INTRODUCTION

THE SEARCH FOR SELF AND THE DISCOVERY OF STORY

RANDY BOSWELL

Randy Boswell is an Ottawa writer with a passion for history, and an associate professor of journalism with the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. He's a former reporter and editor with the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Postmedia News*, where he developed a unique national history beat that tracked newsy developments connected to Canada's political, cultural, social and scientific history. He's also a volunteer editor and board member with the Historical Society of Ottawa.

About 30 years ago, just after I graduated from university, I went on a summer trip to England and decided to explore my family roots in that country. The central figure in my investigation was my grandfather, George Boswell, a quiet, old, slow-moving fellow with a cane when I was a child in the 1970s. Grandpa was born in 1886 and died in 1979, aged 92. I'm the youngest of seven siblings, so my sisters and brother will have more vivid memories of Grandpa Boswell, but one thing I recall about him is that every November he would march in our small town's Remembrance Day ceremony.

Another memory is that he would sometimes remove one of his eyes, hold it in his hand and impishly smile at his awe-struck grandson.

It was made of glass. He'd lost his left eye to a stick in a playground accident when he was growing up in London, England in the 1890s. I discovered a few things during my genealogical explorations in that city three decades ago, examining documents and exploring the east-end neighbourhood – in the vicinity of the Whitechapel district made infamous by Jack the Ripper – where Grandpa began is life two years before those horrific killings.

George's mother, Sarah, had died in childbirth when my grandfather was a toddler. His father, Francis, was apparently forced by circumstances to surrender his son to a home for orphaned children. In my mind, details like these added an *Oliver Twist* element to my Grandpa's life story. Eventually, George emigrated to Canada – to a farm near Grand Valley, Ont., where my own parents were born in 1928 and 1931 and where my siblings and I came along in the 1950s and '60s. Our roots ran pretty deep in the Valley.

For the longest time, we believed a story that either

Grandpa told about himself or had been told about him by other relatives. I don't remember the origin anymore. But the tale went that during the First World War, my grandfather (nearly 30 when the war began in 1914) had lied about his lost eye to get into the army and fight for King and Country.

Many years after Grandpa had died, when Library and Archives Canada made it possible to quickly call up digitized war records, I was thrilled to discover the "Record of Service in the Canadian Armed Forces" of one George William Boswell. When he'd enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in January 1916, his missing eye had been no secret. Under the category "Marks or Scars" in the physical description of Canada's newest recruit, a military official had entered: "Left eye removed – glass eye."

It was a small revelation, but such is the nature of family history research, a tapestry constructed with a few precious patches of truth but interwoven with incidental narratives – like Oliver Twist – and embroidered with mythic tales handed down from aunts, uncles, close cousins and distant kin.

In recent decades, there has been an explosion of interest in genealogy in Canada and elsewhere, a phenomenon being fueled by such developments as the mass digitization of historical documents, an aging population with the passion and leisure time to seek out their ancestral roots, the rise of social history, the networking and knowledge-sharing power of social media, the commercialization of DNA technology, the proliferation and sustained growth of businesses built around genealogical research and the proven popularity of TV shows, magazines and countless online sites dedicated to the exploration of family history.

No doubt there are many other factors fostering the phenomenon. And there are certainly insights to be gained from considering why Canadians (like citizens in many other countries) have so excitedly leapt aboard the genealogy bandwagon. What psycho-social impulses are at play in the search for one's roots? What implications – expected and unintended – might there be from the pursuit of greater knowledge of where each of us came from, and from whom? And how might the growing interest in genealogy's personalized, individualized branch of history promote a wider interest in the past – its social struggles and stratifications, its upheavals and migrations, its shining moments and darkest days?

It was a sign of the times, it seems, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau himself – during an official visit to Singapore in November 2018, and inspired by his mother Margaret's participation years earlier in a search-for-your-ancestors TV show – made a point of publicly highlighting his great-great-great-great-great grandfather's role in the founding of that Asian nation. While the 100th anniversary of the birth of a certain, better-known Trudeau forebear in October 2019 attracted considerable public attention in Canada, the surprising story of the current prime minister's direct ancestral link to Singaporean history through an early-19th-century British colonial administrator, Maj.-Gen. William Farquhar, offered a particularly high-profile and fascinating example of the fruits of genealogical research.

The Association for Canadian Studies and *Canadian Issues* invited a wide array of contributors to help us explore the genealogical impulse, and this volume is the result. We are so pleased to have been able to assemble a rich diversity of perspectives on

how the personal past can add detail and texture to the broader canvas of Canadian history. Our essayists have delved into a host of complicated, challenging, and interesting questions and issues that have arisen in step with the mass popularization of genealogical research.

Public historian Tanya Evans, Director of the Centre for Applied History at Macquarie University in Australia – and a visiting researcher at Ottawa's Carleton University in 2016 – launches this edition of CI/TC by sharing insights from a project that probed "the meanings and impact of family history in Australia, England and Canada and what this tells us about history and historical consciousness in different national contexts."

In her essay, Dr. Natalie Ward, the Director of Performance and Evaluation at Genome Canada, posits the intriguing idea that "individuals are always under construction – as more than their "biological selves" and more than a single, static identity," adding that "we consider identities instead as existing as multiplicities and the self to be fluid."

John D. Reid, a genealogy blogger and past-president of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, offers a detailed look at the origins and evolution of genealogical activity in Canada, including this fundamental observation: "The confluence of transformative factors in the past quarter-century, enabled by the tool of the Internet, means researching their ancestry is something everyone can do at a reasonable cost."

Leighann Neilson, an Associate Professor of Marketing at Carleton's Sprott School of Business, and co-conductor of the Canadian Genealogy Survey, says the 2011 probe of Canadians' attitudes around genealogical research revealed that "the impact of doing family history research is felt as much, if not more, with the heart as in the head."

Jane Badets, who served as Canada's Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Field, recounts some of the challenges faced by Canadian census takers as they frame questions and interpret results about ethnicity and identity in the recurring national surveys of Canada's population. "All of these experiences over time underline the fluidity of the reporting of ethnic ancestries in Canada," she observes, "and the evolution of the social context in which they are reported."

Historian Jack Jedwab, the President of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration, examines the intersection of multiculturalism in Canada and Canadians' interest in ancestry. Interpreting the results of a wide-ranging ACS survey of Canadians conducted by Leger, Jedwab concludes that, "in some ways, the ancestry craze has served to validate multiple identities and challenged assimilationist models and their accompanying narratives in North America. In that sense, it is a reaffirmation of the importance of multiculturalism in those societies where immigration has played an important role."

Jean Teillet, an Indigenous rights lawyer and author of *The North-West is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation and Métis Law in Canada*, critically examines the highly contentious phenomenon known as "race shifting" in Eastern Canada, in which people who previously identified as "white" are claiming Métis ancestry. "What the

race shifters have in common is their use of genealogy and DNA testing as tools to accomplish this race shift. Those pushing back against this self-indigenization call it 'ethnic fraud,'" Teillet explains.

Robert Vineberg, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, provides an overview of the history of immigration in Canada, the backdrop against which Canadians' personal family histories are painted. "Over the course of the past four centuries," Vineberg writes, "immigration has reflected the needs, ambitions and prejudices of the government and people of Canada."

In their co-written essay, colleagues Sara MacNaull and Nora Spinks of the Vanier Institute of the Family trace the rising interest in "dibling" relationships – an extraordinary new category of genetic sibling connections resulting from reproductive technologies or fertility treatments. This kind of "unique, emerging family relationship" can lead to new family bonds or awkward, disillusioning encounters, the authors state. "In a world where access, privacy, Big Data and DNA are colliding at a rapid pace, it is too soon to tell what the next few years will reveal about people's personal histories and ancestry."

Nicole Watier, a genealogy consultant with Genealogy Services at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, offers a guided tour of the genealogical treasures housed in the country's primary repository of historical documents – from immigration records to military service rolls to vast volumes of information detailing the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people. "Our goal in Genealogy Services has always been to share as much knowledge as possible to make LAC's collection known not only to the Canadian public, but also to anyone interested in genealogy, particularly in the context of Canada's historical development."

Margaret Ann Wilkinson, Professor Emerita in the Faculty of Law, Western University, examines the legal implications of the use of DNA technology to trace ancestral links and other genetic connections. "One of the problems we are experiencing in the 'information age'," she notes, "is that information exchange is very difficult to keep within the bounds of legal borders."

And finally, Montreal-based genealogy enthusiast Tracy Arial – who has written books and blogs about family history research – argues that those passionate about genealogical pursuits are profoundly enriching Canada's history. "Because family historians in Canada research specific individuals, we also get interested in the most minute details about small communities. We expose secrets within families. We bust long-held myths, reveal unusual settlement patterns and emphasize the roles of otherwise ignored individuals in societies. We help Canadians discover who they are."