

# Stories Among the Branches

*Family tree reveals connections to the Mayflower, Revolutionary War and Civil War*

By Lori Russell

Shake a family tree and all sorts of people fall out. For family historians Bill and Sandra Ihrig, the list includes passengers on the Mayflower, veterans of the Revolutionary and Civil wars, Oregon Trail pioneers and a British knight beheaded by King Henry VIII.

While never interested in history in school, the Ihrigs admit that changed when they began locating stories about their ancestors.

Rather than simply names and dates on a page, the past became personal.

Bill became interested in his family's history after the death of his father.

"At the time, I only had information back two generations," he says.

"When you are a young adult, your focus is putting food on the table for your family," says Sandra. "When you get older, you become more reflective. You want to

know 'Who am I?'"

In their family history searches, the Ihrigs begin with known information—birth, marriage and death dates and locations—about parents, maternal and paternal grandparents. From there, they work backward.

"We try to go back to at least 1930 because that is when U.S. Census data is available," says Sandra.

Found online and at local libraries, census records can establish age and place of birth, list family members, provide clues to immigration or naturalization status, and give data about military service or occupation.



*James Foster Cook, Bill Ihrig's great grandfather, fought in the Civil War.*

The Ihrigs access census information via the Internet from their home computers with a paid subscription to ancestry.com.

Data collected for each U.S. Census is held confidential for 72 years. The 1940 Census schedules will be released in April 2012.

"Bill and I have different and compatible research styles," says Sandra, who enjoys compiling the data on individual family members. "I work to establish the lineage and get facts down."

Bill focuses on collecting the stories.

"It's a lot of fun," Sandra says. "We've spent many a night up until 2 or 3 in the

## A History of Beheadings and Shipwrecks

Sandra Ihrig connects with cousins via the Internet, sharing stories and photos. Tales of shipwrecks and beheadings of family members have stirred their grandchildren's interest in their roots.

Knight Brereton, ancestor to both Sandra and Bill from different family lines, was beheaded by order of King Henry VIII. The knight picked up Queen Anne Boleyn's handkerchief with his sword after she dropped it during a palace ceremony, according to the Ihrigs' research. The king suspected more to the relationship and eventually beheaded Knight Brereton, several of his friends and Queen Anne Boleyn. The king remarried seven days later.

In 1635, the ship Angel Gabriel was caught in a hurricane and wrecked off the coast of Maine. Ancestors from Bill's maternal and paternal lineage were on board the ship and drifted to shore on a single piece of wood from the wreckage. Four hundred years later, two of their descendants—Bill's mother and father—would marry.

At age 75, Bill still gets excited at the thought of uncovering a new clue or story.

"With genealogy, you never know what you will find," he says. "I think that's why I'm still living. I can't wait to see what happens next."



**Sandra and Bill Ihrig in front of certificates from the Society of Mayflower Descendants authenticating their family's voyage.**

dates of service and battles fought ground historical events in individual experience.

Bill's great grandfather, James Foster Cook, served as a bugler and mail carrier in the 142nd New York Infantry during the Civil War.

The Ihrigs' son, Mark, located an unpublished oral history in Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University of a soldier who enlisted on the same date and served in the same regiment as Cook. Details and reflections listed in the document give an intimate glimpse into the daily lives of those fighting to preserve the Union.

In about 1905, James Foster Cook and his wife migrated to Condon, Oregon, where his great-grandson Bill was raised.

Since tracing their own family lineages, Bill and Sandra have helped in-laws and extended family with their own searches.

"All we need is a cousin or friend to call with a question," says Sandra. "You just take the information that you do know and go with it."

Exploring history brings living family members together as they share stories and help others in the search for information.

"In genealogy circles, you often find people who are family centered," says Sandra. "It's a win-win situation. We share our information because only through the kindness of others were we able to get information on our family." ■

morning. We'll take a break from our computers, I'll make a pot of coffee and we'll talk over what we've found."

Even the smallest piece of information may be the clue that ties the larger story together.

Libraries may have unpublished records, local histories or compiled family histories in their collections. Information such as wills and deeds can be found at the courthouse where the ancestor lived.

At 4,500 Family History Centers around the world, individuals can access micro-filmed vital, land, probate, tax and military records, state and federal census, and family and local histories through FamilySearch.

Sandra and son Mark have had DNA testing to learn more about their ethnic ancestry.

In the days before the Internet, information was harder to come by, says Sandra, who began researching her family history in 1979, nearly two decades before she bought her first computer.

She found a vital link to Bill's family—a family Bible—during a visit to his aunt. Sandra carefully transcribed by hand the entries chronicling the family's history.

The Cook family Bible has been passed down to the oldest son of each generation for almost 200 years.

"Those were the best clues I ever had," says Bill.

The Cook Bible later

became one of the primary sources of information that linked Bill's descent from Stephen Hopkins—one of 102 passengers who arrived on the Mayflower at what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. Bill has connected his lineage to 11 Mayflower passengers and the ship's pilot.

Not to be outdone, Sandra has determined 11 of her ancestors also were passengers aboard the ship.

The lineages granted both Sandra and Bill inclusion in the exclusive Society of Mayflower Descendants.

"Our ancestors were molded by the time they lived in: war, immigration and the events in their lives," says Sandra.

Military records that include