

“Stories That Run Deep”

February 28, 2021

Welcome and Lighting of Chalice - Rev. Betsy Tabor & UUFES Youth

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

This morning we remember an old friend. John Hancock, an active, enthusiastic member of UUFES in its early days, died Wed. night in his sleep. He was 79. We will remember John with the help of his friends Dick Cary and Rod Forsman.

In today's service, we pause to consider our roots: who our people were, what we want to but may never know about them, and how their lives and attitudes inform our own.

Centering Music - “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” (1907 hymn)

Shared Affirmation

Hymn - “Blessed Spirit of My Life”

A Time for All Ages - Alice Posner

When people talk about ancestors, who do you think of? Your grandparents? Some long ago person your family is proud of and you have been told did something important? A person who lived during notable worldwide events? What about the small things, the every day movements of life, how do we remember people who did those things, things so often not written down or remembered, except perhaps in a family custom or unexplainable way of cooking a certain dish, the way we respond to something new that happens in our lives, a landscape that feels pleasing.

To better understand ancestors, and also to better understand history, I like to do some ancestor math, apologies to anyone school age listening who thought they'd have the weekend off!

Let's start with sheer numbers of people, and I'm talking in simple terms here about genetic heritage, which is of course only a part of how many of us make our families. Think about this for a moment, you have two parents, four grandparents (ok that sounds pretty normal) but you have eight great grandparents, and sixteen great great grandparents! You can see how this quickly gets pretty huge, for instance if you go back ten generations you have over a thousand direct ancestors. For many of our young people this would be in the middle of the 18th century. Now that is a lot of people! What starts to get tricky when you go further and further back is that if we all start doing this we see that there were more ancestors than people in the world. There were far fewer people in the world in fact, so we start to see that so many of us must be related, because these relatives have to overlap for the math to make sense. Modern genetic testing for instance, has determined that Native American heritage people can all trace that part of their heritage back to the same six mothers!

Let's talk about dates for a moment. We tend to have long generations in my family in recent years, so it was only two generations away from me, when my grandmother was a child, that women got the right to vote. My great great grandfather was alive when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. History feels so close this way! Apparently my great grandmothers grandmother remembered how expensive bread was in England at the end of the Napoleonic Wars!

I like to think that we have different kinds of ancestors, yes we have ancestors of blood or adopted family, but we also have ancestors of ideas, of people who worked and fought for the things we believe in. If we consider the recycling of atoms, we could even see plants and rocks as ancestors that were once made up of the things we are made up of. I think we also have ancestors of place, and it is an example of one of these I am going to tell you a story about today.

How do the people who lived in our places affect us today? Sometimes we know their stories, or we see their buildings they built, or perhaps we have the belongings they had in life, or even the trees they planted, the rocks they moved, a garden they made. Think about all the old sugar maples planted around Tamworth, huge and falling down, planted for maple sugaring by local ancestors. Perhaps these things leave a feeling behind that we can step into, feel from being surrounded by these things, or perhaps from something we can't quite put our finger on.

A few years ago my family moved into a partially renovated house from the mid 1800s by the Bearcamp river in Tamworth. I am pretty sure that the first nations people, part of the Abenaki Nation must have lived or at least come to this place, as it is fertile soil by the river and a wildlife corridor. There are many indications of the long history of the house and farm here, but the ancestor of place I feel most connection to is the last resident of the house, who I was told would proudly tell people she was born in 1919, the year that women got the right to vote. The house sat mostly empty for a number of years before we bought it, and then a lot of careful work was put into the house before it was sold. I don't know too many factual things about her, although there are many in Tamworth who do, and I would like to do that fact-finding work at some point, but what I do know is that we stepped into her warm presence the moment we moved in. This does also have to do with her wonderful choices of wallpaper and carpet, which you could either love or hate, luckily I love their colorful and floral explosion, and these were apparently are only a fraction of the wallpaper that was up before renovation!

But mostly I know her through her garden. The garden, although overgrown, skirts the house in all directions, and progresses in such an artful series of flowers that seem to just start to open when the last has touched its peak. There are Asters of old varieties you see few other places, and a healthy old-fashioned rose bush in pride of place near our front door. There are gardens I can see under the overgrowth and bulbs pop up in odd places in the spring. Neighbors outside of her family have let us know how much they loved her, and we were gifted the African Violet that she always had in her front window by one, to put back in its decades old pride of place. Someone else told us how she used to pay them a quarter as a child to use a small brush to sweep her front carpeted staircase, and after learning that I try with new vigor to keep swept!

Apparently the house was a boarding house for many years, and there is still a large hearth upstairs with cast iron hooks and a bread oven. I have not yet sorted out whether it continued as a

boarding house under her residence.

What I do know is that we live with her adaptive banisters, and low closets from her later years when she used a wheelchair, and I hesitate to take them out, as they are a reminder of how close the past, and also the future is, and you never know when someone might need them.

I live in the legacy of her life in a small and gentle way. There are people who have more direct connection to her life, know her stories, but for now it is enough for me to simply appreciate the little things that affect my home and days. I connect to this ancestor of place through the medium of every day life. The place in the kitchen she put a hook up to hang a tea towel, the trout lilies as I walk back to the house. I can only aspire that people who come after me might be able to benefit from a legacy like that of mine.

Histories great events get written down, small local or family stories are passed down and loved, or struggled with, but there are also the stories told by the landscape and the houses and the land people have lived, and loved, and care taken, and tended, and these places are quiet monuments to these every day good works of our lives.

I hope to put a new garden in this spring, and as Isaac Newton said, I will be standing on the shoulders of giants.

Musical Interlude “I Got a Letter This Morning” (African American spiritual)
I got a letter this mornin’, oh yes! – St. Helena Island, South Carolina

Reflection - Bill Hoffmann

You may have seen the historical plaque at the edge of a parking lot at the Flume State Park in Franconia Notch. It states:

“This land you see as you stand here all lies within the township of Lincoln, granted on January 31, 1764 to James Avery and others and named after Henry Clinton, ninth Earl of Lincoln. The original grant contained 32,456 acres. Settlers did not begin to arrive until after the American Revolution.”

A number of Averys settled in this area. My family had many Averys in NH. So I feel a personal connection to the flume.

I don’t know when I first learned about this plaque. Silke and I may have come across it 15 or 20 years ago. My family visited Franconia Notch many times when I was a child but I do not remember my father saying anything about a connection with the Avery family.

When I first read the plaque. I cringed at the word “grant.” It still bothers me that a king could delegate a governor of a providence authority to grant to individuals land that belongs to someone else – that is, the native people living there. That is what colonialism is all about and it has continued throughout the history of this country: taking from someone else by force or a claim of superiority. The settlers were no doubt proud of their accomplishments clearing land and creating farms, villages, churches, and schools. But there was a complete disconnect

between that and their disregard of the people who had lived there for generations. They could do that only by dehumanizing the native people. I do remember as a child thinking about how terrible it must have been for an Indian child growing up to think that his life would be like his parents' and generations before, then suddenly having that all taken away.

Current events show that this country is still living this legacy.

Reflection - Betsy Loughran

I've recently published a family memoir based on family letters. To my surprise, I've learned that...(race, immediate family—1 sentence). The last chapter is called the Memorabilia Box. My mother was in the habit of tossing interesting bits of family history into this box pretty much unedited. One story is about Thomas Waite, an ancestor who was a lawyer in 17th century England and fought on the side of the Roundheads in the English Civil War. When they won, he was one of the 59 men who signed the death warrant for Charles I. The article about him in Wikipedia is titled "Regicide." He evidently did quite well for the next twenty years though he was known as a very cruel landlord doubling rents, evicting tenants, and closing in the commons. Eventually, though, the Cavaliers returned and Charles II was put on the throne. The men involved in the regicide were mostly beheaded.

But – my canny ancestor defended himself. He said that Oliver Cromwell had forced him to sign the death warrant, and had guided his hand. So he instead was imprisoned and eventually the family was given an estate in Jamaica.

Writing a memoir means learning somethings you wish you didn't know. I learned that that not everyone in my family's past lived by the UU seven principles. However, I'm glad they lived – as I am alive today and like it or not – have their DNA in me.

Joys & Concerns - Mazurkas Op. 68, Nos. 2 and 3 by Frederic Chopin

Played by Eve Goss

Hymn - "Voice Still and Small"

Meditation/Prayer

We give thanks
 For birdsong
 For afternoons
 For sunlight, warmer and brighter each day

We are grateful for life
 Here, a year into a pandemic
 Here, with our breath
 Here, with our hopes and our wonderings about what's next
 Here, grateful to have choices

May we find ways to walk with each other
 We who disagree
 We who rankle
 We who like to be right
 May we question our certainty
 And dare to open to one another

When struggles are loud, may we listen with compassion
 People cold and hungry in Texas
 Frightened in war zones
 When struggles go unnoticed
 Let us remember those at the margins
 With prayers and intention, with hands and wallets.
 With love. Most of all, with love.

Reading - From “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates read by Amanda Harris
 Today’s reading comes from Ta-Nehisi Coates’s article in *The Atlantic*, called “The Case for Reparations.” It’s a bruising 15,000-word story about the wealth gap between Black and white people. Published in 2014, it garnered wide attention and put the reparations conversation on the map:

Perhaps after a serious discussion and debate...we may find that the country can never fully repay African Americans. But we stand to discover much about ourselves in such a discussion—and that is perhaps what scares us. The idea of reparations is frightening not simply because we might lack the ability to pay. The idea of reparations threatens something much deeper—America’s heritage, history, and standing in the world....

...And so we must imagine a new country. Reparations—by which I mean the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences—is the price we must pay to see ourselves squarely. The recovering alcoholic may well have to live with his illness for the rest of his life. But at least he is not living a drunken lie. Reparations beckons us to reject the intoxication of hubris and see America as it is—the work of fallible humans. Won’t reparations divide us? Not any more than we are already divided. The wealth gap merely puts a number on something we feel but cannot say—that American prosperity was ill-gotten and selective in its distribution. What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts. What is needed is a healing of the American psyche and the banishment of white guilt.

What I’m talking about is more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I’m talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal....

No one can know what would come out of such a debate. Perhaps no number can fully capture the multi-century plunder of black people in America. Perhaps the number is so large that it can’t be imagined, let alone calculated and dispensed. But I believe that wrestling publicly with these questions matters as much as—if not more than—the specific answers that might be produced. An America that asks what it owes its most vulnerable citizens is improved and humane. An America that looks away is ignoring not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the certain

sins of the future. More important than any single check cut to any African American, the payment of reparations would represent America's maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders.

Reflection - Rev. Betsy Tabor

Our stories all run deep, this one in the *Washington Post* last week. A man sifts through his mother's belongings after her passing:

[Her] home had once throbbed with life — the notes as she played the piano ringing through the rooms, the smell of biscuits and fudge filling the air and, not infrequently, the stern thunder of Mary's voice as she kept her six children in line.

Now the house was eerily quiet, jammed with furniture, stacks of papers and puzzles, dusty knickknacks...[and] on an old wooden sideboard...a sheaf of papers...a contract...in a very old-fashioned, angular...script....[a name at the top and bottom]: "Henrietta Wood."

...a large slanted "X" [her signature]....¹

What was this? Why was it here? Through whose hands had it passed over the years? What did it mean to them?

The son now knows that the contract on the sideboard, dated 1866, freed his great-great grandmother. That was the first time she was freed. He also knows that she was captured and re-enslaved for another twenty years. But over those twenty years, while washing and cleaning, planting and picking cotton, often beaten, Henrietta Wood never stopped pushing, not only for freedom, but for payment: wages due for years of work and damages, too.

Finally, in her 60s, freed again, Henrietta Wood won her case. Putting the pieces together today, it appears that the payment she received, a fraction of what she fought for, made possible a home purchase and the education of her son, the first African American to graduate, in 1889, from what's now Northwestern Law School. Today, family members see the impact on their own children of Henrietta Wood's legacy. Dusty papers on a sideboard brought to life this story, whose realness we can picture and feel – a story of reparations.

For too long, reparations has been a bad word. Even after that *Atlantic* article came out six years ago, only kooky leftwing nut jobs talked about reparations. By then, for 25 years, John Conyers of Detroit, the longest-serving African American member of Congress and the sixth-longest serving member of Congress in U.S. history – had opened the legislative session every year by introducing his bill HR40 (40 a reference to "40 acres and a mule").

HR40 didn't call for one dollar to be paid to anyone. It merely proposed a study – a study of slavery and consideration of ways to set right past and present harms to African Americans.

¹ Sydney Trent. "She sued her enslaver for reparations. Her descendants never knew." *The Washington Post*, 24 February 2021, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/02/24/henrietta-wood-reparations-slavery/?arc404=true>

Everyone new Conyers would do this each year. And everyone knew nothing would happen. Not even a study. Reckoning takes a long time, especially compared to the more immediate concerns of daily life. It's easy to look away.

People keep old things for reasons they may not talk about. But scratch the surface and connections will happen.

When we emptied out my parents' home, we found things they'd both kept. A folder in my dad's bedside table had photos of an 1600s English doctor in a wig and a bishop on his father's side, and on his mother's side, all these women. Look! [Show photos.] My mom's people held onto framed photos of a shipyard in Nova Scotia. Someday, I keep saying, this needs a closer look. The women in Virginia in the 1700s make me uneasy. Did they arrive as people of means or were they indentured? What took them all to St. Louis? Those great ships in Nova Scotia – are they a point of family pride or complicity? It's easy to look away.

Scratch the surface of reparations and up come many dozens of organizations that have sought repair for harm done to African Americans, then and now. Although each has a history, a charter, and represents thousands of hours of men's and women's struggles and hopes, to many of us they're long, unfamiliar names. Our eyes glaze over at the list.

I didn't know about The Genocide Campaign 1951, the Self-Determination Committee 1956 or the UN National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America 1957. Did you? What do you know of King's Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged in 1963, the Black Panther 10-Point Program 1966, or the Black Manifesto 1972? How about the Pan African Conference on Reparations 1993, the National African American Reparations Commission 2015, African Descendants Of Slaves 2018.

I learned only this week, browsing for info about reparations, that the UUA's New England lead, Woullard Lett, lives in NH. An African American, past president of the Manchester NAACP, he belongs to N'COBRA – the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America. This long history of efforts to reckon with the past demands attention.

What may feel to us dry or dense or discouraging or “political” or just not as compelling as other things may be for someone else a lifetime of work. It was for Henrietta Wood. Can we find our own connections to their stories? I think we can. Is doing that as important as whatever else is on our to-do lists this week? I think it is.

Reparations is no longer a bad word. In more and more circles, it's not an edgy word but one of promise. And hope. And intention Thanks to Ta'Nehisi Coates, HR 40 is officially on the table today, in President Biden's sights. It sits on a tall stack of important old papers. May it not gather dust.

The Morning Offering - “We Are” by Ysaye Barnwell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTbIERFg1vM>

Performed by Dr. Barnwell and the UUA General Assembly 2020 virtual choir.

Community Response

What would you like to ask an ancestor?

11:07:38 From Marsha C : What do you miss about where you came from?

11:07:47 From Cindy E: What was landing at Plymouth like?

11:08:03 From Sam P: the path from Africa

11:08:15 From Linda H: When & why family came to Ukraine?

11:08:15 From Amanda H: I would like to know if they (the ancestors from 1880s on) were happy, what brought them joy.

11:08:34 From Lynn H: What was so untenable that they left everyone and everything they knew and loved?

11:08:40 From Kim H: I would ask my grandmother who came from Italy at age 16 to Massachusetts how she felt to leave her only home.

11:08:42 From Barbara L: Why did you leave your home and family to come to a place where you knew no one?

11:08:51 From Ellen W: What gave them courage to leave a home for the unknown?

11:09:02 From Shana A: Why did they leave, persecution, pogroms?

11:09:05 From Meredith M: Who are the unidentified faces in the multitude of old photographs saved over the years?

11:09:08 From Moria M: What did you expect to find in the US that you wanted when you left the middle east?

11:09:14 From Sam P: what brought them JOY! indeed.

11:09:15 From Barb B : What happened in your life that made you so guarded, so protective?

11:09:25 From Ann & David W: What encounters did early settlers have with the native Americans? Hope H : So many questions - where were you born? where did you get your education? what did you do for fun as a child? what were your hopes for your children?

11:09:51 From Kevin C: What was it like for a five year old to arrive here alone as I recently learned?

11:10:24 From Ann & David W: What did you eat? What foods did you “discover” in America? How did your appetites change?

11:10:33 From Rod F : To my great-grandmother in Lulea Sverige (Sweden), did you know that your son, my grandfather, would never return? To my great grandmother in Malmo, did you fear that your daughter, my grandmother Peterson, would never return?

Name something you appreciate about an ancestor:

11:10:40 From Pamela A: Tenacity

11:10:52 From Sandra C : Robert Gray, of Maine...fought in the Civil War

11:10:58 From Ann & David W: I know my ancestors WORKED HARD for small salaries

11:11:10 From Margaret R: My grandfather was on the board of the Rosenwald Foundation, supporting black schools in the south.

11:11:12 From Moria M: My mother’s mother was very unconventional — which I value parts of. She was married many times, which was unheard of, for example.

11:11:30 From Betsy G: The young adult generation took care of their mother after their father left her, and she had no money or — as a woman— rights.

11:11:35 From Sam P: perseverance

11:11:36 From Marsha C: MY father's father came from the Ukraine leaving behind a wife and 2 sons, but eventually brought them over and kept the family together...didn't abandon them.

11:11:40 From Amanda H: My grandmother loved estate sale/pawn shop jewelry, and I love her collection of fantastically glamorous jewelry (which is now mine, as her only granddaughter). I also have her collection of sating gloves and colorful scarves

11:11:42 From Ellen W: Grandfather arrived with NOTHING and managed to raise a family of 5.

11:11:42 From Laura C: my ancestors were part of the underground railroad

11:11:44 From Barb B: That they risked coming into so many unknowns.

11:12:02 From Shana A: A celebrated Cantor, before he perished in the Holocaust, he made recordings which have been released, and I have heard them.

11:12:09 From Hope H : her father drew a piano key board on a piece of wood so that my grandmother could practice the piano in the winter when the parlor was closed off to keep the heat in the kitchen

11:12:13 From Ed P: great-grandfather was a whaling captain in New Bedford

11:12:35 From Sam P: a love of hardware stores...

11:13:05 From Kevin C : You survived near death wound in trenches WWI to see WWII roll around with your sons asking you for permission to enlist early. Did you regret not sharing your war stories as your sons grew up?

11:13:30 From Linda H: Grandmother made mountains of the best blintzes & loved everyone, despite history of persecution & escape.

11:13:36 From Ann & David W: I so enjoy the stories of friends about their ancestors and their work and joy and suffering.

11:14:04 From Eve G : Thankful to my grandfather who taught himself to read and became Latvia's foremost author.

11:14:12 From Sam P: finding a spot in the Ossipees...

Let us appreciate the sheaf of papers and photos on the sideboard and pay attention to connections they suggest.

Hymn - "Love Will Guide Us"

Extinguishing of the Chalice

Benediction

"Whether we realize it or not, every little decision our ancestors made charted a path for us as their descendants. And the decisions we make today affect the people who come after us. History isn't some static set of facts ... We are connected to history today."

-Nick Sheedy, PBS series "Finding Your Roots" lead genealogist

Postlude - "Brighton Beach Waltz" by Shana Aisenberg

This service can be viewed until May 28 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/V8Rcvaf0f3SQ4Tgsern5n5JEcq4SyPyWm2T8S5-FLcdPJYCVWBCHf2pQ6R99Uxo.X2q2Stjly4d321Xr> Passcode: jY6K== \$U