

10 WAYS TO MAKE MONEY IN GENEALOGY

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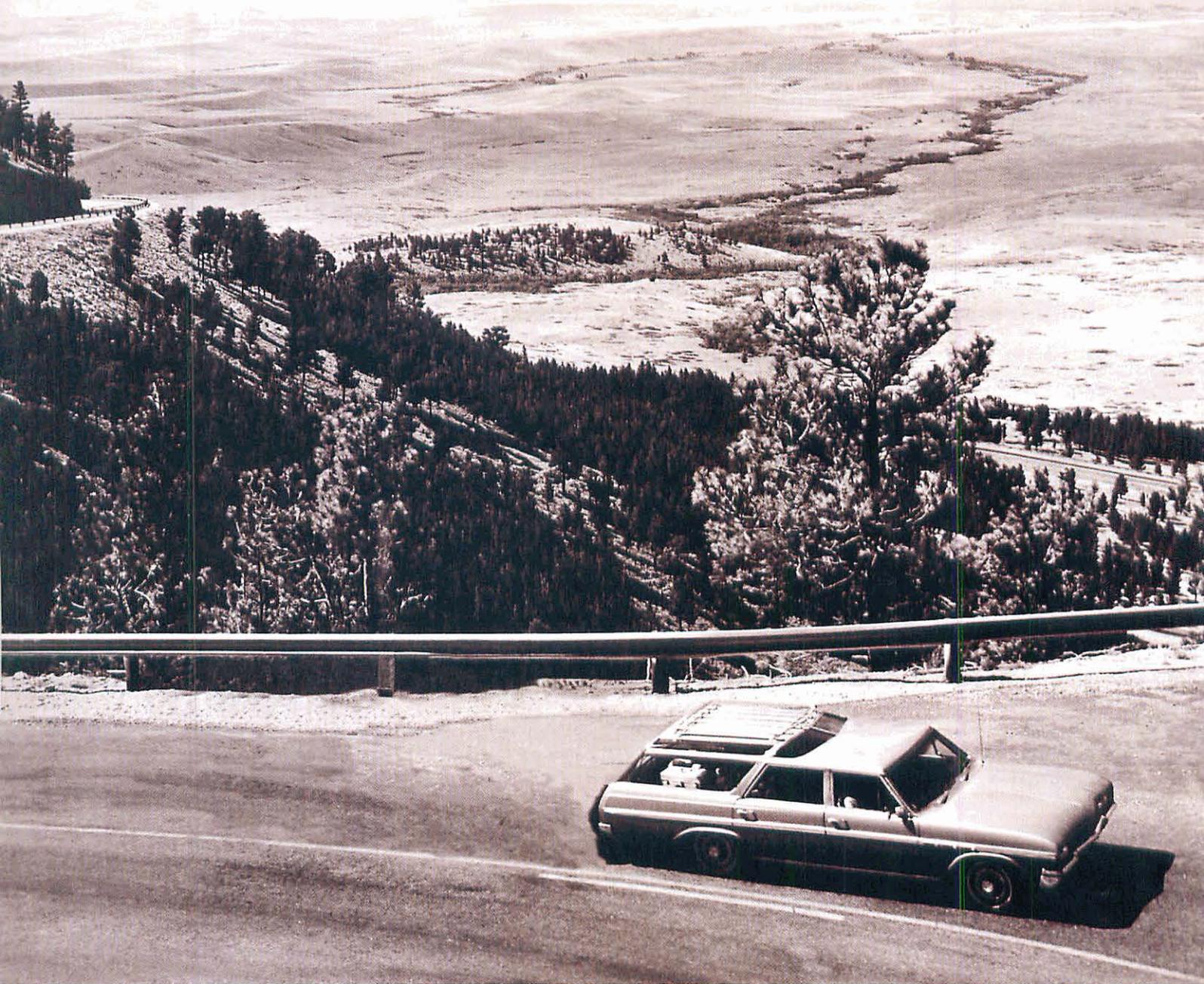
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On the cover: *Music Lesson*. by Frederick Leighton, 1877.



MY PURSUIT OF GRANDPA HALE

By Gerald L. Hale

FOR ALL I KNEW I WAS BORN JERRY HALE IN IOWA IN 1938. That's what it said on my birth certificate, that's the name I went to school with, and that's the name everyone called me—except my maternal grandfather, who insisted on calling me Gerald with a hard G as in golf. I left Iowa in 1955, joined the Navy, and began life away from my childhood home, seldom returning except for an occasional visit.

On one of these infrequent visits home, my Grandfather, who was supposed to be completely deaf and totally uncommunicative, was home alone. Everyone else was occupied so I strolled over to spend some time with him. I tried drawing him out by shouting various questions, but he

just stared passively and chewed on his unlit pipe. Finally I gave up trying to communicate and just sat there. To my amazement, after about ten minutes of silence, he began to respond to the last question I'd asked. Immediately I knew what the problem was—I had not waited long enough for him to reply. Knowing that, I would ask a question and wait. Grandpa would cogitate a while and finally give me a very intelligent answer! Turns out he wasn't a senile old man after all.

Gradually I began to draw him out. He lived in a small house in town and seldom got out. I wished he would let me take him around to the places he used to live and work—I



was sure that he'd enjoy such a trip, but I also knew a direct invitation would be rejected. I decided to see if I could "hood wink" him a bit. I asked him about the farm where he lived as a young boy, knowing perfectly well where it was, but pretending I didn't. After several attempts to explain it to me, I asked if he'd like to take a ride and show me where it was.

He didn't say a word but got up from his chair and left the room. I heard the refrigerator door open and close and supposed he was getting a bite to eat, but a minute later he came back with a hat on his head and a brown paper bag in his hand. It was obvious he had accepted my proposal.

I hurried to my father's house across the street and brought the station wagon around. Grandpa climbed in and

paper bag he had brought with him. In it were two cans of beer. He offered me one and we stood against the car, enjoying the beautiful day and the birds singing—neither saying much. It was a moment I will never forget.

As the years passed I returned home every couple years, always proposing another trip around the area with Grandpa. He would accept without protest and Grandma would caution me how quickly he tired of riding in a car and how his back hurt him, etc. She didn't understand how I could enjoy spending so much time with this deaf old man. I would drive farther and farther away from home, trying to guess the sites Grandpa would like to visit. I still wasn't interested in genealogy and, although I greatly enjoyed these trips, I wasted the opportunity of learning about Grandpa's early life.

Without saying a word he opened the car door and started walking into the woods. After a while he stopped and pointed to a headstone and told me his mother was buried there.

My Grandfather died in 1983 at the age of ninety-two and my interest in genealogy began not long afterward—Murphy's Law, I guess. When I started to pursue Grandpa's line I discovered I knew absolutely nothing about his family. I

off we went. He directed me to his old home a few miles west of town. The house and barnyard were gone and only a few foundations and a rusty windmill remained. After we had looked the old place over I told him I'd like to visit a neighboring town (where I knew he had grown up and gone to school) if he wasn't too tired to take the ride. He said he wasn't and that afternoon I drove him to all the places I thought he would enjoy seeing again, on the pretext that I'd like to see them.

About halfway through the trip I realized I was talking in a normal voice, and he was hearing me perfectly and responding in a normal fashion. The old fox had been "conveniently deaf" for years, allowing him, I'm sure, to ignore Grandma's incessant chatter.

I kept asking if he wanted to see anything special but he said no, just wherever I wanted to go. He never complained of being tired of riding or anything—another myth gone by the way!

On our way home he pointed out a grove of trees and asked me to drive toward them. I followed his instructions and we were soon in an overgrown cemetery near the town he had lived as a boy. Without saying a word he opened the car door and started walking into the woods. After a while he stopped and pointed to a headstone and told me his mother was buried there.

Unfortunately, I did not recognize the significance of his words as I was not yet interested in genealogy. I just thought it was a fun way of spending some time with my grandfather. I paid little attention.

When we returned to the car, Grandpa reached for the

went to my aunt and was surprised to learn he had been adopted by the Hale family at an early age. She didn't know what his birth name had been, but she thought he had once said he was born in Iowa Center, Story County, Iowa and had mentioned the name Shearer.

That started a search I am still struggling with to this day. Having no idea how to proceed, I asked the State of Iowa for his birth certificate, but they replied with "nothing found." I researched every Shearer in Story and surrounding counties. I could find very few who could have been his parents and no birth, death, or marriage record gave any clue. Finally, I decided to return to that remote cemetery we had visited years before, and find his mother's grave. But two tanks of gasoline later I decided I could not find the cemetery—it seemed to have disappeared!

My brother-in-law told me he knew the area like the back of his hand and offered to help me find the cemetery. We drove back to the little town Grandpa and I had visited that day. As I left the town on the same road, I said, "It seems like about right here Grandpa mentioned a grove of trees off to the south but, as you can see, there are no trees. Then about here we turned south but there isn't even a road, so I must be wrong."

Reggie told me the State had started to plow up some of the country roads because they had too many to maintain; there had once been a road where I indicated. We made a detour around to the place Grandpa and I had driven that day and picked up the road farther south. Soon we came to a cemetery. It was beautifully maintained and could not possibly have been the one Grandpa and I visited that day. But Reggie said the town had taken over the maintenance of

the cemetery and had cleaned it up and cut down a lot of trees. I turned in to the cemetery and stopped at what I remembered the distance inside the cemetery had been. I got out of the car and proceeded in a line through the headstones as I remembered Grandpa doing. When I stopped and looked around I found I was about ten feet from the headstones of Aaron and Mary (Sullen) Hale. I had assumed he had been referring to his birth mother's gravesite, but he had meant his adoptive mother. Another dead end!

I worked on the problem for years. A half sister was found living in a nearby town but she had no information. Everyone assured me the State of Iowa would never release the information I needed, nonetheless, I pursued every possible avenue. A lawyer in the county seat advised me I was wasting my time hiring him to petition the court, so I petitioned the court myself. When I got no response I wrote to Judge Riugh repeatedly until he telephoned me in Virginia asking me to quit—the records didn't even go back that far. (Grandpa was adopted in the 1890s.) The 1890 census might have helped, but that had been destroyed—every direction I turned there was a wall!

Finally I told my wife I was taking the motor home to Iowa and would find a campground near Des Moines and stay there until I either found what I needed or died from exhaustion! I did just that. Every morning for twelve days I was at the Iowa Genealogical Society Library when they opened and stayed until they closed. I was very near the point of exhaustion on the last day. I had been over every publication, microfilm, and paper they had on their shelves, but I had not uncovered even a clue.

I was ready to admit defeat. I must have let out a great sigh of surrender because the woman sitting across the table from me looked up, put down her book, and asked me what my difficulty was. I told her all about my problem.

She said, "You don't really have a problem," and explained there were no adoptions in Iowa in the 1890s. Children were passed on an 'indenture' which would be filed in the Registrar's Office in the county seat. There was no law prohibiting them from releasing the information upon a simple request. She went so far as to produce a newspaper clipping which explained the State's policy.

I nearly flew up the road to the Story County seat. I marched up to the Registrar's counter and, when asked what they could do for me, I stated I was there to see my Grandfather's adoption...ah...I mean indenture papers. I was sure they would reel back in horror and send me packing.

Instead, the woman asked, "What was his name?"

"Fred Hale," I replied.

Off she went into the vault. In a little while she came back and asked if that was his original name or his adopted name. I said it was his adopted name. (I didn't know his original name, hence the search!) She informed me all of the records were filed by the original name.

I took a deep breath and said, "His original name was Fred Shearer," not knowing if that even made any sense. In a few minutes she returned.

"John Fredrick Shearer?" she asked.

"Yes!" I said, hoping it was.

She said it must be the correct name because it was associated with the Hales, but she could not tell me more until she had a court order. I thought about showing her the newspaper article but decided it might provoke her and then I would never get what I needed. I thanked her and went up to the clerk's office.

By some strange quirk of fate Judge Riugh happened to be sitting in court that day. I thought he might remember me! The clerk helped me write a petition to release the indenture records, then she carried it in to the judge and returned with his signature a few minutes later.

I hurried back to the registrar thinking some other problem would once again thwart my efforts, but my luck had finally changed. In a few minutes she came out of the vault with a photocopy of the page in the ledger that recorded my Grandfather's indenture to Aaron and Mary Hale on 8 August 1893!

On the document were the names of his parents, John and Maggie Shearer. John had abandoned the family "over a year ago" and they were living in Iowa Center, Iowa at the time.

I was elated. I sent copies to all the people who had predicted my failure and said that I had learned perseverance pays off in the long run. After my excitement ebbed I realized that I still had a few problems. Little did I know those problems would present yet another wall. For the past five years I have looked for a John and Maggie Shearer to no avail, although there were many Shearers in that part of Iowa at the same time. Maggie—is that a nickname for Margaret or Magdelane? And what became of John, off to the gold rush in California or an Oregon settler? I wish I knew.

I'm still working with the premise previously stated, that perseverance pays off in the end, but I'm getting mighty weary and the knots on this old bald head attest to the number of times I've hit that wall! ▲

Gerald Hall, a former Merchant Marine, is a freelance genealogist, writer, and hobbyist and has spent the past several months on a family research road-trip.



Grandpa Hale

