

The Mysterious Photo Album

by Chris Sanders

Sometimes in genealogy strange coincidences happen—or ARE they coincidences? I love browsing through antique stores, and on occasion have tried to trace the families of old photos, postcards or letters I purchased. It makes me sad that these family treasures have been lost, seemingly forever. On one occasion, however, I was happily able to unite one of these treasures with the appropriate family. I truly believe fate—or spirits—were guiding me.

It all started on one of my jaunts to the Silver Moon, a Lewisburg, Pennsylvania antique store, when I spied an old, green photo album lying on top of a little stool in the corner of a booth. It immediately caught my attention because an intact photo album is a rarity. Usually it is torn apart and the pictures carelessly tossed in a box for sale.

The second reason it caught my attention was because my daughter likes old photos and collected them. I thought, “Wow, a whole album—she’ll love this. It will make a great Christmas present!”

A quick glance through the album showed that someone had meticulously attached the pictures and labeled them with names, places and dates. The problem, however, from a genealogical standpoint, was there were NO identifying last names other than “the Whites,” “the McCords” and other different surnames mixed in. A picture would only list first names—OR—on a couple of pictures, “Grandma White” or “Grandma McCord,” for example. Plus, there was no way to pinpoint exactly WHERE these people were from or how to figure out who their families were. The album did not leave any clues, or so I thought.

The more I looked at the album, the more I got interested. It was obviously a labor of love. It began with pictures of a tremendous snow storm in the 60s labeled, “Bradford County,” with smiling kids holding snow shovels and standing on top of huge snow mounds, apparently a significant event to begin the album. Next came the baby pictures, each child’s picture added as a new sibling came along (five in all)—first birthday party, first steps. There were birthday parties, Christmas holidays, Thanksgiving meals, grandma bending over the dinner table (apron on), aunts, uncles, cousins. Women wore dresses, men and children, “dressed up”—love and family togetherness emanating from the photos. There were camping trips, gatherings at the lake, the shore—more names and places that were not clearly identified. I was even more intrigued, but thought, “I do NOT need another project to work on!” I put the album down and walked away—FOUR times!

However, some unseen force literally pulled me back every time. I learned the album was part of the contents of a storage unit the store owner had purchased. Who WERE



Obituary

Beatrice Mary White "Bea" McCord | [Visit Guest Book](#)

Beatrice "Bea" Mary White McCord, 91, formerly of Troy, Pa., went to be with her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2013, while in the care of RiverWoods Senior Living Community in Lewisburg, Pa. Bea was a loving daughter, wife, mother, grandmother and friend. She considered her family to be her greatest legacy, including her 5 children, 14 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Bea was born on March 5, 1922 in Lewes, Del., a daughter of the late William Walter White and the late Effie Bell White. The oldest of 3 children, she was sister to the late Hugh White and the late Robert White, both of Snedekerville, Pa. Bea was the devoted wife of the late William J. McCord whom she married on June 15, 1944. She and Bill celebrated 29 years of marriage together until his untimely death in May of 1973. Bea was devoted to her five children William "Bill" McCord of Hudson, Ohio; the late James "Jim" McCord of Pequea, Pa.; Katharine "Kathy" Gathman of Lewisburg, Pa.; Ruth Blanas of Bethlehem, Pa.; and the Reverend Walter "Walt" McCord of Chicago, Ill.

these people and WHY was this album in an antique store? The 60s were not THAT long ago. Didn't somebody want this album? Hmm, maybe my daughter wasn't getting this album after all! I grabbed it, bought it (\$4) and took it home!

This was the beginning of my adventure. "Where do I start?" I thought. I couldn't use the census, because it only went up to 1940. So first I googled Bradford County, which was indicated on the pictures in the beginning of the album showing the huge snowstorm. Yes, there was a Bradford County, Pennsylvania, and I also discovered that Troy, in Bradford County had the "Storm of the century" in the 1960s—perfect match. One picture showed a gentleman named "Bill." Probably the Dad I thought. Bill White, Bill McCord, William White, McCord? This popped in the obituary of a William McCord who passed away at an early age in 1973, and yes, it listed all the names of the children in the album, including his wife, Beatrice McCord! NOW I was getting somewhere. Plugging in the name of "Beatrice McCord," to my amazement, pulled up HER obituary, showing that she had passed away in 2014 in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, a school teacher, active volunteer, community and church worker, and world traveler. She had five children, 14 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren—every single one of them was listed, including the in-laws! The obituary went on to say, "She considered her family to be her greatest legacy." Well, somehow that didn't surprise me considering how carefully she compiled her photo album. AND the best part was, one of her daughters lived in Lewisburg, only 45 minutes away!

I thought, this will be an easy matter. All I need to do is google the daughter's address, send a letter to her explaining how I came to have the album and she will be as excited as I am. We will meet and I will hand the album over to her. It didn't quite work out that way. I did send the letter and waited—and waited—and waited. No response. "Hmm, wonder what went wrong," I thought. ANYBODY would want their family album, right?

After a month passed by, I finally realized I was not going to be contacted. Christmas was just around the corner, and I had other things to do. The album sat on my table, staring at me, while I pondered what to do next. Finally, tired of looking at it, I impulsively (for better or worse) decided to ship the album to "Walter," the youngest, whose picture of him learning to walk ended the album. Back to google. Wow—immediately a huge picture of him and his wife standing in front of a church in Chicago loomed before me—with an address and all! It seems he was the "temporary" pastor of the church and standing in until a permanent pastor was found. But, there's more! He was a professor at Moody Bible Institute and it went on to list his many accomplishments. I laughed. This struck me as particularly funny, and such a strange coincidence, because I had been listening to the Moody Bible Institute radio station for years! I knew exactly who they were!

That's all I needed. Carefully I wrapped the album in bubble wrap and brown paper, tucked in a letter explaining why I had the album and why I was sending it to him, marched to the post office and shipped her off. Whatever happened, happened. Within three days (about the time for the album to arrive), I immediately got a phone call from "Walter," profusely thanking me for the album. The phone connection was awful—oh, no—NOT at a time like this! But in between the static, I explained where I found it and that I had tried to contact his sister, but received no response. His tone changed and he explained that his sister "had problems," that she had volunteered to take care of his mom, but it became, "more than she could handle." I didn't pry.

Then the bombshell story—they had NOTHING of their mom and dad. No pictures, no mementos, NOTHING. He said they came to look at it as if they had had a fire and "lost everything," and became resigned to it. He was floored when he received my package and opened it. He said I gave him the best Christmas gift he could have ever received! Okay, here came the chills and warm fuzzy feelings! I believe I was as happy as he was

(well, almost). Unaware there was a storage unit, he wondered if there were more things at the antique store or if I could find out what happened to them. I said I would try to find out.

Going back to the Silver Moon, I spoke to the clerk there, explained the story, and asked if I could speak to, or have the phone number of the vendor (who turned out to be the owner). She advised they “did not give out phone numbers, but that she would speak to him, and have him call me back.” Okay, I was hopeful. While I was there, I checked out the same booth again (curiosity) and was able to eke out some postcards that had actually been sent to Walter as a child—a small find but a find nonetheless—which led me to think there was more. I sent these to Walter, along with some genealogical info I gathered from the internet on the McCords (he had mentioned he knew NOTHING about the McCords).

I waited and waited, but of course, the vendor never called. Another trip to the Silver Moon solved the mystery. Speaking to the same clerk again, I found out that the album was in a storage unit for over a year. Because of lack of payment and no contact from the owner or family, the contents were confiscated. I asked her if she knew what happened to all of the contents, and again she said she would ask. I wrote a letter to Walter telling him what I had found out.

After about a month, I called the Silver Moon again, because I hadn’t heard from Walter or the vendor. Speaking to the same clerk, I found that Walter’s other sister, found a painted picture of her mother and father, a desk, and a number other items belong to their parents!! She said the sister started crying when trying to pay for the items. Who says people don’t care? The clerk let the sister have the picture. She said, “It belonged to them.” The sister found more things and would be back for them later.

I breathed a happy sigh. Beatrice, your album has come full circle. It is back in the loving hands of your precious family. I’m glad I could have played a part. Oh, one more thing. About a week or so after I spoke with the Silver Moon, I turned on the radio to listen to the Moody Bible Institute channel, and caught the tail end of the programs. The announcer commented, “Be sure to tune in tomorrow to hear Reverend Walter McCord and his wife talk about their trip to Israel!” Now, what are the chances of my tuning in the radio at that particular time? I don’t know—it must be a coincidence!