D-OGS Newsletter – 2023 January

News & Articles of Interest to Durham-Orange genealogists

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Although the regular D-OGS meeting for the month was cancelled, I wanted to share the monthly newsletter, because I think there is some very good material that I wanted to share with everyone.

SLAVE CEMETERY UNCOVERED IN RURAL ORANGE COUNTY DONATED TO DESCENDANTS TO PRESERVE

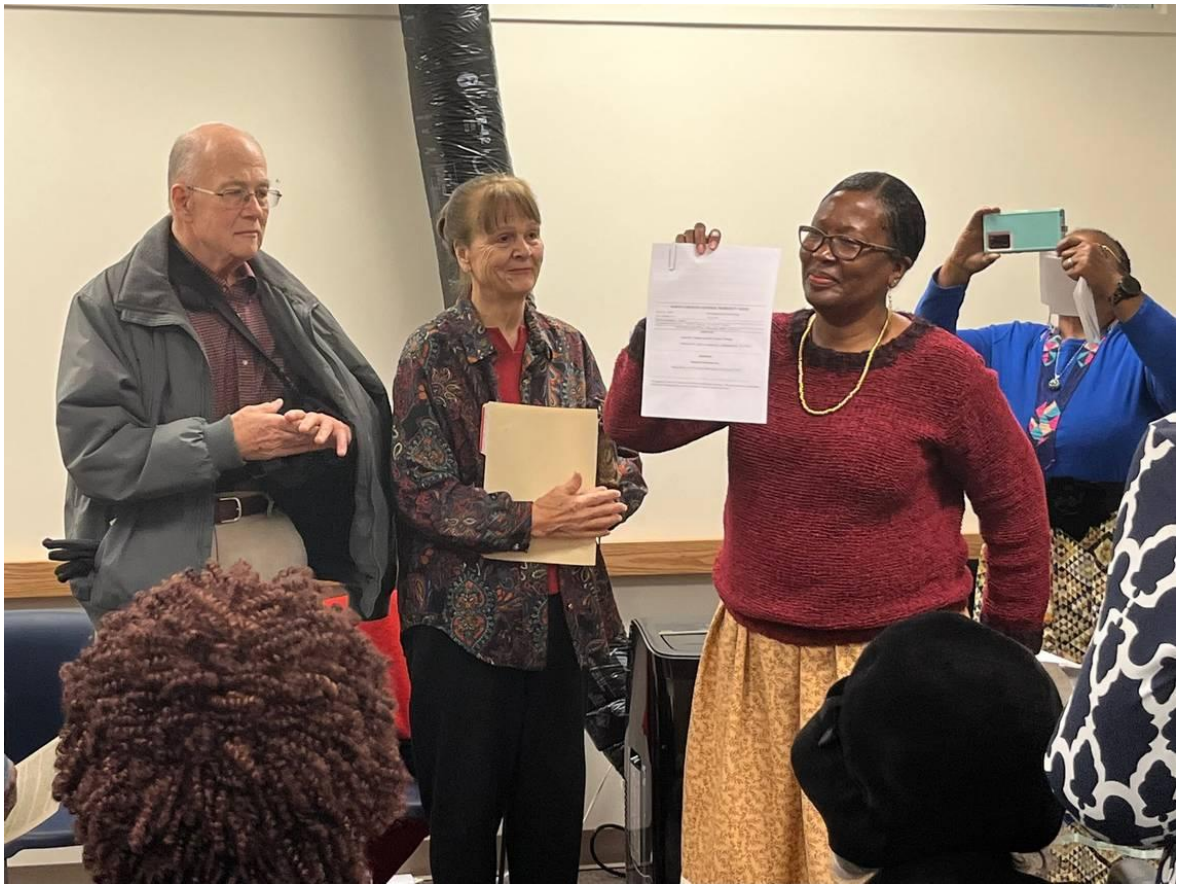
By Mary Helen Moore

The graves are marked only with fieldstone. It's a burial ground invisible to the untrained eye, tucked in the hardwood forest along the Orange-Durham County line, several dozen rough, mossy rocks guarding faint depressions in the ground. The cemetery is believed to contain the remains of people enslaved on Hardscrabble Plantation in the 1800s — and it was nearly lost to history as the landowners considered developing.

But on Tuesday morning, in an overflowing conference room on the third floor of the Orange County Register of Deeds, the deed for the property was conveyed to a nonprofit run by descendants of some of the buried so it will be preserved, even if homes rise around it. Beverly Scarlett, who runs the nonprofit with her sister, called it a "profound" gift.

"Our ancestors paid a price for us to live the quality of life that we live today. And we can just do a few things to keep their memory alive: recognize and honor those sacred spaces ... recognize and honor our elders," Scarlett said. "And just treat everybody the way you wish to be treated." The cemetery's presence was unknown to the Parsley family, who owned the land, but a neighbor whose family has been there for generations saw the Realtor on the land and let him know about its presence earlier in the spring. "Unless you're looking for it, you wouldn't find it," James Parsley said in an interview. "Nature has taken over the whole property."

The Parsleys had a surveyor come to the property, who confirmed it was a cemetery containing up to 75 graves. Three more infant graves under a fallen a tree have since been identified.



James and Carolyn Parsley gave about an acre of land believed to contain a slave burial ground to Beverly Scarlett, right, who aims to preserve the cemetery through the nonprofit Indigenous Memories. A deed conveying ceremony was held at the Orange County Register of Deeds in Hillsborough, N.C. on December 13, 2022.

Hardscrabble Plantation was owned by prominent NC family Hardscrabble Plantation was located along what is now St. Mary's Road in Durham County less than a mile from the Orange County line. The home still stands. "St. Mary's Road is a part of the old Indian trading path. You get on it in Petersburg, Virginia, and it'll take you all the way south to Augusta, Georgia," Scarlett said.

The Cain family, then well connected in state politics, operated the 4,400-acre plantation that enslaved 95 people as of 1830, historical records show.

That made William Cain the largest landowner in Orange County in 1800, according to the historical archive Open Durham. The workers produced tobacco and cotton, plus oats, wheat and corn. The Cain family sold the last of their land in the 1970s. Most of it became a subdivision with several dozen homes bearing the familiar Hardscrabble name.

'History telling its own story'

Scarlett, a retired District Court Judge, said she and other descendants of those enslaved on Hardscrabble Plantation have mixed heritage. "We are what I consider 'maroon people' in that we are a blend of African American, Native American and white," she told The News & Observer. Their nonprofit is called Indigenous

Memories Inc. “Our people were in and out of slavery, even the ones who were not brought there by deed. You could be abducted and sold into slavery on the courthouse steps in Hillsborough,” Scarlett said.

There are two other burial grounds just west, all marked differently, which Scarlett said reveals information about who lies beneath the earth. “It’s like history telling its own story,” Scarlett said. “So you have your ancient people who occupied the land, then you have your blended people. .... Come back east a little bit further and you have a cemetery where everybody was enslaved.”

Deeds reveal history of Black, Indigenous people in NC

Parsley and his wife, Carolyn, who live in Hillsborough, were at Tuesday’s ceremony to donate the acre to Indigenous Memories. The Parsley brothers have owned over 100 acres along St. Mary’s Road since the early 1970s. They’ve cut some timber over the years but left the land largely untouched until a few years ago, when they began splitting off some lots and considering developers’ offers. “I decided it was more important to protect it and give it a future,” Parsley said of the cemetery. “This needed not to be part of some development. I’m just really pleased to be able to pass it to somebody who’s gonna respect and take care of it.”

Orange County Register of Deeds Mark Chilton has been working to catalog the hand-written deeds, wills and slave transactions from the 1700s and 1800s that reveal information about Orange County’s Black and Indigenous people.

“I’ve got to say sometimes doing this research can be very depressing,” Chilton said. “It can be very sad to see how cruelly people were treated and how difficult their fates were back in that day. “But their families live on. ... Many of y’all in the room, who were introduced a few minutes ago, are descendants who are here with us because of these people’s will to go on.”

Retired Judge Beverly Scarlett points out some of the Indigenous burial rocks arranged in the woods near her home in Hillsborough, N.C. on Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2022. The slave cemetery was discovered later in the spring.

MONTHLY BACKUP REMINDER

It is the first of a new month. Don't forget to back-up your data files.

IS IT UNVERIFIED DATA AND WILL IT ALWAYS BE UNVERIFIED?

Warning: *this article contains personal opinions.*

I have been fascinated with the comments posted online concerning "unverified information on the Internet" and comments about linking to family trees without verification. I agree with some of the comments and disagree with some others. I thought I would add my two cents' worth.

First of all, I believe in verification of every bit of information I obtain. I don't care if a fact came from the Internet, from a book, or even from an original record. I still want to verify every bit of information I read. (Most original records are correct but you will find occasional errors even in the original records.) I always look to see who reported the information or who wrote the book I am reading. Even if I recognize the author as being a leading genealogy expert, I still want to verify the claim independently. I don't believe anyone!

So you think I would be against unsourced, unverified information on the Internet? Wrong!

When I am looking for genealogy information about my ancestors, I want to see **EVERYTHING**. I want to see the sourced information, the unsourced information, the verbal claims from someone's Aunt Lydia, and even the guesswork. Since I don't know where my great-great-granddad was born, I want to see every hint and every bit of guesswork. I want to know what everyone else is thinking. I am hoping that someone, somewhere has an idea that I have haven't thought of so far. Sure, when I read someone else's guesswork or facts, I'll check them out and I will ask questions, but I still want all the hints.

The proof is always up to me, regardless of where I found the claimed information.

Yes, I constantly look at unsourced databases and I look for clues every time I see an ancestor of mine mentioned, especially if that claim is different from what I believe to be factual. A couple of times the "facts" that I determined in past years have later been proven wrong when new evidence was shown to me, evidence that I was later able to verify.

NOTE: I "lost" more than 100 ancestors one evening when I was able to verify a new claim I found in an online database. It contradicted something I previously believed to be true. Using the new claim as a hint, I followed a new path of investigation and found that the new "fact" was, indeed, correct. The information I previously believed to be correct had a significant error: two men of the same name lived in the same small town, something I didn't know previously. I had researched the ancestry of the wrong man!

I would never have recognized that error and been able to later determine the truth if I hadn't looked at an unsourced claim that was different from what I believed to be the truth.

I am a big fan of group collaboration. Some people call that "crowd sourcing." Such crowd sourcing will often be wrong, but it almost always includes some clues that I have not seen or thought of previously. Those can be valuable clues.

Bring on the Internet databases! I want to see Ancestry.com's user-contributed family trees. I want to see the I.G.I. I want to see the Ancestral File. I want to see OneGreatFamily.com's database. I want to see FamilySearch. I want to see the handwritten notes of every professional and amateur genealogist who shares ancestry with me. I want to see more of every bit of conjecture that I can find.

What I do see is an education problem. A lot of newcomers will believe "I saw it on the Internet so it must be true." That is a problem. In fact, it is a huge problem, but we will not solve it by sticking our heads in the sand and pretending that nobody else has information that can be trusted or even worth evaluating. The ostrich approach doesn't work very well for ostriches, it certainly does not work well for genealogists who seek the truth.

What we need is a warning label similar to that found on cigarettes and alcohol. "Warning: the information contained here may include erroneous data." That disclaimer should be in a big, bold font on the top of every genealogy web site, followed by a hyperlink to an article about why we want to verify every scrap of information we obtain.

We also should encourage our newcomers to document their sources and to include that documentation when posting information online. Of course, this is not a one-time effort. Newcomers appear all the time. We are watching a parade of newcomers. Some will drop out, some will slow down, and others will follow the parade route for years. Our challenge is to educate all of them early in the parade.

However, I still never automatically discard something simply because it is unsourced. I never look down my nose at any online genealogy database, regardless of the source of information. I do, however, maintain a healthy skepticism.

Do source citations "prove" anything? I would suggest they do not. Instead, I believe source citations are useful only as a courtesy to others that say, "Here is where I found the information, I believe to be correct. You should check this citation and others for yourself."

A source citation simply is an example of being polite, trying to help others save time and effort. We still want others to verify the same information defined in the source citation. The genealogists who read the source citations can also offer valuable feedback: if 10 or 50 or 500 other genealogists look at this same source citation that I did and they all came to the same conclusion that I did, that's valuable feedback for me. Then again, if they all looked at the same source citation that I did and many of them came to a **DIFFERENT** conclusion, that's even **MORE** valuable feedback! Please let me know of any errors you find in my work!

Side comment: all genealogy works contain errors, even those works created by the best genealogists in the world. For verification, ask any expert genealogist. I bet they will tell you the same.

Finally, how are we ever going to improve the crowd sourced databases if we constantly encourage people to ignore them? Every time I read a comment from someone that belittles unsourced and unverified information, I want to grab that person and shake him or her vigorously. Pay attention! There are gold nuggets out there in the tons of sand!

As in Wikipedia and dozens of other online sources, the information in genealogy databases can only be improved if many people look at each fact and each person contribute his or her knowledge and expertise. The more people who look at the information and verify it independently, the higher the accuracy.

Going back to my example of great-great-granddad's unknown origins: if dozens of people look at the record in the public database, there is an excellent chance that someone will have the correct information and will enter it, along with information where he or she found the info. As a result, we all will benefit.

In contrast, if we tell people to ignore the undocumented, unsourced databases and to never look at the information therein, the misconceptions and guesswork will never be corrected by later researchers. In fact, the misconceptions and errors will probably then continue to be published and propagated, year after year. We all lose.

So please, please, enter the genealogy information you have into online databases. Also, please look at what others have entered. If you see something you think is wrong, please, please enter a correction or append a contradictory view. If you have a source citation or other evidence that is not shown in the existing online record, please enter the information you have. If you do that and if I do that and if every other genealogist does that forever and ever, over a period of years we will all benefit. Crowd sourced genealogy databases can become valuable, but only if we all take the time and effort to contribute whatever information we have.

The information you contribute can help another person. Maybe dozens of others.

How to Digitally Preserve Old Media in 7 Steps

By Denise May Levenick

1. Gather material to be digitized.

Gather your files, then review and prioritize what to save in newer formats. Think broadly: CDs, DVDs, USB drives, hard drives, SD cards, and even floppy disks. In addition to photos, records, and other genealogical material, they might hold audio and video files including lectures, interviews, music, videos, home movies, and recorded sounds.

2. Check the "life expectancy" of your current formats.

Do not use writeable media for long-term storage. CDs and DVDs, once the standard for data preservation, aren't getting any younger. Experts estimate life expectancy for burned discs to be just three to five years, so don't rely on them for your archival needs. (Unused discs tend to last longer.)

3. Determine a file naming system and copy files onto your computer, along with relevant data.

Copy files onto your computer. Mount discs and other storage media on your laptop or desktop computer and copy files from them onto that device. Include any metadata you can and add details and tags and use descriptive file names. Create a folder structure that makes sense for your research. Consider using a text editor to write a short "Read Me" description of the material that's saved in the same folder. Identify and choose to save the highest-quality file, when available.

4. Back up even newer media formats.

Digital flash media like SD cards and USB flash drives don't degrade with age like discs. But they do "wear out" with repeated read-write cycles. Because of this (and other factors, like device compatibility), they might not last forever. Even disk drives are prone to failure, and Backblaze estimates the median life expectancy for hard drives to be six years, nine months.

5. Transfer files from your smartphone.

Your smartphone is likely among your newest technology, but not immune from data loss or theft. Transfer digital photos, videos and audio recordings to your computer using auto-backup or a cable. You don't need to preserve everything on your phone for posterity, so review your files and mark only the ones you want to save. Once uploaded, add descriptive file names and dates, then sort into sensible folders.

6. Store carefully.

Use and store physical media—like other archival items—at mild temperatures and keep away from sunlight or dust. Additional best practices vary somewhat by medium:

- Extend the life of flash drives by keeping them dry and clean, and always use the eject command before removing.
- Place SD cards (which are often tiny) in a plastic case to avoid losing them.
- Check disc readability every few years and store them upright in jewel boxes (which save space and protect discs from dust and list).
- Don’t add labeling stickers to discs and avoid slip-in sleeves or CD wallets that can leave scratch marks.

7. Make copies!

Create multiple copies on other storage media, and back up on cloud services in addition to any physical drives. The golden rule of digital backups is the “3-2-1” principle: three copies on two different devices, with at least one copy stored offsite.

(Reprinted from the Family Tree Magazine blog)

INCOMPLETE BIRTH CERTIFICATES CREATE A BUREAUCRATIC MORASS IN MANY PLACES

Have you encountered this problem when researching birth records from 100 years ago or even earlier? In some parts of the U.S., this was a common practice.

I had to smile a bit when reading an article in the Boston Globe published several years ago about the "problem" of incomplete birth records. It seems the city of Boston has many birth records from years ago where the baby's name is simply recorded as “baby girl” or “baby boy.” The reporter wrote, "A generation ago — when more families had six or more children — babies without official first names were surprisingly common. Overwhelmed new parents would leave the hospital without completing birth certificate paperwork."

You can read more in the article by Andrew Ryan in the *Boston Globe* at: http://bit.ly/2pedZ7w. The same article tells how to amend a record and add a first name by providing documentation.

Actually, the "problem" is not unique to Boston nor to any particular area of the United States. An experienced genealogist probably can tell you of numerous similar examples. I have seen it many times, especially in the case of my mother and her siblings.

My mother’s birth record at the town clerk’s office in Ashland, Maine, records her first name as “baby girl.” All of her older brothers and sisters were recorded as “baby girl” or “baby boy.” However, the younger siblings (of the 16 children) are recorded with their correct first names. The same is true for many, many other families in the same town, recorded in the same records.

When my mother had to get a Social Security card some years later, it was a minor problem. Since there was no birth record showing her true first name, she had to get affidavits from several people who remembered the event. That wasn’t hard for her since her mother (my grandmother) was still alive at the time and she gladly submitted an affidavit saying that she remembered the event well! Apparently, all of my mother's older brothers and sisters had to do the same when they applied for Social Security cards.

I have heard a number of different stories about why this practice was common, and some of those stories contradict the other stories. As a result, I don't know what the truth is except that, after reading the town clerk's records and the records of other town clerks in the area, I do know it was a common practice in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Boston officials estimated that, in the 1950s, roughly 1 of every 25 birth certificates lacked a first name. I suspect it was even more common in many rural areas in mid-winter.

I will disagree with one statement in Andrew Ryan's article in the Boston Globe: "Overwhelmed new parents would leave the hospital without completing birth certificate paperwork." In the case of my mother, her siblings, and my grandmother, there was no hospital involved. The nearest hospital was more than 20 miles away, a difficult trip at any time of the year and impossible during the winters in northern Maine, where 3 or 4 feet of snow was common and the (dirt) roads were never plowed in the winter. (My mother was born in March.)

My grandmother gave birth to all 16 of her children at home. I suspect some of your ancestors did the same.

Who provided the information to the local town clerk? And when was the information provided? In my mother's case, the town clerk's office was "in town," 5 or 6 miles away. That's a long ways away over unplowed dirt roads in northern Maine where the snow in March was often more than 4 feet deep!

That was an impossible trip for my grandmother who had just given birth. She also had other children at home that required her care. So, she undoubtedly did not provide the information to the town clerk.

My grandfather was not at home at the time as he was working in the woods (he was a French-Canadian lumberjack working in the deep woods of northern Maine. I doubt if he even heard of the birth of his newest child until he returned home in April or May.)

None of the other children supplied the information as they were too young to make such a trip into town in the arduous winter weather conditions.

So, who supplied the information? Unfortunately, the town clerk did not record that fact.

Was it the doctor? Probably not, as I was told that most of these children were born without a doctor in attendance. Was it a midwife or perhaps another, older relative?

I wish I knew.

(Reprinted from Dick Eastman's Online Genealogical Newsletter)

WEBSITES OF POSSIBLE INTEREST

Two Seventeenth Century Atlases Digitized and Online in England

Two bound sets of maps from the British Library's core collection of early modern English cartography have recently been digitized and placed online. Harley MS 3749 is a series of 18 hand-drawn maps of parts of the Royal estate at Windsor, produced in 1607 by the English surveyor, mapmaker, and author John Norden (c. 1547-1625).

Harley MS 3813 is a collection of 37 (of an original 44) small, printed maps of English and Welsh counties and areas of Ireland and Scotland, engraved by the Flemish artist Pieter Van den Keere (1571-c. 1646) and printed at around the same time as Norden's work. Their histories are entwined in various ways.

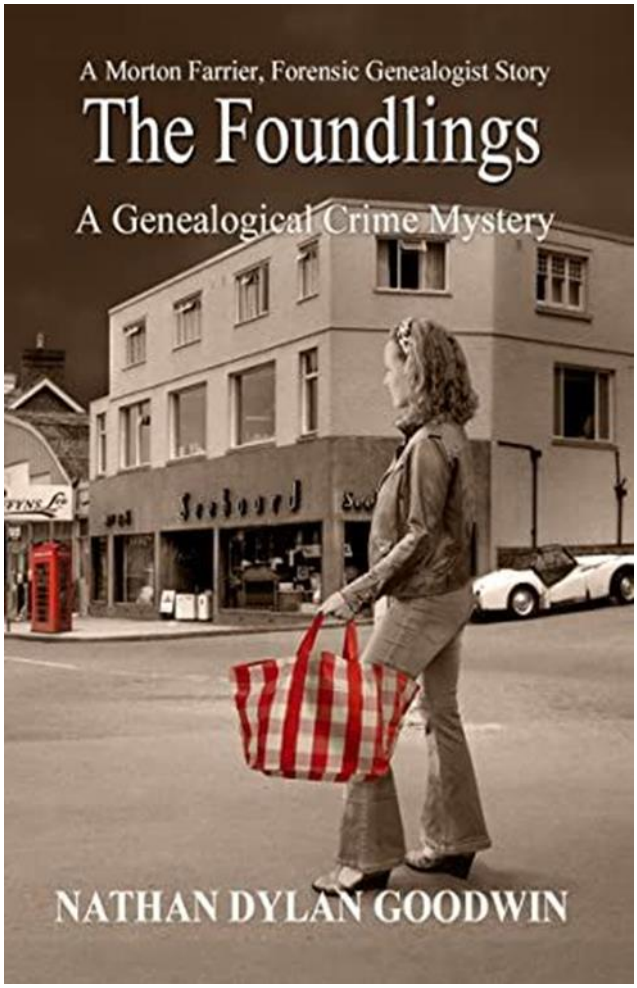
John Speed, 'Midlesex described with the most famous cities of London and Westminster' from The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine. London, 1611-12. Maps C.7.c.20.

Both sets of maps ended up in the collection of Robert (1661-1724) and Edward (1689-1741) Harley, the 1st and 2nd Earls of Oxford, thousands of manuscripts, printed books and associated materials which became one of the founding collections of the British Museum in 1753. Norden's work, produced for and originally owned by James VI and I, came into the Harleys' possession in 1710, whilst Van der Keere's maps reached the collection in 1725.

You can read a lot more and view numerous pages from the bound maps in an article in the British Library web site at https://tinyurl.com/3z8kzmts.

BOOKS OF POSSIBLE INTEREST

The Foundlings



By Nathan Dylan Goodwin. Published by the author. 2021. 252 pages.

Outside a small set of shops in Haywards Heath in West Sussex, a lone woman steps into a telephone box, sets down a large cloth shoulder bag, and within a few moments, walks away. She leaves the bag and an infant.

Nearly forty years later, Morton Farrier is drawn into the case of three children, foundlings, all similarly abandoned as babies, and the mysterious circumstances of who their mother might be. And as much as Farrier loves a good genealogical mystery, now the secrets are going to hit close to home as he determines that his own half-aunt Margaret may be connected to the unsettling events of long ago.

The revelations jump back and forth between chapters set in the past and those set in the present, but the back-and-forth style of writing doesn't lose us, and the threads of the past and the present weave together as the tale proceeds.

Mr. Goodwin's books never fail to please the reader who likes mystery fiction along with a healthy dose of genealogy tossed in. This is the ninth saga in The Forensic Genealogist series, and each is as pleasurable to read as the others.

The author has not lost his magic touch. The Foundlings is an easy read, an engaging read, and nice way to pass the time.

The Foundlings is available from the author at https://www.nathandylangoodwin.com/ as well as from Amazon.

HUMOR

“We get too soon old, und too late schmart” – supposedly a translation of an old German proverb

PARTING THOUGHT

"In order to heal, you have to first be broken."

- *Renee Dyer, Eyes Wide Open*

If you have any items of interest that you would like to submit for future publication, please contact Richard Ellington at mailto:richard_ellington@unc.edu or 919.932.0516 (voice/text)