

Introduction

Dear Family,

Why was my grandmother's father named *Abraham Lincoln* Kelley? Did any of our ancestors play a role in America's struggle for independence from Britain? Where did our family stand in that great conflict called the *Civil War*? What were the roots of the strong Christian faith of so many in our family? Why did Great-great Grandfather Georg Hofferbert come from Germany? What did he contribute after he got here? Why did our distant grandmother leave the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s? Did any of them own slaves?

Until a few years ago, not a lot was known about our family history back beyond my great grandparents. We knew that Grandfather Ira Hofferbert's paternal grandfather came from Germany, and we knew that Grandfather Ira learned enough German to communicate with his own grandfather. But from where in Germany did his ancestor come? Why? When? We knew that that Georg's son, Jacob Levi Hofferbert, came to Kokomo, Indiana in his late teens. But we knew little about his family before he came. We knew little about Grandfather Ira's mother, Amanda Schrock, other than that she was part of a large Kokomo family. I strongly suspect that, had any of my generation been interested enough to ask him, Grandfather Ira could have told us a lot about his family. But none of us was sufficiently interested.

We knew that Grandmother Bertha Kelley Hofferbert's folks were prosperous farmers in Green Township, Grant County, Indiana. But we knew nothing of how they got there. I always wondered, with an Irish name, had there been Roman Catholics in our otherwise pretty fundamentally Protestant Kelley branch of the family? How did our family come by their particular faith?

Only after the mid-19th century was much of Indiana settled. So the parents of those great grandparents must have come when much of the state was still wilderness. In other words, our ancestors were part of the historical process of transforming the American frontier into the developed civilization we have known for the past century.

Curiosity about one's ancestors is not a common human trait, except perhaps among some aristocracies. In our country, it doesn't matter who you *are*. It matters what you *do*. We Americans know that all of our ancestors at some time or other over the past 300-plus years came from someplace else. Our everyday circumstances, however, have enough challenges to hold our attention. A desire to delve into the lives of past generations is neither necessary nor particularly helpful to our everyday lives. It is only with the advance of leisure and improvements in access to public records that we might expect someone to get engaged in discovering and writing about the history of an *ordinary* family. Yet, as I think the following pages will illustrate, American history is formed by the actions of just such so-called *ordinary* people.

I have long been curious about our nation's history. How did this country come to be such a dynamic, democratic, and tolerant place? I had the good fortune to have made a living studying political systems and teaching about them in various universities and colleges. Through my work, my wife Rosemarie and I had the opportunity to live in many other countries and to look back on our own from the outside. And, without being particularly gushy or romantic, I can state without reservation that the more we saw America from the outside the more convinced were we that it is a decent country. From the time of its founding, the U.S. has sustained the struggle for advancement of individual freedom. Gaps exist, to be sure. Setbacks have occurred. Intense squabbles are a constant in our public life. Sometimes we are tempted to despair about our future. But so far, we have maintained the struggle, and the long-term trend has been clearly for the better for ordinary people in this country.

For many years, I have wondered how my own ancestors might have fitted into that struggle and, perhaps, contributed to that trend. Along the way, I have also been curious about what might have accounted for some special traits in my own immediate family – not great big philosophical traits, but aspects of behavior that may well be rooted in family background.

So the main question I have asked, and tried to begin answering in the following pages, is: How does our family history line up with that of the country at large? How did the frontier experience shape us and how did our frontier ancestors shape their communities?

I call this a family *history* rather than a *genealogy*. There is a lot of genealogy in the following pages. But most of the folks I know who indulge in genealogy are trying to find out simply who their ancestors were? Where were they born? When did they marry and die? And just how far back can the family tree be pushed?

I have a friend in Florida who is heavily engaged in genealogy. He has found out that his wife has an ancestor who participated in the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. He knows the guy's name and rank in William the Conqueror's army. And he can fill in the generations between then and his wife today. Well, I traced some of our family back to 15th century England, and then I began to wonder what was the point. First, I was never going to compete with my friend in Florida. But, second, I wondered more about who the people on my family tree *were* and about what they *did* in their lives. Such information was not going to be forthcoming from filling out names and dates on a family tree.

Beginning about 20 years ago, which has proved to have been much too late, I started pumping relatives for family stories. I particularly pressed my father and mother for what they could remember about their family history. In more recent times, I have similarly bugged other relatives. I should have tape recorded those conversations. But I did accumulate a file full of scattered notes. But none did much to push the information back more than a couple of generations.

Then in 2000, I hit pay dirt. While I was serving as a scholar-in-residence at Florida State University for a month that spring, Rose and I greatly enjoyed the company of my cousins Mary (Petro) and John Williams, who were also living at the time in Tallahassee. During a conversation about how little we knew about family background, Mary brought out a copy of a mimeographed essay that she had received from her nephew John Key. He, in turn, had received it from a fellow parishioner (and distant cousin) in the Friends Church where John serves as pastor. The document traced a branch of our family back to 1635 on Long Island. It told of a 5th great grandfather's service in the Revolutionary War. And it provided a link to other sources that filled many lines of family history, with some contextual sketches, over a period of 350-plus years. And, in addition to the contents of that essay, it also alerted me to the fact that Cousin John Key of Swayzee, Indiana was also interested in family history.

After establishing contact with John, I made a few trips back to Indiana and the two of us, sometimes along with his Mother, Virginia (Petro) Key, roamed through cemeteries, libraries, and various sites where our ancestors resided during the pioneer years of Indiana's history. I shall ever be grateful to John for his companionship and guidance in this quest.

Another person deserves special thanks: Mrs. Barbara Love, Librarian Emeritus at the Marion Public Library (Marion, Indiana). Over the many years of her career on the staff of that library, Mrs. Love directed the building of the local museum and genealogy collection. It stands as a living monument to what a dedicated professional can create as a resource for generations of curious inquirers. I had the good fortune, through my mother's sister Eunice (Stover) Althouse's friendship with her, to meet and be guided by Mrs. Love. In addition to the assistance and encouragement I got from John Key, Mrs. Love instructed me in the use of the superb genealogical resources in her library. While now retired for several years, Mrs. Love continues to spend time helping in the organization and use of that model resource. The staff of professionals and volunteers in the History Department of the Marion Public Library continue the tradition of dedicated service established by Barbara Love.

There are five sections to this volume:

- *Part I: Bertha Florence Kelley's Story*, traces what is known of the background and history of my paternal grandmother's family, including, for example, our relationship to Jonathan Winthrop, the Puritan founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. Some of the family history is sketched back to 15th century England. I try to show how that line connected, via a Revolutionary War veteran, to the movement of Scotch-Irish people from the Appalachians to Indiana in the early 19th century.
- In *Part II: Jacob Ira Hofferbert's Story*, I bring together the major strands of Grandfather's background. In addition to documenting the German origins of his grandfather Georg Hofferbert, I also discuss the long line of Amish families who constituted the bulk of Grandfather Ira's ancestry.

- The third chapter, *Our Family in the American Revolution*, tries to fill out the story of William Roe, my 5th great-grandfather – Grandmother Bertha's great-great-great grandfather – and how his service in the Revolutionary War changed the course of our family's fate. The story rests on documented fact, but I also speculate some about the human features of that war's awful impact on our family.
- *And Then You'll Cross that Big Wide Mountain*, is plainly fiction. I have taken two real persons from our ancestry and imagined a story about how they might have made the decision to move from the mountains of North Carolina into the Wilderness land of 1830s Indiana. It is written as a love story, for surely there was much love between pioneer men and women that sustained them throughout the many experiences that led from past to present in our family.
- The last essay, *Dear Little Sister*, does not necessarily make for comfortable reading. Many members of the family know something of some of the difficulties that beset my father during parts of his life. Stories get twisted and even forgotten, while leaving some vague unease about this or that in our past. Now that my parents have both departed this life, I think it is time to get the outline of some of those events down on paper. To be sure, it revolves around my own childhood, and is thus colored by my own memory. No one reading it will be likely to forget that what I have written is indeed subject to that limitation.

The first two items probably are not as readable as the others. They are filled with many seemingly dry facts. I have taken pains to get down the basic facts before I myself depart this mortal coil. Some descendant will someday find this material valuable. It is mostly raw history rather than story-telling. But I hope that it is thereby of some lasting value. At some time in the near future, I hope to bring the story of Bertha and Ira Hofferbert into the years after their 1907 wedding.

The story of Will Roe and the Revolution and the love story of John and Lizzy Howard were fun to write and are, I hope, enjoyable to read.

Through them all, I tried to tell the story of an ordinary American family. So, any family or friends who might be glancing through these pages: Thanks for what interest you can give to the people you find here. If you have any suggestions or observations, or if you have anything that might enrich our understanding of our family, I would be pleased to hear from you.

I have thanked John Key and Barbara Love. But I also have to thank my beloved Rose, who has, for nearly half a century, been my most critical and therefore most useful editor.

5/28/2007

I hope you enjoy reading some of this as much as I enjoyed collecting and writing it.

Rick

Richard I. Hofferbert
690A Country Club Road
Vestal, NY 13850
rhofferb@binghamton.edu