

The Pursuit of Champagne, Faïence and a Renoir Madame

By Julie Doyle

Introduction (*Cover Slide*)

I have titled my paper “The Pursuit of Champagne, Faïence and a Renoir Madam”. What do these three things have to do with each other, and what do they have to do with me? Maybe something or maybe nothing, but it definitely has been interesting exploring the possibilities.

To start, I would like to thank two of my fellow SPHEX members who contributed to my paper in significant ways. First – thanks to Ted Delaney, whose 2015 paper on ancestry sparked an interest in me to explore a particular branch of my own family tree. And to Dennis Roberts, who yielded to my pleading and switched paper dates with me, allowing me to delay my paper from November to February, which gave me the window of time needed to plan a trip and engage in some on-site research.

I have brought some props with me tonight, and by the end of my talk you will hopefully have an understanding of the reasons I have selected these particular items to share with you.

- Henriot Champagne
- Henriot Quimper pottery, or “faïence” which is the French word for porous, tin-glazed earthenware
- A Renoir portrait of Madame Henriot

(SLIDE 2)

The attorney Clarence Darrow said “**The pursuit of truth will set you free, even if you never catch up with it.**”

As a 4th generation American, I realize that there has been plenty of time for family “truths” to morph into folklore, and for stories passed down from one

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generation to the next to take on a life of their own - whether or not they are rooted in certainty.

(SLIDE 3)

A simplified version of my family tree shows the names of my four grandparents, which all trace back to Western Europe and Ireland:

- Pierson – Swedish
- Bruck – German
- McBride – Irish
- Henriot – French

My father's ancestors – the Piersons and the Brucks - settled in Nebraska and Illinois after immigrating from Sweden and Germany. My maternal grandmother's relatives were mostly from Washington State, with roots tracing back to County Wexford and County Limerick in Ireland.

My maternal grandfather – Cleophas Henriot, or Cleo – lived his entire life in Washington State, but the story of how *his* grandparents got to the Pacific Northwest is one of the family favorites. Cleo's paternal grandparents, my 2nd great-grandparents – Joseph Francis Henriot and Marie Genevieve Rose Chatillon – were born in Belfort, France, and they were pioneers in every sense of the word. (SLIDE 4)

As a young married couple, Joseph and Marie Rose crossed the Atlantic in 1852, landing in New Orleans. One story shared among family members was that the 26-year-old Joseph decided to leave France and set out for America with his bride because - as a younger child of Francois and Marie Henriot - he was not entitled to inherit the family land. While my family research did not lead me to any definitive answers about Joseph's birth rank, I did come across information that makes this particular piece of family lore unlikely. The inheritance laws in

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France – from the 1800's on, are subject to the Napoleon Code, which states, “all legitimate children must inherit equal portions of the estate.”

So it is likely that Joseph and Marie Rose left France for America for reasons other than a family grudge. (SLIDE 5) They traveled to the U.S. in the peak years for French immigration, with over 80,000 French citizens coming to America in the 1850's. These numbers were significant, but small compared to the number of immigrants pouring into the United States from Ireland, Germany and other countries during this same time period. According to James McPherson in *Battle Cry of Freedom*, “Immigration during the first five years of the 1850s reached a level five times greater than a decade earlier”. The waves of immigrants would continue until slowing down significantly during the Civil War years.

Once in the states, a love of the land and a desire to farm could explain why Joseph and Marie Rose did not settle into the New Orleans city life with the many other French Catholic immigrants who landed there in the mid-1800's, but instead they headed north and then west. Their first significant stop was in Muscatine, Iowa, where their first three children – Mary, Charles and my great-grandfather, Abel – were born.

Not long after Abel's birth in 1858, the family embarked on a nearly 2000-mile journey from Iowa, across the Cowlitz Prairie, to what was then the Washington Territory.

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So what does the Cowlitz Prairie Henriot history have to do with champagne, faïence and a Renoir Madam? Here is what I thought I knew at the outset of researching this paper: (SLIDE 6)

My mother – Margaret Jeanne Marie Henriot Pierson (or Nini as she has been known all her life) loved to break out the Henriot Champagne for special occasions. In hindsight, there seemed to be an unspoken understanding that Henriot Champagne was “family” champagne - although no real explanation was ever given to my four sisters or me.

I knew that my mom was very proud of her collection of Henriot Quimper pottery. She welcomed every opportunity to add pieces to her stock. When Peter and I lived in the DC area, she would head to the Quimper Faïence store in Alexandria to browse and buy. My daughter, Sarah – whose full name is Sarah *Henriot* Doyle – reaped the benefits of bearing the family name and received various pieces of pottery from her grandmother for birthdays and Christmases when she was growing up.

Additionally, my mother gave my sisters and me framed prints of Renoir’s “Madame Henriot” portrait years ago. These prints have been hanging in our respective houses for years, with very little explanation to offer our spouses and children, other than the presumption that since – the Madame’s name was Henriot - she was probably a relative.

I don’t want to bury the lead, so I will say upfront that it was not as simple as I had hoped to connect the dots between my known Henriot family members and the mysterious Henriots in France. But I can tell you definitively that it was really fun trying!

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1. A Trip to France

It did not take much convincing to twist my oldest sister's arm when I called her to ask if she wanted to go to France with me to explore the Henriot folklore. Ann Marie lived in Europe for several years when she and her husband worked for Nike in the '80's, and she rarely passes up a chance to get back to that part of the world. My cousin, Barbara was the next to get on board. Barb was a great travel companion because - as a recently retired banker – her schedule is fairly flexible and – as the first-born Henriot cousin – she had a wealth of family stories to share, many of which my sister and I had never heard. (SLIDE 7)

The last member of our traveling crew was my 24-year-old daughter, Sarah. As a young professional working in the advertising industry in Chicago, she jumped at the chance to use a few vacation days for an adventure in France. Sarah had not necessarily been very happy about our selection of her middle name when she had to learn to spell it in 1st grade, and even earlier, when she first had to pronounce it. In pre-school, she could not say her "R's", and we loved to listen to her say her name was "Sada Hemama". But Sarah Henriot eventually learned to embrace her name, and she was ready to learn all she could about the French Henriots.

The four of us headed to France in January, with open minds ready to expand our knowledge of champagne, pottery and art.

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2. Reims

Paris was our home base for the week, but on Day 2 we took the train to Reims in the Champagne wine region. Fortunately we had been advised ahead of time that the town's name rhymes with "France", and is not pronounced "reams", as I had assumed. (SLIDE 8)

In anticipation of our visit to Reims, I had reached out to the Champagne Henriot House through their Facebook page to arrange a tour. After having repeated Internet contact efforts ignored, I asked my niece, Katie – who has a degree in French literature and speaks fluent French – to call the Henriot House and put her skills to good use. The word came back that – despite Katie's best efforts to explain that we would love to tour their facility because our family name is Henriot and we have a great interest in the history of the Champagne House – no one at Henriot was particularly interested in us. Katie was told, in no uncertain terms, that only people in the "trade" are allowed to tour their facility – family name or no family name.

Once we realized that we were going to be shunned by our quasi-family, we had made arrangements to tour another Champagne house. But we were not going to visit Reims without at least setting eyes on Henriot. So after a leisurely lunch of steak frites and wine, we called an Uber and gave our driver the address. His English was almost as poor as our French, but we managed to get him to understand that we did not want to be *dropped off* at the Champagne Henriot House; we only wanted to jump out of the car and have him take a picture of the four of us in front of the sign. (SLIDE 9) The resulting picture does not tell the whole story – which is that a very unfriendly woman was peering out of the office window from the moment we drove through the open gates. She appeared ready to walk outside to presumably shoo us away as we smiled for the camera. As soon as the picture was snapped, the Uber driver and the four of us jumped back in the car and sped off, leaving the mysteries of the Henriot House behind.

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The research I had done on Henriot champagne before our trip was very interesting, with the business dating back to 1808. Seven generations of Henriots have so far been involved in various aspects of the cultivation of grapes, and the production and distribution of champagne. The history is rich with inheritance dramas, the phylloxera blight - which wiped out nearly all the grapes in France in the late 1800's - and the devastation of the city of Reims during the First World War.

I initially planned to share some Henriot champagne with my SPHEX colleagues during my talk but instead I decided to hold a small grudge, and instead share with you the lovely product of another Reims champagne house.

The author, Bernard Branson wrote: "Rejection is an opportunity for your selection". Our rejection by the Henriot champagne staff led us to select an alternative: Taittinger Champagne. (SLIDE 10)

The staff at Taittinger welcomed us with open arms, once we paid the admission fee for the tour and tasting. I hope you will enjoy a few sips while I tell you a little bit about the Taittinger House.

The founder of the Taittinger House was Pierre-Charles Taittinger, who was an officer in the First World War. He built the business with his brother-in-law, Paul Eveque, acquiring vineyards and champagne estates over a number of years, making shrewd investments when land prices dropped during tough economic times. Today, Taittinger has over 750 acres of vines in 34 different vineyards throughout the champagne region.

Our tour took us to the ancient chalk cellars (SLIDE 11) where the firm stores their signature Comtes de Champagne. The cellars lie below the site where 13th century monks first lived in an Abbey, later building a beautiful basilica to honor

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the saints killed by the barbarians. The Abbey and the Basilica were destroyed during the French Revolution, but the monks' wine cellars and underground passages remained. Our guide showed us a stairway that was used by the monks hundreds of years ago when more wine was needed during an extended meal. The monks had the foresight to build the stairway with an inverted stairway overhead so the monk who was sent for the wine could use his hand to feel his way down the stairs in the pitch dark without falling.

We were able to tour the massive cellars, over 50 feet underground while learning about the complicated and lengthy process of making champagne. Taittinger's signature bottle – the Comtes de Champagne rests in the chalk cellars for 10 years until it is ready to be enjoyed. At \$150 or more a bottle, that particular champagne was a bit too expensive for me to bring tonight – but I hope you are enjoying the fruits of the Taittinger House as much as we did when we visited the champagne region of Reims. (SLIDE 12)

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3. Quimper

(SLIDE 13)

The day after our trip to the champagne region, Ann Marie, Barb, Sarah and I headed out of Paris in the opposite direction – 350 miles west to Quimper in the Brittany region of France. The Henriot Faïence (or pottery) factory has been an on-going operation in Quimper since the 1700's and we were excited to experience the town and see the factory operations during our 2-day stay.

Brittany existed as an independent duchy for centuries, with its own proud traditions and unique lifestyle. The last Duchess of Brittany was Anne, whose marriages to two successive Kings of France – Charles VIII and Louis XII, led to the eventual joining of Brittany to France in 1532.

(SLIDE 14)

Even after its incorporation into France, the folklore and heritage of Brittany have remained important throughout the centuries. Religious ceremonies known as Pardons, and traditional dress continued to be cherished. Specialty foods – such as crepes, mussels (moulés) and the wonderful French butter cake called Kouign Amann are readily available to this day.

Today agriculture and tourism are the key industries throughout the Brittany region. But our primary interest was to learn about the faïence industry, especially the Henriot Quimper pottery.

(SLIDE 15)

The town of Quimper, which is spelled Q-U-I-M-P-E-R, but is pronounced “kemper”, got its name from the Breton word “kemper”, meaning confluence. The town is situated at the intersection (or confluence) of the Steir and Odet rivers. When French became the official language of Quimper, the town's name took on the French spelling, but the Breton pronunciation remained.

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(SLIDE 16) Quimper has a wonderful rustic feel to it – with footbridges spanning the Odet River and half-timbered houses lining the cobblestone streets. There are numerous restaurants and shops – including a shoe store around the corner from our rented apartment bearing the name *Cleo*, our grandfather's name. A coincidence, or was it serendipity?

The town center is dominated by the Saint Corentin Cathedral. (SLIDE 17) It was built between the 13th and 16th centuries and is the oldest Gothic structure in lower Brittany. The cathedral has an unusual bend in the middle, making it less symmetrical than is typical for Gothic construction.

I came across a few different stories about the reason for the bend, but the simplest explanation was that the cathedral was taking so long to complete (200 years and counting) that the builders hurried up at the end and got a little sloppy. In any case, the end result is stunning – despite its nickname: “crooked cathedral”.

Across the river from the central part of town, is the Locmaria district. (SLIDE 18) It is here that faïence – the porous hand-decorated pottery manufactured in Quimper, has been a trademark of the area for 300 years.

Quimper had a trifecta of natural resources, which made it an ideal place to establish and grow a pottery business. The Odet River is in close proximity to the sea, making the transport of finished goods relatively simple. There was also an ample supply of clay deposits along the riverbanks and extensive forests nearby to provide fuel for the kilns. Clay, wood fuel and accessible waterways provided the foundation for the industry – and readily available, low cost labor helped pull the industry together.

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Jean-Baptiste Bousquet is credited with being the first driving force behind Quimper pottery. His company would eventually be known as the Grande Maison. Bousquet and his descendants had a monopoly in Quimper for nearly 100 years, until an employee left to start up a competing business.

Soon afterward, a third faïencerie was established, initially to focus on plain, utilitarian stoneware. Years later, this third factory would become known as Henriot, when Jules Henriot married into the family and took over the business in 1884 at the young age of 18. Despite his youth, Henriot was considered a sharp businessman with a good eye for changing tastes. (SLIDE 19) Henriot capitalized on the popularity of religious figurines during the Victorian years, and was ready to change direction when the Art Deco movement took hold at the turn of the century.

Competition was fierce in the late 1800's and early 1900's between the three large faïenceries. Mold designs were protected and the markings on the pieces were taken very seriously. (SLIDE 20)

A bitter legal battle between Grande Maison and Henriot played out in 1922, when the Hubaudieres claimed that the similarity of the two factories' marks caused harm to the Grande Maison. The Grande Maison had used the "HB" marking since 1850. ("HB" stood for Hubaudiere-Bousquet, the two family names of the primary owners.) Henriot used "HR" to mark its pieces – with the "H" signifying Henriot and the "R" signifying Jules Henriot's wife's family name of Riou. The marks were remarkably similar and it was unlikely this was a coincidence.

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(SLIDE 21) I asked for photos of some of my mother's Quimper, and reviewed the markings carefully after learning about the differences – and the controversy. At least one of my mother's treasured bowls has the markings of the Hubaudieres at Grande Maison, although I am fairly sure that she has always considered this to be a "Henriot" piece.

Grande Maison was successful in the lawsuit, and as a result, Henriot could no longer use the "HR" mark. (SLIDE 22) As a consequence, all pieces made by Henriot after 1922 incorporated the full Henriot name in the markings – although Jules Henriot stubbornly insisted on capitalizing the "R" as well as the "H" in the mark. Pieces were marked with "HenRiot" in this manner, for many years after the lawsuit was resolved.

Decades later in 1968, the two competitors joined forces to form Les Faïenceries de Quimper. Ownership has changed hands several times in recent years and financial difficulties have strained the operation. However, to this day pieces bear the name "Henriot Quimper", highlighting the Henriot influence and tradition - although it has been many years since anyone named Henriot has been involved.

From very early on, the craftsmen producing faïence in Quimper took inspiration from the master potters in Italy and other parts of France, but created a distinctive Breton style. (SLIDE 23) Traditional Quimper faïence often shows scenes of Breton life – birds, flowers and most significantly – peasant men and women. A frequently used feature of Quimper design incorporates profile views of peasants, frequently a Breton man with a walking stick or playing an instrument, or Breton woman carrying a flower or a basket.

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Our travel squad had better luck with the Henriot factory than we had with the Champagne House. Although the factory does not usually give tours in January, my French-speaking niece convinced a Henriot factory employee to give us a private tour.

(SLIDE 24)

We spent the afternoon getting a close up view of the various stages of production, many of which have changed little over the preceding decades.

It was a quiet day at the factory, but we got to experience the flow through the various workshop areas. Our tour guide walked us through rooms full of custom molds, all waiting to be put to use.

In an adjacent room, several artists were at work hand painting individual pieces. Some pieces are painted freehand, but the complicated designs are outlined on the bisque using patterns traced with charcoal. Each artist trains for at least two years before being able to complete and sign pieces for sale.

(SLIDE 25)

After our guide finished showing us through the factory, we spent quite a bit of time reflecting on what we learned while shopping in the Quimper showroom. In addition to the traditional designs, there were many pieces commissioned by well-known artists who came to Quimper to create pieces that could be then sold under the Henriot Quimper name.

I found it fascinating to pore over the endless designs as I slowly moved through the shop. When my travel companions tired of looking at the pieces before I did, I realized I had inadvertently become a fan of the pottery my mother surrounded herself with for years. If I wasn't hooked before, I was after I looked through a basket of door signs. There were only a half dozen address plaques in the whole shop, and one happened to be "124" – my own address. Surely it was a coincidence – but I felt compelled to buy it all the same.

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Eventually I was convinced to stop looking so I could purchase the items I had selected (including a new piece for my mother's collection). We wrapped up our afternoon by heading back across the river to the town square where afternoon tea and butter cake were waiting for us.

The next day we left the enchanting Quimper behind and returned to Paris. The time had come to get to know Madame Henriot.

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4. Madame Henriot

We were back in Paris by early afternoon, with enough time to enjoy the Musée d'Orsay before it closed for the day. It is always inspiring to see the works of Monet and Manet, Cezanne and Degas in person – but on that day I spent most of my time seeking out the paintings of Renoir. I wanted especially to look at the women Renoir painted – of which there were many.

There are over 80 Renoir paintings hanging at the Musée d'Orsay, including many portraits showcasing his favorite models. There was much to learn about Renoir from the women he chose to paint.

(SLIDE 26)

Pierre-Auguste Renoir lived a long life – from 1841 to 1919 – painting from his early 20's until he died at age 78. In the early years, he did not have money to pay models so he painted his friends, his family members and his lovers. This practice continued even after his work gained acclaim and he began earning money.

By all accounts Renoir loved women – not only their bodies - which he celebrated in his many nude paintings, but also their clothing, which he intricately portrayed with particular attention to color and style. Renoir's father was a tailor and his mother a dressmaker, which must have influenced his appreciation and understanding of fabrics and fashion.

(SLIDE 27)

On display at Musée d'Orsay are some of his best-known paintings, showcasing many of his favorite models. Aline Charigot posed for Renoir many times – before and after she became his wife and the mother of his three children. This painting, titled “*Maternity*” was painted in 1886 after the birth of Renoir's first child, Pierre.

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(SLIDE 28) Aline's cousin, Gabrielle Renard, was not only a frequent model for the artist, but also the family's maid and nanny. Gabrielle is featured in Renoir's famous painting "*Dance in the Country*", while Suzanne Valadon, the artist's lover and rumored mother of his illegitimate son, posed for the sister painting, "*Dance in the City*".

As for Madame Henriot, she is not featured in the Renoir works exhibited at the Musée d'Orsay. The portrait of Madame Henriot that I am most familiar with, actually hangs in the National Gallery of Art in DC.

(SLIDE 29)

Henriette Henriot – who was Renoir's friend and, by some accounts, his lover – posed for the artist at least eleven (11) times in the 1870's and 1880's.

Other well-known portraits of Madame Henriot include "*The Dancer*", "*Madame Henriot "en travesti"*" (*in a Boy's Costume*) and "*The Parisian Woman*" (sometimes called "*The Blue Lady*"). It is easy to see Renoir's eye for women and for fashion, in these three portraits.

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So who was Madame Henriot? After coming to terms with the fact that there did not seem to be any direct ties from my ancestors to either the Henriot Champagne family or the Henriot Quimper faïence artisans, I had to accept without reservation that Madame Henriot was also not going to turn out to be a long-lost relative.

Madame Henriot was actually born Henriette Marie Alphonsine Grossin in 1857. Henriette Henriot was the stage name she chose when she became an actress - so Madame Henriot was not actually a Henriot after all.

Henriette studied at the Paris Conservatory, and later acted in minor comedy productions throughout Paris.

I could find no explanation for why she chose the name “Henriot” when she decided to change her name, but a French friend suggested that she may not have liked her given name “Grossin”, because “Gros Sein” is French for “big breast”. Maybe that name would have helped her in her comedic acting career.

In 1878, Henriette Henriot gave birth to a daughter, Jeanne Angéle Grossin. Henriette never married and she never publically named Jeanne’s father. I found no evidence of speculation that Jeanne’s father was Renoir or a mysterious man named Henriot - or anyone else - so that side of Jeanne’s family tree remains a mystery.

(SLIDE 30)

Jeanne herself also posed for Renoir, most notably when she was very young, modeling for the portrait titled “*Young Girl in a Blue Hat*”.

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Jeanne Grossin would eventually change her name to “Jane Henriot” when she followed her mother into the world of the theatre. Jane achieved the theatrical acclaim that had eluded her mother, and was selected as a resident performer at Le Comédie-Française in Paris. Sadly, her life was cut short when she died tragically in a fire at the age of 22.

The following description of Jane’s death was documented in an online magazine dedicated to unsung 19th century artists:

Jane “is not only loved by the public and critics, but she also makes perfect love with the actor and director Charles Le Blagy, who was her teacher at the Conservatoire.” The story goes on to say that few women could resist the charm of Blagy’s mustaches. Jane was cast in a tragedy in 1900, and “it is a completely different tragedy that will put an end to the lightning career of this young actress.”

“On March 8, 1900, a fire broke out in the building of the Comédie Française. Only a few actors, including Jane Henriot, are preparing in their dressing room for the performance of the morning. While the others present manage to find a way out, Jane ventures into the flames to find her little dog. A foolish or desperate act - she had just broken with Le Blagy, who had offered her the beast. She would never return alive. Asphyxiated dead, the actress is buried the next day at the cemetery Montmartre in the presence of her relatives and comedians of the troupe of the French Comedy, still in shock.”

(SLIDE 31)

Jane Henriot’s body would be transferred later to the Passy Cemetery, where a beautiful statue, created by the French sculptor Denys Puech, graces her tomb. Henriette Henriot would live for another 44 years after her daughter’s death, but Madame Henriot would eventually be buried alongside Jane in Passy.

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On our last day in Paris, my sister and I ventured to Passy to look for the Henriot tomb. The cemetery is beautiful, located near the Trocadero, with a wonderful view of the Eiffel Tower.

We had to wander a while before we found the tomb on the far side of the cemetery. In the meantime, we passed many graves, including the artist Édouard Manet and, somewhat ironically, the grave of a prominent member of the Taittinger family.

We eventually found the beautiful white statue, and took time to read the inscriptions on the memorial. Jane's name was faded, while Henriette's appeared much clearer - even though it was more than 70 years old. The inscription dedicated to the tragic actress Jane Henriot read "She Came – She Smiled – She Passed".

Jane was clearly loved by many in her short life. After her death, her mother and the head of the Comédie Française worked together to commission a painting of Jane by a well-known portrait artist, which I believe hangs in the theatre to this day.

The next day our French adventure came to a close, but not before we gained a new appreciation for champagne, faïence and a Renoir Madam. In the end, I was reminded that a proven blood bond is not needed to make a meaningful connection.

5. The Cowlitz Prairie

(SLIDE 32)

But what about my real Henriot relatives, the ones I left rolling across the Cowlitz Prairie in covered wagons? While there is no written account of what my ancestors encountered during their journey, there are first-hand accounts from the same time period that paint a very clear picture of the excitement, the dangers and even the tragedies pioneers faced as they traveled out west. Somewhat ironically, my older children used to spend hours playing an early computer game called “The Oregon Trail”. This game helped them learn about cholera and dysentery, and the importance of having extra food and supplies for a long journey. But I don’t remember ever connecting the dots with them to ensure they understood that their ancestors made a very similar journey over 150 years ago.

My grandfather, Cleo Henriot, was a storyteller – and I am not sure anyone had a clear understanding of which of his stories were true and which ones were for entertainment purposes only. But one of Cleo’s tales about the trip across the Cowlitz Prairie has lived on throughout the generations.

As the story goes, the family stopped to rest and water the oxen and horses, and at some point during that time, my great-grandfather - Abel Henriot – who must have been no more than one year old – crawled or toddled away from the others. The travelers climbed back in the wagons and continued their journey west for miles before anyone noticed that Abel was not with his brother and sister in the back of the wagon. The family quickly turned around and retraced their route.

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They must have been panicked, and that panic surely did not subside when they found several Native Americans at the location of their last stop. One of the Native Americans was holding Abel, who – as the story goes - was cooing and having a great time with his new friends. Abel was relinquished back to his family without incident, to everyone’s great relief. My ancestors must not have been able to say thank you in a language that the Native Americans could understand, but I expect no words were needed to show their gratitude.

While this story may sound far-fetched, I choose to believe it and my belief seemed validated when I read the following excerpt from the book “Native Americans on the Oregon Trail”:

“The first section of the Oregon Trail bisected two major Native American tribes – the Cheyenne to the north and the Pawnee to the south. The emigrants worried about both. But the expected attacks did not come. In fact, there were many instances of Native American kindness – helping pull out stuck wagons; rescuing drowning emigrants; even rounding up lost cattle.”

Caring for a lost baby and returning him unharmed to his family could be added to this list of good deeds. Thanks to those peaceful and compassionate native residents of the western plains, my great-grandfather Abel made it all the way across the Cowlitz Prairie, and I am here tonight to tell this story.

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6. Ancestry.com

The final portion of my family exploration I will share with you tonight is – again – thanks to Ted Delaney. After hearing Ted’s talk on ancestry, I decided to have my DNA tested through Ancestry.com.

I was interested to see the results for many reasons – one of which has to do with another one of my grandfather Cleo’s stories.

My mom has dark skin and tans easily - and her hair was jet black when she was young. One of my four sisters has very similar coloring, while the rest of us look like we descended in a straight line from our Swedish and Irish ancestors.

On a quick side note, and as a sign of how far I hope we have come in the past 60 years, I want to share a story about my dark-skinned mother. In the mid-1950’s, my mother had to take an unpaid leave of absence from her job as a United Airlines stewardess because she had gotten “too tan” on a layover in Hawaii. Sad to say, her supervisor was worried the passengers might think she was black. This was the 1950’s, when flight attendants were stewardesses, and they were required to be single, young, thin, attractive – and unquestionably Caucasian.

My mother learned her lesson, but unfortunately she was sometimes the butt of family jokes because of her skin and hair coloring. When I was growing up, my grandfather Cleo would sometimes spin the tale that my mother had “Indian” blood in her – with vague references to the journey across the Cowlitz Prairie. Although looking now at what we know about our family tree, I have no idea how that was supposed to have happened – but when I was little, part of me did wonder.

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So when my DNA results came in, the first thing I did was immediately check to see if any Native American bloodline was evident. I was disappointed in a way to find no trace. I am a western European and Irish hodge-podge – no question about it.

I continued to be curious about why my mother and I have such different coloring, so I sent her an Ancestry.com kit and asked her to take the test. The results came in a couple of weeks ago, and it was very interesting to see the difference in her results compared to mine. (SLIDE 34)

I am 7% Scandinavian – which makes sense because of my father's Swedish relatives. But I also have 9% showing from the Iberian Peninsula – which is Spain and the south of France. My mom has next to nothing from that region, but her DNA results show 13% from Italy/Greece. Could that explain the origins of her darker skin and hair?

Despite the differences between my mother's DNA results and my own, Ancestry.com had no problem determining that we are, in fact, related. I received this following notice shortly after my mother's test results were in:

(SLIDE 35)

My confidence that my mother is, in fact, my mother, has always been extremely high – but now I can find comfort that Ancestry.com feels the same way.

The Pursuit of Champagne, Faïence and a Renoir Madame

7. Final Thoughts

(SLIDE 36)

As Clarence Darrow said:

“The pursuit of truth will set you free – even if you never catch up with it.”

Although my pursuit of champagne, faïence and a Renoir Madame did not lead me to catch up with any new truths about my family heritage, in many ways it did set me free.

Free to choose to support a company who makes me feel welcome – no matter what your name is. The freedom to admit - after years of indifference to my mother’s passion for the colorful pottery made in Brittany - that Henriot faïence holds a special place in my heart as well.

And the freedom to feel a bond with a woman I never met, who chose the name Henriot over her own, and who lived life by her own rules before being laid to rest next to her beloved daughter.

(SLIDE 37)

Her daughter’s short life was summed up with the epithet: “She Came – She Smiled – She Passed”. Madame Henriot, however, filled the space between those dashes by living her life to the fullest. Relative or no relative – that is a truth I can embrace.

Thank you.

(END SLIDE)