

Faith in Finding

David E. Rencher, AG, FUGA

Brothers and Sisters it is indeed an honor to be here tonight. It was wonderful to see Brother [David] Pratt receive his award and I know that he would not want me to make a fuss but as one of his former students, he was my favorite instructor and I did enjoy many hours under his tutelage. I want to thank BYU and ICAPGen and others for having me here this evening. It's always a pleasure to visit this campus and to be among the students. It's great to feel their spirit. I always enjoy being with the faculty and staff and enjoy my time here immensely. Tonight, there are a number of things which I would like to share with you and which I hope that in the spirit of which they are offered you will understand why I believe so firmly in family history and how it fits within one of the three dimensions of the mission of the Church. I'd like to start off with a quote by Nephi Anderson.

... Let me suggest the future of this work. I see the records of the dead and their histories gathered from every nation under heaven to one great central library in Zion—the largest and best equipped for its particular work in the world. Branch libraries may be established in the nations, but in Zion will be the records of last resort and final authority.

Trained genealogists will find constant work in all nations having unpublished records, searching among the archives for families and family connections. Then, as temples multiply, and the work enlarges to its ultimate proportions, this Society, or some organization growing out of this Society, will have in its care some elaborate, but perfect system of exact registration and checking, so that the work in the temples may be conducted without confusion or duplication.

And so throughout the years, reaching into the Millennium of peace, this work of salvation will go on, until every worthy soul that can be found from earthly records will have been searched out and officiated for; and then the unseen world will come to our aid, the broken links will be joined, the tangled threads will be placed in order, and the purposes of God in placing salvation within the reach of all will have been consummated.

We live in a day of small beginnings, as far as this is concerned. We are still pioneers. We are but helping to lay the foundation of the 'marvelous work and a wonder that is about to come forth among the children of men'.

Nephi Anderson, "Genealogy's Place in the Plan of Salvation," UGHM 3 (January 1912): 21-22.

Nephi Anderson made that quote. Some of you may be familiar with it, one of Nephi Anderson's probably more popular [works] called *Added Upon*. He made this statement in January of 1912. A visionary man, branch libraries were not realized until 1964 but now number over 4,000. In 1912 the church's microfilm program was yet 26 years away before we would film our first roll of microfilm in the church. The information age has completely changed the landscape over the last 10 years. Digital images, pixels, bytes, and compression technologies are all changing what we do each and every day. Optical character recognition, the ability to read this and to read old handwriting, continues to improve, not the least of which is the Internet. When we look at the Internet and when we look at the opportunity before us, there are grand things ahead. Even the demise of microfilm, which will probably happen within the next double decade, gives us an

opportunity to shift the way we do family history. Some of us can't imagine a world without microfilm, but I think that many of us in this room will live to see it. I plan to be one of those, by the way. In fact, my full time day job is to make sure of it.

While I can speak tonight of all these things; While I can talk about the technical aspects of family history; While I can talk about the record asset that the church has gathered over the years; While I can talk about compression technologies, and I can talk about bi-tonal color, and I can talk about 80 byte technology and all of those things; While we could do that tonight, I choose not to. Rather, I choose to speak this evening about the spiritual side of this great work. A number of personal experiences lead me to believe that there are no accidents in this work and, if you will permit me, I'm going to use some personal examples from my research over the last 25 years to show the support for that belief. Several years ago Hank Jones published a book called *Psychic Roots*. Some of you may be familiar with it. It was so successful that he published a second volume, and then it was so successful that *Unsolved Mysteries*, the television show aired some of the examples from his book. The interesting thing is that these incidents in his mind and the minds of the readers were simply serendipitous, that they were just kind of the "ooh" and the "ah" of what goes on in the world, not realizing the spirit of Elijah which moves upon this land.



One of the things I ran across a number of years ago were some records which indicated to me that there were a number of granddaughters of my immigrant ancestor, John Grant Rencher. I found this lovely portrait of two of them. This is from the mid nineteenth century. I had this haunting feeling that I did not have all of the daughters identified. In fact, I was quite certain that there was a missing daughter. I had visited the graves of most of the family in Pittsboro, in Chatham County, North Carolina. They lined the walk of the Episcopal Church, and as I walked along and recorded each and every tombstone, I still had this haunting feeling that one was missing.

Abraham Rencher's Daughters

In 1997 I was in Washington DC. I was meeting with Eric Grundset who was then the director, and still is, of the Daughters of the American Revolution Library in Washington and conducted business throughout the afternoon. In the evening, Eric and I went to dinner and, towards the end of the evening, I dropped him at his home – it was about 8:00 – and just as I was dropping him off at his home, his wife arrived home from her job. Paula worked at the Annandale County Public Library where, among other things, it was

her job to go through the gift books that came into the library. We met only briefly and just for a few moments. I do have an unusual surname and she remembered it. Several months later I got this little note from Eric in the mail.

Hi, My wife's library received a bible in the gift books the other day. They are holding onto it in case someone comes to retrieve it. She copied the family register pages and pointed out to me that the surname is Rencher. Realizing this is probably not your group, I still thought you might be interested. Should no one claim the Bible Paula will give it to us for the [DAR] Library's collection. Hope all is well with you and have a Happy Thanksgiving.

Well, I immediately recognized the family Bible pages and they were indeed the family bible of Abraham Rencher and there among the deaths was the entry that I had been looking for. Mary Jones Rencher departed this life on the 5th day of October 1841 and was buried in the churchyard of the Episcopal Church in Pittsboro. Mary Louisa Rencher departed this life in the city of Washington on the 14th day of February 1849 at 11:00 in the morning and was buried in the Washington Cemetery number 126 in range M-East. "She was taken of scarlet fever February 8th and at 11:00 on the 14th her spirit passed away. The beautiful clay was carefully ornamented by the hands of a stranger. Sweet lovely child, farewell."

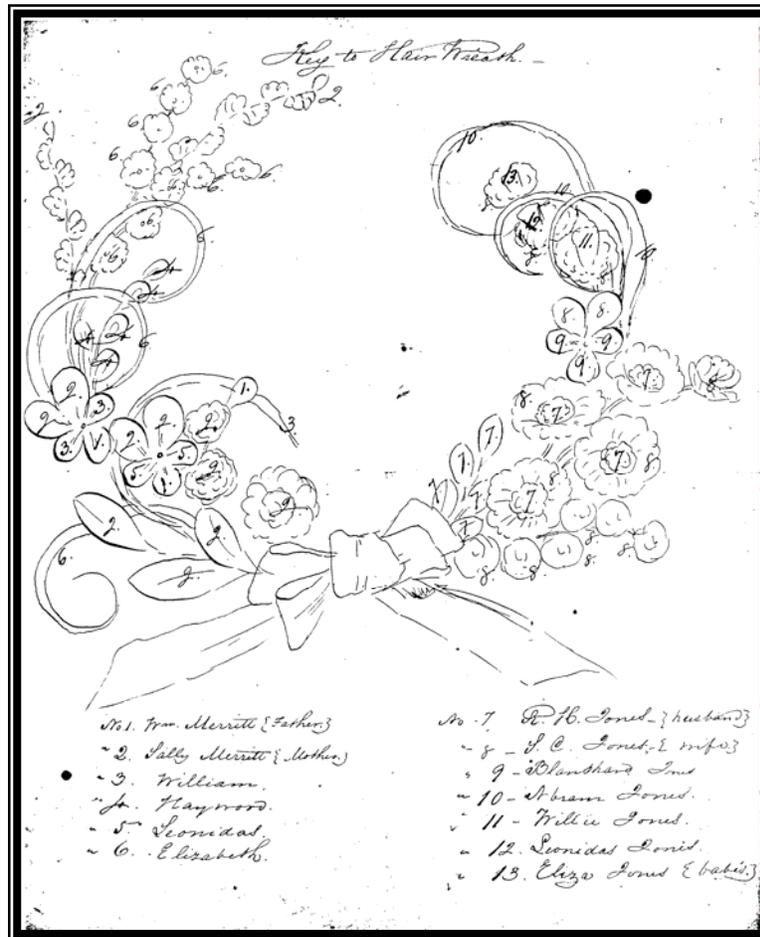
Abraham Rencher was a five-term congressman from the state of North Carolina and was serving in Washington, DC at the time. Because they were living in Washington, this child was buried in the Washington cemetery [also known as Congressional Cemetery]. I later went over to the cemetery and there amongst the tombstones, was a beautiful tombstone for Mary Louisa Rencher, not buried with her family in North Carolina, but buried in Washington DC.

Immediately I gathered my materials and set off to do the temple work for Mary Louisa, believing that she was the only child in this family for whom temple ordinances had not been completed. We had had other family researchers who had conducted extensive amount of research on these families prior and, as I went to look at this family to conduct this work, I found that Abraham had inadvertently had temple ordinances done for him and for the second wife and family of his brother David, and that, in fact, none of the temple ordinances or work had been done for any of the members of Abraham's family.

So I want you to ask yourself: How many public libraries are there in the state of Utah? How many public libraries are there in the western United States? How many public libraries are there in this country? Is it coincidence that the person who goes through the gift box at the Annandale County Virginia Public library is the one person who knows me and who receives this bible? Is that coincidence? I would submit to you that it is not. I would submit to you that councils are held on the other side of the veil in this important work. I submit to you that there were a number of places that bible could have been dropped off and that it could have ended up anywhere. Many of them end up in bookstores for sale. But this one, this one in particular was to come into my hands.

Over the years I have been blessed to find a number of family manuscripts. And in these manuscripts are... not only letters and information, but [precious] artifacts. These are the

artifacts that turn hearts. You sang a hymn about turning hearts. It is the artifacts that begin to turn the hearts and then you begin to see from a completely different perspective and link your family. You have before you here a representation from a hair wreath.



Merritt Family Hair Wreath

Those of you who are older in the audience probably know what a hair wreath is; those of you who are younger may not. [To form] the hair wreath, clips of hair would be taken, usually at the time of death, of a loved one and they would be woven into different patterns and into wreaths and then hung in [the] home. At the bottom of this hair wreath are the names of all of those whose locks of hair appear on the hair wreath. I have seen some beautiful examples [like] this one.

This one in particular is of the Merritt family who are descendents of the Renchers, but I do not know yet the exact location of the wreath itself. When I discovered the drawing of the hair wreath there were also a number of letters, family letters, in a collection of letters deposited in the manuscript library at Duke University. The family letters detailed a number of events in the life of his family. I brought a few clips to share with you today and hope that you will enjoy them. Letter from Kate Woodruff to Abraham Rencher:

Letter, Kate Woodruff to Abraham Rencher

Dear Uncle, Sad indeed is it for me to write you of our deep affliction. Our dear Father has been taken from us by that monster death. From the beginning of his sickness, he seemed to pay but little attention to what was passing and during the latter part was totally unconscious. He lingered a few days and on the evening of the 10th about 6 (o'clock) sweetly breathed out his soul into His gracious hands.

20 July 1868, Gainsville, Alabama

Dated 20 July 1868 from Gainsville, Alabama. This was Daniel Grant Rencher and was his daughter Kate Woodruff who was writing to her Uncle Abraham Rencher back in North Carolina. This is a letter from Daniel Grant Rencher to William Merritt. This is his daughter:

Letter from Daniel G. Rencher to William Merritt

...poor Emaline is gone from us she died on the 13th ult. After a long and painful continued decline of some 4 months...she suffered no tongue can tell I think it was a kind of consumption...

10 April 1844, Rose Hill, Jefferson, Alabama

Emaline, all of Daniel Grant's daughters- he had five- all of them died in their youth basically. All of them were deceased before they were 40, many of them in childbirth, others from other afflictions. One from yellow fever, but the letters contain the details of those events. This is another one:

Letter from Daniel G. Rencher to William Merritt

...it becomes my duty to inform you of the death of poor dear Louisa she breathed her last on the 30th of June between 7 & 8 A.M. conscious of everything as long as she had breath she was the first that gave the alarm that death was exacting its office and said it was sweet to her...

16 July 1851, China Grove, Sumter, Alabama

Abraham Rencher was for a time Governor of the territory of New Mexico. In a letter to his son he writes about the events leading up to the Civil War. Remember that Abraham Rencher was a southerner - he was from North Carolina - and even though he did secure New Mexico, the territory of New Mexico, as an anti-slave territory, he was still relieved of his post and went back to North Carolina. In this letter it says:

Letter from Abraham Rencher to John G. Rencher

I deplore the sad condition forced upon the old state (North Carolina), but whatever her fate is, I wish to share it. I regret that American liberty must be rebaptised in blood.

30 June 1861 Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory

The letters are full of details about the Civil War; details from Daniel talking about their request by the Confederate Government to burn the cotton and he talks about how many bales he would burn; talked about how productive the crop was that year and what his losses would be; talks about the fact that not all of his neighbors were burning their crops but that he was complying and burning his cotton as had been asked; talks about, might have been almost every letter, starts with a general condition of health, systematically goes down through the family and talks about where they are and what they are doing and whether or not they are healthy; talks about his own condition, and for a time talks about

the fact that he almost died, and in an obscure reference to the death of his father, indicates that he often thought that he would die at about the same age as his father at about the same time of year and that that year as he was contemplating that there was a snowstorm in Alabama and he mentions the fact that the day his father died in North Carolina there was a spring snowstorm- his father died in April so there was this spring snowstorm in North Carolina. These rich pieces of family history come together and they turn your heart.

So I am not here to lecture about how to find this material but I know that there will be several of you who come up afterwards that want to know how to find this material and so anticipating that very question, I am going to share with you just for a moment how you can find those. Manuscript libraries, particularly at universities – and you will know this from the university environment down here, almost always have catalogs to their holdings. Alumni and papers of alumni are often deposited in these. Universities will track what happens to their alumni and will go seeking their papers and will have those on deposit. So here in the William Perkins Library at Duke University are the Rufus Henry Jones Papers:

2929. Rufus Henry Jones Papers, 1797-1919

The papers of Rufus Henry Jones include items pertaining to his grandfather, father and uncles and material on the Rencher and Merritt families of NC

Of course you'll see that in the index entry, Rufus Henry Jones while he is [not] a descendent of [the Renchers, he] - married into - the Renchers, there is no reference about the Rencher papers. The Abraham Rencher papers however, appear in the manuscript library in Chapel Hill because Abraham was a graduate from the University of North Carolina.

So, one of the things that you can do is to start with prominent people in your family or known associates, and it's the known associates that you may have to dig deeper for. So in these letters that I have from the family are references to all kinds of events going on in the lives of his neighbors. There are births, marriages and deaths in there about them, but they are not illustrated in the title or the name of the record. Graduates of universities often will their materials to the university upon their death. The family doesn't want them, they're afraid that they're going to be thrown away. I have the same fear for all of my genealogical files, but that's one of those things that you kind of guard and safeguard and see what happens to them.

Let me talk a minute about impressions in being led by the spirit. One of the things that I have noted frequently is that the promptings of the spirit are not only sometimes very subtle, but very fleeting and that while some of them can be very strong, others are just very brief. Several years ago I was attending meetings in Atlanta, Georgia and while there took the opportunity to drive over to Montgomery, Alabama. It happened to be in an era when the Jazz were doing exceptionally well in the play-offs and so I made sure that when I checked into the hotel where I was staying that they had the right television station so that I could get the game.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and there was still plenty of daylight left and my intention at that time was to check-in and then drive down and visit some cemeteries in the area where I was going. So I simply turned on the TV, making sure it worked, making sure they get the channel, and lo and behold, guess what? The game had already started. In fact, the game had just started. In fact, the score was 4-2. I think that was the only time in the game that the Jazz led. I sat there with the remote in my hand and contemplated what I was going to do. I didn't have to be anywhere. I had the next day I could go to the cemeteries. What was I going to do? And I was impressed and had the TV turned off before I really, I think, consciously had finished the thought. I put the remote down, left the hotel and headed for the cemetery.

On the way to the cemetery I passed another cemetery in that community, near where I was headed. As many of you are afflicted with the same ailment, being a good genealogist, there was no way I could pass that cemetery and go on down the road. Following that prompting I stopped and I canvassed that cemetery and I actually did find the child of one of the descendents that I did not know about buried there, single grave, and was just kind of wandering around. Just getting back to my car, I suddenly hear this pickup truck coming down the road. It had very loud pipes. It was obviously going very fast on back-country roads which he obviously knew very well because I didn't go at those speeds. It was a dual wheel double axle pickup truck. He came down the road and he goes flying past the cemetery. He looks up, he sees me and he comes to a screeching halt in the road and backs up.

"Hi, what family are you looking for?" So I told him, and he says, "Oh, they're not buried here. They're buried over in Bethel." I said, sheepishly, "Well, yeah, I kind of knew that. That's where I was headed." He says, "Well, you better let me, why don't you follow me over there?" "Because," he says, "it's kind of hard to find."

To which I gratefully accepted his invitation not knowing just how fast I was going to have to drive to keep up with him to keep him from going out of sight. I followed him over to Bethel Cemetery and he knew right where the graves were at that point, so he goes charging into Bethel Cemetery. I'm just trying to keep up behind, but I stopped dead in my tracks because on the way through the gate, here in a huge family plot is another family that I'd been looking for for some time that I had completely lost track of. I couldn't find them in the census. I couldn't find what happened to them. Nothing was working and here they are. They're all here in Bethel!

Now, he's just talking as he goes, he's not looking at me, you know he's not behind me, but he doesn't see that I've stopped. It's kind of like, you know, your children in the grocery store. They're just, they're behind you. And suddenly he gets over to that grave and he turns around and he comes back and I said,

"This is the family I'm looking for."

And he says, "Oh, are you related to the Bates?"

And I said, "Yes." I said, "These are family."

And he says, "Oh, well then you'll need to call Bill Bates."

And I said, "Oh, well, I'd love to."

Bill Bates is kind of famous in that town. He runs a large turkey farm and he ships turkeys all over the country, in fact, about this time of the year. And Bill is widely known and widely liked there. So I went ahead and captured some of the photos and transcriptions that I wanted there and this gentleman graciously took me over to his home. He had a complete transcription, which his father-in-law had done, of the cemetery that he found me in, which he provided to me. And then he called Bill Bates. Bill and I made an arrangement for me to meet with him at 10 o'clock the next morning. So, I went over to Bill Bates home the next morning at the appointed hour, wonderful gentleman. I'm sitting there talking to him and of course, he knows all about the family. They've held family reunions. He's well versed. I'm taking notes as madly as I possibly can. And then he stands up and goes to the back room and he says, "You know, the old homestead is here."

I said, "Really?"

He says, "Yeah." He says, "Seven months before she passed away, my sister painted the old homestead and we made prints of that and handed them out at the last family reunion."

The print that you see at my right here is a copy of the print that he gave me. He went in and pulled that off the shelf and gave that to me. And then he put me in his truck and took me down to the old homestead. Okay, remember this is Alabama. They don't lock their doors, you know, nothing. I mean, we drive down this little country road and we walk into this home. It's not inhabited, no one living there. We walk in and here are the pictures of Emily Bates, Emily Rencher Bates, and her husband on the wall. Here are a number of other mementos, I mean, any of you folks could walk in there any time. It doesn't seem to concern them, just kind of a friendly neighborhood. I think I was actually more worried about it burning down than anything. But that was the family home in which they resided. And so we got to talking about the Bates' and he says, "Well you know, the Renchers married into the Harris'."

He says, "You really ought to contact Martha Ray Harris."

I said, "Well, I'd love to."

He said, "Well, Martha Ray lives up in Montgomery."

I said, "Well, that's great because that's where I'm staying. I'm staying at the hotel there in Montgomery and I just drove down for the morning to see you."

We go back to his, it was actually Turkey Headquarters and we call Martha Ray. Martha Ray says, "Oh, goodness." She says, "I won't be here at home this afternoon when you come. I'm attending the genealogical meeting at the genealogical society in Greenville this afternoon. Would you like to come?"

"Gee, I'd love to come."

So 2:00 finds me in Greenville and there I am meeting Martha Ray Harris, who of course has with her everything she ever knew about the Renchers and the Harris', which was enormous. We're just having this grand chat and pretty soon this woman walks over to us and introduces herself. Martha Ray of course apologetically stands up and says, "Oh, this is our President, Mrs. Raybon."

And she introduced me, "This is David Rencher."

Mrs. Raybon's eyes got about that big and she says, "Well, you know, the Raybons married into the Renchers!"

I said, "No, I didn't know that."

Well she says, "Oh, yes, I have all of that material. I would be happy to share it with you."

I said, "That would be wonderful. I would love to have that material."

And so, there in a couple days, the wealth of material that came on one of the branches of the descendents was overwhelming. I think how many times I stood there with that remote in my hand. Had I not gone at that very moment, I wouldn't have been in the cemetery when the truck drove by. I wouldn't have been there to meet who is now a dear friend. I would have been sitting in Montgomery watching the Jazz lose a game.

A colleague shared with me several years ago a story which I found touching and which I think also illustrates the workings of the spirit. It was on a temple outing from Oregon that [he] had driven down to the Oakland Temple. At that time they would take bus tours and they would go to the temple. A number of members of his ward had gone down there. They finished up at the temple and then for enjoyment they were going to take the bus and go down to the Fisherman's wharf and then head back up to Oregon. But my friend wanted to go to the family history center which was there at the Oakland Temple and then catch up with the group later. So he was getting his things off the bus when this friend of his noticed that he wasn't going down with the rest of the group. He said, "Oh, what are you doing?"

And he says, "Well I'm going over to the family history library and I'd like to do some research there."

His friend said, "Oh, well, maybe I should go with you."

My friend admits that he just was kind of crestfallen, you know, because; here's a beginner and he has things he wants to do and you know if this guy comes with him then he's going to spend all of his time kind of hand holding him and he really isn't going to be able to do the research that he wants. And, so you know, doing the right thing, he says, "Sure. Come along." And so he takes him with him over to the family history center.

And he says as he goes through the front door he has the most selfish of all thoughts. He says, "You know, I just can't stay and help this guy all the way through this." And so there are three ladies sitting at the reference desk there in the family history center. He points to the one in the middle and he says, "Go over to that woman and tell her what you want to find and she'll help you." And then he sheepishly walks off into the book stacks and starts his own research. So this young man does exactly as he's told. He walks over to this woman and he says,

"You know, I really don't know why I'm here. I really don't know what I'm going to work on."

She said, "Well, what do you know about your family?"

He said, "Well, you know, we have a family tradition in our family that my second great grandfather rode into town on an old white plow horse at about age ten and would never, never talk about where he came from." This was in Nebraska.

The woman sat straight up in her chair and she said, “We have a family tradition in our family that when he was ten years old, our second great uncle took the old white plow horse, rode out of town and was never seen again.” My friend found absolutely nothing at the library, which is poetic justice. But this man and this woman indeed were cousins and they had extended that line considerably and it was a great find for him.

Several years ago in 1997, I was at Federation of Genealogical Society’s conference in Texas and while there I had been doing some research in some of the surrounding counties. One of the places that I wanted to go was Hill County to a small little community called Mount Calm. Mount Calm does have a stop sign. It has no stoplight. It does have a small public library. And as I was attending the conference my colleague, Dean Hunter, happened to see one of the name badges of one of the attendees and it said Mount Calm, because they always list the name and where they’re from. And it said Mount Calm. And he couldn’t get to the woman. She turned and got away from him before he could catch her. He came running up to me and he said, “David, there’s a lady here from Mount Calm. You won’t believe it, but she is from Mount Calm and you’ve got to find her.” I said, “Oh, great. There are only eighteen hundred people here at this conference and I have to find the one woman here from Mount Calm.”

I really didn’t think much about it and I didn’t think there was any way that I would find her. So I turned to another colleague and we went up to the restaurant and we were standing in line and the person in front of us turns around and speaks to my companion because they know each other. She goes on genealogical tours with him all the time, comes to Salt Lake City, visits the [Family History] Library. When she turned around I could clearly see on her name badge, “Nancy Franklin, Mount Calm, Texas.” And so, I said the obvious. “You’re from Mount Calm, aren’t you?” We started talking.

Not only was she from Mount Calm, she was the librarian in Mount Calm. Not only was she the librarian in Mount Calm, she was the genealogist in Mount Calm. She knew a lot about the families that I was looking for. I went to the library and we sat down and I left with her some notes and some other things. And then I get a package from her in the mail, an envelope where she has found a lot of things. One of the things she shared with me, she says, “You must be the luckiest researcher in the world. The only loose obituary in the library and it belongs to the woman you are seeking.” There were a number of other things. And so on my next trip, my next visit, to Mount Calm I walked in (and we had become fast friends, in fact I just met with her again in Salt Lake a few weeks ago). We’re standing there and I’m kind of telling her different things about what’s going on. And she says, “You know, we had this box of pictures come in last week. Maybe there’s something in there that you want.” As we went through the pictures, there was a picture of Camilla Jared Blackburn, one of the Rencher descendents who settled in Mount Calm.



Camilla Jarrot Blackburn

All of these things continue to come together in bits and pieces. I fashion myself a pretty decent researcher, but I have to tell you that all of my research skills, all of the things that I do, don't near compensate for what goes on from the other side of the veil, connections that are made on my behalf as I strive to do this work. There is no other way to explain it.

Several years ago, Lee Davidson, who was the Washington correspondent for the *Deseret News* wrote a column that I thought was absolutely brilliant, but then I liked the subject matter. He starts out:

The woman seemed as different from me as possible as she entered the branch LDS Church family history center where I volunteer in suburban Maryland. I am a white, Mormon male who was wearing a business suit. She is black American, and wore Kente cloth and colorful African tribal designs with a veil that showed she is Muslim. But we would soon find that we have everything important in common and maybe, just maybe, we even tripped into an overlooked key on how America can better overcome racial tension. She is an experienced genealogist as am I. She quickly settled onto a computer to check family histories that people worldwide have sent to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It compiles

them on compact discs for quick and easy searches and distributes them globally to family history centers. After helping other visitors, I sat at a computer next to hers and started some research of my own. An hour later as I reached over for a disc, I glanced at her computer screen. Highlighted was information about Maria Bex, born about 1598 in the Netherlands. That took my breath away. I had the exact same screen of information on my computer, and Bex is my tenth great grandmother. So I asked an obvious but dumb question, "Are you looking for Bex's in the Netherlands?"

She looked up and said, "Yes, I have some Bex's ancestors."

I then turned my computer monitor toward her so she could see we were looking at exactly the same data. "So do I." I said.

Our expressions betrayed what we were both thinking. "I'm related to you?"

But the black Muslim woman and the white Mormon man were indeed both tenth great grandchildren of Maria Becks, born 399 years ago, and her husband, Johannes Nevius. Some of the progeny of Johannes and Maria immigrated to New Amsterdam, later to become New York, later to become part of the United States. Some had slaves; some were slaves; some died fighting to end slavery, such as David C. Ranierison killed with Union troops fighting to capture Atlanta in the Civil War; some such as Andrew Jackson Ranierison, David's brother, became Mormons driven out of Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. But, judging by where many of the Nevius and Becks progeny settled, some could have been among the mob members helping to drive out the Mormons. As in this instance, I've come to find when I talk to other genealogists who've gone far back on their family lines. Even if they appear to be of other ethnic backgrounds, we can often find some connection. It helps me realize something which sounds like a Pointer Sisters' song "We Are Family."

In this day and age of computer technology and computer wizardry there are things which do and do not work. We cannot overcome the promptings of the spirit and expect to find our ancestors. If we ignore that, above all else, we will not have the experiences which we continue to have if we listen to the promptings and go when and where we are told to go. A number of years ago I was taking a little trip in Alabama again. I was driving to a cemetery in the town of Belmont [Greene County]. Belmont has one road in and one road out. As you drive and drive and drive, you drive into some of the poorest part of Alabama you have ever seen. I'm driving down this road. I have previously seen a transcription of this cemetery online, on the internet. And I am driving to this cemetery and all the while I am asking myself "Why am I doing this?" It's starting to get dark. I am in a territory I do not know.

At one point I even pulled off the road, trying to figure out how far along this journey I was and definitely threatening to turn around and just skip it. I thought, "The picture of this tombstone is just not that important to me." It was the picture of the tombstone of a child that was about 10 years old. As I continued to drive I continued to feel the prompting to press forward even though everything logically told me this was a huge waste of time and literally I did fear a little for my safety.

Can you trust what you see? The online cemetery index entry reads, "Elizabeth Jane, daughter of Daniel G. Rencher died September 10, AD aged 10 years 11 months and 20 days." When you get to Belmont cemetery you will find a beautiful brick vault above the grave and you will find a beautiful well-preserved tombstone for this infant. However, what you will not find online is another beautiful vault next to it. The reason you will not find that vault online is because there is no cemetery marker like the other one. Although they are nearly identical vaults, sitting by themselves in the cemetery, they are not there.

One of the things that I am trying to determine is who's in the second vault. It could be John Grant Rencher, Daniel Grant Rencher's oldest son who dies in 1840. It could be Charles Frederick Rencher, who's an uncle to Daniel Grant Rencher and who was the schoolteacher to Daniel's children. Or it could be an un-named child by Daniel's second marriage who died in 1842. When I started I had about 4 other possibilities for who was buried in that vault. I've systematically been whittling away at determining who's in that vault. And at this point I don't know exactly, but if I had to guess today - if you made me guess - I think it's number one. I think it's John Grant Rencher who was the eldest son and who died there.

We must not build systems in today's age to take the spirit out of this work. The secret sauce is not "go here, do this, and that equals instant ancestors." That is not the way this works. It certainly wasn't Nephi Anderson's intent nor was it his prophetic vision in 1912. I wish he were alive today because I would love to see what he looks into when he sees his crystal ball 92 years from now. Where are we? The scripture in Malachi:

Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This doctrine is taught in all four of the standard works of scriptures. It appears in the Old and the New Testament, the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. Do you realize that, Brothers and Sisters? It appears in all of them, not just the Old Testament. Could it be that the Lord really wants us to know and understand this scripture? Or what it means to turn hearts to our ancestors? These are experiences and these are records to turn hearts. I love my computer. I love it for everything it can do for me. But more often than not, my computer is not what turns my heart. What turns my heart are the experiences and the impressions I have from the Spirit of Elijah and from the things that I know and understand.

While I have adequate genealogical skills and while I try to use those and to apply those, there are times, which I think I have illustrated this evening, when no matter how good my skills, I could not connect to the sources and to the information that connected there. I bear you my witness to the sacred nature of this work. I bear you my witness of the place that it fills in the three dimensions of the mission of the church. As we do this work, we do perfect the saints and we do missionary work on the other side, and those who are prepared and those who are ready to receive the blessings of the gospel, I think, see to it that events are orchestrated and that things come into play. If we will listen to those promptings, and sometimes they are very slight, the spirit will lead us and we will know and someday we will meet these people. I look forward to meeting all of these. I bear you my witness in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.