

Scotland

5 May 2024

St Andrews and Edinburgh

Digging into the Auld Sod



Windblown BRIDE

A newly married couple along the cliffside at
the ruins of Cathedral of St Andrew.



Back on Campus

Emily and my cousins Mary Wood and Hank Stallings walking through the campus of the University of St Andrews.

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SOURCES: Underlined words link to them.

When white Americans travel to Europe for pleasure, a frequent reason is that they're searching for their personal histories. They seek a sense of where their ancestors pulled up roots — or perhaps where they were involuntarily uprooted — and in the process gain insights that tell them something about themselves. That desire to learn about oneself could be driven by anything from simply better appreciating long-dead folks to finding a source of pride.

Ancestry is at the root of the trip Emily and I embarked upon last Tuesday, when we boarded the first flight of our trip to Scotland. Thursday in Edinburgh, we met my cousin, Mary Wood Meacham Stallings, youngest daughter of Dan Meacham, my father's older brother, and her husband Hank. She asked me to plan this trip five years ago. After everyone's retirement, working through personal health and Covid pandemic interruptions, we're making it happen.

There's ample evidence of Mary Wood's and my ancestral trail leading back to Scotland from before the American Revolution through the Cowan family, which settled in North Carolina's Piedmont. A Cowan married a Wood in 1848. They had a son, William, who was my grandmother Mary Eliza Wood Meacham's father. Being "Scotch-Irish" (which I'll get into in the next newsletter) was all the older folks in the family would say when I was young and asked where we came from.

Emily had a third-generation Canadian grandmother whose grandfather came from Scotland. Her family tree includes McBeaths, McKenzies and Sinclairs. The three of us were raised in the Presbyterian Church, the Protestant denomination born in Scotland and known officially there as the Church (or Kirk, in Scots) of Scotland. All four of us are natives of North Carolina, a state marinated in Scottish heritage. The Chapel Hill branch of the state university I attended incorporates an argyle pattern in its athletic uniforms. Though Mary Wood's and my county of Richmond was named for an 18th Century English duke, it's adjacent to Scotland County on the east. The first town of any size leaving our county northbound is Aberdeen, named for a Scottish city where we're catching an overnight ferry next week, and it's the gateway to a county containing one of the highest concentrations of golf courses — Scotland's gift to Sunday afternoons — in the United States. The U.S. Open will be played there next month.

Hank's surname probably came from Germany, was Anglicized into Stallings and came to most Americans of that name through an English ancestor, Nicholas Stallings, who arrived in the 1600s. Nevertheless, he persisted and is on our trip, to paraphrase Mitch McConnell, a U.S. senator of Scottish descent.

So, Scotland is as good a place as any to explore our heritage. Perhaps on Friday I'll discover somebody from Fife — a "council area" that includes St Andrews and another town of 170 families in which 70 had the surname Thomson (without the English "p") — who could enlighten me about how my faulty color vision began. That's my pro-diversity argument in a nutshell.

It's also good to remember that Scotland is just a toe dip into my gene pool. Every human has 32 genetic great-great-great grandparents, which is as far back as I've traced any ancestor of mine. For 30 of them I don't even have as much as a name, so it's not fair to put all the blame for me on the Scots.

My sister Julie (Julia Elizabeth Meacham Jones) remembers attending a family funeral in Raleigh and being shocked to find herself standing next to a gravestone engraved Julia Elizabeth Meacham. It turned out the

— *Continued on next page*

Digging into the Auld Sod

— *Continued from previous page*

deceased went by “Bessie,” never married and was one of our grandfather Meacham’s six siblings. I could only trace Meacham surnamed ancestors back as far as James, born in 1746 in Middlesex County, Virginia, so there’s no proven Scottish connection there. Nor is one excluded. But my grandfather’s mother, Julia Haylander Christophers Meacham, was born near Raleigh in 1843. Tracing her back brought me to my great-great-grand grandmother, Julia Ann Ridge, born in Philadelphia in 1771, where she met and married my great-great-grand grandfather Jacob Haylander.

Jacob was born in Stockholm, Sweden.

Is he the cause of my, Mary Wood’s, Julie’s and our fathers’ once-blond hair? Or could it have been some nameless Viking among the Norse hordes who raided, plundered and stayed in Scotland for 4½ centuries beginning in the year 795? We may find out when we get to Shetland in a few days.

Half of my 32 great-great-greats are on my mother Virginia Martin’s side. Martin is a common European surname and the most common surname in France. As Martinez, it’s the second-most common surname in Spanish-speaking countries, of which the United States is either the second- or fourth-largest in the world after Mexico. My mother’s mother was originally a Strickland, which is common in Cumbria, an area of northwestern England snuggled up against the Scottish border. But both of those families had roots in Georgia during colonial times. Georgia, last of the original 13 British colonies in the future U.S. to be created, was founded partly to receive debtors from English prisons for a second chance at life and partly to buffer South Carolina’s rice plantations against the Spanish colony of Florida. Both my mother’s grandfathers (half of my four great-grandfathers) were named Carlos — John Carlos Martin and Carlos D. Strickland.

The known Scottish branch of Emily’s family tree runs through her paternal grandmother, Alma Sinclair Moak, who grew up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. At the great-great-great level of her branch is Roderick McKenzie, who was born in Scotland in 1771 and emigrated to Canada to be a clerk for the North West Company, a competitor in the fur trading business of the more famous Hudson’s Bay Company. According to the 1978 Papers & Records, a publication of the Thunder Bay (Ontario) Historical Museum Society, Roderick’s grandchildren said he “abducted” an indigenous Ojibwe woman known to European settlers as Angélique. The author of the society’s piece said they likely were married according to her tribal customs, which was a common way to maintain peaceful relations between natives and Europeans, and some years later married in a Christian service recorded by a church. Angélique and Roderick’s daughter, Mary, married another Scottish immigrant, Adam McBeath. Their daughter, Flora Belle McBeath, one of the grandchildren consulted by the article’s author, married Duncan Sinclair. Grandma Alma was their daughter, and she married a Bostonian of “British descent” (which means he may have been Scottish), Glen Moak.

So at least 1/32nd of Emily’s ancestry isn’t European at all. What additional secrets are hidden among her other 31?

The larger lesson for me from all this is just how much the heritage we know or believe we know is incomplete. A lot of the story is just missing or hard to track down. Some of it is hidden by cultural naming customs that prioritize paternity. Some is overly emphasized by the pride that we use to attach ourselves to the famous or economically successful among our ancestors.

I can endure a certain level of genealogy for a newsletter inspired by this trip. But I also know we are not entirely — or even mostly — defined by our genetic recipes. Ancestry is not destiny. Family, religion, tradition and custom need not be prisons.



Taking Aim

One of the cannons at the top of [Edinburgh Castle](#) appears to be pointed at the monument to one of the city's great literary giants, [Sir Walter Scott](#).



Ruined By Religion

The Cathedral of St Andrew is the newer church to stand on this site, dating back only to 1318 after 160 years of construction. In the 16th Century when the Catholic mass was outlawed in Scotland by the Reformation, it fell into disuse.



Royal Miles

Tourists pack the Edinburgh's **Royal Mile**, a collection of separately named streets that, end-to-end, lead downhill from Edinburgh Castle, storehouse for the Scottish Crown, to the **Palace of Holyroodhouse**, the residence of the king when he's in town to conduct official business. That takes about a week each year. Britain's royal family spends its Scottish vacation time at their country estate in Balmoral.



HOLY CROSS

The "rood" in Holyrood means, in Scots, the cross on which Jesus was crucified. The royal palace was built in the 16th Century adjacent to Holyrood Abbey Church, which fell into ruin in the 1700s.

Notes on photos

WINDBLOWN BRIDE — Walking along The Scores, a street that hugs the rocky North Sea coast of St Andrews, we happened upon a just married couple who had come from their ceremony with their photographer. My choice was between using the picture of both of them walking toward us — he dressed in his Scottish kilt — or this one with her veil streaming behind her in the wind. Emily and Mary Wood talked more about the veil.

BACK ON CAMPUS — The University of St Andrew, founded in 1413 before Columbus sailed for the New World, is the third-oldest university in the English-speaking world after Oxford and Cambridge. Prince Andrew and Princess Kate are alumni. Beginning in 2023, the university was ranked best in the United Kingdom in the Guardian University Guide, the first time British rankings ever placed a school ahead of Oxford or Cambridge.

TAKING AIM — When Edinburgh Castle was first built atop an extinct volcano about a thousand years ago, the part of Edinburgh toward which this cannon points did not exist. It is the site of Scotland's crown jewels, formally known as the Honours of Scotland, the Scottish National War Memorial and the National War Museum of Scotland. It is Scotland's most-visited paid tourist attraction, with over 2.2 million visitors. Sir Walter Scott's memorial is claimed to be the largest ever to honor a writer. Scott, author of *Rob Roy* (1917), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), was part of a literary tradition that gave Edinburgh the reputation of a capital of the enlightenment. Other local writers included Robert Louis Stevenson (*Treasure Island*), Muriel Spark (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*), economist Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes), children's author Kenneth Grahame (*The Wind in the Willows*), JM Barrie (*Peter Pan*), and JK Rowling (Harry Potter).

RUINED BY RELIGION — The town of St Andrews was named for Jesus' apostle because, according to legend, an Irish monk named St Regulus, or St Rule, carrying "relics" of St Andrew — to wit: a kneecap, an upper arm bone, three fingers and a tooth — was shipwrecked on the coast here in the year 345. Regulus had had a dream that he was supposed to take the bones "to the end of the earth" for protection and that he should build a shrine wherever his ship ended up.

ROYAL MILERS — Linking two major historic sites the Royal Mile is Edinburgh's tourist axis and is crowded most of the day. All kinds of tourist traps from pubs and restaurants to whisky-tasting and kilt shops fill the ground floors of its buildings, some of which date to medieval times and make the Mile a UNESCO World Heritage site. When the buildings were first constructed, they were tall for the period and housed hundreds of people on upper floors.

HOLY CROSS — The abbey church here was where the Scottish Parliament met until 1707 when the Kingdom of Scotland was merged with the Kingdom of England to create the Kingdom of Great Britain. After a referendum in 1997 in which the Scots voted for "devolution," which meant that some of the powers of what is now the Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in London, England, were returned to Scotland, which built a new building for its unicameral parliament called Holyrood across the street from the royal palace.

HOME HOLE — The home of the world's snootiest sport is publicly owned through a trust and anyone can play it. The clubhouses of private golf clubs, including the Royal and Ancient Golf Club (R&A), where memberships guarantee a portion of the tee times, are in the background. On Sundays, the course is closed and becomes a public park for strolling and picnics.



home hole

Golfers putt out on the 18th hole of the **Old Course at St Andrews**, considered the oldest golf course in the world dating back to the early 1400s.