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## My Genealogy Services: Know Where You Come From

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Karla Henderlong and Madeline Yanov Photo Sophie Braccini

Karla Henderlong and Madeline Yanov met at the Contra Costa County Genealogy Society and became friends. When they brainstormed ideas for a new career that would combine flexibility and passion, genealogy quickly emerged. Together they founded My Genealogy Services, where they use their talents and endless patience for research to uncover the layers of data that reveal unique family histories, from the humble to the amazing.

Henderlong's curiosity about the Scottish roots of her paternal grandmother who was born in Washington state in 1898 led her to the field of genealogy. "I became addicted," she says with a smile. She was able to trace that branch of her ancestry to the Highlands of Scotland in 1770 when her ancestor, Rachel, set sail to the new world at age 17. Along the way, Henderlong, a former attorney, discovered that the research needed to be pulled from various sources like census records,

tax records, or the California death index. Patience was paramount to sift through hundreds of records and locate a match.

Yanov, who was a paralegal, studied history in college and had always been curious about her ancestors. She recorded everything her parents and relatives remembered. "I knew the stories (of my grandparents)," she says, "and in the process of studying their life records, I discovered a whole new branch of my family I did not know." She found out about her great-grandfather's relatives through an Illinois newspaper's obituary that listed his siblings and those siblings' spouses. "It's like detective work," says Yanov. "And you have to be able to think outside of the box." She has since reconnected with this Illinois branch of the family that holds periodic reunions.

Henderlong and Yanov joined forces because they feel they have a similar work ethic and philosophy. "We both wanted to offer services that would be affordable," says Yanov, who knows how prohibitively expensive some genealogy services can be. "We can teach research techniques, we can consult and offer suggestions."

"We can also do all the research for people who are too busy to do it," adds Henderlong.

They note that while the Internet, in general, gives access to a lot of information, it's only the tip of the iceberg - only about 10 percent of available material is online.

"We have a client who did research online and had found that one of her ancestors was connected to the Mayflower immigrants, and she wanted us to do some checking," says Yanov. The two Lafayette ladies discovered that the ancestor of this client was married twice: his first wife had ancestors on the Mayflower, while the second, who was the direct ancestor of the client, had none. "We searched documents in different libraries, compared it with the Daughters of the American Revolution records, and found the discrepancy," explains Yanov. "Then we looked at the birth and death certificates of the children of the two wives to confirm the true lineage." Everything has to be verified, Yanov adds. "Otherwise it's mythology."

Some of the stories they uncover can be quite fascinating, like one woman who knew that she had Cherokee blood. "We found that she is a direct descendent of the most famous Cherokee woman of all time, Nanyehi, known in English as Nancy Ward, who helped the patriots during the Revolutionary War, and has a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution named after her," explains Henderlong. The client has since applied for a tribal citizenship in the Cherokee nation

and has gained admittance into the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Another client's grandfather was a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II. "The man never wanted to talk about it, but (after he passed) we were able to find testimonies and journals of people who were in the camp with him," says Yanov. Other research uncovered another client's "family skeleton" involving a great-grandfather who killed his wife before committing suicide. "Everybody has (skeletons) and everybody has stories," says Yanov. "We go beyond names and dates; we look for these stories."

Sometimes the two virtually travel all over the world to find the roots, in some instances partnering with genealogists in other places. "My mother's ancestry is part Norwegian and in this country they have the farms' histories that date back to the 1600s," says Henderlong. As a result, she was able to connect with her Norwegian side of the family and establish new friendships with distant cousins she has visited and who have visited her.

The two women said that people often start this work as a legacy for their children, or as a gift to their mother or father. Henderlong and Yanov also do research for adopted individuals looking for their birth parents.

For more information, contact them at <http://www.mygenealogyservices.com>. For information about the Contra Costa County Genealogy Society, visit [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cacccgs/](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cacccgs/).

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