

For the Love of My *Stidham* *Family*

Compiling the genealogical documentation required for membership in a patriotic organization can be challenging, yet rewarding. In the process, one researcher begins to appreciate her ancestors and their contributions to America.

By Sharron Lee Hayles Torrence (DM-479)



Seal of the National Society of Colonial Dames XVII Century

My best friend informed me that we were going to do our family research. We had just watched the TV series "Roots" and she decided we were going to find ours. This was 1976-77. I had two sons, a 10-year-old and a two-year-old. I couldn't imagine tracing my family when I knew very little about my grandparents on either side, and I had a two year old! So I started asking my parents questions and jotted down some names and places where they lived. I started going to our local library, which had a small genealogy room. My friend Bettye and I asked for information to get started and we were given handouts with a family tree and some information. We jumped in with both feet and started researching and asking lots of questions.

We got involved with the local genealogical society and learned as we went along, reading books and searching through census records. We wrote to courthouses and waited and waited for answers, but we started learning and finding information. Slowly, we were

starting our family trees, all this with a two-year-old in tow. He was wonderful; he played under the table with his little cars, slept, or sat on my lap as I read microfilms, asking if that was a Simms or Maroney or Atchley or Stidham. The library workers were amazed at how good he was, and they watched him grow up going to the genealogy room.

My husband, sons and I took a trip to Lebanon, Laclede County, Missouri. That was where my grandmother was born and that was where I had found living members of my Atchley family. We visited with Louis and Lois Atchley, a lovely couple who lived on the land the Atchleys had settled on in 1838. The family cemetery was there, and buried were not only my Atchley ancestors, but my ancestor, William Penrose Stidham, who had married Susan Elizabeth Atchley.

William Penrose and Susan are my great-grandparents. I had never known anything about them and there I was, standing at their graves. My youngest son was 4, and the oldest was 12. They were used to going to cemeteries with their Mom, although I doubt they

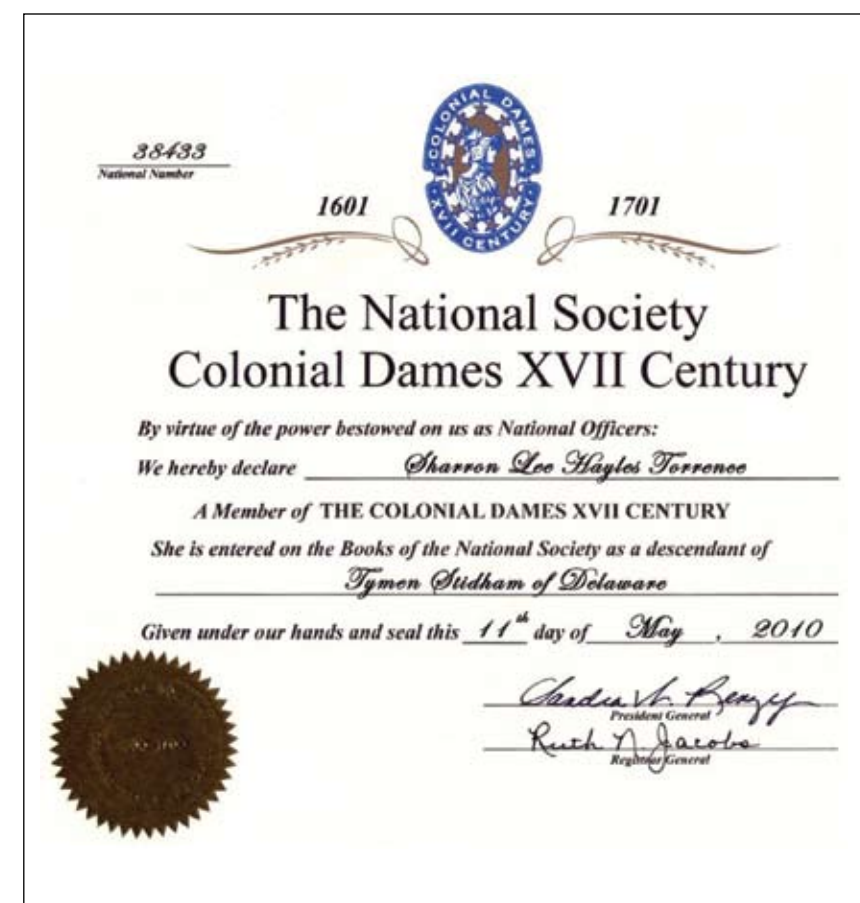
knew the real meaning of just where we were. We always made it a happy place, a place to stand at a grave and be happy we had found these ancestors! I promise this didn't mar my sons, they grew up normal!

Fast forward many years. More information was available and it was easier to find. More census records were being released as well. Bettye and I started going to larger city libraries with genealogy collections. Our trees were growing. I got a computer. More information was beginning to show up on web-sites, and finally, there was Ancestry.com.

Twelve years ago Bettye and I took our first trip to Salt Lake City to research at the Family History Library (FHL). What a wonderful place with so many resources and information. This trip was organized by fellow researcher Martha and we were a happy group of about 20, who said we wanted to come back the following year! We will be going again this year, our 12th trip, and we have a name for our group, the Texas Tracers, and we have tee shirts with our logo. We are a group of 20 to 30 avid researchers that go each year and we stay nine days. The Family History Library people know us well, and always say they look forward to our June visit. We love them!

I began to find more online information about the Stidham family. Then I found a book on the family written by Jack Stidham. I was thrilled beyond words. I had found more information than I ever dreamed I could find. My trips to Salt Lake City became so important to me as I began gathering information on this Stidham line. I was finding death records and marriages and more books on Delaware. As I found more each year, I was adding to my depth of documentation.

A few years ago I found the book on The Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, what a treasure that was. I was also emailing libraries and archives, gathering more information. Texas and Missouri released death records. The possibilities of finding more information had become so great, my Stidham family tree was getting bigger and bigger. I was also adding more to other sides of my tree and again my friend Bettye said we were going to work on our papers in order to join the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Working on getting in to a society makes you become a better researcher, because you document, document, document. I worked



on my DAR papers for my Simms line and my papers were approved. I had done it. I turned to my Stidham line and gathered what I had and looked at the holes in my research. Another year and another trip to Salt Lake City and I filled in more of those holes. An email to Archives in Champaign County, Illinois, where my Stidhams had moved, brought me a tremendous amount of information. I ordered a lot of things on the list they sent

Dumbarton House, in Washington, D.C., is the headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of the XVII Century (top). Author's membership certificate from the Colonial Dames (above).



The author (circled) with the rest of the Texas Tracers, inside the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, for the group's official 2010 portrait.

me, and boy did I hit the jack pot! I was on my way to completing my application to membership in the National Society of Colonial Dames of the XVII Century. Another year and another trip to Salt Lake City completed my needs for documentation. I had everything I needed—and more!

I couldn't have done this without the books written by Jack Stidham. His work paved the way for me, shining the light on the way to go. All I had to do was fill in the documentation and gather more information. I found many books on the Swedish migration and they always had references to Tymen Stidham. Those books, along with the records of the Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, took me way back, connecting my family back to Tymen. With the aid of these books, I completed my application to the Colonial Dames, and many copies later, my papers were off to be scrutinized! It didn't take too many weeks to learn that I had been approved. I was officially in the Colonial Dames.

Next step is membership in the Daughters of the American Colonists, which will be identical to the Colonial Dames papers. I also will add my Cornelius Stidham to the DAR as a supplement on my line, as I am a member of that society on my Simms line.

After researching over 32 years, I am being rewarded by getting my families into these wonderful societies. The Daughters of the American Revolution are such a great patriotic group, we do so much for our vet-

erans and also support private schools in poor areas. We are not a group of old ladies who sit around and sip tea and think we are grand! We have fun and love our service to our veterans! I never knew much about my grandparents and I definitely didn't know anything about my great-grandparents. But after 32 years of researching, I know them all. I love them all. I want to honor them and make them proud that I have found them, and remembered them. Oh, life is wonderful. Ancestors are treasures.

My grandmother was Mary Elizabeth (Mamie) Stidham (1904-1955). She married Thomas Lee Simms (1903-1963). I knew them both, but they died fairly young. My grandmother's parents were William Penrose Stidham (1863-1940) and Susan Elizabeth Atchley (1864-1909). I have a picture of William, but have nothing of Susan. I wish I had a photo of her. My grandmother Mamie had beautiful auburn hair and blue eyes. I don't know who she got them from.

William Penrose Stidham's parents were Joseph Penrose Stidham and Sarah E. Elder. I have not found where the name Penrose came from and I would love to know. Joseph Penrose Stidham was a problem for me. I knew he had moved from Champaign Co, IL to Laclede Co, MO, but never found him on a census record in Missouri. In looking at pension records of their daughter-in-law's parents, the Atchleys, I found a document where Joseph Penrose Stidham said he had known the Atchleys since around 1880. The



The author photographed next to Jack Stidham's books, *The Descendants of Dr. Timothy Stidham*, on the shelves in the Family History Library (right).

document was signed in 1894. I also found him on some tax records, but by 1900 he was no where to be found. In some records on his wife's side I found mention of Sarah E. Elder Stidham going to visit family in Wisconsin. I found them on the 1905 Mills, Washburn County, Wisconsin State Census. I wrote to the county and found a 1908 death record of Joseph Penrose Stidham. Sarah E. Stidham died 27 Feb 1919 in Houston, Harris County, Texas. I found her death record in the FHL records on the Pilot Search, where they have the Texas Death Records and Index. My great-great-grandmother burned to death when she fell into the stove and caught herself and the house on fire. That was a hard one to take. She was living with her son, whom she and her husband had also lived with in Wisconsin. This just goes to show, you never know where they are and why they are there! This is what makes genealogy so difficult! They can move around all over the place! Joseph died in Wisconsin and his death record says he was buried there. Sarah died in Texas and her death record says her body was taken to Joplin, Missouri. She did have a son living there. But back in Champaign County, Illinois there is a beautiful, large headstone with both Joseph and Sarah Stidham, including their dates. Could they have been moved back there later, or did their other son and only daughter erect it for their parents? Another mystery that I have not solved!

My research led me to contact the Archives in Champaign County, IL to find out more on the Stidham family. I was surprised to find information on Joseph Penrose Stidham's father, Penrose Stidham (1807-1862). They sent me information about a book titled, *Early History and Pioneers of Champaign County, Illinois*. It contained 115 engravings and biographical sketches of the early settlers, and Penrose Stidham was one of them. This was published in 1886. What a treasure! I have a picture of Penrose Stidham that was engraved in some medium. The bio written about him was wonderful, giving his birth and death, parents, wife, children, and occupations and migration. This was accepted by the Colonial Dames as proof, even though I had included Wills and Probates to back up deaths and children.

I could explain each step back on my Stidham line, but I would be here forever. I

Author's Lineage from Dr. Timen Stiddem

Dr. Timen [1] Stiddem
Lucas [3] Stedham — Karin Tussy
Jonas Lucasson [21] Stedham — Helena/Eleanor Dericsson
Cornelius [72] Stedham — Christina Justice
Joseph [146] Stedham — Ann Gregg
Penrose [260] Stidham — Mary Sergeant
Joseph Penrose [363] Stidham — Sarah E. Elder
William Penrose [613] Stidham — Susan Elizabeth Atchley
Mary Elizabeth [1287] Stidham — Thomas Lee Simms
Marion Frances Simms — Ralph Edward Hayles, Sr.
Sharron Lee (Hayles) Torrence

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Colonial Families of Delaware (Volumes), by F. Edward Wright

Colonial Delaware Soldiers and Sailors 1638-1776, by Henry C. Peden, Jr.

The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, DE 1713-1799

Revolutionary Patriots of DE 1775-1783, by Henry C. Peden, Jr, M.A.

A Calendar of Delaware Wills, New Castle County, 1682-1800, by The Historical Research Committee of the Colonial Dames of Delaware

encourage every researcher to enjoy the challenges and to keep looking for documentation. It is out there, somewhere, and you can do the "happy dance" when you find treasures like I have.

I'm including some of the titles in a Bibliography (above) of great books I found information in. They are very interesting to read, at least the parts that mention our Stidhams! I encourage every one to continue to add documentation to your lines. It can be amazing in what you can find or, as I have, stumble in to! I think Jack Stidham gave me the bones of my family, and I have been adding the flesh!

Would you like to share some of your family's history in these pages? Email RLSteadham@mac.com for some helpful ideas on how you can tell your family's story too!