

The Falmouth Genealogical Society

Newsletter

February – April 2012

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The Falmouth Genealogical Society Newsletter is published four times a year and is dedicated to news, events and ideas that will help members enhance their genealogical research.

Program Notes From Meetings

Breaking a Brick Wall

*Solving David Martin's lineage to George Soule
As summarized by Ralph Wadleigh.*

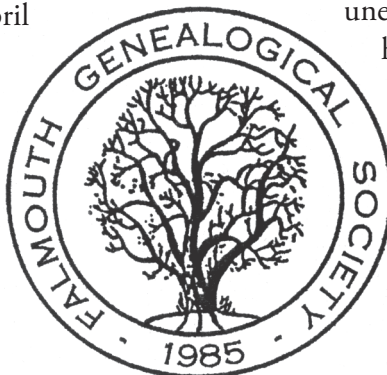
On April 14, 2011, David Martin spoke to FGS regarding methodology use to solve a brick wall in his lineage to Pilgrim George Soule. David started with the George Soule Mayflower Society "Silver Book" which lists the descendants of George Soule through five generations naming the children of the sixth. This book showed a David Sisson as having been born on 4 April 1779 citing a family bible and a "death book" in the hands of a Franklin Sisson of Westport, MA. Using this information, David submitted his application to the Mayflower Society. The Historian General at the time, Carolyn Kardell, rejected David's application reasoning that the 1779 date showed the age of the mother at the time of David Sisson's birth was 51, too old to be correct.

Not to be defeated, David rechecked the sources and attempted to locate Franklin Sisson, the owner of the bible and death book. Regrettably, David found that Sisson has passed away, but family members had information.

They said the bible had been lost, but the death book had been saved and was safely in a bank safe deposit box. At David's request photocopies of the relevant pages were made and David used these photocopies to resubmit his application to the Mayflower Society. Again Historian

General Kardell felt that the date was still 1779, but unexpectedly checked a publication on colonial handwriting. This publication made her believe that the birth year really was 1774, making the birth mother's age an acceptable 46. David application was approved! Whew!

What does this tell us about breaking down a brick wall? First, write down everything you know about the ancestor. Second, do a source check and get to the original source if possible. Third, create a timeline for the ancestor's life. Fourth, study persons associated with the ancestor. Fifth, consider alternative sources and scenarios. Sixth, don't trust the published sources and seventh, don't give up!



Calendar of Meetings for 2012

Saturdays, 10 a.m., Falmouth Public Library

- | | |
|----------|--|
| May 12: | Jeramie Hammond - Vision for a New FGS Website |
| June 9: | Dennis Ahern - Irish Internet Genealogy |
| July 14: | Joyce Pendery - Examples of Genealogical Research in France |
| Aug 11: | Sharon Sergeant - Investigative Genealogy |
| Sep 8: | Richard Harbison - German Research at the Family History Library |
| Oct 13: | Al Moniz - A Research Trip to Portugal |



Gail Kenney, Stan Vincent and David Martin, Falmouth Genealogical Society, April 12, 2012

My Provincetown Ancestors

Presented by Janet Burt Chalmers – December 8, 2011

When I told Ralph Wadleigh that I'd like to read a very poignant letter written by my great-grandmother's brother to his grandson in 1924, and tell a little bit about my Provincetown Burt ancestors, I had no idea how my presentation would take on a life of its own.

I started out to introduce my great-grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Burt, and her younger brother, Matthias William Burt, who were born on Long Point in Provincetown, Mary in 1838, and Matthias in 1851. They were

two of the children of John Graham Burt and Rosetta Small.

As I wrote my story and chose the pictures for my presentation I gained new insights about myself and my role as a mother, aunt, grandmother and great-aunt.

I hope you enjoy my tale and come away from it inspired to tell family stories to your children and grandchildren.

The Provincetown Burts

The Ancestors who Turned me on to Genealogy

As used to be common, my mother's grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Burt Littlefield, was a regular part of her daughter's family. Grandma Littlefield's husband, Joshua Owen Littlefield, died in 1898 at the age of 62, two years before their daughter, Alice Gertrude Littlefield, married Edward Francis Mahady and settled down first in Cambridge and later in West Roxbury. The 1900 census has Mary Littlefield living as a widow in Melrose where she and her husband had raised their family, and the 1910 census has her living in the Mahady household in Cambridge.

My mother, Alice Gertrude Mahady, was born in 1910, the third of three children, her older brothers born in 1902 and 1906. Her grandmother played an important role in my mother's life for the next 24 years. Mom rarely talked about her ancestors, but occasionally she told me tidbits such as the fact that her grandmother used to hide in a closet during thunderstorms, and talked about family members who were "lost at sea."

I was fascinated that my mother's grandmother's last name was Burt, the same as mine. Mom told me about her grandmother being born in Provincetown and about the Mahady family sometimes visiting her grandmother's relatives there. I was enchanted by Mom's tale of running up and down the Provincetown Monument as a girl. I got the impression that the uncle who let her run free was the monument keeper, but I later learned that he was more likely instrumental in getting the monument built.

As a girl, my mother practiced her penmanship, listing her descent from Mayflower passenger Elder William Brewster. This was no doubt taught her by her grandmother whose mother, Rosetta Small Burt, had deep roots on Cape Cod.

My mother had a favorite ancestor named Tamsin Lombard who she told me she had wanted to name me for, but Dad had apparently vetoed the name. Tamsin Lombard was the grandmother of my mother's grandmother, Mary Burt, and the mother of Rosetta Small. Obviously, Mom's grandmother must have told my mother tales of her grandmother, but unfortunately, Mom never passed those on to me. I did learn later that Tamsin Lombard was known by her Provincetown grandchildren as Mammy Small.

I got interested in genealogy as a child when both my parents rolled out huge scrolls of their family trees. Dad used to point out names of people and tell us stories about them. My favorite was Uncle Gage, who Dad said "burned out his gizzard with strong sauces." Mom used to weep over the many names of her relatives who were listed as "lost at sea."

Early on, I wanted to find a relationship between the Burts who lived in Provincetown and my father's ancestors who had settled in Springfield, MA in the 1630s.

My brother David took me to Boston when I was about 12 to buy me a book for recording my family tree. I remember carefully filling out the information I knew, starting with my parents and grandparents and then writing in that same Mayflower line from Elder Brewster my mother used to carefully write, the one that included Tamsin Lombard.

Through the years I've spent a lot of time fleshing out my family tree. I've spent an inordinate amount of time seeking a connection between my Burt lines, but I'm still at a loss. In addition to the Springfield Burts, there are many Taunton Burts whose records I've scoured. They seem to be unrelated. Records are far scarcer in Boston where a family of Burts lived who might have been related to my maternal Burts, but I haven't found a link.

I knew from the records that my mother passed down to us that Mary Elizabeth Burt's parents were John Graham Burt of Boston and Rosetta Small of Truro, and that John's father's name was also John and his mother was Elizabeth Seaver.

Boston vital records showed me that John C. Burt and Elizabeth Seaver were married in Boston in 1817 by the Rev. Daniel Sharp. On the same page I saw that William Burt and Margaret Seaver were married in 1816 by the same minister.

It didn't take me long to find Jonathan Seaver and Margaret Harris, married in 1792 in Boston by Rev. Samuel Stillman, were the parents of Elizabeth and Margaret Seaver.

I also found the record of the marriage of Edward Burt and Tamza Clark in 1790 in Boston, also by the Rev. Samuel Stillman. And I found records of an Edward Burt who married Elizabeth Dunham in Plymouth in 1817, whose first child was named Tamson Clark Burt.

Many of the children descended from John, William and Edward Burt carried on the Clark, Harris and Seaver

names, giving me good reason to link the three as brothers, sons of Edward and Tamza. I had no better proof then and still don't.

I got some good information from a letter dated March 14, 1971 to my parents from my mother's brother, Francis Littlefield Mahady, who had apparently heard that my brother David had been working on genealogy.

Uncle Fran wrote:

Dear Alice and Charlie,

... David [Charles David Burt] is doing well with his research.

I think you have the information on Mother's family. Grandma's maiden name was Burt. One of her amusements was to slide down the backs of whales washed ashore. She lived on the "point" of Provincetown Harbor. One winter the houses were moved over the ice across the harbor to the town.

Our great uncle Will Burt [who turned out to be Matthias William Burt] owned a schooner the "Foster" which supplied packet service Provincetown, Gloucester, Boston. I sailed on his boat once. Davis and I had the measles so we had to stay in the stern. The other kids were in the bow. I cannot understand my recollection of his whirling the wheel. On every boat I have ever steered I was cautioned not to give it too much wheel. I looked up her registry with the idea of adding it to Frank Swift's windjammer fleet in Camden, but she came to a bad end in the warm water of the Caribbean.

As you know Grandma married a Littlefield from Wells, Me. He made a lot of money but his investments went down.

If David wants any addresses I have, I'll be glad to send them. In examining the family tree I hope he does not find anyone hanging on it.



Uncle Fran's letter inspired me to go searching for any Provincetown Burts who might still be living. I scolded myself for not asking my mother questions when I had had the opportunity. I might never find out who Edward Burt and Tamza Clark were, but I might find something if I made contacts with long-lost cousins.

In 2000, I decided to try writing to all the Burts listed in the Cape Cod phone book on the outer Cape, sending a packet of pictures and what information I knew about the Provincetown Burts and my connection to them.

I hit paydirt! Laura Burt, my third cousin once removed, descended from my great-grandmother Mary Burt Littlefield's younger brother, Matthias William Burt, left her groceries to thaw on the kitchen counter and called me immediately on opening my letter and seeing pictures of her ancestors. All excited, she invited me to Provincetown to show me photographs and genealogical gleanings in her grandfather John William Burt's house on Commercial Street.

John William Burt's house was full of portraits of ships and family members. Laura had spread out photographs, family trees and hand-written notes all over the dining room table. Immediately I saw pictures of people I recognized from my own grandmother's albums. I even spotted a photograph of my grandmother labeled Gertrude.

Not only did I find a new cousin interested in her ancestors, I also found records of someone who had been searching for the same information I was a hundred years earlier! Matthias William Burt, born in 1851 on Long Point in Provincetown, was seeking his Burt roots just as I was. And he had discovered the connection between his grandfather John C. Burt and brothers William and Edward, and was in written communication with some of their descendants. I was amazed!

In addition to researching the Burt family, Matthias set out to record his granddaughters' ancestry through their Cape Cod lines, not only the ones I have through Rosetta Small, but through his wife, Alma Porter Nickerson's lines. Matthias went to Sturgis Library in Barnstable where he carefully copied lineages of many Cape families.

The most wonderful record Matthais left was a poignant letter to his grandson, John William Burt, in 1924, two years before he died. He told what he knew of his father's family. He apologized for not being well educated and for not caring early enough to find out more about his ancestors when he could have asked his grandmother for information.

Here is the letter:

Provincetown, Mass. 1924

To John William Burt from his grandfather Matthias William Burt.

What I know about our ancestors: not as much as I wish it was, but all that I have been able to find out. If I had thought or cared as much about it when I was the age you are now, I could have found out a lot from my grandmother Small [Tamsin Lombard Small] about my mother's people.

She was born in Truro in 1785 and always lived there, and was 89 years old when she died. She was an interesting talker and had a good memory, and knew the history of Truro and all the people that lived there in her day.

All I know about my father's people is what I remember hearing him [John Burt] or uncle Edward say. They were born on Essex St. in Boston. The house they lived in was near the water and must have been somewhere between South Station and the Hotel Essex.

When my father was about 10 years old his father [John C. Burt] was killed in a mill that stood on Wheelers Point. It was in the vicinity of their house.

I think I have heard Uncle Edward say they ground plaster in the mill.

My grandmother [Elizabeth Seaver Burt] was left with three small children. My father, John, was the oldest, about 10, Uncle Edward about 2, and Aunt Elizabeth between the two.

My father was playing about the docks one day and Capt. Paul Bangs of Provincetown was there in a fishing vessel. He took quite a liking to my father and found out about him and asked him if he did not want to go fishing with him and live with him in Provincetown.

My father told him he would go if his mother was willing, so Capt. Bangs went to his house and talked with his mother. She thought it would be the best thing for him, so she let him go.

He came to Provincetown and lived with Capt. Bangs, went fishing with him, and when a young man, was Capt. of a fishing vessel himself.

His mother married again. She with her husband [Israel Russell] and other children [Edward Clark Burt, Elizabeth Burt, and Louisa Russell] came to Provincetown to live, and all died there, and are all buried in Provincetown soil.

My father went to sea about all his life or as long as he was able – cod fishing, whaling, mackerel or halibut fishing. The

last of his going he ran a packet between Provincetown and Boston.

At one time he bought a house on Long Point and lived there about 15 years and went fishing from there. Then he moved the house to town and lived in it until he died. At one time there were about 40 houses on the Point, but they were all moved to town and most of them are at the west end.

My Uncle Edward, fathers brother, came here when a boy, and went fishing until the Civil War. He was the first one that enlisted from Provincetown, and was in the Navy during most of the war.

After the war he went to New York for a small steamboat named the Tourist to be used in the engineers' department around Boston Harbor. He was Capt. of her over thirty years, as long as his health and age would let him.

His wife [Ruth Lecount] died some years before he did, and when at home he lived with his daughter until she died just a few years before he did, so he left no descendants.

My Aunt Elizabeth, my fathers sister, came here when a girl. She married Capt. Myrick Cook. He was Capt of a whalerman a good many years. The last of his days he kept a grocery store.

They had two children that lived to grow up. One was Edward Burt Cook. When he was 22 he was Capt of a whalerman. One day he was out in the boat and struck a blackfish. The line got around his leg and hauled him overboard, and he was drowned. They got his body and brought it home in a cask of oil. He is buried here.

The other son, George Myrick Cook, went fishing when young, then got into large vessels and was Capt of a four masted schooner, and died of a fever in a port in South America and was buried there. He was married and left one son whose home is in Philadelphia.

My fathers half sister, Louisa [Russell], came here with her mother. She first married a man named Blake. He was lost at sea and she was left with a little boy named James H. Blake who is now living in Cambridge.

Then she married Capt. Nathaniel C. Atwood. He was a great authority on fish. They had three children: Myrick, who is living here now and is collector in the Custom House, and two daughters who are not living here.

I was born on Long Point near where the end of the break-water now is, and not far from the place where the first boat from the Mayflower landed Nov. 11th 1620. I was born on the same day of the same month 231 years after.

When I was 4 or 5 years old, father moved the house over to town and it is in the same place now that he moved it. Some years after he moved it he raised it up and built a story under the old part. The house is now owned by William Wolf.

When I was 10 years old I started in fishing and went 14 years in that business. Then my father bought the packet James P. Foster Jr. I went in it with him as long as he went, then I took her and went altogether 40 years. Then I sold her to Gloucester parties. They kept her three years then sold her to the West Indies.

The vessel was built in 1862 in East Haddam Conn., was 14 years old when father bought her. I went in her 40 years. She was owned in Gloucester 3 years, so was 57 years old when she went to the West Indies.

When I first went in her lots of business was done by packets. Provincetown had 3 or 4 in summer and 8 or 10 more carrying fish in winter, besides a steamboat. Wellfleet had 2 or 3 packets, Eastham 1, Barnstable 1, Plymouth 1, Scituate 1, Cohasset 1, Salem 1, Gloucester 2 or 3, Rockport 1, and a lot from places in Maine.

When I sold her after 40 years there was not one left. She [James P. Foster, Jr.] was the last of the packets.

Since then I have worked at different things on shore and will keep at it has long as my health and strength will let me. I have worked ever since I was big enough, and want to as long as I can.

I had two brothers and two sisters. I was the youngest. My oldest brother died young. My oldest sister [Mary E. Burt Littlefield] is living now with her daughter [Alice Gertrude Littlefield Mahady]. She was 85 last October. Her husband [Joshua Owen Littlefield] is dead, and of 4 children, 1 is living and 7 or 8 grandchildren.

My other sister [Rosetta Small Burt] died a few years ago. She was married twice. Her first husband was Capt of a whaleman and lost at sea. Her second husband was a store keeper and died at home. She had 3 children. 2 died young. One grew up to be a young man then died, so she left no descendants.

My other brother [John Seaver Burt] was lost at sea in the same vessel with my sister's husband. He was married about two months before he sailed. The vessel sailed from here on the 25th of Jan 1867. A heavy gale came up on the 27th and [I] suppose she was lost in that gale with all her crew, as she was never heard from after she sailed. She was a new vessel and had been fishing only a few months. Her name was the Willie Irwin. Some called her the Little Willie. My brother left no descendants.

I have two children, one son [John Seaver Burt], one daughter [Myra Cook Burt]. The son is married and has a son [John William Burt], the daughter is married and has a daughter [Lucia Burt Jones].

I am in hopes my grandchildren will leave some descendants. I hope the name Burt will not die out. My grandfather's name was John [C.] Burt my father's name was John [Graham] Burt my brother's name was John [Seaver Burt]. My son's name is John [Seaver Burt] and his son's name is John [William Burt], and I am in hopes he will live to have a son he can name John Burt.

I have written this so that my descendants will know something about their ancestors after I am gone. They would find it hard work to find out if they wanted to. Every generation makes it harder.

I know this is not written well, but it is the best I could do. I have wished a good many times my education was better, but I never went to school in the summer after I was 10 years old. I went to the winter school but there were so many boys there they could not learn much if they tried, but I did not try as hard as I wished I had after it was too late.

Most all the men here went to sea, and I thought it did not require much of an education to do that. All I thought was to be smart and catch as many fish as any one, so that is what I tried for, and I caught my share of fish and did my share of work, but in later years I found out my mistake, as we have only one life to live and mine is nearly over now.

It is too late to alter it, but in looking up my ancestors I have found out that some of them were very smart men in their day, and when I think what they were and think what my life has been, I feel ashamed of myself.

But I have the satisfaction of knowing I have used everyone as near right as I knew how, and am not ashamed to look anyone in the face.

My father and all my relations that I can remember have been honest, hard-working people, and I had rather be descended from such people than a man that is worth millions that got it dishonest.

So now William I will close what your grandmother calls truck and write down what I know about the different families we are connected with but I wish some of my ancestors a 100 or more years ago had written down the same kind of truck for me. Your education is better than mine and [you] will see my mistakes but it will answer the purpose it was intended for, to know some of your ancestors and where they came from.

Postscript

As a postscript I want to report that Matthias Burt's name does live on. Though his grandson never had a son to name John, one of his daughters had a girl who felt terrible about the Burt name dying out and changed her last name to Burt. When she married and had a son, she talked her husband into giving the baby the surname Burt.

I am talking about Laura Burt, my 3rd cousin once removed, who opened her grandfather's home to me in 2000 to share her ancestor Matthias William Burt's genealogical gleanings, photographs and stories. Laura and her husband Alan Gonsalves named their son Matthias Alan Burt.

I still hope to discover an early connection between Edward Burt and Tamza Clark who married in Boston in 1790, and my father's Burt line, but I know that I have forged an immediate connection between my maternal and paternal Burts. I am thrilled about that.

After meeting Laura Burt, I connected with Jeannette Burt Priestley online, a descendant of Edward and Tamza through their son Edward and his wife Betsy Dunham. Jeannette was so excited about my tale of meeting Laura that we all gathered in Provincetown with our husbands to meet each other and bond.

I have recently made contact with Emily Hills Aasted, the daughter of Lucia Hills Jones, one of Matthias Burt's descendants. Emily has shared photo files and other information.

And I've gotten my brothers involved too. David and I enjoyed a photography trip to several cemeteries in Truro and Provincetown to shoot ancestors' gravestones. David particularly liked finding Burts clustered together in the shadow of the Provincetown Monument.

A couple of years ago I took my son, Jeremy Burt Chalmers, and his family to Provincetown to climb the monument, gaze down on Long Point and the cemetery where their Provincetown ancestors are buried, and see John William Burt's house where I made my first connection with our cousin Laura Burt.

Naturally, I told my grandchildren, Hadley and Charlie, all the tales I knew about the Provincetown Burts, hoping I was planting the seeds of interest in genealogy in them.

Last year at Thanksgiving, Jeremy's family and my daughter Sarah's family met with us at Plimoth Plantation to see the

Pilgrim village and meet some of the people impersonating Mayflower passengers. We took a family photo in front of Elder William Brewster's house, and talked with Stephen Hopkins and Thomas Rogers, all Mayflower ancestors of ours through Rosetta Small Burt.

Though my mother knew one Mayflower line from Elder Brewster, I had found another, plus two from Stephen Hopkins and one from Thomas Rogers. It is important to me that my grandchildren know that information.

One more thought:

It has been apparent through the years that the common essence my brothers and I share is a love for the sea and an innate ability to sail well. From childhood, I always attributed our sailing finesse to our father who loved boats and gave us endless opportunities to enjoy both pleasure sailing and racing.

After discovering the character of the Provincetown Burts, however, I wonder if our genes got a double dose of passion for the sea. I like to think that David, Ted and I are as much Provincetown Burts as we are Springfield Burts, and that we are the link I have been searching for all these years.

I feel happy for all my extended family that the Burt surname continues in our family through my parents' great-grandchildren, and that the interest in our ancestors continues to be sparked.

A couple of nights ago I got a call from my nephew Jon Burt, son of my brother Ted Burt and his wife Eileen. Jon put me on to his son, eight-year-old Ethan Burt, who was studying the Mayflower in school and wanted to know about his ancestor who was a Mayflower passenger.

Delighted, I told Ethan a few tidbits including the story of his great-grandmother writing her Mayflower descent from Elder Brewster as a penmanship exercise. I also told Ethan that he was descended from Stephen Hopkins and Thomas Rogers, two Mayflower passengers my mother didn't know about.

I want to thank my parents for introducing me to genealogy by melding the Burt lines. I hope I can instill a passion for genealogy in at least one of my five grandchildren.

Janet Chalmers wishes to thank the members of the Society for the lovely arrangement of flowers recently sent to her while she was in the hospital.

Book Review: *American Crisis*, George Washington and the Dangerous Two Years after Yorktown 1781-1783, by William M. Fowler, Jr.

Bill Fowler, former director of the Massachusetts Historical Society and present Distinguished Professor of History at Northeastern University has brought us a closely researched and fascinating account of George Washington's struggles with a bankrupt and intransigent Congress in the years between his victory at Yorktown and final ratification of the peace treaty. From a genealogical point of view there are a number of personal sketches of certain of Washington's officer corps as well as his opposites on the British side. (Fowler gives NEHGS' Gary Boyd Roberts a thank you for help in these matters). In this writer's opinion however, the most interesting part of the book, is the description of the manner in which both sides handled the Loyalist migration into New York City prior to the British withdrawal in late November 1783. Perhaps 20,000 loyalists left the New York City area in that year, with many going to Nova Scotia. Another interesting aspect of this period is Washington's concern about the number of slaves being included as part of Loyalist property, probably due to his own position as a slaveholder. It probably also reflects southern interests in Congress because blacks were included with Loyalist departures in both Savannah and Charleston when the British withdrew from those cities earlier in 1783. If you have a Loyalist in your ancestry, this source will provide valuable background on how their interests were managed (or not). The book is available through CLAMS.

THE 1940 CENSUS: COUNTDOWN TO APRIL 2, 1940

January 14, 2012 FGS program, presented by MICHAEL BROPHY

Reviewed by Joyce S. Pendery, CG

The good news is that as you read this, the 1940 census is about to or may already have been released. It is said to be one of the largest collections of genealogical information ever released. The bad news is that there will not yet be an index. Volunteers are currently compiling indices, but it is a huge project.

Before indices have been compiled, to locate the people of interest to you in the 1940 census, you need to know

where they lived to find the Enumeration District (E.D.) in which their names are included. Once you know the E.D., you will have to scan the pages of that E.D. to find your people. Sounds like fun! The web site <http://stevemorse.org> gives E.D.s for cities and rural areas.

U.S. Censuses have been taken every ten years since 1790 and are released after 72 years. From 1790 through 1840, only heads of household were listed with a count of household members by age and sex only. Beginning in 1850 every member of the household was listed, and as the decades progressed, more and more information about each person was collected. This is true for 1940 as well, with about 20% more questions asked, especially about employment, a concern at the time. The name of the person giving the information was indicated in 1940. The format for display of information has been changed, as well, with names in the center of the line rather than at the left side.

When looking at census data, always remember that the person who gave the information may have intentionally or accidentally provided false information (especially about age). Errors in transcription can occur and not everyone was counted.

Mr. Brophy recommended using information and the tutorial on Steve Morse's web site <http://stevemorse.org/ed/ed.php> to get started. Ancestry.com also has a 1940 census substitute database. Start out by compiling a list of people you want to find. The crucial factor is to know where each individual lived on April 1, 1940. If you think they did not move between 1930 and 1940, look them up in the 1930 census and note their E.D., found at the top of the page. The E.D. could have changed, even if they did not move. If you don't know where they lived, interview living relatives; see if you can find their names in city directories; look for probate records, deeds, obituaries, vital records, and personal papers.

Sources

Morse, Steven P., Find ED Definitions in One Step, (<http://stevenmorse.org/ed/ed.php>)

Ancestry.com 1940 census substitute, 1940 Census Substitute Database (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/grouplist.aspx?group=1940+census>)