

RIGS REPORTER



Newsletter of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society

January 1, 2012 Volume XIV, Issue 3

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RIGS Next Meeting to be Held January 28th

The members of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society will join together for an all-day meeting on Saturday, January 28th, 2012, at the North Kingstown United Methodist Church. The meeting will begin at 10:00am with coffee at 9:30am; a light lunch will be available for a cost of \$5.00. **Lunch reservations required one week in advance.**

Our meeting will host the following guest speakers—

Jeff Howe, our first speaker, is a long-time RIGS member. He has finished his book on the first white settlers of Wannamoisett and has created a slide show based on it. His presentation will cover the area starting from Watchemoket Cove down to Bullocks Point and over to West Barrington down to Nayatt Point. Jeff will include the following: the first settlement of the John Browne family in 1640s; land deeds from Ossamequin and son Wamsutta; John Bullocks deeds; and a plat map on the division of Bullocks Point to heirs which also shows his house location built about 1717. He will also include owner histories with pictures of many of the old farms and houses and some of the earliest deeds.




Christopher C. Child, our second speaker, is from the New England Historic Genealogical Society and will be speaking on the topic: "Uncovering Your New York Ancestors". As many researchers have found when searching for ancestors who

moved to New York state, (either to stay or as a stop on their way west), the records are not as extensive as in New England. Mr. Child will help us understand the New York resources available and how to make the most of them to find our ancestors.

The meeting will break for lunch and some genealogical networking, additional fun, and then continue with two afternoon speakers.

Sarah Merrill, a Personal Historian from North Smithfield, will show us how to preserve life stories for future generations. Some of the ideas that Sarah will share with us include: memoir books; digital life story recordings; wedding and tribute books. She will inspire us to do what we often talk about—preserving the wonderful life stories we have for future generations. [See the article by Sarah on page 6]

Marianne Lockwood Shafer, from nearby Cape Cod, has been working on a book called *Historic Half-Houses of Cape Cod and the Families Who Built Them*. Members will find her talk and her book of interest since many of our Rhode Island families were originally from the Cape. Come and enjoy her slide presentation.

RIGS members are encouraged to bring along a non-member friend to the meeting, everyone is welcome. Plan to make a day of it! 

RIGS MEMBERS' MEETING & PROGRAM

Saturday, January 28th, 2012
10:00am-3:00pm

LOCATION

North Kingstown
United Methodist Church
450 Boston Neck Road, Rte. 1A
North Kingstown

AGENDA

- Speakers: Jeff Howe, Christopher C. Child, Sarah Merrill, Marianne Lockwood Shafer
- Lunch

MEETING DIRECTIONS

The North Kingstown United Methodist Church is located at 450 Boston Neck Road, Route 1A, in North Kingstown. Take Route 102 thru Wickford and bear right onto Route 1A South, go over the small bridge and follow $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (you will pass the North Kingstown Town Hall on the left); continue through two lights and the Methodist Church will be on the left.

TO MAKE LUNCH RESERVATIONS:

Lunch reservations required one week in advance. Please return the coupon with your \$5.00 check made payable to: RIGS and mail to Priscilla Chappell, 12 Highland Ave., Narragansett, RI 02882. For questions, please call 401-783-7006.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

HOW MANY ATTENDING _____

Boston Bus Trip



Reserve your seat! Join us on the next RIGS Bus Trip to Boston (Feb. 22). See details on page 2.



Did You Know?

by Jane H. Maxson

Westerly Library Local History Room is Open!

Good News! The Westerly Library Local History room is open. The collection has been moved to the second floor and can be reached by taking the main staircase and turning right. There is an elevator for the handicapped. Ask at the desk. Books and the vertical files are accessible, but some shelving remains to be done and computers are not yet installed. Reference Librarian Nina Wright has done a major job of reshelving the collection and arranging the room.

At the time this is written (December) the room will be open: Monday: 10:00-12:00, 1:00-3:00, 5:30-7:30; Tuesday: 10:00-2:00, 5:30-7:30; Wednesday: 1:00-3:00; Thursday: 9:00-11:00.

More volunteers are needed. It is a rewarding chore. People come in from all over the country looking for information about their ancestors and you never know what you'll find to further your own research

Phone Reference at 401-596-2877, ext. 3 for more recent information. The Westerly Public Library is located at 44 Broad Street, Westerly, RI.

NERGC Update

New England Regional Genealogical Conference

Woven in History - The Fabric of New England

17-21 April 2013

Radisson Hotel & Conference Center, Manchester, NH

Visit: www.nergc.org for more information

RIGS Research Trip on February 22nd

Join us on a RIGS-sponsored bus trip to Boston, on Wednesday, February 22, 2012. The fee is \$25.00 per participant. Members are encouraged to bring a non-member friend. We recommend that you bring your own bag lunch.

Your choice of research facilities is as follows: the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), the Boston Public Library, or the Massachusetts State Archives. You may also choose to split your day between two of these locations.

For those who choose the NEHGS library and are not members of that society, there will be a library charge of \$10; members of NEHGS are admitted free. Those choosing NEHGS will be offered a tour of their facility. The other two facilities are free.

You may learn more about using the NEHGS library or search their holdings in advance through their website at: americanancestors.org

If you are considering a visit to the Boston Public Library plan ahead to make the most of your time there. You may visit their website at: bpl.org.

Should you choose to visit the Massachusetts State Archives, you will need to present an identification card and fill out a researcher registration form. You will receive a Reader's ID card that must be worn in the Reading Room. Holdings of the Archives date from the year 1628 and document the settlement of lands in Maine and Massachusetts, the arrival of immigrants by ship in the port of Boston only (1848-1891), and the development of state government. Public records are not in the holdings of the Archives. The Archives hold the registration books of births, marriages, and deaths for all Massachusetts cities and towns, 1841 through 1915. Vital records

indices, dating 1841-1910, are also available on the Massachusetts Archives website: sec.state.ma.us/arc. If you are hoping to find specific documentation through the Archives, we highly suggest you call them in advance at (617) 727-2816.

On the morning of our trip, the bus will depart from the Warwick Park and Ride located at Rtes. 95 and 117 at 7:00 am and will also pickup at the East Providence Park and Ride, located on Rte. 44, at 7:20 am. On the return trip, the bus will be departing from the Boston area at 5:00 pm and will arrive in RI around 7:00 pm.

Reservations should be made in advance. Please return the mail-in form with an enclosed check of \$25.00 per participant, made payable to: RIGS. Remember to include your choice of pick up location and research facility you will be attending. Please mail your response to: Helen Smith, 530 West Reach Drive, Jamestown, RI 02835. For further questions, call Helen at 401-423-0442 or send her an email at HHSCTC@aol.com. ▲

BOSTON BUS TRIP

Please include this form with your check.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

CHOICE OF FACILITY: _____

PICK UP WARWICK: _____

PICK UP EAST PROVIDENCE: _____

RIGS Volunteer Town Researchers

Volunteer town researchers offer to provide distant RIGS members free help with simple requests. Volunteers may be willing, by prior arrangement, to do further research for which they may charge, but the Society assumes no responsibility for their work. At the moment we have a number of towns without volunteer researchers, marked "open" in the list below. If you would like to help with a town that lacks coverage, please contact Cherry Fletcher Bamberg at bamberg@tiac.net.

Barrington: Sally Small, 5 Ida Court, Barrington RI 02806-2525, sallyeps@aol.com.

Bristol: Charlie Watson, 27 Sullivan Lane, Bristol RI 02809-1905, chwatson@fullchannel.net.

Burrillville: Margaret Waterman, 330 West Road, Harrisville RI 02830 kodiak6@cox.net

Charlestown: Roberta Dobson, 3 Caswell St., Wakefield RI 02879-3624, Rldobson3@aol.com.

Covenry: Catherine Hey, 69 John Potter Rd., West Greenwich RI 02817, cshey80@cox.net.

Cranston: open

Cumberland: open

East Greenwich: Bruce C. MacGun-nigle, 202 Kent Dr., East Greenwich RI 02818, k8bcm@cox.net.

East Providence: Nancy S. Wolfe, 30 Baker St., Seekonk MA 02771-4404, Grdnwolfe@wmconnect.com.

Exeter: open.

Foster: Viola Ulm, 147 E. Killingly Rd., Foster RI 02825-1314.

Glocester: Margaret Waterman, 330 West Road, Harrisville RI 02830 kodiak6@cox.net.

Hopkinton: Gayle E. Waite, P. O. Box 13, Hopkinton R.I. 02833, redwingsri@cox.net.

Jamestown: Bertram Lippincott, III, P.O. Box 194, Jamestown RI 02835.

Johnston: Barbara Maggiacomo, 370 Sunset Ave., No. Providence RI 02904, greent1@cox.net.

Lincoln: open

Little Compton: Anne Wagner, 124 Hilltop Dr., Portsmouth, RI 02871, AnneBWagner@cox.net

Middletown: Bertram Lippincott, III, P.O. Box 194, Jamestown RI 02835.

Narragansett: Evelyn Wheeler, 29 South Pier Rd., Apt. B 107, Narragansett RI 02882, eviewhee@verizon.net.

New Shoreham (Block Island): Barbara Gaspar, 42 Dorothy Ave., Providence R.I. 02904-1234

Jeff Howe, 31 Virginia Lane, Riverside, RI 02915-1204, jeff50@cox.net.

Newport: Bertram Lippincott, III, P.O. Box 194, Jamestown RI 02835.

North Kingstown: Sally Hilton, 71 Johnson Ave., No. Kingstown, RI 02852-6317.

North Providence: Barbara Mag-

giacomo, 370 Sunset Ave., No. Providence RI 02904, greent1@cox.net.

Pawtucket: open

Providence: Paul Parker, 61 Myrtle Street, Pawtucket RI 02860, pauleddwardparker@cox.net.

Richmond: open

Scituate: Mark E. Gardiner, 71 Cranberry Dr., Hope, R.I. 02831, mgardiner5@cox.net.

Smithfield: open

South Kingstown: Priscilla Chappell, 12 Highland Ave., Narragansett RI 02882-3228, priscillachappell@verizon.net.

Warren: Judy Fardig, jfardig@townofwarren-ri.gov.

Warwick: Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, 141 Prendiville Way, Marlboro MA 01752-6738, bamberg@tiac.net.

West Greenwich: Catherine Hey, 69 John Potter Rd., West Greenwich RI 02817, cshey80@cox.net.

West Warwick: Marie McShane, 23 Colvintown Road, Coventry RI 02816, mimitwo2@msn.com.

Westerly: Vera Robinson, 38 Uzzi Ave., Westerly RI 02891-5254.

Woonsocket: open

RIGS Donates Money to Help Restore Early Town Meeting Records

PRESS RELEASE

3 November 2011

Cherry Bamberg, co-editor of *Rhode Island Roots*, a quarterly journal published by the Rhode Island Genealogical Society, arrived at the Providence City Archives with a check today for \$1,000 to help with the restoration of Providence Town Council and Town Meeting records that date from the Revolutionary War period.

The donation by the Genealogical Society will allow a professional bookbinder to repair torn pages, re sew the books' signatures, and rebind the books in leather. Bamberg cited Archivist's Paul Campbell's knowledge and enthusiasm as an important factor in the society's decision to contribute to the effort. "The City Archives holds a vast amount of valuable historical records and I am drawn back there time and again to do my research," Bamberg said. "There is so much here, once you see the actual records you want to come back for more." Archivist Paul Campbell stated that with limited city resources, "this very generous contribution will allow these irreplaceable records to be preserved for use by future generations of researchers. This gift by the Genealogical Society encourages us to work even harder



Cherry Bamberg (left) presents City Archivist Paul Campbell and City Clerk Anna Stetson with a check for \$1,000.

to serve those who visit us and redouble our effort to protect these valuable records."

Bamberg also said that many of her colleagues are excited about the improvements at the City Archives. For those who are unaware, the Rhode Island Genealogical Society is not a historical society. It is a group that conducts regular meetings throughout the

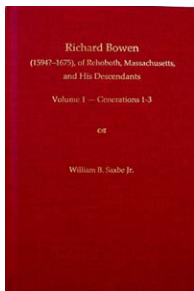
state to promote genealogical research and members contribute articles to their quarterly journal, *Rhode Island Roots*. Some of the six hundred or so members are even from foreign countries. Established in 1975, the members continue to find much of their information from archival records and would not be able to create their family trees without them.

The City Archives is located on the fifth floor of City Hall at 25 Dorrance Street in Providence. Hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The nearly 40,000 cubic feet of records provide researchers a variety of information that span the period from 1636 to the present day. For more information contact archivist Paul Campbell at (401) 421-7740 ext. 558. You can also send an e-mail to archivist@providenceri.com.

Note: On November 28th Paul Campbell reported to Cherry Bamberg that two volumes of Providence Town Meeting records (1725-1746 and 1772-1783) had been rebound in 1/2 leather with marble boards, using the RIGS donation. He said that work was about to begin on Volumes 4 (1743-1774) and 6 (1787-1793) of Providence Town Council records, using the remainder of our contribution.

NEW BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT: BOWEN GENEALOGY

Richard Bowen (1594?-1675) of Rehoboth, Massachusetts and His Descendants Volume 1 — Generations 1-3



Rhode Island Genealogical Society is pleased to announce the publication of the first volume of a new book, *Richard Bowen (1594?-1675) of Rehoboth, Massachusetts and His Descendants*, by William B. Saxbe, Jr., CG, FASG. This volume covers the first three generations of this large family in meticulous *Register* format. Volumes 2 (the fourth generation) and 3 (the fifth) are planned for subsequent publication. The entire print run has been generously donated by the author to RIGS.

The Bowen family has caused endless headaches for genealogical researchers. There have been so very many Bownens—and so many people of the same first *and* last name—that it is often hard to sort out one's own ancestors. As the early generations settled on the Massachusetts Bay/Rhode Island border, which was adjusted several times, locating the original records adds another degree of difficulty. This book will prove indispensable to researchers facing these problems.

Many features make this book a model for future genealogical writing. The exhaustive research brings together original records and the existing body of Bowen literature. Dr. Saxbe writes not merely competently but with grace and perspective on his subject. The clarity of the layout helps the reader to remember where he or she is in the family story. The index of names and places, always critically important for genealogists, is very well laid out and easy to use.

Unlike many compiled genealogies, the text is not an endless list of dates and places of births, marriages, and deaths. The author sets the scene for each generation's challenges with clear historical

material. The text emphasizes the impact of King Philip's War on the family—which lost several members to violence—and on the next few decades of New England settlements.

Tucked inside this three-generation Bowen family history are full five-generation histories of the families of Robert¹ Wheaton, Robert¹ Fuller, and George¹ Kendrick, each of whom married a daughter of Richard¹ Bowen. This unveils the size and complexity of a colonial family's female lines—which are skipped over in many family histories. For example, one of Richard¹ Bowen's granddaughters was an ancestor of presidents of both Dartmouth and Harvard Colleges. By following female lines, much information was also turned up on descendants of other Rehoboth families, including Blanding, Bliss, Butterworth, Carpenter, Mann, Mason, Palmer, Read, Robinson, and Wilmarth.



William B. Saxbe, Jr.,

won the 1991 NGS Award for Excellence in Genealogy and Family History. He comes by his interest in the Bowen family naturally, as both his parents descend from Richard¹ Bowen.

See page 7 for details on ordering.

William B. Saxbe, Jr., a Certified Genealogist since 1981, is a graduate of Amherst College, Harvard Medical School, and Harvard School of Public Health. He was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists in 1997 and presently serves as its vice-president. His writings on the Bowen family, including the delightful "Twenty-One Jabez Bownens," are familiar to readers of *Rhode Island Roots*. Dr. Saxbe's book *Johann Genning (1818-1898) and His Descendants: A Toledo Family*

RIGS Meeting Recordings Available on Tape

Have you ever been unable to attend a RIGS meeting, or thought a lecture was so interesting, you wished you could hear it again? Well luckily for us, Tom Clarke has recorded past RIGS meetings and they are available on tape. They are \$5.00 each. This is a flat fee, no shipping or handling charges. Checks should be made out to RIGS and addressed to: Thomas Clarke, 217 School Street, North Kingstown, RI 02852.

Some available lectures:

- Old Villages of Rhode Island, Donald Leonard
- Holdings at the Waltham Branch of the National Archives, Walter Hickey
- Irish Genealogy, Janice Duffy
- Searching for Your Native American Ancestors in Southern New England, Maureen Taylor
- Early Rhode Island Court Records, Jane F. Fiske
- In Search of the "Swamp Yankee", Marian Harris
- Rhode Island in the Civil War, Robert Grandchamp & Civil War Records at the Rhode Island State Archives, Ken Carlson (Two talks, one tape)
- Of Cemeteries I've Known, Loraine Tarket-Arruda
- Fun in the Sun; Rhode Islanders in the Caribbean in the Federal Period, David Dumas
- Finding Rhode Islanders Who Moved to New York State, Karen Livsey
- Occupation of Newport During the Revolution; The British Soldiers Point of View, Don Hagist
- "Injun" Tefft and Other Swamp Yankees, David Dumas
- Twig and Turf; Legalese for the Genealogist, David Dumas
- Holdings at the French American Genealogical Society, Jan Burkhardt & Background to French-Canadian History, Sylvia Bartholomy (Two talks, one tape)
- Black and Indian Genealogy on Block Island, Jeffrey Howe
- Holdings at the Old Colony Genealogical Society, Andrew Boisvert

Any problems with tapes or questions should be addressed to Tom Clarke (see above), or email: tomclarke1@aol.com

A Historian's Quest

By Robert Grandchamp

A decade in human existence is a short span of time, ten years that seems to come and go so fast, most of us barely have time to register its existence in the course of our lives. For me however, the last decade has been one that will forever stand out in the register of my life. If, ten years ago, someone could have told me what that span of time would bring, I would have laughed, but after being the first member of my family to graduate from college, with an M.A. in American History, the publication of six books and nearly forty-five articles, service to my nation as a National Park Ranger, and the completion of a rigorous course to become a Homeland Security Officer, the last ten years of my life have been the stuff that most men can only dream of; to think of it, I am only twenty-five years old. I owe everything that I have done in this short span of time to one man, someone that I never and can never meet, but who has a profound impact on everything I do on a daily basis. This man is my great-great-great uncle Alfred Sheldon Knight of Scituate, Rhode Island.

Readers of my books and an article in *Rhode Island Roots*, perhaps know the story of Alfred Knight. The seventh son of a wealthy dairy farmer, William Warren Knight, from Tunk Hill, in South Scituate, Rhode Island, he was twenty-nine years old when he enlisted in the summer of 1862 to serve as a private in Company C of the Seventh Rhode Island Volunteers. Perhaps Alfred enlisted because of pure patriotism, perhaps to get off the farm and see some of the world, perhaps to gain a \$400 enlistment bonus, we will never know. In any light, he and his regiment went South in September 1862, training for several weeks around Washington before joining the Army of the Potomac. Thrown headlong against a well-entrenched Confederate foe at Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862 the Seventh lost over 200 men, Alfred made it through although the "balls and shells fell like hail around us." Only six weeks later however, on January 31, 1863 at the regimental camp near Falmouth, Virginia, Alfred Knight died of pneumonia. On what would have been his thirtieth birthday, March 29, 1863, his remains arrived back in Scituate, and were buried in the family plot near the "home he loved so well."

A decade ago in January of 2001, a cold, winter's day at our house in Warwick, my grandmother and I were cleaning out our attic. Opening an old World War II ammunition chest, we were soon pulling out old family photographs, mostly relating to my great-grandfather, Howard E. Knight, who was the assistant postmaster in West Warwick for many years. In the bottom of the chest, however, we discovered a small, tattered, faded, and torn book titled *Genealogy of the Potter Family of Rhode Island*. Being told to be careful as I opened the book, I became disinterested almost immediately from the many names, birth and death dates of members of a family with the names of Potter, Colvin, Knight, and Matthewson among others. Being fifteen at the time, more interested in the sciences and the Air Force, I really did not care for the book, and planned to let my grandmother put it away with the trinkets she had accumulated during her

then sixty-three years of life. However, a photocopy in the genealogy book hit me. It was a copy of a poem called "Lines on the Death of Alfred S. Knight." I noticed that the poem stated he was a member of the Seventh Rhode Island Infantry and had died at a place called Falmouth, Virginia, in January 1863. Being young, I was struck by the beautiful lines that cousin Almon Field had penned in honor of a man who clearly left a place he held dear in his heart and died in the horrors of the Civil War. Having already had an interest in the Civil War, dating from family vacations to Gettysburg in my youth, I was taken aback – was this man related to me? My grandmother flipped through the book and confirmed that Alfred Sheldon Knight was my great-great-great uncle. I knew I was hooked for life.

The discovery that I had a relative fight in the Civil War was found on a Saturday morning. On Monday morning, having talked about nothing else for the last thirty-six hours I "played hooky" from school and went to the Scituate Town Hall and tried to find some more information on this mysterious man. The kind clerks at the hall were somewhat surprised that I, being so young, was interested in looking at the old town records. After being cautioned more than once not to damage the records, I was soon flipping through old pages of barely legible writing, trying to find something. I was not disappointed, discovering family birth, marriage, and death dates, copies of old town tax books, and what I was hoping for, the location of the Knight family cemetery where my uncle was buried. The old town cemetery simply stated the plot was on Providence Water Supply Board property on Tunk Hill Road, "in the pines." It seemed an appropriate place for a warrior to rest.

After several anxious weeks of waiting for the Water Board to allow me access to the property, permission was finally obtained and on one bright spring morning, my grandmother and I tramped through the woods down an old fire road to the cemetery. On a small rise of ground, surrounded by a rusting iron fence, and covered in debris and surrounded by thorns, were the graves of my ancestors. Walking to the front of the cemetery, I saw by far the largest stone in the cemetery. I knew it was Alfred. Walking to the front of his grave for the first time, I saw an American flag carved into the top of the stone, and a lengthy inscription of his life and service in the Civil War, ending with two stanzas of the poem I had discovered. As I stood and paid my respects, listening to the chickadees chirp overhead, I knew I had received my life's calling, I would devote the rest of my life to the study of the past.

While I scoured the Scituate Town Hall for information, I kept on coming up empty-handed. Surely there was more information on Alfred. He was literate and wrote letters home, but where were those letters? The Knight family had lived in Scituate since the early 1700's but with the building of the Scituate Reservoir, the family scattered to the winds of heaven, with many leaving the state. I knew they had to be somewhere. At the time, my mother worked at the Cracker Barrel gift shop in Coventry. Overtly proud of her children,

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A Historian's Quest

continued from page 4

she struck up a conversation one day with a group of visitors from Scituate who were having lunch. When she mentioned that her son had recently found a Civil War ancestor from Scituate, one of the women asked what his name was, and my mother told her. The woman who asked happened to be the official town historian for Scituate, Shirley Arnold. When she heard it was Alfred Knight, she could not believe it. Shirley was a Knight as well, and a cousin. She was related to Alfred, and had copies of his letters in her vast Knight collection. Several weeks later, my mother, grandmother, and I visited her house, and I was amazed to be reading the very words my uncle penned from the camp and battlefield. The letters told the story of a man who deeply missed his Rhode Island home, but had belief in the cause he was fighting for. Shirley was able to plug in many additional gaps that I had inquired about and kindly gave me copies of the letters, while also forming a close friendship, as we constantly exchange Knight-related materials.

The next two years were a constant blur as I finished high school, but in my spare time, was constantly at libraries, and became perhaps a bit of a pest to Ken Carlson at the Rhode Island State Archives, dropping in weekly to read old letters and ledgers about the Civil War. To honor Alfred, I became a Civil War reenactor, dressing up in blue wool in 90-degree summer weather to experience some of the same things my uncle experienced, minus the horrors of combat and disease. Reenacting became a way to escape the doldrums of the 21st century and return to the simple pleasures of the 19th.

In addition, I joined a local chapter of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, forming a lifelong friendship with my neighbor, and traveling around Rhode Island to record, fix, clean up, and on every Memorial Day, flag the graves of the soldiers of western Rhode Island. On these visits, however, I noticed something that had not occurred to me before: Alfred was not the only member of the Seventh Rhode Island Volunteers. Scattered in plots throughout Rhode Island were hundreds of men in the same unit who had a story to tell also. As time went on, and I neared the end of high school, I began to take an active interest in these other men as well.

As soon as I had the money saved, I bought a copy of William Palmer Hopkins' massive *History of the Seventh Rhode Island Volunteers*. Written in a diary format, the book was (and continues to be) read and reread, containing stories, letters, biographical information, and photographs of the men who served with Alfred. Unfortunately, however, Hopkins only gave a brief two lines to Alfred S. Knight, giving the basic information on his service. While I found Hopkins' book interesting, I knew there was more information out there. Beginning at the Rhode Island Historical Society and then branching out until I eventually visited every library and archives in Rhode Island, I discovered hundreds more letters and images of the soldiers who served with my uncle, and they as well had a story

to tell. Soon my small closet was overflowing with copies of images and letters.

One day while looking around the Warwick Public Library, I noticed a small book titled *Pleas Excuse All Bad Writing: A Documentary History of Rhode Island in the Civil War Era, 1854-1865*. The small book had been published in 1993 and was a copy of transcriptions and photographs of soldiers from southern Rhode Island. The book was edited by a Kris VanDenBossche. After discovering in *Pleas Excuse*, a transcript of the diary of a mother who had a son in the Seventh Rhode Island, I knew I had the beginnings of a book on the Seventh. On a whim, one night driving home from Rhode Island College, where I had gone to study American History, I decided to try, and attempt to contact this Mr. VanDenBossche; perhaps he knew where I could find more information on the Seventh Rhode Island. Sure enough, he answered the phone and in a two-hour-long conversation had laid out the road map on which to follow my course, naming off archives, sharing material from his own collection, and giving me the idea to contact the newspapers of Rhode Island looking for material. Without Kris, none of what I did then or since on the Civil War era could have been accomplished.

I soon wrote editorials to nearly every major paper in the state and was rewarded by a few actually publishing the letter searching for anything relating to the Seventh Rhode Island. The *Warwick Beacon* actually visited my house and the reporter I honestly believed was shocked to discover I was a nineteen-year-old sophomore at RIC, instead of a retired veteran working on a family history project. The letter-writing campaign put me in contact with a score of descendants of men who served in the regiment and allowed me access to dozens of letters and other sources.

Nearly a year previous to beginning the search for information on the Seventh, I had written a small booklet on Scituate, Rhode Island in the American Revolution, as seen through the eyes of my sixth great grandfather, Colonel Joseph Knight. Believing if others could write history, I could as well, I published this small volume, *With their usual ardor*, and another, *With High and Holy Aim*. This was a small piece about Alfred based on a term paper I had written for Dr. Stan Lemons Rhode Island History class at RIC, with transcriptions of Alfred's letters and the poem. With the hindsight of nearly seven years, I look back on these volumes as poor excuses of writing, poorly edited, poorly written, but a start nevertheless, as one has to cut one's teeth somewhere. I knew my next book, however, would be done right.

With two small volumes behind me, and practicing my writing skills as a correspondent to several Civil War reenactor magazines, I then produced a small book of edited letters from soldiers who served in the Seventh Rhode Island's Company K, recruited from Scituate and Foster. This was followed several months later when I wrote my first "real" book, *The Seventh Rhode Island Infantry in the Civil War*, a full history of the Seventh, based on the letters, diaries, and images I had discovered in my quest for more information on Alfred. The writing of this book opened up

many doors for me as I was invited to join the book review staff of two Civil War magazines, was able to meet many of the Civil War authors whose work had inspired my own, went on a lecture tour throughout Rhode Island, and was even invited by the Rhode Island National Guard to edit and write a history of the 103rd Field Artillery, becoming the first civilian to be awarded the prestigious Order of Saint Barbara. This book was followed two years later with *The Boys of Adams' Battery G*. In the meantime, the Town of Scituate gave me an award for studying the soldiers of the town, while Brown University conferred upon me their Margaret B. Stillwell prize for collection old books; I simply considered them good reads.

While I wrote and completed my B.A., I began to wonder what I should do with life after college. Having decided that being a classroom history teacher was not the life I wanted to follow, I decided to try and find my calling in life – what to do with this gift of education? After consulting with my advisor at RIC, he encouraged me to pursue an internship, learn what real historians do in the field, and perhaps "get my foot in the door." I took his advice and remembering the battlefield tours of my youth led by National Park Rangers with their "Smokey Bear" hats and brains that seemed to know everything, I applied to several National Parks, and had my choice to intern at Fort Necessity in Pennsylvania, or Harpers Ferry in West Virginia.

I decided to go to Harpers Ferry, as it was a Civil War battlefield. It was the best decision of my life, as I soon formed close friendships, learned new things about the Civil War, lived on a Civil War battlefield, and discovered what I wanted to do with my future. I guess I did well, because before the end of the summer, I was hired as a Park Ranger, complete with the Smokey Bear hat and brown hiking boots, giving tours, and enjoying a life I could only have dreamed of. My brief career in the Park Service lasted four summers, two at Harpers Ferry, one in Barnard, Vermont, and another in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Shenandoah. During the school year as I raced towards completing my Master's in American History, I constantly dreamed of the summers and where they would take me. Unfortunately, my chosen career path was shut down because of budget cuts, taking me to perhaps the not-as-thrilling, but equally challenging and rewarding, field of Homeland Security, a place I can still analyze, write, and research, but not about Civil War soldiers. This leaves the Civil War to my off hours, reading, writing, and simply enlightening myself, while listening to the constant chatter of my parakeets, aptly named after Civil War muskets, in the background.

In the spring of 2011, as I prepared to leave Rhode Island and move to New Hampshire, I realized it had been ten years since that young man had made that discovery of having an uncle in the Civil War. What a decade it had been; but something, despite all my accomplishments, seemed to elude me. Despite the constant requests upon my many friends to search libraries, collectors, dealers, shops, and other places, I could never find a

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A Historian's Quest

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picture of Alfred Knight. All I knew of what he might have looked like was from a basic physical description given when he enlisted; he was five feet ten inches tall, and had black hair and hazel eyes -- characteristics that I, as I approached my mid-twenties, had as well.

One night, as I returned from perhaps my last visit to the graveyards of southern Rhode Island, visiting "old friends" who had served with Alfred and now rested in plots throughout Washington County, I received an e-mail from my old friend Kris, who works as an antiques dealer. In the course of his travels, he had discovered a collection of images that I might be interested in. The images had been owned by a Leona Wilcox of Coventry. The name was not familiar to me, so as I read on, he mentioned having nearly a half-dozen images of a woman named Emma Salisbury. To say my mouth dropped would be an understatement, for Emma was my great-great-great grandmother. Continuing to read the email, I was even more astounded to discover that there were images of William



Alfred Sheldon Knight

Warren Knight and Joseph Knight, two of my grandfathers. It was when I opened up the attachment to the e-mail that I received one of the greatest shocks of my life. There, on the

screen was a small carte de visite of a man in a blue uniform, hazel eyes, black hair, and a Captain Ahab style beard that I had recently myself begun growing. Looking into those eyes from 150 years ago, I knew that my ten-year quest was finally over; Alfred Sheldon Knight had finally come home. Kris kindly sold me the images, and there I was looking at the image of a man who had been the inspiration of so much. After pondering for so long, I finally could see my uncle.

As I sit back now, and think of what the last ten years has brought me, and where my life has gone, it amazes even me sometimes. All of it occurred because of the discovery of a piece of paper that some people would have thrown out. By reading it, I became a student of the past, and embarked on a trail of discovery that eventually led me to discover myself.

Robert Grandchamp has authored seven books and scores of articles and reviews on American military history. The recipient of an M.A. in American History from Rhode Island College he resides in Rockingham, New Hampshire where he works for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. He can be reached at rgrandchamp40@aol.com

Tips, Tidbits, & Events

Champlin Family Reunion

The Champlin Family will be holding a Reunion from Sunday, June 17th, beginning at 3 pm, through Friday, June 22nd, 2012, ending at 11 am. The Reunion will be held at the Holiday Inn located at 3900 Tower Hill Road in South Kingstown, RI.

Reunion guests will pay a discounted room rate for Sunday through Thursday nights at a cost of \$82 (plus tax). Rooms need to be reserved by April 15, 2012 to get this Reunion rate and may be reserved by calling toll free: 877-805-9008 or dial locally: 401-789-1051. When making your reservation, use "CFR" as the group discount code.

There will be NO charge for attending the Reunion. However, there are day trips planned that include Newport and Block Island and these will incur expenses. Money will be collected in advance to pay for these expenses from those people who want to go on the trips.

In addition, there will be expenses for all of the hospitality suite refreshments, printing costs, and various other things; therefore, voluntary donations of funds to cover these expenses will be greatly appreciated.

For further information, visit the following website: <https://sites.google.com/site/champlinreunion2012/>.

Submitting to RIGS Reporter

If you have a tip, tidbit or event for the RIGS Reporter, please submit it to Rachel Peirce at peircerachel@yahoo.com. Please send queries of thirty words or fewer, on RI subjects only, to the Query Editor, Deby Jecoy Nunes, 23 Job Drive, Richmond, RI 02892-1022 or by e-mail to rignsqueries@gmail.com.

The valuable work of personal historians

By Sarah Merrill

If you're perusing the RIGS newsletter, chances are you appreciate the great value of understanding your family's origins. Perhaps you are actively engaged in mapping out the branches of your proverbial *family tree*. Now—imagine filling those branches with leaves. This is the work of a **personal historian**. Similar to memoirists or biographers, personal historians assist individuals in gathering the stories that make their family unique and fascinating. *We personal historians maintain that these stories get lost at great cost to a family and a community.* However, when these family stories are recorded (whether in audio format or in writing) future generations are the recipients of a great gift: an understanding of the personalities, the experiences and the wisdom of their grandparents, their great grandparents, and so on up the branches.

As stated in the brochure of the Association of Personal Historians (of which I'm a member):

"No matter how ordinary a life may seem, descendents and others will be inspired by the extraordinary stories told."

Very briefly, this is the model that most personal historians (PH) follow:

- **Phase one:** A personal historian is contracted to record an individual's life stories or those of a parent or other relative. Together the client and the PH make decisions about the scope of the project. Some clients are interested in recording their entire life story from birth through the present, while others want to capture an important period or a particular theme that has run through their lives. Some families are interested in recording the stories of their ancestors.
- **Phase two:** The PH visits with their clients and interviews them in their homes, for an enjoyable and casual process. Generally, a full life story requires recording several

hours of interviews over the course of a couple of weeks.

- **Phase three:** The PH takes those *digitally recorded* interviews and carefully transcribes them into written word. In this way, the PH is able to capture and maintain the voice and personality of the subjects. We then incorporate family facts, biographical information, and—of course—photographs!
- **Phase four:** Most clients choose to have the manuscript transformed into a beautiful, hardcover book, a truly priceless heirloom that can be passed on through the generations. The product is the story of your life, your parent's life, or perhaps a compilation of stories from multiple family members.

The benefits of participating in a personal history are many and profound. The individual being interviewed (the "narrator") often feels more connected to loved ones; gains more clarity around important relationships in their life; and often comes away from the project with a greater sense of self worth and *personal wisdom about life*. The benefits for the family are also significant: In addition to gaining an understanding of the narrator's life journey and philosophy, the work often leads to a greater sense of connectedness among family members. And finally, a community benefits from the great variety of stories that together comprise the diverse human experience.

Visit Sarah's website for more information about what she can do for you and your family: www.memoirsbymerrill.com. Call or email her to discuss a potential project: (401) 258-5129; sarah@memoirsbymerrill.com.

Sarah has worked for 16 years as a journalist and an editor, as well as a poet. She graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1996. She did her graduate work in oral history and documentary writing at the Salt Institute in Maine. She is the mother of two young boys and lives in North Smithfield, RI.

Special Publications of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society

Rhode Island Genealogical Society pursues an active program of publishing source material for the study of Rhode Island families, such as diaries, cemetery transcriptions, compiled genealogies, and transcriptions of original papers. We are proud to offer the following books published by RIGS and classic sources by society members. All are well illustrated and carefully indexed. Prices are shown for members of Rhode Island Genealogical Society (M) and nonmembers (NM). Your purchase supports the publication of future books.

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RIGS Events Calendar in Brief

Jan. 28th, 2012 (Sat.) **RIGS Member Meeting (All Day)**
See page 1 for details

Feb. 22nd, 2012 (Wed.) **RIGS Research Trip to Boston**
See page 2 for details

April 14th*, 2012 (Sat.) **RIGS Member Meeting (Half Day)**
* Note date change, due to holiday.

May 20th, 2012 (Sun.) **RIGS Annual Meeting**

Membership Renewals

Thanks to all those members who have already renewed, and mailed back the membership survey. If you haven't already done so, renew your RIGS membership by March 1, 2012, to receive a complimentary issue of the year's Special Bonus Issue of *Rhode Island Roots*, 152 pages of fully indexed abstracts by Cherry Bamberg, FASG. Please remember to return the renewal notice with your payment and include an update for your Rhode Island and New England family names, or renew online at www.rigensoc.org.

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