

Omaha Women Having Notable American Ancestors



A LITTLE, prowling around among genealogies, family trees and sear and yellow pamphlets brings to light the interesting fact that a good many Omaha women come of illustrious ancestry. Although these women blush with true western scorn at anything so reactionary as an ancestor, they cannot but admit that their forefathers were of a sort not to be sneezed at by the most conservative of eastern blue-stockings.

We have in our midst a cousin—many times removed, it is true—of a reigning sovereign of Europe; we have a descendent of no less a ruler than Alfred the Great; one who can claim with Mrs. Cornwallis West, formerly Lady Randolph Churchill of England, the bones of the same ancestor lying in a little graveyard in New York; two sisters whose forefather was the founder of Craigie house, where the poet Longfellow afterward lived; a direct descendent of John and Priscilla Alden; a pretty, little school ma'am whose many-times-great grandfather was that big man from a little state, Roger Williams; and other women who come of forebears who took an active and prominent part in the stirring times of early American history.

An Omaha physician, Dr. Mary Strong, has heard from the lips of her great aunt tales of skirmishes with the Tories and Indians which took place near the log cabin where she was born. This aunt—Lucy Bayley was her name—came into the world while the fight with the redskins was on and it was only the bravery of a little band of patriots which saved the new baby and her mother from certain death.

"As Aunt Lucy lived to be 87, I have often heard her tell this with great pride," said Dr. Strong.

Dr. Strong's great-great grandfather, General Jacob Bayley of Newbury, Vt., was a member of the committee of safety for that state and, with most of his sons who were old enough, served as soldier, scout and on the committee for that province, which had recently been claimed both by New Hampshire and New York. General Bayley was one of the famous Green Mountain boys, who, led by Ethan Allen, resisted the New York claimants. And he helped defeat Baum's forces when this division of Burgoyne's British and Hessian soldiers came to Bennington to fight the Vermonters and New Hampshire patriots.

Many other of Dr. Strong's ancestors fought at Bennington. Her great grandfather, Tillotson, was there and saved a powder horn which Dr. Strong has put in the Omaha public library. Another relic of war times which the doctor has loaned the library is a queer, little, iron oil lamp which one of her Strong ancestors brought back from an expedition against the French in Canada.

"Alexander Strong was one of those who helped guard the cabin where little Lucy Bayley was born. His son married her younger sister, Mira Bayley—my grandmother," said Dr. Strong. "He moved up the Connecticut to Oxford, N. H., with his father to lands given by King George III for services in the French and Indian wars."

Mrs. J. C. Weeth, who is vice president of two local patriotic organizations—the Omaha chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Nebraska chapter of the Daughters of 1812—has a case of revolutionary relics in the library. But, perhaps, nothing in the whole collection has so strange a history as a quaint, old pin containing a lock of red hair, which Mrs. Weeth sometimes wears.

The lock of red hair was from the head of my

great-great-grandfather, Rev. Ebenezer Morse, an Episcopal clergyman sent to New England to preach. His little settlement in what is now Vermont was attacked by Indians and few whites escaped. My ancestor's wife and two sons escaped, but he was scalped by the Indians and left for dead.

"A few hours later, a band of the Indians returned and seeing that he was still alive marvelled at it; and, noticing the color of his hair—which was a novelty to them—concluded that the Great Spirit wanted him to live. They were afraid. So they bound his head with herbs and plantain leaves and took him with them to Canada.

"The Indians held my grandfather captive for eight years. The old chief gave him an Indian name and wanted him to marry his only daughter. The night before the ceremony was to take place grandfather escaped with a friendly Narragansett Indian. They killed the two Indians on guard and the others were stupefied with drink made from corn juice and wintergreen berries to celebrate the occasion. Grandfather gradually worked his way south to Bennington. His family had gone, the village had been rebuilt and it was with difficulty that he finally located his wife and two sons in Charleston, Mass."

Another great-great-grandfather of Mrs. Weeth's—Benjamin Reed—was a Minute man, who lived in Cunningham between Lexington and Watertown.

"When Paul Revere made his midnight ride, grandfather, with his son, was plowing in the field—it being just dawn. He left his team of oxen, ran for his musket, kissed grandmother good by and flew off without hat or coat."

This loyal patriot was stationed near Watertown bridge, which was destroyed by the British and rebuilt of stone several years later. The money was raised by selling shares on the lottery plan. The prizes were a "neckyoke for oxen, saddle, bridle, pair of shoes, churn for butter, hanks of yarn, package of indigo for dyeing, dress patterns" and other practical things. Three shares for the new bridge are in Mrs. Weeth's collection in the library.

On her mother's side, Mrs. Weeth's ancestor, Stephen Hopkins, and his daughter, Constance, came to America on the Mayflower in 1620. Stephen Hopkins was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Miss Isabelle Frances Williams, one of our public school teachers, traces her ancestry directly through generations of Williamses, including William Williams, who signed the Declaration of Independence, to the greatest of all Williamses, Roger Williams, the first governor of Rhode Island.

Miss Williams is also a descendent of Colonel

Nathan Miller of the Continental army, whose son, Brigadier General Nathan Miller, did good service during the revolution. General Miller's closest friend throughout the struggle was the French count de Rochambeau, who presented his American companion with a gold sword encrusted with jewels at the close of the war.

General Miller was a member of the continental congress and of the congress of 1786, which met in New York. His daughter, Patience Miller, married William Williams.

Another Omaha woman who can trace her ancestry directly to illustrious early settlers is Mrs. A. L. Fernald, whose great-great-great-great-grandparents were John and Priscilla Alden.

Hanging in the home of Miss Katherine and Miss Margaret Hilliard are pictures of two ancestral places. One is Craigie house, still standing in Brattle street, Cambridge, Mass. It was built by Andrew Craigie, of whom the chronicles of the time say that "he was the first person of

Boston who had ice in the summer and flowers in the winter and habitually drove a coach and four," and that his brother-in-law "was a gentleman and died of the gout."

The second picture in the Hilliard home is of a plantation, intact until recent years, near Wilmington, N. C. It was the refuge of an aristocratic young southerner named Burgwin, who sought to escape from grief over the loss of his young wife. He recovered, married an English woman and reared a large family. The "Hermitage," as the place had been called, was turned into a center of social gaiety. A grand-daughter of Burgwin's house married a descendent of the Craiges and from them descended the Misses Hilliard.

Mrs. L. E. Shipman, who is treasurer of the Omaha chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, traces her American ancestry to Aaron Jerome, whose bones lie in the rustic cemetery numbering less than forty headstones, at Pompey in Onondago county, New York, and who was the great-grandfather of a titled lady across the ocean—Mrs. Cornwallis West—who was Lady Churchill. The first of the Jeromes to come to America was Timothy, who emigrated from the Isle of Wight early in the eighteenth century. But the family, before that, were French Huguenots. Mrs. Shipman's genealogy gives names of men who were apt with sword and pen and who were of staunch religious fiber.

"Daniel May served four years in the French and Indian wars and through the revolution, always carrying his Bible in his knapsack," said Mrs. Shipman. "He firmly believed that no bullet would hit him while he carried his Bible; and he came through unharmed." His daughter Sally May, married John Woodworth, one of three brothers who came to America from Kent county, England, in 1635. Samuel Woodworth was the author of "The Old Oaken Bucket."

Mrs. J. W. Griffith's American ancestor is Governor Dudley of Massachusetts, from whom she is the ninth generation in direct descent. Previous

to coming to this country in 1630, Thomas Dudley had served as captain under Henry of Navarre, having received his commission from Queen Elizabeth. He was descended from the elder branch of the Dudley family to which the Earl of Leicester belonged and which traced its ancestry straight back through William the Conqueror to Alfred the Great.

Mrs. William S. Heller has a highly interesting and varied line of notable ancestors. The Bentons on her father's side go back to Norman origin and the Norman coat of arms always hung in the home of her girlhood days. Through the Norton line she goes back to John Webster, who was one of the early governors of Connecticut and who was the forebear of Daniel and of Noah Webster. On her mother's side Mrs. Heller traces back through the Van Horns of Holland stock, who came to America in 1635; to the reigning family of Holland, being an eighth cousin of Queen Wilhelmina. On her mother's father's side—the de Havens—she goes back to the ancestor of that name, a distinguished Frenchman, who left France during the troublous times of Louis XIV and settled in Philadelphia in 1635, which place has always been the home of the family.

Mrs. Pressly J. Barr, president of the Omaha chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, comes from a French Huguenot family that fled to Holland to escape persecution and became identified with the Dutch. Mrs. Barr's revolutionary ancestor is her great-grandfather, Johannes Vele. She is a member of the Daughters of 1812 from the brave deeds of her grandfather, Tjerick Vele.

Mrs. Barr has recently been invited to join the Society of Founders and Patriots of America through Aernhout Cornelisen Vele. This one of the Velees was especially prominent. He came to this country with his father about 1630 and the latter erected an Indian trading house at Port Orange, now Albany, N. Y., and became an interpreter between the government and the natives and any number of treaties with the Indians for many years bear his signature. Governor Thomas Dougan sent Vele as special envoy to the Iroquois and Governor Jacob Leister made him governor of the Six Nations. He was at the council of Onondago when, at the instigation of the Canadian authorities, the Iroquois tribes assembled to decide whether the English or French should have their allegiance.

"Upon the decision depended the fate of the colony," said Mrs. Barr. "If it hadn't been for the