



My Family Treasure Hunt

BY ROSALIE WESTENSKOW

On the surface, it seemed boring, but when I dug deeper, I uncovered something precious.

Walking down the steps that led to the basement of our meetinghouse, I caught sight of my mother, hunched over a strange-looking machine, peering at illuminated pages in a darkened room and straining to read old documents. Still a young child, I didn't understand what my mother did every Tuesday night for two hours in this quiet room. I had been sent to retrieve her from the church's depths because Mutual had ended and my family wanted to go home.

My mother's dedication to family history confused me for

years. I often heard Church leaders stress the importance of participating in family history, but it seemed like an overwhelming task to me. Besides, it looked so boring.

“What satisfaction could she possibly receive from poring over lists of dead people’s names,” I wondered one afternoon as a teenager after dropping her off at the family history center. I continued in this vein of skepticism until, little by little, I began to wade into the waters of my ancestry.

The first time I felt the appeal of family history occurred during the Christmas break of my freshman year at BYU. One evening, as the rest of the family boisterously played a board game in the living room, I found myself seated at the kitchen table with my mom and older sister. The conversation soon turned to relatives, particularly my mother’s dad and his parents.

My great-grandparents, Orla and Roger, died in their 20s, leaving my grandfather and his brother in the care of Roger’s family. After Orla’s death, her father, Robert, died of appendicitis. A short time later, her mother fell, cracked her skull, and suffered several strokes, becoming bedridden. Orla’s oldest sisters, Thelma and Ena, then carried the full burden of supporting the family—a difficult task for two young, unmarried women in the late 1920s.

It was all so fascinating to learn about people I felt connected to but had never met. I was amazed by the trials my family had faced. Hearing it all made my own problems seem so small in comparison.

Several months later, with my mother’s

story crowded into the recesses of my mind by school and work, I received an assignment in one of my classes at Brigham Young University to find 8 to 10 primary documents containing the name of one of my ancestors.

My genealogical training to that point consisted of singing the Primary song “Family History—I Am Doing It,” but grades weren’t negotiable in my mind, so I began at the only place I could think to start—Orla’s family. I looked her up on a pedigree chart and traced her line back until I found her grandfather, Joseph Argyle Jr.

One afternoon, I made the trek across the BYU campus to the library and into the family history library. I explained to a worker who Joseph Argyle was and the little information I knew about him.

For the next two hours, that worker guided me through a treasure hunt, which took us all over the library. We searched records of Mormon passengers on emigrant vessels, discovering that Joseph and his family crossed

In a few hours in the family history library, I was introduced to a hunt for treasure of a very personal kind.





There are more resources to search out your ancestors than there have ever been in the history of the world. . . . With those opportunities there comes greater obligation to keep our trust with the Lord. . . . The names which will be so difficult to find are of real people to whom you owe your existence in this world and whom you will meet again in the spirit world. . . . Their hearts are bound to you. Their hope is in your hands.”

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, “Hearts Bound Together,” Ensign, May 2005, 79–80.

the Atlantic on a ship. Later that year, he traveled to Salt Lake Valley with the Ellsworth handcart company, which we found in a record book of handcart companies. We looked through the Endowment House records (found where he received his temple ordinances), the Utah death index (he lived to 84), and old Church membership records (there he was).

In an online database of Utah newspaper archives, I found a front-page obituary for my great-great-great grandfather. Published in the *Davis County Clipper* in February 1927, every sentence contained an interesting fact, such as Joseph’s contribution to the building of the Salt Lake Temple.

“He has the credit of having hauled the largest stone put in that building which weighed 13,000 pounds,” the article read.

I began to get a glimpse of the impact we can have on future generations when I discovered he had 88 descendants at the time of his death, a number which increased exponentially in the past 79 years.

Every time I found another document with my ancestors’ names on it, I felt a little tingle of excitement run through my body. It was like a mystery novel, putting all the pieces together, little by little beginning to understand who this man was. I became so immersed in learning about my



ancestor, I didn’t leave until late in the afternoon, almost missing work!

I completed the assignment and received an A, but even more

importantly, I created a tangible connection with one of my relatives. Joseph Argyle left his home, sailed across the ocean, traveled to Utah and helped build the temple, all because he believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, a legacy which I inherited and which gives me the strength to fight my own battles in the 21st century.

I am a link in the chain of Joseph Argyle, and I can pass on his example to strengthen my children and their children. There are others I can help as well. The temple work for the vast majority of my ancestors has yet to be completed, and hundreds, even thousands, of my ancestors are waiting for me to do my part. **NE**

For more information on how to get started on your family history, visit your local family history center or go to www.familysearch.org.

