Five Countries, Three Continents An "American" Family History

The coronavirus situation has left most of us living in some state of isolation and disruption of our usual daily activities. People have been endlessly creative in responding to the pandemic and adjusting to the "new normal." Beyond tackling the obstacles related to maintaining the basics of life, they have challenged themselves to use the hours and days of staying at home to do things they have had on their to-do lists or to try something new (learn a language, try a new hobby, etc.). In that vein, I recently had the good fortune of being contacted by a new client, Ellen Daly Leuner, who was using her downtime to focus on her family history and asked if I was available to work on it. It was a most welcome diversion from COVID-19 for me. She provided me with a good deal of information to get me started. Ellen's family story is one that epitomizes the American stew of ethnicities and origins.

Ellen knew that her paternal grandfather, Timothy Joseph Daly, was born in Castleisland, County Kerry, Ireland in 1888, and that her father was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1923. She was especially interested in discovering more information about her father's maternal ancestry, particularly her "Washington line." A story had passed down through multiple generations of her Washington family that they were related to U.S. President George Washington. Research shows that both Ellen's Washington line and the President's had roots in the northwest of England in the Lancashire region but, while Ellen's Washingtons remained in that area until leaving for Ontario Canada in 1829, the President's direct ancestors relocated to Northamptonshire in the southeast of the country 500 years ago. The President's ancestors remained there until John Washington, the President's great-grandfather, emigrated to Virginia in 1657. The President's grandfather and father were subsequently born in Virginia. The President himself was born in Virginia in 1732. Any connection point between Ellen's and the President's Washington lines would likely have been over 500 years ago.

But, as it turns out, Ellen does have at least one George Washington in her family tree: her great-great-great-grandfather George Washington, born in England in 1816. At the age of 12, he emigrated with his parents (Stephen Washington and Elizabeth Little) from Heversham, England to Ontario, Canada. In 1839, George married Caroline Pratt in Ontario. George and Caroline had many children, including a son named Nelson Washington who became a doctor and was Ellen's great-great-grandfather. Ellen's George Washington lived a long life in Durham, Ontario, dying there in 1905 at the age of 89.

While no absolute proof has been found (yet) that Ellen's

The Auditorium Hotel and its lobby in Chicago, where the family story of being related to President George Washington was publicized by the press.

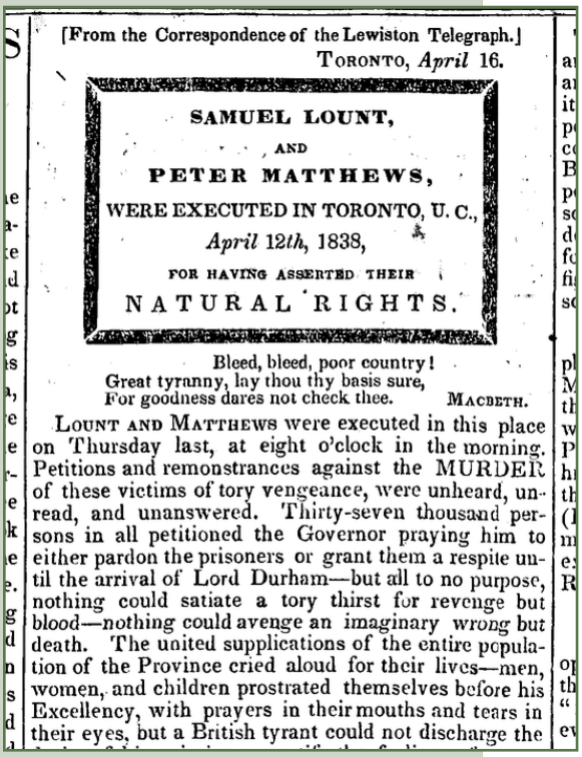
Washington line and that of President Washington are branches of the same ancestral tree, the search for Ellen's Washington ancestors did result in some surprising, interesting, and entertaining finds. Those discoveries came from a multi-pronged research approach and illustrate the importance of remembering that genealogy research is not just about creating a family tree chart. Genealogy research should be done in tandem with historical research so that names and dates are viewed in the context of the times in which those people lived. In the case of Ellen's research, great finds came from online newspaper archives, an Ontario Canada genealogy and history website, and from historical research related to colonial British India in the 1800s.

Newspaper Archives:

Dr. Nelson Washington and his wife, Harriet McFarland Washington, were each found in interesting newspaper stories. Dr. Washington, a Methodist, died in February 1921 and an unusual bequest in his will was the subject of a few articles that appeared in *The Gazette* (Montreal, Canada) in March 1921. His will stated that, after the death of his wife Harriet, "residuary income" of his estate would go to his four granddaughters "provided that they don't marry Roman Catholics and do not become actresses and appear on the theatrical stage." One of the granddaughters stated that the girls were aware of that condition in the will but were "at a loss" to understand their grandfather's motivation since he had never expressed any "deep prejudice" against Roman Catholics or the theatre. Less than 18 months after these articles appeared, one of the granddaughters (my client Ellen's grandmother, Dorothy Rowland) married Timothy Daly, a Roman Catholic!

Dr. Washington's wife Harriet made the papers in an 1897 article that was first published in the *Chicago Chronicle* and then reprinted by the *Vancouver Daily World*. Titled "Descendants of Washington," the piece reported that a Mrs. Nelson Washington of London England had registered at the Auditorium Hotel along with her daughter Mrs. Rowland of Toronto and son-in-law. The threesome was reportedly traveling "for recreation and health." While at the hotel, Mrs. Washington was heard to say that her husband was the great-great-great-grandson of one Stephen

Washington, who left England along with two brothers, one of whom was "an ancestor of President George Washington." She stated that her husband's ancestor settled in Canada while President Washington's ancestor settled in Virginia. The article ended, tongue-in-cheek, with the reporter's observation that Mrs. Washington's daughter, Mrs. Rowland, did not "bear much resemblance" to the father of our country, saying she was "pretty, of medium height, a blonde, and carries no doubt with her as to her relationship with the first President of the United States." (In fact, Dr. Nelson Washington was the great-grandson of a Stephen Washington born in England in 1755 who remained in England his entire life. Dr. Nelson's grandfather, Stephen Washington Jr. was born in England in 1786—54 years after President Washington was born in Virginia. It was he who emigrated to Canada in 1829.)



[From the Correspondence of the Lewiston Telegraph.]
TORONTO, *April* 16.

SAMUEL LOUNT,
AND
PETER MATTHEWS,
WERE EXECUTED IN TORONTO, U. C.,
April 12th, 1838,
FOR HAVING ASSERTED THEIR
NATURAL RIGHTS.

Bleed, bleed, poor country!
Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,
For goodness dares not check thee. MACBETH.

LOUNT AND MATTHEWS were executed in this place on Thursday last, at eight o'clock in the morning. Petitions and remonstrances against the MURDER of these victims of tory vengeance, were unheard, unread, and unanswered. Thirty-seven thousand persons in all petitioned the Governor praying him to either pardon the prisoners or grant them a respite until the arrival of Lord Durham—but all to no purpose, nothing could satiate a tory thirst for revenge but blood—nothing could avenge an imaginary wrong but death. The united supplications of the entire population of the Province cried aloud for their lives—men, women, and children prostrated themselves before his Excellency, with prayers in their mouths and tears in their eyes, but a British tyrant could not discharge the

A sympathetic account of the executions of Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, from *Mackenzie's British, Irish, and Canadian Gazette*, Rochester, NY, August 11, 1838.

www.genealogybank.com

Ontario and Upper Canada Genealogy and History:

An excellent resource with extensive content, this site, www.ontariogenealogy.com, was designed and created by Michael Stephenson. Included in the wide variety of information and links provided on the site was a mid-1890s historical reminiscence penned by one Stephen Washington, a brother of my client Ellen's great-great-great-grandfather, George Washington. Stephen gave his birthplace (in 1813) as Kendal, England, saying that Kendal was "where the ancestors of (President) George Washington were born and resided." He described his immediate family's 1829 emigration from England to Canada, saying that the sea voyage to Quebec, which took five weeks and four days, was "favorable" until the ship ran aground at the entrance to the St. Lawrence River. His father first purchased land near what is now Toronto for $7.50 an acre. He went on to talk about a later purchase of a large parcel in Darlington Township and the hard, physical labor it took to clear the land, build a homestead, and farm there. He also talked warmly and by name about other early settlers who became his friends and neighbors. In closing his story, he said he wanted "to say a little about my experience as a soldier." He gave no dates related to his service but said it was when "the rebellion broke out" and he mentioned a man named Matthews, a rebel leader, who was hanged after the rebellion was put down. Stephen Washington said Matthews was hanged because he ordered the shooting of a young Englishman who was employed by a local company.

Wanting to know more about Matthews and when the rebellion took place, I searched online and found that Captain Peter Matthews was a farmer and soldier who participated in the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837. Born in 1789 in Upper Canada (now southern Ontario) and raised in a Loyalist family, Matthews had served as a sergeant in the militia during the War of 1812. He later became an activist in a movement seeking reforms from the

Florence Washington

Radcliffe Rowland & Florence Washington, 1894, Bombay, India.

Florence Washington Rowland with Dorothy.

Dorothy Rowland Daly

British government and then joined up with a group planning a rebellion, serving as one of the local leaders. Matthews's unit of about sixty men was tasked with creating a diversion on a bridge. Just as Stephen Washington had written in his reminiscence about that rebellion, Matthews and his men killed one man and burned the bridge before retreating. Matthews was arrested, jailed, and pled guilty to a charge of treason for which he was hanged in 1838. He was pardoned posthumously in 1848. What a difference ten years and hindsight can make!

British India in the 19th Century:

Among the information Ellen provided when she asked me to research her family was the fact that her grandmother, Dorothy Rowland was born in India. Dorothy's mother was Florence Lorena Washington, who was born in Ontario Canada in 1871, the same "pretty blond woman" mentioned in the 1897 newspaper article. Dorothy's father was Radcliffe W. Rowland, who was born in India in 1860. His parents were among many British who had settled in India during the era when India was under British colonial rule. Ellen knew little about her great-grandfather. Research revealed that Radcliffe Rowland and Florence Washington married in Byculla, Bombay, India in January 1894. Their daughter Dorothy Rowland was born in November 1894 in Bombay. Their marriage was short-lived. By 1901, their marriage had ended and Radcliffe Rowland was living with his sister in Surrey, England. Later that year, Radcliffe died in Surrey at the age of 41. But there was more to find out about Radcliffe Rowland. He was recorded in the 1881 United Kingdom (UK) census as a student studying at the Royal Indian Engineering College (more commonly called Cooper's Hill College) in Egham, England. The mission of that college was to train engineers to serve in the Public Works Department of India. In 1886, Radcliffe Rowland was included in a publication listing UK civil engineers. His place of employment was shown as Sirhind Canal in Punjab, India. Further research confirmed that Radcliffe Rowland's parents and grandparents had lived in India for four decades prior to his birth there in 1860.

It was my pleasure to work with Ellen to research her family's history and rediscover their diverse and worldwide roots that span England, Ireland, Canada, India and, ultimately, the United States. Ellen's Washington/Rowland/Daly family research yielded interesting surprises and important insights into the actual lives of her ancestors. The old saying: *Truth is stranger than fiction* very often applies in genealogy research and, in my experience, the imaginings of even the most creative of authors has nothing on the true-life stories of our ancestors.

"Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies."

—Shirley Abbott

Maureen Wlodarczyk

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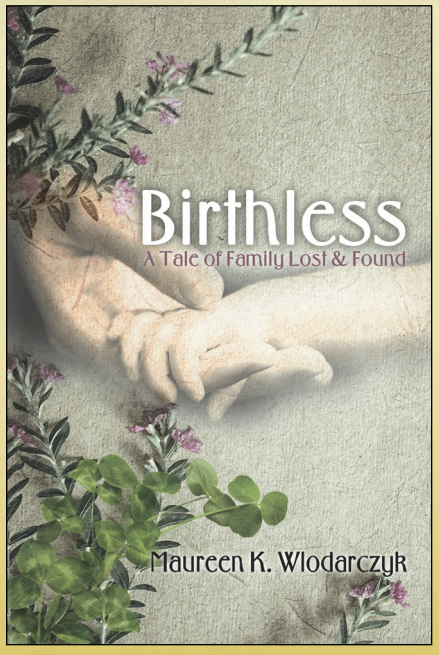

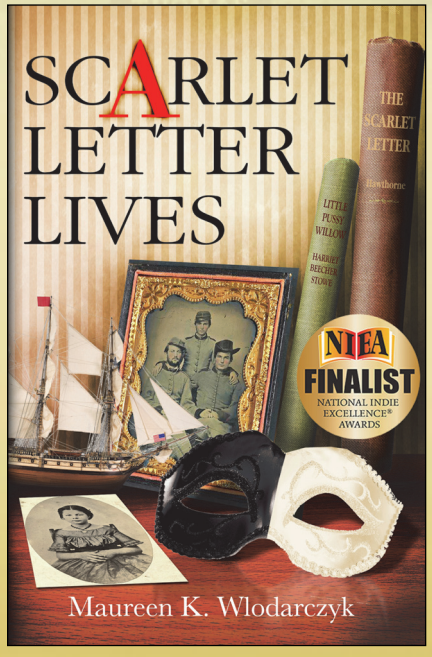

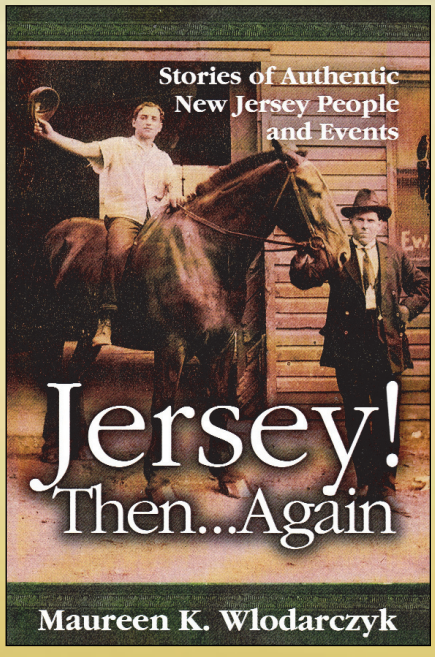

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