Edition, by Everton Publishers, 2005.

An example for researching in Michigan comes from the Library of Michigan in Lansing. The site provides general resources, books about specific Michigan counties, and suggested further study Internet sites. This site is: www.michigan.gov/documents/hal/lm_AH_Courthouserecords_194631_7.pdf.

If you are well prepared, a courthouse visit can reward you with new insight into your family and provide clues to missing information. It just might get you over a brick wall.

Quotable Quote

One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.

English proverb

Spider Webs: New Zealand Birth, Death And Marriage Records, New at FamilySearch, Chinese-Canadian Genealogy Wiki, 1916 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, 1914 U.S. County Maps

New Zealand Birth, Death And Marriage Records

A new Web site, developed by the Department of Internal Affairs of New Zealand has historical birth, death and marriage information. The following information has been made available:

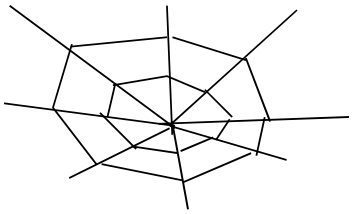
- Births that occurred at least 100 years ago
- Stillbirths that occurred at least 50 years ago
- Marriages and eventually Civil Unions that occurred 80 years ago
- Deaths that occurred at least 50 years ago or the deceased's date of birth was at least 80 years ago.

The information is only an index which has the year of the event. To see the certificate, one must pay a fee to get the information. The records can be found at: www.bdmhistoricalrecords.identityservices.govt.nz/

New at FamilySearch

Since January 5, 2009, Familysearch added over 6 million new indexed records and 1.4 million new images to its Record Search pilot. New projects which have been completed are:

- West Virginia birth, marriage, and death records
- Illinois, Cook County Birth Certificates and Birth Registers
- 1915 and 1925 South Dakota Census
- Massachusetts Death Records 1906-1915
- Guanajuato 1930 Mexico Census
- New Hampshire Early to 1900 Births
- 1920 US Federal Census for Arizona, Illinois, Florida, and Massachusetts
- Arkansas Marriages [Part 1]
- Prince Edward Island 1861 Census
- Nova Scotia 1861 Census



- New Brunswick 1861 Census
- Kentucky– 1870 US Census (Part 2)
- Queretaro– Censo de Mexico de 1930

Also, some changes have been made to the pilot site after the latest update:

- Region map flyover now lists the number of collections in a region
- Rotate an image clockwise or counter-clockwise in the viewer
- New full screen view in the image viewer
- Search form now displays the collection being searched
- Image navigation- moved previous, next & go to buttons to the bottom of the page
- Collection list page is now a single column
- Image only collections are identified
- Changes to print selected area

To visit the site, go to: http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html#start

Chinese-Canadian Genealogy Wiki

The Vancouver Public Library in partnership with Library and Archives Canada has created a wiki to collect the stories of individuals of Chinese origin who were born in Canada in the 19th century. There are many Chinese who immigrated to the Pacific Coast of Canada. Chinese-Canadians: Profiles from a Community is an attempt to document the history of this community and create a portrait of the early Chinese-Canadians.

The core of the wiki is the transcription of a portion of a document produced by the federal government in 1923, which recorded all individuals born in Canada to parents of Chinese origin. There are 461 individuals born prior to 1901 in the document. The data is organized to separate profiles for each person. Anyone with information can register on the site at no charge and contribute additional data to the profiles. They can add biographical details, photographs, document images and other information. Research tools are provided for those who would like to help search for the stories of these early Chinese-Canadians in both online and offline sources. To view and participate in the wiki, go to ccgwiki.vpl.ca

1916 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta

Ancestry.ca now has the 1916 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta available online. This census contains 1.7 million names found on more than 38,000 images of original Census pages. The census is indexed and has a fully searchable format. From 1906 to 1956, a separate Canadian Census was taken for the Prairie provinces five years after each national Census. It gave a more detailed status of Canada's west at this time. By law, the census was kept private for 92 years and this is the first opportunity for the public to see these records.

This Census is the first in Canada to ask about military service. , providing much more detailed information about one's ancestors. In addition to the population and demographic statistics, this Census recorded migrant communities, which originated from England, Ireland, Scotland, the U.S. and Russia. 1916 was the year that the notorious Doukhobors, a group of Christian immigrants from Russia, first arrived in Alberta. Also in 1916, women in Manitoba were finally given the right to vote on January 28 and Canadian troops saw action in some of the most significant battles of the First World War at Mont Sorrel and the Battle of the Somme.

Ancestry.ca is a subscription Web site. It is available separately or packaged with sites offering records for other areas around the world. The are offering a 14 day free trial. Go to: www.ancestry.ca

1914 U.S. County Maps

An old atlas was found containing county maps for the United States as they existed from 1910 to 1914. Janie Edwards kindly rescued the book (which was missing the covers and a few pages), scanned the maps and posted the images on RootsWeb. Each map contains about a dozen counties. The townships within the counties are not shown, but many villages which do not appear on modern maps are often there on these maps. The maps were made before our highway system was built. The maps show the railroads but roads are not shown. To visit the site, go to: http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~shastaca/maps_index.html

Illegitimacy In England

By Lesly Klippel

If the parents of a child are not married at the time of the child's birth, the child is illegitimate and will be listed as such in both civil and church records. If she could stagger up the church steps before labor started, the child was considered legitimate. If she had a husband at the time of the child's birth, he was considered to be the father unless he could prove that he was not capable of fathering a child. Many husbands had suspicions, but proving them in court was extremely difficult. The similarity of appearance of the child to the appearance of the milk man or some other man in the village was not enough to convict the miscreants.

Social Acceptance

Illegitimacy was so common in the 17th and 18th centuries, that there is hardly a pedigree that can avoid a case of it. Socially, there were degrees of acceptance of the illegitimate child. If the parents intended to marry, but the father died or deserted before the wedding, the child would be accepted in the village. The child of a rich man's mistress and the child of a young girl who was seduced, would be somewhat accepted. The child of a poor man's mistress, a promiscuous village girl or the child of a married woman by another man would suffer persecution and the child of incest would usually die mysteriously as an infant. Illegitimate children were easier to disguise in a city and would be passed off as younger siblings or nieces or nephews.

Parish Registers

In a village, when a young man and a girl were betrothed, sexual activity was socially acceptable and one or more children may have been born before the actual wedding. The marriage of the parents legitimized the children. The parish priest saved his moral criticism for prostitution, rape and incest.

In the parish registers, the illegitimacy will be expressed in Latin by the words spurius, filius populi, filius nullius or in English as base, bastard, spurious, supposed, imputed, misbegotten or chance begotten. The pregnant single girl would be pressured to name the father and may even be put in prison if she refused. If the father was known, his name would be listed in the parish registers. Occasionally, two men's names may be listed if she was not sure which one actually fathered the child. The form introduced in 1813 left no room for the illegitimacy notation and so the mother's occupation as spinster may be the only indication that the child was illegitimate or the priest may have written "base" in the occupation column. Another indication would be a surname listed for the child that matches the mother's surname but differs from the father's.

Maintenance of the Illegitimate Child

There were two reasons for learning the father's name. It needed to be known to avoid accidental incest between a man and woman not knowing that they were half-siblings. Also the father would be pressured to support the child until the age of 14 when he or she could be apprenticed. If the mother named the father, he would be brought before the parish council and pressured to admit that he was the father. If he admitted it, he might privately pay the girl enough to keep her and the child until it reached the age of 14 and thus keep his name out of the records. This was not encouraged because of the possibility of later incest. Alternatively, he could sign a Bastardy Bond and pay the overseers for the costs of the birth and for the child's upkeep. If he denied the charge, witnesses could be called in to testify that they saw the couple together. He may then agree to marry the girl, sometimes with a small dowry provided by the parish itself. If he fled, he would be sought and brought back to face the music. If he joined the army or the navy, he could not be prosecuted, but the name of the man's officer and regiment would be entered in Assize roll kept at the County Record Office.

If the father was too poor to pay for the child, his home parish would have to cover the costs. This might not be where the father was living, but was his "parish of settlement", either where he was born or where he had lived continuously for the required number of years. All of the papers regarding the case will be in the parish chest materials and in the county record office. Payments to the mother and child from the parish will be in the parish chest. The warrant for the father's arrest, the Bastardy Bond and apprenticeship papers for the child will be in the county record office.

Tracing the Illegitimate Child

The child's marriage certificate may reveal what the child knew about his parentage. My William Lambert, who was the bastard of Hannah Lambert, listed William Lambert as his father. Either he lied or his mother lied to him. Since William had an illegitimate younger brother by another father, he probably knew his own origin but was trying to save face. While the parish paid for his upbringing, there is no records of payments for the second son, so supposedly, the father supported him.

If the mother married, her illegitimate child may have taken the stepfather's name. There were very few legal adoptions, only informal agreements to raise a child, either by the stepfather or by a relative. Hyphenated names were common, indicating the birth and "adopted" surname or some other combination, such as birth name-"apprentice master" name or birth name-"employer name."

Census records may reveal an illegitimacy. The family may lie to the village, but didn't generally lie to the census taker. The child may be listed as "son-in-law" (stepson) or "wife's son." In 1841, where no relationships are stated, the child may have a different surname and be listed after the other children.

Victorian Morals

In the Victorian era, families went to great lengths to keep an unwanted pregnancy secret, even to the extent that the mother of the girl would pad herself and pretend to be pregnant and then raise the child as her own. If the girl could not be hastily married to someone willing to take her, she might be sent abroad with a nine-month illness and the child fostered out. The homes for unwed mothers were a breeding grounds for prostitutes and many an unwary girl found herself among the fallen women in the world's oldest trade.

With the advent of the Poor Law of 1834, pregnant girls whose families could not or would not care for them, were bullied into workhouses which were supported by a group of parishes called a "Union". Life in a workhouse was very difficult and few babies survived their beginnings there. The father might be arrested and the case reported to the local papers with all its lurid details.

If the father had a title, it was against the law for his bastard to use the title or any associated coat of arms. Modern laws allow illegitimate children to claim maintenance from their father's estate. There may be some cases where the illegitimate child of nobility or royalty was accorded social acceptance and an inheritance, but they were the exception.

Illegitimacy in Scotland

The Presbyterian church in Scotland was much stricter about moral issues than the Church of England. If an unmarried girl was pregnant, she was brought to the parish council for an "examination," and questioned extensively. The guilty parties had to sit on the "repentance stool" in front of the congregation for a number of Sundays. The sordid details were written in the Kirk Sessions Book and deposited with the parish registers.

In the 1700s, it became the custom to house farm workers and servants away from the main house in barracks. This practice gave rise to much illegitimacy. Female farm workers generally kept their babies with them on the farms. House servants had to leave their posts in disgrace.

In Scotland, a couple could hold hands before two witnesses and state that they intended to marry and they were legally considered married in every way except in the matters of inheritance of title and property. Even though these marriages were not recorded, any children from a "handfest" union would be considered legitimate. This type of marriage was not legal in England, so if the couple emigrated, they would have to marry formally. Later, "common law" marriages in England legitimized children but did not allow for the inheritance of property. A common law husband would be legally responsible for the maintenance of wife and children.

Bastardy and Genealogy

Family tradition will often provide the name of the father of an illegitimate child. The tradition may be the truth and told in order to avoid accidental incest or it may be a fabrication based on wishful thinking. Inspect the tradition carefully. Was the father old enough and did he live in close proximity at the right time. Compare photographs to look for physical similarities. If the father was wealthy, there was probably a pay-off or a mention in his will. He could even state "my baseborn son" or he could leave money to a particular child of a married woman in the town. Gossip columns in print may give the clue you need.

When it comes to illegitimate children of nobility and royalty, there has been MUCH exaggeration. If you count the number of children certain kings such as George III is supposed to have had, they must have spent their entire adult lives in some bed or another. "Princess Olive of Cumberland" by a Mrs. Serres gave rise to many claims of descent from royalty through the wrong side of the sheets. She was a "brilliant forger and a romantic genealogist." Many old pedigrees based on family tradition and high hopes are hopelessly flawed and should not be taken as the truth. My claim to fame as a descendant of William the Conquerer through a "mistress" was dashed when I learned that William never had any mistresses and my "mistress" had a perfectly good husband who came across the English Channel with his boss, the Conquerer.

DNA and Illegitimacy

Modern tests for DNA comparison are proving many a pedigree to be either correct or faulty. My brother-in-law's father was illegitimate and the family tradition stated the name of the supposed father who had drowned before the child's birth. Now that DNA tests have been priced within the average budget, he has finally been able to prove that he is really a Harrigan and not a McDonald. Now that the female lines can be tested, even more genealogical revelations will undoubtedly emerge to help our pedigrees be more accurate.

Of Interest

FamilyLink.com, Inc. Raises $2.4 Million, Maryland Historical Society Layoff, Arizona Historic Cemeteries, Daughters of Union Veterans Expand Headquarters, Ancestry.ca To Preserve Canadian Records, Dome Leak Threatens City Archives, Legend Seekers, South Carolina African American Records

FamilyLink.com, Inc. Raises $2.4 Million

FamilyLink.com, the parent company of World Vital Records. Com, recently raised $2.85 million in Series B funding. The company is growing in spite of difficult economic times. The company raised initial funding of $1.25 million in August 2007. FamilyLink.com is the developer of *We're Related*, one of the most popular applications on Facebook. The site is visited by almost a million people every day. The company will launch its social networking site later this quarter at FamilyLink.com. FamilyLink.com turned profitable in late 2008. The company owns WorldVitalRecords.com, a popular genealogy subscription site, and later in

2009, the company will introduce a new genealogy web site, GenSeek.com. The company currently employs 30 people in the U.S., located in Seattle, WA, Boulder, CO, and its headquarters in Provo, Utah, and at development offices in India and the Philippines. Paul B. Allen, the CEO of FamilyLink.com, was the founder of Ancestry.com.

Maryland Historical Society Layoff

The Maryland Historical Society laid off six of its 48 staff members on Wednesday, including an archivist, a director of collections, an assistant curator, a security guard, and part-time librarian. The society was founded in 1844, and currently operates a museum and library. The library has 60,000 books, 800,000 photographs, 5 million manuscripts, 6,500 prints and broadsides, 1 million pieces of printed ephemera, extensive genealogy indexes, and more.

Arizona Historic Cemeteries

Volunteers working with the State Historic Preservation Office are trying to locate and identify burial sites and cemeteries that were established 50 or more years ago. Phoenix historian Reba Grandrud is one person striving for an inventory of Arizona's historic cemeteries. A cemetery may have just one grave, or it may have thousands of individuals. Some of the burial sites may belong to the Native Americans, some to the Spanish colonial period, and some from a later period. Some may not be visible today. In any case, Reba Grandrud wants to see them all documented. Historians, archaeologists, genealogists and directors of funeral and cemetery associations are all working together on the project. More volunteers are needed. They hope to produce a comprehensive list of cemeteries by the state's centennial celebration in 2012.

Daughters of Union Veterans Expand Headquarters

The Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War purchased a home in Springfield, Illinois to expand its national office and museum. The home is an updated, 2,800 square-foot "American foursquare" house built in 1898, located next to the Daughters' museum and office at Walnut and Governor streets. The present facilities had become too small and purchase of land and a building project had been discussed. When the house came on the market, it looked like an answer to their needs and the organization wasted no time buying it.

The Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War is open to all direct female descendants of Union Civil War veterans. The organization will be 125 years old in 2010. They plan to dedicate its new facility in August of that year, when members will hold their national meeting in Springfield. An open house at the new facility will be held in April.

The basement is full of items the organization has never been able to display, and more keep arriving as donations. They group will soon have enough museum space, and a place to host programs and speakers. A research, library with computers and microfilm readers will be available for researchers.

Ancestry.ca To Preserve Canadian Records

Ancestry.ca launched the Canadian section of the World Archives Project, which will give individuals the opportunity to help preserve historical Canadian records from the comfort of their own homes. Downloadable software allows volenteers to view images of original records and create indexes containing key information such as name, age, date, gender and location. Ancestry websites will later host those indexes, which will be free.

The first Canadian collection that will be available for World Archives Project participants is *Ontario, Canada Marriage Registers by Clergy 1896 – 1948*. These important records include approximately 24,000 names recordeded in marriage registrations compiled by members of the clergy under the Canadian Registration Act of 1896. Anyone can participate, and in the process get a *sneak preview* of collections not yet publicly available. Preserving historical records is both costly and time consuming. In recent years, governments, libraries, archives, the family history community and Web sites have worked hard to preserve historical records. Due to their age and condition, many Canadian records are in urgent need of preservation. Ancestry.ca hopes to accelerate the rate at which Canadian records are being preserved by providing the community with the tools it needs to assist with this significant task.

Dome Leak Threatens City Archives

The Providence, Rhode Island city archivist says leaks in City Hall's dome are threatening old records covering centuries of Rhode Island history. The leaks in the dome have stained the walls and have already damaged boxes of old photos, which are warped and stained from sitting in water. Plastic tarps have been placed over some material to prevent further damage. The problem has been getting worse each year for the past few years, but so far, little has been done to get the problem solved.

Legend Seekers

Watch for the first TV series about the family history of ordinary everyday people. Legend Seekers preview episode The Lively Family Massacre will be broadcast on public television in select local markets starting with WFYI-TV Indianapolis, on Thursday, March 26th at 9:30pm. Filming for the historical reenactment scenes was done on location in Indiana at Connor Prairie in Fishers, Indiana. The pilot episode is a half-hour documentary that traces the family legend of Southern Illinois resident, Pam Frazer. The host, Madonna Davis, who is a genealogist and a Daughter of the American Revolution, helps trace Pam's direct connection to some of the first white settlers to arrive in Southern Illinois in 1813. During Pam's search for her ancestors. she uncovers a handwritten letter addressed to William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame) mentioning Pam's ancestors by name, and 200 year old graves of her ancestors, the Livelys, who were massacred by a group of American Indians.

The remainder of the series is about everyday ordinary people who have legendary family stories, and about the process to authenticate, discover and reenact these legends. Through travel, research, and genealogy, fascinating experts and cutting-edge science are introduced (DNA, archivists, historians, satellite imagery, ground penetrating radar, etc.) to engage the audience along this journey. A trailer for the new series can be seen at: www.Legendseekers.com/media.html

South Carolina African American Records

Lowcountry Africana and The South Carolina Department of Ar-

chives and History plans to digitize and publish online more than 25,000 historic documents for researchers of African American genealogy and history. The records include:

- *Colonial and Charleston, South Carolina estate inventories dated 1732-1867*

  These records will be digitized and indexed in detail, including the names of more than 30,000 slaves.

- *Inventories of estates in early South Carolina probate records*

  Often slaves were listed in family groupings in probate records. They also detail the material possessions so important for researchers of social and cultural history.

- *South Carolina bills of sale*

  More than 14,000 South Carolina bills of sale, most of them for slaves, will also be digitized for online viewing. These documents, dating from 1773 to 1872, are already indexed on the South Carolina Archives Web site but have not yet been digitized.

When finished, the index and digital images of the documents will be available at no cost on Lowcountry Africana (www.lowcountryafricana.com), and also in the Records Index for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (www.archivesindex.sc.gov). Anyone may volunteer to help index the records at: www.afriquest.com Copies of the microfilms of the original historic documents were donated by FamilySearch International.

The Department of Archives and History is the official repository for South Carolina's state and local government records. The Online Records Index of this organization provides free index access to over 300,000 documents and digital images of some 100,000 pages of South Carolina public records. Lowcountry Africana is an all-volunteer research project and free website devoted to the family and cultural history of African Americans in the rice-growing areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida, home to the rich Gullah-Geechee cultural heritage. The Magnolia Plantation Foundation of Charleston, South Carolina sponsored the development of Lowcountry Africana.

Stranger than Fiction

Geronimo Is Object of Court Battle

Geronimo, the famous Apache warrior, is about to be the center of a battle, this one to be fought in a court of law. Harlyn Geronimo, a great grandson of the long deceased Apache chief has sued the Order of Skull and Bones, a collegiate society at Yale that has been there since 1832. The societies' membership roster would read like a *Who's Who.* Among its members are President George W. Bush and his grandfather, Prescott Bush.

Geronimo was a Chiricahua Apache chief, who, along with many other Apache leaders, fought to preserve the culture and the lifestyle of their people in the late 1800s. Geronimo fought both the Mexican and U.S. governments in southern Arizona and New Mexico. He died in 1909 of pneumonia while he was a prisoner at Fort Sill. Rather than give the body to the family so that Geronimo could receive a proper burial according to Apache tradition, the U. S. Government buried Geronimo in Oklahoma. Now his great-grandson wants to rebury his ancestor in accordance with Chiricahua tradition. The law appears to support the Apache cause. In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This law protects Native Americans' rights to their family member's remains, defines the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes and native Hawaiian organizations to Native American human remains as well as cultural objects.

Apparently, in 1918, Prescott Bush and other Bonesmen robbed the grave of Geronimo and carried his remains back to Yale, where the Skull and Bones kept them in the tomb, referring to the Skull and Bones house in New Haven, Connecticut. Apparently the bones are in a glass display case along with a few other stolen artifacts. The robbing of Geronimo's remains was an act called "crooking," a competition among Bonesmen to steal valuable things. The objects are then kept hidden in the tomb, which has extremely limited access to members of the society.

In 2006, Marc Wortman, a writer and former senior editor of the Yale Alumni Magazine, found an old letter tucked into a book in the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale. Soon, an article was published in the magazine, which told about the letter. The letter was written on June 7, 1918, by one member of the society, Winter Mead, to another, F. Trubee Davison. The letter stated that the Skull and Bones had Geronimo's bones, which had been dug up by other members of the group at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Prescott Bush was one of the individuals who dug up the bones. Author Alexandra Robbins picked up the story to use in her book, *Secrets of the Tomb*, a book about the secret societies at Yale, with special emphasis on the Skull and Bones and its paths to power.

Harlyn Geronimo learned about the letter, and has sued Yale and the Order of Skull and Bones so he can recover the remains. President Barack Obama, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of the Army Pete Geren are listed as defendants in the 32-page lawsuit filed by Harlyn Geronimo in the District of Columbia. Yale has declined comment to the news media about the case except to say that it does not speak for the Order of the Skull and Bones. No one would comment or return phone calls from the Skull and Bones.

A few researchers do not believe the Bonesmen found Geronimo's bones. Some have concluded that the Bonesmen could not have even found Geronimo's grave in 1918. David H. Miller, a history professor at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, is mentioned in the Yale Alumni Magazine's article about the letter. He cites historical accounts that the grave was unmarked and overgrown with weeds in the 1920s, until a Fort Sill librarian persuaded some local Apaches to identify the site for him. Miller assumes that the remains they did dig up at Fort Sill could have been an Indian, but it probably wasn't Geronimo."

None of this has deterred Geronimo's great-grandson from pursuing his case. Harlyn Geronimo is offended by the actions of the Bonesmen. It appears that we have an interesting court battle to watch.

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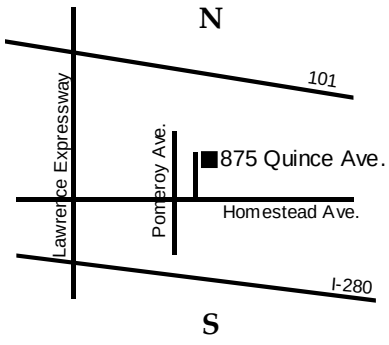

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