

Past Tracks



A Publication of the Southern Arizona Genealogy Society

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Contributors

Mike Day
Becky McCreary
Irene Little
Bob Pitcher
Lucy Redding

Southern Arizona Genealogy Society meeting

Thursday, December 18, 2025
1:00 - 3:00

Recreation Center at La Posada
(directions on page 29)

Hybrid Meeting (In-person and Zoom)



December SAGS Meeting will feature Ed Storey talking about using English Archives. Also featured will be Pat Edwards showing how to use Welsh and Irish Tithe maps to find ancestor information.

President's Message

Winter Solstice and Holidays



December, with the Winter Solstice and important holidays like Christmas and Hanukkah, is a time for holiday parties, worship and a break from school or work. My childhood memories include trips to the relative's farms in Iowa, warm kitchens full of the aroma of baking bread, card playing, music and new flannel shirts for the farm men. In my time as a father with small children, we made many trips to Missouri to visit my parents and in-laws. Drinking eggnog, telling family stories (some of which have required research to substantiate), walks and drives around the hills of Southeast Missouri where bare trees revealed the limestone bluffs and streams that were hidden in Spring and Summer.

At my mother's house, there were always bird feeders. Typical winter birds included Cardinals, Blue Jays, Juncos, Chickadees, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Sparrows and the occasional hawk or owl. Sometimes, the nights would be clear and we would watch the stars, always looking for Orion's belt and scabbard.

At our December monthly meeting, Ed Storey will talk about using English Archives for learning more about English ancestors, most of these archives are free and searchable by Google. Ed has spoken several times over the last few years and I've always learned something useful from his talks. Pat Edwards will show us how to use Welsh and Irish Tithe Maps to explore these ancestries. When I lived in England from 1978 to 1980, I spent many weekends in Wales and my earliest Day ancestor may have been Welsh, so I will be very interested in her talk.

Please talk about Genealogy and SAGS with your friends and family... Bring a friend to our next monthly meeting. Genealogy can be a lonely activity without the support of friends and family, so let's do this together.

SAGS December Monthly Meeting

On December 18, there will be two topics presented by SAGS members. First, Ed Storey will share his experience using **English archives** and resources for researching his English family.

The second topic will be Pat Edwards showing how to use **Welsh and Irish tithe maps** to find ancestor information.

In the second half of the meeting, we will have a holiday party and everyone is encouraged to dress like one of their ancestors and briefly tell the ancestor's story.

Please, remember to wear your name tag.

SAGS January Monthly Meeting

On January 15, Courtney Car from the Pacific War Museum in Texas will introduce the mission and activities of the **Society of Sons and Daughters of WWII Veterans**. You will learn how family members can participate and become members. The Society provides guidance on researching, verifying, and preserving WWII service records for family trees. She will emphasize importance of safeguarding wartime legacies for future generations. The society also provides access to resources, archives, and online communities for WWII family history research.

<http://pacificwarmuseum.org/s&d>

Dress like your Ancestors:

The date is fast approaching—the Dress Like Your Ancestor program will be on Thursday, Dec 18. You need not spend a lot on your outfit, try shopping in your closet for clothing for the relative you portray or bring a prop to enhance your story. Tell us about your relative or write a short story about this person in your family tree to read to the audience. Come, join the meeting in person for this unique and fun experience.



Bob Doss is his 5th great-grandfather, Revolutionary War Patriot James Weethe.



Darillyn Doss



Mike Day as a Coal Miner Ancestor

“Just a Little Something.”

Often at holiday time we hear people say they want to give a gift, ‘just a little something.’ The Green Valley-Sahuarita Genealogy Library has just the gift for you, a library card to the Genealogy Library for \$10 which expires in 2 years. With the card cardholders can check out books, a special feature of a research library, and consult our knowledgeable volunteer Library staff. Also, there is a fine collection of books which focus on family histories. Stop in and see us on the La Posada campus next to Java on Monday to Friday from 9-3 or Sat 9-12 for ‘just a little something’, that special gift.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THESE TWO EVENTS IN 2026:

Annual Seminar

SAGS will hold its annual genealogy seminar one day on **Saturday, February 7, 2026** in the Recreation Center at La Posada. There will be 2 local speakers, am and pm, Amy Urman and Moreen “Mo” Ferdie. Each speaker will present two topics. A catered lunch will be available the Rec. Center at La Posada for a modest fee.

Please note the date on your calendar to attend this annual event. There will be a raffle and also door prizes. More information to come.

Will you please help us with set up/take down and other tasks? Sign up sheets requesting volunteers are on display at every monthly meeting.

Anniversary Party:

How many organizations in Green Valley have been around for 50 years? The original name was **Green Valley Genealogy Club**. A few years later it was changed to **Green Valley Genealogy Society**, the in 2018 renamed **Southern Arizona Genealogy Society**. We will celebrate our 50 years of growth with a celebration open to members and the community on **Thursday, March 19, 2026** in the Recreation Center of La Posada. Please mark your calendar to celebrate our Society 50 years to honor our long time members and friends and join the in-person festivities.

Calling for Volunteers!

SAGS needs volunteers to serve as:

- Past Tracks Editor
- SAGS Board Vice President
- Director of Membership

Please refer to the website for description of responsibilities and contact a member of the SAGS board if you would like to help.



Education Opportunities



*Please inform the facilitators/instructors if you will attend their session. Some classes require a Zoom link.
The latest SIG information is always on the [SAGS website calendar](#).*

Let's Talk Genealogy (SIG)

First Weds of each month: Dec 3; Jan 7; Feb 4

9:30 - 11:30

In-person Meeting

Genealogy can be confusing. Sometimes, you just need to be with some friends to talk about a research problem. Maybe you want to share a breakthrough you have been working on for years. That's the purpose of "Let's Talk Genealogy"— friends talking about genealogy and family history. Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month. Meeting location: La Posada Pavilion, Building #670, 2nd Floor, Synergy Room.

Storytellers: Writing Family Stories

Second Tues of each Fall/Winter months: Dec 9; Jan 13; Feb 10

10 - noon

In-person Meeting

The Storytellers class for SAGS members meets on the second Tuesday of the month October through May at Friends in Deed. This is a class for those who want to write to preserve their personal stories and those of ancestors. **This is not a drop-in SIG; you must register in advance to join the class.** For more information, please contact the instructor, Becky McCreary: rebeccamccreary764@gmail.com

Family Tree Maker SIG (Updated Schedule!)

Third Monday every other month: Nov 17; Jan 19; Mar 16

10:00am - 12:00 noon

Zoom meeting

Explore the features of FTM with a hands-on approach! An email with the Zoom meeting link will be sent out approximately 5 days prior to the meeting to those on the group email list. To have your name added to the group list, send an email to webmgr@azsags.org.

SIG Leader: Karen Feeney

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Beginning Genealogy SIG

Fourth Thurs of each month: Jan 22 (No meetings in Dec due to holidays); Feb 26

3:00 - 4:00

* Hybrid Meeting: Green Valley Genealogy Library, and Zoom.

This meeting is open to non-members & members. It is a great way to get started with researching your family tree. This group meets the 4th Thursday of the month. For more details, contact Jon Otto, Group Leader, at jonotto48@yahoo.com and check the SAGS Events Calendar for future meeting dates.

* In-Person Meeting location: Green Valley Genealogy Library, 665 S. Park Centre Ave., Green Valley.

DNA Special Interest Group

Fourth Friday of each month: Jan 23 (No meetings in Dec due to holidays); Feb 27

9:30 - 11:30

In-person Meeting

LaPosada Recreation Center, 685 S. LaPosada Circle, Bldg. #37, Green Valley, AZ

This SIG will start with the basics through the experience of its leader, Mike Day. Mike is a former teacher and technologist who brings a decade of experience as a user of DNA testing services and a career of understanding technologies. If you have any questions or would like more information, contact Mike Day at michaelhday@me.com

News from the *Green Valley - Sahuarita Genealogy Library* at La Posada

Becky McCreary, Library publicity



How does a book get from here to here?

It is well known that new additions (and editions) are not added to the Green Valley-Sahuarita Genealogy Library shelves by magic nor are placed there by little elves after the Library lights are turned off. But how do they get chosen, catalogued, and shelved?

- It begins with Library Team Leader Darillyn Doss. She first checks the physical condition of the book or materials. If it needs repair and can be repaired, Candy Cullen is the resident mender of broken books. Her career experience of bookbinding is an asset to the Library Team.
- Next is accessioning — the process of adding new materials to the Library. Darillyn checks to see if the book is already in the Library catalog. If the donated book is a newer version or in better condition, then it will replace the older book.
- The new book goes to Catalogers Rey and Jon Otto who print and attach the call number labels for the book spine, card, card pocket inside the book.
- The books with the catalog numbers go back to Darillyn, who types the information into the online catalog. Then the book finds its new home on a shelf in one of the 15 bookcases.
- Once the book has a place in the Library it is watched over by the *Book Tenders*. Bob Doss leads a crew of volunteers who adopt a bookcase to keep in order. They are: Ron Agte, Cindy Albert, Chris Arundel, Candy Cullen, Bob Doss, Pat Edwards, Susan James, Jon Otto, Anne Pinckney, Marilyn West, and Barbara Zimmer.

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- If the book is not catalogued, the book remains on Darillyn's desk. She checks the value of the book on Amazon. If it can net 70 percent more than when sold in *Books for Sale* or at a SAGS program *Silent Auction*, the book is listed on Amazon. If it sells on Amazon, she and Bob package, label, and mail the books to the buyer. She handles all the financial aspects of the online account.
- If the book is like new or of high research interest, volunteers Janis Slaughter and Barbara Zimmer might choose it for a SAGS program *Silent Auction*. Darillyn writes a brief description of the book and e-blasts it to members prior to the meeting.
- And the book continues to live. Susan James is the *Books for Sale* lady. She determines a price and places it on an alphabetical list that hangs on the bookcase and the book is placed in a category on *Books for Sale* shelf in the bookcase. If a book is not moving, it is put on the \$1 shelf on the *Sale* cart.
- One last chance for a book is at a SAGS monthly program. Along with research publications magazines, miscellaneous items which may be of interest to researchers, Candy Cullen arranges them on the *Freebie Table*. There are always treasures to be found!

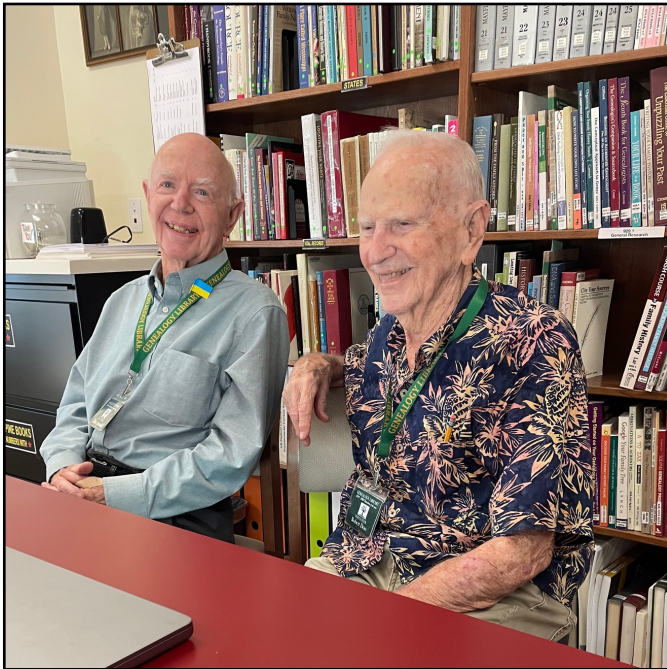
All the money received from the *Silent Auction*, *Books for Sale*, Amazon, etc. is in the Library's bank account for Library supplies and books.

After all this cooperative work to find a place in the Library catalog or a new life for a book removed from the shelves and catalog, you can see that books live on.



Happy Holidays from the Library Team!

THE GENEALOGY LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS AND 2 PATRONS



L-R: CHRIS ARUNDEL , BOB DOSS



L-R: BARBARA ZIMMER, JANIS SLAUGHTER. SEATED SUSAN JAMES



L-R: PAT EDWARDS AND CANDY CULLEN. SEATED, RON AGTE.



L-R: MARILYN WEST, MARTI STEBBINS, ANNE PINCKNEY. SEATED, BILL SIMS, PATRON.

THE GENEALOGY LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS AND 2 PATRONS



L-R: JON OTTO, CINDY ALBERT



JERRY HUGGINS

These volunteers are available in the Library every week, M-F 9-3 and Sat 9-12. Their combined genealogy experiences represent 1000s of hours. Stop in for a tour of the Library which located next door to Posada Java on the La Posada Campus and find out how they can help you.



**L-R: KERRY COLLIER, LUCY REDDING
SEATED: TOM SWENSON, PATRON.**



**L-R: DARILLYN DOSS, SUSAN BURDICK, FORMER
MANAGER OF LIBRARY**

Southern Arizona Genealogy Society Storytellers share their stories



Storytellers writing and reading at a recent class. The 10-minute, in-class writing was “A food that connects you to your childhood.” Everyone had a different food but the good memories were equal.

Left to right: Alexis Alexander, Ann Richwine, Susan Hulbert, Jon Otto, Paul McCreary, Barb Macgillivray, Joan Iserman, Martha Ashton, and Pat Burgess. Bob Pitcher was traveling.

The class is beginning its seventh year, with three charter members: Joan, Jon, and Paul.

Food took on another dimension. The Storytellers brought over 25 pounds of non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, and hygiene products for the Community Food Bank.

Becky McCreary



*For
your
Reading
Pleasure*

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Getting thrown out of my Birth Country

Irene Marenin Little

My first clear memory is walking through the woods at the border of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) and Germany/Bavaria. It was May of 1945. I was pushing a baby carriage with a doll inside and was quite content. That did not last very long. In a very short time, the carriage was requisitioned by the American army for a young girl that seemed to be suffering from an appendicitis attack. At four years old, I was not very happy to give up my baby carriage.

How did we get into these woods near Schwandorf, Bavaria close to the Czech-German border? That is a long story of what happens to civilians in a war.

May 4, 1941 was an important date for me. I was born on that date in Pilsen in the middle of WWII, Czechoslovakia/Bohemia [previously the Bohemian-Moravian kingdom, Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland/German Reich, Czechoslovakia and now the Czech Republic (1993) called Czechia]. My mother hoped I would be born in Prague the same as my 2 brothers. But I did not cooperate. I was two weeks late and my mother decided to return to Pilsen. In 1937, my father had gotten a job at the Skoda Werke in Pilsen as a mechanical engineer working on locomotives.

At the time of my birth our family was Stateless, meaning we had no citizenship in any country. My father was born in Yavoriv/Javoriv in the Lviv Oblast (province) of western Ukraine, part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in 1896, the middle child of 6. With the fall of the Empire after WWI the borders between countries were re-drawn and Yavoriv became part of Poland. There is no love lost between the Poles and the Ukrainians.



1942, Oma Kraus, Irene 1, Roman 5, Otto 3

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My father, who was studying in Vienna, Austria in the 1930s refused to return to his birthplace to become a Polish citizen, he lost his citizenship and became stateless. When my parents married in 1934, my mother lost her Czech citizenship and became stateless too, since a wife has to adopt the citizenship of her husband. All three of us children were also born stateless since by law we had the citizenship of our father.

My mother, Maria Franziska Kraus, called Mia, was born in Saaz in 1902. Saaz (Zatec) Bohemia/Sudentland lies in what is now the northern part of the Czech Republic, a hops and beer brewing city about 1 hr north of Prague. About 95% of the population of Saaz were ethnic Germans who had lived there for centuries as part of the Holy Roman Empire. My mother was Austrian by birth. She changed citizenships 6 times without ever moving from the Saaz-Prague-Pilsen area. She was Austrian (1902-1918)--Czech (1919--1934)--Polish/Ukrainian (1934) when she married my father)--German (1938-Munich pact)--stateless (sometime after she married my father)--German citizen (Reichsdeutsch)(1944-1962). US citizen until her death (1962-1989).



I remember very little of my first 4 years in Pilsen. I used to have wonderful bi-lingual conversations with my Czech friend. She would tell me her secrets in Czech and I would answer in German and visa-versa, much to the surprise of neighbors.

During the war when food was rationed, my mother took Otto (about 5) and me (about 3) one day to the grocery store and asked the two of us to wait outside. The grocery lines where very long. When my mother came out, neither Otto nor I could be found. It is a lot to ask of small children to wait outside for hours. My mother was frantic. Eventually she gave up searching and went home only to find us there, much to her relief. She was furious with Otto and ready to spank him until my father intervened and told her to ask Otto what had happened. Otto said (of course in German): He spoke very slowly at that time.

*Marriage of Myron Marenin & Maria Kraus,
11 Aug 1934*

“You were gone so long that I thought you had forgotten us”

“How did you get home?”

“I followed the streetcar tracks till I came to the Bahnhof (train station) and then I knew how to get home”.

That was a walk of several kilometers for two very young kids (!) but Otto was bright enough to know what to do.

My father received his Diplom-Ingenieur certificate in 1929 from the Prague “Technische Hochschule” (equivalent of a master’s degree in engineering). He worked for Skoda Werke in Pilsen during WWII from 1937 to 1945 on various aspects of locomotives. From February 23, 1943 to March 28, 1944, he was assigned to Berlin to work as construction engineer for “Grossdeutscher Locomotivfabriken” (Locomotive industry). During that period, he was reassigned for 6 weeks to work for Henschel in Kassel, Germany for fortifying locomotives. The downside of the assignment was that he was considered a collaborator by the Czechs at the end of the war.

After he returned from Berlin, we all applied for and were granted German Citizenship on September 9, 1944. We became Reichsdeute-full citizens of the German Reich, not Volksdeutsche-citizen of Germany as descents of Germans living in other countries. My parents had to show documentation that there were no Jewish ancestors in our family for 5 generations. That sounds like going from the frying pan into the fire, but in the long run it worked out for the best. The Czech people had a lot of resentment against the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia with justification since the Czech nationals were treated badly by the Germans.

Towards the end of the war, everybody speculated about the war. We heard that the Russians were advancing on Pilsen from the East and the Americans from the West. The Russians were rumored to rape, pillage and ship all the refugees in the camps to the East. On May 6, 1945 the 3rd army under General Patton arrived in Pilsen, much to our relief. On May 8, 1945 the Czech people overthrew the German government and war effectively ended for us. Eventually Prague was liberated by the Soviets but not before thousands of civilians were killed in the final fighting.

After the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the Germany, things were very worrisome for German citizens in Pilsen because any Germans could be arrested without justification. Shortly after the “Umsturtz” (liberation) a group of Czech soldiers came to our house in interrogate us and look for weapons. Since my father had worked at the large ammunition factory of Skodawerke, my parents were very worried for all of our safety. They especially worried that I as a 4-yr old would not understand the gravity of the situation and I would greet the soldiers with a “Heil Hitler”. Fortunately, I had been well briefed and I greeted them politely in Czech,

much to the relief of my parents. Eventually, the soldiers left without doing any damage and finding no weapons. During the next couple of weeks, the Czechs rounded up German citizens and put them into 5 internment camps around the city of Pilsen. According to Madeleine Albright's Autobiography (Madam Secretary: A Memoir, 2005) Germans were rounded-up in three waves. In the first wave were Nazis and collaborators such as our family. Eventually about 1.6 million ethnic Germans were rounded up and expelled from Czechoslovakia purely because they were of German origin—Ethnic cleansing before it was called ethnic cleansing. Tens of thousands of Germans died in this process. We were lucky to survive and that nothing exceptionally bad happened to us except we lost all of our possessions.

Later in May they came to our house and asked my parents to come to the police station and register. No reason given. They did so, but they did not return home and my 69-year-old grandmother, my mother's mother Franziska Kraus (Oma), was left with her 3 young grandchildren--Roman almost 8 yrs, Otto 6 yrs and myself 4 yrs. We did not know what had happened to our parents. About 2 weeks later, the police asked my grandmother to register at the police station. She had the presence of mind to bring us children with her. At the police station after my grandmother registered all of us, we were put into the cellar of the police station for the night. That dark cellar was quite scary. The next day, we were taken to one of five camps around Pilsen and never saw our home again. We did not know where our parents were, but one day my brothers in roaming the camp saw our parents in the next camp and we were reunited. We were lucky!! My grandmother or mother had had enough sense to stuff valuables into Otto's coat pocket (and probably Roman's clothes) and also sewed some money/valuables into my coat. That was all the possessions we ever had from our lives in the "Sudentenland".

In late May of 1945, Patton authorized the removal of all German citizens to Germany. Our family was in a convoy of 5 trucks that drove us from the camps around Pilsen to near the German border town of Schwandorf, Bavaria, but still in Czechoslovakia. We were told to get out since now we were "HOME" to a place nobody in our family had never been to. We only found out where we were when a soldier showed us our location on a map. We were lucky to be transported to Bavaria. That part of Germany was under American occupation which was the least hostile of all the occupation forces to the German people. We were told that all the trucks would go to the same place and not to worry if different members of your family ended up in different trucks. But after arriving in one town, the 5 trucks

went off in different directions. My mother remembered clearly that part of one family was on one truck and the rest of the family on another with the two trucks driving off in different directions. We can only hope that they managed to get reunited eventually with the help of the Red Cross. With millions of refugees all over Germany and Europe, that was a difficult proposition. We were lucky to be evacuated by the Americans this early. Many bad things happened to Germans left in Czechoslovakia in the later waves before and after being removed.

From that place in the woods, we started walking to get to any village and then to the next and the next, etc. At the villages we were put up for the night and given food eventually ending up in Schwandorf. For about 6 weeks we wandered through Germany always heading west to get away as far as possible from the Russians. We would stop at the next town/village and were put up in churches and schools. Food was provided. At least I don't remember being hungry. There were millions of other refugees wandering through Germany trying to find a place to stay. Eventually we got to Marktheidenfeld on the Main River. There we got good news. As of July 2 1945, we would live in the small farming community of Altfeld in northern Bavaria which had

an original population of about 500 people, The American Occupation authorities had authorized that German refugees should be quartered in small farming villages. The authorities would go through all the houses in Altfeld and would requisition the rooms for refugees that the authorities believed would not be needed by the farming families. Farming villages were about the only places in Germany that were not bombed out. So, villages were ideal places for the placement of refugees. But you can image how well received this decree was by the farmers(!) when over 500 refugees were quartered in their little community.

We had been on the road since middle/late part of May to 1 July--~42 days. First by truck from Pilsen to the border with Germany--about 70 km (~1 day). Walking from the border to Schwandorf ~70 km (~10 days). From Schwandorf to Marktheidenfeld ~220km (~22 days (2 ½ hrs by modern car)); to Altfeld ~7 km (1.5 hrs). On the way we spent



1954-Irene Marenin, 13 yrs, on the way to School in Kassel, Germany

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several days in Wurzburg and Bamberg and other places. We finally had a place to put our head down in Altfeld for the coming nights. We stayed in Altfeld for the next 4 years until 1949.

Eventually, my mother ended up working as secretary to the mayor of Altfeld. She had been a foreign correspondent for a bank in Pilsen. No former Nazi was allowed to work for the government or teach school. All three of us started school in Altfeld with very substandard teachers. In December 1945 my father left to find work in Munich with Krause-Maffei in Allach-Munich designing steam locomotives. But he could not find housing for us in Munich even with the help of Krause-Maffei. He left for Kassel to work for Henschel (for whom he worked under the Germans in 1943/44). In 1949 we were reunited in Kassel. Eventually, we built a house and stayed in Kassel until March 1957, I finished 9th grade and we emigrated to the US under the refugee program.

Cause of Death

Michael Day

One of the family history details I like to understand is the cause of death of my ancestors. The cause of death incorporates genetic and environmental factors that may be relevant to my health and the health of my children. With modern death certificates, we have more information than in 18th and 19th centuries, but I've learned that cause of death can be incomplete or inaccurate. Filling out the death certificate is usually a low-priority activity for most doctors and seldom reviewed or challenged by other doctors. Many people, particularly older people, have a number of chronic illnesses that may contribute to their death, and sometimes it is difficult to identify which illness caused the death.

Relationship	Birth	Life Expec	Death	Age	Age - Life Expec	Cause	Contributing Diseases	Occupation
Father	1915	59	1998	83	24	Alzheimer's Disease		Chemical Engineer, Coal Miner
Mother	1924	62	2015	90	28	Respiratory Failure	Diabetes	Teacher
Paternal Grandfather	1875	44	1933	58	14	Stroke	Tuberculosis	Coal Miner
Paternal Grandmother	1879	43	1941	62	19	Pneumonia		Housekeeping
Maternal Grandfather	1890	43	1963	73	30	Aortic Aneurysm?		Professor, Farmer
Maternal Grandmother	1893	45	1983	90	45	Congestive Heart Failure	Diabetes	Housekeeping
Great Grandfather	1837	40	1894	57	17	Tuberculosis		Farmer
Great Grandfather	1844	41	1929	85	44	Pneumonia		Housekeeping
Great Grandfather	1845	40	1903	57	17	Complication of Diseases	Tuberculosis?	Coal Miner, Farmer
Great Grandmother	1860	43	1942	82	39	Acute dilatation of the heart	Advanced age	Housekeeping
Great Grandfather	1862	44	1937	74	30	Chronic Heart Trouble		Blacksmith
Great Grandmother	1865	41	1895	30	-11	Tubercular Peritonitis		Housekeeping
Great Grandfather	1863	40	1939	76	36	Kidney Failure		Farmer
Great Grandmother	1868	42	1960	92	50	Influenza	Congestive Heart Failure	Housekeeping

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A few notes on the chart: Most of these causes are from death certificates and obituaries, a few (marked with a question mark) are my speculation. My grandfather died in Sri Lanka in 1963, there was no autopsy or western doctor present. He lived for a couple of days after a major cardiovascular event and the family speculation is that it was an Aortic Aneurysm. "Complication of diseases" was the notation in my great grandfather's obituary. This usually meant he suffered from several diseases, any one of which could have killed him.

I grabbed life expectancy from the web based on sex and age. This is life expectancy at birth for all Americans. However, particularly in the 19th century, rural people lived up to 10 years longer than urban people. Also, white Americans expected to live 5 years longer than African Americans. Infant mortality was high and that biased life expectancy. In any event, my ancestors, with one exception, outlived the life expectancy of the time by many years, even though some of them suffered from tuberculosis. I included a column that was the difference between age at death and life expectancy. This is to get a sense of whether the ancestor outperformed or underperformed life expectancy of the time.

The average age at death across the three generations is 72 years. If the cases of tuberculosis (both diagnosed and suspected) are excluded, then the average age at death is 81 years. Three of my ancestors (my mother, grandmother and great grandmother) all lived past 90 years of age. It is interesting that my mitochondrial DNA came from this maternal line of long-lived women. It is also interesting that there is no cancer on this chart... maybe there were cancers that were hidden.

What are the lessons for me? Disease, heart and lung conditions predominate in the family. If I can minimize disease and pay attention to cardiac and lung health, I should be able to live longer than the national average for my demographic. I am already older than the median age in this group of 14 ancestors.

I have two brothers and a sister who are all living. They suffer from some of the same diseases as our ancestors... diabetes and lung disfunction. Family genetics are not our destiny but they certainly inform our health and longevity.

AN UNUSUAL SOURCE: VIRGINIA COURT RECORDS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Bob Pitcher

Part II: The Families

In Part I, I outlined a long-enduring dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania over the southwest boundary of Pennsylvania, and the implications of the resolution of that dispute for the new United States. The records referred to in the title here are a by-product of that interstate squabble. In order to firm up its claim in the 1770s, Virginia actually organized three counties on land now a part of Pennsylvania, and those counties held court sessions whose records have been preserved.

In this Part, I'll trace how two parts of my family, the Vanmeters and the Hedges, came to that part of America, and then how they, and a small branch of my wife's family, the Loudens, appear in those court records.

My Family: The Vanmeters

I wrote about the Vanmeter family in my father's line in the December 2024 and January 2025 issues of *Past Tracks*, under the title, "My Huguenot Ancestors." The Vanmeters were Dutch, and settled in the Hudson Valley a few years before Nieuw Nederland became New York. The Vanmeters were traders; the change in government didn't faze them. Marrying into French Huguenot immigrant families for a couple of generations, the Vanmeters engaged at first in transporting and selling flour and cattle up and down the Hudson, and trading furs with the Indians. In the early 18th century, they expanded into large-scale stock raising in central and southern New Jersey, which was then a new colony just opening up. My earlier account left the family there.

John the Indian Trader. The early Vanmeters had many children that lived to have their own children. Many of the boys for several generations were named Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, which may show the family's cast of mind. The eldest son in the third generation here, Jan Joosten, named for his grandfather the immigrant, branched out. Other family members could take care of the stock-raising in New York and New Jersey, John the Indian Trader, as he was known, was an explorer, land speculator, outfitter, and fur-trader in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and northwestern Virginia. John's brother Isaac shared many of his adventures, and had some of his own.

In the late 1720s, John got a land grant from Maryland's proprietor, Lord Baltimore, encompassing much of the Monocacy River Valley, including what became Frederick City, in which John is said to have been the first legal, settled resident. He then brought German settlers there from New York and Pennsylvania – and I would conjecture that those settlers were outfitted for the trip by the Vanmeters. The other major landholder in the Monocacy Valley was Joseph Hedges, an English immigrant whose family had settled first in northern Delaware. It looks as

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though the Hedges had brought capital with them, since they took up land speculation soon after they came.

A few years later, and John and Isaac were in Williamsburg, arranging with Virginia's Governor Gooch to open the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley and the valley of the South Branch of the Potomac to settlement. Pursuant to an agreement in the early 1720s, the Iroquois had relinquished their claims to this territory. The upper Shenandoah to the south had already been opened. The northern part, however, lay at least partly in the enormous Fairfax Grant, and Virginia's right to dispose of it wasn't clear. That didn't stop Governor Gooch, who deeded 40,000 acres to the Vanmeter brothers, for sale to anyone who would improve and settle the land. John and Isaac soon sold most of the grant off to Joost or Joseph Hite, who seems to have been a brother-in-law to them, and left it to him to deal with Lord Fairfax.

Isaac retained a tract known as Indian Old Fields along the South Branch, near where Moorfield, now West Virginia, was settled three decades later. Isaac established himself on this land. A very young George Washington visited him there in 1748, during the first of George's surveying trips for Lord Fairfax. In 1756, with trouble with the French in the air, Washington ordered a fort to be built on that land, to be called Fort Pleasant. The next year, when trouble started, Isaac, working in his fields, didn't make it to the fort in time and was killed by a raiding party of Shawnee and Delaware. Washington made at least one more trip to the area – where he also probably had holdings -- in 1784, and noted that the fort was still there.

For himself, John also had kept several large tracts of land along Opequon Creek in what's now Berkeley County, West Virginia, and made his own settlement of the title with Lord Fairfax. He had settled on this property by 1740, which was to remain one center of the Vanmeter family's activities for at least a couple more generations.

Abraham Vanmeter. I'm descended from two of the Indian Traders' sons, one from each of his two marriages. The first died young and doesn't enter this story. The second was Abraham Vanmeter, whose dates are 1720 to 1783. He grew up in Maryland, and married Joseph Hedges' daughter Ruth. Indeed, the two families were closely allied for several generations, and often intermarried. Hedges had also taken up land near the Vanmeter holdings in Virginia.

Like his father, Abraham was an explorer, outfitter, and land speculator. He worked with Squire Boone, Daniel's son, in opening to settlement the area around Louisville, and spent many of his middle and late years between Louisville and land he had acquired along the Ohio in the area Virginia disputed with Pennsylvania. In the early 1770s he was a leader on the Virginia side of the squabble, and he and others were cited by Pennsylvania courts for riot on account of it.

By 1776, however, Abraham seems to have withdrawn from the territory that became Pennsylvania, and focused on what's now the northern panhandle of West Virginia, then part of Virginia's Ohio County. There he built two Forts Vanmeter, for the protection of settlers preparing to go down the river. (There were at one time four additional Vanmeter forts between

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Wheeling and Louisville.) When Virginia organized Ohio County, to try to cement its claim to the area, Abraham contributed the land for the first courthouse and jail, and he and a nephew served as the first judges. The Ohio County court records show that the county reimbursed Abraham for the land, by order of November 3, 1778. He had resigned the judgeship by that point, and was involved instead in George Rogers Clark's campaign in the West – though whether he went the entire way with Clark's expedition I don't know.

Joseph Vanmeter. John's son was Joseph, born in Maryland, but spending his life along the Ohio. He was involved in the family's outfitting business, and seems to have left political activity to his father. In the Ohio County court records, Joseph seems regularly in attendance, for in the course of a year he was four times appointed to assess the estate of decedents and was twice sworn as a jurymen in civil cases. In 1780, the court noted that Joseph had proved to the court's satisfaction that he had served with a "Ranging Compy" in 1758 and '59, which would have made him eligible for a bonus land grant for ex-soldiers.

But Joseph didn't live to claim any bonus, or to succeed to his father's political activities. Later in 1780 he disappeared in crossing the Ohio on a hunting trip. Whether he drowned or was ambushed by Indians, who were much on the warpath that year, was never known.

The Court Records: My Family

Members of the Hedges family are also well represented in the Virginia court records, especially Solomon and Charles, who were Abraham Vanmeter's cousins (and Solomon a brother-in-law as well), and Solomon's son Silas. Silas was sworn a justice of the peace for West Augusta District in 1774, and, when the District was divided into the three counties, as JP for Ohio County. Sessions for West Augusta were held in what was first called Fort Dunmore, after a popular Virginia colonial governor. By 1776, though, Dunmore having proved his loyalty to King George, the place became and remained Pittsburgh. The Ohio County sessions were held at Black's Cabin, north of where Wheeling now sits. Silas often presided at those sessions, as it seems to have been close to Hedges' property. Solomon was in these later years also an Ohio County JP, a position that entitled both father and son to be called "gentlemen." Their names appear on the records of nearly every Ohio County court session.

The name Vanmeter appears less commonly. Abraham traveled a good deal between Virginia and Kentucky, and is identified in one record as of Berkeley County. For his part, Joseph, as noted, tended to the family business along the Ohio, trading, stock-raising, and outfitting. Henry Vanmeter, one of Abraham's brothers, held land in the area as well, and his name occasionally appears, though he held no office.

The records are not always very revealing, and Boyd Crumrine, who compiled them, says that in significant sections they are only partly legible or not at all. Individuals who are assigned duties, such as to serve as jurymen, to inventory and assess the estate of a decedent, or to inspect a local

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road, are named, but for many of the actual cases that came before the courts, only the parties' names are given, with no details.

Cindy's Family: The Loudens

I haven't written about my wife's family here before, but their history in America is as complicated as mine, as full of surprises, and a little bit longer. Cindy's father's line is Swedish and German, representing 19th century immigrants to Chicago, but her mother's is split among New England Pilgrims and Puritans (with some Nantucket Quakers), Virginians that go back to 1619 Jamestown, and Palatine Germans and British Quakers in Pennsylvania. The latter two of those lines – the Virginians and Pennsylvanians -- were united in the marriage of Esther Louden and Nathan Garrett in Louisville on July 6, 1786.

I know little of Esther Louden beyond the date and place of that wedding. FamilySearch has her name wrong – London – but Louden is clear on the marriage records. Those records are the marriage bond and the marriage register. Kentucky was then still a county of Virginia; the bond runs to "Patrick Henry, Governor of Virginia." In both, the name of Esther's father is left blank. Another source suggests the family was from or came to Kentucky by way of Pennsylvania and that Esther's father's name might have been Robert.

The court records for now long-vanished Yohogania County, Virginia, clear this up. They state that on September 28, 1778, the Court of that County named Robert Louden guardian of the seven children of James Louden, deceased May 26. The children are named, and Esther is one. Robert had earlier been named administrator of James's estate, for which he had returned an inventory. Robert soon took his own family, and his brother's children, to Kentucky. It's possible that they went with Abraham Vanmeter's brother Jacob, who moved there at this time. In those years, it wasn't advisable for settlers to descend the Ohio except in fairly large groups.

Years after Esther and Nathan's wedding, Nathan moved across the Ohio to what was then Wayne County, Indiana, and he died in 1826, perhaps on the same land, which was now in Henry County. Whether Esther was still alive to go to Indiana with him I don't know, though I do know that Cindy is descended from their son John, born in Kentucky in 1789.

Louden is mostly a Scottish name, and Scots were flocking to America in the years after The '45, during England's overreaction to that rebellion. Whether James or Robert or both were first-generation immigrants, perhaps through Philadelphia, isn't known. FamilySearch opines that Robert's wife Jane was born in Scotland, and he in Virginia, but gives no evidence for either.

Clearer in my mind is a picture of Robert and Jane Louden taking James's seven children, along with three or four of their own, down the Ohio River on a flatboat from Pittsburgh to Louisville in a bad winter, and during an Indian war....

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SOURCES:

The court records discussed here are to be found in: Boyd Crumrine, compiler, *Virginia Court Records in Southwestern Pennsylvania*, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1997 reprint.

A wonderful source on the Vanmeter family, from their Dutch origins down (in my line) through Joseph's son William Vanmeter, my fourth-great-grandfather, is <https://patburns.com/a-jan-joosten-van-meteren-line-intro/>.

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