My Very First Family History Research

by Ron Vincent, Friday, April 10, 2020

This is the story of how I became a 3rd generation Vincent Family historian.

I was in my 4th year of military service stationed at Castle Air Force Base, Atwater, Merced County, California. I was due to be discharged the middle of August 1970. I attended the Atwater Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My Air Force friend and fellow barracks mate, Jim Brey, and I were offered a class in genealogy.

To begin, the sister who taught the class gave each of us a blank pedigree chart and some blank family group sheets. She told us to write all we know about our family then ask relatives for the information that was missing. Jim and I began a family research quest that, as of the summer of 2020, has lasted half a century.

I wrote what I knew on the pedigree and group sheet. It wasn't much and I had no one to talk to who could tell me more. Furthermore, I was over 2,200 miles from home and this was years before internet and mobile phones were invented. Even access to a telephone was limited plus long-distances telephone calls were too expensive.

I wrote home to ask my wife Susie if she could find out more from my parents. She enjoyed visiting with my parents and it wasn't long before she sent me a packet of information.

My dad had been doing family research before I was born and mother knew a lot about her family.

Susie even visited the local library to find out more based on what my parents told her. She kept extensive notes and sent those to me because photocopies were hard to obtain and were expensive. I still have those notes she made way back in 1970 as well as the cover letter she sent me.

First, I'll include the notes. Past the notes you'll find an image copy of the letter she sent.

1850 - Chambers Co. Ala Census

1. John Vincent, 21, M, schoolteacher born Pennsylvania, living with Daniel S. Robinson. census 1850 1081 page 342

Marr. of Some Virginia Residents 1607-1800 ~~1607-1800~~ SO. 929.355

Hawes -

① — m. Judith Aylett dau. of William of King William Co. Caroline, p. 365.

② — m. John Coleman.

③ Anne m. Henry Washington.

④ Charlotte m. (1) Richard Buckner; m. (2) William Buckner.

⑤ Daniel m. 17 May 1779, Margaret Miller. dau. Thomas Miller. Goochland Co. Mar. Bond.

⑥ Elizabeth m. Thomas Buckner.

⑦ Elizabeth m. Thomas Coghill.

⑧ Eunice m. John Coleman

⑨ ~~Mary~~ Mary m Robert Buckner

⑩ Mary (or Marye) m. Elijah Daniel

⑪ Richard, b. 1772, son of Samuel and ~~Ann~~ Anne (Walker) m. 1792 Clara Walker b. Spotsylvania Co., res. 1797 ~~res. 1797~~

Caroline Co.; rem. 1810 to Ky.
Caroline, p. 440; Bicg. Enc. Ky. p. 142
12) Samuel m. 16 Feb., 1749, Mary Ann Balls (? Ralls). OPR.
13) Samuel m. ca. 1712, Anne Spencer. Caroline, p. 440
14) Samuel, b. 1727, Caroline Co.; d. there, 1780; son of Samuel and Anne (Spencer); m. 1751; Ann "Nannie" Walker. Caroline p. 440; DAR No. 31 432; DAR no. 82 510.
15) Thomas m. 2 Jan 1792, Hannah Wright. Caroline Co. Mar. Record

Constant Hawes dau. of Richard and Ann Hawes married Thomas Dewey born 16 February 1640 marriage date - 1 June 1663

Thomas was son of
Thomas Dewey b. ___ died 27 Apr. 1648
Francis Clark widow of Joseph Clark - md. 22 May 1638-9

~~Caroline Co. Virginia~~
~~SO. 975.536~~

Colonial families of the USA Vol. 2 SO 929.1

1) Constant Hawes (dau. Richard and Ann Hawes) b. 17 July 1642, d. 27 Apr 1702-3, m. 1 June 1663 to Thomas Dewey

2) "Page 221 John Hawes, the elder, of St. Lawrence in the Co of Essex, Yeoman, 7 th Aug 1613, proved 12 Oct. 1613 ~~a~~ widow Elizabeth

Lineage Book DAR Vol 32
p. 166 - Samuel Hawes and Nannie Walker m. 1751. Samuel Hawes (1727-80)

Lineage Book DAR Vol 83
p. 195 Eliza Nicholas Hawes (1833-1904) dau Edwin Hawes (1807-77) son Richard Hawes and Clara (Walker), son of Samuel Hawes and Ann (Walker)

Alabama Records Bibb Co. Vol. 160

1) Susan Blake m. 8 October 1837 Joel Taylor - Marr. Bk D page 23

2) John Blake name throughout county records as an official.

3) will of John Blake Sen Vol 166 p. 43

Marr. Records Bibb Co. 1820-1860

1) Blake, Asa and Harriet Elizabeth McMin (?) Potts, 5 July 1830; 8 July by D. R. Boyd, J. P. Bride's name was later written "Harriet Potts." (Note: In 1850, she was 40, b. N.C., "insane".) C-95

2) Blak (Blake), Asa and Melissa Jane Pearce, 20 Oct. 1853, 20 Oct. by P. Wallace, J. P. Consent of William Pearce for daughter. E-79

3) Blake, John and Dicy Griffin, 20 Aug 1844: 22 Aug. by B. L. Defreese, M.G. (Note: In 1850, John was 30, b. Ala., Disa was 22, b. Ga.) D-291

4) Blake, Madison and Martha Ann Youngblood, 13 Nov. 1839; 14 Nov. by J. E. Sumners, Judge. (Note: named in will of John Blake, Sr. See Handmade Vol 166.) D-145

5) Blake, Richard and Elizabeth Fulton, 14 Aug. 1848; 15 Aug by N. Haggard. D-400

6/ Blake, Thomas and Elizabeth Ann Youngblood, 26 Feb. 1833. 28 Feb. by J. E. Summers; M. G. Consent of her father, Henry Youngblood. C-230

Jones & Garland Vol. 232

p. 17 - B. H. Warren, Judge, ~~work~~ heard a case for Mary Mayberry.

p. 80 - Marr. Bk. E, P 85. Joseph Warren to Martha Goodwin 27 Dec. 1853 (29 Dec) by Samuel Knott

p. 32 - Tract Bk, Archer Blake, assignee - T24N R10E St Stephens meridian. NE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Sec. 21. 39.64 acres. Apr. 14, 1853 #75448 Military Act of 1850

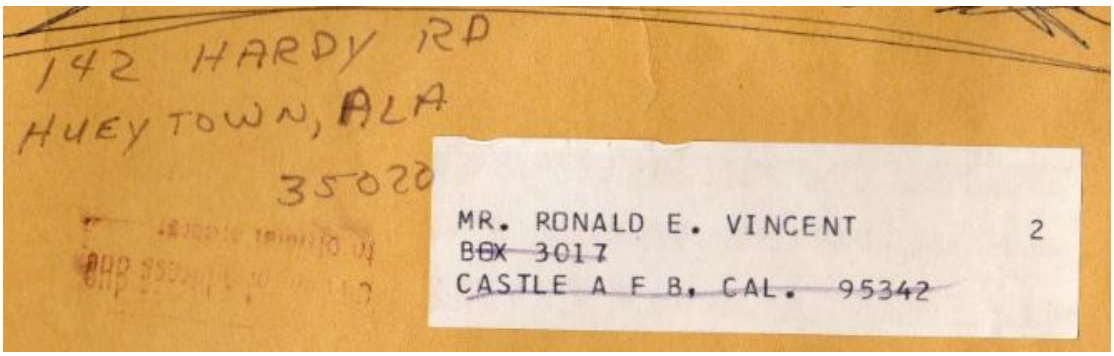
p. 79 Marr. Bk E p. 79 Asa Blak (Blake) to Melissa Jane Pearce 20 Oct. 1853 (20 Oct.) by P. Wallace JP consent of William Pearce for dau

p. 99 - Marr. Bk E p. 156. Thomas Carlisle to Mary Blake, 21 July 1856 (21 July) by R. L. Boyd, JP.

The letter she sent, dated July 2, 1970, was saved by me in the enveloped pictured below. The envelope her letter arrived in has been lost but I received this other envelope a little later in which I saved her letter. This other envelope arrived at Castle Air Force Base after I was discharged in August 1970. The base post office forwarded it to where I moved.

The postmark on the face of the envelope shows it was mailed from Akron, OH on Sept. 21, 1970. It arrived in the Merced, CA post office on Sept. 24th. They forwarded it to Castle Air Force Base in nearby Atwater.

The base mailroom discovered I had been discharged and marked the envelope undeliverable. They wrote my correct address on the face of the envelope and had the post office forward it.



Susie's 5-page letter follows. It is rather personal but it's a clear example of what novices we were at doing family research.

Since neither of us kept a journal back then, this letter also gives precious information about what life was like for her. She was living with her parents trying to help with their family budget on our meager pay while also caring for our first child, 7-month-old son, John.

P.S. Some of the information on the family group sheets is in the wrong order or place. Mostly children not in order and explanations under "other marriages."

July 2, 1970

Dear Ronnie,

Here is all the information I have on your family. As you can see a lot of it is ready to be submitted. And a lot more information is readily available. I suggest that you get all of it before you start researching records. Look under "Other Marriages" and "Explanations" and also on the back of some of the sheets for information as to where you have relatives living who might give you a little more information.

Where you have the town that they live in you can probably get the address from information in that city. It's toll-free but you'll have to put it through the operator if you use a pay phone. If you dial direct find the area code from the operator if you don't know it and dial 1 - the area code - 555-1212. Be sure to ask for the telephone number first or they may not give you the

address. I know you know all this but I'm just reminding you.

I'm enclosing some mailing forms you can use. You can get more from your Ward I guess. It doesn't have the Temple Data on it so you won't have to explain. Pres. Acker says you should inclose a self-addressed stamped envelope and you'll get better response. Be sure to ask them to tell you about all marriages and divorces because people often forget or hide other marriages than the one they are most familar with.

I've enjoyed working with your family. I know you will be happy to get to work on it some. I'm not as enthusiatic about working with my people. I guess because I don't have nearly so much done and it hasn't gotten interesting yet. But with our July 4 Family Reunion I should be able to set up some appointments

to get more information.

I went today and spent my allotment check. I got John a life jacket to wear in the boat and in swimming. I got me a swimsuit (which was a little extravagant since I could have done without it). I should have saved my money but I haven't been able to swim all summer because I didn't have one so I decided I "deserved" one for losing so much weight (13 pounds).

I got some things for the car and some canning equipment and so my money went. But don't worry about me. I've got enough.

Did you send a check to Dr. Dietz? I hope you can send him some. I pay him some but I can't pay a lot and our bill keeps going up. We average $10 a month just for routine check ups. Maybe soon I'll be down to ideal weight and John will

be finished with his shots and we'll be finished with going to the doctor every month. If we have to continue like this after you get out of service it may be difficult to stay ahead.

Well, baby, I'd better go now. I've got a lot to do. I hope you have good luck with your genealogy. I know you'll do your best.

I love you very much. Will see you soon. You asked about my schedule well here it is: Sunday - Sunday School and Sacrament, visiting in between usually.
Monday - wash clothes, shop, clean house
Tuesday - " " " Relief Society
Wed. wash, clean house, Genealogy
Thurs. Primary, Prep. Meetings, wash, clean
Fri. wash, clean, shop
Sat. wash, clean, & get ready for Sunday

As you can see, I do a lot of washing and cleaning. John needs clothes washed every other day and we usually do the rest on

alternate days. Occassionally we skip a day and then frantically try to catch up for the next 3 days.

Now I'd really must go now. I'll see you in my dreams, my love. I love and adore you.

Love,
Susi

Page 1 of Susie's Letter

On the bottom of the first page of her letter, Susie goes into a lengthy explanation of how to get addresses from 4-1-1 "Information" which at the time was Bell Telephone System's operator services. Although they were reluctant to give out anymore than phone numbers, there was a way to get them to also give addresses if we were careful how we asked.

Susie had worked as a Bell System Information Operator from the time she was a senior in high school. She knew how to ask "Information" the right questions.

Page 2 of Susie's Letter

On the next page she mentions "Pres. Acker." John Acker was the president of the Bessemer Branch, Birmingham Alabama District, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On this same page she mentions doing family research in her own family and how she is looking forward to meeting some aunts, uncles, and cousins on their next family reunion held on Independence Day.

Page 3 of Susie's Letter

From this page onward she is sharing personal information. This may be historically significant to our descendants. The "allotment check" she mentions is the meager amount from the Air Force sent to the spouse of married enlisted personnel. When we were living off base this was $100.00 a month. It was a lot of money in 1970.

Unfortunately, it included the amount the Air Force would have spent on living quarters as well as meals for me. Since I was forced to live in a barracks while stationed in California, the check was much smaller and only covered the cost of my meals plus a small additional amount for Susie.

She talks about losing weight but she only weighed about 130 lbs at the time. Her dad was in the habit of spending many days each summer on Alabama's Warrior River. He rented a cabin there where the family slept during summer week days. They would go boating and water skiing which was surprising since her father did not know how to swim.

She asked if I paid on our bill to the family doctor, Carl Dietz. He was an old family friend who had attended school with Susie's father and who had in fact delivered Susie when she was born. I do not know how much our bill amounted to Dr. Dietz. I only know it was hundreds of dollars and we could only afford to pay him a few dollars a month. He never complained.

Page 4 & 5 of Susie's Letter

As she concludes her letter, Susie gave details of her weekly schedule. This is really priceless. Back then things were very different than what they are today. Church today combines almost all meetings in a simple 2-hour period. In 1970 our church met twice (morning and evening) on Sunday and again on several other days of the week.

Her weekly women's Relief Society meeting was on Tuesday. Wednesday was for youth meetings. We had no teens but we did eventually have a family history center in our church building and people would often go on Wednesday evenings to work on their family history research.

Children's Primary meeting was on Thursday. Susie was a Primary leader and attended the leaders' preparation meetings also held on Thursday.

She mentions having to wash a lot of clothes for our son John. What she does not mention is that we used only cloth diapers for our first 4 children. We could not afford disposable diapers for many, many years so everything he wore and everything we cleaned him with was made of cloth.

~ rv ~