

PREFACE

Twenty some years ago I set out on a quest to discover what I could about my ancestors. It was a time in my life when I was searching outward instead of inward for clues to my self-worth and happiness. I had absolutely no interest in history of any kind, but rather was hoping to find something, anything, like having a famous ancestor, to give me additional fulfillment.

I didn't find any famous ancestors on my side of the family. But what I found was more important. My ancestors were ordinary people getting by with life the best they could, doing what they felt they needed to do for their children and grandchildren. At some point, some of them decided to immigrate to America to either escape oppression or to reach for the opportunity that America symbolized.

Sandy's side of the family is another story. Most of her immigrant ancestors came to America long before the American Revolution, and contributed to the colonization, settlement and the establishment of the United States.

During all these years I've become grounded. Getting older has certainly contributed to that. So has watching your children become adults and have families of their own. So has maintaining a relationship with your spouse through thick and thin for thirty two plus years. And so has surviving a grave illness. Yet there is also something also very grounding about walking through cemeteries looking at ancestor gravestones, taking a trip to Europe and exploring the countryside and homestead from where an immigrant ancestor chose to emigrate, or realizing that if anything would have happened to any direct ancestor through centuries upon centuries, killing them before having children or at the very least rendering them unable to have children, the line would have died there and that every descendant after that person would not exist.

It is not hard to accumulate piles of paperwork when doing family history research and I've certainly accumulated my fair share while doing research on the various pedigree lines. In the process I've become a bit of a historian, both American and European. Certainly no expert, but no beginner either.

I am also certainly no old man at fifty sixty-two, and yet as I've recently looked through some of my files, there are things in them that just can't be written into books that would be a shame to lose when I die; things like the tone in a letter of correspondence with a distant relative, now deceased, talking about their recollection of family and ancestors, or photos I've received of people and places of previous generations.

That is my challenge now – how to preserve those bits and pieces of my family history research that lives in my files and nowhere else, so that it is available for future researchers of the collected family lines that make up the Dierks/Miller family tree.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul', with a stylized, wavy line extending from the end.

Paul R. Dierks
March 1016