

We all are a wee bit curious about our roots, aren't we?

By Alfred Woollacott, III

A few months ago, e l Edwards asked if I would give a genealogy talk at the Oak Bluffs Library, since the recently hired research librarian wanted to increase awareness about Ancestry.com, the largest, fee-based family history website. With some local publicity about 50 people attended, several from the Harthaveners, which I appreciated. I hoped that the talk was well received, but wasn't sure. But when asked later if I would be willing to do it in the spring, my doubts lessened.

Having recently completed a project for my mother-in-law on her father, Russell Clark Germond born 4 Oct 1887 in Brooklyn, NY, I used him to demonstrate Ancestry.com's power. Russell's family tree with ancestors, siblings and descendants took shape with only three censuses. The basics, dates and places for birth, death and marriage, were added and then the leaves (*e. g.* his schooling, income, street addresses, draft statuses, immigration), all available from genealogical websites. The free websites Familysearch.org and findagrave.com were accessed during the talk to demonstrate their capabilities. In about an hour, the audience had a sketch of a person, who was previously unknown to them and branches to explore further – it really is that easy. Records are being digitized daily, allowing for ready access. As an example findagrave.com presently has 93,000,000 gravesites available on line - access it and type in your extended family's last names.

At the outset, I asked the audience about their family history experiences. Many were dabblers, who had encountered stumbling blocks and stopped. Upon retirement, I too became a dabbler. But now my Personal Ancestry File (PAF) approaches 4,000 names. The PAF software is available free from familysearch.org. As I gazed upon the sea of innocence, I feared for what my talk might unleash. So I offered a cigarette pack styled warning as an early defense lest a plaintiff's attorney might sue for a client's disturbed behavior that I allegedly caused.

CAUTION: genealogy can be habit forming, possibly leading to obsessive compulsive behavior.

In October, the Friday before the 1987 market crash, we purchased our residence from Jill's cousins – no, they didn't give us a deal. Jill's great grandfather, Maxwell Hart, built our house *circa* 1915 and during her childhood she stayed in the guest house. Even though I had visited the Vineyard but briefly, I was aware of this former family compound's history. And whenever I entered Harthaven, the white house reminded me of its patriarch, William Henry Hart born 25 July 1834 in New Britain, CT.

As we met neighbors during our first summer, the dearth of Harts in Harthaven surprised me until I learned that the patriarch's only daughter Martha married E. A. Moore. They in turn had five children and a daughter, Barbara married Maurice Pease. My self-imposed enigma was

becoming clearer as more pieces were fitted into the puzzle. Harthaven had plenty of Hart blood, but much of it was concealed by the surnames Moore and Pease.

I was pleased with my sleuthing until my mother-in-law threw more puzzle pieces on the table. Her mother was a Chamberlain from New Britain and many of that family lived in Harthaven, too. Phronsie, the Bamfords and Sam Low have a common ancestor, Valentine Burt Chamberlain born 13 April 1833 in Colebrook River, CT. Further, since Sam's grandmother, Louise Chamberlain married Walter Hart, he and Jill were the only ones in Harthaven with both Hart and Chamberlain blood. My latent genealogical tendencies were aroused by two minutiae; Jill and Sam's common bonds and Val Chamberlain's birth day of April 13th - the same as Jill's, albeit years apart. Dates stick onto a genealogist's mind like Velcro, impossible to shake off. Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13th and John Adams on October 30th, my birthday. Hopefully that is where the date connection ends. Unlike these two Presidents, we are not planning on dying eleven hours apart on the 4th of July.

Genealogical curiosity once unleashed is never quelled. Known as Sandy, Jill's father's full name is Sanford Ballard Chandler, Jr. Sam Low's first name is Sanford too and his father's full name is Sanford Ballard Dole Low. And there was a Sanford Ballard Dole, who was President of the Republic of Hawaii and then Governor of the Hawaii Territory. You need only a short genealogical journey to realize that we WASPs lack imagination when naming our children. Saddled with Alfred Woollacott the third, I am living proof. I still remember my grandfather's annoyance when we named our first born son Justin – for Jill, Alfred IV was just a bit much. But giving Justin the middle name Chandler probably increased Alfred Sr's frustration even further. So a rare first name, Sanford, coupled to an even rarer middle name, Ballard, couldn't be happenstances. My genealogical obsession was aroused and I couldn't escape – I had to know. While my research is not completed, I have located the common ancestor, Calvin Ballard born about 1780 in Hallowell, Maine. Calvin is Sam Low's and Sandy Chandler's great, great, great grandfather. Thus these two Sanfords are fourth cousins.

So Jill and Sam are thrice related. If I was an accomplished genealogist, I would recite the probability of such a rare occurrence. As Chamberlains they are second cousins, having a common great grandfather, Val Chamberlain. As Harts and Ballards, Sam and Jill's father Sandy are second and fourth cousins, respectively, having the same respective great grandfather, William Hart and respective three greats grandfather, Calvin Ballard. Jill and Sam have the same relationship, but one generation removed. This obscure genealogical journey began about 1780 in Hallowell, Maine, expanded to Connecticut, Hawaii and elsewhere to conclude in 2013 for two of the many descendants, who just happened to be next door neighbors on a tiny island 8 miles and 45 minutes from America. And for me, I remain an outlaw in-law not descending from a Hart or a Chamberlain or a Ballard - my children and grandchildren on the other hand....

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