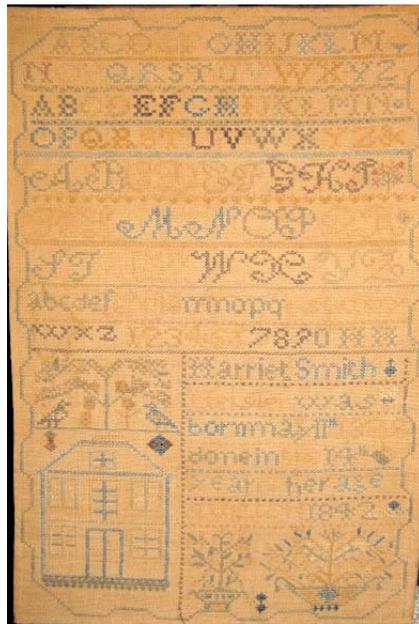


HISTORY & Mystery Perfect Together!



Garden State Legacy's Genealogy column author, Maureen Wlodarczyk, is an avid genealogist with over 30 years' experience, an author, a columnist and a speaker about genealogy. Maureen's first two books, both true "Jersey" stories of the 19th century, are the result of Maureen's own surprising and poignant family research discoveries. Maureen also writes a column about Hudson County historical people, places and events for the *River View Observer* newspaper. In reviewing Maureen's first book, *Past-Forward: A Three-Decade and Three-Thousand-Mile Journey Home*, the New Jersey Genealogical Society called the book "an excellent example of taking genealogy far beyond just names and places and dates by including personal stories, summaries of the research process and what emotions are uncovered in the quest to find our ancestors," and said that *Past-Forward* would be valuable to "anyone who has an interest in the journey of seeking their ancestors." Find out more about Maureen, including a recording of her recent interview on The Authors Show internet radio program, at www.past-forward.com.



The trinity of history, genealogy & antiques...

...has been igniting sparks of curiosity in my life for decades, launching historical research journeys, genealogical quests and the hunt for dusty old things in flea markets. Sometimes, rarely, two or even all three elements of that trinity converge in a serendipitous adventure like the one I had when I purchased a mid-nineteenth century schoolgirl sampler a few years ago.

On a hot summer morning I was purposefully moving through the rows of tables at the Golden Nugget Antique Market in Lambertville, my feet and those of many other antiques hunters literally kicking up dust while scanning the seller offerings. Spotting a particular seller who often had the kind of folky old things I especially like, I slowed to take a good look at his table. I inquired about two samplers he was selling with particular interest in the older of them. Dated 1842, signed by the girl who made it, and embroidered with a federal-style house, birds and lovely baskets, it was calling me. He had done some initial research on the name of the sampler-maker and felt certain the sampler was done by a girl from South Jersey who lived in a town that bore her family surname, Heisler. Considerable negotiation followed. Always courteous when trying to make my best deal, I reminded the seller that I was a repeat customer and likely future customer and asked for his help in getting to a price that would work for both of us. The repartee bounced back and forth and just when I was thinking that perhaps I should pass, we came to an agreement and the sampler came home with me.

The sampler was in good condition, save for certain of the thread colors having faded more than others, making those areas harder to distinguish. Among the most faded was the maker's last name but there was no doubt that it was Heisler, her full name being Harriet Smith Heisler. Harriet had made the sampler in the "14th year of her age," in

1842, and embroidered her birth date as May 11, 1829. Knowing the maker's name and birth date and bitten by the history detective bug once more, I could not resist heading to Ancestry.com to start a search for Harriet. I'd like to say that my search was fueled by the pragmatic motive that documenting provenance enhances value but, since honesty is the best policy, the truth is that it was the lure and challenge of the hunt that had me firing up my computer.

I very quickly found the Heisler family in the 1850 US census, living in Maurice River Township in Cumberland County. At the time the census-taker visited, the household of ten people included Harriet, her parents George and Lydia Heisler, her siblings John, Rhoda, Hannah, Mary and Charles, an 82-year-old woman also named Lydia Heisler (who I guessed must be Harriet's paternal grandmother), and a 20-year-old man named John Spence. Harriet's father George gave his occupation as "farmer."

The 1860 US census found the Heisler family still residents of Maurice River. George and Lydia S. Heisler, ages 59 and 54 respectively according to the census-taker, had four of their children living with them, Rhoda, Hannah, Mary and Charles, along with a teenage boy, Elmer Errickson. George Heisler's occupation was given as "merchant farmer" with real estate assets valued at \$5,000 and personal property valued at \$2,000, obviously a successful man. Conspicuously missing was the object of my search, Harriet Heisler, who would have then been 31, and likely married. Her brother John Heisler was also gone from the household, believed to have married in 1856 and become a Methodist preacher. Next move, a side trip to FamilySearch.

FamilySearch.org, the family history research website of the Mormon Church and the largest and most robust repository of genealogical records, is open to everyone without charge. It is a treasure trove and an unparalleled gift to genealogical researchers and, in the case of my search for Harriet Heisler, it did not disappoint. As I suspected, Harriet had married after the 1850 census and prior to the 1860 census. On Christmas Eve 1854, in Maurice River Township, Harriet married George W. Spence, both bride and groom born in Cumberland County in 1829.

Segueing back and forth between Ancestry and FamilySearch, I learned that both Harriet and her husband George Spence were descended of families that had settled in South Jersey before the Revolutionary War. Harriet's mother was Lydia Smith Heisler, which explains Harriet having Smith as her middle name. Harriet's paternal grandmother was Lydia Spence Heisler, making it likely that Harriet's marriage was not the first between a Heisler and a Spence and confirming that the 82-year-old woman in the Heisler household when the 1850 census was taken was, in fact, Harriet's grandmother, born in



1768. John Spence, also part of that household in 1850, was most likely a cousin.

At the time the 1860 census was taken, Harriet, her husband, and their first two daughters were living next door to Harriet's parents, the Heislrs. Harriet and husband George Spence, who was also a farmer, lived in Maurice River Township in the section known as Heislerville throughout their marriage of over 60 years. They were the parents of four daughters, Julia, Caroline (called Carrie), Lydia (called Lily) and Mary. Harriet and George can be found in US census records for 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900 and 1910. George died in his 90th year in 1919 and it appears that his life partner Harriet died just a few years earlier, in her late 80s.

Having found out so much about the girl who made my sampler breathed life into the needlework wrought by her hands over 160 years earlier. Now that I knew Harriet, I wanted to know more about Maurice River Township, the place where she was born, lived, died and went to her eternal rest, at Leesburg Methodist Cemetery.

According to the website mauricerivertwp.org, Maurice River Township in Cumberland County currently includes a number of small villages including Heislerville and Leesburg. In the 1700s, one of the early families in Leesburg was that of a George Heisler, very possibly a relation to Harriet. Heislerville, originally known as Maurice River Neck, was first settled in the early to mid-1700s and, at one point, had a population of over 400 residents. Agriculture and fishing, including oystering, were the main industries in those days, with many residents being waterman as the village was situated where the Maurice River enters Delaware Bay. In the 1790s another George Heisler, likely the son of the Leesburg Heisler, homesteaded in Heislerville where the family became prominent in the local Methodist congregation.^{1,2}

All of the Heislrs and Spences having been tracked down and accounted for, only one person remained a mystery, Elmer Errickson, the young man listed as part of George and Lydia Heisler's household in 1860. Who was he? Family? Friend? Boarder? Time to find out.

More digging revealed that Elmer was the son of Furman and Rebecca Errickson, residents of the Ewings Neck (now Delmont) section of Maurice River Township. It appears he was employed by George Heisler as a farm laborer who boarded with the Heisler family in 1860. The following year young Elmer, about 18, joined the Union Army as the Civil War was heating up. He was mustered in on October 22, 1861 for a three-year term of service.

Elmer R. Errickson was assigned to the Tenth New Jersey Infantry Volunteers, Company B, and rose from the rank of Private to Corporal. The Tenth Regiment was first in a camp at Beverly, New Jersey, then going on to Camp Clay outside Washington, DC. The Tenth participated



in a series of engagements in Virginia from 1863 to 1865, including one in the first days of June 1864 at Cold Harbor, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. Years later, Ulysses S. Grant admitted that he still regretted giving the order for the final assault at Cold Harbor as any gains did not compensate for the heavy losses incurred. Among the thousands of Union casualties was young Corporal Elmer Errickson, wounded on the battlefield. Elmer was taken to the US Army Hospital at Alexandria, Virginia where he died of his wounds on June 9, 1864 at the age of 20. He was laid to rest at the National Cemetery in Alexandria. That five acre cemetery, located near Old Town Alexandria, was established in 1862 on lands originally known as Spring Garden Farm. By 1864 the cemetery was nearly filled to capacity, a factor leading to the planning and eventual construction of Arlington National Cemetery.^{3,4}

While I had set out to track down Harriet Smith Heisler, the maker of my 1842 sampler, it was the story of Civil War soldier Elmer Errickson that resonated with me and touched a nerve. Perhaps that is because my own great-great-grandfather was also a young Union Army soldier from New Jersey who was hospitalized after another Virginia engagement, the Battle of Williamsburg. Unlike Corporal Errickson, my ancestor survived to return home to his family in New Jersey. The journey to find Harriet had led me to Elmer, perfectly illustrating one of the important truths of genealogical research: one thing leads to another.



Endnotes:

- 1 Homepage, Maurice River Township, www.mauricrivertwp.org/history, December 27, 2011
- 2 Homepage, National Park Service, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/nj2/chap2d.htm, December 27, 2011
- 3 Homepage, US Department of Veterans Affairs, <http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/alexandriava.asp>, December 28, 2011
- 4 Stryker, William S., *Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Civil War 1861-1865 – Vol. I*. Trenton, NJ: John L. Murphy Steam Book and Job Printer. 1876. 488, 497.

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