

Reunion to trace Miner family's rich role in history

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Jay Cramer wasn't much interested in his family's roots until he learned how deep they go.

"The ancestry is amazing," said Cramer, 65, of Jeannette, a descendant of Eli Miner, who settled in Mt. Pleasant in the 1800s.

"For Jay, it's been a revelation," said his wife, Frankie, 66, who is tracing her family's genealogy back to Wales in the 1500s.

Eli was the youngest child of Jacob Miner Jr. and his wife, Catherine, who lived on a 500-acre farm near Kingwood in Somerset County in the 1800s. Their nine children produced for them 63 grandchildren and 226 great-grandchildren.

The Pennsylvania German family traces its roots to Jacob and Maria (Neun) Miner, who settled along the border of Fayette and Somerset counties in 1791. They had 12 children and at least 87 grandchildren, 479 great-grandchildren and 1,400 great-great-grandchildren.

Members of the family will gather for their yearly reunion June 25-26 a few miles from where Jacob and Maria Miner settled at Maple Summit in 1791. About 125 people attended their first reunion on Aug. 21, 1913, in Ferncliff Park in Ohio.

The size of the clan is unusual, said John T. Humphrey, past president of the Mid-Atlantic Germanic Society, a past vice president of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania and the leader of the National Genealogical Society German forum.

"It would be more common for a man to have 10 to 12 children with two wives," he said. "The survival rate in colonial America was better than Europe, so you basically had women having babies every two years."

The Miner family played a role in shaping the history of the region and country; it also had its share of scandal.

The family says Rebecca Miner (1850-1915) had a love affair with Capt. Thomas Ward Custer, brother of Gen. George Armstrong Custer, that produced a son when they were neighbors in Wood County, Ohio. Both Custer brothers died in the Battle of Little Big Horn.

The family included an actor who made films with some of Hollywood's top stars, a writer who published prize-winning fiction and a guidance systems engineer in the Apollo rocket program. The clan produced two Connellsville mayors, a Major League Baseball pitcher and a pastor.

The family's website includes the biographies of 1,332 family members. The site drew more than 1.7 million visitors since its launch on May 7, 2000, including 266,552 the past year.

"Most people trace their families looking in reverse. This site helps people watch time elapse in a forward fashion," said Mark Miner, 49, of Beaver, who has organized the family's reunions since 1995 and runs its website, www.miner.com.

Miner is hoping to attract 130 to 140 of his "cousins" to this year's reunion. The count of descendants numbers in the thousands, said Miner, whose last name's spelling is one of at least five offshoots of Miner.

"These people were not educated," he said. "The spelling probably didn't matter until Social Security and the IRS came along."

Family members worked in education, the military or on railroads, farms and in manufacturing plants. At least 330 of them mined coal and made coke and steel.

Fourteen men from the clan were killed in workplace accidents between 1884 and 1941. Thirty people from the family died in fatal railroad and streetcar accidents. Since 2000, 753 members of the clan have died.

Sharon Kern of Findlay, Ohio, is a great-granddaughter of Civil War soldier David Harbaugh of the 5th Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery and his wife, Mary Magdalene "Lena" Whipkey.

Kern, the last one in her line from Letitia Whipkey, David and Mary Harbaugh's daughter, became "deliberate in genealogy" in 1999 after spending the previous summer clearing out her mother's house after she died.

When she found more than 100 professional photographs of her ancestors taken more than 100 years ago, "that sparked my interest."

She began sorting through the photos, documents and other snapshots. Her grandmother Letitia had them pretty well labeled.

Kern attended her first MinerD reunion in 2001.

Among the artifacts she has are daybooks from Nathan Shaw's farm from 1853-1863.

"I have bins of people ... documents, maps photographs," she said.

Additional Information:

Family history

The MinerD-Minard-Miner-Minor family has a long history of military service. More than 220 family members served in America's wars. At least 32 died in battle. The veterans, by conflict:

7: American Revolution (1775-1783)

2: War of 1812

107: Civil War (1861-1865)

9: Spanish American War (1898-1901) and Philippine Insurrection (1899)

103: World War I (1914-1918)

(Participation in World War II, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam War and the War on Terror is being compiled.)

Source: www.minerd.com

Additional Information:

Artistic bent

Some members of the MinerD clan made their mark in the arts:

Dean MinerD: Actor, director, producer, author and entrepreneur based in Hollywood. He appeared in 'Demolition Man' with Sylvester Stallone, Wesley Snipes and Sandra Bullock, and 'The Arrival' with Jodie Foster and Charlie Sheen.

Jeff MinerD: Award-winning writer and a former staff editor with The Futurist, the magazine of the World Future Society in Washington.

Annette Hanshaw: Named 'most popular woman singer in the nation' by Radioland Magazine in a 1935 poll. The New York Times praised her as 'one of the most prolific recording singers in the late 1920s and early '30s.'

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