

But, Dad, I Thought the Coles Were English

Thanks for inviting me to speak to you this morning. It's always nice to spend time here – the mountains are beautiful and the buckwheat pancakes at the Brass Pelican are the best anywhere. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Brad Cole. I was born in Bloomsburg and lived there for about twelve years. My parents and both sets of grandparents lived in Bloomsburg, also. So, even though I now live in Annapolis, Maryland, I still proudly consider myself a Columbia County, Pennsylvania, native.

I will briefly relate the story of how I solved a genealogical problem while talking a little bit about the origins of the Cole family in this area. By the way, I do not consider myself to be a bona fide "genealogist."

First, I'll tell you about the event that inspired my interest in developing a more thorough understanding of the history of the Coles of Columbia County as well as the general history of Northern Columbia County. I'll also explain how, with little discretionary time or money, I was able to conduct research, have some fun and meet new people (even a few distant relatives) in the process. Then I would welcome any and all questions you may have.

What inspired me, after being away from the area for almost thirty years, is somewhat of a long story – I'll try to give you the condensed version this morning. I was in Salt Lake City on business in January of 1997, had heard of the Mormon Church's family history library and decided to take a quick look between business meetings. They had computers readily available to query family information by using just first and last names. I entered Ezekiel Cole and got a line that traced to a Barent Jacobsen Kool/Cool, originally from Holland. I saw familiar names such as Tunis and Benjamin Cole but had never seen the name Cole spelled Cool or Kool before. I remembered that Harry E. Cole, who had researched the Cole family from the 30's until he died in 1963, had inferred in his August 17, 1934, *The Morning Press* article titled "Coles of Locality Trace Their Ancestry To King Cole" and his 1936 genealogy done as a WPA project titled "Genealogy of Cole Family, Columbia County" that we were of English ancestry. He inferred that we're perhaps even related to Old King Cole himself. A copy of Harry's genealogy can still be obtained at the Bloomsburg Public Library. Let me read the opening paragraphs.

"The origin of the Family name Cole is lost in antiquity, the first Cole in recorded history being King Cole, who reigned in England in 238 A.D., a grandson of Constantine the Great. King Cole married the daughter of the King of Wales and was the father of King Arthur." He continues on about three brothers leaving England. Wouldn't you agree that Harry, by inference, develops a Cole connection to English, and, perhaps, even noble roots?

A few weeks after I returned home, I called my father and asked him what he knew of the family's Holland connection, and, well, he couldn't add much. However, a week later he

showed up with a couple of musty smelling boxes that I believe had been taped up since shortly after my Grandmother Cole died in 1992. I spent that night digging through old Bibles, news clipping, photos, and other documents. Those boxes were full of family history treasures but contained no resolution to the question of possible Dutch ancestry.

After carefully reading Harry's genealogy again, I thought my next move should be to contact his son Harry E. "Zeke" Cole, Jr. I tracked him down in Alabama where he was working as a college professor. He was very pleasant but informed me that all of his father's notes, records and family Bibles were destroyed during the disastrous Hurricane Agnes flood in 1972. The Coles had lived on Leonard Street in Bloomsburg, right next to Fishing Creek, until the death of Harry's wife in 1973.

So much for easy answers -

Well, if it hadn't been for the Internet coming into general use at that time, I may have given up after going through the boxes and talking to "Zeke." However, I was able to search for information on-line quickly and inexpensively. I found more information than I bargained for – some of it clearly inaccurate.

I also benefited from my Grandmother Cole's past efforts. She was an active member of the Ft. McClure Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and quite interested in family history. She took copious notes and saved just about everything. Also, she was the one who took me to places like Benton, Orangeville, East Stroudsburg, etc. to see my Cole relatives when I was very young. Anyway, she had things documented on the Cole side from the current generation back to Ezekiel reasonably well. So, I certainly had a running start.

The most noticeable "confusion" in Harry's genealogy - we all need one problem to solve or it's too easy, I suppose - was when it came to confirming Ezekiel Cole's parents and siblings. Since he is the father of the family Harry Cole called the Coles of Columbia County, I felt it important to confirm his lineage.

Ezekiel Cole was born on May 24, 1756, in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. He first moved to Northampton County, Pennsylvania, before the Revolutionary War, and, as Harry stated, was the son of Benjamin and Geertje/Charity Cole. Ezekiel was only six years old when his father died in 1762. I was unable to determine with whom Ezekiel lived after his father's death or when he moved across the Delaware River to Northampton County.

During the Revolutionary War, Ezekiel served in the Northampton County Militia. After the war, he was living as a "yeoman" farmer in Northampton County, Pennsylvania. Then he and William Hess sold their lands in Northampton County and moved west to Northumberland County in 1792. Remember the Columbia County of today wasn't formed until 1813. Ezekiel and his family settled just a few miles from here, where Cole's Creek enters Fishing Creek.

One of the treasures, and a great source of information, that I found in one of the musty smelling boxes my Dad had given me was an old bond or note between Ezekiel and William Hess dated January 31, 1786. Hess would become Ezekiel's father-in-law in 1790. However, at that time Ezekiel was still married to Rebecca Coleman. This document definitely places him living in Bethlehem Township, Northampton County, in 1786. I assume Ezekiel may have borrowed the money to buy land. Interestingly, this bond is eight months older than our Constitution which was drafted September 17, 1787.

Ezekiel must have moved within four years after signing the bond, because he and William Hess are recorded in the 1790 census as residing near each other in Forks Township, Northampton County. Ezekiel's first wife Rebecca died in October 1789, and, on January 17, 1790, he married Elizabeth Hess making William Hess his father-in-law.

Now, back to Ezekiel's parents and why there was some confusion. Because Harry had not cited his sources in anything of his I had read, I can only speculate how he made his determination about Ezekiel's parents and siblings. Here's my best guess - there is a book titled *Early Germans of New Jersey* which used baptism records primarily as its source of information. I believe that Harry Cole may have used that book and Ezekiel's Bible as sources when preparing his family history in 1934-36. Somehow, Harry included a few of Benjamin's brothers as his sons and added a son of undetermined origin. The names and information listed in his genealogy as the children of Benjamin and Charity Cole are:

- Seertje (Sarah), Baptized 11th March, 1753 (*Early Germans of New Jersey*)
- Rachel, Baptized 6th June, 1756 (*Early Germans of New Jersey*)
- David, Died 1798 (?)
- Ezekiel, Born May 24th, 1756 (Bible)
- Isaiah, Died 1767 (?)
- Tunis (?)
- Simon (?)
- Arriyanna, Born September 27th 1758 (Bible)

This is a good place to bring up my first and, perhaps, most important point about family history research. I strongly recommend always trying to find multiple sources to support the information you believe (or want to believe) to be correct. Then, list those sources when writing your findings down so others will know where you found them. A source can even be, "Aunt Sara said..." as long as you list it that way. To come up with the multiple sources necessary to confirm the Benjamin/Ezekiel father/son relationship and Ezekiel's siblings took me about two years (and cost a few dollars) before I declared success, but it was well worth it.

Being a salesman I decided to combine my research with some old fashion cold calling. By the way, living and working near Washington, D.C., made a big difference. I was able to do a lot of research without taking much time away from work. Within 20 minutes from my office is the DAR Headquarters, Headquarters of the National Genealogical Association, the National Archives, etc. I'm not sure I'd have done as much research if I were living in the mid-West someplace.

I found a reference to Ezekiel's Bible in Harry's genealogy and in a file at the DAR in Washington, D.C. Fortunately, after making a number of calls, I was able to locate a distant relative named Regina Klimp in Florida. She is in possession of Ezekiel Cole's Bible. I sent my sister, who also lives in Florida, on a mission to photograph the family pages. The information from those pages matched information that I had found in the DAR library in Washington, D.C. In the Bible, Ezekiel recorded his birth date as May 24, 1756, and recorded his sister Arryana's birth date as September 27, 1758.

I also convinced my mother to make a trip to the New Jersey Archives to get a copy of Benjamin's will. In the will Benjamin lists his children as: Sarah, Ezekiel and Arriantia. Interestingly enough, after Benjamin's death, Arriantia was sent to live with Benjamin's brother, Ezekiel (that name was well used for a few generations, wasn't it?).

During that same time period, my father and I hired a local Hunterdon County, New Jersey, genealogist to guide us to the Schomp-Cole Burial Ground at Pleasant Run to see the graves of Benjamin and his parents, Tunis and Sara Cole. That was truly a fascinating trip. These photos show the simple stones used to mark their graves. I must confess that it's a powerful experience to see the stones memorializing one's great-great-great-great-great-great-grandparents - that's 8 generations back - grandparents who lived and died decades before the Revolutionary War began.

I even made a trip to New Brunswick, New Jersey, to visit the Dutch Reform Church archives to see the baptism records from the Readington Dutch Reformed Church in Hunterdon County for myself. Those records were used by Theodore Frelinghuysen Chambers in 1895 when he wrote *Early Germans of New Jersey*. I concluded, after reviewing the records and talking with the archivist, that there may have been a transcribing error for the entry of a Rachel Cole baptized on June 6, 1756, that listed her parents as Benjamin and Charity Cole. It's highly unlikely that Ezekiel was born to Benjamin and Charity on May 24 and a daughter named Rachel baptized just a few weeks later. Furthermore, it's my understanding that the Dutch attempted to have their children baptized as soon after they were born as possible.

Finally, I decided to seek membership in an organization called the Holland Society of New York which is dedicated to the study of the history of New Netherland. To become a member, I would need to confirm that I was a descendant in the direct male line of a resident of the Dutch colonies in the present-day United States prior to the year 1675. Because Barent Jacobsen Cool was living there as an employee of the Dutch West India Company by 1633, I would be admitted if I could just verify that Ezekiel's father was Benjamin. I had solid sources for linking the other eight of nine generations back to Barent Jacobsen.

To my good fortune, while working on my application to join the Holland Society, I stumbled across a man named Richard Benson on the Internet. He just happened to be in the process of writing a book on the first five generations (males) of the Barent Jacobsen Cool Family – now that's luck! I helped him by providing information on Ezekiel who squeaked in as a fifth generation descendant of Barent Jacobsen. In return, Richard

helped me with a few things. For example, he brought to my attention Dutch naming patterns as a source. Children were often named after their relatives, especially their grandparents. It certainly appears that Ezekiel named his eldest son, Benjamin, and his eldest daughter, Charity, after his parents.

In the end, using Benjamin's will, Bible records and naming patterns, I was able to establish the link between Benjamin Cole of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, and Ezekiel Cole of Columbia County, Pennsylvania. The Holland Society was satisfied with the proof of the relationship and granted me membership in the organization.

In conclusion, it looks like the Coles of Columbia County are actually of Dutch Holland ancestry – sorry, but there appears to be no relation to the old English King. The rest, as they say, is history.

This presentation was given to the North Mountain Historical Society by Brad Cole at the Brass Pelican Restaurant on May 19, 2003. Mr. Cole was born in Bloomsburg in 1957. He currently lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with his wife, Dana, and their two daughters. His parents, Samina and David Cole were in attendance. The grandparents referenced were the late Loula L. and Ray M. Cole and Miriam L. and Thomas P. Rishton of Bloomsburg. Ray M. Cole served as Columbia County Superintendent of Schools from 1938 until 1958. Brad is a life member of the Columbia County Historical & Genealogical Society.