

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.

History & Mystery...Perfect Together!

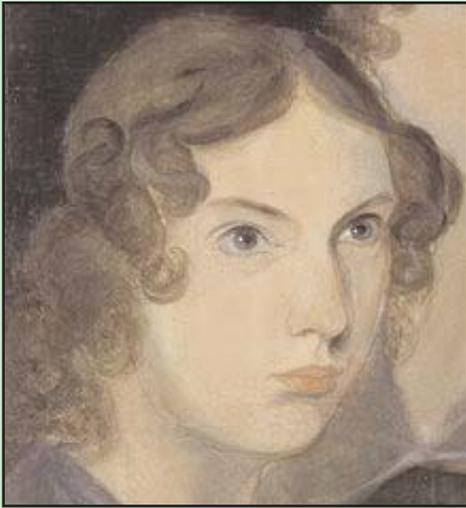
Being a self-published author who sells more Kindle and Nook books than their paper counterparts, I am very aware of the ever-increasing popularity of ebooks. Just the same, I remain drawn to the physical book I can hold in my hands, especially antiquarian books, those well-worn survivors whose yellowed or foxed pages and scoliotic spines speak to years of handling and enjoyment brought to multiple generations of readers. While I am not a collector of expensive editions of old books, I confess to having paid a premium to buy a 19th century copy of one of my favorite books, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, when I could have bought a nice clean and cheap modern edition. In my mind, I imagine a Victorian-era woman reading the book I now own, her eyes taking in the words as Hawthorne weaves the tale of Hester Prynne, a woman all-at-once a model of courage and the object of public shame. How many pairs of eyes, male and female, moved down and turned those pages, passing that book on until the day it became mine?

With that question in mind, let me tell you about my recent adventure with another old book I own, this one an 1864 edition of Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, a book first published sixteen years earlier in 1848 under the pseudonym "Acton Bell." Anne Bronte, sister to authors Charlotte and Emily Bronte and the least known of the three siblings, died of tuberculosis at the young age of 29 not long after publishing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* which had been very popularly received. Although written more than 160 years ago, its theme, a misused wife who defies convention and leaves her abusive husband to protect her young son from him, is as fresh and relevant today as it was revolutionary then.

My old copy of the book has an inscription on the first inside blank page: "M.C.S. Young, Belpassi, Oregon, 1866." Being a genealogy addict, that inscription presented a challenge I could not ignore and so I set out to find M.C.S. Young, the original owner of my book.

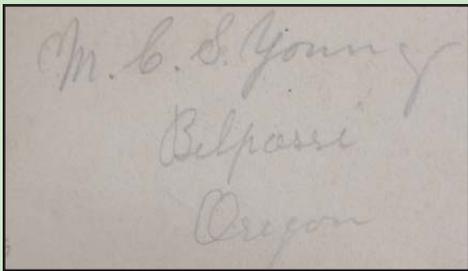
Where to start? First, some research on Belpassi (also spelled "Belle Passi") Oregon was in order. Belpassi, settled in the mid-1800s, was reportedly named by a local clergyman who read about an Italian town of the same name in a theology book, the name translating as "beautiful peaceful place." Located in the Willamette Valley, the area had earlier been the home of the Kalapuya Indians and then of French-Canadian settlers who had worked for the Hudson's Bay Company.¹ By the 1840s, American pioneer settlers headed west to the Oregon Territory to homestead the fertile lands of the Valley. In the 1850s, Belpassi became home to stores, a school, post office and a church, Cumberland Presbyterian, whose pastor Reverend Neill Johnson was the man said to have given Belpassi its unusual name. By the early 1870s, when the nearby community of Woodburn took root and Reverend Johnson moved his church there, Belpassi began to fade.² Today, little remains to mark the site

• Maureen Wlodarczyk • www.GardenStateLegacy.com September 2012



Anne Bronte

*Being a
genealogy addict,
that inscription
presented a
challenge I could
not ignore*



of the little town with the romantic name except Belle Passi Cemetery. M.C.S. Young lived in Belpassi in the 1860s during its days as a growing community and local social center. So, who was M.C.S. Young?

The handwriting of the person who wrote the pencil inscription in the front of my book said “adult” (but not “elderly”) to me. Unfortunately, the style of the cursive writing could easily be that of a man *or* a woman. Being a life-long intuiter, I am very comfortable relying on instincts and feelings mixed with logical thinking to arrive at conclusions. Using that unscientific methodology, I decided to start the search on Ancestry.com using a birth date of 1840, meaning that M.C.S. would have been about 26 years old when the inscription was written.

That initial Ancestry search led me to Milton and Celia Young, residents of Belpassi at the time the 1870 U.S. census was taken. Milton and Celia were both born in Illinois, he in 1827 and she in 1840. Milton was a prosperous farmer who told the census-taker he owned real estate with a value of \$3,000 and personal property valued at \$800. The Youngs had 6 children in 1870 ranging in age from 6 months to 14 years. Celia had married Milton in 1855 at the tender age of 15.

Expanding my search on the internet, I discovered that Celia was the daughter of Oregon pioneer settlers Charles and Margaret Cannon Hubbard. Celia had traveled with her family by wagon train from Illinois to the Oregon Territory in 1847 at the age of seven.³ The town of Hubbard, Oregon would be named for Celia’s father some years later. Through a Hubbard family genealogy website, I was able to cold-email a woman named Clara Hubbard Foster telling her about my book, the inscription and the possibility that the book belonged to a 19th century relation of hers. Clara generously offered to look through her voluminous family genealogy records, also thinking it very likely that Celia was the original owner of my book since Belpassi was a small town in the 1860s. Both of us were puzzled by the way the initials in the book inscription presented though. I wondered if the “M” was for Milton and the “C” for Celia . . . or perhaps the “M” was an abbreviation for “Mrs.” If so, what was the “S” for? Then there was the issue of Celia’s middle name which was Belle. Why wasn’t there a “B” in the initials of the inscription? Clara offered to dig further in her records looking for any connection to the elusive “S.”

In the meantime, being someone not very good at sitting still, I went back to Ancestry and instead of doing a search that specifically included Belpassi as the place of residence, I widened the search to all of Oregon knowing that would yield more results, something genealogists know to be both a good and a bad thing. While more possibilities mean more opportunities to find the person you are looking for, it also means much more work separating real leads from potential wild goose chases. I entered “M.C.S.” as the first name for the search and “Young” as the last



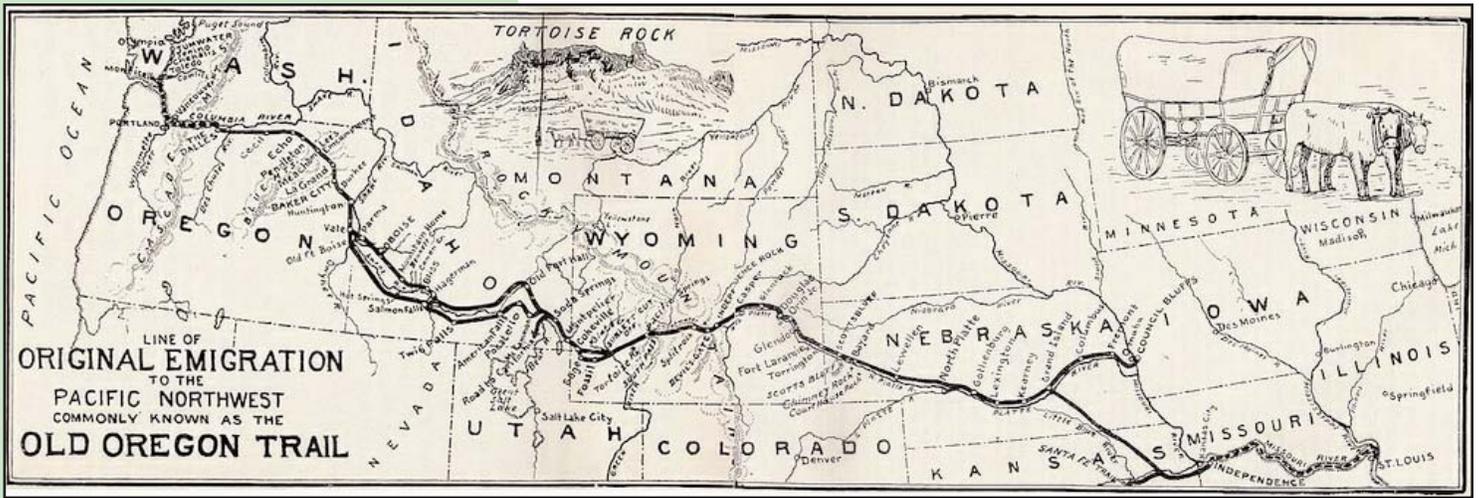
*I sat staring at
the screen
almost not
believing what
I was seeing.*

name, sticking with the unscientific 1840 year of birth. What did I have to lose? Expectations low, I hit the enter key. The screen blinked, refreshed and presented me with an 1880 census record for “M.C.S. Young,” born in 1839 in Pennsylvania and then living in Yamhill County, McMinnville, Oregon. Mrs. Young was the wife of physician Stephen A. Young, born in Illinois in 1840 and the mother of Rosa Young, age 12. I sat staring at the screen almost not believing what I was seeing. In just moments, I was on the hunt for more census records for the Youngs. Since Rosa was born in Oregon in 1868, there *had* to be an 1870 census record. I still didn’t know M.C.S.’s given name(s) but now knowing her husband’s name, age and place of birth, I could search for him specifically. Before doing that, I quickly sent off an email to Clara Foster telling her about my new discovery that very likely meant her ancestor was not the owner of my book.

Searching for Stephen Young, born in 1840 in Illinois, brought me straight to the 1870 census record and I found the Youngs once again residents of McMinnville. Stephen had, at that time, given his occupation not as a doctor but as a farmer owning real estate valued at \$12,550 and personal property valued at \$3,600. The census gave me Mrs. Young’s first name: Mary. Little Rosa, then age 2, was also listed on the census record. Based on Mary and Stephen Young being born in 1840, and Rosa’s age, I could estimate that they married in the mid-1860s. Could I find a record of their marriage? The hunt was on.

I did not find a marriage record on Ancestry and so jumped over to FamilySearch.org, the free genealogical website hosted by the Mormon Church. I entered Stephen A. Young’s name, Oregon for the location, the date range 1860–1868 and selected a marriage record search. Bingo! The search returned a January 1, 1866 marriage record for Stephen A. Young and M. Cecilia Spencer—and the mystery of “M.C.S.” was solved: *Mary Cecilia Spencer Young*. The owner of my treasured copy of Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* having been confirmed, it was time to find out more about Stephen and Cecilia Young and their lives in the untamed Oregon Territory.

Ancestry.com took me to the *Directory of Deceased American Physicians 1804–1929*, which listed Dr. Stephen A. Young as an 1876 graduate of the Medical College of the Pacific located in San Francisco. That explained his change of occupation from farmer in 1870 to physician in 1880. Public family tree listings on Ancestry provided more clues and I concluded that Dr. Young was the son of pioneer Joseph R. Young, born in Ohio in 1807, and his wife Mary Hussey, who married in Sangamon, Illinois in 1829. Joseph R. Young was an Illinois veteran of the 1832 Black Hawk (Indian) War, as was Abraham Lincoln. In 1850, Joseph and Mary Young packed up their family and traveled by wagon train to Oregon.



*By 1850,
Spencer wanted
very much to
travel to the
Oregon
Territory and
be part of the
missionary
church there.*

Stephen Young was ten years old when his family moved west, settling in Yamhill.

Mary Cecilia Spencer, born in 1839, was the daughter of Methodist minister Reverend John Spencer born in 1802 and his wife Julia Ann Fell, who married in Westmoreland, Pennsylvania in 1832. Julia Fell Spencer came from a long line of early Americans born in Pennsylvania as far back as the turn of the 18th century.

My web search for information about Reverend John Spencer surprised me with the discovery that a substantial archive of his personal papers is housed in the collections of the Washington State University Libraries. Included in the collection are his daily journals for 1858–1880, letters, newspaper clippings and sermon texts. The Washington State University Libraries website also includes a list of the Spencer children, including Mary Cecilia (and identifying her husband as Dr. S.A. Young) along with a fascinating short biographical sketch of Reverend Spencer and his family. To summarize that biography, John Spencer’s journals revealed he had a “conversion experience” that led to his decision to enter the ministry. He eventually became a church Elder in the 1840s while living in the Midwest. By 1850, Spencer wanted very much to travel to the Oregon Territory and be part of the missionary church there. Unable to get approval from church officials to do so, he resigned his post in Ohio and, in 1852, moved his family to Oregon where he took up a land claim in Chehalem, Yamhill County. There he and his sons built a log cabin and planted wheat, oats and fruit trees. A new home was built on the land in the mid-1860s and Reverend Spencer served as the local Superintendent of Schools. In 1872, Reverend Spencer sold his land to his son-in-law Stephen Young, moving to nearby McMinnville where Spencer served as postmaster from 1874 to 1880.⁴ Although apparently not serving as a congregational minister in Oregon, Reverend Spencer sometimes filled in at worship services, performed weddings and baptisms and is listed with the occupation “minister” or “clergyman” on every census record from

1850 to 1880. The good Reverend and his wife lived a long life in Oregon, well into their eighties.

Their daughter Mary Cecilia, who turned the pages of my book 140 years before me, predeceased her mother Julia, dying in 1889 at about 50 years old. A year or so later her husband, Dr. Stephen Young, remarried. He lived just past the turn of the 20th century.

I am grateful to M.C.S. Young for penciling her name into the front of a book that would pass through many hands and wander for many decades to find its way to me in 21st century New Jersey. Her simple inscription took me on a much-enjoyed historical journey and genealogical adventure. It also linked my life with that of her pioneering family who packed up their personal belongings, loaded boxes and trunks onto oxen-drawn wagons and bravely climbed aboard for a journey to an unknown and untamed new frontier. I think Anne Bronte, who died not long before M.C.S. stepped up into that wagon, would have been pleased to know that the story of her strong, independent heroine was read by an equally strong young American woman. 

(N.B. As of this writing, no familial connection between Milton & Celia Young and Stephen & M.C.S. Young has been uncovered although the couples lived nearby each other in Yamhill County.)

Endnotes:

1 Homepage, Yamhill County Oregon, <http://www.co.yamhill.or.us/history.asp>, February 18, 2012

2 Homepage, City of Woodburn OR, www.ci.woodburn.or.us, February 20, 2012

3 Homepage, The Oregon Territory and Its Pioneers, <http://www.oregonpioneers.com/ortrail.htm>, February 23, 2012

4 Homepage, Washington State University Libraries, <http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/masc/finders/cg581.htm#s1>, February 25, 2012

Genealogical research for this article was done and interpreted by the author through the use of resources stated in the article including Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.com, and other relevant public genealogical sources.

The Genealogical Society of New Jersey

GSNJ is a non-profit organization dedicated to procuring, preserving and publishing information on New Jersey families.

Membership includes subscriptions to the Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, published three times a year, and the GSNJ Newsletter, published quarterly. Queries in the GSNJ Newsletter are free to members. We offer discounts on society publications, educational seminars; and more to our members. Individual Dues: \$40; Library, Archive or Society subscriptions also available.

For a brochure & application send an SASE to:
GSNJ Membership Services
Attention: G. S. Lowry
PO Box 1476
Trenton NJ 08607-1476

For more information – please visit our website: www.gsnj.org

