

**MID-CITIES
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
OFFICERS:**

President: Bonnie Baker
(817) 562-3242
smyles200us@yahoo.com

Vice President: Kellie Merck
(817) 467-0587
k.merk@sbcglobal.net

Secretary: Patsy Harrison
(817) 287-8127
chuck@gmail.org

Treasurer: John Pinkerton
(817) 860-1743
bjpinkerton@sbcglobal.net

EXECUTIVE BOARD:

Comm/Web Master

Bernard Meisner
(817) 379-6512
bernardmeisner@cs.com

Membership Marilyn Hay
(817) 379-4214
mhay@nabem.net

Correspondence Secretary:
Ruth Tipton Smith (817) 605-8909

Greeter: Leah Chance
(817) 417-4623
ihchance@sbcglobal.net

Historian: Mary Moore
(940) 648-8764
evermoore54@gmail.com

Room Setup:

Still need a volunteer

Newsletter Editor:

Peggy Poole
(817) 243-9990
glynnp413@aol.com

Parliamentarian: Bernard Meisner (817) 379-6512
bernardmeisner@cs.com

Hospitality: Anne Taylor
(972) 254-1604
ataylor42150@gamil.com

Publicity: Evelyn Kelly
(817) 988-2055
fourthgentx@yahoo.com

Seminar Coordinator:
Sandra Crowley
(817) 571-9939
sandrac@tx.rr.com

Looking for a Genealogy Program that Will Be Around for a Long Time

Dick Eastman • The Daily Online Genealogy Newsletter February 16, 2016

A newsletter reader wrote to me today expressing dissatisfaction with the recent "retirement" of Family Tree Maker. He wants to switch to a different genealogy program but is concerned that the next program he uses also might be "retired" before long. He asked, "Which genealogy software will stand the test of endurance?"

I decided to publish my answer in this newsletter in case others have similar concerns.

Family Tree Maker certainly did not "stand the test of endurance." Since it was supported by the largest commercial company in the genealogy marketplace and reportedly was the most popular genealogy program in the world, many of us assumed it would be a viable product forever. We were wrong, as the recent announcement about "retirement" of the program shows. Obviously, support by a multimillion dollar corporation is no guarantee that a program will be available in the future.

Several other major genealogy programs have also disappeared over the years, including Personal Ancestral File, Roots 4, The Ultimate Genealogist, The Master Genealogist, The Family Edge, and a few others I cannot remember right now. All of these were leading genealogy programs at one time but have since faded into oblivion.5

Of course, the risk also extends to all of today's genealogy programs: RootsMagic, Legacy Family Tree, Mac Family Tree, Family Tree Builder, Reunion, RootsTrust, Heredis, Family Historian, The Next Generation, WebTrees, Ancestral Quest, and every other genealogy program I can think of. I wouldn't bet on any of them surviving forever. That is especially true as the trend of the computer industry these days is to move away from programs installed in personal computers and toward cloud-based solutions.

This is not a "genealogy problem." The same is true for non-genealogy software as well. We have lost Lotus 1-2-3, VisiCalc, dBase, WordStar, and a few hundred other excellent programs over the years. There are no guarantees with anything in this world.

My advice: When looking for a new program for any purpose, find one you like and use it. However, never lock yourself in. Always have an exit plan in mind in case your favorite program suddenly becomes non-functioning for any reason and cannot be replaced. This is true for genealogy and non-genealogy programs alike.

Judy Russell



Cyndi Ingle



2016 TxSGS Family History Conference

Texas State Genealogical Society
October 28 – 30, 2016 in Dallas, Texas

Our conference program will feature two extraordinary genealogy instructors—Judy Russell and Cyndi Ingle! Details about their specific lecture topics will be released soon.

www.TxSGS.org

#TxSGS2016

How I Became Chinese: The Story of One Woman's Search for Her Chinese Roots

From: <http://blogs.ancestry.com>

Posted by **Paula Williams Madison** on February 8, 2016 in **Guest Bloggers, Research, Stories**

Beijing, summer 2008. Standing on a corner near the Silk Road, just a few blocks from my hotel, thousands of Chinese passed me by. They were all hurrying somewhere. Not me. That day, I had no destination; I just wanted to see if a Chinese metropolis like Beijing had the hustle and bustle of my hometown, New York City. I was an NBC Universal executive vice president, in China to attend the Summer Olympics. Me. I was a Harlem-born daughter of Jamaican immigrants just standing on a street corner in China. My brown skin and curly Afro did attract attention, but even if the passers-by cared to exchange pleasantries, I don't speak Mandarin and for the most part, they don't speak English.

And yet, I felt a deep kinship to these people.

My grandfather was Chinese.

And somewhere in this nation of more than 1 billion people, I had family. My heart ached because I needed to find my long-lost family, but where would I start?



At a reunion in China in 2012, the descendants of Samuel Lowe numbered more than 300. Some are pictured here.

At that moment, a beautiful and statuesque Chinese woman, about 5'7", caught my attention and took my breath away. This Chinese stranger with fair skin, upturned eyes, and straight black hair, who as quickly as she appeared, disappeared into the crowd, reminded me of how my mother, Nell Vera Lowe Williams looked when I was about 10 years old! My chest tightened. Tears welled in my eyes. And then I felt invigorated. Seeing this

apparition of my already deceased mother was a sign. I would find them. I would find my grandfather's descendants in China. And so I began the quest to find the family of my grandfather Samuel Lowe, a quest that forever changed my life.

Just two days later, in my hotel room, an English-language documentary was on television. I was busying myself getting ready to head out to the Olympics competitions. The documentary was about the construction of the Great Wall of China, which had long fascinated me, but today I just didn't have time to sit and watch. Half-listening to the documentary's narrator, I heard the voice explain that the Great Wall had been built section by section by local people living along the 5,500 mile route. This section, he said, was built by people who lived in a village named for the Lowe family. What was I hearing??? I ran to the TV, but the narrator had moved on; no more about the Lowe village. I couldn't rewind or record!!! TVs in hotel rooms don't have such features. My grandfather's surname was Lowe, just what the narrator said, but how would I learn more? Who would I ask? Still, I took this as yet another sign.

First my mother, then this voice from a documentary that I couldn't rewind.

China was where I knew they were. China was telling me to find them.

Over the next three years, in fits and starts, I would attempt to trace my genealogy. I worried it was too late because my tight-lipped Chinese Jamaican mother (who knew just a little about her father) had died in 2006 at the age of 87. My Jamaican dad was racially black and he'd known nothing about my mother's Chinese roots. He, too, was deceased by then.

But in 2011, finding my Chinese family moved into my focus. At the time I'd had a very demanding career that left little time for any primary research. So I did what I knew I had to do: after 22 years, I retired from NBC Universal, ending my work life as executive vice president for diversity. It just seemed that working someone else's agenda would be too distracting. I knew myself well enough to expect this journey would involve endless research, countless conversations and a deluge of emotions.

With little else to go on, I contacted my father's siblings and cousins, hoping they might direct me,

and in a remarkably short time, an elder cousin said a huge Chinese Jamaican population had immigrated to Toronto, Canada. He said would ask friends and acquaintances for help.

By April of 2012, that cousin, John Hall, had told me about a Toronto conference that occurs every four years: the Toronto Hakka Conference. First organized in 2000, this gathering is an international conference of the Hakka Chinese, who are racially Han and are a minority cultural group in China. Worldwide, there are an estimated 70-80 million Hakka. The name translates to "guest," but I think of it as a gentler way of describing these migrants, who were sometimes invaders, sometimes aliens. This migratory tribe originated in central China, and over the millennia, because of wars and conflicts, settled mostly in the far southeastern region of China, Guangdong Province. My grandfather was Hakka.

I decided to register myself and my two older brothers, Elrick and Howard, for the Toronto Hakka Conference, hoping we'd uncover clues about our grandfather. Back in 1921, three-year-old Nell was forever separated from the father she recalled as kind and loving. Her jealous mother vowed to keep them apart because Samuel was to marry sight-unseen a Chinese bride sent from China by his parents. And the rift in my family began. My mother, Nell, always melancholy yet beautiful, spent the rest of her 87 years fatherless. She never saw him again. We never had our grandfather.

The end of June 2012 found us among the 400 conference attendees. Our cousin, John Hall, joined us from his Toronto-area home. The four of us and maybe a couple of others stood out from the crowd because of skin color, more caramel to chocolate in tone, darker than the creamy tones of the Hakka Chinese.

There, I met Carol Wong, a.k.a. "the Dragon Lady," and a leader in the Toronto/Markham Hakka Chinese community. I'd been introduced to Carol via email a few months before. She was co-chair of the conference, and I'd contacted her to get more insight into the conference and the Hakka people. Carol explained that she came from a family of Chinese shopkeepers in Jamaica and that many of the Caribbean Chinese descended from indentured workers who began arriving in Jamaica in 1834, after the British abolished slavery. The emancipated Africans refused to work for the British and U.S. sugar plantation owners who had enslaved, brutalized, and murdered them. So the owners faced the East to India and

China, attracting laborers who signed contracts ensuring them passage to Jamaica and three years of indentured labor.

I also met Jeanette Kong, a Chinese Jamaican filmmaker, who I quickly hired to produce and direct my film. We were joined at the conference, too, by Martin Proctor, director of field productions for the Africa Channel.

The chair of the conference, Dr. Keith Lowe, also was Chinese Jamaican. When I was able to get a few minutes with him, I told him why we were there. He encouraged me to stand and tell what I knew of my mother's and grandfather's lives. And so, before 400 mostly Chinese people, I said, "I am Chinese and am trying to find my grandfather's descendants in China." For the very first time in my life, no one laughed or snickered. To pronounce that I — clearly black — am Chinese didn't produce even any head shaking. That was my huge surprise; these Chinese people believed me. And so I began to have hope.



Nell Vera Lowe Williams, the author's mother and the firstborn child of Samuel Lowe. Nell was separated from her father at age 3 and never saw him again.

Almost a week later, Keith Lowe responded. Jeanette convinced him to help me. And so Keith decided to send an email to his nephew in Hong Kong. A Black

Chinese-Jamaican woman is looking for her grandfather's family in China. Grandfather's named Samuel Lowe. Can you ask the Lowe family in mainland China if anyone has ever heard of him?

Next day, the return email read, "My uncle says Samuel Lowe was his father."

See more in Finding Samuel Lowe, available on [iTunes](#) and [Amazon](#) February 2nd.

Read more in Finding Samuel Lowe, available in select [book stores](#).

See more at:

<http://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2016/02/08/how-i-became-chinese-the-story-of-one-womans-search-for-her-chinese-roots/#sthash.jguFmgKg.dpuf>

Genealogist Breaks Through Her Brick Wall!

From: *GenealogyBank News January 2016*

Every genealogist has experienced it: hitting the dreaded "brick wall" – when you reach a dead end in your family history research, unable to find any more records to fill in the missing names, dates or places of your ancestor's story.

On the other hand, few genealogy stories are more encouraging than hearing of someone smashing through their brick wall, finally getting the answers they spent years searching for with equal measures of determination and frustration. It took genealogist Debby Abad 15 years, but she but she finally broke through her own brick wall. Here's how she did it.

As Debby explains:

"I have been searching for information on my great grandmother Nannie Willis, and my great uncle Cary Sprouse, for the last 15 years. Without a date, I could not apply for a death record."

Debby had been a member of GenealogyBank and found information about other members of her family, but after thoroughly searching its [Historical Newspaper Archives](#) could not find any articles about Nannie or Cary's deaths – so she didn't renew her membership.

Two years later, Debby learned that GenealogyBank is constantly adding new content every single day, adding millions more genealogy records and newspaper articles every month. Having been frustrated everywhere else she had looked, Debby decided to come back and give GenealogyBank one more try – and was glad she did!

As Debby wrote to us:

"You can imagine my surprise when these articles popped up! I now had dates and could locate death records for my uncle and grandmother!!"

Imagine her delight when she did a new search on her elusive great grandmother Nannie Willis – and up popped the record she had spent years looking for: her obituary.

Finally she knew the date of Nannie's death: *7 February, 1951*. Not only did this obituary give her this important information, it was filled – as obituaries often are – with many more family history clues: the names of Nannie's three surviving sons and the married names of her two surviving daughters, plus the fact that Nannie had 24 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren and 2 great-great-grandchildren. Armed with this information, Debby now had many more directions in which to pursue her family history research.

Perhaps even more dramatic was what happened when Debby searched for her great uncle Cary Sprouse, trying once again to find out when – and how he died. When this article popped up, Debby at long last had her answers.

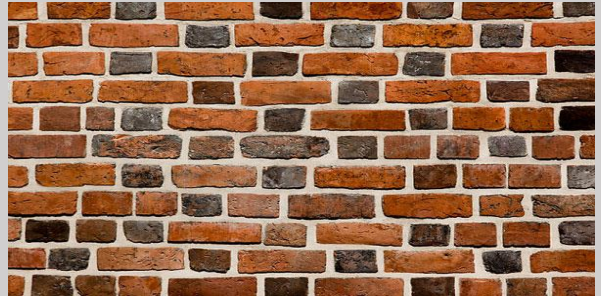


Photo: brick wall. Credit: Pawel Wozniak; Wikimedia Commons.

WILLIS—Died at a local hospital Wednesday, February 7, 1951, Mrs. Nannie Elizabeth Willis, of Route 6, Varina. She is survived by two daughters, Mrs. Jennie Phelps and Mrs. Hester Sprouse; three sons, Walter L. and William A. Coleman and Frank D. Willis; also 24 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. Remains rest at the Joseph W. Billey Funeral Home, Third and Marshall, where services will be held Friday at 3 P. M. Interment in Oakwood. 9PM

Richmond Times Dispatch, 13 August 1917, page 7

BODY FOUND IN WOODS

Charlottesville Lineman Steps on Live Wire in Darkness and Is Electrocuted.

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.]

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA., August 12.—While walking through woods near Frys Spring, late to-day, two young women came upon the body of Cary Sprouse, aged thirty-five years, a lineman for the Charlottesville and Albemarle Electric Light Company, who had been dead over twenty-four hours. Late yesterday Sprouse went to look after a grounded wire and was electrocuted. When found, his right foot had been burned off and his leg charred two inches above the ankle. He was lying prone upon his face with fingers on both hands dug into the ground.

Sprouse is survived by his wife and three children. He also leaves one brother and two sisters, George Sprouse and Mrs. Sadie Sacree, of this city, and Mrs. Agnes Sensibaugh, of Baltimore.

Richmond Times Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia)
9 February 1951, page 34)

Our congratulations to Debby for breaking through her genealogy brick wall, and our thanks for sharing her story with us and giving us permission to tell that story to our readers.

As we often remind readers here in the GenealogyBank Blog, it pays to redo your searches periodically in GenealogyBank. Just because you didn't find something a week, month, or several months ago, doesn't mean we don't have something on your ancestors now. There is a feature on the newspapers' search box that lets you search just on the content added since a certain time.

GenealogyBank adds millions of new records monthly, so keep searching. And good luck with your family history research!

There it was, the long-sought date of Cary's death: 11 August 1917. And, like Nannie's obituary, this article gives other family history clues: Cary was survived by his wife and three children, and his surviving brother and two sisters are named along with the cities where they lived. Now Debby had even more directions to pursue her family history research.

This article about her great uncle's death makes an important point about using [old newspapers](#) for family history research: government records can give names and dates, but to learn something about our ancestors as people, and the individual lives they lived, we need their stories – and these stories are found in old newspapers.

Sometimes the stories we learn about our ancestors are not pretty, but they are real – and they're *our ancestors' stories*. In this case, Cary died a gruesome death by electrocution while trying to locate and fix a live wire that had fallen to the ground. The article gives some grisly details of Cary's death, including the poignant detail of his having been found "lying prone upon his face with fingers on both hands dug into the ground" due to the agony of the electricity burning through his right foot and leg.

Not a comforting picture. But now, as Debby looks at Cary's name and dates on her family tree, she at least knows the story of his death and can take comfort in the fact that he died doing his job, trying to restore power to his community.

Enter your ancestor's name below and we'll search historical newspapers to help you learn more.

Last Name

First Name

Include Keywords

Exclude Keywords

Date Range to

Date

Added Since

- the beginning
- December 2015
- November 2015
- October 2015

Search U.S. Newspaper Archives By State

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More fascinating new worldwide resources:

Findmypast FRIDAYS, February 26, 2016
<http://search.findmypast.com/search-world-Records>

This week's **Findmypast Friday** marks the release of an assortment of valuable new collections from the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

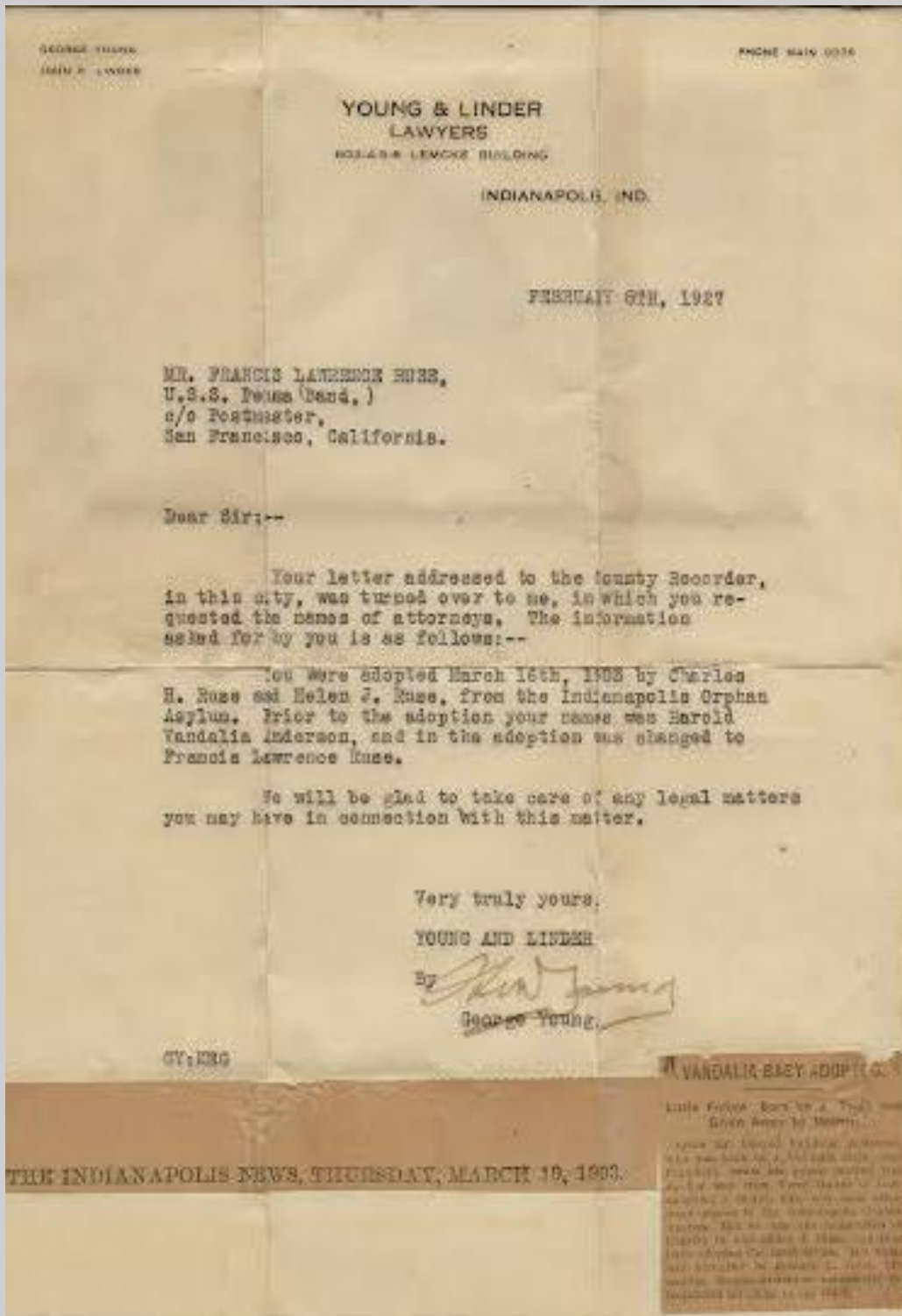
Britain, Merchant Navy Seamen, business indexes

Ireland, Non-Conformist Births & Baptisms, marriages and congregational records.

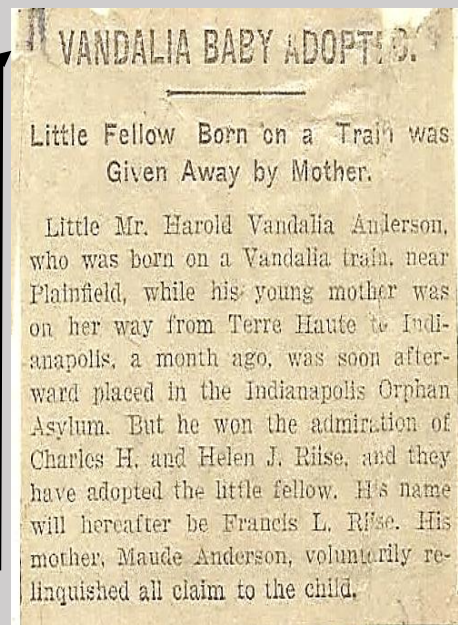
See all this week's new records

A MEMBER'S STORY: contributed by Cathy Riise

My grandfather was born on a train coming from Terra Haute, Indiana to Indianapolis, Indiana. The train was named *The Vandalia*. He was delivered on the train in Plainville just outside Indianapolis. When the train stopped in Indianapolis he was taken to the Sister's Catholic Hospital in Indianapolis and transferred on to the *Indianapolis Orphan Asylum*. He was adopted a month later by my great grandparents, Carlos Riise, born in Fort Yuma, California and Helen Jenkins from San Antonio, Texas. His birth name was Harold Vandalia (name of the train he was born on) Anderson. After his adoption he became, Francis Laurence Riise.



The train was named *The Vandalia*. He was delivered on the train in Plainville just outside Indianapolis. When the train stopped in Indianapolis he was taken to the Sister's Catholic Hospital in Indianapolis and transferred on to the *Indianapolis Orphan Asylum*. He was adopted a month later by my great grandparents, Carlos Riise, born in Fort Yuma, California and Helen Jenkins from San Antonio, Texas. His birth name was Harold Vandalia (name of the train he was born on) Anderson. After his adoption he became, Francis Laurence Riise.



VANDALIA BABY ADOPTED
 From: THE INDIANAPOLIS NEWS,
 Thursday, March 18, 1908

"If you don't recount your family history, it will be lost. Honor your own stories and tell them too. The tales may not seem very important, but they are what binds families and makes each of us who we are." -Madeleine L'Engle

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