

Editor's Note: *A diehard genealogy researcher will tell you that one should always start with family traditions but that these have to be verified in every detail. The following article about the dogged quest for one man's family illustrates this truism clearly.*

Clayton and Lottie's Story

Dani Crossley

According to family lore, Clayton died in a construction accident and his wife Lottie died in childbirth about 1921. How very sad for the three little children left behind. I listened closely as Clayton's grandson Bill Hughes filled in the few details he knew. Bill's father, Harold Clayton Hughes, was probably less than 2 years old at the time of the tragedy according to the date on the birth certificate from which Bill read. Harold was the third of three children born to Clayton A. and Lottie Dye Fluker. All Bill could add was that his father Harold was put in the abusive care of foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Hughes near Pittsburgh. He ran away during high school and lived above a store. Anger and bitterness about his childhood kept him from talking about it. He died near his son Bud in Texas in 1985.

Now his other son, Bill, after many unsuccessful attempts to discover the truth himself over the past ten years had contacted me to try to find anything I could about Clayton and if at all possible, locate any of his father's living relatives. Since Bill's mother, Avis Hilliard Hughes, was an only child, Bill and his brothers had never known any aunts, uncles or cousins. The words "family reunion" had no meaning. I told Bill I was used to looking for dead people, but I'd certainly give it a try.

A daunting task with so much at stake. According to census records, the little family of five Flukers was intact in 1920 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Clayton was working in a shipyard – certainly a plausible setting for a construction accident. Harold's two sisters were Helen, born 1911 and Irene, born 1913. Fast forward to 1930: Helen and Irene are living with their maternal aunt, Dora, and her husband, Rev. Herman Pool in S. Dayton, Cattaraugus County, NY. Harold has already been placed with his foster parents. Wouldn't you know it – female siblings! How was I ever going to find them and any descendants not knowing their married names?

I hatched a plan for a road trip to Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties as part of a visit to our son who lives in Erie, PA. My husband could help them with household projects while I scouted out the courthouses in the county seats. I naively figured I could zip in, flip to the index in the marriage docket and quickly capture the names of the husbands of Harold's two sisters.

I started doing a little research online as to hours, directions and holdings for each courthouse. I know New York State zealously guards the privacy of its residents. Good thing I did! The marriage records are kept in the town where the marriage took place. Just grand. I had no idea if a marriage had even taken place, much less in which town within two likely counties it might have happened. Fortunately, to accompany this bizarre record-keeping scheme, a state-wide index of all marriages exists. BUT, it is only available in the main libraries in five cities: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and New York City. Luckily for me, my twin nephews live in Buffalo and they agreed to try to find the sisters' marriage records.

After a false start that had my nephew plodding through each individual marriage certificate, he laid his hands on the index and found what we were looking for: Irene Fluker, married May 1, 1937 in Clarence, NY. Oddly enough, the husband's name is not a part of this index. Only slightly fazed, plunged ahead and fearlessly roused the Clarence town historian. Her first question: "What is the husband's name?" Arrgh! Reining in my frustration, I asked if she would be able to find that out with the information I had given her. She said she probably could and I should call her back in an hour. The

clock was racing as we were leaving to go to Erie in a little over that time. I had already listened to the spiel about privacy and request forms and payment and signatures and “already dead.” It would be a miracle if I were able to obtain this name before setting out for southwestern New York.

I needed a backup plan. From scouring cemetery records posted online for Cattaraugus County, I had discovered that Dora Pool had died in that county in 1963. If she raised the two orphan girls, surely she would’ve remembered them in her will. “Hello, Cattaraugus County courthouse, would you be so kind as to check if you have the will for Mrs. Dora Pool?” “You do? Wonderful! I’ll be there on Friday.”

In the meanwhile, a follow-up call to Clarence, NY revealed that they did indeed have the marriage record. Could I prove that the woman was deceased? (How could I do that when I didn’t know her name, I thought.) I assured her I definitely could and she offered that she was fairly certain the husband was deceased as he was born in 1899. I said I could look it up if I had his name (expectant pause)? “Oh,” she said, “it’s William Newcomb.” Hallelujah! Irene’s married name!! Now, if she only had children...

Armed with Wanda (our snappy GPS system), an extensive to-do list and my bottle of diet soda, I was off bright and early Friday morning. The Little Valley courthouse was easy to find in the center of town and I helped them unlock the doors. Since I knew I wasn’t going to find any marriage records there, I concentrated on wills. While the kind assistant located Dora’s will for me, I searched the indexes for any other pertinent names. Voila! There was Willis G. Fluker, father of our hero, Clayton Fluker. What a find! I already knew that Willis Fluker had died in May of 1921 from falling off a hay bale. Since Clayton didn’t appear in the newspaper write-up about the tragic accident and death of Willis, that coincided with (and I thought pinned down) the story of Clayton’s early demise around 1921.

Things were falling into place, or so I thought. I was saving the juicy tidbit (Dora’s will) for last and quickly skimmed Willis Fluker’s will. Imagine my astonishment when he leaves his ADOPTED son Clayton a dollar. Whew! My neat little timeline is blown out of the water and this family history is murkier than ever. Clayton is still alive in 1921 and there’s obviously some bad blood here.

Before I leave Willis behind, jolt number two is delivered when I come to the realization that good ol’ Aunt Dora was Willis’ wife before she became Mrs. Herman Pool. Dora Emma Dye, Lottie’s older sister, was married to Lottie’s husband’s adoptive father. I need an Excedrin... and a score card. I must leave those fascinating revelations and proceed with the people mentioned in Dora’s will.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Dora! There among the antique desks and painted portraits were the names of Dora’s many heirs – siblings, nieces and nephews as she never had any children of her own. Jumping off the page immediately were the names of nieces Irene Newcomb and Helen McKeown and... sister Lottie Powers??!! What happened to dying in childbirth? When the will was written in the late 1940’s, Lottie was not only alive, but remarried. In the list of nieces and nephews, two unfamiliar names, Margaret Meade of East Aurora, NY (suburb of Buffalo) and Nancy Thurston of Michigan, appeared. From doing extensive research on the Dye family beforehand, I could identify the others in the list, but these two I didn’t know. Did Lottie have children from her second marriage? I couldn’t wait to find out.

Excited about all sorts of new nuggets on which to chew, I made quick work of my stop in Mayville, Chautauqua’s county seat and added nothing new to the file. The rest of Friday evening I used every shoehorn available to try to squeeze Margaret and Nancy into Lottie’s new family. Nothing fit. On a hunch, I searched current directories and found an 85-year-old Margaret Meade living in East Aurora. It had to be her.

Nine o’clock Saturday morning, the earliest I could bring myself to make the call, I contacted Margaret. When I explained that I was looking for relatives of Dora Pool, she replied, “You found her.” She was

very sympathetic to my quest, offering copies of Dye family pictures and whatever she could to help. Her father, Charles Dye, was Dora and Lottie's brother. I asked her if she knew Irene and Helen.

She had known them. Unfortunately, both were now deceased. Irene never had any children, but Helen had two daughters. In fact, Margaret had corresponded for a time with the one daughter and her name and address were somewhere on an old Christmas card list. With promises to send off copies of photos and look for Helen's daughter's information, she wished me good luck on my search.

I contacted Bill Hughes and told him I was making progress.

In Wednesday's mail after my Saturday morning chat with Margaret there arrived a note from her. It wasn't large enough to contain photos, so I was a little puzzled. When I opened it, she had written to let me know that Helen's daughter's name was Joan Van Dyke and she lived in Mt. Bethel, PA – not even two hours from me! At six that evening, I tracked her down via reverse address lookup and made the call. As soon as I told her who I was and why I was calling, she began crying and laughing all at once. She couldn't believe I was contacting her. Her mother and her aunt had looked their whole lives for their little brother Harold. They had even hired a private detective. Unfortunately, they had been searching for Harold Fluker and he had been given the name of his adoptive family, Harold Hughes. Joan and her husband, Chuck, were still grieving the loss of one of their beloved pets and she said my call was a blessing. When I asked if it was okay for me to pass along her name and phone number to Bill, she said she'd be waiting by her phone for his call.

I realized when I hurried to my computer that I didn't have an address or phone number for Bill. We had communicated solely by email. Since he was probably still at work on the west coast and he didn't always check email regularly, I didn't know when I'd hear from him. Five minutes after I clicked the 'Send' button, the phone rang and Bill was on the line. His excitement and eagerness for Joan's number cut our conversation short. In the emails I received from them later that evening, both claimed it would be a long time before they stopped bouncing on the ceiling.

I am so glad to have been a part of bringing this family together. It is sad that the three siblings had passed before the connection was made, but Joan is sure that they are all watching and glad that the reunion has finally happened. Ten years ago when the sisters were still living, it wouldn't have been possible because the online records that made it all come together weren't available then. Plans are in the works for an actual "family reunion" of the first cousins in Pennsylvania this summer.

Epilogue: Joan was the recipient of her Aunt Irene's treasure trove of family records. I spent an enjoyable and enlightening day in her lovely Mount Bethel home and pieced together some of the remaining pieces of the puzzle.

Through an Indenture Contract binding Clayton to his adoptive father Willis Fluker, we learn that Clayton's birth surname is Abbey – a family that arrived in the United States in the 1600's. Clayton's birth parents abandoned him at about three years of age. Through other photos and family notes, we discover that Clayton was actually the youngest of four Abbey siblings, not an only child as we previously thought. His parents not only abandoned their children, they apparently abandoned their identities as they are not found in any subsequent censuses.

Clayton did not die in a construction accident. There was such an accident at his workplace in Ohio, but an associate of his was the unfortunate victim. A mistake in the original newspaper article about the accident named Clayton as the fatality. Clayton and Lottie divorced in 1923. He moved on, married another woman and had several more children with her, living mostly in Texas. He died in 1960 in Florida. No one in the family had anything to do with Clayton after he left them.

Lottie, now single in Philadelphia, wrote several letters home. From them we understand she is caring for a sick little baby girl, Margaret Eola, who succumbs in January 1921. Lottie, the 'fun one' of the six Dye sisters, married Ray Powers and lived the rest of her life in New Jersey, where she died in 1953. Both Margaret Meade and granddaughter Joan remember her fondly. Daughter Helen mended fences and resumed a relationship with her mother Lottie. Irene never forgave her mother for giving up the children and leaving Harold to be placed in foster care and they remained estranged.

Final note: Bill's maternal grandfather Walter Hilliard worked with my grandfather Thomas Lawson at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh in the early 1930's. It's a small world.

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An Escaped Slave's Story

Edited by W. M. Baillie

The Richardson Family Papers in the Society's manuscript collection include several folders relating to John Lyman Richardson, who lived at Grovania near the Columbia/Montour County line. Among these is a single sheet dated April 22nd (probably 1864) in which a onetime slave named W. C. Patterson tells briefly the extraordinary story of his life: born a free man, he traveled just before the Civil War to New Orleans and there was enslaved. He escaped, was recaptured, escaped again and eventually made his way to St. Louis, where during the War thousands of escaped southern slaves gathered under Union Army protection.

John L. Richardson probably knew Patterson and may well have taught him to write and encouraged him to write out his little autobiography. Richardson, a longtime educator, had gone from Pennsylvania to St. Louis to teach freedmen reading and writing.

Richardson's life is treated at some length in the Beers *Historical & Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties*. He was born September 15, 1816 in Jericho, Vermont to an old New England family—both his father and mother were descended from settlers who came from England in the 1630s. At the age of nineteen he began teaching, then studied for four years at Burr Seminary in Vermont. He taught in various places, including Otsego County, New York, and Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.¹

In 1855, while he was principal of Madison Academy in Waverly, PA, Richardson was appointed superintendent of the public schools of Luzerne County, a newly-enacted position which he filled capably for several years. The idea of a county superintendent was strongly opposed by many people as interference with local control of schools, but Richardson's "enlightened attention to [his] duties" enabled him to establish the superintendent's authority and influence over public schooling.

Beers' *Annals* comments that "It seems but natural that a man of such high character and strong sense of justice should have been active in the Abolition cause and later in the betterment of conditions among the former slaves." In April 1863 Richardson accepted an appointment to organize schools for newly-freed slaves in St. Louis on behalf of the American Missionary Association; his salary was to be just \$20 per month plus board—a large reduction from his previous earnings. During his first year there he was busy in organizing schools and employing teachers for them. It is in St. Louis, presumably, that he met W. C. Patterson and received the former slave's brief autobiographical sketch.²

There was violent opposition in St. Louis, however, against teaching African-Americans to read and write. After a few years Richardson had to leave because, as a protégé learned in a letter from him, "the Southerners was burning the school houses down and he was coming back."³

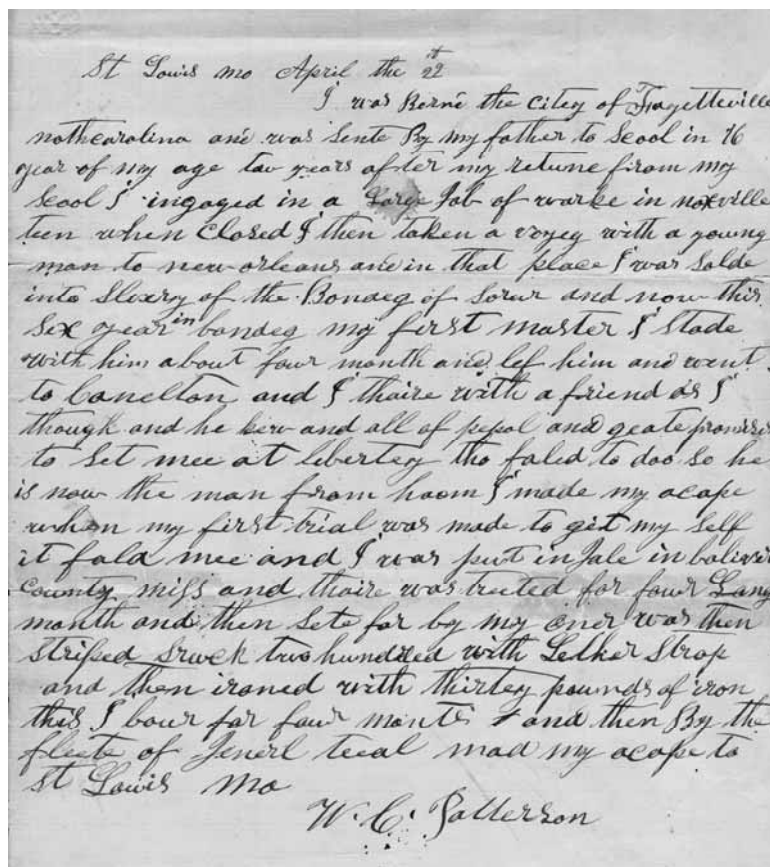
He spent some time traveling to ask for contributions to help freedmen; his notebooks record amounts from 25¢ to \$5 gathered from individuals in towns such as Tioga and Blossburg in Pennsylvania, Butternut, NY, and North Guilford, CT. In his "Collection Book 1867" we find a section of a speech he gave to ask for money, appealing to his audience's sense of basic fairness:

In presenting the righteous claims of the freedmen of this country for your sympathy and support it is not important that we discuss the equality or inequality of the races; for if the African is superior to the Anglo-Saxon he needs present aid, if he is only equal he needs aid and if he is an inferior he needs all the more aid. Aid is what the black man now needs in this country unless we admit the assumption that his normal condition is that of slavery. If God really designed the African for this condition then we should not seek to raise him above it. If God designed him for slavery, then we should not seek his freedom. If God made him to be a

slave, then recent proclamation of Emancipation was a great sin. All efforts to educate him should be at once abandoned, and the sooner he shall be remanded back to his former condition the better.³

But of course, Richardson expected his hearers to conclude, Emancipation was right and hence the African deserves our support.

In 1879 Richardson retired to a farm he bought in Grovania (Cooper Township, Montour County, on the Columbia County line). He died in March, 1885 and was buried at Danville's Odd Fellows cemetery. His son John L. Richardson became the treasurer of the Richard Manufacturing Company of Bloomsburg, and it was probably through his family that the Richardson papers came to the Society's collections.

A photograph of a handwritten manuscript on aged paper. The text is written in cursive and matches the regularized transcription provided below. The manuscript is dated "St Louis mo April the 22^d" and signed "W.C. Patterson" at the bottom. The handwriting is somewhat shaky and shows signs of being written by someone with limited formal education.

St Louis mo April the 22^d
I was Borne the citey of Fayetteville
northcarolina and was Sente By my father to scool in 16
year of my age tow years after my retune from my
scool I ingaged in a Large Job of worke in noxville
teen when closed I then taken a voyeg with a young
man to new-orleans and in that place I was Solde
into Slavery of the Bondeg of Sorur and now this
Six year in bondeg my first master I stade
with him about four month and lef him and went
to Canelton and I thaire with a friend as I
though and he kew and all of pepol and geate promises
to set mee at libertye tho faled to doo so he
is now the man from hacin I made my acap
when my first trial was made to get my self
it fald mee and I was put in jale in bolivar
County miss and thaire was treated for four Long
month and then sete for by my enor was then
Striped druck two hundred with Lelker Strop
and then ironed with thirtty pounds of iron
thid I boue for four month and then By the
fleet of Jenerl teal mad my acap to
St Louis mo
W.C. Patterson

Reproduced above is the original life story written by escaped slave W. C. Patterson.⁴ Following are two transcriptions, first in a literal reproduction and then regularized. The writer evidently had only very rudimentary training in writing and spelling, but he had an extraordinary story to tell. I have not been able to learn more about him than what he tells here; his last escape "by the fleet of General Teel" possibly refers to a flotilla of Union forces on the Mississippi.

St Louis mo April the 22^d

I was Borne the citey of Fayetteville northcarolina and was Sente By my father to Scool in 16 year of my age tow years after my retune from my Scool I ingaged in a Large Job of worke in noxville teen [Knoxville, TN] when closed I then taken a voyeg with a young man to new-orleans and in that place I was Solde into Slavery of the Bondeg of Sorur and now this Six year in bondeg my first master I stade with him about four month and lef him and went to Canelton and I thaire with a friend as I though and he kew and all of pepol and geate promises to Set mee at libertye tho faled to doo so he is now

the man from whom I made my escape when my first trial was made to get my self it failed me and I was put in Jail in Bolivar County miss [Mississippi] and there was treated for four long months and then sent for by my owner was then stripped struck two hundred with Lether Strop and then ironed with thirty pounds of iron this I bore for four months and then By the fleet of General Thiel made my escape to St Lewis mo

W. C. Patterson

St. Louis, MO April 22 [?1864]

I was born in the city of Fayetteville, North Carolina and was sent by my father to school in the 16th year of my age. Two years after my return from school I engaged in a large job of work in Knoxville, Tennessee. When that closed I then took a voyage with a young man to New Orleans, and in that place I was sold into slavery, the Bondage of Sorrow, and now this six years [I spent] in bondage. My first master I stayed with him about four months and left him and went to Canelton [? Canton, MS], and I [stayed] there with a friend, as I thought, and he knew and all of people and got promises to set me at liberty though [he] failed to do so; he is now the man from whom I made my escape. When my first trial was made to get my self [free] it failed me and I was put in jail in Bolivar County, Mississippi and there was treated for four long months and then sent for by my owner. [I] was then stripped, struck two hundred [strokes] with a leather strop, and then ironed [put in irons] with thirty pounds of iron; this I bore for four months and then by the fleet of General Thiel made my escape to St. Louis, Missouri.

W. C. Patterson

NOTES

1. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1915, vol. 1, pp. 483-88; most of the biographical information herein is from this work. Richardson was named for his mother's father, Revolutionary War veteran John Lyman (1760-1840), who descended from 1631 immigrant Richard Lyman, a founder of Hartford, CT.
2. S. L. Jocelyn (American Missionary Association, New York City) to J. L. Richardson, 26 Feb 1863; CCHGS, Richardson Papers, MS Box #8, folder #3.
3. Ann Elizabeth Green to Laura A. (Richardson) Miller, 7 Oct. 1921; Richardson Papers, folder #3.
4. Richardson Papers, folder #8.

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