

# My History Is America's History

15 Things You Can Do  
To Save  
America's Stories



A PUBLIC PROJECT OF  
**THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

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# 15

things you can do to save

# Americ

Follow your family's  
history and you  
will discover  
America's history.



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## 1

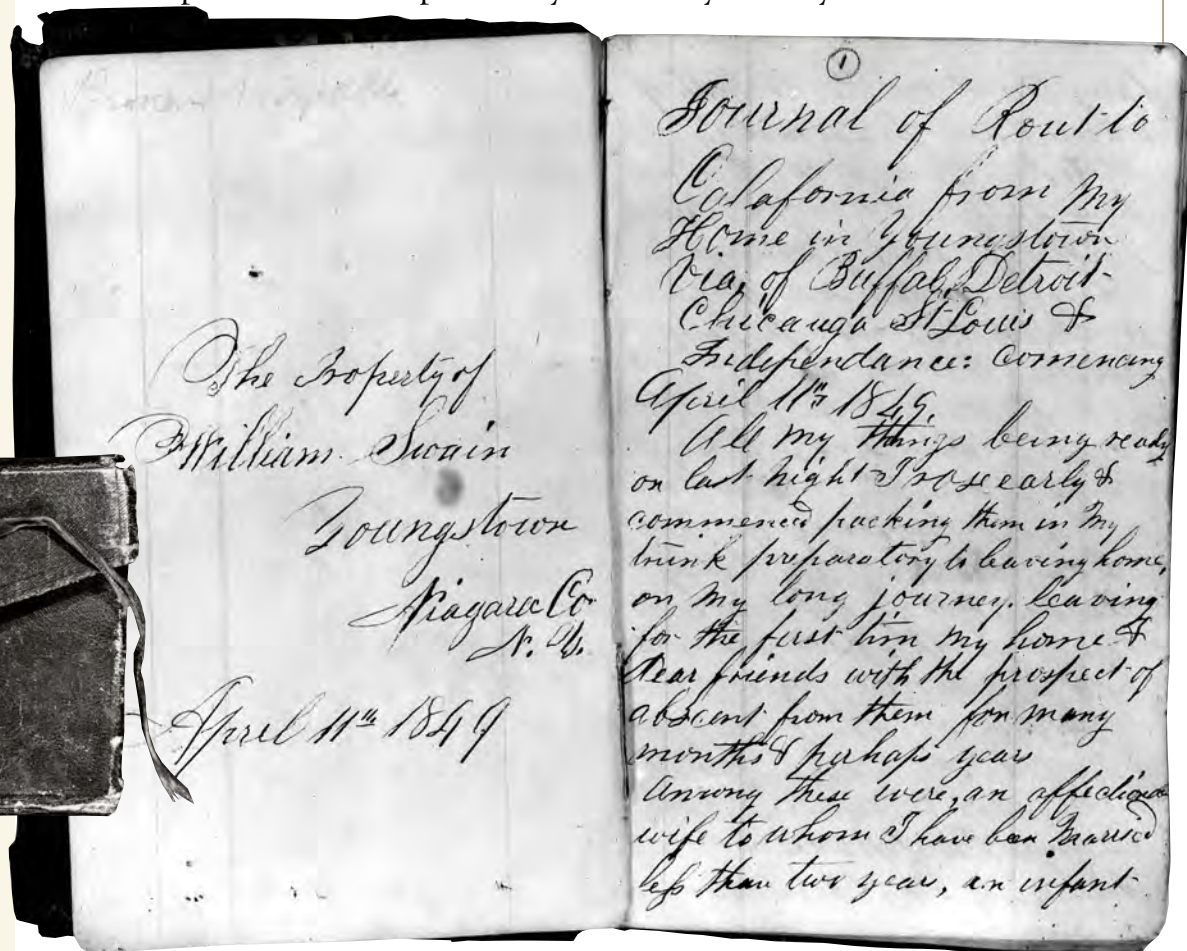
## Keeping a journal

Start small.  
Keep it fun.  
Write a little  
bit every day  
if you can.

If one of your parents had written a journal, wouldn't you want to read it? Do your children and grandchildren a favor, keep a journal yourself. Write your own personal history, what you think and feel. But be sure to write a few lines on what you see, read, and hear about—weddings, jobs, scandals, local news, politics, parades. All these things are American history in the making.

If you don't know where to start, look in a library or bookstore for books on keeping a journal or writing an autobiography. One piece of advice appears in nearly all these sources—relax. Start small. Keep it fun. Write a little bit every day if you can. Years from now you will have a document that will amaze you, fascinate your descendants, and show connections you never suspected to other parts of your family history and the nation's. ★

Below and right: The cover and first page of William Swain's journal.  
Facing page: Frederick Granger Williams, Rebecca Swain Williams, and a letter from William Swain to his wife, Sabrina.



# The Swains' story

MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

William Swain of Youngstown, New York, kept a journal of his trip west. For eight months he wrote almost every day, and left rich, detailed descriptions of his companions, the landscape, and the events of his journey. He also sent letters home to his wife, mother, and brother. Many of his letters and entries betray a sense of urgency—William Swain had joined the Gold Rush.



Swain's daughter Sara treasured the diary, and kept it and the letters safe for many years. In 1938, she donated the journal to Yale University. Her gift preserved the fragile document, and the story of her father's harrowing cross-country race to riches that he

never found. She later agreed to part with the letters between her parents, William and Sabrina. Their correspondence is filled with hope, the ache of separation, and deep religious faith. Like the journal, the letters are filled with American history—Sabrina's daily life on a farm in rural New York and William's days on the trail, in the mining camps, and aboard ship on the way home. Historian J. S. Holliday made the journal and the family's letters the heart of his book *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience*.

As the journal weaves among the threads of American history, it nearly intersects the story of another Swain's journey west. In 1815, Rebecca Swain, William's sister, married Frederick Granger Williams, who became a counselor to Joseph Smith, founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormons. Eleven years before her brother went west, Rebecca Swain Williams and her husband followed Joseph Smith into the frontier states of Missouri and Illinois. They endured different hardships on their journey, as religious persecution cost Smith his life and drove the Mormons



across the Midwest to their haven in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

William Swain's journal shows that he passed within 100 miles of his sister near the end of August 1849. Neither may have known the

other was anywhere near. Each was on his or her own path, and each part of a larger current of American history that would transform the West. But some 150 years later, their descendants made up for the missed opportunity with a reunion of their own.

One thread of the Swain family story leads to Velma Skidmore, the great-great granddaughter of Frederick Williams and Rebecca Swain. With the help of many relatives, she organized a gathering for both sides of the family that included trips to the original Williams homestead in Newburgh, Ohio, and the cobblestone home built in 1836 by Isaac Swain, William and Rebecca's father, in Youngstown, New York. The people at that reunion were living proof of the connections between family history and American history. Their ancestors were the characters of William Swain's journal, the recipients of his letters, the founding

families of the Mormon Church, and some of the first families of Youngstown, New York, and Newburgh, Ohio. Their joint family website is at [users.sisna.com/jfarr](http://users.sisna.com/jfarr).

A debt to William Swain also links them, for his patience and determination, just to keep a journal.



## 1799

Velma Skidmore's great-great-great-grandfather William Wheeler Williams establishes a township near present-day Cleveland, Ohio.

## 1805

Velma's great-great-great-grandfather Isaac Swain settles in Youngstown, New York, near Lake Ontario.

## 1815

Velma's great-great-grandmother Rebecca Swain, daughter of Isaac, marries Frederick Granger Williams, son of William Wheeler Williams.

## 1830

Rebecca and Frederick Williams become Mormons and follow Joseph Smith into Missouri and Illinois in search of a place to practice their religion freely.

## 1847

William Swain, brother of Rebecca, marries Sabrina Barrett.

## 1848

Reports begin to spread of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, near present-day Sacramento, California.

## April 11, 1849

William Swain leaves New York State to find gold and begins his diary. His path passes within 100 miles of his sister on her way to Utah.

## 1849

San Francisco grows from 6,000 to 15,000 residents in four months' time.

## November 14, 1849

William Swain arrives in the Sierra mining camps, approximately 125 miles from San Francisco.

## November 6, 1850

Unsuccessful in the mines, William Swain begins a seaward journey home with little gold or cash to show for his year in California.

## February 6, 1851

William Swain arrives in Youngstown, New York, where he remains for the rest of his life.



## Why family recollections matter

Tape recordings preserve your relatives' voices, how they express themselves, who they are.

Lots of people have a grandparent or a cousin who has been promising for years to write down his or her memories. Don't wait for them, and risk losing part of your family history. Interview your relatives, write down their answers, or better yet record them on tape. They will probably interpret your request for an interview as an honor. Your time and effort prove that you take their memories seriously.



Conduct the interviews with a little care, and you'll end up with a coherent oral history rather than random reminiscences. The tapes will also preserve something fragile and precious—your narrators' voices, how they express themselves, a sense of who they are. The tips on page 12 will get you started. ★

★ For more information about conducting and preserving oral histories, use your library and visit Baylor University's Institute for Oral History's "Workshop on the Web": [www.baylor.edu/~Oral\\_History/Family.html](http://www.baylor.edu/~Oral_History/Family.html).

★ Tell your favorite family story at [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

Top: Thelma Curley.  
Right: Recording an oral history.

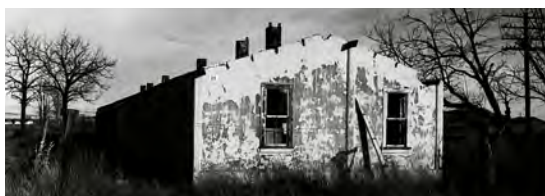


T.W. Ransom

# Dick Curley's story

MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Jerry Curley didn't know much about his father's past, and, like many fathers, Dick Curley never had much time or inclination to talk about himself. In 1992, a tragic coincidence brought Dick Curley's history to his son.



That summer, Jerry Curley joined the Southwest Memories Project, which offered workshops in interviewing and oral history. The same year, Dick Curley was diagnosed with cancer. Jerry had a few months to create a record of his father's life. Dick had a chance to preserve part of his history, his family's and his people's—the Navajo.

Jerry knew some of the details of his father's life. Dick Curley was born in Canyon Diablo, west of Winslow, Arizona, in 1927. His name was Tsish Chillie Tso, which means "Big Curly Hair." He took the name Dick Curley later, when government census takers could not say or spell his Navajo name. Dick Curley and Thelma Thompson married in the 1940s, a match arranged by their families. He worked in a munitions plant in World War II. After the war, there were few jobs on the reservation. In 1952, Dick Curley signed on as a laborer for the Santa Fe Railroad.

Jerry's interviews with his father gave him more than the facts. They gave him a feeling for his father's life and for his great strength of will:

*I was determined to find work. I didn't have anything to offer my children. Even though the work didn't pay much I have followed it for forty years. . . . I obtained many things from my work, like a vehicle, sheep, cattle, and a home. Things I could call my own. This is why I followed my job.*

Dick Curley had never been to school; Jerry's older brothers read road signs to him and taught him how to write his name. Yet among Navajos, he was active in tribal politics, well-respected, and known as a Haataali, or Singer, and as Hastiin Ayoyalti, "the man who could speak," because of his strong opinions and eloquent speeches. He told his children to take advantage of the white man's education but to keep Navajo culture and language. The combination, he said, would be very powerful.

Jerry, in his way, has followed his father's advice ever since. The sessions with his father led to a larger project interviewing Navajo railroad workers across the Southwest. He learned about the changes in their lives and jobs over the years and sometimes about their memories of his father. No one in the union worked for the railroad longer, and more than one worker described him as a man who was never afraid to speak his mind. Jerry Curley's oral history rescued his father's pride in his culture and his life's work. "I was at the top of the seniority list," Dick Curley told his son, "Number one."



Above: The remains of the Curley "section house" in Seligman, Arizona, originally provided by the Santa Fe Railroad. Left: Dick and Thelma Curley, 1952.



## 1927

Tsish Chillie Tso (Big Curly Hair) is born and later given the name Dick Curley.

## About 1938

After the death of his father, Dick Curley takes over sheep tending and other aspects of his family's farm.

## About 1942

Dick Curley marries Thelma Thompson, a match arranged by their parents.

## About 1943

Dick and Thelma Curley move to Barstow, California, where Dick works in a munitions plant.

## 1945

Navajo begin leaving the reservation in large numbers, looking for wage work.

## 1947–1948

Severe winter brings national attention to living conditions of Navajo and Hopi. In its aftermath, the Bureau of Indian Affairs establishes a job relocation program.

## 1952

Dick Curley begins working on the Santa Fe Railroad.

## 1956

Jerry Curley born.

## 1960

The Curleys acquire their first television.

## 1992

Dick Curley retires from the railroad; Jerry Curley begins oral history.

## 1993

Dick Curley passes away.


Top: Dick Curley.  
Left: Dick Curley, second from left in the top row, with his railroad crew.



**OLD MAN:** You get old  
and you can't do  
anybody any good  
any more.

**BOY:** You do me  
some good,  
Grandpa. You tell  
me things.

Robert Penn Warren  
"Being Here"

 Tell your favorite  
family story at  
[www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

# How to do an interview

The most important piece of advice is simple: get started. Your family history isn't getting any younger. And at the beginning, think about the end. You want to finish with balanced portraits of family members in a logical collection of good-quality recordings that your grandchildren can make sense of 50 years from now.

## Before the interview

- Pick a good candidate. Older relatives are obvious choices, but you might want to start with the one you're most comfortable with.
- Do a little research. Learn when and where your narrator was born, a few facts about his or her parents, spouse, children, occupation, and community, and create a simple information sheet. Then visit a library and look over books, a timeline, an encyclopedia, or videotapes about American history. The more you know about your narrator's times, the richer the interview.
- Get in touch early—give your narrator time to get ready for the interview. Explain why you are conducting the interview and what you plan to do with the notes and tapes.
- Buy, borrow, or rent a reliable tape recorder and learn how to use it. Find one with an external microphone—the sound will be better. Run the recorder from a power cord, or bring extra batteries.

## The questions

- Give your interview a focus—you will overwhelm yourself and your relatives if the subject is "life."
- Ask yourself what you really want to know about the person before you begin, then give some thought to what might interest your narrator most. If you make sure the first interview is fun, chances are you can arrange another, and you will want to.
- Make broad categories of questions—family life and relationships; the narrator's life in the community; his or her reaction to important historical events. Make a list of topics and

subtopics and bring it to the interview. A few specific questions prepared beforehand will also help get the interview going. Most libraries and bookstores have books with sample questions.

## The interview

- Be sure the recorder is working properly. Start by recording the narrator's name, the date, place, your name, and the general subject of the interview.
- Ask open-ended questions. If you say "Tell me about your first job" or "What was it like to grow up with ten brothers and sisters?" you give the narrator a chance to explore his or her memories.
- After you ask a question, let the narrator talk. Relax and listen. Don't interrupt.
- Take notes and ask follow-up questions. If your narrator touches on an area of interest, say "Tell me more" or "Can you give me an example?" Don't be afraid to stray from your list of topics and questions.
- Be encouraging and considerate. Don't pry. Interviews sometimes touch on sensitive or painful subjects. Give your narrator the chance to drop an uncomfortable subject or to gather himself or herself in silence for a few moments. Let the tape run. The silences can be meaningful, too.
- Don't be too timid. You can ask difficult questions if you have a good reason, just ask politely. And don't take sides. Different members of your family will remember things differently. Your job is to record a thoughtful oral history, not to confirm or undercut someone's recollections or point of view.



- At the end, check over your list of topics. Go back if you've missed anything important.
- Keep the interviews to a reasonable length, especially with older narrators. Between one and two hours is usually about right.

### After the interview

- Label every tape immediately. Review them as soon as you can and make a simple index by noting the subjects on the tape every five minutes or so. You can use the counter on the tape recorder to note the location of topics or particularly wonderful answers.
- Transcriptions can take a lot of time, but might be worth the investment, especially if the interviews will become part of a larger family history.
- File the tapes with the index, your information sheet about each narrator, and your notes.
- Send a thank-you note to the narrator and include a copy of the tape.
- Make sure you get a written release from the narrator, even if you only plan to use a small part of the oral history in a school paper and especially if the tapes may end up in a library or historical society.

### The last word

Don't stop with one interview. Keep going. You will see American history in a new way, and create an archive of recollections that your family will be delighted to have.

### Sample questions

*Thinking up questions for an oral history usually isn't a problem. Choosing among them is more difficult. Here are three broad topics and a few examples of questions. Tailor your questions to your narrator.*

**Don't stop with one interview. Keep going.**

### Historical events and eras

- What is the first important event in American history that you lived through? What did you think when you heard about it?
- What do you remember about the years just after World War II?
- What is your most powerful memory of the 1960s? What did you think of the changes in the United States during that decade?

### Your community

- What was your first job in your chosen occupation and where did you live at the time? What was a typical day like at work?
- Who were your neighbors and what do you remember about the neighborhood you lived in?
- What was your town like?

### Your family

- What did your parents expect of you (behavior, chores, work, school)?
- What was the best time for you in your family, and the roughest time?
- Who was included in your "immediate" family? Stepbrothers and sisters, grandparents, boarders, live-in companions, old family friends you called "aunt" or "uncle"?
- How was your family like other families, and how was it different?

## 3

# Playing detective with photographs

Ask five questions about your family photos: who, what, where, when, and why.

**Talk to your relatives who appear in family photographs** and ask them the five questions: who, what, where, when, and why. Write down their answers. If you know how a photograph connects to other information about your family, such as diaries, letters, and interviews, jot that down, too (but don't write on the photograph).

Some photographs will leave you with guesses, hunches, and new mysteries rather than answers. Save the mysteries, too. The answers might lie somewhere else in your family history. To learn how to protect your photos, turn to "Saving Your Family Treasures" on page 53. ★



A picture is supposedly worth a thousand words—what do you think this picture says?

Who appears in the photograph—a family, co-workers, strangers? Why do you think so?



Post a family photo via  
[www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

When and where do you think the photograph was taken? How can you tell?

What relationships do you see among the people pictured?

# Discovering clues in family papers

4

**War, peace, love, death, recipes, and weather reports**—this is the stuff old family letters and diaries are made of. They will show you both sides of your family history, remarkable and ordinary. Letters or diaries of relatives long gone carry fragments of their ideas and their point of view, as well as a glimpse of their times.

Family Bibles sometimes have lists of relatives stretching back for generations. Diplomas, invitations, newspaper clippings, and ticket stubs also hold part of your family's story. A little detective work will reveal how these paper treasures fit into your family history, and a little care can preserve them.

Try to identify the writer and recipient of family letters, as well as when and where they were written. Some may be hard to read or written in a foreign language. A transcription or translation can help. Write down as much as you can find out about the organizations and events represented by other records and mementos. As you fill in the gaps between these paper records, they will help fill in the gaps in your family history. ★

A little detective work will reveal how paper treasures fit into your family history.





## Sallie Walton's story

MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Angela Walton's great-grandmother Sallie passed away in 1961, when Angela was 9 years old. Her father inherited Sallie Walton's Bible. Inside was a sheet of paper that Angela occasionally unfolded and studied, especially when someone brought up the subject of "Indian blood" in the family. The paper showed the boundaries of a township and bore the words "Choctaw Nation" and "Sallie Walton." Another note in the Bible had Sallie's name, a number, and a mysterious abbreviation, "Choc. Fr." But no one in the family knew the meaning of the second note, nor much about Angela's great-grandmother or her background.

# Clues in family papers

Top: Sallie Walton.  
Right: Samuel and Sallie Walton.





Agents of the Dawes Commission interview applicants to determine land allotments.

Angela Walton grew up in Arkansas, not far from the Oklahoma border. In the summer, her family piled into the car and headed west to visit her cousins, aunts, uncles, and great-grandmother. As they crossed the Arkansas River, her father would point to a sign on the bridge that said “Entering Indian Territory,” and Angela would feel a little rush of mystery and excitement. Present-day Oklahoma was once set aside as permanent territory for American Indians, before it was opened to white settlement in the 1880s. “You know, Nannie is Indian,” her father always added, “she’s a Choctaw.”

Nannie was Sallie Walton. On visits to her home, Angela spent hot summer days racing around with her cousins and quieter moments listening to the reminiscences of her relatives—elderly black men and women recalling their lives growing up in Arkansas and Oklahoma. She understood that her great-grandmother was connected to the Choctaws, and that she must be connected to them, too. Some of her friends at school bragged about being related to Cherokee chiefs. But to Angela, the talk about Indians in her family never meant much. The Indians she knew best fought cowboys and lived on television.

Over the years, Angela Walton grew more interested in family history and signed up for classes on genealogy. She also married and moved to Maryland, near Washington, D.C. In 1991,

thirty years after she lost her great-grandmother, Angela Walton-Raji found her again—down the hall from the Constitution, not far from the Declaration of Independence, at the National Archives.

Angela Walton-Raji had learned that records about the Indians of Oklahoma were on microfilm at the Archives. One day she stopped by and started looking through the reels of film, but without success. Then recalling the note about “Choc. Fr.,” and realizing for the first time that it stood for Choctaw Freedmen, she turned to the microfilm labeled Freedmen Records. On the second roll, in file 777, she found her family—Samuel Walton, Sallie Walton, and their two sons and stepdaughter. Among the pages Angela copied, she later discovered the names of her great-great-grandparents, and another surprising piece of family history. Sallie’s father was a Choctaw Indian named Eastman Williams. Both of Angela’s great-grandparents had been born into slavery, and at one time both were enslaved by Choctaws.

Angela Walton-Raji’s discovery drew her to a time and place in the nation’s history that few Americans know much about. The Choctaws were one of the “Five Civilized Tribes,” along with Cherokees, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles. These nations grew cotton, raised livestock, and prospered in the agricultural economy of the Southeast in the 1700s and early 1800s. From the point

of view of white settlers, the people of the five tribes were “civilized” because of their success as planters.

Presidents from Thomas Jefferson to Andrew Jackson and southern state governments were eager to promote white settlement and plantation agriculture across the South. To open all the lands east of the Mississippi River and parts of present-day Louisiana and Texas, the federal government passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The act forced the Five Civilized Tribes from their lands in the Southeast in return for the promise of a permanent home in present-day Oklahoma. The Choctaw left almost



immediately; some tribes resisted. But over the next decade, all but a few ultimately traveled west. On one exodus in the winter of 1837–38, thousands of Cherokees lost their lives to winter cold, starvation, and disease. Their path came to be called the Trail of Tears.

From the days when Europeans and African Americans first encountered the people of the



Above: Angela Walton-Raji’s book *Black Indian Genealogy Research*, Sallie Walton’s Bible, and Sallie Walton and her son.



Sallie Walton



Left: Choctaw doll.

Below: This township map lay folded in Sallie Walton's Bible for decades. It shows an area six miles on a side divided into 36 equal squares, or sections, of 640 acres each. The smaller squares within each section represent 40 acres. The red arrow probably points to property granted to the Walton family as members of the Choctaw Nation.

**1787**

Northwest Ordinance establishes Indian nations as separate governments, nations within a nation.

**1803**

Thomas Jefferson purchases the Louisiana territory from Napoleon.

**1830**

Indian Removal Act requires the relocation of the Five Civilized Tribes from east of the Mississippi to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Choctaw acquiesce, whereas other tribes resist removal.

**1831**

Cherokee Nation takes the State of Georgia to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declines to hear case because Cherokees are considered a separate nation and not bound by U.S. laws.

**1832**

Supreme Court invalidates removal policy, but President Andrew Jackson continues to push Indians west.

**1837-1838**

Trail of Tears: Federal troops uproot 15,000 to 20,000 Cherokees, and force them on the 800-mile march to Indian Territory. One in four dies.

**1840**

Samuel Walton, Angela's great-grandfather, born a slave in Arkansas.

**1860**

Arkansas's population doubles in 20-year period to 435,000, approximately one-fourth slave.

**1862**

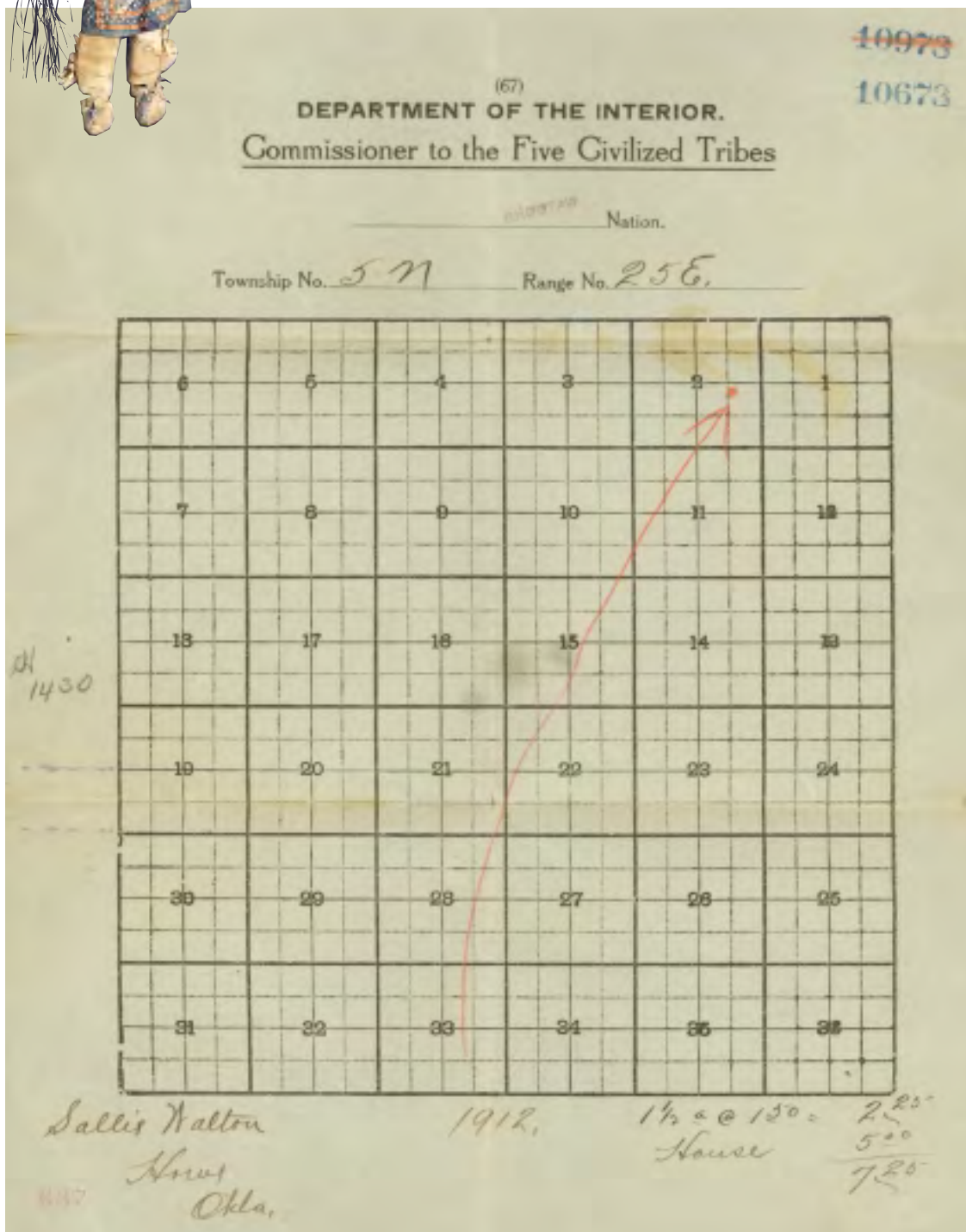
In the Civil War, seven regiments from the Five Civilized Tribes fight with the Confederacy in the Battle of Pea Ridge.

**About 1862**

Samuel Walton is sold to Jim Davis, a member of the Choctaw tribe.

**1863**

Emancipation Proclamation frees all slaves held in states in rebellion.



Five Civilized Tribes, some whites, blacks, and Indians formed families, and so did their “mixed-race” children. Among the peoples of the five tribes, race was often a complicated matter.

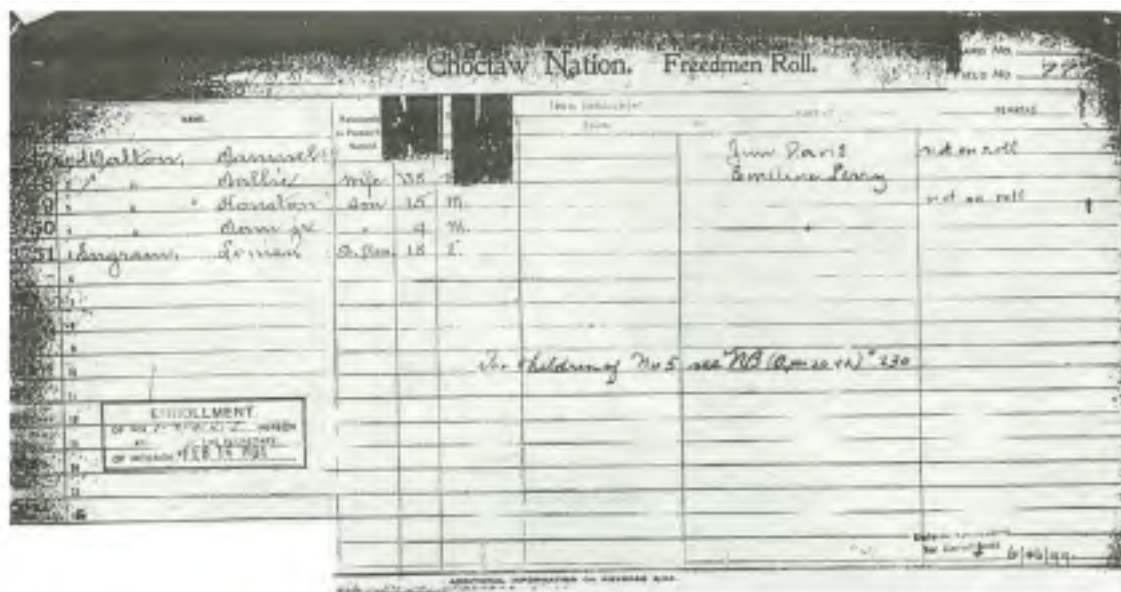
African Americans—enslaved and free—lived among the peoples of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Southeast and moved west with them. They were treated differently in different tribes. Several free black families prospered among the Creeks and Seminoles in Indian Territory. Almost none lived among the Choctaws and Chickasaws. After the Civil War, African Americans enslaved by the people of the five tribes were freed—the Waltons became Choctaw Freedmen. Like freedmen across the nation, they were seldom treated as equals. Blacks among the Choctaws were denied the right to vote in tribal affairs and shortchanged on tribal lands. To escape discrimination,

many African American freedmen in Oklahoma established their own towns, schools, and churches and were joined by freed slaves and free blacks from eastern states.

In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act in an attempt to help Indians become full members of American society. The act ended the legal standing of tribes as separate nations, granted Indians American citizenship, and required that most of the vast Indian territories be divided among their members and no longer held in common as tribal lands. To receive land allotments, Indian freedmen among the Five Civilized Tribes had to prove to a government commission that they were former slaves and currently tribal members. Satisfying the commission often took four or five years and generated paperwork. The records that Angela Walton-Raji found at the National Archives

were part of the proof for Samuel and Sallie Walton. The rest of the tribal lands were opened to homesteaders, which ignited the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889. As waves of white settlers arrived in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the segregation and discriminatory laws common elsewhere in the South multiplied in Oklahoma.

As Angela Walton-Raji discovered, the Dawes Commission records are a reservoir of clues for family historians with Native American roots. Some 20,000 freedmen are listed on the rolls. Since many of the records name previous owners of enslaved African Americans, they give some families a rare chance to trace their ancestors to the years before the Civil War. Angela Walton-Raji’s search for her family history turned on just such a piece of evidence, and on two sheets of paper in a Bible. These documents—and all she learned in making sense of them—also gave her a deeper understanding of the complexities of race in American history, and the chance to help other family historians with her book, *Black Indian Genealogy Research*, and website: [members.aol.com/angelaw859/index.html](http://members.aol.com/angelaw859/index.html)



1863

Angela’s great-grandmother Sallie Anchutubbe born a slave of Emaline Perry, a Choctaw.

1865

Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery throughout the United States, but not in Indian Territory.

1866

Slaves among Five Civilized Tribes are freed by treaty with U.S. government. Sallie and Sam Walton go free.

1887

Dawes Act brings tribal nations into the United States and awards land to members of Indian nations, including freedmen.

1889

Oklahoma Land Rush.

1890–1910

African Americans establish a dozen towns across Oklahoma.

1899

Sam and Sallie Walton testify before a federal commission to support their application for a land allotment.

1907

Oklahoma, home to 20,000 freedmen, admitted as a state.

Top: Detail of a quilt made by Sallie Walton.  
Above left: Slave house on a plantation near Talala, Indian Territory, 1900.

Left: The enrollment card for the Walton family lists members of the family at left and their former owners on the right.

# Uncovering history in the attic

5

**Clothing, silver, furniture, and works of art** make the journey from one generation to the next. But the stories that help give meaning to these treasures often don't survive the trip. Ask family members about their possessions from the past, the original owner, and special stories or memories about each item. Incorporate their answers into a family history.

Ask family members about possessions from the past.

Your local library or historical society will have books and articles on historic decor, furnishings, clothing, and other artifacts so you can learn more about the history of your heirlooms and how to protect them. The section of this guidebook on "Saving Your Family Treasures" will also help.

If you come across an unusual item, ask a curator or other expert at a museum or historical society for more information. ★



## The Morses' story

MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Marie Locke's family history was safe in the attic, in her grandmother's memory, and in her great-grandfather's greatest passion, photography. The attic was in the home of her grandmother, Irene Morse Bartlett, who lived in the village of Islesford on Little Cranberry Island off the coast of Maine from 1909 to 1998. The treasures overhead had held Marie's curiosity since childhood, and her summers spent exploring the island included many special afternoons in the attic.

She had always known about her great-grandfather Fred Morse's turn-of-the-century photographs. She eventually decided to ask her grandmother to tell her the story behind the photographs and gather some of the images and recollections into a simple family history book. Not long after, on a visit to the island, a friend of Marie's, designer Nancy Montgomery, saw some of the images and suggested a more elaborate possibility. That weekend was the start of a five-year project to create a book that would paint a picture of early island life through the eyes of Irene Morse Bartlett and her photographer father Fred.

The project began with Irene's daughter Jo bringing down from the attic a cardboard box full of Fred's glass-plate negatives wrapped in newspaper. Irene held the plates up to the light from the window and described what she saw. As the stories unfolded, Jo retrieved more objects from the attic and Marie, her grand-mother, and Nancy Montgomery went over them one by one.



Many of the treasures from the attic were old merchandise from the family's general store. A glass ladle with a small hole in the bottom was a pickle dipper for scooping pickles from a barrel. The lid of a crate for Goudy and Kent's Biscuits declared the contents "Best on the Land" and "Best on the Sea." A flared Moxie glass came from the makers of Moxie, the first mass-marketed soft drink in the country, still available today in New England. The drink had enough kick to produce a slang term

for pluck and boldness, namely "moxie." Irene's attic also produced lamb's wool soles for soft slippers, metal disks called Mendets to mend pots and pans, and buttons made of bone and buffalo horn. Marie's grandmother remembered something about all of them and what they revealed about everyday life on the island.

Some of the keepsakes from the attic were personal, not commercial. There were quill pens from Irene's school days. From a church fair, someone had saved a pillow made of ribbons used to tie bundles of tobacco. Irene still had the head of a doll that

**1870**

Marie Locke's great grandfather Fred Morse is born in Maine.

**1885**

Orphaned at age 11, Fred Morse eventually arrives on Little Cranberry Island to work as a fish skinner.

**1893**

Mary Smyth, who will become Fred's second wife, emigrates during a year when arrivals from Ireland number nearly 43,600—10 percent of all immigrants.

**1894**

Fred Morse and Fanny Stanley marry.

**1897**

Tourism increases on the island, as professors, doctors, and their families travel by boat from Boston to spend their summer there.

**1900**

Mary Smyth works for Boston families. Half of Irish-born women living in Massachusetts work as household servants.



Top: Mending a net.

Above: Tourists by the surf, about 1900.

Left: Fred Morse's camera.



**1903**

Fanny Stanley dies of tuberculosis.

**1906**

Mary Smyth arrives at Little Cranberry Island working as a nanny for a summer family and meets Fred Morse. At the end of the summer, Mary returns to Boston and Fred travels to the mainland to pursue a career in photography. He survives the San Francisco earthquake.

**1907**

Mary Smyth and Fred Morse marry in Boston and settle in Greenville, South Carolina; Fred works at a photographic studio.

**1909**

Irene Morse is born.

**1909**

Nathan Stanley asks Fred Morse to run the general store. The Morse family moves back to Islesford.

**1917**

First motor vehicle brought to island on barge.



**1950**

Morse general store destroyed in fire.

came all the way from France, and would have had the rest if she hadn't left the doll on the lawn one day when her father was mowing. She had also saved some sweetgrass baskets made by John Snow, a Passamaquoddy Indian. In the summer he traveled around the islands selling his baskets to the residents and the steadily growing number of tourists.

None of the other heirlooms in the attic, however, could quite match Fred's photographs. His images showed the island through the years, from portraits of the Morse family to sailboats in the harbor. The old schoolhouse, the general store, sea views, landscapes, a frozen harbor, and panoramas of the village of Islesford are among Morse's images. By



themselves, the pictures preserve a portion of small-town life in the early 1900s. Their creator was an accomplished photographer and a shopkeeper, actor, father, orphan, and soda jerk. His life on Little Cranberry Island is partly a story of how families and family history are built from bonds of affection, not just blood.

Fred Morse came to the island as a teenager in 1885 to find work as a fish skinner. There he met Fannie Stanley, the only child of Margaret and Nathan Stanley. The Stanleys were descendants of one of the first families to settle the island in the 1700s. In 1894, Fannie and Fred married, and the couple moved in with Fannie's parents. Fred



painted houses in nearby Bar Harbor for a time. He later opened a soda fountain in the Hotel Islesford. But the Morses were married only nine years. Fannie died of tuberculosis in 1903, and Fred set out across the United States.

After studying at Eppingham College of Photography in Illinois, Fred traveled to San Francisco, and survived the earthquake there in 1906. But he seemed to have left his heart in Islesford. Mary Smyth, an Irish immigrant and a nanny who came to the island with a family from Boston, had met Fred before he left. In 1907, they were married and moved to Greenville, South Carolina, where Fred set up a photography studio.

Since Fannie's death, Fred had kept in touch with Nathan and Margaret Stanley. When the Stanleys wanted help to run the



Top: Fred Wesley Morse.  
Right: The Stanley and Morse family general store.



general store in Islesford, they asked him to bring his family back. In 1909, Fred and Mary Morse and their infant daughter Irene moved to Little Cranberry Island to make, with the Stanleys, three generations of a new family. Irene would live on the island for nearly 90 years, and all her life thought of the Stanleys as her grandparents.

Irene Morse Bartlett's memories of the island knit together her father's photographs and the contents of her attic into a family history and nearly a century of local history on Little Cranberry Island. Tourists started coming to the island about the turn of the century, Irene told her granddaughter. They stayed at the Hotel Islesford and hired lobstermen to take them sailing on day trips. As the summer trade picked up, many families on the island rented their homes to tourists and lived in their sheds for the season. Irene remembered selling milk to the natives for 12 cents and to the summer visitors for 20, "the only double standard we had." Her mother, she recalled, helped out in the store, raised children, and played basketball with a group of ladies who scandalized the island by wearing bloomers on the court. She also wrote local gossip and

news for the *Bar Harbor Times*. Irene started ghostwriting the column for her mother in the 1930s, and carried on until 1998, when her daughter Jo took over.

During World War II, the U.S. government inadvertently contributed to the family's history by establishing a tax on the inventories of general stores like the Morse's. The family took part of their goods and hid

them in the attic of their home, across the street. Then on New Year's Day in 1950, Mary Morse accidentally burned the general store to the ground while cleaning out the woodburning stove. The cracker boxes, ribbons, root beer extract, and all the other goods were safe across the street for Marie Locke to discover and years later weave into the story of her family and a book, *Memories of a Maine Island*.



For a closer look at *Memories of a Maine Island: Turn of the Century Tales and Photographs* by Marie Locke and Nancy Montgomery, visit [www.memoriesofmaine.com](http://www.memoriesofmaine.com)



Top left: **Eight young fish skimmers on Little Cranberry Island. Fred Morse is in the bottom row, at the left.**  
Top right: **Mary Smyth Morse and child.**  
Right: **Boys by the water in Islesford, Little Cranberry Island, 1900.**

## 6

## Exploring your home's history

Houses are an expression of the people who lived in them and their times.

Like a family photograph or an old letter, your home is evidence about your history, especially if it has remained in the family for a few generations. Houses are an expression of the people who lived in them and their times. Apartment buildings reveal trends in architecture and building construction. Fixtures, landscaping, and the size of rooms are tied up with tastes in architecture and technologies such as air conditioning and lawn mowers. An addition to a home might offer clues about births, new jobs, and the local economy. Nearly 43 million Americans move every year, and a few of those moves might have generated documents that can help in your search.

Getting started is easy. Write down what you know and go from there—when you bought your home or when you moved in; who lives there now. Then start working back.

Exploring a home's history means a trip to the city or county courthouse to look at deeds, title documents, building plans, permits, and other public records. A historical society, your neighbors, and the local history section of your public library are likely sources, too.

With any luck, you will learn who owned your house or building and when, and perhaps how its appearance has changed over the years. You might find that you have led





yourself through a personal course in architectural history and building construction. And you might have created a short local history that starts at your house and spreads out through your community. ★

With any luck, you will learn who owned your house or building and when, and perhaps how its appearance has changed over the years.



# Climbing the family tree

Research your ancestors—try a little genealogy.

If family history brings out the detective in you, don't stop at interviewing your relatives. Investigate your ancestors—try a little genealogy. The job still involves collecting facts and anecdotes about your relatives, but as you go back through the generations, the mysteries grow and you rely on different evidence.

Birth certificates, marriage records, and other legal documents can give you the official information about family members. Be sure to include records for yourself. Federal and state censuses offer clues about the movement of your family members between states, occupations, even nations. Visit county courthouses to look at records of land exchanges, wills, and probate records. Local cemeteries can also help reveal family ties.

Keep track of all your sources of information carefully, including correspondence. Make a record of what you find—and what you don't.

To learn more about genealogical research, visit your local library, call your local or state historical society, check in the yellow pages for a genealogical organization near you, or write to the National Genealogical Society at 4527 N. 17th Street, Arlington, VA 22207-2399 ★

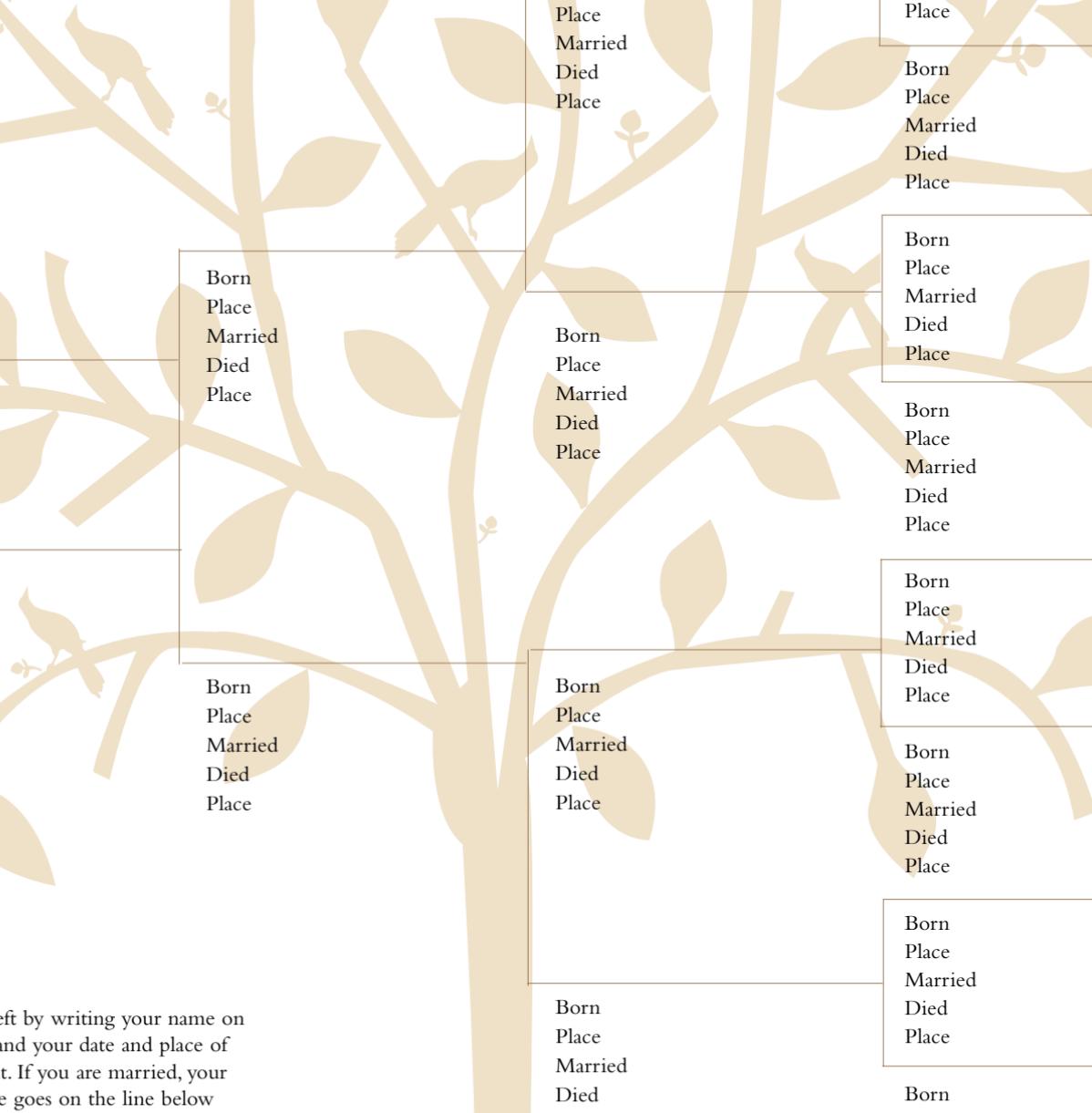
The World Wide Web has a wealth of resources. The NEH does not make endorsements, but here are a few places you can go online to get started.

"The Genealogy Page" of the National Archives and Records Administration	<a href="http://www.nara.gov/genealogy/genindex.html">www.nara.gov/genealogy/genindex.html</a>
The National Genealogical Society	<a href="http://www.ngsgenealogy.org">www.ngsgenealogy.org</a>
Genealogy.com	<a href="http://www.genealogy.com">www.genealogy.com</a>
Cyndi's List	<a href="http://www.cyndislist.com">www.cyndislist.com</a>
USGenWeb Project's Information for Researchers	<a href="http://www.usgenweb.org">www.usgenweb.org</a>
Family Search Internet Genealogy Service	<a href="http://www.FamilySearch.com">www.FamilySearch.com</a>
MyFamily.com	<a href="http://www.myfamily.com">www.myfamily.com</a>

★ To discover connections between your history and the nation's, visit the My History website at: [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

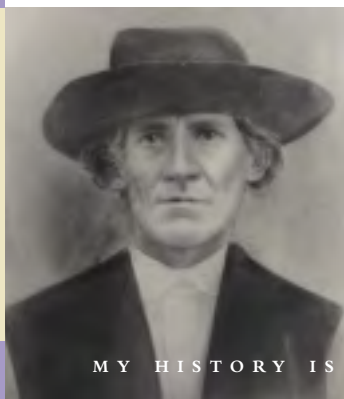
Right: Julia Fong's family tree. Her family history appears on page 49.





Start at the left by writing your name on the top line and your date and place of birth below it. If you are married, your spouse's name goes on the line below yours. Fill in your father's name on the line above yours and to the right, and your mother's on the line to the lower right. Follow the same pattern for your grandparents and great-grandparents.

Born Place Married Died Place  Spouse	Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place	Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place  Born Place Married Died Place
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MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

## The Madrids' story

Tom Madrid ultimately discovered the first ancestor bearing his family name to set foot in the United States—Francisco de Madrid. He was a wagon driver, or *chirrionero de los carros*. On his journey north from Mexico, he traveled with ten soldiers and four Catholic missionaries along a twisting, rocky road that ran beside the Rio Grande. They reached the small settlement of San Gabriel, in present-day New Mexico, in 1603.

Top: Juan Antonio Madrid, Tom Madrid's great-great-grandfather, about 1883.

Right: The signature of Roque de Madrid, Tom Madrid's 7th great-grandfather.



The mission at San Juan Pueblo, an early Spanish settlement in New Mexico.

When Francisco de Madrid arrived in New Mexico, the Spanish colony there was barely five years old, and struggling to survive. It had been founded by Juan de Oñate in 1598—nine years before English settlers arrived at Jamestown. Francisco de Madrid, his sons, and grandsons married the daughters and granddaughters of some of the original settlers, such as Gerónimo Márquez. These men, their wives, and children joined the ongoing struggle between native peoples who had inhabited the continent for thousands of years and new arrivals from Europe. For them it was daily life.

The life of Tom's ancestor Gerónimo Márquez, one of Juan de Oñate's trusted captains, reveals some of the hardships of the times. In September 1598, Oñate ordered Márquez and four other soldiers to track down deserters from the colony who were headed back to Mexico. They caught up to the runaways and executed two of them on the spot. Two months later, Márquez was part of a hurried retreat from the Acoma Pueblo after Indians killed the leader of his party and several other soldiers. In January 1599, he returned as part of a force that killed and captured hundreds of Acomas in retaliation. In 1604–05, he was a member of an expedition led by Oñate to the Gulf of California; the party survived the return trip by eating their horses.

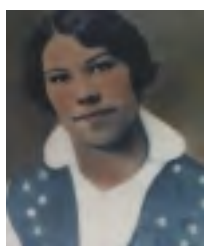
About 1609, the Spanish colonists in New Mexico moved some 25 miles south from San Gabriel to a narrow valley that they thought would be easier to defend. They established a new settlement there, the city of Holy Faith, or Santa Fe. Francisco de Madrid, Gerónimo Márquez, and other ancestors of Tom Madrid were among the original residents. Today, their tiny walled village is the oldest capital city in the United States.

Poverty, hunger, desertions, and conflicts between the clergy, the military, and political leaders plagued the colony. For the next 70 years, the fortunes of Tom Madrid's ancestors rose and fell in the turbulent history of Santa Fe and New Mexico. In 1640, several of Tom Madrid's relatives joined a plot against the Spanish governor, Luis de Rosas, who was eventually assassinated in 1642. Two were beheaded for their part in the affair, including Diego Márquez, the son of Gerónimo.

Less than 40 years later, the native peoples of the region rose up in the Pueblo Revolt and drove the Spanish out of New Mexico. Roque de Madrid, Francisco's grandson, was one of the colonists who fled down the Rio Grande with his family. Twelve years later he returned as a lieutenant to Diego de Vargas, the military leader who reconquered the region for Spain.



# The Madrids



Piecing together his family history took Tom Madrid more than a decade. He found inspiration for the work on the other side of his family, in his maternal grandfather. In 1984, when Sabino Vialpando died at age



92, his grandson Tom was left with question after question for his grandfather, all too late to ask. "Looking back," he said, "I think my initial interest in finding out about my heritage was to preserve his memory."



Top: **Madrid Plaza, in Madrid, Colorado, built in 1862.**

Above left: **Clorinda Madrid, Tom Madrid's grandmother.**

Above: **Sabino Vialpando, Tom's maternal grandfather, in World War I uniform.**

Left: **Wedding day of great aunt Jesusita Vialpando and Juan Mestas.**

TOM'S RESEARCH LED HIM TO THE STATE ARCHIVES of New Mexico, the Catholic Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the National Archives and Records Administration, and county courthouses in Colorado and New Mexico. He joined the Genealogical Society of Hispanic America and traveled with his wife to many of the towns where his ancestors had lived, including one they helped found, Trinidad, Colorado. He is a self-described stickler for documentation. Any other researcher using his sources, he says, could follow his tracks and learn what he has learned. The whole remarkable chain of family history from Gerónimo Márquez and Francisco de Madrid is on the Madrid family website: [www.users.uswest.net/~madridt/index.htm](http://www.users.uswest.net/~madridt/index.htm). But then following clues may come easier for Tom Madrid than for most people, since he is a police detective.

## 1540-41

The search for the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola brings Spanish explorers to the Southwest, among them Francisco Vásquez de Coronado.

## 1598

Juan de Oñate establishes towns for Spain in present-day New Mexico, including San Gabriel and San Juan. San Juan Bautista founded as a Spanish mission for Pueblo Indians. Tom Madrid's 10th great-grandfather, Gerónimo Márquez, serves with Oñate.

## 1603

Tom Madrid's 9th great-grandfather, Francisco de Madrid, arrives at San Gabriel.

## 1607

On the eastern coast of the United States, Jamestown, Virginia, becomes the first permanent settlement by English colonists.

## 1607-1610

Spanish found Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. Members of Madrid family settle there. Colonists and Indian laborers construct the Palace of the Governors, Las Casas Reales.

## 1680

The Pueblo Revolt drives the Spanish from New Mexico.



## 1692-96

Tom Madrid's 7th great-grandfather, Roque de Madrid, takes part in the reconquest of Pueblo lands and leads an expedition into Navajo territory.



## Finding your family's place in American history



Your great-grandmother's footprints might be on the Oregon Trail. The Civil War might have been your family's war, and the Civil Rights Movement your family's struggle for equality. Everything you have discovered about your ancestors' lives—names, dates, and movements from place to place—fits into the larger story of the nation's past.  So consult timelines on American history and world history to compare important events in your family's history with regional, national, and international events.  Trace your family's movements on maps, recent and historical. Let these connections lead you to books and websites that focus on the events, time periods, and geographic areas that you found in your ancestors' stories. Look at the lists of books and films beginning on page 70 for good places to start.

This broader perspective will help in your genealogical research, and it will also make your own story more meaningful to you. Follow your family's history and you will discover America's history. ★

# Writing your own story

9

**Share your family history with your family**—write a story.

Pick a time, a place, or a person to start with. You might focus on one especially interesting relative. Recount his or her experience of an accomplishment, a disaster, a battle, or a move across the country. Your story could begin where your family lives (or lived), and follow the family's original migration there, the conditions when they arrived, and how the people and place changed over the years.

Before you begin to write, review the information you have collected about your family and American history. Define a focus and scope for your story to help select facts to include and resist the temptation to tell everything you know. Try to accomplish two goals: tell the reader what is unique about your family and also what experiences your family shared with other people of the same era. ★



## The Petersons' story

OUR HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Logging was mostly winter work in the North Woods, and during the winter James and Anna Peterson were apart for weeks and months at a time. Their long separations were simply part of their life together. “Dear Ma,” he wrote her on Easter of 1942, “When I was ready to start yesterday the horses had gone away. . . . I went out to look and it was dark before I got home with them.”

Top: Jim and Anna Peterson.

James Peterson was a lumberjack in Wisconsin for fifty years and a roadbuilder for decades. His father, Jens, had left Denmark for the United States in the late 1800s. Jens found work with the Soo Line Railroad, which carried grain and other freight across the Upper Midwest. He made his way to Wisconsin and settled north of Medford. Like hundreds of thousands of others—immigrants and American citizens alike—he staked a claim under the Homestead Act.

Homesteaders could claim up to 160 acres of unoccupied land owned by the government if they remained on the land for five years, cultivated it, and put up a permanent structure. Jens built a shed to live in while he started his farm, constructed a log home, and lived as a farmer, fisherman, and lumberjack. Four years after he left Denmark, he sent for his wife and daughters.

Jens and his wife had three sons and another daughter in the United States. James, the oldest

son, married Anna Berg in 1907 and bought the family farm from his father. James stayed with logging, and he had a head for business. By age 18 he had saved enough money to buy his own horses and equipment. While he managed a growing crew of loggers, Anna ran the farm. Their sons, George and Morgan, were born in 1909 and 1911.

In 1928, a reporter from the Taylor County *Star News* interviewed James about his trade. “There is something about this woods that gets a man to like it,” he said. “Your real lumberjack couldn’t be kept out of the woods in winter. It’s something more than the wages he gets out of it. Why some of the men have 12 to 15 thousand dollars cold cash in the bank—but the woods call to them and they come back.” The article described life in a logging camp, including the long hours for the lumberjacks and the longer hours for the camp cook and his assistants, the “cookees.” They cooked about 100 pounds of meat a day for the 105 men in James Peterson’s camp—five

tons of meat for the whole season. Two tons of sugar, five tons of flour, 400 bushels of potatoes, and sacks of beans, vegetables, and other food kept the lumberjacks alive through the winter.

“Something about the woods” got to James and Anna’s sons. They began logging in their teens. Like his father and grandfather, Morgan endured the ups and downs of the logging business, economic depressions, and the snow. One Thanksgiving Day, he recalled, “It snowed 30 inches. It never thawed till the 1st of February. . . . That was a bad year.”

Bad years for logging and farming were uncomfortably common in Wisconsin in the 1920s and 1930s. In the warmer months, some logging equipment could be put to work building roads. The Petersons turned to road construction in the early 1920s to help make ends meet. Into the fourth generation and seventy-nine years later, five family members still run the family construction business.



James Peterson



#### 1890s

Angie Peterson's great-great-grandfather Jens Peterson leaves Denmark for U.S.

#### 1899

Height of logging boom in Wisconsin; more than 3.4 billion feet of board harvested in one year.

#### 1907

Angie's great-grandfather James Peterson marries Anna Berg and soon purchases his father's homestead.

#### 1911

Angie's paternal grandfather, Morgan Peterson, is born.

#### 1913

Florence Anne Hessefort, Angie's paternal grandmother, is born.



#### 1920

U.S. Census reports the first urban majority; 51 percent of Americans live in towns of more than 2,500 residents; 29 percent on farms.

Top: Florence Hessefort, Angie Peterson's paternal grandmother, at age 5.  
Above: John and Anne Sherwin Hessefort, Florence Hessefort's parents.  
Left: Lumberjacks at a logging camp, 1908.





# The Patersons

## 1929-32

With the Great Depression, farm income declines by 60 percent; one third of all farmers lose their land.

## 1930

Morgan and Florence marry and move in with his parents.

## 1933

President Franklin D. Roosevelt launches New Deal, which includes the Agricultural Adjustment Act, providing price supports for farmers.

## 1936

The Rural Electrification Act establishes utility cooperatives to provide electricity to rural homes.

## 1936

Florence and Morgan build their own home on Highway M, near Medford. Electricity comes two years later.

## 1980

Less than 3 percent of population lives on farms.



Morgan asked Florence Hessefort to a dance in April 1928, and they hit it off well enough to stay together for 60 years. Their dates included dances and ice cream sundaes, but if Morgan and Florence

happened to be out at 10 p.m., they often stopped at the Medford train station. In rural Wisconsin almost seventy years ago, part of an evening's entertainment was just finding out who was coming and

going. They were married on December 23, 1930. Like many families during the Great Depression, the newlyweds could not afford a home of their own. They moved in with Morgan's parents. Morgan had



Above right: Barn building in Wisconsin, 1895.

Right: Hauling out the logs, 1914.

only enough work to keep a handful of lumberjacks busy. Florence found a job as a cosmetologist and counted herself lucky.

With their first son, Jim, on the way, Florence and Morgan built their own home in 1936. But they had to wait for electricity. Electric power hadn't yet reached all the farms of Wisconsin.

As long as Morgan stayed in the logging business, he and Florence also lived through long separations. Like Anna Peterson before her, Florence ran the farm and took most of the responsibility for raising the



children—three sons and a daughter by 1955. She grew vegetables, washed clothes, cooked, cleaned, made her own soap, butchered chickens, and managed the help, which at various times meant a hired man, three women, and two teenaged girls, the Grlicky sisters. Mary and Dotti Grlicky lived with the Petersons during high school and helped out on the farm so they could be close to school, which was diagonally across the road from the Petersons' farm. To feed everyone, Florence sometimes went through 50 pounds of flour a week making bread and pies and biscuits.



**Jim and Anna Peterson, just married, in 1907.**

*Florence's journal from the year 1950 offers a glimpse of life on the farm:*

**Monday, February 13—**

Washed clothes. Grandma and I went to see Mrs. Grlicky at hospital. Took her some jonquils.

**Friday, February 17—**

Cleaned house and back porch. Had French fries for supper.

**Monday, July 3—**

Jim and Jack went fishing with Billy Daniels while we went shopping at Hayward and looked at road job. Jackie had fish hook caught in his head above his ear. Dr. at Kateri removed it. No after effects. Took our boys and Billy to see "Sitting Pretty" movie at Hayward. Went to the Aladdin Inn later to dance and eat.

**Wednesday, July 5—**

Picked 6 qts strawberries at home and about 16 qts at Grandma's. Jim and Jack went fishing with Erv at night. Hauled in 4 loads hay.

**Wednesday, November 30—**

Pressed clothes, mended. Washed up green davenport and chair. Played cards at school card party. Morgan won 1st prize.



MORGAN AND FLORENCE'S GRANDDAUGHTER, ANGIE, began exploring the Petersons' history with a school assignment in sixth grade to make a family scrapbook. But like so many family historians, she felt a deeper need to understand her family history after the death of a relative. Her grandfather Morgan, "a walking history

book," passed away over the winter holidays in 1989. In tape recordings of his stories, her grandmother's journals, the letters of James Peterson, newspaper articles, and research of her own into the logging industry, Angie Peterson found a story larger than her family's. Immigration, long separations between husbands and wives, the Great Depression, small-town romances, the rhythms of farm life, and a family's hard work and prosperity through the generations are as much a part of the nation's story as the Petersons'.



Above: Angie Peterson and her father Terry.  
Above left: George and Morgan Peterson, 1912.

## 10

## Fun for the family

**In family history projects,** your relatives can be the actors as well as the audience. The easiest way for a family historian to make his or her job easier is to get them involved. They will automatically help with research, spread the word to other family members, and lighten the workload. They will probably get caught up in the fun of family history—and history projects for the whole family, young and old, are the best way to create new family historians. Here are some projects from the editors of *FamilyFun* magazine.

### Our Family Quilt

American quilts have always reflected our diverse heritage, from the simple and refined quilts of Amish communities to the crazy-patchwork quilts of early settlers. Women etched the births and deaths of family members onto quilt squares with indelible ink, then sewed them into quilts. Today, quilting continues to be a creative expression of personal, family, and community history.

You can honor your own clan and create a quilt that reflects the personalities and pastimes of your family members—ask each one, young and old, to contribute a square. Your quilt can make a lovely gift to commemorate an event, such as a big wedding anniversary.

#### Materials

- Beginner's quilting book, if necessary
- Paper and pencil
- Four squares of prewashed, unbleached muslin per participant, cut to size
- Material of your choice for decorating each square, such as fabric paint or appliqué materials
- Cotton border, backing, and sashing, cut to size
- Cotton batting, cut to size
- Sewing supplies

1. If you or another family member is not a quilter, you can hire a professional seamstress to turn your patches into a quilt. Ask for a recommendation from your local fabric store (prices range from \$10 to \$15 an hour). Better yet, find out if the shop offers a quilting workshop that you could sign up for.
2. Decide how many family members you want to include

in your quilt, remembering that each person will create one square. Now sketch out your quilt to see what size and shape it will be. A simple patchwork pattern in a rectangle or square is easiest.

3. Ask each participant to design one quilt square that symbolizes something special about your families, such as pictures of people, pets, houses, proverbs, family treasures, special events, or cultural symbols. Be sure to clearly outline for them the scope of the project, your goals, and your deadlines.
4. Give each participant four blank quilt squares, assuring them that you only need one to be finished and returned; the remaining squares are extras for practice or mistakes. You can also give them suggestions for techniques to use, from appliqué to photograph reproductions to fabric painting.



## Family History Museum

Kids can investigate and then show off their family history by creating a mini-museum of prized family mementos. The exhibition hall can be a shoebox, a drawer, or a mantelpiece. When family members gather for reunions and holidays, your kids can give them tours and request donations of other important artifacts.

### Materials:

- Family photos, newspaper clippings, family documents, ticket stubs from special events, and other important mementos
- A special spot for a mini-museum
- Any items needed for displaying artifacts, such as thumbtacks or double-sided tape



1. If your child has an overwhelming number of objects for his museum, try picking a special theme to help winnow it down. It can be as simple as "Tom's Baseball Museum" or as elaborate as "Our Puerto Rican Heritage." Reduce the family pictures and other documents on a photocopier then return the originals to a safe place.
2. Encourage your child to investigate the meaning and origin of the things he collects and make labels with dates and captions for each item. Then have him carefully display his items, grouping objects in a logical way.
3. Your child can make a small catalog to accompany the mini-museum and even send out announcements to family members and friends to come to an exhibit opening.

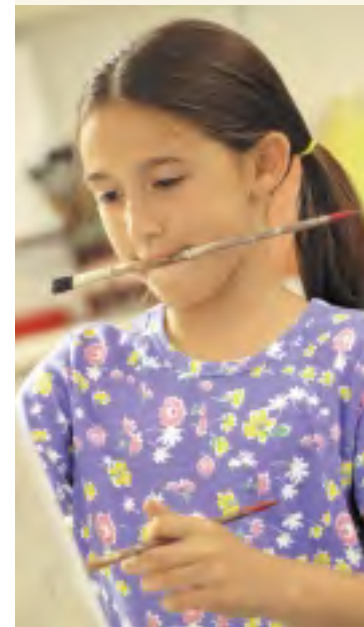
## Millennium Family Portraits

Did you know that in the nineteenth century, a smile was considered too frivolous an expression for a formal portrait? Or that a person shown holding a book in a photograph was a clue, indicating to the viewer that the subject was educated? Every portrait tells a story. You and your family can mark the year 2000 by creating self-portraits, either by taking photographs, by painting, or as outlined here, by drawing—a technique that works well with artistic families.

### Materials

- Acid-free heavy-stock paper (at least five sheets per person)
- Acid-free markers

1. Each person should think about how she would like to remembered years from now. What objects would she hold to best reflect her personality? What should the setting be like? Should she place anything in the portrait that reflects her ethnic heritage? What emotion would she like to express?
2. Set up your work area and put out all the supplies, encouraging everyone to try several versions of their self-portraits. When everyone is done, set aside each person's favorite self-portrait.
3. Mark on the back of each portrait the date, the artist, and the place it was drawn. You can even get your self-portraits inexpensively framed.





## Family Web Album

Now that families are so computer-savvy, they might enjoy creating a scrapbook about their family history on the World Wide Web. Just about anything can go into your private website: recipes, newspaper clippings, songs, proverbs, riddles, jokes, oral histories, drawings, photographs old and new—anything that tells the story of your family. Thanks to a free website service, this process can be very straightforward.

### Materials

- A computer with Internet access
- Digital photographs on CD-ROM (ask your film developer for details)

1. MyFamily.com has a free, easy-to-use template for a private family website, including areas for news, chat, photographs, recipe collecting, and more. Parents and children should begin by reviewing the site together ([www.myfamily.com](http://www.myfamily.com)), with parents filling out the forms as instructed. There is even a complimentary helpline if you get stumped.
2. Once you know how you want to customize your site, collect the data and images you need, log back in, and set up your site, following the directions. You can then set up your website to notify all your family members to log on and add their own information.

## Our Family Cookbook

Perhaps the most common, but overlooked, heirlooms in our families are old family recipes. Special dishes can reveal a lot about our countries of origin, the American regions we have lived in, and the religions we celebrate. You can collect your family's recipes, organize them in a book, then print copies of the cookbook to share with everyone who contributed.

### Materials

- Completed recipe forms on white 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper (See Step 1)
- Photographs of family members who created recipes, optional
- Photographs of family members cooking and sharing meals, optional

1. Draw up a list of all the family members from whom you would like to request recipes. Create a form and send several copies to everyone on your list. The form should include blank spaces for filling in the name of the recipe, the name of the contributor, the history of the recipe, the ingredients needed (in order of when they appear in the directions), the cooking directions, and the amount of prep time and cooking time.
2. Explain in an accompanying letter that you plan to copy the recipes into a cookbook, and send a copy to each participant. Give your family deadlines, and follow up with a reminder postcard as the deadline draws near.

3. When your recipes are in, design a cover and an introductory index to all the recipes on the same kind of paper as you used for your form. Lay out the recipes and, if desired, the photographs in the order you like best (from soups to dessert, perhaps, or by cook).
4. Take your layout to your local copy shop and ask them for options, such as glued bindings or spiral bindings. Consider reducing the paper to make a smaller format cookbook. Photographs can be photocopied, too, as well as reduced and enlarged. Request paper samples for both the cover and the inside pages so you can decide what it best for you. Get cost estimates and then ask for as many cookbook copies as you need.

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## Oral Histories for Kids

Collecting oral histories isn't just for adults. With a little help, kids can use the guidelines on page 36 to gather oral histories. Let children pick a theme or focus for the interview, such as school, holidays, or childhood. And keep in mind a few special considerations.

- Help kids develop questions that link interviewers and narrators, such as: What is your earliest memory? What was your life like when you were my age? What was your favorite book? What do you remember about me when I was younger?
- Have narrators bring photographs, toys, or other family treasures that might interest children.
- Be sensitive to special issues facing adopted children and children whose parents have divorced or remarried.
- Help young interviewers be sensitive to powerful issues that can come up in an interview, such as the difficult experiences some family members may have had. Some parents and narrators will want to avoid these subjects, and others will want to be ready for them. ★





## Sharing your story

Add your family stories via the My History website: [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

**Your family history connects you to other families** and other historians. People tracing their own family histories might discover a lead in yours. A scholar might find anecdotes about your family that will help bring a historical study to life. The critical step is creating an accurate, well-documented family story or history and helping other people locate it.

- Enter your family story or history in a word processing program, print a few copies, and send them on a tour through the family.
- Add your family stories via the **My History** website at [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org), or create your own family history website.
- Find out whether your local library or historical society collects family histories and offer to donate yours.
- With other family historians, ask your local library or historical society to begin a collection of local family histories.
- Link your family history website to the appropriate spot in USGenWeb, at [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org) ★

Top: **Sal Romano's grandmother Maria Iob and cousins.**  
Facing page, top right: **Stefania Iob's class in Cunevo, Italy, 1919.**

# The Romanos' story

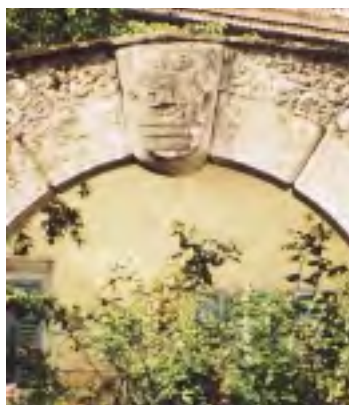
MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

SHARING YOUR STORY



The first words on Sal Romano's website tell why he started his labor of love. "My introduction to Trentino began with stories told to me as a child—stories about a valley in northern Italy surrounded by mountains, castles, and lakes. These stories fueled a desire to learn more about the area—its people, its culture, its history. A natural progression was to undertake the task of tracing my ancestral ties to Trentino."

Although the stories were of Italy, the storyteller and the audience were both in the United States. The storyteller was Sal's mother, Stefania Iob Romano. The stories she told years ago helped bring forth the family history, Italian history, American history, and hundreds of links to other resources that fill the pages of her son's website at [members.aol.com/sromano937](http://members.aol.com/sromano937).



Above: 16th-century arch bearing the Iob family crest.  
Right: Postcard of West Main Street, Trinidad, Colorado, 1920s

Years of crop disease, floods, and landslides devastated Trentino in the late 1800s. Thousands of the region's residents, or Trentini, left Italy around the turn of the century. Most headed for South America, but many also began new lives in the mining towns of Colorado, including Maria Banaletti and Roberto Iob, Sal Romano's grandparents. Maria's first husband was killed in a mine explosion and both lost brothers and cousins to mining accidents. Maria and Roberto married in 1907 but remained in the Hastings, Colorado, area only three more years before the hard mining life drove them and their three young children back to Italy. Thousands of mining families followed as the industry

Carlo, an American citizen born in Colorado, left Italy to escape being drafted into Mussolini's army, and later landed on the Normandy beaches as a G.I.

Stefania returned to the United States in 1931 and lived with her sister, Lena. In 1942 she married Salvatore Romano, Sr., and moved to New York City. She taught herself English from comic books, worked in a garment factory, and



declined. The population of Hastings fell from 2,000 in 1909 to 700 in 1912. The waves of immigration they joined were made of countless individual decisions to move—family history pouring into national history. But the history of nations also pushed people toward personal decisions. Stefania's brother

raised Sal Junior, and his sister. After her husband died in 1957, she supported the family as a seamstress and dressmaker from her home. The family story came full circle when young Salvatore, in the Army himself, visited Trentino in 1967 and decided to explore the region's history and his own, and preserve both.

## 1900–1909

Nearly two million Italians arrive in the United States, constituting almost one in four immigrants during those years.

## 1901

Sal Romano's grandmother Maria Banaletti arrives in Colorado mining region.

## 1902

Maria Banaletti marries Francesco Iob.

## 1903–04

Members of the Iob and Banaletti families participate in Cripple Creek strike, led by the Western Federation of Miners.

## 1905

Roberto Iob joins his brother Francesco in Colorado.

## 1906

Francesco Iob dies in a mining explosion.

## 1907

Roberto Iob, Sal's grandfather, marries Maria Banaletti.

## 1907

Economic downturn prompts immigrants to leave the United States in large numbers.

## About 1910

Roberto and Maria Iob leave U.S. for Trentino, Italy, with their children including one-year-old Stefania, Sal Romano's mother.

## 1931

Sal's mother, Stefania Iob, arrives in the United States and lives with her sister, who finds work for Stefania as a seamstress.

## 1942

Stefania Iob marries Sal Romano, Sr.

## 1967

On leave from a military tour of duty in Europe, Sal Romano, Jr., visits Trentino, Italy.

## 12

## Connecting with your community

**Never underestimate the power of a good story.** Some evening, out on the porch, lean over and tell your neighbor about your great aunt the army nurse and let her tell you about her great-grandfather the bootlegger. Look for the connections—your stories and your neighbor's might flow together at some point, probably in a way you don't expect.

Look around the community for more ways to share your family stories. You may find informal conversations where you can simply listen and tell stories. You will at least make a connection with others and glimpse what it's like to be in their shoes.



offerings on state or local history.

You may find more structured programs for collecting or exchanging family stories at your local library, college, or historical society. While you are at it, take the opportunity to check their

Once in awhile, these shared family histories that begin so simply take on a life of their own as documented community histories, exhibits, or heritage trails. Don't concern yourself with that at the start. Just join the conversation.

- You may find family conversations already going at your church, civic club, library, or senior center. If not, why not start one? Invite a historian to join the group to help tie stories together and lend some historical perspective. If you are looking for a historian, ask for a referral from the local college, historical society, or state humanities council.
- Check the local library's schedule of reading and discussion programs. The themes and readings often welcome and inspire the exchange of family stories.
- If you have already begun to gather your family history, find ways to collaborate with others in your community. The more families you include, the more your collected family histories will begin to form a community history. Recruit historians to join the team. The historical society or humanities council may not be able to play a role, but they will be interested to know what you're doing.
- Learn what you can about state and local history from programs offered by historical societies and humanities councils.
- Post one or more stories about your family on the World Wide Web through [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org) and look for other stories there. ★

# Communities' stories



Above: A fruit stand in the French Island archive, Left: Taping oral histories on the island.

Below: A postcard photograph of island resident Nelson St. James. He wrote on the back, "How do I look in this uniform?"



## "Let's Talk About It"

At a small library in South Carolina, a discussion of American identity inspired a lively exchange about local families and local history. Based on the book *Lemon Swamp*, the discussion was part of a series developed by the American Library Association (ALA), and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Available across the country, reading and discussion programs connect lifelong learners with books and films. For more information, visit the ALA website at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org).

## An Urban Memoir

Senior residents at Potomac Gardens public housing site in Washington, D.C., met with public historians for two years to assemble their stories and review their photographs and favorite objects. The historians learned about migration from the rural south to Washington, D.C., and everyday life in the city since the 1920s. Grants from the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., helped produce an oral history project, "In Search of Common Ground," a documentary video, and an exhibition at the Anacostia Museum.

## A French-Speaking Place

On French Island, Maine, a small group of residents started asking their neighbors to talk about life there when they were young—simply to capture some of the history of this French-speaking community before it disappeared. With the help of many people in the community and a grant from the Maine Humanities Council, their oral histories evolved into a photo-graphic archive, a website, and an illustrated history of the community. To see how a small family history project can grow, visit [www.old-town.lib.me.us/nos/default.htm](http://www.old-town.lib.me.us/nos/default.htm).



Two of the participants in the program "In Search of Common Ground: Senior Citizens and Community Life at Potomac Gardens."



## 13

## Finding help

Help a local history organization set up a “Family History Day.”

★ Look for case studies of community oral history projects at [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)

Below: Participants in The Century Project, young and old, gather in the Hall of Flags at the Maine Statehouse.



**Preserving family and community history** is part of the mission of local libraries, historical societies, museums, humanities councils, colleges, and universities—and you can help. Volunteers are crucial to local history projects, so get in touch with organizations like these and sign up.

- Volunteer for local oral history projects. Historical organizations aren't the only sponsors: senior centers, fraternal organizations, and professional associations sometimes collect oral histories. The skills you've developed in gathering your own family history will be useful, and transcribing oral histories is also vital work. Transcripts are still one of the best means of storing and sharing oral histories.
- Help a local history organization set up a “Family History Day.” People from the community can bring in photographs, diaries, naturalization papers, and other family treasures to learn a little more about them from the staff of the museum or historical association. The local organizations get a better idea of what is out there in the community and can photocopy documents and photographs that might be important for programs or collections. ★



# Making the story grow



T.W. Ransom

## An Island in Washington State

The Orcas Island Oral History Project has a forty-year history, and students and volunteers have been crucial to the project throughout its life. In the 1950s, a University of Washington student began an oral history project with residents of island, off the Washington coast near Bellingham. Other local residents and scholars picked up threads of the project and added photographs of some residents in the 1970s. In the 1980s, teachers on the island assigned students to interview their elders, and

these recordings joined the growing oral history collection. In 1999—through the work of professional historians, photographers, storytellers, performers, and volunteers—the project culminated in an exhibition and series of public programs. Both celebrate the island's past and share with its residents the permanent archive of local history gathered and preserved over the years.

Counterclockwise, from top:  
**One of the six adjoining homestead cabins that are part of the Orcas Island Historical Museum.**

**West Sound, Orcas Island, Washington, about 1890.**

**The late Alfred O'Neill, subject of an oral history.**

**Main Street in East Sound, Orcas Island, about 1939.**



## 14

Teaching American history  
through family history

Encourage your  
children's  
teachers to  
develop family  
history projects.



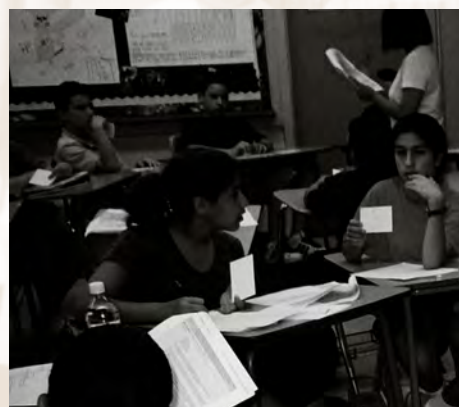
Seen through a grandparent's eyes or in an old family photograph, events such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Depression regain the immediacy of real life. Bringing this family history into the classroom helps children understand how people's choices have shaped our history and still influence our lives today. Encourage your children's teachers to develop family history activities or to assign projects like these:

**Preschool**

**Class Family Quilt**—Give each child a square of construction paper to decorate in class and at home with emblems of his or her family life: pictures of family members (including pets), mementos of family pastimes and travels, words and images that evoke the family heritage. Form a quilt with the finished squares on a bulletin board. Have each child talk about his or her square, then talk as a group about the things their families share.

**Elementary School**

**Where I'm From**—Combine geography with family history by having students research the regions and countries that are part of their heritage. As a class, create a large world map on which each student can plot his or her family's travels over time. Discuss the range of countries and cultures represented, the distances covered over many lifetimes, and where the paths of students' families may have crossed.





### Middle School

**The Impact of Events**—Use family history to help students understand the impact of landmark events. For events still in living memory, such as World War II, the space race, or the movement of women into the workplace, students can interview family members to learn how an event affected their lives—or why it didn't. For events long past, such as the California Gold Rush or the Dawes Act, students can research family documents or family traditions to create timelines that show how these events changed their families' lives.

### High School

**"Auto-biography"**—Today, most American's lives are shaped in part by "auto-mobility"—the freedom to live far from the workplace, visit distant relatives, even drive to the wilderness. Have students create family auto-biographies, which might include pictures of cars their ancestors have owned, oral histories of memorable roadtrips, and a comparison of the automobile's influence on family life across several generations.

### A Note for Teachers

At [www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org), you can find lesson plans and classroom-ready resources in family history for all grade levels. Look here for lessons that integrate learning across the curriculum—in literature, language arts, geography, social studies, civics, technology, art, music, and other disciplines. In addition, there are many activities and projects adaptable for learning outside the classroom, in community centers, by youth groups, and within the home.

Plot the  
migrations of  
your ancestors  
on a world and  
U.S. map.



Keep in mind that family history can touch on sensitive and sometimes painful issues, such as the difficult experiences some family members may have had. Teachers should try to anticipate concerns such as these and respect the privacy of students and their families. ★

Visit "Teaching with  
My History" at  
[www.myhistory.org](http://www.myhistory.org)



## Joining your hometown experts

After you visit,  
you may want to  
volunteer.

Visit your local historical society and public library—find out what's already there. All local historical organizations depend in part on the good will of the community, so you may want to volunteer. You might live near a state or regional historical organization, and those places often need volunteer help, too. Check the list of organizations in this book for possibilities. Local historical societies are particularly interested in acquiring documented family items. ★



©Chinese Historical Society of America



# Fong Soo Foon's story

MY HISTORY IS AMERICA'S HISTORY

Julia Fong's grandfather, Fong Soo Foon, passed away when she was only a year old, but she feels she knows him. A visit to the Chinese Historical Society helped to inspire her search for his story. She chronicled his life's journey from China across the Pacific to the United States. She traced his father, brothers, wife, and children; and a merchant named Fong Soo On, who made Fong Soo Foon his "paper son." The wanderings would take her through the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, World War II, and the Communist Revolution.

## A Paper Son

Fong Soo Foon was born in Taishan, China, in 1902, into a family and a village struggling against poverty. Even as a young man, he knew he could never be a farmer nor stay in Taishan. Hope for a better life in the United States drew him, as it had thousands of Chinese since the Gold Rush days of the 1840s.

Fong Soo Foon's father forbade him to leave. Two of his brothers had already immigrated to the United States and were plagued

by debts. The United States didn't want him. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited immigration by all Chinese except scholars, diplomats, and certain merchants and barred any Chinese from becoming naturalized citizens. Merely a laborer, Fong Soo Foon knew that his only chance to bypass this law and reach America was to buy someone else's identity for a huge sum and convince immigration officials that he was the son of a legal Chinese resident of the United States.

"Paper sons," in a way, were children of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. It destroyed birth certificates and citizenship papers for many of the naturalized citizens and legal Chinese immigrants in California, who could then claim they had left behind sons or daughters in their homeland. Young men and women in China paid thousands of dollars to assume these identities and come to the United States.



Top: Fong Soo Foon, Julia Fong's grandfather.

Above: Jimmy Fong, left, with his mother, Yee Fee King, and sister Dorsee.

Left: The U.S. Quarantine Station at Angel Island, California. ©Chinese Historical Society of America.





Fong Soo Foon

#### 1848–49

Gold discovered in California and Gold Rush begins.



#### 1860

35,000 Chinese are living in California, one out of ten residents of the state.

#### 1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act suspends immigration from China for 10 years; it is extended indefinitely in 1904.

#### 1902

Julia Fong's grandfather Fong Soo Foon born in Taishan, China, the fifth son in a family of 11 children.

#### 1906

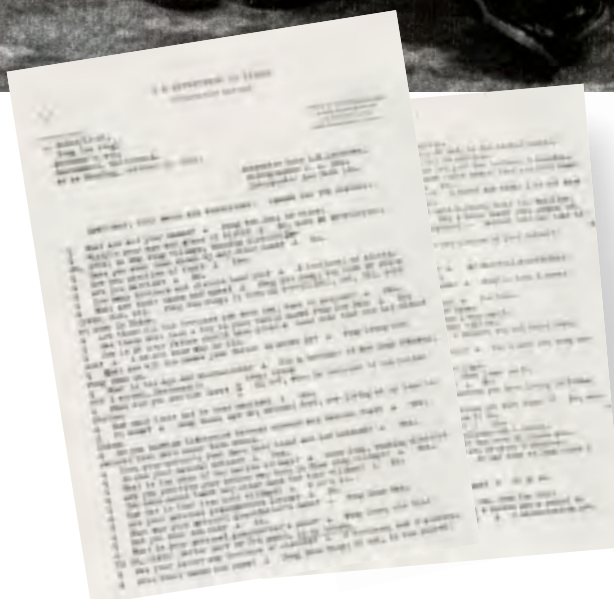
San Francisco Earthquake destroys immigrant records, opening the door to "paper sons" from China.

#### 1910

Angel Island opens as an immigrant station and begins processing applications.

#### 1921

Fong leaves China for the United States. After interrogation, he receives a Certificate of Identity.



Above: Jimmy Fong, third from left, back row, stayed with his relatives in Hong Kong for eight years while he waited to join his family in the U.S. Left: A transcript of Fong Soo Foon's immigration interview at Angel Island, 1921.



Fong Soo Foon eventually won his father's blessing. With help from his brother, he borrowed \$3,000 to become the paper son of Fong Soo On, a merchant in Sacramento. He studied the details of his new identity for months and finally boarded the S.S. *Nanking* for the United States. He reached San Francisco on October 14, 1921, and on November 3, began his cycle of interviews at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, the "Ellis Island of the West."

Immigration officials interviewed Fong Soo Foon three times, asking questions such as where did you live? When did your family move there? Which house? How many entrance doors to the house? Do the houses in your row touch? Where was the well? What material was the schoolhouse made of? They also interviewed the merchant Fong Soo On and other witnesses, asked the same questions, and compared the answers. One immigration official found contradictions in the testimony and recommended that Fong Soo Foon be denied admission to the United States.

A week later a second inspector read the interviews differently, overturned the original decision, and transformed the lives of Fong Soo Foon and his family. On December 24, he passed through the immigration station, deep in debt, alone, without work, and carrying his new American Certificate of Identity.

Fong Soo Foon found work in a laundry, one of the few jobs available to Chinese immigrants in the United States. He worked hard, paid off his debts in just a few years, and began to send money home. However, he seldom left the safety of Chinatown—a haven from a society that distrusted Chinese.

In his new country, Fong Soo Foon still felt deep ties to China. He saved money for a trip back, but turned 21 in the meantime. His age invalidated his original papers, so he added a new layer to his identity. He presented himself to immigration officials as a part owner of the Jin Fook Company, which sold dry goods, groceries, and general merchandise in San Francisco. He memorized his facts well, and by the end of 1924, Fong Soo

Foon was a paper son and a paper business partner, on his way to China.

Fong Soo Foon's trip back to his homeland began a cycle of reunion, marriage, parenthood, immigration, and separation that lasted 34 years, until 1958. He married Yee Fee King when he first returned to China. But she could not bear to leave her family and homeland, so he returned to the United States alone. He sent money to her faithfully, saved for other trips to China, and returned there in 1932 and 1939. On his last trip he fled the country just ahead of invading Japanese troops and the outbreak of World War II.

Fong Soo Foon and Yee Fee King had two daughters and a son—Bik To, Dorsee, and Jimmy. Bik To married a Chinese veteran of the U.S. military and immigrated to the United States in 1945. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was lifted in 1943,



#### 1924

Immigration Act establishes quotas for each nationality—2 percent of their representation in 1890 census.

Working as a laundry man, Fong earns enough to pay off his debts. He becomes a "paper business partner" with San Francisco grocers to obtain a new visa and buys passage to China.

#### 1925

While in China, Fong marries Yee Fee King. She wants to stay in her homeland, and gives birth to their first daughter in 1926.

#### 1932

Fong returns to China for another visit; second daughter born in 1933.

#### 1939

Fong visits China for the last time and cuts visit short due to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War; third child, Jimmy, who is Julia's father, born in 1940.

#### 1943

Chinese Exclusion Act repealed.

#### 1945

Fong's daughter Bik To marries a Chinese veteran of World War II and immigrates into the United States.

#### 1949

Fong becomes a U.S. citizen; Yee Fee King comes to the United States and leaves two younger children—Dorsee and Jimmy—in the care of relatives in China.

Top right: **Prospecting for gold near Nevada City, California, 1852.**

Above right: **Restaurant and Tea Garden, Chinatown, San Francisco.** ©Chinese Historical Society of America.





Left: From left to right, Fong Soo Foon, Yee Fee King, their daughters Dorsee and Bik To, and her husband and children.  
Below: Jimmy Fong.  
Bottom: Julia Fong and her maternal great-grandmother, in China.

#### 1951

Dorsee and Jimmy escape Communist Revolution and stay with cousins in Hong Kong; Dorsee becomes a “paper daughter” and joins her family in the United States.

#### 1958

After many attempts, Fong’s petition to bring his son to America is approved, and Jimmy joins his family in the United States.

#### 1958

Angel Island becomes a national park.

Fong Soo Foon began the process of becoming an American citizen, but the small quota for naturalized Chinese kept him waiting six years. In 1949, Yee Fee King was granted a visa to join her husband, and Fong Soo Foon found a chance to bring Jimmy over as a paper son. Jimmy’s opportunity fell through as Yee Fee King’s visa was about to expire, and she faced the same kind of terrible choice that once confronted her husband. She could either give up her chance to immigrate, or leave behind her two youngest children, now sixteen and nine. Not knowing if she would ever have another chance to join her husband, Yee Fee King left her children with her mother and sailed from China in 1950, filled with determination to bring her children to the United States.



Poverty kept Dorsee and Jimmy trapped at their village. The villagers, desperate for money, refused to allow the children to leave because they believed that Fong Soo Foon would send them more money. The next year, Dorsee devised a scheme to travel with her brother to Hong Kong, supposedly to retrieve more money from her father and bring it back to the village. Once there, she and Jimmy found distant relatives to stay with. Shortly afterward, Dorsee had the chance to become a “paper daughter” herself, but only if she

left within four months. On September 11, Dorsee sadly told her little brother to be a good boy and do well in school before she stepped on a plane for the United States, one day before her papers expired.

Jimmy was now 10 years old and the only member of his family left behind. Jimmy’s parents sent him many letters and as much money as they could, and repeatedly petitioned the U.S. government to grant him a visa. Out of frustration and loneliness, Jimmy took up calligraphy and poured his emotions into the intricate, elegant Chinese characters. In 1958—seven years after his sister left Hong Kong and nine years after his father became a naturalized citizen—Jimmy was finally granted permission to join his family in America and meet his father for the first time.



SOME FORTY YEARS LATER, JIMMY’S DAUGHTER JULIA took her fourth grade class to the Chinese Historical Society in San Francisco and noticed a program called “In Search of Roots.” The discovery of the program matched her budding interest in her heritage. As an intern she interviewed her father, aunts, and other relatives, pored over immigration files, returned to China, and toured the Angel Island Immigration Center. She then reconstructed the story of her grandfather’s refusal to let poverty, distance, or immigration laws keep him from his dream or his family. And she transformed her own indifference and even embarrassment over her family’s struggle to a source of intense pride.