

"Wisconsin Woman Delves into Family History"

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By Mary Ann Ashcraft

One of the gifts Carroll County gives some of her lucky sons and daughters is "roots." But if you live far away, the history of your family may be hard to discover without local help. Staff and volunteers at the Historical Society of Carroll County recently had a lovely opportunity to open the family history door for Genevieve Davis of Wisconsin when she called in late July to ask for the obituary of an ancestor.

Happily for Miss Davis, everything conspired in her favor the day she called and unearthing her roots began immediately. The obituary was easy to locate. In addition, the annual Davis Family Reunion was scheduled for the end of August, so we could supply her with a contact phone number in case she decided to make the trip east. The next thing we knew she walked into the Historical Society on August 24th ready to start some serious family research and confident she would uncover valuable information.

A special treat awaited her. Several years ago Cathy Baty, the Society's curator, published an article about items in the collection that belonged to some of Genevieve's ancestors. The article was nicely illustrated with color photos of a sampler stitched by her 3rd great grandmother, Ruth E. Bennett Crawford, a medical case belonging to her 3rd great grandfather, Dr. Francis J. Crawford, plus family portraits and other objects. Francis and Ruth's daughter Kate married into the Davis family. When Miss Davis stopped in, she picked up a copy of the article, but she saw the original items too.

The following day, one of the hottest and most humid in many years, was the Davis Reunion held on the grounds of the Davis Meeting House on Watersville Road outside Mt. Airy. About 65 attendees shared stories, family history and good food. Reunions are popular during the summer in Carroll County because so many families have lived here for generations. At this reunion people occasionally ducked into air-conditioned cars to escape the almost unbearable heat, but it didn't dampen anyone's enthusiasm. Miss Davis said, "You couldn't find a nicer group of people." The day was also an opportunity to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the tiny white clapboard church by a Davis ancestor.

Before returning to Wisconsin, Genevieve connected with many Maryland relatives she'd never met and had several unique opportunities she couldn't have anticipated when her trip began. The present owners of the handsome old Crawford family home gave her an impromptu house tour and invited her to spend the night. They shared tales of Confederate soldiers hidden there during the Civil War by her Southern-leaning ancestors. What experience could be more heady to a family historian than sleeping in the house where your ancestors slept, climbing the same stairs or looking out the front windows at a view which hasn't changed appreciably since the 1850s!

While at the house she was shown the long-abandoned family cemetery on the edge of a cornfield and discovered the headstone and footstone of her 4th great grandmother, Isabella Smith Crawford, born in Scotland in 1783. That stone had lain for years on the dirt floor of a nearby shed.

Dr. Francis Crawford probably visited most of the houses within 5-8 miles of his Taylorsville home as he cared for patients during the mid-nineteenth century. His account book showing their names, ailments and the cost of treatments is another of the Historical Society's treasures.

Miss Davis wrote of her trip to uncover her family history, "It was the experience of a lifetime!"



Genevieve Davis with the gravestone of her 4th great grandmother, Isabella Smith Crawford, born in Scotland in 1783, died in Carroll County in 1857.

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a library volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.