



Ancestors Revealed

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Are your Family Documents in Someone's Attic?



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Last Thanksgiving, my husband's cousin, Carol, arrived for the annual turkey dinner with a box containing an amazing treasure. Inside was over 40 letters from 1845 through 1922, saved by her grandmother. These letters chronicled the family's life in Plymouth (as descendants of Pilgrims), running Boarding Houses in Boston, and moving west as early settlers of Iowa. The earliest letters were mere folded missives, sealed with wax, carried

to their destination by a friend or neighbor.

My husband and I could not get over our excitement as we read these letters, doling out fatherly advice, expressing sympathy for the loss of loved ones and describing the cultural and financial circumstances of the times. Among other things, the letters validated family lore that an ancestor had been to the Gold Rush. Now we had a date when he was in California and knew the amount his family had received for the gold he found.

I scanned each of these letters, preserved and transcribed them and created a book which I shared with family members. The details of the letters held clues for further research, which I also included in the book.

Now each member of our family has a copy of these precious letters for their own. One relative wrote to me, "I cannot

believe what you have done with these things I saw as papers-in-a-box that I never explored further. As children, we all knew the Family Archives were in trunks and boxes in the attic, but somehow they were too important to be handled, so we pretty much left them alone. We heard the Family Stories at the dinner table, especially when Auntie Bar was there on Sundays, but the papers were off limits."

Every family has a cousin Carol, "guardian of the family papers" or photo albums. Often that person is reluctant to let these items out to their sight. And for good reason. Old photos and papers are one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable. That's why scanning and preserving them is so important.

Genealogists specialize in preserving family memorabilia, putting it in historical context and using it to further your family history research. Find your documents and photos and I will help you.

History I learned from the letters

- Men going to CA for the gold rush needed passports because CA did not become a state until Sept. 1850.
- In 1850 people engaged in a game called fillapeen. A person finding a nut with two kernels ate one, and gave the other to a person of the opposite sex, and then whichever said "fillapeen" first at the next meeting won a present.

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“HOW
WONDERFUL
TO PRESERVE
THESE
DOCUMENTS
FOR
GENERATIONS
OF THE FAMILY
YET TO BE
BORN”

~JOHN BEARY

Preserve Letters & Photos Before its too Late

Here are some things to know when approaching family members about sharing documents and photos:

1– Photos and letters are degrading and fading each day. A scanned image will last much longer.

2– Scanning can be done anywhere, on a portable machine. So the items never have to leave the sight of the owner.

3– Scanning an item creates a copy that is stored as a photo on a computer.

4– The photo that is saved on the computer can be put on any number of disks to be shared with any number of people.

5– Once an item is scanned, it can be enlarged for better viewing and can also be cropped and printed for

framing.

6– Scanning an item will not damage it.

7– Books, letters, photos, birth, death and marriage certificates can all be scanned.

8– Once scanned, photos and documents should be preserved in acid free, archival quality sleeves and archival quality box. These are not expensive and protect materials from deterioration.

Excerpts from Cousin Carol's Family Letters



The gold you sent home arrived safely last week, by the Cherokee and pa got for it \$203.45. What kind of a place have you got into to dig, is there a plenty of the shiners so you can get enough to come home by fall?

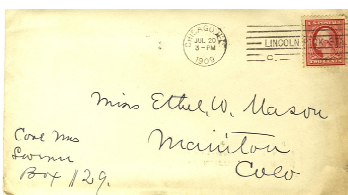
I expect he is a very fine looking man, as near as I can find out, he has promised to send Mary E. his miniature.

~Aug. 11, 1850



Illinois is now settling up with a more intelligent class of people than have been here from it's first settlement

...way down in [the southern part of the state] where there's nothing but Democrats we can't expect to see schools ~March 15, 1857



You remember the Frog Pond on the Boston Common don't you? Well she went up early one morning and saw a young elephant taking his bath in it;

he laid down in it and then filling his trunk with water, spouted it all over himself! Musn't it have been a queer sight! ~July 14, 1859

I called at Mr Spragues yesterday to ascertain if you still lived in the Howling Wilderness (Waukegan, IL.) I am engaged again. Will not tell you the Gentlemans name until I am married for we don't know what might happen ~February 10, 1862

I have broken my glasses and I want you to help me out. Enclosed are the glasses also .66 cents in stamps which I think is what I paid for 'em at Seagle Coopers. So when you are down town wish you would step in and get a pair or else your grandfather would have to buy a dog and staff ~April 9, 1896

Envelopes from “Cousin Carol's letters”.