# Sweetland/Swetland Lore #74 Summer 2015

## Ancestral Word-of-Mouth Stories: Fact or Fiction?
### By Anne Kirby

Sometimes it's hard to know whether stories handed down from generation to generation are true. Could they have been embellished through time? Or did they even happen at all? Census records may provide the clues needed to find out.

My mother, Virginia (Robinson) Sweetland, was close to her mother and grandmother as she grew up. Mother told me that her grandmother, Mary Amelda Gates Tagert, attended the Golden Spike ceremony in Promontory, Utah. Her grandmother's family moved many times, but I had never found them living in Utah. Even so, several of the eight children always appeared on census records as being born in Utah, with no town listed.
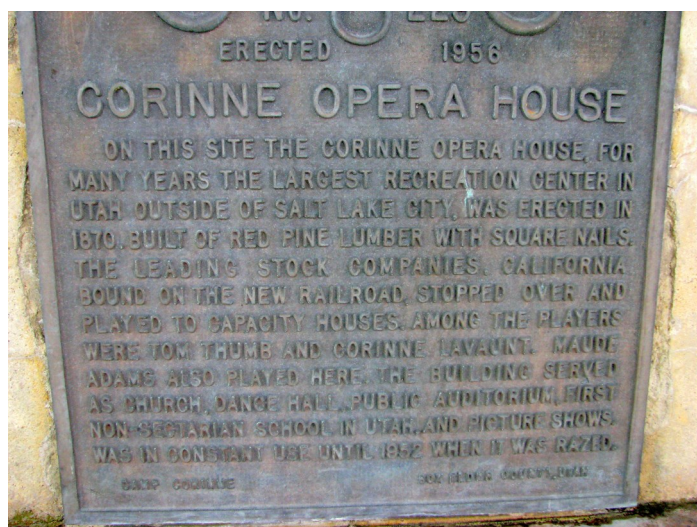
Another mystery was my finding an old picture of the dwarf entertainers Tom Thumb and his wife, who both stood only three feet tall, among the photos in a box of old pictures that Mother had given me. Mother said her grandmother had seen them perform and they gave her the photo.

I already had found the vital information-- names, dates and places for my great-grandmother's family, but I was curious about her life and stories. I knew the family had first lived first in Virginia City, Montana, and later in Leadville, Colorado. But when the 1870 Census was indexed, I was surprised and delighted to discover the family in Corinne, Utah, near Brigham City. It was a shipping center and after the town was laid out by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869, it grew within two weeks to include 500 frame and tent buildings and numerous businesses. The census showed my great-grandfather was involved in cattle sales.

A little research showed that meat and produce raised in Utah were shipped from there to the booming mining towns in Montana, Colorado and elsewhere, so the Tagerts had likely moved there from the mining town of Virginia City, Montana, to find work. So now I knew why they had several children born in Utah.

But what about the Golden Spike Ceremony and Tom Thumb? The Golden Spike was driven on 10 May 1869 in Promontory, just 30 miles from Corinne, Utah. The 1870 Census showed that the Tagert's youngest child, age one, was born in Utah in 1869. This puts the family in the right place at the right time for the ceremony.

My husband Dale and I visited Corinne in the summer and were famished by the time we got there. Luckily, we had brought a picnic lunch and found a nice grassy church lawn with shade trees to sit under. After I finished eating, I wandered over to a large bronze plaque on the corner of the lawn. It explained that this had been the site of the Corinne Opera House, and that after the transcontinental railroad was completed, many prominent entertainers, such as Tom Thumb, stopped there on their way from New York to San Francisco to perform. So that was how Mary Tagert saw Tom Thumb and got his picture!

Across the street from the church stood an old, abandoned brick building, the old Masonic Lodge (shown at left). Joseph was a Mason, and I'm sure he attended his lodge meetings there. Down the street I found the church that Joseph's wife would have attended (pictured at right). We walked through town, admiring the 145-year-old houses with their ornate "gingerbread" woodwork and the old dry goods store where Mary and Joseph shopped (see below).



Soon we drove to Promontory to visit the Golden Spike National Historic Site. Outside, two steam trains, replicas of the originals, stood on the train tracks, ready for the daily reenactment of the east and west coast trains meeting there. (Pictured at left is Train #60, coming from the West, courtesy of Patti and David Kryder.)

A visitor's center featured a film about the historic race to finish the train tracks. Afterward I talked to a ranger who worked there and asked if there were other pictures not on display which might show my grandmother at the ceremony. He told me the railroad officials hosted several ceremonies and showed me a photo of people disembarking passenger train cars. Those trains had brought people from the nearby towns for the festivities. That is probably how Mary had come the thirty miles from Corinne with her husband and children.

The ranger invited us into his office and told us we could use his computer and look at all the photos they had of the ceremonies. There weren't very many women in the photos, and he told me that photos were generally of the dignitaries and their families who came. It was difficult for me to see faces clearly in these group photos taken from a distance. However, I am quite certain that my Mary was not any of the few women shown.

Despite not finding her picture at the site, I am confident she was there since she lived nearby at the time the spike was driven, passenger trains brought residents to Promontory, and she'd told her daughter she'd attended the ceremony. In one fascinating trip my curiosity about Mary Tagert having children born in Utah, seeing Tom Thumb and his wife perform, and going to the Golden Spike ceremony was satisfied. But this would never have happened without the 1870 census record providing the key clues. In this case, family lore turned out to be family fact!



Left: Dry goods store built in Corinne, Utah about 1870.

Right: Old-fashioned roses still bloom along a Corinne street.



**Note: Census Records may be found at www.FamilySearch.org for free! Sign in, hit "Search," enter name.**

## The English Sweetland Family

Because this publication is called "Sweetland/Swetland Lore" it seemed fitting to add the Sweetland coat of arms to Lore's masthead. While it is still unknown where in England our John Sweetland (died 9 June 1711 in Providence, R.I.) hailed from, the site www.HouseOfNames.com provides a history of the name:

"The name Sweetland first arose amongst the Anglo-Saxon tribes of Britain. It is derived from their having lived in the area that was referred to as Sweetland found in the county of Devon. The surname Sweetland is a *habitation* name that was originally derived from pre-existing names for towns, villages, parishes, or farmsteads. The surname originated as a means of identifying individuals from a particular area. In the Middle Ages people often assumed the name of the place that they originally lived as their surname during the course of travel. [Sweetland was] first found in Devon where from ancient times they held Sweetland's Farm, a name which would later become a surname and a place name in Devon."

This article explains that before the invention of the printing press even the most literate people recorded their names according to sound rather than spelling, accounting for variations in spelling the name: Sweetland, Swetland, Sweatland, Sweedland, Swithland and others. Different spellings of the last name even occur among members of the same family in historic records.

The website further states that during the Great Migration, "the shores of the New World beckoned many English families that felt that the social climate in England was oppressive and lacked opportunity for change. Thousands left England at great expense in ships that were overcrowded and full of disease. A great portion of these settlers never survived the journey and even a greater number arrived sick, starving, and without a penny. The survivors, however, were often greeted with greater opportunity than they could have experience back home. These English settlers made significant contributions to those colonies that would eventually become the United States and Canada." The HouseOfNames site states that an examination of early immigration records and passenger ship lists showed some early Sweetland arrivals in North America:

**Sweetland Settlers in the U.S. in the 19th Century**

- William Swetland in Caplin Bay in 1815
- J. Sweetland arrived in San Francisco, California in 1852

**Sweetland Settlers in Canada in the 18th and 19th Centuries**

- Henry Sweetland setted in St. John's in 1787
- William Sweetland settled at English Harbour in 1790
- Henry Sweetland settled in Ferryland, Newfoundland and was a Justice of the Peace, in 1790
- Edward Sweetland settled in Carbonear in 1802
- Benjamin Sweetland at Trinity Bay, Newfoundland in 1837

**Family Reunion Refrigerator Rolls** (Yield: about 36 rolls)
**Recipe from Ellen Todd Posy Twist***

Heat Together: 1 2/3 C **milk** and 1/2 C **butter** and cool to lukewarm. Beat together 1/2 C **sugar,** 1 t. **salt** and 2 **eggs.** Beat together the lukewarm and cold mixtures above. **Add** 1 pkg. **yeast** dissolved in 1/3 C warm **water.** Add 3 C **flour.** Beat <u>very</u> thoroughly with wire whip. Cover, let rise 1 hr. Then add 3 more C **flour.** No Knead! Cover. Let rise in frig at least 8 hrs. up to 3 days. Shape into crescent rolls. Let rise 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Bake 375-400 about 15 minutes.

***Ellen was the granddaughter of Ernest J. and Nell (Reilly) Sweetland, daughter of J. Thornton and Ruth (Sweetland) Posey and the wife of Thomas E. Twist.**

### TREASURER REPORT FOR END OF 2014
**Priscilla Swetland, Treasurer**

Balance as of July 21, 2014
$1,763.63

Donations:
$50.00 Scholarship Fund
$50.00 Lore Fund

Expenses:
$100.00 Ramada Cortland (they called me and sent me info that they had made a mistake.)
$72.45 Lores #71 & #72

Balance as of December 31, 2014
$1,791.18

$1,061.55 Scholarship Fund
$656.63 Lore Fund
$73.00 Reunion Fund

**Do you have interesting Sweetland/Swetland family information to share and would like to be included in the next Lore? For example an interesting story, a photo of an ancestor's home, people, a family heirloom, tools, etc., or comments on a previous story. Please feel free send these to our editor, Anne Kirby (see contact information at right) along with your written permission to publish the information.**

View This Newsletter, Past Issues and More at SFA Website: www.swetland.org

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