

LOST COUSINS FOUND

By Bonnie L. Connolly

I looked over boxes of family history that my distant cousin Andrea and I collected over the last year since we met. I'm amazed that we've come so far. A year ago, we did not even know each other!

For at least twelve years, I have worked on my family history. I started with my dad's family from Norway and Sweden. Then I decided to work on my Mom's family. Mom didn't know much about her parent's family, except that they were from Canada. I poured over clues from obituaries, death certificates, and old letters. Each step of the way, I reported to Mom what I had found. It was something fun we could do together, as her health deteriorated in the nursing home.

Something on my grandmother's death certificate caught my attention. It said she was born in Maple Lake, Ontario. On a Canadian map in Haliburton County, I found the tiny town of Maple Lake. Mom did not know this. She thought her mother was born in Saskatchewan. No wonder we didn't get very far.

Once I realized where Maple Lake was, I searched the internet, found, and joined their local Haliburton County Genealogy Group. I asked if I could put an ad in their "Original Roots" Newsletter to see if any distant relatives might see the ad and respond. They published it in their Summer 2006 newsletter:

JAMES MELVILLE/THOMAS JONES/WILLIAM CLARK (E) New member Bonnie Connolly is a Minnesota descendant of James Melville (1832-1887, buried Maple Lake Cemetery), Thomas Jones and William Clark (e). She wonders if descendants are still in the Haliburton area and would like more information. Bonnie can be contacted at 651-785-0693, or 1536 Oakwood Terrace, Shoreview, MN 55126 or conn0132@tc.umn.edu

I placed the same ad in two local Haliburton newspapers. A few fun calls came in from Mom's distant cousins in Canada. But, the best surprise was yet to come. Eight months after my ad was published, I received an email from the editor of "Original Roots". She shared an email from a Minnesota woman who was doing some family history research and came across the ad in the "Original Roots" newsletter. It was written on March 10, 2007, which would have been my mom's 88th birthday.

Unfortunately, Mom died three months before this. The editor added, "Do let me know if you two are a match."

I glanced at the last name, which sounded vaguely familiar, and wrote back right away. We wrote a few more emails in which we quizzed each other. Then it dawned on me: her father was my cousin Ron, whom I had not seen in forty years!

Andrea and I met for the first time four days later. I am amazed that not only are we related, but it took an Ontario newsletter to tell us that we lived ten miles apart!